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ON THE BORDER: WOMEN'S WRITING FROM THE MARGINS OF THE MEXICAN NATION

By

Sarah Brenna Anderson

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ABSTRACT

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By

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This dissertation proposes an analysis of representative texts within the category of border writing in contemporary Mexican women writers. The corpus of the project extends beyond the actual geographic border of the Mexican nation, and argues that "border narratives" are identifiable from Mexico City to Tijuana. The writers included in the study are: Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich. With the theoretical approaches of border theory, nation theory and feminism as tools for analysis, the study examines how these writers de-construct and challenge the myriad of borders--geographical, political, historical and borders of gender--present in the Mexican nation. As the study contends, these writers maintain a certain code of borders in their texts that control and/or dispute the national project, but with a similar outcome: a new form of writing/reading the nation. Hence, this study intends to prove that borders in Mexican women's writing are ever present--a reflection of the environment of the nation-state--and therein highlights how these writers cross, undermine, and re-formulate the borders of the nation to establish new parameters and conceptualizations of identity, for their nation, their regions, and themselves as writers and women in their patriarchal institutionalized nation-state.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage
>
> --Gloria Anzaldúa--[1]

> The thinner the border the clearer and more acute sense of nation it defines and isolates. Thin borders or should we say, "Good fences make good neighbors". The border is, from this perspective another "grand" narrative, with its own hero (those within), and its antagonist (those without), whose goal is the definition of a national identity and narration.....Borders, then, link to narrative through literatures which reflect **border encounters**, as well as the multiple possibilities of crossing and being crossed, silenced and eliminated by the border"
>
> --Jesús Benito & Ana María Manzanas--[2]

In the past decade, the concept of the border/borderlands has undeniably flourished and become an ardent topic of debate in the literary and critical theory circles. The term "border", with its ambiguous nature and multitude of definitions, becomes a space to negotiate and dispute visions of our nations, our cultures and ourselves. As Jesús Benito and Ana María Manzanas so pertinently assert, the seminal idea of employing borders in literature leads to a myriad of border encounters. That is to say, the parameters established by any given set of borders -- geographical, physical, psychological, political

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[1] In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 165
[2] In *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands*, p. 2-5

or those of gender -- incite these "border encounters," allowing for a critical discourse of examination. The present study of contemporary Mexican narrative by women writers explores these "border encounters," highlighting that "borders" in women's writing in Mexico are not exclusively linked to the geographic border, but rather border narratives are identifiable from Mexico City to Tijuana. Furthermore, the study examines how these "border narratives" challenge the concept of nation, questioning how and why borders control the national ideology. As we will see, each text maintains a certain code of borders that control and/or dispute the national project, but with a similar outcome: a new form of writing/reading the nation, where the marginalized "others" -- regions, border spaces and women -- take an active role in the formation and development of the nation-state. Hence, this study intends to prove that borders in Mexican Women's writing are ever present--a reflection of the environment of the nation-state--and therein highlight how these writers cross, undermine, erase, and break down the borders of the nation to establish new parameters of identity, not only for their nation, but also for their regions, women, and themselves as writers.

The study of borders in Mexican literature is not original, however, the focus of the majority of the critical corpus of border studies specifically treat the border region and the multitude of borders that make up the zone. That is to say, in studies such as Debra Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba's *Border Women*[3], psychological, political, and borders of gender are confronted and treated, along with the geographic

[3] This important text explores border texts from both the Mexican and U.S. side of the border. Ironically, this study was published after initial investigation was done on the present study and two of the writers from the Mexican side of the border, Rosina Conde and Rosario San Miguel are part of both investigations. As much as this validates these women as part of this study, it also indicates the lack of published writers from this region.

border, as part of the border reality. These metaphorical borders concur with Jean Franco's analysis of the changing environment of the concept of borders, "margins, borders, and frontiers have been refunctionalized not necessarily as boundaries of actual territories but rather as boundaries of neoterritories that mark not only geographical but also psychological space" (225). Nevertheless, although these psychological border spaces form part of the body of border criticism, there is an evident lack of studies on Mexican women writers that treat these borders--in their extensive metaphorical usage--in literature alienated from this border zone. As this study will show, the manner in which "borders" have been portrayed in narratives from the border region, extends into women's writing from other regions of Mexico, including Mexico City.

Therefore, the present study is vital to the critical corpus of women's writing as it explores similar patterns of borders in texts geographically separated and ideologically isolated from each other, but united in a nation that still maneuvers within the discourse of the central political powers and where the paradigm of the center vs. periphery, continually excludes the "others" separated from this metropolitan mecca. Furthermore, this analysis is innovative in its examination of the concept of borders juxtaposed with the notion of nation and how both of these highly debatable topics are tied to women's roles as members in the nation-state. That is to say, the tropes of borders, women and region fuse together in a re-writing of the national project that challenges the ideologies that dominate and govern the nation, inverting the positions of power to restructure and re-invent the laws of patriarchy in a new nation-state. Through a close reading of the texts in question and with the theoretical approaches of border theory, nation theory and feminism as tools for analysis, the study examines how these writers de-construct borders

and re-establish a novel approach to the formation and desired democratic implementation of nation.

The selection of writers that comprise this study were chosen because of their texts, as each portrays a myriad of "border encounters" that are tied to concepts of nation and national identity. It is striking to note that in our current technological era, in which the internet produces an infinite amount of sources and information, a search on the authors in question: Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda, and Sara Sefchovich, provides such a miniscule amount of information (where two of the authors don't match to any links) that it leaves one wondering, how is it that the topic of women's writing in Mexico has presumably become a central topic of interest in the Mexican literary scene since the late 1980's, but two of its authors are not present in this cyberspace mastermind? Debra Castillo and María Soccorro Tabuenca Córdoba note that presently, "it is no longer news to talk about the historical silencing of women writers. (62)" Notwithstanding, it is worthy to note that unless the female writer in question is from the privileged site of publication, Mexico City, it is still relevant to address the question of the silencing of women's writing. As all but one of the authors in question (Sara Sefchovich) are from regions of Mexico alienated from this sacred central space, their writing, as seen with this cyberspace search, continues to be excluded from the corpus of Mexican literature. Therefore, this study further extends the metaphor of the border to include the situation of women writers in Mexico -- specifically those estranged from the central publishing powerhouse[4] -- undermining the notion of the supposed Boom

[4] As noted in *Border Women*, this lack of opportunity for publishing lead to in many cases displacement of writers or forgotten voices, "One aspect of this phenomenon is the displacement of writers from the border—who, subject to small press runs and inadequate

femenino, which as this study illustrates encompasses a small group of voices, all from within the borders of Mexico City and many whose entrance into the corpus of national literature has been facilitated by male writers who form core members of the literary circles. This being said, the inclusion of Sara Sefchovich's texts in this study highlights how even after the "boom" of women writers, living in the ever-powerful metropolis--the publishing mecca of Mexico—does not warrant entrance into the literary corpus. Sefchovich's texts--*Demasiado amor* and *Vivir la vida*--exemplify the multitude of borders present in Mexico City and in the nation, borders controlled and executed by the patriarchal political hierarchy.

Historically, the inclusion of women's voices and writing in Mexican literature has been minimal and those who have gained access to this "bordered" and glorified space have waged a battle against the patriarchy that has attempted to silence them. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) exemplifies exceptionally this battle. Sor Juana is considered to be the first woman in Mexico to challenge with her writing the subordinate role of women. As a means of escaping these borders, Sor Juana became a nun. The walls of the convent were preferable to the all-encompassing borders that entailed a marriage during the 17th century. Furthermore, the convent allowed Sor Juana the space for self-education and writing, and as education was more important to her than bearing children, she embraced the borders of this religious life that allowed her significantly more freedom than the outside patriarchal world.

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distribution, are less well known and tend to be associated with 'regional' themes—by centrist writers about the border (Carlos Fuentes' *Frontera de cristal* and Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* are salient recent examples) and by border writers displaced to the center of the country (Silvia Molina's *La familia vino del norte*) whose work is widely read and distributed, while also fitting more neatly into dominant culture constructions/inventions of borderness" (33).

With Sor Juana as a type of "matriarchal" impetus for future women writers, we skip ahead a few centuries to the twentieth century when women's writing in Mexico flourishes and emerges in many cases as counter-narratives to the patriarchal discourse that dominated the literary scene for decades after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). One of the early writers of the 1970's that navigated a path for women writers to come was Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974), "No one in Mexican letters has been more lucid in understanding and putting into practice a social feminist critique than Rosario Castellanos. She gave Mexican feminism the direction and sense of purpose it required to survive in the 1970's" (Valdés 16). Although written more than thirty years ago, in one of her many essays, Castellanos underlines the role of the woman in Mexico, as she notes, "[In Mexico a woman is] a creature who is dependent upon male authority: be it her father's, her brother's, her husband's or her priest's....The Mexican woman does not consider herself-nor do others consider her-to be a woman who has reached fulfillment if she has not produced children, if the halo of maternity does not shine above her" (in *The Shattered Mirror* 16). Although at first glance, Castellano's words appear strikingly outdated, at the core of Mexican society these presumptions still exist for women and therein form the nucleus of the intricate web of borders that have maintained the problematic relationship between women and the nation-state.

Two further writers that stand out for their early contributions to the body of women's writing in Mexico are Elena Garro (1920-1998) and Elena Poniatowska(1933-). Following in the footsteps of these women, a group of writers, all born in the 1940s and 1950's begin publishing in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Included in this group of contemporary writers are María Luisa Puga, Silvia Molina, Brianda Domecq, Carmen

Boullosa, and Angeles Mastretta. Hence, it is these women that provide a point of entry--a backdrop of women's writing-- for Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich, all of whom form part of the present study.

The first chapter of this investigation, "Theorizing the borders of a [female] nation" explores the critical approaches of border theory, nation theory and feminism to establish a workable framework for a productive close reading of the texts in question. The chapter highlights the multiplicity of border theories and their divergences, where as noted, theorizations from the U.S. side of the border tend to treat the topic of borders as a metaphorical concept. In contrast, border criticism that stems from the Mexican side of the border appears to take into account the realities of border existence, noting the effects of such theorizations on the border dwellers. In turn, the reader will note that a critical framework of border studies is far from being complete. In a similar fashion, the examination of theories on nation are also ambiguous in nature. The chapter highlights how while the concept of nation has evolved over time, the position of women within the confines of defining a nation have continually been relegated to the "borders" of the nation. Therefore, the chapter continues with an overview of feminist theory, particularly the ideas of French Feminists and psychoanalytic feminist criticism. At its core, this brief introduction to feminist thought highlights ideas of women's language and subjectivity, facilitating a reading of the borders in these texts and how the writers appropriate feminist theorizations to allot subjectivity and voice to their characters. Furthermore, this chapter introduces portions of the texts in question to establish credibility and to support the selection of theories utilized.

The first two writers treated in this study -- Rosina Conde and Rosario San Miguel-- are from the Northern Border region, an area which has historically faced a myriad of tribulations within the national project[5]. Noteworthy of this conflict are Carlos Monsiváis's comments published in an article on NAFTA, where he highlights this calamity, "se sanctificó el juego de los opuestos: civilización y barbarie, capital y provincia, cultura y desolación. Desde principios de siglo...cunde una idea: la provincia es 'irredimible', quedarse es condenarse (197)" [A play of opposites was sanctified: civilization and barbarism, capital and provinces, culture and desolation. Since the beginning of the century...the idea has propagated that the province is 'unredeemable,' that to stay is to be condemned] (Castillo/Tabuenca Córdoba 124). Therefore, it is not surprising that the women writers from this region treat the topic of nation in their writing, as their regions have historically been negated as active participants in the nation-state. It is only since the mid-1990's that some of the writer's from the northern border region have become recognized nationally and internationally, nevertheless, the majority of their readership still stems from local literary circles. Consequently, most of their writing is published primarily in local newspapers, chapbooks, and magazines, with a general preference for shorter forms of prose: vignettes, short stories, chronicles and short novels.

This concise style is notable in the writing of Rosina Conde (Tijuana, Baja California), whose texts *La Genara* and *Arrieras somos* form the basis for chapter two, "Crossing Borders: Rosina Conde's Wandering Women". Her brief novel *La Genara*

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[5] The border region, as noted by Debra Castillo, has been referred to by both the Mexican nation and the United States as an "uncultured and potentially disruptive hybrid group" (19). Rolando Romero notes of the border region, "Very few places have been subjected to as much verbal abuse as the border between the United States and Mexico" (38).

(1998) and her short story collection *Arrieras somos* (1994), have both gained her significant recognition in the past decade, as the collection has been translated to English and to French (*Women on the Road*, *Femmes en Chemin*). In brief, Conde studied language and literature at the National Autonomous University in Mexico (UNAM), and is currently working on a Master's degree at said institution while also teaching at the Academia de Literatura at the Universidad de la Ciudad de Mexico. Additionally, Conde has founded two publishing houses, Panfleto y Pantomina and Desliz and has been an editor to two literary magazines, *El Vaiven* and *Tercera Llamada* and two cultural magazines, *La linea Quebrada/The Broken Line* and *Revista de Humanidades*. Furthermore, as a lifelong seamstress, since 1972, she has participated in the design and production of theater costumes. Other novels and collections she has published are: *De infancia y adolescencia* (1982), *El agente secreto* (1990), *Bolereando el llanto* (1993), *En la tarima* (2001), with many of her poems and short stories also appearing in numerous anthologies.

In *La Genara* and *Arrieras somos* we witness a web of borders that entangle the women characters in the borders of their region, their nation, their education, their gender and the patriarchal society. Nevertheless, in both texts, Conde inverts the positions of power, breaking down the wounding barbed wire and allowing her characters to re-invent the spaces that have jailed them. Thus, Conde's characters speak metaphorically of the border region and its existence in the national project. Therefore, Conde's texts are vital to this study as they portray effectively this juxtaposition of borders and nation, with women as the weapons to wage the battle against these longstanding patriarchal constructions.

In Chapter three, "Life on the Border: Rosario San Miguel's *Callejon Sucre y otros relatos*", the short story collection, *Callejon Sucre y otros relatos* (1994) becomes a vital example of Border writing that encompasses the diversity of border life--rather than a treatment of such within the stereotypical space of the center/periphery as Carlos Monsiváis has so poignantly recognized. Rosario San Miguel has lived most of her life in the area of Ciudad Júarez-El Paso and therefore has directly experienced the multitude of borders that surround her. As noted in an interview, San Miguel highlights that she does not remember living in a world without borders:

> La frontera es un espacio muy violento. Te golpea por todas partes. El hecho de estar junto a los Estados Unidos y tener a la Migra vigilándonos todo el tiempo. La frontera es como la habitamos y como caminamos por todos sus espacios. Nos permea por todos lados. Ahí nos confundimos y nos mezclamos todos: ricos y pobres, mexicanos, chicanos y gringos, cholos y chorchos, hombres y mujeres, homosexuales y heterosexuales; primer mundo y tercero. La frontera es violenta, pero fascinante. Cuando descubres todos sus rincones, no te puedes separar de ella [The border is a very violent space. It strikes at you from every angle. The fact is that the United States is right next to us and the Migra is constantly watching our coming and going. The border is the way in which we dwell and walk through all its spaces. We all swarm through the air and intertwine: rich and poor, Mexican and Chicanos, cholos and preppies, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, First World and Third World. The border is violent but fascinating. When you discover every nook and cranny, you cannot stay away from it] (Castillo/Tabuena Córdoba 8).

Unfortunately, the literary scene and possibilities for publication in Ciudad Júarez are not as great as even those in Tijuana, limiting the recognition that San Miguel has received. Not surprisingly, San Miguel is one of the authors whose name is missing from the cyberspace web.

In *Callejon Sucre y otros relatos*, San Miguel delves into the dark topics that form part of the myths and stereotypes of her region. San Miguel does not mask the realities of the border; rather in her text she underscores how the border reality extends far beyond this identity of vice. By including a gamut of border dwellers in her text, from the educated lawyer to the nightlife entertainer, San Miguel is able to portray the diversity and hybridity of the border. Her text becomes a wake- up call to the reader and to the nation, as she demands that the multiple borders of her region be seen, heard and accepted as part of the nation.

In chapter four, "A Nostalgic Re-writing of the Nation in Marta Cerda's *Toda una vida*", it becomes evident that although Guadalajara, Jalisco is in itself a metropolitan, cultural, regional capital, it does not offer its writers the opportunities found in Mexico City. As Marta Cerda notes, the lack of opportunity for publishing (outside of Mexico City) makes becoming a recognized name within the corpus of Mexican literature difficult. Cerda affirms, "Guadalajara tiene todo para que una aspirante a escritora se desarrolle hasta antes de la publicación. De ahí en adelante es necesario salir de la ciudad en busca de editoriales...." [Guadalajara has everything an aspiring writer needs to develop until it's time for publication. After that it's necessary to leave the city in search of publishing houses] (*Escritoras jalisciensesfrente al nuevo milenio* 23). In part, Marta Cerda herself is to be commended for her contribution to the support and development of

local writers. After participating for years in the "talleres literarios" [literary workshops] as a writer, in 1988, Marta Cerda founded the Escuela de Escritoras SOGEM [Women Writers School] where writers converge, share their work and organize local literary events. One of these events that has become known even outside of the borders of the region is the Feria Internacional del Libro, which has led to a larger recognition of local literature. Nonetheless, as Marta Cerda highlights, the region still hasn't produced "la Rulfo femenina". Then again, Marta Cerda's publications are extensive and include the following novels: *Juegos de damas* (1988), *La señora Rodríguez y otros mundos* (1990), *Y apenas era miércoles* (1993), *De tanto contra* (1993), *Las mamas los pastores y los hermeneutas* (1995), *Todos los pardos son gatos* (1996), y *Toda una vida* (1998).

In *Toda una vida*, Cerda narrates the history of Mama—originally from Guadalajara—who has relocated to Mexico City and the ensuing tribulations of this displacement. The chronicle parallels the documented history of Mexico City and therein becomes a tool for an ardent critique of the political system and the borders that this system places on the national identity of the country. With this text, Cerda successfully breaks down a myriad of borders and re-writes the roles of women, her region and the parameters of nation-formation in history.

The final chapter in the study, "Border Narratives of the Metropolis: Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado amor* and *vivir la vida*, treats Sara Sefchovich's highly acclaimed novel, *Demasiado Amor* (1990), which received the Agustín Yañez award and later, was adapted into a film of the same name (2002) and *Vivir la vida* (2000). Sara Sefchovich was born in 1949 in Mexico City and studied Sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), earning a Master's degree in 1987 and a

Doctorate in 2005 in the History of Mexico. She has done research at the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales and published articles in magazines such as *Fem* and the "Revista Mexicana de Sociología" and for the newspapers *La jornada* and *El universal.* Aside from *Demasiado amor* and *Vivir la vida*, Sefchovich has published two additional novels: *La señora de los sueños* (1993) and *La suerte de la consorte* (1999) .

The inclusion of Sefchovich's text in this study is fundamental to the thesis of this project, as it delves into the multitude of borders for women, even within the confines of the glorified center, and for the nation. That is to say, *Demasiado amor* and *Vivir la vida* highlight the extensive borders the political system has forged to create its nation -- a national identity full of fallacy and manipulations, whose benefits belong only to those part of this patriarchal political hierarchy that has systematically abandoned the country and its people. *Demasiado amor* and *vivir la vida* underscore at their core the notion of the center/periphery paradigm, relegating that this central metropolis, is not a borderless space but rather that the environment of the city is for many, a place of border encounters.

As a final point of introduction, Jean Franco states in *On Edge The Crisis of Contemporary Culture*, "the imperative for Latin American women is thus not only the occupation and transformation of public space, the seizure of citizenship, but also the recognition that speaking as a woman within a pluralistic society may actually reinstitute, in a disguised form, the same relationship of privilege that has separated the intelligentsia from the subaltern classes. The woman intellectual must witness not only the destruction of the wall, but that of her own anonymous inscription on that very wall" (80). Franco's words poignantly underline the vital task of "destruction/inscription" that break down the

borders of the Nation and allow the words and voices of the writers in this study to be heard throughout their nation-state. *On the Border: Women's Writing From the Margins of the Mexican Nation* presents an innovative glimpse into the border filled existence of women, regions, writers and members of the Mexican nation, who live between these barbed wired borders. It explores how Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich, as a group of women writers inside and outside of this web of borders, negotiate and dialogue the tribulations of this environment and through the power of the pen, re-write the borders of the nation.

Chapter I

Theorizing the Borders of a [Female] Nation

> The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism' so long prophesized, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.
>
> --Benedict Anderson--[6]

> The idea of an authentic culture as an internally cohesive and autonomous space is untenable except, perhaps, as a useful fiction or a revealing distortion
>
> --Renato Rosaldo--[7]

The words of Benedict Anderson pertinently establish a point of departure for the present analysis of contemporary Mexican women writers whose texts challenge the embodiment of nationalism and nation, validating Anderson's premise that the study of nation continues to be a legitimate field of investigation. Therefore, we can recognize that this elusive concept is one that is in flux and should be continually re-evaluated and re-defined in accordance with the cultural and political environment of the nation-state in question. Moreover, it is important to note in this arena, as Renato Rosaldo has stated,

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[6] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities* London: Verso, 1991, p. 3

[7] Renato, Rosaldo. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, p. 209

that the idea of an "authentic culture" which is unified and cohesive is no longer valid. Thus, in the particular case of Mexico, this disrupts the ideology of the concept of nation, that since its inception has followed a pattern of presumed uniformity, where, " (i)n repeated fashion, successive administrations have attempted to present a united nation to the outside and to deny the fragmented status of its people" (D'Lugo 17). This continual attempt by the political administration in Mexico to unite the country under false pretenses and ignore the diversity and "fragmentation" of the country has led to an ambiguous definition of the idea of nation in Mexico. As this study will show, the central powers that have historically imparted nationalism upon the people have disregarded and continue to ignore certain portions and aspects of the population to try and create a sense of nation that in the end, has created a multitude of borders that permeate the nation state: physical, geographical, emotional, racial, sexual and borders of gender, are all part of the fragmentation of the country[8]. Instead of embracing this diversity and accepting the impossibility of a unified autonomous nation, the political powers only strengthen the borders that divide the nation, by means of exclusion and manipulation.

This is the political and cultural environment in which the writers considered in the present study--Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich-- find themselves: amidst a myriad of borders—border dwellers in a centralized,

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[8] Renalto Rosaldo notes that, "Although most metropolitan typifications continue to suppress border zones, human cultures are neither necessarily coherent nor always homogeneous. More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics dress, food, or taste. Along with "our" supposedly transparent cultural selves, such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation" (1993: 207-8).

patriarchal country that continues to struggle with its ideological definition of nation. As Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel and Marta Cerda are all from regions of Mexico distanced from the capital, they find themselves alienated from this metropolitan space that has shaped, formed and manipulated its national identity.[9] Moreover, as Conde and San Miguel are from the northern border region, an area which historically, has experienced a complex relationship within the Mexican nationalist project[10], they face their own set of tribulations and confront endless borders that far surpass the ever present geographical border. Therefore, these border writers are not alone as they face an endless surplus of borders that make problematic the acceptance of the parameters of the "nation". As women and as members of the national community, all the writers considered in this study therein confront a multitude of borders--a "fragmented" diverse culture of the nation-- that the political hierarchy has incessantly attempted to ignore and erase[11].

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[9] Sara Sefchovich is from Mexico City but as she highlights in her text *Demasiado amor*, the metropolitan space is itself divided by borders that prevent access and voice to its minorities in the national project.

[10] In the mid- 1980's the Border Cultural Program was implemented to "cultivate and nationalize" the border states, hence, as Debra Castillo notes, "the conceptualization of this project is fraught with contradiction. If the central government's concern is primarily seen as one of 'nationalization', it follows that the inhabitants of the northern states were still largely seen in the mid-1980's as an uncultured and potentially disruptive hybrid group, dangerously threatened by absorption into the U.S. culture next door" (*Border Women* 19)

[11] As Nelly Richard has so poignantly recognized, "The limits of inclusion and exclusion territorializing the boundaries of institutional control are neither fixed nor linear. Various forces of social and cultural change can exert sectorial or regional pressure on these limits—in order to move them, partially relax their marks of closure and vigilance, weaken rigidities. Among them are: ...(2) forces invigorated by the feminist debate denouncing the homological foreclosure of masculine self-representation; and (3) transcultural and multicultural forces of the Latin American periphery that revise and critique the metropolitan synthesis of the center's modernity..." (2004:3).

As a means of analysis, the present study utilizes Border theory, theories on Nation, and Feminist theory, to examine the works of Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich. It shall explore the mechanisms utilized by these Mexican women writers to undermine, overcome and erase the borders that thwart the formation of a cultural identity of the Mexican nation that accounts for its diversity—annihilating the idea of an "authentic" unified national identity.[12] Finally, the present study does not pretend to be comprehensive in its presentation of the theories utilized but rather embraces the eclectic nature of elements of said theories as a means of better understanding the complexity and importance of the texts in question.

Border Theory

The term "border" is an ambiguous concept, in part, due to the multitude of ways in which current theory has scrutinized this topic; as we will see, divergences in border theories are common[13]. In David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen's introduction, they note that, "like 'race' and 'gender', and then 'nation' and 'sexuality', the intellectual

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[12] Jean Franco notes, in relation to hybridity and fragmentation, "Culture is no longer securely located in a place of origin or in a stable community and is constantly reinvented by people on the move...The "hybridity of this culture that develops out of displacement, juxtaposition, or the sheer speed of its transmission has produced a new set of problems for the analyst as well as new cultural configurations....Both homogeneity and hybridity challenge older definitions of national identity and community" (*Critical Passions* 208-209)

[13] However, at its core, the importance of border theory/writing can be defined as stated by Harry Polkinhorn, "Border writing broadly defined is important because of its very marginality with relation to the centers of cultural power. Since it lacks significance within the received terms of critical discourse, it poses a challenge to those terms. Its characteristic marker consists of the relationship of opposition, simultaneously underscoring the power difference which constitutes it and making its theorization literally impossible with the discourse conventions which have been evolved from within power to rationalize its advantage" (1).

entry point of the 'border' is one of the grand themes of recent, politically liberal-to-left work across the humanities and social sciences. National interdisciplinary conferences are organized around this theme, and hundreds of papers and books produced in all of the liberal arts disciplines" (2)[14]. It is clear that the border is widely theorized and obvious deviations of thought are found in the different disciplines. As this study is particular to the writing of Mexican women, the focus will be on studies relevant to the field of Mexican literature[15], to utilize said material to understand how and why the writers in question depict borders in their texts and how their restructuring of certain borders leads to new ways of narrating the nation.

One of the most important studies in recent years treating the topic of the border in Mexican literature is Debra Castillo and Maria Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba's invaluable text *Border Women*. In this study the authors note that current studies on border theory present two distinct perspectives: the Mexican and the U.S. theorists. The Mexican point of view focuses more often on the literature from the specific border region, with its theoretical views stemming from the texts themselves, while also focusing on the current socio-political environment of the actual border region. Conversely, the U.S. theorists tend to treat more often the abstract theoretical concerns. That is to say, the border as seen from the U.S. is more commonly viewed as an abstract textual-theoretical border instead of an actual geographic border. This theoretical position of the border-as-metaphor lends itself to a host of discourses that denounce

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[14] Johnson and Michaelsen also note of border studies, "(The border) often is assumed to be a place of politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility. The borderlands, in other words, are the privileged locus of hope for a better world" (3).

[15] Broader studies on the border in Latin American literature will be included as the ideas of theorists such as Nelly Richards can be contextualized in any Latin American country.

various exclusionary stances related to issues of power, gender, and hierarchy. It is important to note the validity of both perspectives, and for this study it is imperative to not only focus on one side of the border as this exclusivity would not paint a complete picture of the divides that define Mexican reality. As John C. Welchman states in his text *Rethinking Borders* that, "the condition of borders has been crucial to many recent exhibitions, intellectual projects and conferences. But there does not yet exist a convincing critical framework for border discourse" (xii). That said, this study intends to incorporate both the metaphorical and geographical border studies, from both sides of the border, as a means of better understanding the complexities of this challenging but insightful concept.

Beginning with the Argentine theorist Nelly Richard, widely published in the U.S., she writes:

> Each historical period or cultural tradition selects a fixed point which functions as the centre of its current maps, a physical symbolic space to which a privileged position is attributed and from which all other spaces are distributed in an organized manner. The privileged position which this centre defends, and then translates into authoritarian roles-taking decisions, fixing rules, exercising control, etc-stands out most forcefully in the opposition we can mark as centre/periphery (71)

Although this information appears basic--the idea of the center vs. periphery--it is vital to recognize how this political hierarchy is at its core the power that drives the creation and implementation of borders. Richard further elaborates how these centers of power have the authority to validate meaning and identity on people, places and things. This is

apparent in the texts in this study, as the authors repeatedly show how the central powers of the Mexican state have and continue to impose meaning and identity on the people[16]. Therefore, we can question, how do these writers then undermine such imposition? Turning to Richards, she proposes the inclusion of the rhetoric of the "other" within the concerns of the progressive intellectuals as a means of de-centering this central power. As a means of dehierarchization of the mechanisms of cultural meaning, Richards looks to the border as a site of enunciation, which allows a shift in the positions of power and concurrently unmasks the arbitrary nature of the central project. As this study shall demonstrate, within *La Genara*, Rosina Conde does just that--she turns the border into a site of enunciation and therefore inverts the postion of power to that of the border.

Importantly, Richard notes that identity is a "moving construction" which is continually formed and transformed. While "authenticity" is impossible, the placing of the self in tension with the other allows for a process of borrowing and negotiation in an attempt to rethink the limits of cultural meaning in the nation space. This idea of borrowing and negotiation will be seen in all of the texts in this study as the authors continually negotiate border spaces that entrap the characters. To emphasize this idea we note that for Richard, "borders" themselves are "the places where models and references range beyond the networks of meaning ordered and controlled by the cultural hegemony of the centre" (75). That is to say, Richard's ideas on the border center on the tension

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[16] Johnson and Michaelson note 'The cultural knots—the sorts of borders that strangely elide the difference between inside and outside—are products of beginnings. What is typically described as identity difference is nothing more than an effect of an identity relationality that makes it seem as if cultures are still to be 'crossed' rather than as David Murray has suggested, analyzed for their 'constant' interplay" (3). That is to say, these borders of power and identity implemented by the "inside" metropolis should be re-formulated and become instead an interplay of the inside politics with the outside regions, allowing for new models of national identity.

between the border spaces and the central powers and she proposes that, to hear the voices from the borders, the "mask of the metropolitan culture" needs to be removed. This idea of the mask and its removal is another theme of Richards that is strikingly appropriate in the present analysis as many of the "border dwellers" in these texts hide behind a variant of masks—from the masks of anorexia to prostitution—in their search for an identity beyond that of the imposed identity of the political hegemony.

One of the most well-know U.S. based critics of the border is Harry Polkinhorn who states that the only way to understand the border is to cross it. Polkinhorn's analysis is from the perspective of looking North to South as he looks at both Chicano and Mexican border literature within the same confines. As Debra Castillo notes, "For Polkinhorn, border writing stresses the importance of an *otherness* whose locus is to be found in a nonplace of transition that gives rise to either a game or a struggle between two or more languages and cultures" (10). Polkinhorn looks at this struggle within Chicano literature and sees the border as being a no-mans land where narrative identities in Chicano literature are imprisoned and unable to cross the wire fence of the border and be included in the corpus of Mexican literature. Hence, this leads to an ambiguity in said texts, as they are not able to "cross" the border, which as Polkinhorn believes, is to be able to understand it. Polkinhorn's analyis of the border is useful for this study in that this idea of "to cross the border is to understand it" can be translated not only to the geographic border, but to the many metaphorical borders that the characters face in these texts. As we will see, only as the characters are able to understand the borders that hinder their movement, whether it be physical, geographical or psychological, are they able to disengage that particular border. That is to say, metaphorically they are able to cross the

border and be aware of its meaning in relation to their existence, as Polkinhorn has theorized.

The U.S. based theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, as one of the earliest border theorists, prompted a host of responses to her insightful ideas on the border in *Borderlands/la frontera* (1987). In her text, the idea of the metaphorical border is examined as Andalzúa speaks of the border as an "open wound" where the "Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country".(3) Therein, Anzaldúa recognizes the "border space" as a third country between the two nations, "the borderlands". By using this allegory of the borderlands, it allots power to the border space, in acknowledgement of the diversity of border culture that should be celebrated as part of the national culture instead of ostrisized.

For Anzaldúa, this blending of the third and first world cultures results in a more heterogeneous transnational space of (national) identity formation. That is to say, by viewing the borderlands in this manner, this space becomes a priviledged site rather than being categorized as the "other" by the central political powers. At the same time, Anzaldúa's analogy of the grating of the two worlds acknowledges the wounds of the border region, as this space has always been between the two existing cultures-- close to both-- but at the same time alienated as actual participants in either. For example, we will see in Rosario San Miguel's *Callejón Sucre y otros relatos* evidence of these "wounds" that have plagued the border region as she delves into topics of the nightlife and dark sides of the border. That is not to say that San Miguel condemns her region for these aspects of its existence, but recognizes how the "grating" of the two cultures lends

itself to this type of activity. Therefore, San Miguel's vivid picture of the realities of the border celebrate the diversity of this area and in a sense distinguish its differences, as Anzaldúa believes, into a third country—the borderlands.

Interestingly, this metaphor of the grating of the two worlds is also useful as we read Sara Sefchovich's novel *Demasiado amor,* as this text highlights the border spaces[17] found even within the confines of the glorified center. As a means of escaping her subordinate position, sefchovich's character, Beatriz, creates for herself a new "country"--her own borderland. This is an important concept, as this study intends to recognize the universality of borders in that they are not exclusively a geographic dividing line between cultures or countries, but that they are ever present and extensive, in particular, when there is conflict or tension between a controlling agent and the broader culture. Therefore, although Anzaldúa's study is specific to the actual border region, her ideas extend well beyond that in an analysis of the Mexican culture.

In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Walter Mignolo treats the topic of the border in the U.S., Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and the former British Commonwealth. In his study, he states, "By 'border thinking' I mean the moments when the imaginary of the modern world system cracks" (23). That is to say, he bases his ideas on the history of the border areas in question and allegorizes the conflicts in history as the cracks in the system. For example, in the case of the U.S. and Mexico, these cracks are due to the fluctuating tensions since the 19th century. We could compare these

[17] These are spaces that are created because of the grating of the national imposed culture by the political hegemony, with any diversified culture that falls out of the definition of what the political powers desire, as border spaces.

cracks to Anzaldúa's wounds--injuries of the political battles over the borderlands, beginning with the early disputes of ownership of the Northern border region.

A further point of interest in Mignolo's study is the manner in which he contemplates the situation of intellectuals, like himself, who move between two languages and two cultures, looking beyond the common border analysis of the non-intellectual border dweller. For Mignolo, this position is one of power as he (and said intellectuals) are able to theorize "from the border" with the border as a bridge. That is to say, this "border bridge" is a space of authority that can manipulate and control the information that is disseminated between the two sides of the border. This places the border region as an authoritative site of enunciation. Although strikingly simple, recognizing the intellectual as part of the border space is fundamental--allowing the intellectual circuits to be further cultivated and acknowledged. In this sense, we will see in *La Genara,* how Rosina Conde emphasizes the intellectual community as part of the border community, highlighting the need for the border to be recognized in this light as opposed to the continual focus on the negative aspects of the region. Like Mignolo, Conde emphasizes the border as a priviledged site of enunciation.

Although Claire Fox uses the analogy of the fence and the river, in her text with the same name, she is critical of theories like those of Anzaldúa and Mignolo, as she believes that too much discussion of the border as only metaphorical or abstract can undermine the "real" dilemmas that border regions face. In her study, Fox highlights the importance of understanding the complexities of the border and states, "the border as it appears in literature and art must be understood as polyvalent, as a place where urban and rural, national and international spaces simultaneously coexist, often in complex and

contradictory ways" (3). However, Fox is conscious that this coexistence, full of contradictions is challenging. As a means of understanding the border as a place of intersection, Fox provides a thorough examination of the political and economic circumstances that affect the border region, and how the incorporation of the border zones into the national economies of Latin America have led to both positive and negative outcomes[18] . Hence, Fox's study is useful as a guideline in this study to better understand the politics and economics, which have created conflict in these border zones—going beyond a unitary study of the border as simply a metaphorical concept.

In *Border Matters*, José David Saldívar points out a space of "Latinity" through which writers (Latino and Latin American) attempt to outline a new "transgeographical" idea of American culture that takes into account the geographical, political and cultural ideologies-- missing in a traditional, restricted conception of nation. In his text, he explores the melting-pot myth with a new reading of the historical migrational patterns and their impact on the U.S. border culture, as he poignantly questions "what changes, for example, when American culture and literature are understood in terms of 'migration' and not only immigration?" (17). This idea is appealing to the present study, as the writers considered appear to pose this idea of migration within their texts. That is to say, the idea that their voices migrate throughout Mexico and the position from which they are speaking (in terms of center/periphery) is insignificant to how they are received. For this study, migration can come to mean an acceptance of the flow of ideas between different

[18] For example, the maquiladoras have brought monetary support to the border region but at the same time, in many maquiladoras, the working conditions and benefits for the workers are substandard.

regions, allowing the countries diversity to surface instead of being shadowed by the central powers. [19]

Lastly, Saldívar recognizes that theorizing on the border is difficult because it is a space of "hybridity and betweenness", leading to any framework of the border being a hybrid definition in itself.[20] This assertion is crucial to this study, as it proposes to argue, there is no true, identifiable definition of the border. Nevertheless, as this study will show, there are particular patterns to border literature, which will become evident as we ponder why and how borders are utilized and integral to the texts considered. The common thread to the borders in this study, is that all lead back to an underlying message of the tribulations of the formation, implementation, and exclusionary stance of nation in Mexico.

The ideas of the U.S. based theorist Emily Hicks, prove to be undoubtedly the most constructive to the readings of the texts in the present study . Although some are critical of her ideas of biculturalism, bilingualism and bi-conception of reality[21], her study

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[19] Along the same lines, Claire Fox notes how the border region itself treats the concept of migration and immigration, relegating this population outside of either national system. Fox states, "Traditionally, the social sciences have viewed international border zones as culturally diluted and marginal to the interests of the nation-state. This attitude, according to (Robert) Alvarez, has prevailed in U.S. –Mexico border studies, where immigration issues have been emphasized to the almost complete exclusion of the Chicano/a and Mexican populations that have occupied the region for centuries. He writes, 'These people are placed in a direct relationship to the marginal status of the border region and are often perceived as transitory and marginal participants in both [national] systems" (2).

[20] Saldívar questions, "what changes, for example, when culture is understood in terms of material hybridity, not purity? How is the imagined community of the nation-to use Benedict Anderson's (1983) terms—disrupted and customized by materially hybrid U.S.-Mexico borderland subjectivities?" (1997:19)

[21] This criticism is due to the fact that there are writers from both sides of the border that are neither bilingual or bi-cultural whose writing is nevertheless considered as border writing.

is comprehensive, in that her use of metaphor is consciously supported by the history and geography of the regions in question. For Hicks, border writing must be viewed as a "mode of operation" (xxiii). That is to say, in her analysis Hicks believes in the power of the word of border writers to make change, writing becomes an operation that can lead to political and social transformations. This is true of all the writers in the present study--their writing is an operation, which engages the reader in the social circumstances that prompt their texts. None of the writers leave room for any critical reading of their texts that does not lead back to an underlying criticism of the social or political system.

Furthermore, as Hicks states, "What makes border writing a world literature with 'universal' appeal is its emphasis upon the multiplicity of languages within any single language; by choosing a strategy of translation rather than representation, border writers ultimately undermine the distinction between original and alien culture" (xxiii). This is particularly evident in this study of women's writing, as the writers translate the reality of the borders of their region, space or being to a language that undermine the stereotypes associated with said conditions. Moreover, Hicks believes that border writers hold a privileged position as they are able to occasion the reader to see from both sides of the border, with multidimensional perception, as she terms such a state. This multidimentional perception engages the reader and allows them to actively view the borders and the conflicts that surround them[22]. That is to say, the writers clearly expose to the reader both sides of the border allowing the reader to reflect the conditions of the borders in question rather than being presented with a unilateral vision.

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[22] Hicks notes, "Border literacy, or the ability to read border literature, is a kind of border crossing as well as a democratic thought process; it avoids a single perspective, such as a middle-class, Western cultural bias" (xxxi).

Hicks acknowledges the culture of Latin America as basically heterogeneous, where in the particular case of Mexico, she states, "The contemporary culture of Mexico, for example, emerges from what can be considered a multilayered semiotic matrix: the Mixteco Indians, Spain, the Lacandonian Indians, Mc Donalds, ballet folklorico, and punk rock" (xxiv). For that reason, this heterogeneous state results in borders of conflict between traditions of indigenous cultures and cultures that have crossed the borders from the United States. Therefore, Hicks believes that "much contemporary Latin American literature is a literature of borders: cultural borders between Paris/Buenos Aires and Mexico City/New York, gender borders between women and men, and economic borders between dollar-based and other-currency-based societies" (xxiv). Said stance, recognizes the broader definitions of borders that we will see in this study. That is to say, the borders that permeate the Mexican nation arise out of these differences between cultures--foreign and national cultures--where most lead us back to a re-conceptualization of the concept of nation.

A further characteristic that Hicks presents of border writing is that the subject is de-centered and the object is not present but rather displaced. This leads to her concept of deterritorialization, as she contemplates the decentered subject, as suggested by Paul de Man,

> He argues that Immanuel Kant's notion of the architectonic assumes, in rhetorical analytical terms, a consideration of the limbs of the body apart from any use. This leads him to a provocative conclusion: the dismemberment of the body corresponds to dismemberment of language 'as meaning-tropes are replaced by fragmentation' into words, syllables, and letters (121-44). This dismemberment

> of language bears a similarity to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of deterritorialization. That is, one could argue that the nineteenth-century European notion of the subject is replaced in the work of the border writer by fragmentation in cultural, linguistic, and political deterritorialization (xxiv)

Therefore, Hicks utilizes this concept of Deleuze and Guattari, which comes from their definition of minor literature, to develop her theory of "border writing". Hence, her re-written version of their categories of minor literature are the following:

> (1) The displacement or 'deterritorialization' of time and space through nonsynchronous memory and 'reterritorialization' (and not only through nostalgia in a pejorative sense); (2) deterritorialization or nonsynchrony in relation to everyday life; (3) the decentered subject/active reader/assemblage/agent/border crosser/becoming-animal; and (4) the political.

When referring to the term reterritorialization, she notes that when leaving one's place of origin, the objects that form part of the past are missing and this place of origin takes a spot in our memory. Therein, by compartmentalizing these memories, it is possible to "re-establish" oneself, or "reterritorialize". The ideas of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are fundamental to this study as we will repeatedly see how the writers use this formulation as a means of undermining the borders that hinder their characters. The displacement and therein "re-placement" of characters lends itself to new perspectives on the ideas of nation and furthermore becomes a tool in their individual search for identity and also metaphorically in the nations own search for identity.

In transition, we will now briefly examine the critical perspectives from the Mexican side of the border. However, as noted by Debra Castillo and María Soccorro

Tabuénca Córdoba, this body of criticism is far less extensive and has not gained significant attention as an integral part of the corpus of border theory. For example, Ignacio Betancourt studies the works of both Chicano and Mexican writers, but both Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba note that, although his work has great potential, it could be further developed and is lacking in conclusions. Nevertheless, the ideas of the handful of critics who have been able to publish their work and successfully enter into this critical body of theory are noteworthy.

Two significant studies, are those by critics Eduardo Barrera Herrera and Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz. The ideas of Trujillo Muñoz are original in that in his article, "La frontera: visiones vagabundas" he traces the manner in which North American writers have portrayed the border region in their literature. In a sense, this type of study is useful in that it demonstrates the abundance of stereotypes that prevail in this literature from the other side of the border, written by authors such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Graham Greene[23]. Moreover, Trujillo Muñoz's study is helpful in that it traces the history of the border region and how these authors use pieces of this history as part of their literature. Trujillo Muñoz concludes that for many of these writers, the border is a space where counter-positions in values and beliefs are disputed, while also providing a space for, "la fascinación por lo extraño, la búsqueda de respuestas espirituales, el afán de aventura y exploración, los intereses políticos"(129) [a fascination for the unusual, a search for spiritual answers, the desire for adventure and exploration, political interests].

[23] These would be some of the authors that write of the border but are themselves not bi-cultural nor in most cases bilingual, referring to the criticism of Hick's use of these terms as part of border theory.

In Barrera Herrera's study, his re-elaboration of the ideas of Néstor Garcia Canclini of the border as a "laboratorio de la postmodernidad" (6) are constructive to this study. His analysis names the border as a site where the national identity is re-assessed because of the juxtaposition of symbolic systems, rural and urban migration, maquiladoras, tourism, trans-national commerce, radio and television. This co-existence of cultures and ideologies leads to this "postmodern laboratory" where negotiations of identity undermine any fight for hegemony from the center of the country. Said assessment, penetrates the core of this complex debate of border studies where the ambiguity created in this "postmodern laboratory", as we have traced in this analysis, has led to a host of distinct and often contradictory positions of border theories.

Another critic, Francisco A. Lomelí in his article, "En torno a la literatura de la frontera: Convergencia o divergencia?", develops his concept of the border "as a dynamic site of socioeconomical, cultural, and political exchange and resistance, and as a unifying element between Mexicans and Chicanos" (Castillo/Tabuenca 23). This premise further places the border as a site of privilege, similar to many of the other critics from the U.S. that we have seen. This common thread leads to a better understanding of the concept of borders. It appears that the critical body of theorists we have seen, believe in the posibility of transforming the term into a priviledged concept and reversing its negative stereotypes. That said, the border then becomes a point of departure for change, a term that although loaded with negative connotations has the potential to revolutionize the premises of nation and cultural identity in Mexico.

Nation Theory

At this point, we look to the theories on nation to further understand how the borders these women writers confront, challenge the ideology of the Mexican nation, and moreover, the theories behind this often vague concept. The study of nation and nationalism is ambiguous to some extent as Benedict Anderson has so poignantly noted in his seminal text *Imagined Communities*, "Nation, nationality, nationalism-all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse. In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it is conspicuously meager" (3). Nevertheless, both Anderson and Ernest Gellner, also known for his studies on nation attempt to define said ideology. Gellner notes that nationalism is in most senses a political principle, "which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (1983: 1). Moreover, Gellner notes the variety of ways in which nationalist principle can be despoiled, and notable to this study is his example of how the political boundary of a state, may not include all the members of said nation. That is to say, such exclusion may lead to turmoil within the nation-state where nationalist principles are then called into question. Nonetheless, Gellner attempts to define Nation and bases his definition on the following two principles,

> 1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating. 2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation...A mere category of persons..becomes a nation if and when the members of the category

firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it" (1983: 7).

Furthermore, beyond these ideas of a shared culture and recognition of shared rights, Gellner believes that the existence and presence of a centralized state is imperative to the vision and workings of a Nation. These ideas of Gellner are constructive to this study in that they help us to understand the stronghold of national thought, that is to say, why the divergences we will see in the texts in question become disparities to the belief in a shared culture with mutual rights. As we will see, these ideas cannot hold true in a diverse, hybrid culture but rather, create with such national thought further borders that impede this shared membership of nation.

For Benedict Anderson, his definition of nation is that it is, "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Anderson notes that Gellner attempts to make a similar point as he says that nationalism is not the arousing of nations to self-consciousness but rather the invention of nations. Anderson criticizes this formulation as he states that Gellner assimilates "invention" as "fabrication" and falsity instead of "imagining" and "creation" as he proposes. He states, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). Thereafter, Anderson proceeds to explain the terms that make up his definition. He begins with his use of the nation being imagined as limited, emphasizing that borders and boundaries are never endless in any nation-state population. Secondly, in terms of sovereignty, he states

that the nation is sovereign because the concept developed during a time in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the power of the "divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic" (7) reign. Such timing led to the desire of nations to dream of freedom, therefore his use of the term sovereign. Finally, the nation is imagined as a community because Anderson sees it as a "deep, horizontal comradeship" which prevents people from killing and destroying each other and basically accepting their position as members of said population.

Anderson's principal idea of nations being imagined is a valuable, while also conflictive concept to this study. In one sense, we can utilize this idea as the women writers in question themselves use new forms of imagination in a re-creation of national identity. Nevertheless, this belief is a double-edged sword if the imagining of the nation is done only by the central powers and imparted as the solitary possibility for community. Furthermore, Anderson's idea of a deep, horizontal comradeship will be greatly disputed by the texts in question as they all illustrate the borders that prevent this comradeship. Both Anderson's and Gellner's ideas, although praised and accepted as part of the critical body of thought on nation, demonstrate the tribulations with the formation and understanding of this concept. For the writers in this study, these traditional conceptualizations of nation hinder the acceptance of a national identity created by the people and not by the political hierarchy.

With Anderson's ideas a as point of departure, Homi Bhabha delves into nation building in literature in his text *Nation and Narration*. Hence, said study is vital to the present study as Bhabha's analysis is particular to narration where Anderson devotes much of his work to the historical development of the concept of nation itself. Therefore,

Bhabha's work effectively supports an analysis of said phenomenon within the contemporary narrative mode of the texts in question. As Bhabha articulates, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation-or narration- might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west" (1). This "powerful historical idea," as Bhabha refers to it is however ambivalent, and that, as Bhabha notes creates questions of how narration responds to this ambivalence. If the nation is an ambivalent figure, then what effect does this have on narrations of "nationness", "....on the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the language of the law and the parole of the people" (2). All of these elements are called into question when one attempts to narrate the nation or challenge a particular system responsible for the "creation", borrowing Anderson's term, of a nation.

Bhabha's response to this is to embrace this ambivalence which as he states, therein, avoids recent tendency to read the Nation restrictively, either as the apparatus of state power, as theorized by Foucault or Bakhtin or in a more "utopian inversion", as the expression of the "national-popular" sentiment. Therefore, Bhabha's conceptualization of nation intends to incorporate and include the many "others" and therein breaks down the borders that have been justified by a unilateral vision of nation.

Moreover, Bhabha, borrows from the ideas of Volosinov, that the ideological sign is multi-accentual and Janus-faced. Therefore, Bhabha explores,

> the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation. This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in medias res; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image (3).

This idea of accepting the parameters of culture or nation as being in medias res or seeing the notion of nation as a composition -- an on-going process of re-working and re-writing the principles and convictions of a nation, is invaluable. Along the same lines, Bhabha further acknowledges that as a form of cultural elaboration, the nation, is an "agency of ambivalent narration" that places culture in a productive position so that it is able to subordinate, fracture, diffuse, and reproduce while at the same time being the agent of production and creation. As a means of allowing this fracturing and subsequent creation of culture, Bhabha proposes looking to the margins or as we may propose for the present study, to the "borders" of the nation-space. As noted,

> The marginal or 'minority' is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity-progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past- that rationalize the authoritarian, 'normalizing' tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. In

> this sense, then, the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production (4).

Therefore, Bhabha underlines the importance of recognizing the different "pockets" of culture that are not unified in relation to themselves, nor must they be recognized as the outside "other" but rather these boundaries need to be part of a process of hybridity. This is to say, including new people within what is considered to be the "body politic" and creating sites that lead to political antagonism and unpredictability. Said spaces, will lead to a continual process of nation formation that does not become static and therefore exclusionary. This "incomplete signification," then, as Bhabha names this unpredictability, turns the boundaries and limits of the nation into the "in-between" spaces where cultural and political meanings are negotiated. Along these lines, Bhabha notes that "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries-both actual and conceptual-disturb those ideological maneuver through which 'imagines communities' are given essentialist identities" (300). Therefore, once again we can note that a common thread to Bhabha's theory rejects any sort of essentialist identity, as he advocates for the continual re-working of a nation. In his belief, any supremacist or nationalist claims to cultural authority leads to a falsity in the "nation-ness" of any given nation.

In terms of narrating this mode of nation formation, Bhabha highlights that, "the present of the people's history, then, is a practice that destroys the constant principles of the national culture that attempt to hark back to a 'true' national past, which is often

represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype. Such pedagogical knowledges and continuist national narratives miss the 'zone of occult instability where the people dwell" (303). Hence, in this sense, one vital aspect of not relying on any "true" history or stereotype in nation formation in Bhabha's opinion is through the process of forgetting, where being forced to forget, permits a remembering of the nation and "peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification" (311). Therefore, this idea of forgetting and remembering while also looking to the 'zones of instability' lend themselves to a reading the texts considered, that present themselves as counter-narratives of the nation. Hence, it is not unforeseen then that in the text *Between Woman and Nation*, Bhabha's theory's becomes a springboard to extend an analysis of nation, within feminist theory, to study the role of women in these national projects.

In *Between Woman and Nation*, the problematic situation of woman in the construction of the nation is recognized. As noted by the editors of the study, the concept of nation is typically viewed, "as the central site of 'hegemonic masculinity' or what Luce Irigary calls 'hom(m)o-sexuality' as social mediation, the nation-state sharpens the defining lines of citizenship for women, racialized ethnicities, and sexualities in the construction of a socially stratified society" (Alarcon, Kaplan, Moallem, 1). The acknowledgement that women as part of the national project have in most cases been relegated to the sidelines, to the borders of the nation, leads the editors of this pertinent study--a vital framework of nation and women, to study the relationship between the Nation-state and the rhetoric of borders. Inevitably, as they state, "Viewing the world as constituted only through margins and centers...leaves us within the

discursive cosmos of colonial power relations, helpless to recognize the complex and nuanced manifestations of transnational circulations of peoples, good, and information" (4). That said, the editors from *Between Woman and Nation*, recognize that beyond this center/margin dichotomy, current theory also examines the rhetoric of borders and hybridities, where the concepts of inner/outer are seen to construct an "edge, or a border", which facilitates an understanding of the double movements of the nation-state, its "plural logic of doubleness and aporias (Derrida 1993)" (5). Said doubleness,

> serves to speak simultaneously in the name of the people 'inside' and those who are outside. In attempting to consolidate its nationalist power for the well-being of the people, the nation-state often overlooks the effects its decisions and consequent events may have on diverse populations whose difference, often marked through concepts such as sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, and class, may situate them adversely to a 'center'" (5).

That is to say, this study identifies the nucleus of the problem when stating that such consolidation in the name of the "people" inevitably leads to exclusion that may cross lines of gender, race and class, which therein itself can create adversity to the "central" powers that have created said ideologies. Therefore, in this study the concept of the border, as we saw in border theory, is functional in prompting change and creating new ways of thinking about nation.

Borrowing from Derrida, the authors of the text argue that the notion of borders refers to two heterogeneous boundaries and not a single line. As Derrida has noted, "one type of border passes among contents [sic] (things, objects, referents: territories, countries, states, nations, cultures, languages, etc.), the other type of borderly limit would

pass between a concept and an other, according to the bar of an oppositional logic" (5). Therefore, this double concept of the border creates contradictions in meanings as contents and concepts create aporias which results in the "impossible unity" of the nation, that Bhabha argues is, "always transitional, hybrid, and inalterably social" (*in Between Woman and Nation* 5). Once, again we return to this idea of a nation being transitional, similar to the ideas of migration as proposed by Saldívar. Hence, the idea of nation should be a continual re-thinking of the movements and changes within the nation-state, a constant inter-change of ideas, a process, and not a static, unilateral decision.[24] This point is important to this study, as the texts in question, overturn the longstanding borders that are part of this static, political system that appears to continually re-cycle its design, instead of allowing for new ideas and change. As we will see, the writers in this study, propose new ways of breaking down these borders and creating a new form of reading and writing the nation.

Furthermore, as noted, this doubleness and deconstruction of borders as part of the construction of a nation, then promotes the articulation of impossible unities, subjects and practices, which historically has not been the case, as Elspeth Probyn notes, "the retrospective activity of nation-building in modernity is always predicated upon woman as trope, displacing historical women, consolidating hybridity into totality, and erasing the doubled border into a single sign" (*Between Woman and Nation* 6). Therefore, as Probyn then acknowledges, in the present era of postmodernity, the woman/feminine signifier becomes a figure of resistance in the fraternal fight for power in the national

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[24] In this sense, the study agrees in part, with Benedict Anderson's ideas of an imagined community as, "an unstable fiction whose desire must be continually posed and questioned. It is the utopia and dystopia of the nation-state and the people" (6).

project. Thus, it is these figures of resistance that highlight the issues that many Nation-states are unable to resolve. As we will see, the protagonists in this study all become figures of resistance--from the prostitute to the academic--that embody this resistance in the patriarchal battle for power in the national project.

Finally, as the authors respond to the selection of the title of their study, they furthermore expose the core hypothesis of their work which states that "Between woman and nation' refers to a specific space where women and nation intersect, giving rise to 'the interval of *difference*', again, utilizing Derrida's terminology. Through this 'difference' and through a racialization, sexualization, and genderization, these authors propose that the nation is able to become a "timeless and homogenized entity" (7). Furthermore, by

> Critically reading the spaces between woman and nation as not only structured by patriarchy, we can begin to grasp the supra- and transnational aspects of cultures of identity, what Mohanty has referred to as 'imagined communities of women' with 'divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic (13).

Therefore, as asserted, by weaving together the divergent histories of women and looking to the borders of the nation, for new cultural forms and identities, an evolvement and re-structuralization of the nationalist space is possible. Moreover, to reiterate the need to analyze the "border" spaces within any nationalist project is evident as argued in *Between Woman and Nation*, "the crosscutting of space and temporality in the interminable nationalist project leads to the observation that the nation-state manipulates the logic of

margin/center to its advantage. Thus, to speak from the margin is to be already complicit with the discourse of the nation-state, which, moreover, appears to be unavoidable in contemporary political life" (8). Therefore, this idea that to speak from the margins is to be complicit with the discourse of the nation is invaluable to this study as Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich all speak from the margins, in one form or another, and this compromising position then allows them to challenge the "official discourse" of the nation.

Hence, the concept of nation in this study covers the conceptualization of nation as constructed by the State, recognizing that the nation is forged by its people/inhabitants, in everyday cultural acts, just as women's writing proves. With the culmination and aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the government embarked on a fervert project of nation building in Mexico. The focus of this project treats this official venture of the political system and its ardent endorsement of a national discourse, designed and imparted by this hierarchal power house.

Other means of nation building that have occurred in Mexico are acknowledged by Mexico's most recognized cultural critic, Carlos Monsiváis, "Monsiváis devotes his creative project, then to a trinity of nation-building concerns: the artistic, social and political phenomena of Mexico's immediate and recent history, as these bear upon the progressive democratization of his society" (Egan x). In his many studies, Monsiváis highlights how popular culture, the people and political movements have led to new ways of interpreting hegemonic paradigms. As he notes, this left-liberal view of popular culture is resistant to the official, dominant culture and gives individual citizens credit for their efforts in re-working the national discourse as directed by the state. For Monsiváis,

popular culture occupies an important role in the national culture, "Cultura nacional, cultura popular. Es tan enorme en México la fortuna de ambos términos en nuestros ámbitos politicos y académicos, que previsiblemente, a ese auge no lo acompañan definiciones, difíciles de alcanzar y de riegosa aplicación" [National culture, popular culture. In Mexico, the fortunes of both terms are so huge in our political and academic fields that, predictably, their rise in importance is not accompanied by definitions, which in themselves are difficult to arrive at and risky to apply] ("Notas sobre el Estado" 33).

Moreover, Monsiváis highlights in his writing the role of the people which contribute to the potential democracy of the country, as he believes, is still not in place as he states, "Cúanto falta en México para el pleno ejercicio de la democracia?" [How much longer will Mexico wait for true democracy?] (*Entrada* 11). In response to this question, Monsiváis cites examples of the power of the people. In the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake, Monsiváis notes how the "ordinary citizen (was) willing to make personal sacrifices for the good of strangers, brave enough to confront an inept government with civil disobedience" (Entrada 34). Along the same lines, Gilbert Joseph notes how after the earthquake, "The government's often slow and self-serving response to the emergency angered many people, and out of the rubble grew several important organizations. Probably the most important was the CUD (Coordinadora Unica de Damnificados), which was itself composed of some twenty neighborhood groups formed to demand greater government responsiveness to the disaster" (*The Mexico Reader* 579). Monsiváis further cites examples of Indigenous migrant women's groups forming in a Zapotec Municipality of the city called Juchitán, whose name, common to Mexicanist scholars signifies "cultural resistance, political dissent and strong women..." (Egan 201).

Monsiváis also chronicles the actions and struggles of rural teachers and farmers forming independent unions. However, as noted, "Activists among these, dissenting from the government-backed national teachers union, 'ya enclave feudal' [still a pocket of feudal power] and a mirror image of the PRI's paternalistic hierarchy, are murdered or threatened, as though the national union were Hernán Cortés and those dissenting from its point of view were Tlaxcaltec natives: 'Pediremos que les corten las manos por meterlas en nuestro organismo [We will demand that their hands be cut off for having stuck them in our business] (174)" (Egan 201).

Therein, although nation building in Mexico can be seen in popular culture and in the joining together and uprisings of the people, it is evident by Monsiváis's analogy of the hegemonic political system and Hernán Cortés, that it is pertinent to focus on the concept of nation that has been constructed by this dominant, centrist, political system. Therefore, an analysis of the conceptualization of nation extends beyond nation-building as driven and assembled by the State, this study recognizes both the strong-hold the political hegemony has on this construction, and how simultaneously the writers in question themselves, as an integral and indispensable part of a community of citizens who act in their everyday life through writing and action, undermine and re-formulate the borders of this national project.

Feminist Theory

As a starting point for the following overview of a pertinent selection of feminist theory, we turn to Rosina Conde, one of the writers in this study. Conde has stated, that before becoming aware of the significance of the geographical border of her region, "the first

border she was made aware of was the border of gender" (Castillo 7). Conde's words strikingly underline the ongoing battle for women in Mexico as they confront these borders that have not only historically encumbered them equal participation in the work force, the political system, or for that matter, anywhere in the public sphere. Although great strides have been made for the position and treatment of women in Mexico, there is still an undercurrent of resistance by many that believe the woman's place is in the home. For that reason, this study utilizes feminist theory to better understand this topic of gender borders and to furthermore highlight mechanisms of subversion that the writers in question employ, to confront and overcome the obstacles these "borders" present.

Thus, the ideas of French Feminist critics and psychoanalytic feminist criticism construct a framework of feminist theory that adequately examines the concerns of the present study. The term French feminism applies to numerous writers and critical approaches to literature, but at the core of the theory is the idea of a 'woman's language' and most attribute said concept to the studies of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Héléne Cixous. What these critics share is a belief that our structures of understanding are coded in and by our language. The three of them are all deconstructionists in that they believe that systems of language are structures of power based upon internal contradictions, which can be deconstructed or taken apart. In brief, French feminists focus on the processes of language--the acquisition of language by the infant--as a means to deconstruct patriarchal discourses. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the "Woman as other" forms the core of said feminism, where all theorize to some extent that feminine language is itself the "Other". They agree, as Maggie Humm notes, "that language has been the central mechanism by which men have appropriated the world. The linguistic

means by which men colonise women, they argue, is that men devalue sensuality in favour of symbolism" (95). Therefore, we can note that these texts appropriate power to the female voice, where with few exceptions[25], the narrative voices are those of women. This allows for a reversal of roles where the women can shape, form and "colonize" to some extent their male counterparts.

In terms of addressing subjectivity for women, each uses different tools to approach this dilemma. Julia Kristeva, on the one hand, uses psychoanalysis to clarify her concept of the semiotic discourse, or instinctual drives, a time of sensual language between mothers and children before children enter into the formal language of society. Therefore, Kristeva's idea's are beneficial to the reading of Marta Cerda's text, as the narrative voice is that of the fetus of Mama. On the other hand, Irigaray and Cixous, use psychoanalysis to formulate a discourse that by expressing women's sexuality, represses male power. The female physiology then for Cixous and Irigaray, is a crucial source of metaphor through which they are able to reflect on women's discourse as a means of changing the phallocentric order of culture. For these women, literature is central to these concerns because, "literature often represents dreams and the unconscious; literature is the accumulation of subjectivity; and literature's discursive formations provide spaces/absences—or moments—when other kinds of subjectivity might be represented" (Humm 96). Hence, all have their own styles of how they believe one

[25] The first short story in Rosario San Miguel's collection has a male narrative voice, which will be addressed as part of her narrative technique. The other male narrative voice is that of the fetal narrator from Marta Cerda's text.

should write the body, as this style of writing is an important literary technique for these critics[26].

Irigaray, for example, proposes that to undermine the linear, masculine style so abundant in literary and philosophical texts, critics have to utilize female imagery because through this type of symbolism--the female auto-eroticism of lips, "Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact" (350)—they are able to speak to other women. The metaphor she uses, is in contrast to that of men's eroticism which she notes is dependent on something: a hand, a body, language, and this in itself requires a minimum of activity. Hence, this bestows power to the woman. Nevertheless, Irigaray's ideas subvert from those of Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the Other, "Irigaray argues that both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether" (Butler 14). She further notes that the feminine "sex" is a point of linguistic absence-- she is not "lacking" or "Other"-- as both of those concepts remain in opposition to the category of Subject, all part of a phallogocentric analogy.

Héléne Cixous believes that to write the body, women must adopt sex-specific rhythms and desires, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement" (Cixous

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[26] Interestingly, where many Anglo-American feminists tend to describe the social construction of femininity, French feminists highlight styles of writing derived from their readings of literary and philosophical texts.

334). Cixous further notes, "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (338). The metaphorical value of the mother's milk becomes important to Cixous in this idea of writing the body as she highlights that in each woman there is always a little of the mother's milk and therefore she writes in white ink. These ideas are appealing to this study, as we will note that these writers "write" women's bodies as a means of disrupting the borders that entrap them. The female body becomes a weapon in the war against patriarchy, highlighting the power of women's voices[27]. Furthermore, Cixous's conceptualization of the mother's milk being her ink is constructive in our reading of Marta Cerda's text, where the character's maternal milk, becomes a tool of empowerment.

The above arguments and literary techniques, have become know as écriture feminine, which focuses on the relationship between sexuality and writing style and forms. That is to say, women's physical desires, if put into writing, can function as a counter language. As noted, "These desires are for the most part unconscious. Building on Freud's notion that the unconscious is represented in disruptions of syntax (or slips of the tongue) critics argue that similarly women's 'unconscious' might disturb the ordered syntax of traditional literary criticism" (Humm 97). However, one of the criticisms of écriture feminine is the threat of universalism. This assessment, resounds as this type of

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[27] However, as Kristeva notes, to fight this power battle is to be commended but to gain entrance into this system of power is difficult, "The assumption by women of executive, industrial, and cultural power has not, up to the present time, radically changed the nature of this power...Experience proves that too quickly even the protest or innovative initiatives on the part of women inhaled by power systems are soon credited to the system's account..The difficulty presented by this logic of integrating the second sex into a value system experienced as foreign and therefore counterinvested is how to avoid the centralization of power, how to detach women from it, and how then to proceed, through their critical, differential, and autonomous interventions, to render decision making institutions more flexible" (453).

writing limits the historical and social experiences of women in favor of their libidinal experience. However, for the purpose of this study, this concern does not address these women's writings as their character's bodily experiences parallel and function as a means to acknowledge their social and political experiences. A further criticism of this style of writing, is its tendency to be Eurocentric.[28] However, the ideas of these theorists can easily resonate beyond the borders of European literature and can translate to the writing of women of any nation. For that reason, the ideas of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva are critical to the reading of the texts in this study.

In brief, the history of language, literature and philosophy, are all major sites of power in patriarchy. Inadvertently, "Language determines the ways in which we perceive gender and come to know ourselves as gendered beings and the ways in which society perceives gender and creates gendered subjects" (Humm 110). Therefore, as a means of deconstructing this hierarchy of language, the ideas and mechanisms of écriture feminine offer alternatives to undermine and re-write this patriarchal language, a goal of the women writers in this study.

In terms of feminist theory that falls within the realms of psychoanalysis, the well-know text *The Madwoman in the Attic* by critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argues that novels are principally narratives about the location of gender identity. They suggest that women's writing holds certain knowledge about the repressed and unconscious traits of women's identity. As one of the most cited texts in contemporary feminist criticism, the text has created a feminist poetics. The style of writing, in the seven-hundred and eighteen pages, is unique in that the authors transition from writer to

[28] As Gayatri Spivak explains, "The limits of their theories are disclosed by an encounter with the materiality of that other of the West". (11)

writer, without acknowledgment, and end the text with no concluding chapter. One of the most interesting aspects of their analysis is that through images of enclosure, doubles, disease and madness, women writers are able to expose their cultural and social anxieties. Furthermore, in terms of character development, these critics believe that women writers are closest to the characters they detest, that in these images are represented their anxieties about their own creativity. Of particular interest to this study are Gilbert and Gubar's ideas of disease, as a means of expressing social or cultural anxieties. As we will see in several texts, the use of illness parallels the conditions of the region or country.

Another critic who explores psychoanalysis as a feminist is Gayatri Spivak. One of the outstanding aspects of her work is the concept of absence. In "The Letter as Cutting Edge" Spivak notes that any critic familiar with the texts of psychoanalysis knows that language is formed as much in its absences as by the substance through which these absences are framed. Spivak suggests that it is the critics duty to unmask these rhetorical slips and absences in texts. A Lacanian interpretation of such a task, would interpret these textual signals as the inclusion of the Other into the text. Spivak believes, that the job of the feminist psychoanalytic critic is to, "look at imagery and signifiers of desire in a topological cross-hatching of the text" (Humm 127). That said, Spivak is also cautionary of psychoanalysis as a means of analysis in that she notes that this type of analysis digs deep into the psyche of the texts, but believes that this can be problematic because, the critic's job is to make a sensible interpretation of the text. Nevertheless, Spivak's solution is to categorize frontiers, borders, and boundaries where the text can then become a series of subtexts. In this sense, these "subtexts" then can be subversive

not only to any ideology in question but at the same time to the "boundaries" of formal criticism. This idea of categorizing frontiers, borders and boundaries is intriguing as in general the texts we will see are divided up by a multitude of borders. Therefore, her idea that these subtexts can be subversive is pertinent as this study looks at each of the borders as a subversive concept--a piece of the puzzle--to undermine the ideology of the nation-state.

Finally, a brief look at Judith Butler's text *Gender Trouble* is invaluable, as she notes that, feminist theory has presumed that there is an existing identity, "understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued" (3). Furthermore, Butler expresses concern with feminist theory in that studying gender within the confines of gender norms can lead to homophobic consequences. She believes that feminism must be cautious not to represent certain expressions of gender that could lead to new forms of hierarchy and exclusion. Therefore, her text examines methods of breaking down these gender binaries as she notes that, "the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions" (7). One way then that Butler challenges this notion of the unity of the concept of women is to distinguish between sex and gender, where sex is biologically determined and gender is culturally constructed.

Therefore, in this sense, the body becomes a "passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself" (12). Hence, the body then becomes a vital site in the reading/re-writing of cultural meaning. Furthermore, for

Butler gender becomes a performative act, "performativity" implying repetition and ritual "which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (xv). The ritualized interpretation of sex is contextualized and shaped by political and cultural intersections within a specific historical context. All of these ideas are constructive to this study as we will see the body used as a re-writing of cultural meaning, particularly in *La Genara*, where the anorexic body is a reading of the border region. Furthermore, Butler's idea of performativity will come into play in the last chapter where Sara Sefchovich's character uses prostitution as a performative act that becomes a statement of gender, in which the borders of the patriarchal hierarchy are undermined through performativity.

Finally, to summarize Butler, she states it best when she clarifies that her text attempts,

> to think through the possiblity of subverting and displacing thoses naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not throught the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity (44)

Hence, as we have seen, the core of feminist theory is as Butler states, a search for mechanisms to subvert and displace notions of gender that support patriarchal hegemony. Although, this analysis is far from complete in depicting the magnitude and vastness of feminist theory, it provides the necessary tools for an analysis of the borders women writers confront as they attempt to locate themselves and their writing in the Mexican

Nation.[29]

To conclude, with these theorizations as a general framework for the present study, we will now examine the specific texts in question to explore how each writer presents the concept of borders, specifically which borders they treat in their texts and why, and the literary devices employed to highlight, subvert, undermine and re-territorialize these borders. Furthermore, by examining the differences and similarities in these border texts, this study proposes to establish patterns of how these contemporary Mexican women writers challenge borders as a means of subversion to the nation-state. That is to say, this study questions the difference between actual writers from the border regions in comparison to writers from other regions of Mexico, including the capital, to consider how physical, psychological, geographic, and borders of gender become tools in the re-writing of the nation. Therein, the theories we have seen-- border studies, nation and feminist theory--facilitate a close reading of the texts in question and provide a framework to better understand how the writers operate these borders in their texts and how these borders become a vehicle for a re-reading, re-writing and re-establishement of the parameters of nation in Mexico.

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[29] In this sense, this study concurs with Claudine Potvin's notions on the position/space of Latin American women writers, "To escape the culture of reproduction, therefore, the most viable position for the Latin American woman writer is to stand on the border, on the line, in-between, ready to move, looking simultaneously on both/all sides, open to new meanings, new landscapes" (227). The writers in this study, all stand on this border--this in-between position allots them the power to provoke change.

Chapter II

Crossing Borders: Rosina Conde's Wandering Women

> Monsiváis elaborates on the binary oppositions still undergirding official national understandings of the conflict between central Mexico and the provinces. In this view, the conflict capital versus province carries with it the baggage of civilization versus barbarism, culture versus desolation, national consolidation versus aborted history"
>
> --Debra Castillo--

Many writers from the Northern Mexican border towns find the term "border writer" objectionable. Their resistance is political-- a denunciation of the Border Cultural Program (Programa Cultural de las Fronteras)[30] implemented in the mid-1980s by Miguel de la Madrid which, "as a political project... the program served to authorize and to include the all-too-often forgotten (and increasingly important) border populations within the horizons of 'lo nacional' (the national)" (Tabuénca Córdoba 20). Many believe this

[30] See "Reading the Border, North and South" in *Border Women*. Castillo/Tabuénca Córdoba. The Border Cultural Program was created in 1985 by the president Miguel de la Madrid. The idea behind it was to promote regional cultural development in the country, giving recognition to regional artists and writers. Politically, De la Madrid saw the project as a means to re-gain authority, as after the financial crisis of 1982, the ruling party (the PRI) was being threatened by powerful conservative politicians in the north. Reactions to the program were not favorable, it was seen as a way to, "shore up a conflicted sense of national identity, to civilize the barbarians, and to continue centralized corruption by other means" (19).

project only served to further stereotype the border region and alienated its inhabitants even more from any true participation in the " national culture." At the same time, some writers reject the term "border writer", as they believe that it hinders them from entering into the canon of Mexican writers, an elite group that, not surprisingly, most often writes and publishes within the borders of the Metropolis, Mexico City. Rosina Conde is one of these writers. Although she objects to being considered as a border writer, in her novel, *La Genara*, set between her native Tijuana and Mexico City, and in her short story collection, *Arrieras somos*, borders are ever present: geographical, social, cultural and gender borders are broken, inverted and crossed. This rupture of borders serves as its own political project that inverts the position of the border region in the national project. As Homi Bhabha states,

> The 'locality of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning, and inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation (4).

The present analysis will examine how Conde implements this multitude of borders that are violated, crossed or re-written, to generate new sites of meaning in her texts and give voice to the "others" -- her region and her women. Furthermore, this study intends to illustrate how Conde formulates a reconceptualization of the idea of nation, re-written

and re-thought outside of the borders of the metropolis and out of the hands of the patriarchal political system.

Conde's brief novel, *La Genara,* is composed of a series of letters, primarily e-mails and faxes, between two sisters, Genara and Luisa. Both sisters have recently separated from their husbands and each in their own way are facing an identity crisis, as they find themselves in a new environment that is conflictive with their previous experiences. While Genara stays in her native Tijuana, Luisa leaves to study for a Masters Degree in Mexico City. As a means to better understand the borders the sisters confront, it is imperative to highlight their traditional, conservative, Catholic upbringing. The manner in how their parents have supported each of them is different based on their marital decisions. Genara was married in the Catholic church and therefore, her parents do not approve of her separation from her husband. They believe she should stay married and support him, even after he is arrested for drug smuggling and running a prostitution ring. This differs from Luisa's case, as she was married in the civil court and is not breaking Catholic doctrine with her divorce. The traditional values that surround these women create strong borders that impede their individual desires for happiness Moreover, the location of each of the sisters, Tijuana and Mexico City, affect the sister's quest to better understand themselves and their roles in the public sphere. Geographically situated in oppositional spaces, that is to say, spaces which form the controversial paradigm of the metropolis vs. the periphery, the crisis of the women allegorically represent the crisis of the border region in its "alienated" position.

The reader in Conde's text takes on a critical role as he/she has to decipher and unravel the borders that shape the text. As Emily Hicks states-- on the task of the reader-

-in her important text *Border Writing*, "Border writers give the reader the opportunity to practice multidimensional perception...By multidimensional perception I mean quite literally the ability to see not just from one side of a border, but from the other side as well" (xxiii). That is to say, as an outside witness, the reader observes from both sides of the "borders" of the metropolis and the periphery and becomes an active participant in piecing together the elements of the letters. Furthermore, Hicks notes that "border narratives are decentered: there is no identity between the reader and the individual character, but rather, an invitation to listen to a Voice of the Person that arises from an overlay of codes out of which characters and events emerge (Barthes, S/Z)" (xxviii). The reader in this text becomes a decentered observer, displaced from the politics of the nation, thus enabling the characters to speak through their written word and erase the boundaries that encompass them. Finally, for the reader to understand the multitude of borders utilized to deconstruct and re-construct Conde's message, it is expected that the reader has an understanding of the tribulations associated with the border region.

That said, Tijuana is considered by many as a city of vices[31] and is seen as such both from the northern and southern sides of the border. The reputation that surrounds the city is negative on many levels, for example, as Gilbert Joseph stresses,

> It is 1997. The city council of Tijuana declares itself scandalized by Tijuana's terrible public image, created by media coverage of the wretched conditions there both for would-be border crossers and, even more, for the migrants from Southern Mexico...The council responds by taking out a patent on 'the good name of the city of Tijuana'. But even with NAFTA's new standards for enforcement of

[31] Images such as those of high crime rates, prostitution and drug trafficking, permeate visions of the region.

international copyright laws, the council will find it impossible to prevent local, national, and global exposure of the worsening conditions there (6).

Along with the scandals associated with the maquiladoras and the treatment of its workers, the city is burdened with a multitude of stereotypes. To understand the beginnings of these stereotypes[32] and to see why and how Conde reshapes this identity in her novel, a look back at the history of the city is helpful.[33]

In brief, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, separated Tijuana from the port of San Diego. However, in 1907, with the arrival of the Tijuana and Tecate Railroad, the relationship between these two cities was re-established. In 1919, ties to the U.S. were increased tremendously with the implementation of prohibition in the U.S. Consequently, Tijuana became a site for U.S. developers and a place for Americans to cross the border to gamble, drink and enjoy the good life. The lack of financial support from the country's capital, Mexico City, was replaced by big investments from the United States. This act distanced Tijuana further from the center (Mexico City) but nonetheless also highlighted the extreme differences between itself and the U.S. side of the border. Therefore, Tijuana was alienated to a certain extent from both the North and

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[32] It is interesting to note, that according to Carlos Monsiváis, the stereotypes associated with the border region have all been basically derived from two cities: Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. That is to say, although the border region is extensive, its images of vice and stereotype center on these two cities. (Polkinhorn 5)

[33] Besides its historical beginnings as a city of vice, Tijuana has always been a place of national hybridity—a type of invented space as Santiago Vaquera notes of the postcards available to the tourist in the city, "La geografía imaginaria que construye esa tarjeta postal es compleja y llena de significaciones. Dice un tijuanense, 'ante la falta de otro tipo de cosas, como en el sur, que hay pirámides, aquí no hay nada de eso...como que algo hay que inventarle a los gringos'. Lo que resulta es una ciudad traspasada por textos de un México que jamás existía en esa region; pirámides, pinturas de selvas tropicales y otras imágenes que remiten a una realidad ajena al norte, que es una region desértica" (24). This highlights the identity crisis of the region; unsure of its position in the nation.

South and the black legend of the city[34] was augmented. With the stock market crash of 1929 and the repeal of prohibition in 1933, the investors left Tijuana and, as Debra Castillo notes, "the repeal of Prohibition began the town's slow slide into an emphasis on less luxurious forms of vice" (Campbell 4). The prostitution industry, in particular, was one area that grew and still exists today[35].

Nevertheless, Conde crosses the presumed borders of this identity and instead focuses on Tijuana as a cultural center, far from the "metropolis", but not lacking in its own cultural diversity. For example, when Genara, who stays in Tijuana writes to her sister Luisa in Mexico City, "Dichosa tú que vives en una ciudad grande y tienes la oportunidad de conocer gente con más experiencia" [Lucky you who lives in a big city and has the opportunity to meet people with more experience](25) she implies a lack of diversity in her city. However, when Genara meets Fidel on a trip to Mexico City and he subsequently follows her to Tijuana, it leads to new opportunities for Genara. Fidel's career at the local television studio and his theater company provide a new group of people that help Genara to experience a different Tijuana:

> "Seguimos yendo al café cantante y ya tenemos un buen grupo de amigos, amigos muy diferentes de los que acostumbraba tener. Ahora entiendo por qué me decías que me saliera de aquí. Pero, ya ves? No tuve que irme de Tijuana para cambiar

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[34] "la 'leyenda negra' de Tijuana, leyenda que empieza en los años de la Prohibición en los Estados Unidos cuando las caravanas salían de Hollywood directamente a los casinos de Tijuana. Esta leyenda negra que presenta a la ciudad fronteriza como centro de vicio y de incertidumbre viene a estructurar gran parte del discurso sobre la ciudad y la frontera" (Vaquera 25)

[35] See *On the Rim of Mexico* by Ramon Eduardo Rúiz for a more detailed history of the city

de ambiente" [We continue visiting the coffee house and we have a good group of friends, friends who are very different from what I'm used to having. Now I understand why you told me to leave here. But you see? I didn't have to leave Tijuana to find a new environment](71).

Fidel's presence in Genara's life allows her access to a cultural scene that she had previously not experienced. Furthermore, the fact that Fidel willingly leaves the "metropolitan" mecca for this "peripheral" space and exposes its cultural diversity underlines Tijuana as a cultural center. Thus, his character inverts the classic position of the writer/actor/artist who leaves his provincial home to go to the capital where he can engage and actively participate in his art. Moreover, Fidel represents not only a geographic inversion; rather, he encarnates a repositioning of the male/female power binary. That is to say, Fidel's willingness to give up everything to be with Genara substantiates the power Genara has over him. This comes to represent the collapse of the male dominated central control of the country[36].

However, as much as Fidel's actions facilitate Genara in her search for herself and her happiness, Genara's metamorphosis occurs because of her own actions and decisions. She is solely responsible for the crumbling of the walls that have hindered her. For example, as Genara comments, in Mexico, women are taught to "llorar y callar"[cry and be quiet], destined to silence. However, Genara and Luisa empower themselves and overcome this destiny of crying and silencing through the power of their word--they break their silence with their writing. Furthermore, the fact that their communication is done primarily by fax and e-mail gains them access to the typically male dominated space

[36] In political, cultural and social terms

of technology. At the same time, the use of cyberspace as a means of communication breaks down geographic boundaries of distance. As Beatriz Sarlo notes,

> We live in cyberspace...Reading and writing are still the key to deciphering the written word even if the latter is no longer written on paper and has become virtual, flowing freely around that ring which we call the Internet, rolling around the world like a gigantic ball of text...Sophisticated citizens in the cyber-nations of the future will be connected, or are already connected, to a massive flow of writing, images and sounds" (26).

As Sarlo explains, the internet and technology convert local into global.[37] In this text in particular, this phenomenon erases the geographic borders between Mexico City and Tijuana and creates a new space to resolve the political tribulations associated with the metropolis/peripheral paradigm. Thus, this "cyber" space is perhaps the space or zone that Norma Alarcon refers to when writing of women's place in the nation, " Women are both of and not of the nation. Between woman and nation is, perhaps, the space or zone where we can deconstruct these monoliths and render them more historically nuanced and accountable to politics" (12). By allowing these women to speak through the written technological word, Conde enables her characters to cross borders of regional and gender alienation, providing them with a neutral space where they can "identify" themselves within their region and as speaking subjects in their "nation".[38]

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[37] This globalization is very present in the nation's reality since the inception of NAFTA where this global flow of industry breaks down borders of geographic distance.

[38] By placing her character in both Tijuana and Mexico City, Conde creates connections between these two alienated geographic spaces.

As we have seen, Genara is able to conquer her crisis and break down the borders that controlled her by staying in Tijuana. The walls that had formed the "small world" that she lived in have disappeared. As she says,

> Yo me siento tan bien emocionalmente, que no me ha importado que mis padres me hayan dejado de hablar, y que mis antiguas amistades me hayan cerrado las puertas. Ahorita la sociedad me vale un reverendo cacahuate. Gracias a ti y a Fidel me he dado cuenta de que hay otros medios y que el mundito en el que vivía era precisamente eso: un mundito" [I feel so good emotionally, it doesn't matter to me that my parents have stopped talking to me and that my old friends have closed the doors on me. Now society doesn't mean anything to me. Thanks to you and to Fidel I've realized that there are other things in life and that the small world I was living in was precisely that: a small world] (91).

Meanwhile, Luisa's efforts to solve her problems while studying for a Masters degree in Mexico City end in failure. In her early letters, Luisa comments of her happiness--telling tales of two boyfriends and her social life at the university. However, as time passes Luisa's letters become more infrequent and she begins to comment on her disillusionment with her studies and her life in Mexico City[39]. New borders begin to form around Luisa. Beyond her feelings of solitude, it becomes clear that Luisa struggles with issues of her weight-- claiming to be fat-- but at the same time not eating for days. Therein, this is how her existential crisis metastasizes--in anorexia. Her eating disorder

[39] This disillusion can be read, as Luisa is in the capital, as the disillusionment felt by the people, where since the 19th century the national project was a continual cycle of hope and then disillusionment.

cements together the multitude of borders that have finally overcome her attempts to escape them.

As she explains:

> No te había escrito porque no me había sentido muy bien que digamos...Ya no doy clases con el mismo entusiasmo y la maestría me tiene muy decepcionada. Con decirte que en varios días me he olvidado hasta de comer (y que bueno, porque estoy muy gorda),...Me he dado cuenta, hermanita, de lo sola que me encuentro. Hasta la fecha, no he concretado ninguna relacion (ni de trabajo ni de pareja ni de amistad)...En últimas fechas, he entrado en una crisis existencial muy gruesa [I haven't written to you because let's say I haven't felt very good. I don't teach with the same enthusiasm and the Master's program has deceived me. I'll tell you that for various days I've even forgotten to eat (and that's a good thing because I'm very fat)...I've realized, little sister, how lonely I am. Until now I haven't made any close friends (not at work not as a couple nor with anyone)...Recently, I've entered into an existential crisis.] (88-89).

The appearance of anorexia in literature is not unique--it has appeared as a theme throughout the centuries in texts with female characters as the protagonists. As Donnalee Frega states:

> Female hunger and eating habits have long been regarded as a form of discourse, a rich and complex metaphoric language of victimization, physicality, eroticism, and empowerment. Feminist scholars acknowledge that women's ability to manipulate food distribution and their bodies (often the only resources in their power) can be a double-edged sword, a tool that allows women to repress their

> sexuality, to establish social rank...even while it forces them to accommodate physical victimization in order to empower themselves....women who use food as an analogue to self often find themselves unsure of their identities. This tension has been particularly obvious in literary portrayals of heroines who use biological hunger to obtain the 'authority' necessary to write their own stories" (1)

This is true of Luisa. On many levels, Luisa is trying to escape victimization and uses her body and hunger as her weapon to combat her sufferings[40]. As we learn at the end of the text, Luisa suffered physical abuse in her marriage that caused a miscarriage. This violence in itself would be significant enough to cause anorexia, however, Luisa's pain runs deeper as she is also trying to escape the borders of her childhood that trap her within the walls of her parents education. As Genara states of their parents beliefs in education,

> Con frecuencia llego a pensar que la educación que recibimos no fue la más adecuada: a pesar de que nuestros padres nos impulsaron a estudiar una carrera universitaria, lo hicieron con el pretexto de que deberíamos estar preparadas 'por si nos iba mal en el matrimonio'; pero el matrimonio siempre fue el motor de nuestras vidas" [With frequency I think that the education we got was not the most adequate: although our parents pushed us to study a university career, they did it with the pretext that we should be prepared if things go bad in our marriage, but marriage was always the motor of our lives] (106).

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[40] In Matra Robertson's text *Starving in the Silences: An Exploration of Anorexia Nervosa*, she highlights Susie Orbach's groundbreaking work on the anorexic mind, stating, "She argues that women's insecurity about their bodies is culturally induced. Orbach's anorexic is a heroic figure: 'Like a hunger striker, she is in protest against her conditions. Like the hunger striker she has taken as her weapon a refusal to eat. Not eating is her survival tool' (Orbach, 1985:131)" (49).

Thus, the only purpose of an education, according to how the sister's were raised, was as a back-up plan to the more important role of wife. However, this is not Luisa's motivation for her education.

For Luisa, being part of academia is what she desires, but she finds entrance into this world challenging on many levels. In the first place, she is entering a field that is typically male dominated where she finds the atmosphere lonely and inhibiting. Moreover, Luisa acclimation is further complicated by the fact that she pursues her studies in a city that is foreign to her, an unknown environment in which she hopes to find refuge. This is to say, Luisa attempts to cross numerous borders simultaneously, without first recognizing and redefining her own identity.

The border region faces challenges similar to those of Luisa. Just as she has to overcome numerous borders and obstacles to be an academic woman, the border region continually confronts its own "borders" and obstacles, which like Luisa, weaken its authority and voice as an active member of the nation. Consequently, Luisa's character becomes an allegory of the tribulations of the border region. On one hand, because of Luisa's illness, she is "empty"--without food in her body--representing how the center views the border region, an empty space lacking in "subsistence". Also, Luisa's attempt to "fit in" to the metropolis without being sure of who she is, symbolizes how the border towns tried to adapt to the cultural project that was implemented, so they could "fit in" to the national identity, that was placed upon them.[41] Nevertheless, this project failed to account for the "true" identity of the region and therefore wasn't successful.

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[41] "The official project...needed to sketch out the absent subject and make him/her present; it needed to identify itself within the concept of the savage border or to identify the savage with the civilizing force of national culture in order to impose upon the border

This is similar to how Luisa functions in Mexico City. She invents her own reality, not wanting to face her truths: "En ese sentido, la ciudad de Mexico me brindó la oportunidad de tener un mundo propio, creado por mí misma y para mí misma...Es más, en Mexico me di cuenta de que ni siquiera tenía una percepción adecuada de mí misma. No estaba segura de cuales eran mis dolencias, mis gustos, mis gestos cotidianos" [In this sense, Mexico City gave me the opportunity to have my own world, created by myself and for myself...even more, in Mexico City I realized that I didn't even have an adequate perception of myself. I wasn't sure of what my pains were, my likes or even my daily routines](117). She also confesses that the boyfriends she wrote of did not exist: "ni siquiera tuve el valor de decirte que todo lo que te contaba era mentira" [I didn't even have enough pride to tell you that everything I told you was a lie](120). Metaphorically, representative of the "border region", Luisa tries to invent a new identity for herself without understanding first her "history", just as the cultural project attempted to do with the border towns.

Furthermore, Luisa complicates her situation by placing herself outside of the borders of her region to "find herself". As Beatriz Colomina notes, "Throughout this century, this disturbance of boundaries has often been understood as a threat to identity, a loss of self...Heidegger, for example, was elaborating Nietzsche's claim that 'a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon...A man...sickens and collapses [if] the lines of his horizon are always restlessly changing...the absence of boundaries, is seen to produce sickness" (52). That is to say, Nietzsche's theory helps to understand Luisa's anorexia-- her "lines of horizon" are

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another discourse, transforming and normalizing it within the national classificatory system" (Castillo 20)

changing and she finds herself in the absence of the borders of her region--which she needs to understand to re-establish herself. This becomes clear by the contrasting example of her sister Genara, who's successful in her identity search by remaining within the border region during her metamorphosis.

The fact that Genara's "healing" takes place in Tijuana is a powerful statement. On one hand, it could be seen as reinforcing the idea of borders that separate people within the nation, but this is not the case. Instead, as this study argues, Conde simply allocates power to her region over that of the center. Furthermore, as Carmen Flys Junquera notes,

> A sense of place is one of the most primal human needs—the need to feel roots, a sense of belonging. The sense of rootedness, according to Simone Weil, lies in a full participation in the life of the community, which is formed, among other things, by the place of birth and the environment. Place is inhabited space, a space which is enclosed... the center of established values. Place, whether natural, constructed or imaginative affects people's inner states of being and therefore is an essential given in our sense of identity (95).

Therefore, the fact that the border region represents for Genara this sense of place—a given part of her sense of identity—it confirms the validity of her self-transformation occurring here. In this sense, Conde bestows authority to the border region as a place of cultural value in the nation. Genara is able to "enrich" herself and transform her crisis into recognition of her self-worth, which is allegorical for the need of the nation to recognize the value of the border zone in the nation.

Moreover, the fact that it is Genara who goes to "rescue" her sister from her anorexia implies that she is rescuing her region from the central powers that have excluded for so long the borderlands as a member of the nation-state. In this sense, Conde inverts the power of the center to the periphery. As Nelly Richards notes, "The privileged position which this centre defends, and then translates into authoritarian roles-making decisions, fixing rules, exercising control, etc,- stands out most forcefully in the opposition we can mark as centre/periphery" (71). That is to say, Genara has taken on this authoritarian role. Genara has broken down the borders that previously excluded her from this position of power and is now ready to exercise her newfound independence and influence to rescue her sister, metaphorically, her region in its floundering state. Hence, we can see how Genara's transition not only inverts her role as a woman in the nation, but also her region's in relation to the capital, as she successfully exhibits the border region as a cultural metropolis, rather than an alienated city of vices.[42]

Conversely, as we read Luisa's character as the border zone, her illness comes to further represent the ills of the region. As Abdul Jan Mohamed writes, "if the border subject is the site on which the group defines its identity, then the ruptured body of that subject becomes the text on which the structure of group identity is written in inverted form- the information of the group is inscribed upon the body of the border subject" (115). As Luisa's broken body represents the history of her region, it is important that her body recover outside of the hands of the powers that have crippled her. Hence, Luisa's recovery takes place in a clinic in Jalisco, el Grullo, a neutral space away from both the center and border so she can heal. This other peripheral region becomes an ally

[42] This does not mean that Conde negates the realities of the border, with its nightlife industry, but rather she portrays a re-valuation-- a distinct view of the geo-political city.

in the battle to break down the powerful borders that have for so long excluded other regions of Mexico from the political and cultural powerhouse of the center. The use of this space that falls outside of the center/periphery dichotomy of the border region and Mexico City can be viewed as a "third space"—a term used by Homi Bhabha to theorize, "something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation..This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (1990: 211). Bhabha's words ring true as this third space[43]—El Grullo- is where Luisa heals, resolving questions of authority for herself and her region, and challenging the political hierarchy that has perpetuated the wounds to her region.

Thus, Luisa's metaphorically scared body[44] tells the story of the border region and its continual battles with stereotypes of vice and corruption that condemn its reputation, its existence as a lost space between two nations, and its subsequent fight to be part of its country of origin. In this sense, by introducing a third space into this two-way battle, the borders of the nation are extended, which can be productive to the nation-state, "Borders,

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[43] This third space also recalls of Bhabha's ideas on "in-between spaces" as he states, "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood—singular or communal that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1994:1-2). That said, El Grullo becomes for Luisa a place to re-evaluate her self-hood (and that of her region) while challenging the identity of the nation under the enforcing direction of the political powers of the country.

[44] As testimony of the body as a metaphor, Susan Bordo writes, "The body, as Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body" (90). In such, Luisa's body has fallen ill because of the demanding rules and hierarchies that the culture has placed upon her.

then, not only separate but, as Anzaldúa and Gómez-Peña have suggested, 'enlarge the geopolitical space' .....But it seems necessary to qualify this enlargement. It is not only a geopolitical question, but also cultural, linguistic, historic and of course, literary" (Benito/Manzanas 10). Therefore, as Luisa has moved between the borders of these three different spaces and experienced the cultural differences in each, she becomes an icon for the breaking down of borders and the formation of a new pattern of borders that more fittingly represents the hybridity[45] of the nation. As further testimony to the validity of Luisa as the link to this enlargement of the borders of the nation, in the text she calls attention to linguistic differences between the border and the metropolis. An example of this is how in the border region, people typically use the article in front of people's name --as in the example of the title of the text, *La Genara*. Luisa's friends criticize this linguistic derivation from that of the center, calling it "lo bronco", implying that linguistic differences of the border, are inferior to those of the center.

Moreover, the letters between Luisa and Genara--their voices--create a new literary text. That is to say, by utilizing the epistolary form as the basis for the text, Conde authenticates and authorizes the protagonists voices. There is not the presence of an omniscient narrator--a third party witness--but rather the characters speak through their writing, creating this new literary text that is symbolic of an enlargement of the literary corpus--one that includes the alienated voices/writers of the border, in their first person

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[45] This representation of hybridity in the nation, also calls attention to Tijuana's boom in population that lead to new hybrid identities for the city, "According to Herzon, from 1950 to 1980 Tijuana's population grew from '65,346 to over 700,000 inhabitants'. García Canclini argues it is precisely this demographic explosion-la expansion urbana that 'intensifies cultural hybridity'. Of course, about two-thirds of this expansion was the result of exile and migrations from Latin America and the interiors of Mexico" (Saldívar 1997:32).

stance. No longer is the border being recognized soley through voices such as that of Carlos Fuentes in *Frontera de Cristal*--a border text written from the center by a male writer--a type of double alienation, from the actual border reality. A representation of the border is being heard from the border through the marginalized voice of a female writer.

Therein, Conde's message is clear--just as Luisa attempted to escape these borders, without resolution, the border region is incapable of healing from its wounds without confronting these borders, understanding them and accepting them as part of the border reality. Nevertheless, this acceptance should also lead to newfound ways of forming part of the nation--not as the excluded other, marginalized from central Mexico, but as a diversified, contributing member-- financially and culturally-- to the nation state. Just as Genara was able to modify her identity within the confines of her existing space and gain self-empowerment and resolution, the border region should attempt the same.

In as much as the crisis that Luisa experienced was difficult, she believes it was necessary for her to heal: "pero quiero decirte que fue saludable pasar por esta crisis que, viéndola a distancia, vino a ser como una especie de etapa de purificación por la que tenía que atravesar para poder iniciarme"[But I want to tell you that it was healthy to have had this crisis, seeing it from a distance, it became a type of purification through which I had to pass to be able to start over] (120). Accordingly, with these words, Conde acknowledges that, like Luisa, her region needs to move beyond its crisis and find in its long history of victimization a new beginning. By recognizing the myriad of borders that were impeding both women from self-fulfillment, self-empowerment and access to a voice within the public sphere, Conde's characters undermine the discrimination and oppression they have faced and become icons for the border zone. Their voices are no

longer lost in the nation space, they are able to cross borders and speak—cyber-voices in a modern, borderless, technological nation . With this outcome for her characters, Conde requests the same of her native region.

Finally, although Rosina Conde does not want to be considered as a border writer per se,[46] her text concurs with the characteristics that Emily Hicks proposes of border writing: deterritorialized, political and a product of collective enunciation (xxx-xxxi). That is to say, Luisa is deterritorialized by her marginalization from her region and from herself, while, due to her illness, she represents the collective voice of her region[47]. Nevertheless, the fact that Conde's text "fits" in with Hick's Border theory is important only in that it reinforces the strong political message of the text--which at its core, underlines the borders of exclusion and entrapment, borders that have been created and guarded by the central powers of the nation. Therein, Conde's text confronts this myriad of borders that have held the border region, and women, captive for so long--excluding them as active members of the national community. Hence, with this text, Conde proposes a reconceptualization of the idea of nation that includes the vital participation and voice of women and of the border region, by means of a "rescuing" and "re-writing" of their mutual oppressive and victimized histories.

In Rosina Conde's short stories collection, *Arrieras somos* (Wandering Women), the theme of life on the border is subtle in comparison to how she portrays the same in *La*

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[46] Conde wants to step "outside" of this categorization so that her writing will not carry with it the cargo of the connotations of the border. That is to say, she wants her writing considered for the validity of her writing and not because she is from the border region. However, with *La Genara* Conde's concern for the political and cultural situation of the border region is obvious.

[47] As Susan Bordo explains, "The bodies of disordered women...offer themselves as an aggressively graphic text for the interpreter- a text that insists, actually demands, that it be read as a cultural statement" (94).

Genara. This evident lack of direct cultural information is replaced by a string of metaphors that speak of women's gender roles on the border, in domestic life and as part of the national identity. The multitude of voices, using the first person singular, speak to us of their silencing and their "wounds", while breaking the borders that entrap them in their gender roles by telling their stories.[48] In *La Genara*, the binary opposition of the border vs. the capital created a conflict that led to a message of "re-birth" of the border region and its women. In this text, the binary opposition that is clear in all of the stories is that of women vs. men. Nevertheless, the conflict fashioned between this gender battle speaks metaphorically of the struggle of the border to become an active member of the nation.

This being said, Emily Hick's notion of viewing the border as a holographic text, a reflection of both sides of the border, facilitates a better understanding of the struggles for power in the border region, which metaphorically, serves to highlight the battle of the protagonists. As Hicks states "if we conceive of the border as a multidimensional or holographic text created from the interference pattern formed by two dominant cultural codes, we will find that no links among any two signifiers can all hold. All signifiers and their binary oppositions al otro lado will continually struggle for dominance and be dismantled" (110). The women in *Arrieras somos* struggle for this type of dominance, but as Hicks notes, they are metaphorically "dismantled"—a result of gender and cultural conflicts. As Foucault has stated, this "corporeal destruction" is necessary to produce the speaking subject.[49] Consequently, as a means of breaking the borders that "wound" and

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[48] We see that how Conde places her characters in troublesome and/or difficult situations—an allegory of the border region's struggles in the nation-state.

[49] As stated in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, p. 160

"dismantle" these women, Conde inverts the traditional spaces of domestic life and in their relationships with men, enabling them to become speaking subjects.

It is not coincidental that the first story in the text, "Arroz y cadenas", is told while the voice of the protagonist is knitting and begins with a detailed description of the blood of her first menstrual cycle. This blood is significant on multiple levels. In the first place, a girl's first menstruation biologically symbolizes the beginning of womanhood--in contrast--the act of knitting can be viewed as a stereotypical, domestic task for women. Thus, the juxtaposition of a woman's blood with knitting, highlights a difference between the biology of a woman and her traditional role as a "domestic" being. That is to say, Conde acknowledges that biologically women are different from men, but rejects the traditional borders that have shaped their existence--that because they are women, they are tied to the domestic duties. In this text, these domestic and stereotypical spaces become important sites of enunciation for these characters--a means of turning these powerless spaces into empowering positions. As we will see, Conde does not condemn these emblematic, domestic spaces [border spaces], but does however, re-define the laws of power that have shaped them.

In "Arroz y cadenas", the description of the blood metaphorically symbolizes the "wounds" that the women throughout the text endure in their silenced position as other--a result of the myriad of troubled relationships each face with men. Moreover, the presence of blood, reminds us of the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, in her well known book *Borderlands*, where she refers to the border region as "una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country-a border culture" (3). Hence,

metaphorically, the traditional act of knitting, which comes to represent the submissive position of woman, grates against the physiology of womanhood and creates a scab, a border. Once again, as we saw in *La Genara,* Conde forges a strong connection between the condition of the border and that of women. Thus, metaphorically, their "bleeding" and their "wounds" become their weapons to break down borders, to invert themselves to the position of "subject" instead of "object", and to dissolve the binary oppositions that entrap them in the position of other, either as woman or the borderlands.

In the story "Estudias o trabajas" the female protagonist describes the views of three men on what each considers to be the liberation of women. Interestingly, as the protagonist voices, each male manipulates his definition to meet his needs: "mientras los chavos no se pongan de acuerdo en que es la liberación, pues, a nosotras nos va a llevar el demonio, porque ellos la acomodan a su conveniencia" [While the boys don't agree on what is liberation, well, for us women it's going to be hell, because they accommodate it to their needs] (27). As she notes, being an educated, working woman, threatens the men that surround her, as she believes men are happier in the dominant role. Therefore, she decides to use this space of the powerless, oppressed woman to her advantage:

> Finalmente, es con ellos con quienes te realizes y relacionas, y eso de navegar con bandera de liberada o inteligente no te conviene. Por eso, ahora, cuando conozco a un chavo y me pregunta, 'estudias o trabajas?', yo le contesto como pendeja: 'ay!, Pues ni estudio, ni trabajo:, porque eso es lo que ellos quieren: mujercitas idiotas que ni piensen, ni sean autosuficientes económicamente. Finalmente, me pagan todo [Finally, it's with them [men] who you are with and this thing of walking around with a flag of the liberated or intelligent woman doesn't help

you. For that reason, now when I meet a guy and he asks me, Do you work or study? I'm going to answer like an idiot, well I don't work or study; because that is what they want: Dumb women who don't think or aren't economically self – sufficient. Finally, they pay for everything] (27).

Instead of fighting a loud battle for liberation, she quietly accepts her "position" as the subjugated woman—supposedly imprisoned by patriarchal borders--all the while feeling as if finally, she is the one taking advantage of the men. Although this appears to undermine the capabilities of women, in reality, it widens the spectrum of possibilities for them. That is to say, Conde believes all women, no matter what obstacles or borders they face, are capable of self-empowerment, whether it be in the political arena, the public sphere or in the home. Erasing the borders of gender, does not deem, for Conde, the traditional spaces of women to be dismantled, but rather, re-formed. This theme of reform is an undercurrent in all of the stories in this collection, which on one level pertains to the women in her texts, but on a parallel plane, refers to the similar situation of the border region. Conde proposes small changes to invert roles and positions of authority--small changes in thought, as seen in this text, can lead to vast possibilities of transformation and re-formation of borders.

Another piece in the collection, "Morente", is the story of a doctoral candidate, staying alone at a beach house to study for her exams. The theme of solitude underlines the story in its entirety, as the story begins with the protagonist saying, "Me mueve a escribir la soledad: la soledad de la ciudad, de la casa, los muebles, los objetos, la pluma misma"[It moves me to write of loneliness: the loneliness of the city, the house, the furniture, the objects, even the pen] (85). As she sits in solitude--with pen in hand-- she

describes how for hours she observes the ocean and its activity, detailing with immense description the forms of the waves. However, this solitude is broken as she launches the reader into a tale of her relationship with Morete, a younger man who mysteriously appears, and begins living in the apartment below hers. Just as suddenly as he arrived, he disappears one night, never to be seen again. When she asks her landlord about what happened to the man living below her, he affirms that no one had rented the place in months. Therefore, as readers, we deduce that this wild love affair that occurs with this mysterious man, was part of her writing "la soledad"--the details of the waves and of her affair were performances of her pen. The act of writing allows her to live her life of solitude in any way she pleases. Her pen manipulates Morete, her lover, as she pleases and "erases" him from existence as she wills. Coincidentally, this character reminds us of Luisa from *La Genara*, whose lonely life as an academic woman led her to invent her lovers as well.[50]

In "Morete", solitude and writing convert into a form of power. The protagonist breaks down borders of gender with her pen. As she manipulates and controls this object-- a metaphor for the phallus-- she directs the love affair, an inversion of a traditional courtship or love affair in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, her solitude is her tool to self-empowerment--it allows her a space free of borders where she is able to do as she pleases--her solitude does not hold her captive, but rather frees her. The borders of being an older, academic woman, engaged in a love affair with a younger man,

[50] We will see in the analysis of Marta Cerda's *Toda una vida* how this idea of inventing or imagining a reality recalls of the political hierarchy's "invention"of the nation's identity through icons of popular culture and historical and religious figures.

are metaphorically erased with the ease of a pen, establishing new rules of gender entitlement.

The story "Las perlas" treats the topic of the emotionally abandonded wife: "Después de casi ocho años de convivencia con Gerardo, me daba cuenta de que estaba terriblemente sola...no sé cómo es que no había aprendido a estar sola, conmigo misma.." [After almost eight years of living with Gerardo, I realized that I was terribly alone...I'm not sure why I couldn't have learned to be alone, alone with myself] (80). Ironically, her pearl necklace evokes memories of the verbal abuse that she has suffered, vibrating in her hands as she shakes out of fear and sadness as she remembers her husband's violent words. Finally, she gains the courage to secretly request a divorce and as she says,

> El día en que el abogado me entregó los papeles del divorcio y de la casa, cambié todas las combinaciones de las chapas, y aventé la ropa de Gerardo a la banqueta, feliz, ante el asombro de los vecions; después, me puse a esperarlo en la ventana de la recámara del Segundo piso. Nunca se me va a olvidar como saboreé ese día cuando llegó Gerardo (y ahora lo saboreo de Nuevo con el contacto de estas perlas)" [The day the lawyer handed me the divorce papers and the title to the house, I changed all the locks and I threw Gerardo's clothes off the balcony, I was happy and the neighbors were surprised. Afterwards, I waited in the window of the second story bedroom. I will never forget how I enjoyed that day when Gerardo arrived (and now I enjoy it again when I touch this pearl necklace)](82).

As we see, the protagonist has reclaimed the space of the house that has caused her so much pain, and furthermore, the pearl necklace that reminded her of her misery now reminds her of her freedom and justice. Metaphorically, her life has come full circle, just

like the shape of the necklace. An object, like a chain, that once "jailed" her, has now given her freedom. Hence, we see how this very feminine piece of jewelry becomes a tool to freedom--the significance of the necklace becomes inverted-- just as the protagonist reclaims and repossess her previously encarcenated space. Her borderlands (her house) have been disengaged from the powers that controlled them, and now she holds the priviledged position of authority.

Once again, we see how Conde inverts the traditional spaces of women into those of power, rather than relegating them to be destroyed. In this story, the protagonist becomes empowered and is able to recover and re-establish herself within the space of her house, rather than leaving her husband and going elsewhere. This is similar to what we saw in *La Genara*, where Genara, stayed in her space--the border region--and found self-empowerment there. This pattern we see with Conde's stories of breaking down big borders with small acts, within already established spaces, underlines in part her message for her region--celebrate and re-establish the cultural diversity of the border while also empowering it's voice in the nation.

In the final story of the collection, "Tina, Tinita," the protagonist similarly gains power through her state of solitude after a long relationship that leaves her dissatisfied: "había optado por la soledad, por una tranquila soledad sin remordimientos ni esperanzas" [I had chosen loneliness, a calm lonely state without regret nor hope](103). While dating, Tina feels lonely and discouraged because Rosendo only calls, visits or takes her out when he wants. Therefore, she decides being alone and inverting this solitude into a peaceful space for herself is a better life than being lonely and always waiting for a man. However, years later, Tina gets poetic justice when Rosendo calls and

wants to meet her at a restaurant. She agrees to meet him, arrives at the restaurant, sees him through the glass and then leaves. Like in previous stories, Tina has gained silent power and healed her "wounds" through the stereotypical space of the lonely woman. That is to say, she has found the courage and strength to act in such a manner. Again, we see how Conde inverts and therein portrays the borders of solitude not as a confined space but rather an emancipating site of enunciation for her protagonists.

Interestingly, the whole time Tina tells her story, she is preparing for this date, and questions whether or not to wear nylons because Rosendo loves to see her bare legs. As she debates over this seemingly minor detail, we see that the nylons become a metaphor for men and how her ultimate decision to not wear them signals to the fact that as she "leaves behind" Rosendo, she rejects the constraining patriarchal constructions of gender:

> Por qué siempre será lo mismo? Nunca tienen las medias que una necesita: o son muy claras o muy oscuras, y cuando tiene las del tono adecuado, demasiado grandes o demasiado chicas. Optó por las grandes: sería preferible que se le colgarán un poco y no que le apretaran las tripas. Pidió permiso para entrar a ponérselas en el baño. miró de nuevo el reloj. Ocho menos cinco. 'Llegaré un poco tarde', pensó, 'total...' Las medias eran demasiado largas. Pidió que le dieran las chicas; pero le apretaban. ¡Iré sin medias, en fin!, se dijo resignada" [Why is it always the same? They never have the nylons that one needs: or they are too light or too dark and when they have the right tone they are too big or too small. She (Tina) chose too big, it's better to have them hanging a little bit instead of squeezing your gut. Tina asks for permission to go into the bathroom

to put them on. She looks at her watch again. Five minutes to eight. I will be a little late she thought. Anyway, the nylons were too big so she asked for the smaller ones, but they were too tight. I will go without nylons—finally, she resigned] (108).

Like the nylons, Tina realizes that Rosendo will never "fit" her needs, and therefore when she says she will go without nylons, she is referring to the act of abandoning him at the restaurant and metaphorically freeing herself from the borders of patriarchal roles and conceptualizations of gender. Furthermore, by indirectly comparing men to such a feminine article of clothing, such as nylons, Conde inverts the position of the woman as "object" to that of the man. Once again, we see how feminine objects and acts such as nylons, necklaces and knitting, become weapons of power for Conde's women. No longer do these traditional acts or objects form part of the borders that entrap women, but through each protagonist's self-empowerment, they become objects of resistance in the gender battle.

Finally, it is important to note that Tina leaves Tijuana and goes to live in Mexico City after her relationship with Rosendo has ended. She states, "Tijuana me asfixia"[Tijuana is suffocating me] (101). Then later, "Después de dejar a Rosendo y a Tijuana, Tina se había deshecho de sus cosas; había roto sus fortografías; cambiando sus ropas, su peinado y maquillaje. Había 'renacido', según expresión suya"[After leaving Rosendo and Tijuana, Tina got rid of her things; she tore up pictures, got different clothes, a new haircut and make-up. She was "re-born" according to herself] (102). This differs from the other stories in this collection, where as we have noted, Conde tends to dismantle and resolve borders within native spaces. This is the only story in the

collection that makes direct reference to both the border region and Mexico City, thus, closing her collection with this direct reference to the border/Mexico City dichotomy. By doing so, Conde sends a strong message that ties the stories of the entire collection back to the underlying theme of the battle of the border region with the stronghold of the central powers. Therefore, in this sense, it is not coincidental that this "rebirth" of the protagonist Tina, takes place out of the border region and in the Metropolis. With this act, Conde places Tina in the center, metaphorically the "male-dominated" central power, and it is here that she inverts the binary opposition of the male vs. female power struggle—present throughout the collection-- while also making a statement about allotting power to the border region as part of the Nation.

With this text, Conde emphasizes a strong connection between the condition of the border and its longstanding struggles with the political hierarchy, and that of women in this patriarchal society. By allowing her characters to find power in their solitude, Conde metaphorically heals the "wounds" of these women and of the "wounded" (Anzaldúa) border where they live. Furthermore, by ending the collection with "Tina, Tinita" in Mexico City, Conde writes her text, her region and her women into the national identity. By including these "Others" as part of the Nation, their "wounds" are healed and their voices are heard.

In *La Genara* and *Arrieras somos*, Conde sends a clear, ardent message. Both texts portray the multitude of borders-geographical, cultural and social- that both women and the border region face. By dissolving these borders and inverting the positions of the border region and women's traditional spaces, these forgotten voices can be equalized and included as speaking Subjects into the Nation-State. As Homi Bhabba states:

> Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its 'difference' is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within', the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one. The national subject splits in the ethnographic perspective of culture's contemporaneity and provides both a theoretical position and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse. They no longer need to address their strategies of opposition to a horizon of 'hegemony' that is envisaged as horizontal and homogeneous (301).

Conde accomplishes this task of designating narrative authority to the marginal voices in both texts, erasing the boundaries of this hegemony that is horizontal and homogeneous. Conde achieves said act through her characters, all of whom become strong, independent women whose voices gain authority in the nation-state. The paths to this newfound state differ for each protagonist, as each acknowledges the borders that impede and hinder this independence, and find mechanisms to overcome and disengage these borders[51]. As they do so, the women are able to unearth their previously encapsulated identities and escape their marginalized position in the nation. Thus, in *La Genara* and *Arrieras somos*, Conde outlines a reconceptualization of the idea of Nation with a narrative inversion--for women and the border zone-- that is re-written outside of the "borders" of the Metropolis and out of the hands of the patriarchal political system. In Conde's texts, the marginalized "others" attain the authority to re-create, re-asses and re-assemble the out-dated, uni-

[51] This follows the pattern of the Mexican nation that as a country has historically searched for this economic, cultural and political independence while maintaining its political and commercial relationships with other nations. As we will see throughout this study, this dichotomy has often led to an unbalanced position of the nation where national interests are pushed aside in favor of foreign relations.

lateral, oppressive conceptualization of nation [and its over-zealous borders] and in doing so, Conde brings to light, the possibilities for her region and her nation to grow and strengthen its identity as a united entity, rather than excluding and ignoring its diversity, hybridity and history.

Chapter III

Life on the Border: Rosario San Miguel's *Callejón Sucre y otros relatos*

> Thus, despite all the conscious attempts to purify and exclude, cultures are far from being unitary, as they have always owed their existence more to differences, hybridities and alien elements than they really care to acknowledge"
>
> --Trinh T. Minh-ha-- [52]

The words of Trinh T. Minh-ha appropriately introduce Rosario San Miguel's short story collection *Callejón Sucre*, as in said text, San Miguel portrays the diversity of the borderlands, as she acknowledges and emphasizes its differences, and undermines its vices. San Miguel's collection becomes a candid picture of the streets of her native Ciudad Juarez[53], as she delves into the many realities of life on the border-- the nightlife to the day-to-day routine of it's people--are emblematic of the broad spectrum of people and experiences that structure this zone. San Miguel does not mask the tribulations of her region but rather demands that these realities be seen and heard as part of the Nation.

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[52] Taken from "An Acoustic Journey" in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C. Welchman Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. p.1

[53] Ciudad Juárez is located in the state of Chihauhua, across the border from El Paso, Texas. It is a major port of entry and transportation center of north central Mexico. It is a growing industrial center with more than 300 maquiladoras. Left over from the US Prohibition era, Juárez has a reputation as an entertainment center with its bars, nightclubs and brothels. Currently, large slum housing communities are extensive in the city. Moreover, Juárez has gained further notoriety as a major center of narcotics trafficking and for the hundreds of unsolved murders of young women since 1993.

It is not coincidental that Rosario San Miguel begins her collection with "Callejon Sucre", as the story prefaces and introduces the entire short story collection.[54] "Callejon Sucre" takes places during the course of a night. The narrative voice is that of an older ex-cabaret entertainer who is at the hospital with his sick, dying wife--an ex-cabaret dancer herself. After checking on his wife, he leaves the hospital and returns to the Mona Lisa (the cabaret) on Callejon Sucre street, "la calle más sombria de la ciudad"[The darkest street in the city] (11), to re-visit his previous life in the shadowy world of nighttime entertainment. The hospital, the streets of the city and the inside of the Cabaret, then, become the sites of enunciation that speak metaphorically of the myths that surround the border region. Images of darkness, illness and a militant vocabulary lend themselves to the battle of the border region in the national culture and furthermore, those doubly marginalized within this nightlife "region" of the border. That is to say, by opening her collection with this story, San Miguel draws to the attention of the reader the ills and stereotypes associated with the border region[55].

The story begins with the narrative voice stating, "La noche no progresa. Abro un libro y pretendo poblar las horas con situaciones ajenas que me lleven de la mano, con amabilidad, por las páginas de otras vidas. Fracaso."[The night doesn't advance. I open a book and pretend to occupy the hours with different situations that take me by the hand in a friendly manner, for the pages of other lives. I fail] (9). With these words, San

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[54] By beginning the collection with a story that treats the stereotypical image of vice in the region, San Miguel highlights how the entire collection will depict figures of resistance to these stereotypical projections of her region.

[55] Néstor García Canclini notes of the image of Tijuana (and respectively Ciudad Juárez), "Desde principio de siglo hasta hace unos quince años, Tijuana había sido conocida por un casino, cabarets, dancing halls, liquor stores, a donde los nortemamericanos llegaban para eludir las prohibiciones sexuales, de juegos de azar y bebidas alchólicas.." (294).

Miguel not only establishes the darkness that surrounds this particular story, but also invites the reader into the entire text, asking them to do as the narrative voice--experience the lives of others in different situations and, in this case, the diversity and normality of life on the border.[56] However, just as the narrative voice fails in immersing himself in his reading, San Miguel recognizes, with the single word "fracaso"[fail], that her region has failed to be recognized or understood in its complex but fascinating reality. Moreover, by stating that the night doesn't progress, Conde highlights the state of the border as static--the manner in which it has been portrayed, and misunderstood, does not change. The stereotypes persist and, like the night, an image of darkness hangs over the region's identity. Therefore, by including a wide spectrum of life on the border in this collection, San Miguel insists on undermining this perpetual vision of her region and instead is adamant on acknowledging and accepting the diversity within her region, as part of the national culture.[57] As Homi Bhabba states, "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture" (297). That is to say, as San Miguel demands, the compilation of a national culture needs to embrace the gamut of its inhabitants, from the far-reaching borders to the inner borders, all of which comprise the nation. San Miguel's text takes the "scraps, patches, and rags" of the border

[56] This invitation to the reader to actively participate in the text, leads to a better understanding of the message of the author, according to Emily Hicks, "It follows that the politically committed artist can be understood best by a reading that is willing to engage in a kind of border crossing, that is, a critical consideration of the nonidentites between the referential codes of the writer, the reader, and the sociohistorical semiotic context" (11).

[57] For San Miguel this means an acceptance of women, lesbians, gays, prostitutes, etc. as part of the nation. San Miguel underscores dramatically with her protagonists the concept of a patriarchal national identity.

zone and through them tells its story, while also breaking down the borders that deny these "others" a voice in the nation[58].

In "Callejon sucre" the dark images of the night, the hospital and the sick ex-cabaret dancer, Lucia, are all representative of the metaphor of the "sick" border with its vices. We see how San Miguel's prose, become poetic in nature, as she utilizes strings of metaphors to emphasize the border as sick and a battle zone. For example, San Miguel refers to the space of the hospital as a region (9) and describes the dancer's deteriorating body like a battle ground that has been "invaded" by tubes and medicine, "la enorme sútura que ahora le marca el vientre; las sondas, sueros y drenes que invaden su carne"[the giant suture that now marks her stomach; the tubes, medicines and drains that invade her body] (11). San Miguel extends the metaphor, as the narrative voice leaves Lucia's room, "para no verla convertida en un campo de batalla dónde la enfermedad cobra terreno cada segundo"[to not see her converted into a battleground where her illness gains power every second] (10). The use of this militant vocabulary that describes Lucia's body as a battleground within this "regional" space of the hospital, converts her into a symbol of the fight for her region to escape this image of vice. Lucia's body becomes the battleground for a voice in the nation--a space to negotiate the long-standing stereotype of the borderlands as a "barbaric", ailing zone--the region that sickens the nation.

Furthermore, the tubes and medicine that "invade" Lucia's body can be read as the central powers that attempt to "heal" the region, all in the name of the nation.

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[58] With this text San Miguel acknowledges a wide range of "others"—from the lesbian lawyer to the poverty stricken campesina. The text highlights recent movements in Mexico where minority groups—workers, farm workers, indigenous groups—have shown resistance to the hierarchical political system.

However, as we saw in the previous chapter, these attempts by the central government to renovate and restore the border region, were unsuccessful, as they were only interested in placing an identity upon the region which clashed with the realities of the zone[59]. Therein, this metaphor of invading the sick woman's flesh, reveals not only how the region is depicted, but also the central government's unwanted attempts to "fix" the regions ills[60].

Moreover, we can also understand these metaphors as a tool to gain authority. As Emily Hicks notes, the use of the grotesque in the border region is related to relations of power; "the inclusion of the grotesque is already an anti-centering strategy" (xxviii). This concept somewhat coincides with the ideas of Gilbert and Gubar, as they state, in their well-know text *The Madwoman in the Attic,* that through images of disease, women writers reveal their cultural and social anxieties (Humm 122). Therefore, we can view this initial focus on illness and darkness as a clear alert to the reader of the tribulations of the region, and how Conde requests through her text, the presence of a active reader[61],

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[59] As Debra Castillo notes of the border cultural program, it's implementation was only to present a united nation, not try to understand the realities of the zone, "It is not too exaggerated to suggest that, in anticipation of NAFTA legilative approval, the border cultural program projected a Mexico both educated and united in order to counteract national anxieties about appropriation or absorption by the United States" (20).

[60] The Border Cultural Project is an example of how the central government has historically attempted to "fix" the border region, "De la Madrid's border program was created in 1985, when Mexico was still suffering the effects of the 1982 crisis, particularly by powerful conservative politicians in the north. As a political project, then, the program served to authorize and to include the all too forgotten border population with the horizons of 'lo nacional', and also –in this area of heavy investment in foreign industrial plants—helped to buttress with visible projects the rhetorical position that 'el país no estaba en venta' (Castillo 20).

[61] We can theorize this active reader as one similar to Julio Cortázar's lector cómplice, where the reader has to actively piece together the fragmented stories into a complete picture/image of the border region

one wiling to see in actuality the extension and multiplicity of the confining borders that encompass the region.

The fact that the narrative voice in "Callejon sucre" is that of a male, and the only male narrator in the text, is important. In the first place, positions of power and the dominant voice in nation building have always been tied to the masculine identity. Therefore, the fact that it is a male voice who uses these dark, militant descriptions links him to the outside, metaphorically the Metropolis, which views the border in this way. Nevertheless, it is clear that he himself, as a border dweller and former cabaret entertainer, faces significant borders, as San Miguel makes clear the division of spaces that he passes and looks through. Besides the hospital and the cabaret, the descriptions of doors, curtains, windows and even "a través de los vidrios empanados de mis anteojos"[through the wet lenses of my glasses] (11), symbolize the idea of looking across the border but not amply seeing its reality. The narrator visits the space of his previous life, that he claims he "deserted"[62], and states, "Nada vine a buscar; sin embargo, encuentro la imagen oculta del antiguo animador de un cabarét de segundo"[I didn't come to look for anything; however, I find the hidden image of an old ex-cabaret entertainer from a low class cabaret] (11). After passing and looking through the different borders, at the end of the night, he sees this eye-opening identity. Therefore, his realization and understanding of himself, symbolizes the need for the outside, patriarchal powers to stop "seeing" the border region through "foggy glasses", but rather to see a

[62] The use of the word deserted is a further example of the militant vocabulary throughout the story, "Años atrás nos vimos por última vez, cuando Lucía y yo **desertamos**. Cuando abandonamos a Rosaura y su mundo" (11).

clear image of the zone. For that reason, San Miguel implements this male narrative voice--the first and last male narrator in the collection.

Moreover, with the use of the symbolic windows and doors, San Miguel also invites the reader to see through the "borders" that entrap her region, and recognize, that beyond the borders of the city, of the streets of the night and the doors of the bars, prostibulos and cabarets, there exist citizens of a nation, who should be recognized and part of the national voice. It can no longer be a singular, masculine voice[63]. The individual identities of the multi-faceted, multi-level border need to be seen. This coincides with the beginning of the story where, through the narrative voice's actions of reading, San Miguel invites the reader to be open to experiencing the lives of others.

With "Callejon Sucre", Homi Bhabha's theorizations on nation and subversion are strikingly appropriate, as Louise Rodriguez Connal states,

> Marginalized groups can meet to subvert or challenge an oppressive system. In Homi Bhabha's interrogation of 'cultural hybridization,' he argues that the interplay among cultures takes place in the in-between places of society: '[The] in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself' (The Location 2)" (Rodriguez Connal 208).

The spaces of "Callejon Sucre" do just that, challenge the idea of nation to recognize the diversity of the border and to include the marginalized border dwellers not recognized as part of the larger society. With this story and the entire collection, San Miguel does not

[63] Like that, of the male narrative voice in the story.

mask the problems or the diverse realities of the border, but does, however, demand that her region be accepted and included in the national culture.

The small, enclosed space of a hotel room, on a street in Ciudad Júarez know for its nightlife, is where most of the story "La otra habitación" takes places. In her analysis of the story, Debra Castillo calls attention to the intertextual play of Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own", where, in contrast, this version transpires in a low-end hotel, instead of an important British university college room[64]. However, as the similarities are notable, this story is not the only one in the collection that uses these types of confined spaces as a site of operation. Furthermore, although the use of windows as barriers is more pronounced in this story, this textual practice was also seen in "Callejon Sucre" and is present throughout this collection. That is to say, the use of these enclosed spaces and barriers (windows and walls) calls attention to the borders around these characters. In this case, as we will see, the "borders" that entrap the narrative voice's identity, also hold hostage to the unique identity of the city, as representative of the border region.

> "La otra habitación" begins with Anamarías flight from Monterrey to Ciudad Juarez and from the initial sentence places her in an enclosed space looking out: Desde la ventanilla del avión mire sorprendida el color blancuzco de los medanos. Como si los viera por primera vez, sentí un estremecimiento, Además de la belleza del desierto y de la inevitable sensación de pureza que me causaba contemplarlo, al final del viaje aterrizaría en Juárez". [From the window of the plane I was surprised by the white color of the medanos. It was as if I were

[64] In *Border Women Writing from la Frontera*, p.79

seeing them for the first time and I felt a longing. Besides the beauty of the desert and the inevitable sensation of purity that it caused to observe it, at the end we would land in Juarez] (17).

Although Anamaria recognizes that this is not the first time she has made this trip or seen the desert, she does so through innocent eyes, which are surprised by the beauty of the scenery. The innocence she experiments, is the first in a long series of events where Anamaria is unable to escape the "borders", that prevent her a complete experience. That is to say, Anamaria's experiences are fragmented--for example--while she is on the airplane, she is only able to see from above. Over and over, this fragmentation in the story, is related to her five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Therefore, as we will see the lack of full use of her senses is representative of her identity conflict. Moreover, in the description of the desert, it is interesting to contrast the tone and descriptive words, such as, white, beauty and purity, with the images from the previous story, that was comprised of illness and darkness. Therefore, not only does the initial paragraph of "La otra habitación" introduce to the reader the beginnings of Anamaría's identity crisis, it also provides another glimpse into the landscape of the border region. Throughout this text, San Miguel uses this technique of double representation. That is to say, while the focus is primarily on her characters, she also portrays a very diversified picture of her region, from the beauty of the desert to the dark streets of the night.

In "La otra habitación" Anamaría returns to Ciudad Juúrez to meet with her former sister in law to settle ownership of the house of her ex-husband, who has passed away. Coincidentally, Anamaría decides to stay in the hotel where she used to escape with her husband, and, after leaving him, would later return with her lover, Fernanda.

Interestingly, initially in the text Anamaría does not admit that these later visits were with her female lover. It becomes clear throughout the story that Anamaría struggles with her lesbian identity, as the reader at times has to deduce this information about her sexuality. Therefore, the fact that she returns to this specific hotel that has been a site of desire in her past is significant[65]. In *Between Woman and Nation*, Mary N. Layoun writes of desire,

> Desire is often and almost proverbially formulated as in opposition to some more properly biological need, and that desire as for something absent or missing or lacking. Further, desire is proposed as itself a representation of that absence or lack through the attempt to imagine its satisfaction. In this formulation, desire, then, is an imaginary depiction of its own fulfillment. To push this proposition further, desire can be a productive way to account for the workings of narratives of nationalism-as an attempt to imagine it's own fulfillment" (92).

Thus, metaphorically in the text, Anamaría's absent senses symbolize what is missing and causing her crisis, and that is the acceptance of her sexuality. Furthermore, the barriers that trap her in this identity crisis come to represent the borders that inhibit a clear, recognition of the diversified border region. Just as Mary Layoun states that desire can function as a means of imagining nation, we see that only as Anamaría opens up to her sexuality will the reader/nation experience Juarez through all of Anamaría's senses.

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[65] Sabina Berman also treats the topic of sexuality/desire/lesbian identity in her theatrical works in the context of digressing positions of Mexican national discourse. Jaqueline E. Bixler notes in her article, "From Ecstasy to Heresy: The Theatre of Sabina Berman" that in her plays, there is an underlying position of distrust to all official discourse and continual references to the transgression of borders of sexuality and personal and national identity.

Throughout the story, as Anamaría sits in her room, either by herself or when her sister in law visits to discuss the house, she passes her time by looking out the window. Her observations of the city are only through her sense of sight, making clear that the window is closed. Lacking other senses, she is left to imagine the complete picture, as she does with an accordion player sitting on a street corner: "Por unos instantes me distraje con los movimientos de sus dedos sobre las llaves. Por la rapídez con que los movía supuse que tocaba una melodía muy viva"[For a few seconds I was distracted by the movements of his fingers on the keys. Because of the quickness of their movement, I imagined that he was playing a very lively melody] (20). Because she cannot hear the music, she deduces by his finger movement that he is playing a lively song.

This "imagining" also occurs with another of her senses. Anamaría becomes interested in the conversations of her neighbors, Cony and Roberto, that she hears through the walls of her room, to the point that she states, "llevaba el horario de Cony que Cony me imponía, indirectamente, con su vida nocturna. Hasta que ella agotaba sus fuerzas se abría el silencio para que abordara el sueño" [I follwed the schedule of Cony that she placed upon me, indirectly, with her night life. Until she was tired out, the silence reigned so that sleep would come](18). As Anamaria listens to Cony she invents an image of her: "Imaginé a Cony cambiar su vestido negro por una bata ligera, también color negro. Luego que se dirigía al tocador a mirarse en el espejo mientras cepillaba su cabello. Por el timbre de su voz creí que era largo y ondulado, color caoba"[I imagined Cony changing her black dress for a light bathrobe, also black. Then she went to the nightstand to look in the mirror while she combed her hair. Because of the pitch of her voice I imagined it was long, curly and dark] (22). By the sound of her voice and her

movements, Anamaría has created an image of Cony in her mind. This type of deduction, however, can be deceptive, as we see when Anamaría encounters Cony for the first time: "Cuando los vi cruzar el loby me di cuenta que había fallado en todo"[When I saw them cross the lobby I realized that I had failed in everything] (27). Besides the fact that Cony looked different than Anamaría had imagined, she also recognized her from the past as a singer from the local bar that she had gone to with both her husband and Fernanda.

The manner in which Anamaría's creation of Cony was erroneous, reminds us of how the border region is imagined by the rest of the nation and across the border[66]. This "imagining" within a nation challenges Benedict Anderson's ideas on Nation because, as he states, "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (5). However, if this imagined unity leads to falsity in the reality of the people, as in the way the border has been perceived, then Anderson's definition of nation as an "imagined political community" (5) can lead to a misunderstanding of the true complexities of one's nation.

Cony's character also challenges the conception of the nightlife and vice of the border region on a different level. As a singer in a nightclub who lives in a run-down hotel with her boyfriend, a contraband seller, Cony could be depicted as someone living on the fringes of society. However, Cony is happy and instead, notes bitterness in Anamaría, stating she wouldn't want to be like her (31), an inversion of how society

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[66] "Even in well-informed current discussions, Mexico's northern border's remoteness and relative isolation from the two contemporary dominant national discourses (Mexico, U.S) offer intriguing opportunities for speculative projection.....[where] border culture is invented, projected as an imaginary space". (Castillo/Tabuenca Córdoba 34).

would place the two. Furthermore, Cony is decisive and breaks the myth of a woman's fulfillment being motherhood[67]. When she unexpectedly became pregnant, she crossed the border for an abortion, as she knew she didn't want to have children. Therefore, as the French feminist Luce Irigaray states, "maternity fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality" (352) confirming Cony's self-confidence as a sexual being. Cony is a powerful character who embraces her sexuality, and therefore it is not coincidental that Anamaría is able to "find" herself through her relationship with Cony, allotting power and voice to this otherwise "imagined" unhappy, marginalized border woman.

Interestingly, as Cony and Anamaría finally talk, the borders that have separated them dissolve as they see the similarities in each other: "Atentas a la historia ajena, reonocimos una en la otra nuestra propia condición"[Paying attention to our different stories, we recognized in each other the same condition] (31). Therefore, we can deduce that, as they "speak" and break down this "border" that has separated them, they open a new discourse that, as Monique Wittig has theorized, is not controlled by the dominant heterosexual linguistic system. Judith Butler states of Wittig's theory, "women, lesbians, and gay men... cannot assume the position of the speaking subject within the linguistic system of compulsory heterosexuality. To speak within the system is to be deprived of the possibility of speech; hence, to speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot 'be' within the language that

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[67] This rejection of motherhood is interesting in the light of Octavio Paz's analysis of the Mother in the Mexican culture, as he states, "The *Chingada* is one of the Mexican representations of Materninty, like *La llorona* of the 'long-suffering Mexican mother' we celebrate on the tenth of May. The *Chingada* is the mother who has suffered—metaphorically or actually—the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb that gives her her name...) (*The Mexico Reader* 21). Cony rejects placing herself in this conceptualization of mother in Mexico.

asserts it" (148). Said dialogue that has united Anamaría and Cony, then, metaphorically represents the marginalized voices of their region gaining access to this "dominant heterosexual linguistic system" and participating as active speaking subjects in the Nation.

Furthermore, through Cony, Anamaría is able to re-discover herself and unleash her repressed sexuality. Helene Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," encourages women to write themselves and the pleasures of their body as she states that, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (334). However, as Anamaría attempts to write "herself" and her body, we see that initially she is only able to focus on the biology of the body as related to her emotional state: "Conocía de sobra mis altibajos emocionales como para dejarme sorprender...La proximidad de la regla, los síntomas prematúros de la menopausia, la migraña que me martillaba los recuerdos" [I knew too well the emotional ups and downs to be surprised by them...the proximity of my period, the premature symptoms of menopause, the migraine that pulsed my memories](26). Not coincidentally, this quote is followed by a description of a poem that Anamaria has brought with her on the trip to translate, as a

> placentero ejercicio que yo misma me había impuesto como una calistenía escritural, mientras llegaba mi momento, me decía. Sólo que ya parecía que me conformaba con traducir, con buscar la palabra mas cercana, cuidar el ritmo, su sonoridad y todo lo que implicaba trasladar el mundo que encierran las palabras-el mundo de otros..Era una delicada, cobarde manera de revelarme" [pleasant exercise that I had placed upon myself as a writing exercise, while I waited for my

moment I told myself. Only it appeared that I had resigned myself to translating, to looking for the closest word, paying attention to the rythmn, the sound and all that it implys to translate the world that holds the words—the words of others. It was a delicate, cowardly way of showing myself](27).

Anamaría admits that she is a coward and unable to write her own words, although writing is her passion. By translating other's words, Anamaría is incapable of understanding her self or "writing"/discovering her desire, as Cixous has theorized. In the previous quote, where she does write of her body, it is very factual and biological. At that point, Anamaría is still unable to delve into her deepest feelings and desires--the borders of her sexuality in a patriarchal society, place claim on her identity, leaving her only "translating" other's words and ideas.

However, this begins to change because of Cony. After a period of time, Anamaría recognizes, how she has lost interest in working on her translating--she finds more pleasure in inventing Cony, "inventar a la mujer a la que pertenecía la voz que me desvelaba, me causaba, a la vez, placer e inquietud"[inventing the woman to whom the voice belonged that kept me awake, caused me both pleasure and uncertainty] (27). Anamaría's own creating and writing begins with her imagining Cony and, as Cixous states, "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible" (334) and, as Irigaray also notes, "Perhaps it is time to return to that repressed entity, the female imaginary" (353). By beginning to delve into her imaginative capabilities--creating and writing her own version of Cony--the borders that surround Anamaría begin to crumble.

These crumbling borders are demolished, as Anamaria consummates her desire with Cony and at last, resolves her repressed sexuality and accepts her lesbian

"identity"[68], "En la hora madura de la noche, la entraña de una mujer amada rezumaba su deseo. La entrega perpétua era un juramento. Las palabras amantes tejían una enredadera, su aliento perfumaba el aire de la habitación sellada" [In the late night, the insides of a loved woman re-awoke her desire. The perpetual giving was a promise. The lovers words knit an entanglement, her breath perfumed the air of the closed hotel room] (37). Only after this description of their sexual encounter, which is clearly described as occurring inside the "sealed room", do we see for the first time that Anamaría opens her window. And only then, does the reader finally see, hear and smell a complete picture of the city:

> Abrí la ventana. En la otra habitación, Cony me esperaba. La vida se renovaba. La melodía del acordeón se mezclaba con el fragór del mundo. Algunas monedas caían en el sombrero a los pies del músico. Hacia el poniente la catédral soltaba las campanas. Los fieles a misa. Atrás del campanario el desierto devoraba una naranja en llamas. El templo metodista abría sus puertas. Los cholos buscaban sus guaridas, cercanas a las vías del tren. Las indígenas recogían sus tendidos de yerbas y dulces. Los gringos cruzaban los puentes para beber toda la noche. Los acantonados en Fort Bliss buscaban amoríos en el Callejon Sucre [I openend the window. In the other room Cony was waiting for me. Life began anew. The melody of the accordion mixed with the fragrance of the world. Some coins fell

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[68] This acceptance of Anamaría's lesbian identity, places her in position of power as Amy Kaminsky notes that lesbianism in Latin America is one of the most bordered existences for women, "Given phallocratic culture's will to control women's sexuality, it is not surprising that sexual expression on the part of women that does not include men is the most forbidden of all. It is still possible to silence potentially feminist women with the epithet 'lesbian'. Heterosexuality is so deeply ingrained that it is passed off not only as 'natural' but as the sole natural expression of sexuality. To be called 'lesbian' is to be called 'monster' (xiv).

in the hat of the musician. In the west the cathedral played its bells. The faithful to church. Behind the bell tower the desert was devoured in orange flames. The Methodist temple opened its doors. The cholos looked for their hiding places near the train tracks. The indigenous people collected their cloaks of herbs and sweets. The gringos crossed the bridges to drink all night. The soldiers in Fort Bliss looked for romantic encounters on Callejon Sucre street]. (37)

At last, the reader experiences the sights, smells and sounds of Ciudad Juárez as Anamaría opens up to her desire and accepts her "identity". Importantly, we see that the people that comprise this picture are a diversified group; the faithfully religious on their way to church, the "cholos", the indigenous and the "gringos"—a slice of life of the true border city of Ciudad Júarez. The borders that encapsulated Anamaria's senses, metaphorically her sexual identity in a patriarchal society, represent the borders that estrange the border region from its identity. That is to say, the stereotypes and myths that surround the border region have held captive to the diversity of the zone--metaphorically in this story, as experienced through all five senses. Therein, the words of Louise Connal are strikingly pertinent as he writes, that "Hybridity allows for emerging differences among members of society, but difference should not silence people" (209). As evident in "La otra habitación", Rosario San Miguel demands that the hybrid state of her region--and the hybrid differences in its people: Men, women, gay or lesbian--be experienced by the nation-state through all senses, and the voices of these marginalized "others" be silenced no longer.

The story "Un silencio muy largo" takes place primarily in Las Dunas bar, on Callejon Sucre street, and from the initial description of the place, we see that San Miguel

challenges the perceived notion one would have of a bar on the border: "Nada espectacular ha ocurrido en medio siglo. Nadie ha cometido un crímen o un robo aparatoso. Nunca se ha provocado un incendio. En este sitio, las horas se suceden rigurosamente uniformes"[Nothing spectacular has occurred in half a century. No one has committed a crime or robbery. A fire has never been purposefully started. In this site, the hours pass rigourously uniformly] (51). Furthermore, with characters that are subversive to their "assigned" societal roles, and to the manner in which they are perceived, we see how San Miguel continually undermines the perception of the reader as a means of subverting the stereotypical notion of the border region.

The protagonist, Francis, arrives at Las Dunas to drown her sorrows after quitting her job and moving out of her apartment, all as a means of leaving her married boyfriend. As Debra Castillo notes, Francis's actions clearly link her to a series of acts traditionally associated with male behavior;

> From the very moment of Francis's introduction to the reader, we know that she has broken with traditional values by accepting a relationship with a married man, that in making the decision not to see him again she once again steps outside the expectations of female behavior, and that she cements her unorthodoxy by coming to Las Dunas in order to perform the eminently masculine task of forgetting the faithless lover with a dose of hard liquor" (Castillo 69).

Francis subverts the traditional role of a woman and in similar fashion to how Anamaría's hotel room in "La otra habitación," and her unlikely relationship with the nightclub singer Cony, led her to a rediscovering of herself, Las Dunas and Francis's interactions with the bar's employees and prostitutes, aid in her healing. This technique

of unlikely friendships, between educated women and nighttime entertainers metaphorically breaks down the "borders" of the gap between the "educated" Metropolis and the "barbaric" border region, undermining this stereotype of vice. This inversion of power, where the stereotyped "fringes of society" contribute to the healing or identity search of these "educated" women, suggests the capabilities of the border region to be a contributing member of the nation-state--like these characters, the zone is misrepresented as the "fringe of society" in the national identity of the country.

Moreover, aside from the presentation of Las Dunas as a tranquil, uneventful place, rather than a wild and crazy bar, the fact that China, one of the oldest workers, passes her time knitting, between cleaning and dealing with the prostitutes and their clients, furthermore challenges the imagined perception of a border bar: "China tejía toda la noche. Solo suspendía su labor unos minutos para ir tras las parejas que ocupaban los cuartos. Entonces cambiaba las agujas por el papel higiénico. Eso y su visita eran las únicas herramientas para la inspección sanitaria" [China knitted all night. She only stopped her work for a few minutes to follow the couples who occupied the rooms. Then she traded her knitting needles for toilet paper. That and her visit were the only tools for the sanitary inspection] (65). These descriptions of domestic tasks over any account of sexual encounters further portrays the bar as a site of daily life instead of an "exotic" place of vice.[69] Interestingly, Rosario San Miguel appropriates this traditional act of knitting, to draw attention away from the sexualized images of vice that are associated with the region, while in the previous chapter, Rosina Conde utilized knitting as an icon of women's space, idealized and fomented in a patriarchal society. That is to say, both

[69] We are reminded of Bhabha's words on Nation, "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture" (297)

manipulate this predominantly female activity, to undermine and subvert simultaneously stereotypes associated with women and the border region.

In "Un silencio muy largo", the continual subversion of stereotypes breaks down the "borders" of the region and, finally, in Freudian Oedipal fashion, Francis tells of her recurrent dream that leads her to look for reconciliation with her mother. In the dream, there is a young girl, presumably Francis, who is playing and running on a brick patio and falls. With the fall, the girl "Sentía un dolor muy intenso en el sexo. Ardor en las raspaduras de la entrepierna. Luego la humedad. Se bajaba de la jardinera y revisaba su calzon de olanes: asustada descubría una mancha de sangre" [She felt an intense pain in her private parts. Burning in the scrapes of her inner thigh. Then the wetness. She came off the patio and checked her underwear: scared she discovered a spot of blood](68). The fall appears to have caused her first menstruation. In her dream, the fall that leads to her bleeding is symbolic of the Biblical fall of Eve, which leads to hers and Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. However, in Francis's dream, her fall into womanhood empowers her. When she is finally "expelled" from Las Dunas--like Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, "Dice Morra que para ti ya no hay servicio" [Morra says that for you there is not any more service] (71), she remembers her dream and states, "Primero pasar unos días con mi madre y buscar la reconciliación; luego, retomar el hilo de la vida" [First I'm going to spend a few days with my mother and try to reconcile with her; then, re-start the threads of life] (72).

Both the use of the dream motif and the reconciliation with the mother evoke images of Freud's Oedipal complex, as Francis has "acted" the part of a male in her

"castrated" state and now desires to return to the mother.[70] That is to say, as Debra Castillo noted, all of Francis's action coincide with stereotypical male behavior. Moreover, for Frued the Oedipus Complex is, "the beginnings of morality; conscience, law and all forms of social and religious authority" (Eagleton 136). However, in this case, Francis's dream empowers her and allows her to accept authority as a woman-- without the need to play the role of a man to find this power-- and therefore, by reconciling with her mother, she accepts and embraces her own female identity. Therefore, although strikingly reminiscent of Freud, San Miguel subverts this psychoanalytical theory to create her own new beginnings of law and social conscience that break down the borders of women's roles in the nation and also that of the border region. If Eve's fall led to her demise, Francis's fall in her dream led to new beginnings for herself and her region. Once again, we see how San Miguel simultaneously condemns multiple borders with her writing. The battle she forges with the nation-state, contests the myths that engulf the region. For San Miguel, it is not enough for her region to be given the power it merits—her stipulations require the reader/nation to experience all the borders of the borderlands and accept these divergences as part of a hybrid, nation-state.

In "Paisaje en verano" the streets of Ciudad Juárez are no longer those of the night life on Callejon Sucre street, but rather the neighborhoods where the adolescent Cecilia lives and spends her time.[71] Through her innocent eyes we experience a different view of life on the border. Her story could be that of any twelve-year old girl who is on

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[70] Eagleton, Terry *Literary Theory* Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 134-135

[71] This upper-middle class neighborhood could be that of any large Mexican city-- including Mexico City.

the verge of womanhood, awaiting the arrival of her first menstruation, "la tardanza de su primera regla la angustiaba" [the lateness of her first period troubled her] (84). At this age of uncertainty, Cecilia is trying to figure out herself and the world—the borders that form her reality as an adolescent, border dweller: "decidió recorrer las calles del centro dónde el mundo, el verdadero según su percepción, no estaba regido por ley o autoridad alguna que le impideira sentirse libre, ir a todas partes para observarlo todo" [She decided to explore the streets of the center where the world, the true world, according to her perception, wasn't restricted by law or any form of authority that impeded her from feeling free, to go anywhere and observe it all](80). As she roams the city streets, her innocence leads her to believe, she is free of any borders or authority.

Although initially Cecilia's tale appears like that of any adolescent, a closer look calls attention to the intertextuality of Cervantes's Don Quijote. In the previous quote we see Cecilia set off on an adventure of the city streets, that according to her perception was the "true" world, in similar fashion to Don Quijote, whose perception of things blurred the boundaries of what he considered "verdadero"[72] and the actual reality. Furthermore, from the initial sentence of the text we see that Cecilia has her sidekick, "la Gorda Molinár" (77), whose nickname of "chubby" recalls of the "panza" in Sancho Panza. Also, just as Don Quijote's sentimental inspiration is Dulcinea, Cecilia has Daniel who, not surprisingly, like Dulcinea, isn't beautiful to the outside observer, "Tenía 14 años y el cútis salpicado de diminutas y rosadas espinillas como si tuviera salpullido" [He was 14 years old and his skin was plagued with red pimples that looked like he had measles]

[72] "Quién duda sino que en los venideros tiempos, cuando salga a la luz la verdadera historia de mis famosos hechos?" Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote de la Mancha* Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Planeta, 1980, p. 42

(87). Like Don Quijote, Cecila immerses herself in books and crosses the borders of reality and fiction, "Ajena al Ruidoso tráfico de los carros, la solitaria caminata se transformaba en una travesía imaginaria a través de los personajes de sus lecturas" [Unaware of the loud traffic of the cars, her solitary walk was transformed in an imaginary passageway through the characters from her books] (78). Futhermore, just as Don Quijote's library and his books led him in search of adventure and glory, Celicia turns to the library for answers to life: "En la biblioteca desierta, Cecilia leía un libro de biología afanada en desentrañar algunos misterios. Creía que el conocimiento de los microrganismos o de las etapas reproductivas de los mamíferos la llevarían a esa comprensión de la vida que buscaba, de sus leyes y su razón de ser"[In the deserted library, Cecilia read a biology book determined to unmask some mysteries. She believed that the knowledge of microorganismsor the reproductive stages of mammals would bring her this understanding of life that she was looking for, the laws of life and a reason for being] (81).

Moreover, in Cecilia's adventures of the city she encounters what she believes to be a woman, who she addresses as "señora", but when the woman corrects her and says she isn't a "señora" and Celicia then calls her "señor" and the same occurs, she asks, "Si no es mujer ni hombre, que es usted pués? [If you aren't a woman or a man, what are you then?] (81). When the person responds, "Soy Kalíman" [I'm a Kaliman] (81)--referring to a popular, super-hero, comic book character--we see how this incident further blurs the borders of what is true and what is reality.[73] For Cecilia, this "borderline" state is

[73] Judith Butler notes, in *Gender Trouble*, "If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of those perceptions as the 'reality' of gender: the gender that is introduced through the simile

challenging--it becomes evident to the reader that Cecilia is looking for "clear" scientific, answers, to the reasons and laws of the world[74]. Even the laws of her body deceive her, for although she is not yet "biologically" considered a woman, she enjoys the pleasures of her body, and with a description of masturbation she states, "Nadie creereía que aún soy una niña, susurró perturbada" [No one would believe that I'm still a child, she sighed excitedly](83).

Cecilia's world is filled with borders: the reality of border life in Ciudad Juárez, the blurred borders of fiction and reality and the borders between childhood and adulthood. Just as the tales of Don Quijote question and undermine the historical realities of his time, Cecilia is searching for "answers" to the laws and borders that surround her. Hence, just as Cervantes hid his critique of society behind the comical Don Quijote, San Miguel uses the innocence of Cecilia to once again demand that the reader/Nation look beyond the "blurred reality" of how the border is perceived, to acknowledge its "true" identity.[75] With Cecilia, San Miguel peels back another layer of the border reality, leaving the reader to question with each continuing story, what will she expose now?

The last story of the collection, "El reflejo de la luna", takes place on the U.S. side of the border, in El Paso, giving the reader a different glimpse of the border zone. The

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lacks 'reality', and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance...When such categories come into question, their reality of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be 'real', what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. Call it subversive or call it something else". (xxiii)

[74] The idea of reason and faith in science are characteristics of Modernity.

[75] By using the allegory of Don Quijote, San Miguel indicates further the need to go "outside" of the borders of the national identity for innovative methods to narrate the nation. By escaping of the borders of her nation and using this "foreign" allegory, San Miguel attests to the static environment of the nation, in need of new ideas from outside of the central strong-hold.

story is the longest of the collection and is broken into seven short chapters. The story centers around the lives of Nicole and Arturo, a married couple, both who have grown up on the U.S. side of the border, but whose experiences have been extremely different. Nicole grew up without a father, working in the cotton fields with her mother. As her mother wanted a better life for Nicole, she often left her with her grandmother for months, following the route of work for the farm workers so that Nicole could go to school. Her mother's hard work paid off, as Nicole became a lawyer for undocumented and migrant workers.[76] On the other hand, Arturo came from a very wealthy family from Chihuahua. His grandfather settled in El Paso, where he brought the family business that Arturo eventually inherited, along with the mansion where Arturo and Nicole live.

> Arturo and Nicole's "border identities" are on two ends of a spectrum. Where as Nicole identifies herself as a Chicana[77], Arturo's identity is blurred:
>
> Arturo se creía mexicano pero no lo era en su totalidad; había nacido y se había criado en Estados Unidos. Eso no significaba que comprendía a fondo la manera de percibir el mundo de los chicanos, ni compartía su sentimiento de amor-odio hacia la sociedad colonizadora en la que vivían. Nunca se había sentido discriminado. El racismo para él no era una experiencia viva. Tampoco se

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[76] See Peter Andreas Border Games. Andrea's book focuses on the rapid escalation of the U.S. border-policing activities in the 1990's to stem the flow of illegal drugs and undocumented immigrants—the one's San Miguel's character defends. This tightening of borders was ironic, as Andreas details, after the implementation of NAFTA where this created a type of bridge between the two countries, but on the other hand, the border-policing created a protective barrier between the countries.

[77] Although the term chicano refers to a person of Mexican decent born in the U.S., the term dates back to the literary and political movements of the 1960's and 1970's when Mexican Americans established the term as a term of ethnic pride. Therefore, it still contains strong political associations and in the feminine version, holds feminist connotations.

identificaba plenamente con los mexicanos. Nada tenía el en común con los hijos de los trabajadores agrícolas que llegaban al país-incesantemente-muertos de hambre. Entre él y esos mexicanos había diferencias insalvables. Era como si Arutro viviera siempre en la frontera. A un paso de pertenecer, pero al mismo tiempo separado por una línea imperceptible trazada por la historia [Arturo believed himself to be Mexican but he wasn't in all senses; he was born and had grown-up in the United States. That didn't mean that he understood fully the manner of perceiving the world of the Chicanos, nor did he share their sentiment of love-hate against the colonizing society in which they lived. He had never felt discrimination. Racism for him was not a lived experience. He didn't fully identify either with Mexicans. He didn't have anything in common with the sons of agricultural workers that arrived to the country –dying of hunger. Between him and these Mexicans there were huge differences. It was as if Arturo lived always on the border. One step from pertaining, but at the same time separated by an unbreakable line drawn by history] (130)

Furthermore, with the inclusion of one of Nicole's clients, an undocumented worker of indigenous heritage whose family had come from southern Mexico and settled in the colonia Revolución Mexicana, where many Mazahúa families lived, San Miguel includes a further "border identity"--all part of the U.S. border reality. Thus, San Miguel carries her ideas of hybridity across the border and highlights with these characters, the borders of identity of this region--extending to both the north and south--that many people experience. Arturo, although successful and wealthy, is an icon of this identity crisis--he is unable to break down the borders of history that shape his understanding of

himself as a citizen of the United States and as a native of Mexico. Yet again, we note how Rosario San Miguel includes in this collection a spectrum of people that form the body of the extensive border region.

In the case of Guadalupe, who becomes Nicole's client, San Miguel delves into the issue of languages, as she highlights how Guadalupe speaks Spanish as her primary language, but understands the Nahúatl[78] that her parents speak at home. That is to say, the "borders" of this zone extend beyond even the Spanish/ English dichotomy that in itself sparks much debate. The presence of many indigenous groups in this zone, adds further diversity, to an already wide spectrum of border experiences. Guadalupe's reality, is that she has grown up selling chocolates on the street and working the line at General Motors--her only schooling was that of the first three years of Elementary School[79]. When she is attacked by one of the sons of a business client of Arturo, and Nicole becomes her lawyer, we see how the two worlds-- the rich and the poor without rights-- collide. Although the father of the boy threatens to talk to the judge if Nicole doesn't drop the case, she stands her ground: "Ni Guadalupe era una indígena desamparada, ni ella una chicana indefensa. Las dos eran mujeres sin privilegios, acostumbradas a la lucha diaria; hijas de trabajadores migrantes. Ahora ella sabía muy

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[78] The inclusion of this language in this text is interesting as it is the language that was used by the Aztecs—therefore dating back further than the Spanish language in Mexico. It is still spoken in Mexico by approximately 1.5 million people and is recognized as a "national language". The largest populations of Nahúatl speakers are found in Puebla, Veracruz, Guerrero and Hidalgo. Due to migration from these areas to the U.S., there are now pockets of Nahúatl communities in the United States.

[79] San Miguel emphasizes the large population of inhabitants to this region whose education levels are extremely low. The farm workers, the maquiladora employees, and the street side vendors who spend long hours on both sides of the border highlights a border industry for the poor, without an education. By including this aspect of border life in her text, San Miguel further stresses the injustices faced by many border dwellers.

bien como hacer valer sus derechos y los de Guadalupe"[Neither was Guadalupe a indigenous woman without rights, nor was she (Nicole) a defensless Chicana. Both were women without privileges, used to the daily fight; daughters of migrant workers. Now she knew very well how to make her rights known and those of Guadalupe] (122). The borders of their womanhood--as a chicana and an indigineous woman--challenge Nicole to undermine their position of power, from one as "other" to "subject", and dissolve these borders of gender and ethnicity.

In the end, as the outcome of the case isn't part of the story, we see that Guadalupe is an icon for the struggle of border immigrants to survive and the racism they encounter. Moreover, Guadalupe serves to highlight the power of Nicole as an educated woman who defends the rights of all women. When Guadalupe wants to drop the case, Nicole tells her "Si no luchamos para que castiguen a Dick Thompson, siempre se agrederá a los débiles. Defendiéndote a ti es como si defendiera a otras mujeres que han sido violadas, por eso te pido que me ayudes. No lo hagas únicamente por ti, hazlo por las demás" [If we don't fight so that they punish Dick Thompson, they will always attack the weak. Defending yourself is as if you were defending other women that have been raped. For that reason, I ask that you help me. Don't do it only for you, do it for the others](123). Throughout this collection, we have seen a spectrum of "border" women[80], many of which are without power or voice, and so it seems fitting that San Miguel would end her collection with this character who has crossed many borders to be able to have the power to defend those without a voice.

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[80] San Miguel has shown with her diversified protagonists that the title "border" women has multiple definitions. These women are not only defined by the impeding geographic border marker, but also the borders of gender, sexuality, age, class, race and profession define their identity.

Moreover, the fact that Nicole is pregnant, awaiting the birth of a daughter, is a sign of hope.[81] The mother's milk becomes a symbol of the power of womanhood that Nicole will pass on to her daughter.[82] We see this as Nicole examines her breasts that she wishes "duros y llenos de leche"[hard and full of milk] (133) and furthermore, "En seis meses nacería Gabriela y a Nicole, en el primer momento de tenerla en sus brazos, le causaría una honda tristeza. Vería con dolor su indefensión, pero al amamantarla, el pezón en la boca ávida de la criatura, el cuerpo de la niña prendido a su cuerpo le brindarían un sentido nuevo de pertenencia" [In six months Gabriela would be born, and for Nicole, in the first moment of having her in her arms, would feel a deep sadness. She would see with pain her defensless state, but upon nursing her, her nipple in the mouth of the child, the body of the baby grasping her body would provoke a new sense of belonging] (133). The act of nursing her daughter empowers both mother and daughter and attests to a sign of hope that San Miguel has for all women in her vast border region. The mother's milk, as theorized by Cixous becomes her pen--white ink--to re-write and re-vise a new story for the next generation of Chicana women, like her daughter, or like the many border women, whose existence has been controlled by the borders of society--relegated to the margins of either the Mexican nation-state or the U.S. nation-state--border dwellers in this vast borderland.

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[81] The concept of hope has been important in the fight against the disillusion of postmodernity, just as for San Miguel, this idea of hope battles the disillusions of the national identity of the country.

[82] "...sometimes the capacity to nurture, as in mothering, has been seen instead as a gift, or rather as a special power at once corporeal and psychic. In French feminist theory..escriture feminine, writing that evokes women's power as women's bodily experience, as of giving birth and nursing" Kuykendall, Eleanor. "Toward and Ethic of Nurturance: Luce Irigaray on Mothering and Power" p. 263

As the final story in the collection, "El reflejo de la luna" highlights further the diversity and extremes of the border region[83]. Furthermore, by crossing the "physical border" in this story, San Miguel recognizes that both sides of the border include a multitude of "identities", realities and difficulties, challenging the concept and stereotypes of a singular vision of the region.

In this compilation of border stories, San Miguel effectively exposes the reader to a gamut of the diversity of her region. San Miguel's representations of these different identities, from the educated lawyer to the nightclub singer, serve to undermine any predisposed stereotypes of the region and its inhabitants. With its subversive undertones, *Callejon Sucre*, challenges the region's lack of voice and true participation in the nation and, as Homi Bhabba argues, "the counternarratives of the nation evoke and disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (Kaplan 7). As a "counternarrative" of the nation, *Callejon Sucre* is emblematic of the struggle of the border region to "speak" and be "heard". San Miguel does not allow for her region to be "imagined", and therein, given a misrepresented "essentialist identity", but rather systematically displays, through her diverse characters, the realities of the region, expelling myths and allowing voices to echo throughout the nation-state.

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[83] San Miguel captures this sentiment best in her own words as she speaks of the border region, "Ahi nos confundimos y nos mezclamos todos: ricos y pobres, mexicanos, chicanos y gringos, cholos y chorchos, hombres y mujeres, homosexuals y hetereosexuales; primer mundo y tercero. La frontera es violenta, pero fascinante. Cuando descubres todos sus rincones, no te puedes separar de ella" (Castillo/Tabuenca Córdoba 8).

Chapter IV

A Nostalgic Re-writing of the Nation in Marta Cerda's *Toda una vida*

> Thus, in the universal crisis of the modern political community, the moment we would term postmodernity, the woman/feminine signifier continues to serve as an alibi or figure of resistance in the fraternal struggles for control of the nation-state and the national project....Often these subjects stand on the edge of contradictory boundaries
>
> -Norma Alarcon[84]-

In the study *Escritoras jalisciensesfrente al nuevo milenio*, Marta Cerda articulates that one of the key concerns of women writers from Guadalajara, Jalisco is their lack of representation in the corpus of what is considered to be the Mexican National literature. This apparent concern of Cerda's appears valid, as she goes on to state that, apart from one or two writers who have published with success in Mexico[85], "las demás son desconocidas fuera de Guadalajara" [The rest are unknown outside of Guadalajara](31)[86].

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[84] See *Between Woman and Nation*, p. 6

[85] Martha Cerda, Matilde Pons and Martha Vogel are the most recognized of the published women writers from Guadalajara.

[86] Historically the presence of the city of Guadalajara in literature has been scarce, as Wolfgang Vogt has noted in his study of Guadalajara in Mexican narrative, "Obviamente

This leads Cerda and others to an understandable position, as she cites, "Dejar de ser escritora de Guadalajara para ser simplemente escritora, es lo que más deseamos, pero sin salir de nuestra ciudad" [Stop being a writer from Guadalajara to simply be a writer, that's what we most want, but without leaving our city](27). However, as noted previously with Rosina Conde, who objects to her identity as a "border writer", escaping the borders of these regional identities creates a challenge for these women writers. Although both Cerda and Conde dislike the notion that their regional location defines their literature and impedes them entrance into the "glorified" literary corpus, in the end, both utilize their regions in comparison to the center as a means of breaking down the borders that marginalize not only their region but also their writing from this Metropolitan space.

The multitude of borders these women face as writers outside of the walls of the capital, where as Cerda states, "está la élite de la literatura mexicana" [is the elite of Mexican literature](27) forces them to challenge the system -- through the power of the pen-- that has excluded them as active participants in the corpus of Mexican literature. At the same time, Cerda's battle to undermine this literary "regional" alienation serves as a catalyst in a re-writing of the history of the Mexican nation, that at its core, has been a history of alienation--a history controlled by a plethora of borders which have denied to members of the nation, access, participation and voice in the formation and execution of

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no podemos hablar de una novela de Guadalajara como se habla de una novela del Distrito Federal, de Nueva York, de París o Madrid. Guadalajara es una ciudad de provincia que no tiene a un Galdós o Carlos Fuentes que describe su vida urbana. Las grandes figures de la literature mexicana que nacieron en el occidente solo pasaron por Guadalajara, pero no se quedaron allí. Enrique González Martínez y Agustín Yáñez nacieron en Guadalajara, pero se fueron a vivr a la capital. Mariano Azuela o Eduardo G. Correa nacieron en pequeñas ciudades de provincia y pasaron solo sus años de estudiantes universitarios y algun tiempo más en la ciudad" (17).

the national identity[87]. This history of alienation and the lack of power by the people, dates back to the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) when Porfirio Diáz was President. The hierarchy of his regime, with all the wealth and power in the hands of the elite, provoked the revolt of the masses with Pancho Villa y Emiliano Zapata as the country's revolutionary leaders. Therein, these two heroic figures, come to form part of the popular culture of Mexico, that historically the nation-state has utilized to unify and solidify the national identity of the country.[88]

As a means of entering into this "elite" literature and breaking down the borders of this centralized, patriarchal nation, Marta Cerda's novel *Toda una vida,* borrows, reshapes and recycles many techniques of the Latin American Boom literature[89], to treat the topic of National identity, so common to these Boom novels. Her text particularly mimicks *Cien Anos de Soledad* (Gabriel Garcia Marquez[90]), the one-hundred year tale of

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[87] In "Border (lands) and Border Writing: Introductory Essay", the relationship between borders and history is highlighted, as stated, "The border expresses the limits, preferably closed and finished, of a nation; history defines time limits in similar terms, for the border is not only concerned with space, it is also a time line which graphically represents and actualizes the flow and the progression of history. History has traditionally established and consolidated borders. Borders not only acted as lines differentiating nations and identities but also established a hierarchy within difference" (Benito/Manzanas 5).

[88] See Ilene V. O'Malley *The Myth of the Revolution. Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940.* Westport: Greenwood, 1986.

[89] Most sources agree that the Latin American Boom began sometime in the 1960's and continued through the 1970's, although many argue that the characteristics of these novels continue in the 1980's and 1990's. The Boom is associated with the publications of Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. According to Frederick M. Nunn, the following are characteristics of the movement: "international focus or appeal, or both; stylistic innovation; urban settings as well as rural ones; historical and political focus; questioning of regional as well as, national identity.." (7).

[90] The success of Gabriel García Márquez and other Boom writers has been attributed to a surge in international readership during this time and a circulation of Latin American texts that only began to occur with the pre-boom writers like Alejo Carpentier, Miguel

the Buendia family, the founders of Macondo, whose chronicle has been said to encompass the entire history of Colombia, and in general that of all of Latin America. Its mixture of historical facts, interspersed with Magical Realism[91] and notions of cyclical and historical time, made the novel not only an international phenomenon, but also a critical work in the corpus of Latin American literature. In similar fashion, Marta Cerda's text combines its own touches of Magical Realism and subversions of lineal time with the forty-year chronicle of Mamá, whose life serves as an allegorical representation of the history of Mexico. Overall, the appropriation of the themes and literary devices of the Latin American Boom novels become a tool to break down the borders of literature--a means of allowing these techniques to represent the "others" in the national space, a national identity voiced from the outside, by a writer outside of the literary corpus. By juxtaposing history and fiction[92], Marta Cerda undermines the borders that have created a uni-lateral, one-party historical record for Mexico. She destabilizes borders that for so long have excluded and denied voice, not only to its people, but to the regions alienated from the heart of the country--metaphorically, the "blood-pumping" metropolis-- that through its flow of "blood", authorizes and powers the body of the nation.

Angel Asturias y Juan Carlos Onetti. Texts began to be translated to different languages and there was an explosion of literary criticism, literary journals, and conferences centered around these Latin American writers.

[91] This term has been defined as magical elements that appear in an otherwise realistic setting. It was initially used by the German art Critic Franz Roh to describe paintings which demonstrated an altered reality. Alejo Carpentier conceptualized a similar term "lo real maravilloso" which he described as a kind of heightened reality in which elements in the miraculous could appear while seeming natural and unforced.

[92] Frederick M. Nunn notes of this mixing of fiction and history, which concurs with Cerda's utilization of the two, "Fictional histories employ real characters (here meaning that they borrow characters from each other). They question the very nature of history (they do not simply rely on setting). They are cyclical, with unpredictable endings (they are not exclusively linear). They present conflicting worldviews (they are more than works of political and social protest)" (8).

Toda una vida is the story of Mamá, a native of Guadalajara who moves to Mexico City when her family discovers her secretive love affair with Hector. Once in Mexico City Mamá suspects she is pregnant with Hector's child, and at that point in the text, it is revealed to the reader, that the narrative voice is that of the fetus. In brief, Mama thrives during her early years in the capital, where she is young, beautiful and finds a good job, working as a secretary in a government office. However, Mamá never forgets her true love, Hector, the father of the child she is expecting. As the fetal narrator is able to control his destiny, he decides it is best not to grow or be born until Mamá can be with his father Hector again.

Structurally speaking, the novel is divided into two parts, the first section covering the life of Mama in Mexico City between the years of 1943-1985, and the second part occuring during the course of one day. Throughout the first part of the text, the chapters are organized in five-year cycles. That is to say, the fetus "wakes-up" every five years and describes what is happening to Mamá and simultaneously recounts anecdotes and events occurring in the city and in the world. Hence, aside from the story of Mamá, the first part of the novel becomes a historical recount of Mexico City over five decades--a blend of fiction and reality, where the reader recognizes actual historical events, but also reads tales of the clock reversing time, a grown man with an umbilical cord and comic book characters coming alive. This balance of history interspersed with magical realism, overturns the borders of certainty for the reader, leading to questions of veracity of the historical record. Over the course of these five decades, Mamá becomes sad and disillusioned; never having reunited with her lost love Hector has left her in despair. The borders of the city become her jail; she no longer works, and lives in

misery. As the fetus has incessantly refused to leave her womb--afraid of the situation outside of the maternal walls --Mama decides to abort the fetus. She is tired of the burden of carrying this underdeveloped being. The day on the calendar is September 19, 1985, a historically significant date which reminds the people not only of the famous earthquake but marks a moment in which the Mexican reality is shaken. Therefore, before Mamá can take measures to abort the fetus, the natural disaster hits, jolting her body, and she yells at her unborn son "sal, hijo de puta" [Get out you son of a bitch] (76). Surprisingly, the fetus that has not grown in the womb comes out a full-grown man.

This is the beginning of the second part of the text. In this section, Mamá has forgotten her history and can't figure out where she is or who(m) the grown man is who continually suckles at her breast and is attached to her by a long umbilical cord. At this point, the hands of the clock begin to spin backward and objects from the past that Mamá has forgotten and all of the letters that Hector wrote which she never received begin to fly through the window of their apartment. The act of the child/narrator drinking Mamá's milk is what provokes the forgotten past to come back. Thus, the second part of the text repeats the years of 1943-1985, in one day's time, piecing together Hector's life with that of Mama's. In the end, Mamá is able to remember her history and takes a bus to Guadalajara to find Hector. The year on the calendar is 1943.

In *Toda una vida*, Cerda juxtaposes historical data with that of Mamá's fictional character to highlight the documented narrative of Mexican history while underlining the multitude of borders associated with this history. This technique, as we will examine, becomes a means for an ardent critique of the political system that has controlled the national identity of the country for its own benefit, creating a "history" for the people

underscored by fallacy. In the dedicatory of the novel, Cerda dedicates her novel to "la generación que nos enseñó a cantar y amar, la que nos heredó sus recuerdos, la que ocupó nuestro lugar en la Historia, dejándonos la nostalgia"[The generation that taught us to sing and love, where we inherited our memories, the one (generation) that occupies our spot in History, leaving us with nostalgia]. This nostalgic period that Cerda refers to is known as the Golden Age of Mexico, beginning in 1940 and lasting for three decades. Many speak of this time with nostalgia and talk of "el México que se nos fue". However, this nostalgia is deceptive in nature as this feeling of patriotism becomes the vehicle for the PRI[93] to shape and control the people to its advantage. During these years, the political powers manipulated and molded the country to create a patriotic sense of nation. Nevertheless, this vision was narrow and misleading, a false representation of the country.

As Arthur Schmidt cites of the decades of this Golden age:

> A rosy and often ahistorical view of post-1940 Mexico, the Revolution to Evolution perspective derived from the 'nation-building' legacies of the Mexican Revolution and the post-World War II concerns of policy sciences in the United States. It emphasized Mexico's development, the stable process of nation building and material progress that seemed to characterize the country for nearly three decades after 1940" (24).

[93] The Partido Revolucionario Institucional initiated in the late 1920's and maintained control of the country for 71 years when finally defeated in 2000 by Vicente Fox and the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional). Ironically the party was called revolutionary when in reality it had already become institutionalized and therefore since its inception has carried with it this irony.

During this time, the PRI promoted and fueled national identity in a variety of cultural arenas including public schooling, public celebrations, the promotion of tourist sites such as Acapuluco and Chichen Itza, and folkloric displays and dances such as the ballet folklorico, all of which came to represent "Mexico" to the foreign eye. This forging of an identity, created a unified front for the people, but in all actuality, was a falsified vision of the realities of the country[94]. Moreover, the cultural production in the film, music and literary scenes came to serve as icons, "latter-day telenovelas, well-remembered songs, the recycled images of movie stars and other popular heroes, illuminate the politics of cultural production and consumption that played a pivotal role in the construction of Mexican nationalism throughout the second half of the twentieth century" (Joseph 9). That is to say, a strong theme of patriotism underlined the cultural productions of the times, facilitating the mission of the political system. The people responded to the movies and songs, which exuded a love of their country and portrayed a feeling of national patriotic sentiment. Fortified by means other than direct political intervention, the campaign of the national project was further fueled, leaving many to believe that the patriotism of the people was independent of the system--unaware of the manipulations of the political strong-hold.

Furthermore, this political-cultural project drew upon "lo mexicano" which emerged in the 1920s as a unifying motif after the devastation of the revolution. Images, songs, military and political heroes like Benito Juarez, villains such as La Malinche and, most importantly, the Virgin of Guadalupe all helped to conceptualize what it meant to be "Mexican", a national identity the people longed for after the upheaval of the

[94] A picture of a happy, unified country overrides the oppression of the government and the poverty of the people.

Revolution[95]. This emphasis on "lo mexicano" continued into the decades of the Golden Age, where this "cultural unity" served to uphold and strengthen the centralized, authoritarian one-party political system,[96] with the pretext of this cultural enrichment being for the people. The idea of the country as a Revolutionary family, headed by the glorified patriarchal president, was the environment and outlook that permeated the nation-state during these years. That being said, the national identity derived from the early years of this "Golden age" can be seen as a ficticious construct derived from and sustained by an intentional manipulation of Mexican historical reality and sentiment by and for the benefit of the hegemony.

Nevertheless, this double-faced situation of harmony and denial, comes to a close with the 1968 student movement and subsequent massacre at Tlatelolco. This defining historical event, has been referred to as a marker in history-- a before and after--which is misleading, as there was a continual and gradual build-up of resistance to the political environment of the country. In 1968 however, no longer willing to accept the PRI's rhetoric of revolutionary promise, "the students challenge to the state's patrimonial authority and the later's brutal response also dealt a mortal blow to the *patriarchal* culture that had been the very essence of the Golden Age identity. Reassembling the

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[95] As noted by Gilbert Joseph this longing for an identity has permeated the Mexican culture until the present, "Mexicans, perhaps more than most peoples, have long been preoccupied with defining what it means to be Mexican, such that the terms *lo mexicano* and *mexicanidad* have become standard intellectual fare. Yet musings on the topic have seldom been celebrations of Mexico's vibrant national spirit; they have more typically been tortured reflections on the country's apparent inability to emerge from a prolonged and troubled adolescence" (2002:9). See also, Roger Bartra's *La Jaula de la Melancolia.*

[96] John Mraz has noted of the role of the president during these years, "the untouchable core of the nation', El senor presidente himself. He presided over a formidable cultural state in which, 'the wealthy and powerful were to be emulated, the underdogs made picturesque or ignored completely or demonized if they did not follow the rules, [and] the nation was one, indivisible and homogeneous" (Joseph 9)

patriarchal ideal of the Revolutionary Family would prove to be difficult" (Joseph 12). The aftermath of the 1968 tragedy appears to be the marker for the decline of the state of affairs in Mexican politics, economics and the situation of the people.[97] The sentiment of approval for the patriarchal culture that the political hierarchy created was torn open at its core. The feeling of safety and protection by the political "father" figure disappeared. As Arthur Schmidt notes, "the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre dramatically showed the intolerant, autocratic character of the political system, and increased income inequality undermined the notion of a perpetual Revolution that brought 'social justice" (27). This collapse of the system brought dramatic changes not only to the people but also to the political system and its economic policies.

The aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre brought with it a new dependence on foreign capital, which began with Luis Echeverria Alvarez's presidency (1970-1976) and continued throughout Jose Lopez Portillo's presidential term (1976-1982). This reliance on foreign capital coincided with Mexico's oil reserves gaining the country global recognition--an apparent benefit for the well being of the financial state of the country. However, this asset ultimately led to the crisis of 1982 after the United States pressured Portillo to export extensive amounts of petroleum--an exaggerated demand that the oil industry was ill prepared to handle and that cost the country large amounts of money. With this exaggerated focus on oil, in a still underdeveloped industry, Mexico had to borrow vast amounts of money to cover both internal and external economic shortfalls.

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[97] As Elena Poniatowska so poignantly states of the aftermath of 1968, "What did the student movement do? In the first place, it destroyed the official image of Mexico. That image was lustrous, full of blue skies and promises. Above all, it suggested that we were different from the rest of Latin America; we were proudly Mexican...All of the countries to the south—or rather, down below—were backward, and they looked up to us; we should be the leader, the spokesman for the continent" (*The Mexico Reader* 558)

Hence, by the early 1980's Portillo's government found itself in crisis; "Anti-inflation policies in the United States had helped provoke global recession. Reduced petroleum demand, high international interest rates, an overvalued peso, and growing capital flight forced the Mexican government, in August 1982, to declare that it could no longer meet is foreign debt payments" (Schmidt 28). This crisis highlighted and came to represent the disillusioned state of the people who felt they had been forgotten and no longer believed in the promises of the political system.[98] This was a drastic change from the sentiment of the Mexican nation, two decades prior to this economic collapse. The golden years of the country had disappeared and a newfound awareness of the deceptive nature of the political system became second nature to the people.

Said historical synopsis is the backdrop for *Toda una vida*. In her early years in Mexico City, Mamá, like the country, is flourishing. She is able to work, have nice clothes and is even confused with the famous actress María Félix, herself an icon of this era. Therefore, in this initial part of the text, Cerda creates an atmosphere in her text similar to that of the country. As it was the time of the golden years in the music industry, mention of musical artists and their songs are present throughout the first part: "y luego en el trayecto a la XEW, 'la voz de la América Látina desde Mexico', donde esperamos tres horas junto a un joven llamado Jose Alfredo,.. Mamá canto, ayudada por su cancionero *Picot, Perfidia* y *Vereda tropical*, como la mismísima Avelina Landín, su cantate prefererida" [And then on the station XEW, the voice of Latin America from Mexico, where we will spend three hours with a young man Jose Alfredo...Mamá sang

[98] As Arthur Schmidt notes, "The country's deeper incorporation into the globalizing world economy has been fraught with suffering and instability. Mexican statecraft, far from treating the 'people' as 'the greatest natural resource available', has been more inclined to manipulate than to trust civil society" (23)

with help from her song book *Picot, Perfidia y Vereda*, just like her favorite singer Avelina Landin](16). The inclusion of these famous artists, places the reader in direct contact with the environment of the era--a reminder of all that was good during these years. Popular culture during this time came to represent the essence of the national culture--the icons of this era testify to the power of popular culture over that of any elite culture in unifying the people. Therefore Cerda utilizes popular songs of the times as the titles of her chapters. These titles coincide with the emotional state of Mamá, which as we will see parallel the emotional, economic and political state of the country. For example the first chapter uses the song title "María bonita", but in a later chapter, in which Mamá laments the loss of her true love, entitled "Ella, la que hubiera amado tanto" [She who I would have loved so much]--we see a message that echoes the downward spiral of the country; metaphorically the sentiment of the people toward their nation-state, one which they "could have loved so much". With this plethora of cultural information as the setting for the earlier years of Mama's life in Mexico City--which includes names of famous artists, including Diego Rivera, actors, movies, music and even the well-know restaurant Sanbourns, "el de los azulejos"--Cerda highlights the good life and nostalgia associated with the era. However, as much as this nostalgia penetrated the outlook of the country, Cerda reminds the reader of the underlying falsity of the environment, by means of a fetal narrator who refuses to grow or accept the situation, and through Mamá, who continually laments her lost love. The borders of this identity of the country, an era of patriotism, are enclosed with barbed wire. Any attempt to escape this dictated reality, leads to pain, metaphorically the pain experienced by both the fetus and Mamá.

Moreover, just as the events of 1968 led to an upheaval of the emotional and political sentiment of the country, this massacre coincides with Mama's slow downfall into crisis,

> Mamá volvió a encerrarse en la depresión y a chuparse el dedo, como en aquel barril del que no se acordaba. Afuera de ella la depresión también se adueñaba del país. El Nuevo presidente subió el precio del azúcar y luego de la gasolina. Como vio que era muy lento subir el precio de los artículos de uno por uno, decidió bajar el valor del peso, de esa manera subía todo de un jalón.." [Mamá fell into a depression and began to suck her thumb, in a state that she could remember before. Outside of her the depression was also taking control of the country. The new president raised the price of sugar and later gasoline. As he saw that it was slow to raise the price of the articles one by one, he decided to instead lower the value of the peso, so that all the prices were raised at once (46).

Furthermore, the situation for the narrator/fetus is also becoming desperate as he states:

> La vida trascurría inútilmente y yo me desesperaba adentro de Mamá sin encontrar la forma de salir. No podía ponerme en huelga como amenazaba Fidel Velazquez cada vez que quería sacar algún provecho para sus trabajadores, ni armar una revolución, como el otro Fidel y menos una Guerra, me decía recordando la de Vietnam" [Life passed and I became desperate inside of Mama without finding a way to leave. I couldn't go on strike like Fidel Velazquez threatened to do every time he wanted to take advantage of his workers, nor could I start a revolution like the other Fidel and even less a war, I said to my self remembering Vietnam] (59).

The "golden age" of existence for Mamá and the fetus has come to a close and both are looking for an escape. However, as both note, the ever-increasing borders of the political system, controlled economically the possibilites for the people, leaving them with little option other than that of survival. This new realization of the significant lack of power and control by the people, left a trail of deception and depression.

Nevertheless, the narrative voice attempts to escape these borders by poking a hole in Mamá's bellybutton--a possible means of escape. After much work, he makes a hole only big enough to look through and, what he sees is shocking; dirty, poor children in the street begging for money, eating food out of the trash and finally:

> Lo último que vi fue a un niño drogándose con resistol. La nariz carcomida y la baba escurriéndoloe por la boca, no le importaron al hombre que se lo llevó detrás de una barda con un letrero pintado: Vote por el PRI. Al poco rato el niño lanzó un grito de dolor y yo me apresuré a cerrar el hoyo del ombligo de Mamá" [The last thing I saw was a boy drugging up with solvent. His nose was running and saliva poured from his mouth, this didn't matter to the man who took him behind a sign that said, Vote for the PRI. A few minutes later the boy yelled out in pain and I quickly closed up the hole in Mama's bellybutton](60).

This obvious rape of the drugged up young boy, directly behind the political banner for the PRI, is allegorical of the very apparent "rape" of the people by the political system. No longer can they believe in the words or actions of their leaders--they are left in a state of disillusion. As the narrator/fetus sees this reality first hand, he decides it's better to stay inside of Mamá--closing up the only hole in his "bordered" up existence. Therein, the fetus calls attention to the parallel crisis of Mama and the country, as he states, "Pobre

patria, estaba quebrada como Mamá"[Poor country, it was broken like Mamá] (70). The reaction of the fetus, epitomizes the culmination of the crisis in Mexico. The borders that had shaped the country's existence during the previous decades were crumbling, as the people acknowledged that their beloved country had been trapped in borders of falsity--"lo mexicano" no longer created a sentiment of pride, but rather left a feeling of deception.

In *Toda una vida* Cerda utilizes the earthquake of 1985, which literally destroyed much of Mexico City to metaphorically represent the collapse of the borders of history that for so many years trapped the country and its people in a falsified identity--a Mexican nation imagined and implemented by the political hierarchy.[99] Therefore, it is not coincidental that in Mamá's case, the earthquake shakes and jolts the fetal narrator, casting him out of her body--which ironically--saves him, as Mama was ready to abort this fetal cargo that plagued her:

> Su situación era insoportable, igual que la inflación, la burocracia y la corrupción del país. Mamá estaba cansada, y el pueblo también, de traer cargando un falso porvenir. Casi a los sesenta años, Mama reaccionó y yo estuve a punto de morir antes de nacer, de no haber sido por el terremoto. La tierra empezó a temblar y Mamá a correr....Entonces se detuvo, se abrió de piernas y gritó: sal, hijo de puta.

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[99] The earthquake was a tragic marker of the deficiencies of the political system, "The governments often slow and self-serving response to the emergency angered many people, and out of the rubble grew several important organizations. Probably the most important was the CUD (Coordinadora Unica de Damnificados), which was itself compsed of some twenty neighborhood groups formed to demnd greater government responsiveness to the disaster...With few resources or means of communication, the CUD was able to mobilize impressive demonstrations and get tangible results" (Gilbert 2002:579). This solidarity of the people to organize and help the disaster victims in a more effective and efficient manner than the government, solidified the illusory environment of the nation.

> Y sali" [Her situation was insupportable just like the inflation, the beurocracy and the corruption of the country. Mamá was tired and the country also, to be carrying a false future. So, almost at sixty years old, Mamá reacted and I was at the point of dying before being born, if it hadn't been for the earthquake. The earth began to tremble and Mamá began to run. Then, she stopped, opened her legs and yelled, get out son of a bitch. And I left] (76).

Hence, as a result of the earthquake, Mamá does not "abort" the fetus, but her intentions were to do just that, which symbolizes the need to "abort" the system, a system whose bureaucracy and inflation are no longer a viable situation for the people. As we will see, this fetal narrator, who is born a full-grown man comes to represent the people of the nation, underdeveloped and trapped within the borders of the system. The act of cursing the "son of a bitch" fetus out of the womb, is a wake-up call to the people--like the fetus, they have been abandoned by their "father"[100] and cannot rely on this patriarchal guidance but rather need to react and demand change on their own accordance.

At the same time, the "false future" the narrator describes for both the country and Mamá leads to skepticism--metaphorically, skepticism of the "truth"--that of the History of Mexico and of Mamá. Consequently, this questioning of the truth becomes a means to criticize the ideologies of the system, reminding the reader of how postmodern critics underline skepticism of the truth, as a fundamental technique to critique and subvert notions of authoritative claim. As Timothy Spaulding states, "Postmodernism called into question claims of absolute or objective truth characteristic of Enlightenment thinking,

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[100] Gilbert Joseph notes of this role of the metaphorical father, "It remains clear that the end of the Revolutionary Family metaphor, which cast the state as the wise, gentle, all-providing father, was congruent with the end of the ideal of such a patriarch in ordinary Mexican families, too" (12).

emphasizing the subjectivity and contingency of all truth claims. Postmodernism as a discourse placed in flux all faith in traditional conceptions of identity, aesthetic or cultural value, and history" (13). Consequently, as Cerda utilizes techniques such as magical realism and cyclical time, popular in the Boom novels[101], these become techniques to sustain this uncertainty in the text, leading the reader to doubt and question the veracity of the fetal narrator's words. In much postmodern literature, "parodies of all sorts of meta-narrative and master-code elements, including genre and literary form" (Lye 1) overturn the lineal, realist narrative structure, and these techniques serve to undermine and subvert the concepts/systems in question.

Therefore, an obvious narrative strategy that captures the readers' attention is that of the narrator, who undoubtedly subverts a traditional omnipresent narrative voice. Similar to how the threat of a baby born with a pigs tale controls the actions of the characters in *Cien anos de soledad*, Cerda's "baby" born with its umbilical cord left uncut, moving only as far as this "life" cord will allow, controls the authoritative voice of this full-grown fetus. Thus, Cerda's use of the fetus as narrator is problematic. Not only is the fetus's ability to interpret reality bound by the corporeal constraint of his umbilical cord in the womb, he is also only able to recount that which he observes when he wakes up in 5 year cycles[102], as he says: "Cuando por fin logré despertar habían pasado otros cinco años. Lo hice en medio de una plática de Mamá con su amiga Florencia."[When I

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[101] Apart from *Cien años de Soledad*, other classic examples of Boom novels that experiment with Magical Realism and cyclical time are *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (Carlos Fuentes), *Rayuela* (Julio Cortazar), *La casa verde* (Mario Vargas Llosa) and *Tres tristes tigres* (Guillermo Cabrera Infante).

[102] This use of cyclical time reminds us of how Carlos Fuentes structured his novel *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, where these cycles have been tied to notions of the Aztec calender—a mix of historical and cyclical time—as a means to re-write the national identity.

finally was able to wake up, 5 more years had passed. I woke up in the middle of a talk between Mamá and her friend Florencia] (28). Hence, the narrator wakes-up in medias res of the history of Mamá and as readers we are left to question what has happened during the past 5 years. The knowledge that the narrator was absent for half of the conversation between Mamá and her friend, further calls to our attention the uncertainty of this voice of authority, leaving the reader to doubt that perhaps we have missed an integral part of the history. In addition, the fact that the narrative voice is that of a fetus--an "underdeveloped being"--who speaks from inside the walls of the uterus, a barrier that conceivably prevents him a complete experience, incites reservation and distrust on the part of the reader.

Interestingly, as Linda Hutcheon has noted of the narrator in postmodern literature, "Another consequence of this far-reaching postmodern inquiry into the very nature of subjectivity is the frequent challenge to traditional notions of perspective. Narrators in fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate or resolutely provisional and limited-often undermining their own seeming omniscience" (*Poetics* 11). This appears to be the case with Cerda's narrator, he seemingly narrates much of the history of Mexico and that of Mamá, but at times states his lack of knowledge or just disappears: "Su frió me adormeció y no supe que sucedió con la carta, el Secretario, Héctor y Mamá" [Her coldness made me go to sleep and I didn't know what happened with the letter, the Secretary, Hector or Mama] (21), leaving us to question the truth behind his narration. From this "limited" position, as Hutcheon notes, Cerda's narrator subverts the reader's perspective on the veracity of the narration, undermining the "truth" behind the historical record of the country.

This continual loss of time, history and narration by this "unreliable" narrator also speaks metaphorically of the loss of meaning and culture in the country. The narrator highlights this sentiment after leaving the womb and running through the city, afraid from the earthquake:

> Pasé por Chapultepec, Por Xochimilco, el Zócalo, la Villa; por el Paseo de la Reforma, la torre Latino, la Plaza Garibaldi, por Coyoacán; y no encontré ni a Maximiliano ni las chinampas ni al presidente de la república ni a la Virgen de Guadalupe ni a los mariachis ni a Diego Rivera. El México que conocí desde el vientre de mi madre se había quedado ahí dentro. Las estatuas habían perdido sus heroes, nadie sabía quién era el jinete de 'El caballito', ni las figures que rodeaban el pedestal del Angel de la Independencia. Mamá desapareció entre estéticas unisex y restaurants Mc Donalds"[I passed by Chapultepec, by Xochimilco, the Zocalo, the Villa; by the street of the Reforma, the Latin tower, the plaza Garibaldi, by Coyoacan; and I didn't find Maximiliano, the chinampas, the president of the country, the Virgen of Guadalupe, or the mariachis or Diego Rivera. The Mexico that I knew from the womb of my mother had stayed there inside. The statues had lost their heroes, no one knew who was the rider of the "Caballito", or the figures that surrounded the Angel of the Independence. Mamá had disappeared between unisex salons and Mcdonalds] (81).

This loss of culture, can be seen as a further criticism of the system for the "selling" of the country to international hands[103]. Although the years of the Golden age, were manipulated and constructed by the political hierarchy, they were based upon events,

[103] This theme of the selling of the country can be also be seen in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz.*

icons and feelings of the Mexican nation. Nevertheless, by the time the earthquake of 1985 hit the country, we can see, as exemplified in the previous quote, how the Mexican culture has been disrupted by the influence of the United States, leaving a sense of loss and uncertainty of a cultural identity for the people. The borders of the national identity have been further destroyed by this corporate invasion from the north.

On a historical note, although the text only treats the events of the country until 1985, it was published in 1997, and therefore, it is probable that it refers doubly to the crisis of 1982 and the "selling of the country" with the implementation of NAFTA[104] as well as the subsequent financial crisis that followed. As Claire Fox notes, this crisis was reminiscent of the one of 1982,

> The sharp devaluation of Mexican currency in the winter of 1994-95 and the $47.5 billion 'bailout package' assembled by Clinton with funds from the United States, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and other countries evoked memories of Mexico's previous crisis of 1982, because it drastically reduced the standard of living for average Mexicans while simultaneously precipitating a flood of investment capital from the United States and other countries" (6).

Hence, it is likely that Cerda acknowledges both of these economic crises that not only affected the Mexican people financially, but also emotionally, contributing to this loss of meaning and culture, that we see ficticiously represented by the situation of Mamá and

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[104] A recent study argues that Mexico's "bigger economic pie (NAFTA) has meant very little for a majority of the population...Unfortunately, what's missing-wage and employment gains, improvements in income distribution, and sustainable growth –may never follow 'naturally' from the new market model" (Pastor 43)

the fetus. A sense of loss of culture that points its finger at the United States and at Mexico for selling itself to this ever powerful entity.

For Lyotard, this "loss of meaning" in postmodern literature is mourning the fact that master or meta-narratives are no longer able to hold the knowledge of a nation or culture. (Hutcheon *Poetics* 6). In a sense, Cerda's novel concurs with this premise. If the whole first part of the novel is at the same time a remembering of a nostalgic past and a disparagement of the system that manipulated, shaped and then ultimately "sold" and destroyed the country's national identity, the second half of the text proposes to reverse history to try and re-write the borders of this "master narrative" of the country.

Nevertheless, for Mamá to recover the past, she has to remember, so she can try and live "toda una vida" again. According to Homi K. Bhabba, this forgetting and remembering of history is imperative in the recovering of a nation, as he states that being "obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identifications" (311). Therefore, we can conclude that Cerda proposes a piecing together of the "forgotten" past, a search to return to origin[105], while including those who were forgotten in the formation of her Nation.[106] As we see in the text,

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[105] Once again, this idea of a return to origin recalls of the boom novels. As noted earlier, Fuentes implements a return to origin with his use of historical time—returning to the pre-hispanic native cultures.

[106] This idea of remembering and including the forgotten past, is theorized by Angel Rama as he notes that "the (relatively) modern urban centers promote modernization and, therefore, readication of traditional cultures, with the exception of their fossilized and folkloric expressions. However, regional cultures and their intellectuals are capable of resisting complete deculturation or acculturation. Thus, he believes that through their artists and intellectuals, traditional cultures are able to 'take hold of the contributions of modernity, use them to revise regional cultural content, and use both regional and modern elements to compose a hybrid capable of transmitting the inheritance received. It will be

> Las manecillas del reloj giraban en sentido contrario. Entonces comprendí lo que ocurría: el tiempo se había desacomodado con el terremoto y el presente se había hundido, igual que los rasacielos. En cambio, los hechos pasados, que habían caído al olvido, salieron de el como nuevos. El olvido estaba repleto de amores frustrados, buenas intentiones, tristezas, objetos perdidos y toda clase de cosas pasadas de moda" [The hands of the clock turned backwards. Then I understoond what happened: time had become disrupted by the earthquake and the present had sunk, the same as the skyscrapers. In turn, past events, that had fallen into a forgotten space, came out like new again. This forgotten space was full of frustrated love, good intentions, sadness, lost objects and all thing that had gone out of style (84).

In this second section of the text, the present becomes invisible and the past is being recovered and restored.

In the end, all of the forgotten past and Mamá's ensuing remembering leads her to start over in Guadalajara, from her place of origin. With this act, Cerda's re-writing and re-vision of the historical record, proposes the inclusion of her region. As Mamá's story was written only within the borders of the Metropolis, it wasn't a "complete history", but perhaps by including her region as part of the chronicle, Mamá's history, and metaphorically that of the country, will flourish. Accordingly, Nelly Richards states that we should regard "the periphery not solely as a *place of operation* (a historico-cultural, or politico-social context) but also--and above all--as a site of enunciation: that is, as a discursive position/posture and a critical strategy of cultural negotiation" (Rethinking Borders 72). In this sense, Cerda suggests a "remembering" of her region as part of the

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a renewed inheritance, but one that can still identify with its past (Rama 1982, 29)" (De Castro 3).

nation, and, subsequently, as a "site of enunciation" whose written word is worthy of inclusion into the national literature.

Moreover, the means by which the forgotten history of Mama/Mexico is recovered is of uttermost importance to Cerda's message. Not only does she request an acceptance of her region as an integral part of the Nation, but also her text justifies and demands a feminist re-writing of history. That is to say, clearly drawing upon the French feminist Helene Cixous's theory, Cerda utilizes the mother's milk as the means for recovering the past. As Cixous has stated, "There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in while ink" (339). Interestingly, this "milk" that helps in the recovery of the past is given to the narrator, who savors the liquid, "La teta de Mamá sabía agridulce, parecía que estuviera chupando un mango verde. Yo la envolvía con mis dos manos y experimentaba el placer de succionarla cadenciosamente" [Mamá's breast tasted sour-sweet, it seemed like I was sucking on a green mango. I wrapped it up with my two hands and I experimented the pleasure of sucking lovingly] (85), and in turn, allows him to read all of the lost letters from Hector, aiding Mamá in the re-writing of her history. The mother's milk becomes a powerful tool. Metaphorically, this "white-ink" empowers Mamá as a woman to collaborate with the patriarchal system in the re-writing and re-formation of the nation, one which includes women's history as an integral component in the national project.

As Kate McCullough has noted, in the construction of America in women's regional writing in the United States "gender is central to these writers' representations both of region and nation. Representations of femininity, that is specifically inflected by various combinations of region, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, serve as vehicles for these

authors' constructions of national identity" (7). Cerda, like these authors, uses gender and region to re-shape a national identity that has forgotten said identities in its formation. Once again, as we saw in the case of Rosina Conde and Rosario San Miguel, these writers utilize the role of woman as a double icon—to establish new gender roles and as weapons in the battle of regional alienation, challenging the position of "other" (region) in the national identity of the country.

To attest to this underlying subversion of gender roles, Mamá's character continually undermines the allocated role of the woman--the borders of this identity--as designated by the patriarchal system. As Jean Franco has noted, the role of the woman in Mexico falls within two categories: "el de la mujer virgen-madre, símbolo de Maria, y el espacio prohibido de la mujer no virgen, no madre y prostituta" [that of the woman virgin-mother, symbol of Maria, and that space of the prohibited woman, not a virgin, not a mother and prostitute (Valencia 90). Thus, the words of the fetal narrator concur with Franco's observations when he says of Mamá, "ahora era una mujer sin atributos: ni casada, ni virgen, ni madre" [now she was a woman without attributes: not married, not a virgin, not a mother] (42). However, in a sense Mamá celebrates this inversion of her designated role, because although her desire is to be with Hector, she rejects the traditional roles of mother/wife:

> Ahora era distinto, las señoras contaban con utensilios para hacer las labores y ellas se convertían en las reinas del hogar, según los anuncios del día de las madres. Entonces Mamá quería ser señora, de esas a las que sus hijos les regalaban el diez de mayo una liquadora Osterizer, para que se sintieran felices; o una estufa Acros, para que se sintieran más felices; o una máquina de coser

Singer, para que pudieran vivir felicísimas el resto de sus días, cosiéndoles vestidos a sus hijas, camisas al marido, cortinas para la casa...Cada día de las madres Mama suspiraba viendo los anuncios de licuadoras, planchas, refrigeradores, lavadoras y maquinas de coser. Pero al día siguiente daba gracias a Dios de no tener que ser tan feliz como las señoras que lavaban, planchaban, cocinaban y cosían con sus maravillosos aparatos. Y si alguien por equivocación le decía señora, respondía: señorita, por favor. [Now it was different, the women counted on utensils to do their work and they turned into queens of the house, according to the announcements from mothers day. Then, Mamá wanted to be a "señora", those whose kids gave them a Osterizer blender for mothers day, so they could feel happy; or an Acros stove, so they could feel even more happy; or a Singer sewing machine, so they could live extra happy for the rest of the days of their lives, sewing dresses for their daughters, shirts for their husbands, curtains for the house...Every mother's day Mamá sighed seeing the ads for blenders, irons, refrigerators, washing machines and sewing machines. But, the next day she thanked God for not being so happy like the other women that washed, ironed, cooked and sewed with their marvelous machines. And if someone by mistake called her "señora" she responded, "señorita" please] (55-56).

This subtle subversion and rejection of her place and power as a woman in Mexico is also seen when she speaks to a priest of her affair with Hector[107]. As the priest

[107] The Catholic Church in Mexico has historically held a powerful position in the nation. As Roderic Ai Camp notes, "the Church is a significant source of what Demerath labels cultural power', the capacity to use cultural resources to affect political

asks her whether she repents for the sin of pre-marital relations, Mamá answers, "No, padre-dijo ella. Y empezó a temblar. A temblar tan fuerte que el ángel se cayó, y nadie pudo salvarlo. Su cabeza de oro se rompió, sus alas no lo elevaron, porque Mamá había dicho: no padre" [No, Father, she said. And she began to tremble, to tremble so strongly that the angel fell and no one could save it. It's gold head broke and it's wings didn't elevate it because Mamá had said: no Father](38). Hence, not only does Mamá rebuff the pressures of the culture to be a good wife and mother, she further defends her decisions regarding Hector, over the laws of the Catholic church, destabilizing the role of the woman as the archetype of María.

In addition, Mamá not only confronts the Mexican culture and the Catholic Church, but also challenges the political system, when in the year that women were given the right to vote she states,

> Y ahora el presidente les concedía el voto a las mujeres y Mama se preguntaba si ese derecho servía para votar porque no se les pusiera a los nietos los nombres de los abuelos, para que no hubiera pobres, para que no murieran de tuberculosis los hermanos ni atropelladas las hermanas, para elegir esposo y no esperar a ser elegida. Si no servía para nada de eso, entonces para qué servía el voto?, se preguntaba Mamá" [And now the president gave the vote to women and Mamá questioned whether this right served to vote because they didn't put the names of grandfathers on their grandchildren, so that there weren't any poor people, so that no one would die of Tuberculosis, sisters wouldn't get run over, and the right to

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outcomes.....many scholars attribute general authoritarian values to Catholicism. It has been suggested that the Church indirectly fosters a certain style of political education by disseminating values learned in the interaction between laity and ecclesiastical authorities, including deference, obedience, and respect for hierarchy" (5).

choose a husband and not wait to be chosen. If it didn't serve for all of these, then what was the vote for?] (34).

Mamá's criticism of the right to vote ridicules the political system and its manipulative intentions to control the people in the name of the nation, while also acknowledging the lack of power, one's vote carries, in a Nation controlled by a centralized one-party political system. The manner in which she undermines the right to vote, calls attention to the host of other tribulations--real life situations--that plague the country, which the government disregards in place of its own agenda.

This feminist and postmodernist reading of *Toda una vida* highlights the multitude of borders overturned by Cerda as a Mexican woman writer and her transgression of the traditional boundaries of patriarchal literature. Borders of time, narrative voice, perspective and gender are subverted. Mamá and the fetal narrator become "deterritorialized" border subjects (Hicks xxxi), both marginalized within their own culture. Furthermore, this marginalization has created this "unreliable" male fetal narrator. He recognizes that he himself is nothing more than a piece of the puzzle to recover the history of Mamá and Hector, as he wonders:

> Cuando acabaría de armar el rompecabezas que era su vida? Al pensarlo, me percaté de que yo era la pieza que podía unir el recuerdo y el olvido. Como acababa de nacer no tenía pasado propio que recuperar ni presente que perder, aunque si poseía una especie de memoria colectiva que ciertamente no me servía de nada, pués lo único que deseaba era ser yo" [When would the puzzle of her life be put together? Thinking about it, I realized that I was the piece that could unite memory and the forgotten space. As I was just born I didn't have my own past to

recover, nor a present to lose, although I did have a type of collective memory that didn't really help with anything, well, the only thing I wanted was to be me] (110).

As he was unable to "develop" due to the situation of Mamá, he does not have a past or a true future that exists--he carries the cargo of history (his collective memory) that entrench the people in this underdeveloped situation, in an underdeveloped nation.

Therefore, metaphorically, the fetus comes to represent the people of Mexico as they have been trapped within the system that has controlled their destiny and left them as "underdeveloped" beings, like the fetus, who's desire is just to be himself. Interestingly, the fetus is tied to Mamá by the umbilical cord even after his birth, and in this sense Mamá herself becomes an allegory for the Nation, where the child is tied to the "Madre patria" by this cord that controls them. Moreover, in true Oedipal fashion, the child narrator loves and desires his mother, as seen when he erotically drinks her milk: "Cada cuatro horas, puntualmente, mamaba de la teta izquierda. Mamá abría su saco y yo veía brotar su magnífica teta palpitante, tibia. Acercaba mis labios a su pezón y pasaba mi lengua por el suave, largamente, hasta endurecerlo" [Every 4 hours, punctually, I nursed from the left breast. Mama opened her jacket and I saw the big magnificient breast, warm. I leaned my lips in to her breast and passed my tongue over it gently, until it became hard] (111) and then later states, "Si, estaba enamorado de Mamá."[Yes, I was in love with Mama] (117). This child of the "nation" loves his mother, reminding us, as Cerda has proposed in her dedicatory, of the nostalgic love for her nation that has been forgotten. However, this child overthrows the Oedipal order by not repressing his feelings toward Mama and looks for his father not out of fear of

"castration" nor out of a desire be like him because "if he is not a patriarch now, he will be later" (Eagleton 134), but to recuperate the forgotten histories of the people, in a return to origin that will allow him, as a symbol of the people, to start over.

Therefore, as a man whose umbilical cord has never been cut from his mother, the words of Irigaray[108] are strikingly appropriate, as she has theorized, "Our irreparable wound is the cutting of the umbilical cord and not, as Freud had fantasized, castration" (Kuykendall 266). In this sense, as the narrator stays attached to Mama until he shrinks back to fetal size to start over (back to his origin), he has not been metaphorically wounded. By staying within the confines of the womb, this narrative voice escapes the wounding borders of the nation--he becomes an icon of hope in his representation of the people. Moreover, the fetus's separation from his father, represents the nations separation from its patriarchal political "father" that has abandoned its culture, history and people as a means to gain power, authority and control.

Thus, the paradigm of Mamá, the fetal narrator and Hector are allegorical of the story of Malinche. In the traditional telling of the Malinche myth, the indigenous woman betrays her people by serving Hernán Cortés as both interpreter and mistress, creating a sense of unpatriotic betrayal of the nation associated with Malinche's name. In Octavio Paz's seminal analysis, he focuses on Malinche as an icon of the psychological trauma of a national identity based on betrayal that is both political and sexual. The well know cry, "Viva México, hijos de la chingada" implies a connection between the nation and Malinche as the figure of the raped indigenous woman. In the case of *Toda una vida*,

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[108] Although referring to the female child, we can make this connection between this narrative voice and Irigaray's theory as his umbilical cord forms an important part of the narration

Mamá's cry to her unborn fetus, "Sal, hijo de puta" reminds the reader of the famous hijo de la chingada cry. That is to say, this testifies to the role of the narrator as a metaphor for the people--the hijo de puta, o hijo de la chingada--who has been abandoned by the father, symbolically the nation, and born to Mama, symbolic of Malinche[109] as she has betrayed herself by forgeting her origins. Moreover, in this case, the lack of the father figure (Hector) attests to the underlying need for a re-uniting of the alienated regions to the center in a re-writing of the nation. Mamá (Malinche) needs to return to her people of origin and attempt to re-write her history, this time without producing a "hijo de puta". That is to say, Mamá is the icon of the raped nation.

Therefore, we can conclude that the "child" (the people) of Mamá (the Nation), is the missing link to a re-writing of the history of Mexico. By joining together Mamá (Nation), as a woman who continually undermines women's position in society, with her true love (Hector/political "father figure") in her region of origin, through the narrative voice of the people (the child), Cerda proposes an upheaval of the hierarchy--of the political, historical and borders of gender--that have plagued her country since it's beginning as a Nation. The myth of Malinche[110] exemplifies the historical and political borders of the nation, as it highlights the conception of a national identity conceived through rape, with said act of personal violation, metaphorically persisting within the

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[109] As testimony to this allegory, "If in the complexities of national myth the nation is both mother and whore, then national pride and perceived deficiencies in the national character derive from a common cause. Moreover, if racially inferior and sexually available women are to blame—literally or metaphorically—for society's problems, tacitly national pride is also bound up in the admission that nothing can be done to improve the situation since the powerful, handsome, yearned-for father is always already gone" (Castillo/Tabuenca Córdoba 42)

[110] See Sandra Messinger Cypess, "The Figure of La Malinche in the Texts of Elena Garro". *A Different Reality: Studies on the Work of Elena Garro.* Ed. Anita K. Stoll. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1990. 117-135

political system. Therefore, for Conde, a re-uniting of the political hierarchy with the people and with the alienated "others of the nation"--regions and women--is her underlying message in the text. As Nelly Richards notes, "The entire history of cultural colonization, between whose lines of domination and subalternity Latin America has been forever ransomed, reflects the disjunctions of identity by imposition" (76). In *Toda una vida,* we have seen multiple layers of this "disjunction of identity by imposition" and at its core, the text challenges and subverts this disjuncture--highlighting the need to re-distribute positions of power and authority in the nation. By forgetting its place of origin, the nation is lost, unable to construct a national history based upon the realities of its existence. Thus, as we read the final words of the text, we can begin to construct Cerda's modus operandi for a re-vision of Mexico's history of identity by imposition.

That is to say, in the end, the child/narrator begins to shrink back to fetal size to start over: "Mi voz y mi sexo han cambiado, son los de un recién nacido; entro por un tunel calentito, comienzo a ol-vi-dar..."[My voice and my sex organ have changed, they are those of a newborn; I enter through a warm tunnel, and I begin to forget] (129). As the final word of the text is that of "to forget", we look to Bhabha, as he theorizes that the need to forget "becomes the basis for remembering the nation" (311). Therefore, theoretically, this fetal narrator "forgets" to "begin" over and this time we question as readers if his voice will be heard outside of the walls of the "womb"—a symbol of the multitude of borders faced by those marginalized within the Nation. Metaphorically, can the people "forget" their history of imposition and manipulation, to attempt to re-write and re-invent a new history, one that remembers its origin, forgets its falsities and inverts its powers to those of the voiceless "others" lost in a national identity, bound by the

borders of the political hierarchy? Cerda ponders this question, when the narrative voice states, "Mamá ha llegado a tiempo de reescribir mi historia, cambiará también la de México?" [Mamá has arrived on time to re-write my history, will the history of Mexico change also?] (128).[111]

To conclude, with *Toda una vida* Cerda challenges the reader and the nation-state to action. Her condemnation of the patriarchal system that has controlled the nation is apparent on various levels within the text: politically, culturally and with regional and gender rights. This denouncement brings to light Cerda's hope that, as part of her nation, her voice—as an "outsider" to the elite literary corpus-- will be heard and accepted beyond the borders of her region. With the simple act of breaking down the borders of literature, Cerda's message, along with those of other writers alienated from the legitimizing voice of the central Metropolis, can be heard, and converted into a powerful message to the nation-state. As we have seen thus far, Martha Cerda, Rosina Conde and Rosario San Miguel, all seek recognition of themselves as writers, women and regional members of the national community. If their voices can be dispersed throughout their nation, Cerda believes in the possibility of a borderless nation. As these writers emphasize borders in their writing to highlight difference--and by exaggerating and stressing this difference--these infringing borders can be re-constructed more equivalently. In *Toda una vida,* Cerda subverts the borders that have denied access and muted so many voices as legitimate participants in the formation and implementation of a national identity. Arguably so, Cerda's text serves as a metaphorical request for the reconceptualization of Mexican history, that like the narrative voice, her nation "start

[111] This idea reminds the reader of Umberto Eco's idea of an open-ended text (a tenet of contemporary hermeticism).

over", re-writing and remembering its origins, embracing its extensive geographic and historical diversity and forgetting its fallacies.

Finally, although *Toda una vida* is not per se a "border text", as it is geographically distanced from the border region, the borders that shape this novel make it possible to read Cerda's novel as such, which as noted by Emily Hicks, "Border writing offers a new form of knowledge: information about and understanding of the present to the past in terms of the possibilities of the future...Border writing holds out this possibility, through its combination of perception and memory, of subverting the rationality of collective suicide, of calming the storm of progress blowing from Paradise—the ability to withstand the pull of the future destruction to which one's face is turned" (xxxi). Hence, as this text presents a multitude of borders and furthermore highlights the present in relation to the past--by means of the historical record--and underlines the destruction and the possibility to reconstruct the Mexican nation and culture, we can conclude that just as much as Rosina Conde's and Rosario San Miguel's texts are border texts, *Toda una vida* forms part of this corpus of border narratives.

Chapter V

"Border Narratives" of the Metropolis: Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado amor* and *Vivir la vida*

> El gobierno mexicano ha mantenido..la política de absorver y uniformar el multiculturalismo para defender una identidad nacional.
> [The Mexican government has maintained a politics of absorbing and unifying the country's multiculturalism as to defend a national identity]
>
> --Monica Mansour--[112]

As the sole writer in this study from Mexico City, Sara Sefchovich, in her novel *Demasiado amor*, responds to similar concerns of the development and formation of national identity within the Mexican Nation that we have seen with the previous authors from outside the borders of the Metropolis. The texts of Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel and Marta Cerda, re-write the concept of nation to include their regions, Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Guadalajara respectively, while also voicing a strong feminist critique of the system which excludes women as true participants in the national project. Sefchovich extends this criticism highlighting that, even within the confines of the sacred central space, the Mexican national project is flawed--borders are ever present and as

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[112] . In "Identitdad regional e identidad nacional en la literature mexicana" *Mexico: Literaturas Regionales y Nación* Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1999

Sefchovich emphasizes, these borders do not discriminate. The same borders that alienate and destabilize regions and people, leaving them without voice in the nation-state, seize and restrain inhabitants of this metropolitan strong-hold. Therefore, Sefchovich's reconceptualization of the idea of nation manifests by creating a new space, metaphorically a new "nation" within the Metropolis, that reverses the roles of power and breaks down the borders of the patriarchal system and those of the Catholic Church that manipulate and control the identity of the country.[113]

In brief, *Demasiado amor* is a compilation of letters[114] from the protagonist Beatriz to her sister living in Italy and to Beatriz's "weekend" lover. There is no return correspondence from either person, and in the end, the reader discovers that the letters to her lover were instead a journal, one that was never sent. Initially, the letters to her sister describe her lonely state, as she is now on her own in the house they previously shared with their parents who have passed away. In said letters, Beatriz questions her sister on the progress of the guest house by the sea in Italy, and describes the money she is saving so that she will be able to join her soon.

However, Beatriz's plans begin to change when she meets her "weekend" lover on a visit to the restaurant VIPs and goes home with him for a weekend where no words are spoken between the two. As Beatriz recalls, this affair begins as a "silenced" sexual encounter,

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[113] This act confirms that even living within the cultural, political central space there still exists marginalization of racial and ethnic identities, class, and gender.

[114] Recalls of the epistolary tradition in literature—a genre dominated by the female voice where letter writing became a vehicle to escape the borders of women's isolated positions in society.

> Conocí tu calor antes de oir tu voz. Conocí tus dedos antes de oir tu voz....Dos días y dos noches estuve entre cuatro paredes, entre dos piernas, entre una sábana. Nunca te oí pronunciar palabra ni vi nada de ti más que aquél tu cuerpo enorme que se me acercaba otra y otra vez para dejarme alucinada y adolorida, adolorida, y alucinada" [I knew your heat before hearing your voice. I knew your fingers before hearing your voice...Two days and two nights I was between four walls, between two legs, between a sheet. I never heard you pronounce a word nor did I see anything of you other than your big body that came to me over and over again, leaving me enlightened and pained](12).

After this initial weekend together, Beatriz goes to VIPs every Friday to meet her lover and the two begin to travel for the weekend to different parts of Mexico. This weekend lover becomes Beatriz's tour guide[115], teaching and showing her the gamut of Mexican geography, art, literature, history and cuisine. The letters to her lover (her journal), become an intricately detailed account of their travels with long lists of all they did, for example:

> Me llevaste a ver cerámica en un museo de Tlaquepaque, una tienda de artesanías en Morelia, piezas pre-hispánicas en la casa de un pintor en Oaxaca y copias de codices en un palacio de Mérida. Me ensenaste máscaras en San Luis Potosí, conchas en Mazatlán, trajes regionales en Chiapas y a los mormones y los menonitas en Chichuaha. Me llevaste a ver las alfombras de flores en Huámantla, los fuegos artificiales en Dolores, los murales en Cacaxtla, las grecas

[115] This idea of travel with a tour guide alludes to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with Sefchovich's protagonist, using the name same name—Beatriz—as the tour guide who guides Dante's narrator through Paradise. Beatrice in Dante's work is his projection of the perfect woman and describes her in courty love tradition.

en Mitla, el Mercado en Juchitan, las focas en Baja California y los minerales abandonados en Pachuca..[You took me to see the ceramics in the museum of Tlaquepaque, an artisan store in Morelia, pre-hispanic pieces in the house of a painter in Oaxaca and copies of codices in a palace in Merida. You showed me masks in San Luis Potosi, shells in Maztlan, regional costumes in Chiapas and the Mormons and Menonites in Chihuaha. You took me to see the rugs, and the flowers in Huamantla, the fireworks in Dolores, the murales in Cacaxtla, the grecas in Mitla, the Market in Juchitan, the seals in Baja California, and the abandonded minerals in Pachuca] (43)[116]

As these trips with her lover encompass Beatriz's "weekend" life--and as we will see--altering and transforming her vision of her country; during the week a different sort of transformation begins to occur, where she gradually leaves behind her job as a secretary for that of a prostitute. Although the word prostitution never appears in writing in the text, Beatriz describes in detail all of the men she picks up at VIPs and the money she makes. The only true reference to the title prostitution is in response to a letter from her sister where she is upset because: "Qué carta tan terrible la tuya! Me enojó y me lastimó muchísimo. ..Tres veces dices que mi trabajo 'tiene un nombre muy claro' y las tres veces pusiste ese nombre con mayúsculas. Te das cuenta de que gracias a mi trabajo ese que tanto te averguenza hemos podido cumplir nuestros sueños?"[What a terrible letter. It made me mad and hurt me a lot. Three times you said that my work has a very clear name and three times you put this name in capital letters. Do you realize that thanks to my work, that embarrasses you, we have been able to fulfill our dreams] (70). Finally,

[116] All of the places they visit allude to the extensive possibilities of tourist destinations, highlighting, as we will see, the connection between tourism and nation-state formation.

as the text progresses, not only has Beatriz begun to note in the travel letters to her lover all the negative aspects of what she has seen of Mexico, but she also begins to find more love and happiness in her life with her "clients." The text culminates with Beatriz showing her lover her life as a prostitute, allowing him into the sacred space of her house, knowing that this act would end the love affair with him. In a final letter to her sister, she says she is sending as a gift to her niece, her journal that recounts her love affair with the weekend man and with her country.

At first glance, the detailed letters to the weekend lover appear to function as a cultural and historical overview of Mexico with a conglomerate of information as diverse and extensive as to include meticulous details of the cuisine to the different churches and altars the pair visited. Nevertheless, a closer look at Beatriz's travelogue and the underlying significance of her entries within an analysis of the national identity of the country leads us to re-visit the years when the formation of this identity was so important to the country. As previously commented when discussing the works of Marta Cerda, the years after 1940 were considered a time when the political system manipulated and forged an identity for the country, so as to create unity among its people. One method the government utilized in this phase of development, to create this identity for the country, was through the promotion and implementation of tourism. Although it would appear that this drive to promote tourism was primarily a means to achieve financial gains for the country--which in itself was an outcome of this movement--it also served to create a sense of nation, as Alex Saragoza notes in "The Selling of Mexico: Tourism and the State",

> the formative stage of tourism in Mexico took place within the context of an intensely nationalist cultural project that marked the state-building efforts of the new postrevolutionary government. The initial thrust of the tourist industry built on the state's drive to construct a sense of nation-or, as Manuel Gamio put it, forjando patria-expressed in an essentialist vocabulary of national identity, that of lo mexicano, mexicanidad, el pueblo mexicano, and related terms" (91).

Furthermore, Saragoza highlights that this building of a "nation", reinforced by the tourist industry, was possible only because of the support and involvement of the different regions of Mexico, but always in response to the federal initiatives. Hence,

> regional and municipal authorities worked to foment a sense of patria...Clubs, antiquarian societies, and volunteer organizations contributed as well to enhancing or to building heritage sites that paralleled government-supported displays in Mexico City. And the private sector, especially the entertainment business, contributed to the imaginary of mexicanidad. Furthermore, restaurant owners, merchants, hoteliers, and the like produced their own images of lo tipico: waitresses and waiters in 'traditional' garb; the selling of goods and artifacts in stores; the 'Mexican-style' architecture of lodging establishments and their interiors. Nevertheless, in this multilayered presentation of Mexican heritage and culture, the state's project served as a vital if not essential catalyst". (Saragoza 93)

Therefore, this creation of Mexican culture and Mexicanidad was a production, in some sense a dramatic "play" designed for the tourist but at its core served as a means of unifying a nation where too much diversity could lead to confrontations with the central power. As Saragoza notes of Nestor Garcia Canclini;

> (he) has proposed persuasively that one effect of tourism is to turn the particularities of ethnic cultural expression into a larger category of "type". That is, what is unique to a specific region or ethnic group becomes 'typically' Mexican: the cultural expression, display, or artifact of that group-the local- loses its particularity and authenticity. 'The need to homogenize and at the same time preserve the attraction of the exotic dilutes the specificity of each village or town...not into the common denominator of the ethnic and Indian but into the (political) unity of the state-Michoacan, Veracruz- and each state into the political unity of the nation" (Saragoza 93).

That is to say, the politics behind the tourist industry in Mexico created a "false sense" of the countries heritage and diversity leaving an image for the world and for the Mexican people of what it means to be Mexican while "forgetting" its true multicultural and multifaceted diversity[117].

It is from this point of departure that Sara Sefchovich addresses her reader. In the text, the weekend lover metaphorically symbolizes the centralized political powers. As a male, representative of this patriarchal system, he takes Beatriz under his authoritative wing and instructs her in the ways of the nation.[118] Initially, he does not speak but

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[117] The tourist industry utilized only icons of the country—el jarabe tapatío, for example, a regional dance from Jalisco—became a national dance. This use of icons to represent the country left the actual regions, with their people, unrepresented in the nation. Where in these "cultural representations" do we see the large indigenous population in Mexico, with their own languages and dialects represented? The language Nahúatl, for example, is categorized as a second "national language" of the country. The diversity of the Mexican nation is extensive, and during this time of "forjando patria" as it has been referred to, when tourism was utilized as part of this project, we see how the system utilized icons to represent its nation, instead of its people.

[118] As noted by Edmundo Heredia, "siguiendo un sistema educativo y un proceso cultural, el hombre ha adquirido un sentido de lo nacional. En Buena parte esto es obra

"subdues" her with his sexual powers--a means to control her loyalty to her country. Recognizing her lonely state, he is able to manipulate her feelings and her actions. By systematically, "touring" her throughout Mexico and "teaching" and "showing" her the diversity of the country, Beatriz falls in love not only with this man, but her country. Repeatedly, Beatriz recognizes that her love for her country develops in response to these travels with her "lover" tour guide, as she states, "Porque tú me ensenaste este pais. Tú me llevaste y me trajiste, me subiste y me bajaste, me hiciste conocerlo y me hiciste amarlo" " [Because you taught me this country. You took me and brought me, you took me up and down, you made me know it and you made me love it] (24) and later, "Y te amé porque me ensenaste este pais, con toda su alegria y todo su amor, con sus colores tan vivos y sus artesanías, con sus edificios, y sus comidas, con su gente de buen corazón [And I loved you because you taught me this country, with all its happiness and love, with all its vibrant colors and art, with its buildings, food, with its good hearted people] (141). These continual references of her love for the weekend lover and her country almost always are formed with the verb "enseñar"(to teach)—highlighting that these travels the couple did together were not a mutual learning experience but rather a methodical instruction of "lo mexicano" manipulated and controlled by this weekend lover, as Beatriz states, "Todo eso vimos porque así es, dijiste, este país" [All of this we saw because this is this country, you said](79).

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del Estado nacional que administra el territorio politico donde transcurre su vida; el Estado tiene como una de sus misiones esenciales dotar a la ciudadanía de una imagen que recrea ese espacio conforme a las pautas que son necesarias para conformar, mantener y sostener ante propios y extraños la idea de nación y de pertenencia a ella" (52).

To emphasize the methodical manner in which Beatriz was influenced by this man, the text documents the travels themselves in an extremely systematic style following a pattern of: where the couple went and then long exaggerated lists, monotonous lists, of the details of what they saw. The extremeness of these lists is meticulous to the point that the reader either skims the lists or becomes hypnotized due to the repetitive nature of said letters. This modus operandi of the text underlines the manner in which the political system also systematically implemented this "cultural" heritage of the Nation, which as stated earlier, was in ways similar to a theatrical performance. For Beatriz, these travels became a performance, a show of her "Nation".

Nevertheless, the drama comes to a close as Beatriz is unmasked to the realities that surround her, the borders crumble, opening her eyes to the falsity of what she has believed to be true. Beatriz discovers that even the products in her country are not what they are deemed to be, undermining the knowledge she had acquired from her "lover" that she held as the truth:

> Y entonces, precisamente cuando las cosas se empezaron a poner díficiles, descubrimos que la blusa deshilada no era de Aguascalientes sino del Mercado de Tepoztlán, descubrimos que el rebozo de Santa María no cabía por el aro de un anillo porque no era de seda sino de imitación, que el marco no era de plata sino de laton, el sarape no era de lana sino sintético, el mantel no era del mercado sino de una tienda, el pantalón de manta no lo hicieron los indios sino una gringa de San Miguel.... [And then, exactly when things began to get difficult, we discovered that the woven blouse was not from Aguascalientes but rather from the market in Tepoztlan, we discovered that the shawl from Santa Maria didn't fit

right because it wasn't made of silk but of an imitation, that the picture frame wasn't made of silver but rather plastic, the "sarape" wasn't made of wool but rather was synthetic, the table cloth wasn't from the market but from store, the pants of cloth weren't made by the Indians but by a Gringa in San Miguel] (155).

And, even more disturbing to Beatriz is the sad reality that she sees occurring in her country,

Y cada vez, la cosa se ponía peor...Un día llegamos a Campeche y se quemaron durante días dos pozos de petrolco en el mar. Un día llegamos a Salina Cruz y las Tortugas estaban desapareciendo, a Chapala y el agua estaba desapareciendo...Vimos fábricas que echaban porquería a los ríos, porquerías a los aires, deshechos al mar...Vimos agues negras que corrían libres, coladeras sin tapar, basura abandonada, ratas, bichos, alimañas, excrementos y hasta muertos sin enterrar. Vimos subir el tabaco a un avión y sacarlo de este país. Vimos bajar el maíz de un tren y meterlo a este país. Vimos subir el dinero a un avión y sacarlo de este país. Vimos policías que se llevaban a la gente y policías que se reían de la ley...Vimos niños con panzas hinchados de bichos, niños desnudos y niños descalzos, niños que pedían limosna y movían al panza, que vendían chicles, cargaban bultos y robaban bolsas. [And each day things got worse..One day we got to Campeche and they were burning fuel in the ocean for two days. One day we got to Salina Cruz and the turtles were disappearing, at Chapala the water was disappearing....We saw factories that threw trash in the rivers, garbage in the air, chemicals in the ocean...We saw sewer water that ran in the street, drainage holes without covers, trash, rats, bugs, excrement and even dead

bodies not buried. We saw tobacco being loaded on a plane and being taken out of this country. We saw corn coming off a train being brought into this country. We saw money being loaded onto a plane and being taken out of this country. We saw police that took people away and police that laughed at the law...We saw children with inflated bellies full of bugs, naked children, barefoot children, children who were begging for money and sold gum, carried big packages and stole purses](160).

After being "taught" by the "system" (lover) to love and be proud of her country, Beatriz finally comes to understand the true environment of her nation and simultaneously becomes disillusioned with her love affair. As discussed previously, when Beatriz was toured by her lover, she consistently utilized the verb "enseñar" [to teach] and repeatedly stated, "tú me enseñaste" [you taught me]. Now we note, that the repetitive verb of "ver" [to see] is used in the "we" form "vimos", to emphasize that the "lover" also saw the falsity and deceits of the nation. The metamorphosis that Beatriz experiences emphasizes the role of her lover as a symbol of the political system that has created a "nation" of deceptiveness, that as Beatriz comes to recognize, has left her country abandoned. The borders of the nation that the government attempted to establish, through a tourist industry where "lo tipico" became "lo nacional", are uncovered by Beatriz. No longer are these falsified borders able to contain Beatriz as a puppet in this Mexican nation-state, where performances were more important than beneficiary actions. Therefore, by including the lover/system in the observation of the tribulations of the country (with the use of "vimos"), Sefchovich recognizes that the political hierarchy is

not blinded to the ills of the country but rather is familiar with them as this system is indisputably responsible for this fabricated environment of the nation-state.

To extend the metaphor of the lover as representative of the political system, we also observe in the text a strong religious vocabulary that ties the role of the Catholic Church to that of the central powers. The opening lines of the text recall of an integral portion of a Catholic mass, "Por tu culpa empecé a querer a este país. Por tu culpa, por tu culpa, por tú grandísima culpa....Y ahí iba yo atrás de ti...en este país nuestro de cada día" [It's your fault that I began to love this country...For you fault, your fault, your great big fault..and there I went behind you, in this country, our of every day(7). By making this connection between the weekend lover and the Catholic church, Sefchovich's criticism of the national project extends to a critique of the relationship of the church and state, that despite a law of separation[119], continue to work together. The sacred borders of Catholicism fuse with those of the political system, constructing resilient walls for those outside of these authoritative spaces. As noted by Roderic Ai Camp,

> It is often forgotten that religion forms an integral component of a society's culture, including its political culture, and that religious institutions historically, more often than not, were allies of, not vocal challengers to, the state. Religion and religious institutions are important vehicles for granting legitimacy to other more 'political' structures and agents. Typically, the Catholic Church has been

[119] "Eckstein observes that 'Church and state in contemporary Mexico are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, despite the fact that church and state since the 1930s have outwardly established a modus vivendi acknowledging each other's 'structural and functional autonomy'. In spite of 'stringent legal, social, economic, political and religious restrictions' on the church, local priests and leaders of lay groups have established ties with local government groups and with the PRI" (Metz 111).

viewed as a legitimizing agent of the state, and of the existing order in Mexico, despite periods of deep, historical antagonism" (3).

Ai Camp further notes the ability of the Church to pacify the people and discourage them from challenging the decisions of the state and "reducing the inclination of individuals to blame the system for social inequalities" (5). This relationship between Church and State is seen in Sefchovich's text, as she continually links a religious vocabulary to her protagonist's lover, and then later with Beatriz's disillusionment of the reality of her country: "Seguiríamos así por este país de Dios, tan sufrido y abandonado, tan lastimado y lacerado, tan explotado, viendo las cosas feas.."[We will continue in this country of God, suffering and abandonded, hurt and cut, exploited, seeing the ugly things] (174). As we see, she is criticizing God, as a metaphor for the system, as these political powers act and control the destiny of its people in god-like fashion.[120] This use of religious metaphors, referring to Beatriz's lover, and treating the political hierarchy as a god—the ever powerful father of the nation—highlight the environment of the country as distressing and oppressive, organized at its core by a web of borders that facilitate the authoritarian powers and disengage its people from power and voice in the decisions of the nation. A supposed democratic nation, run and directed by church and state.

However, Beatriz does not accept this reality and instead creates a new space for herself by inverting the positions of power and allocating to herself the power typically given to the political and religious leaders. As a means to this end, Beatriz gradually

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[120] We can note that Sefchovich calls attention to the environment of suffering in Mexico that is seen with the poverty levels. Ironically, the Church emphasizes suffering as a means to a better after-life. Sefchovich highlights the hypocrisy of this situation, that lends itself to a pacifying of the people for the political system. If they are suffering because that is how God is testing them, they will not challenge the political system for their poverty stricken positions.

crosses the borders from an "acceptable" role as a secretary to that of prostitute as noted earlier. The transformation is gradual and initially Beatriz takes these men home for the money she can make and justifies her actions as a way to get to Italy sooner. However, as time passes we see that the prostitution for Beatriz becomes pleasurable as she states, "Es más, el dinero es lo de menos. Me gusta el teatrito de seducir y cambiar de personalidad según lo que quiera el señor en turno"[It's more, the money is the least important thing. I like the theater of seduction and changing personalities, according to what each man wants] (166). This affirmation that her acts are not merely for financial gains places her in a position outside of the "borders" of the role of the good or bad, as Debra Castillo notes in *Easy Women*, "The loose woman poses a particular threat to society if she has sex for pleasure because thus she violates both of the stereotypical categories for women: that of the decent woman indifferent to sex and that of the prostitute who accepts money for an unpleasant service" (7).

Hence, Beatriz does not accept the money for "an unpleasant service" but as she states likes the theater of seduction. Thus, Beatriz becomes a "threat" to society because she has converted this deplorable (as designated by society) role into one of self-pleasing power, and therefore, this allows her to confront the system that has controlled her. To support this idea, we see how instead of a long list of details about her travels and her country (all of which metaphorically were placed upon her), Beatriz now meticulously notes the gamut of the men that have been her clients:

> He conocido a uno que se emborracha con vino hecho por su mamá, a uno que tiene el secreto para hacer hijas mujeres, al que escribe ensayos históricos sobre la China Antigua, al que organiza huelgas estudiantiles, el que sabe llenar formas

para impuestos, el que prepara buen café, el que entiende de política nacional, el dueño de una agencia de viajes, el camarográfo de televisión, el periodista de sociales..." [I've met one man that got drunk off of wine that his mom made, one that knows the secret of making girl children, one that writes essays on Ancient China, one that organizes student protests, one that knows how to fill out forms for taxes, one that makes good coffee, one that understands the national politics, an owner of a travel agency, a television photographer, a newspaper reporter] (66)[121]

And, the list goes on--Beatriz is now "instructing" her sister on the variety of men in similar fashion to how she described the details, of all her lover "taught" her. Throughout this process of transformation, Beatriz is gaining power. Beatriz becomes the puppeteer who "directs" the theatrical performances-- as she acknowledges how she likes the theater of seduction. As noted earlier, this is similar to how the national identity of the country was in itself a "drama," played out for the tourists, a creation manned by the system. This was true for Beatriz when she only saw the beauty of the country that the "lover/system" wanted her to see-- she was masked to the realities of the country and only later was she stripped of this dramatic "mask." As a prostitute, the roles are reversed and Beatriz is creating the drama for the "men", stripping them of their powers, as Beatriz notes, "Conmigo no requieren ni máscaras ni discursos" [With me they don't

[121] Sefchovich's use of satirical humor is noted by the strange and diversified personalities of her clients.

require masks or statements](178).[122] The men are de-masked when they are with Beatriz--there is no need to think or be, because she holds the power.

The idea of Beatriz as the director of a masquerade, as Judith Butler notes, "is that the woman in masquerade wishes for masculinity in order to engage in public discourse with men and as a man as part of a male homoerotic exchange" (67). Although said observation refers to the act of cross-dressing, the outcome is the same. Beatriz doesn't necessarily desire masculinity, however, she yearns for the powers associated with the masculine identity. Furthermore, Butler notes of the performative,

> Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of casual unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity" (175).

This performance then, reverses the roles of sex and gender so that Beatriz can address the cultural configurations of her nation that exclude woman as true "performers"(participants).[123] Furthermore, Homi Bhabha notes of the perfomative in relation to Nation formation,

> The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's self generation by casting a shadow between the people as 'image' and its signification as a

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[122] This recalls of Octavio Paz's reference to the mask and how Mexicans wear a mask to hide their feelings.

[123] Along these same lines, Nelly Richard notes, "The body is the physical agent of the structures of everyday experience. It is the producer of dreams, the transmitter and receiver of cultural messages, a creature of habits, a desiring machine, a repository of memories, and actor in the theatre of power" (Hicks 13)

differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other or the Outside. In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation itself and extrinsic Other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between through the 'gap' or 'emptiness' of the signifier that punctuates linguistic difference" (299).

Therefore, Beatriz's "performance" interrupts the sovereignty of the nation and her new space is representative of this "in-between" that calls attention not only to linguistic difference but also marks a cultural division.[124]

In so much as Beatriz becomes the "director" of her "theatrical performances," her house becomes the site of operation--a private space where Beatriz is free to fashion and construct these performances. Therefore, Beatriz's house becomes her sanctuary. Gaston Bachelard in his book *The poetics of Space* notes the importance of the house, "For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (4). Furthermore, Bachelard refers to the house as a "remote region" and notes the importance of the imagination in this construction, "We shall see the imagination build "walls" of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection-or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts" (5). In a sense, Beatriz does both. The walls of her house convert into her own self-constructed borders--borders of protection and comfort--in this newfound space where she can heal from the betrayal by the system (lover) and be the manipulator as opposed to manipulated, as she was with her lover. Therein, Beatriz's new "region" becomes a space where the social codes are reversed and re-written as she notes of her house:

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[124] See Marjorie Garber. *Vested Interests. Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety.* New York: Routledge, 1997

No hay un solo mueble, todo lo tiré, ni un solo adorno, todo lo regalé. Dejé las paredes blancas, los cuartos vacios y las ventanas sin cortinas. La casa parece un bosque con sus plantas, sus globos, sus mariposas, su tapete grueso de color café. Mi amigo Goméz convirtió la tina del baño en fuente, llena de pescados. Y por toda la casa los clientes están echados, fumando, bebiendo, durmiendo. Ya nadie se preocupa por vestirse...Yo voy de uno a otro hombre, siempre cariñosa, sonriente...me esfuerzo por satisfacerlos más, por agradecerles su entrega y su fidelidad" [There's not a single piece of furniture, I threw everything out, not a single decoration, I gave everything away. I left the walls white, the rooms empty and the windows without curtains. The house looks like a forest with plants, its balloons, its butterflies, its brown rug. Mi friend Gomez turned the bathtub into a fountain, full of fish. And throughout the house the clients were lying around, smoking, drinking, sleeping. No one cared to get dressed...and I would go from one man to another, always loving, smilling...I would try to please them more, as a means of thanking them for their duty and faithfulness to me] (180)

and she finishes this letter to her sister with, "Te mando muchos besos desde este paraíso en el que ahora vivo, lejos del mundo, lejos de todo y sin extrañar nada" [I'm sending you many kisses from this paradise in which I now live, far from the world, far from everything and without missing anything(180).

This "paradise" as Beatriz calls her home[125], is a creation that not only inverts the roles of power, but is itself a reversal of time, remnicient of the Garden of Eden with only

[125] A further reference to Dante's Comedy--however--we note the satire in this representation as Dante's Beatrice toured the narrator through the Paradise of heaven. Here, Beatriz's paradise is her private brothel she has created in her house.

nature and naked people[126]. Beatriz has started over--a new beginning in this new "region"--an Eden that undermines the laws of the patriarchal politics[127]. This is Beatriz's creation and as a confirmation of this act, states, "Y así como en el séptimo día Dios descansó, orgulloso como estaba de su creación, así en el séptimo año yo decicí descansar de ti...Padrenuestros, Dios te salve, Aves Marías, Aleluyas, Salmos, Cánticos, Rezos, Oraciones, este es el fin. Padre Celestial, Dios nuestro Señor el gran final"[And just as on the seventh day God rested, proud of his creation, on the seventh year I decided to rest from you....In the name of the father, God save you, Ave Maria, Halleluja, Salmos, Songs, prayers, this is the end. Celestial Father, God our father the grand finale] (183). With these words Beatriz manifests her happiness in this "Eden"-- her new "nation"--and therefore is able to leave her lover, metaphorically, the "system" that has controlled her. Moreover, by utilizing once again this religious vocabulary, that recalls of the bible and the creation story, Beatriz suggests that the government has acted in this manner--proud of its creation, its nation, and then resting--without concern for how this system functions. In addition, by describing this break with her lover as "Padre Celestial, Dios nuestro Señor el gran final", she further highlights the authority and power of her lover as a metaphor for God/system, and therein terminates this authority as her leader. With the final act of inviting the weekend lover to her house, Beatriz breaks down the

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[126] The manner in which Beatriz describes the atmosphere of the house is that of an orgy—an extreme in the realm of prostitution. That is to say, Beatriz transgresses sexual borders in her portrayal of her house/brothel.

[127] This space is similar to Julia Kristeva's ideas of a countersociety, a "female society", "A 'female society' is then constituted as a sort of alter ego of the official society, in which all real or fantasized possibilities for jouissance take refuge. Against the sociosymbolic contract, both sacrificial and frustrating, this countersociety is imagined as harmonious, without prohibitions, free and fulfilling...the countersociety remains the only refuge for fulfillment since it is precisely an a-topia, a place outside the law, utopia's floodgate" (453).

borders that previously detained her--able now to live in peace and solace within the "acceptable" borders of her own "nation-state." No longer is Beatriz restrained by the falsified borders of her nation, borders which the political hierarchy, organize and control. Furthermore, by sending her notebook of the "letters" to the lover (that he never read), to her niece in Italy, Beatriz passes on her words to only female readers--the sister and the niece. Moreover, it is significant that both of these female readers are geographically located outside of the "borders" of the country: metaphorically this ensures that Beatriz's words escape the powers of the patriarchal system that might edit or censor them.

This issue of the written word crossing the border to a place outside of the site of confrontation and the fact that Beatriz creates her own new "nation" with the walls of her house being its borders, makes it possible to consider this text as border literature, although Sefchovich is herself a writer from the Metropolis. As Harry Polkinhorn contends in his theories on the U.S. Border, "border writing stresses the importance of an *otherness* whose locus is to be found in a nonplace of transition that gives rise to either a game or a struggle between two or more languages and cultures" (10). This otherness that is found in a "nonplace of transition" recalls of Beatriz's space in her house. The struggle that occurs may not be between two distinct "languages" per se but with Beatriz playing the role of the patriarchal powers and God, there is a reversal of the linguistic code that challenges the present system. Furthermore, this dehierarchization of the system within Beatriz's new "nation" produces a struggle of two cultures: her reelaboration of a new national identity and that formed by the central powers.

Apart, the fact that Beatriz sends her journal and letters to Italy[128], and only to female readers, calls attention to another struggle of culture, which affects the Mexican Nation, and that is the relationship of the nation with the Vatican. As Allan Metz notes, "The Mexican church depends heavily on the Vatican and this dependency can present problems for the church in its relation to the state" (113). Hence, it is not ironic but rather purposeful that Sefchovich uses Italy as the site to receive this testimonial "document" of Beatriz's love affair with her nation and subsequent disillusion. Metaphorically, by sending the letters to Italy but only to her sister and niece--female readers--who in Italy are the "other," they now "hold" the power of the word, instead of the authoritative, patriarchal Vatican. With this act, the text successfully inverts the positions of power in Italy, whose ties to Mexico have also made it part of the masquerade played by the church and the state.

At the same time, the definition of borders in Latin America that Nelly Richards offers, is productive in this analysis of the text as she states,

> Borders....are the places where models and references range beyond the networks of meaning ordered and controlled by the cultural hegemony of the centre, which obliges the signs to defend certain programs of representation aimed always at conserving the privileges accrued by centrality and totality. The ruptures in the universal design of central modernity liberate the meaning of those fractions of language and identity which are disseminated on the periphery of the universal-culture system, and which disturb the normative, official, control-codes of a 'superior' culture" (75).

[128] The use of Italy can be viewed as a further intertextual reference to Dante's comedy.

As we have seen, this text is made up of a multitude of borders, which challenge the cultural hegemony of the centre. On one hand, Beatriz's prostitution, disturbs the "normative" and ruptures the "universal-culture system", all as a means of breaking down the borders of the hierarchy that has dubbed the central powers as that of the 'superior' culture, as Richards states. Furthermore, by rupturing the image of the Mexican nation, as seen metaphorically through the pages of a travelogue, Sefchovich undermines the borders of a national identity based upon codes of superiority and totality. The borders in this text are twofold--those of the system that are confining and structured, and those of Beatriz that break down meaning and re-write these laws of authority.

Therefore, although this text is not technically considered a "border text" due to the geographic location of it's author, a closer look at the message of the text leads us to compare Sefchovich's writing to that of other authors in this study who are physically removed from this Metropolitan space. In similar fashion to Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel and Marta Cerda, Sefchovich is troubled by what constitutes her "Nation" and how said formation of such has been to some extent based upon falsities which in the end, have left the country and it's people wounded.

Hence, as Beatriz creates her new "nation" we see that this is a site to "re-form" the parameters of the nation-state. In accordance with Homi Bhabha,

> Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its 'difference' is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within', the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one. The national subject splits in the ethnographic perspective of culture's contemporaneity and provides both a theoretical position

and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse. They no longer need to address their strategies of opposition to a horizon of 'hegemony' that is envisaged as horizontal and homogeneous" (301).

In such, as Beatriz has now established this new space and put into effect the "laws" and limits of her new nation, she symbolizes this national subject that is able to represent the marginal or minority voices of her country. Within the confines of her nation-state, she is able to address the issues that these minority discourses encounter without confrontations to the hegemonic center's discourse. Furthermore, as Bhabba notes, "The people are neither the beginning or the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social...." (297). In fact, Beatriz is this cutting edge that is willing to break the borders of her role as a woman, disrupt sexual codes, sanction her writing for only the female reader and finally invert her role as a participant in the national project—not as a recipient of the "performance" of the nation but as an active participant willing to voice the need for change. In agreement with Benedict Anderson as noted in *Between Woman and Nation*, "Anderson's imagined community is indeed a continuous or, as we remarked earlier, an interminable project of production and reproduction within the bureaucratized spaces of modern nation-states where the intersection of power and knowledge becomes the very condition of belonging" (Alarcón 8). Therefore, as Beatriz was able to gain the power and knowledge of the "truths" of her nation, she is able to participate in this "production" and "reproduction" that will enable her to "belong" as Anderson has proposed--within of course, a new model of her nation-state.

In 1882 Ernest Renan wrote in his vital essay, "What is a Nation" that "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation...the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (in McCullough 1). This poignant statement concurs with Homi Bhabba's theory[129] that, "Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification"(311). Throughout the text as Beatriz describes her travels with her lover there are continual references to what she remembers and what she forgets, "Creo que lo he olvidado todo....Dónde fue que comimos buñuelos enormes bañados en miel...Dónde compramos macetas decoradas con flores de colores rosa y azúl....Cúal era esa iglesia donde llevaban al Niño Dios vestido y aventaban confetti? No me acuerdo de nada. Lo he olvidado todo, todo" [I think I have forgotten everything...Where was it that we ate bunuelos with honey...Where did we buy pots decorated with colored flowers....where was this church that they had baby Jesus dressed and threw confetti and him? I don't remember anything. I've forgotten it all](29). A few pages later we see the contradiction to this state of complete forgetfulness as Beatriz states, "De todo me acuerdo, de todo"[I remember everything, everything] (31) and therein, lists a multitude of things that she "remembers". This reminds us of Marta Cerda's text, *Toda una vida*, where this forgetting and remembering was the catalyst that allowed Mama to re-write her history. Mamá's recovery of her memory allowed her to return to her place of origin, to start over.

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[129] Bhabba uses Renan's ideas in his analysis of Nation formation. See p. 310 in *Nation as Narration*

By simultaneously remembering (the good) and forgetting (the bad) of the national identity placed upon her country, Beatriz is able to re-formulate said identity to create her own model nation-state. The act of remembering allocates her entrance into her own place of origin--her Eden--created by herself. In so much as she is capable of "forgetting" part of her history with her weekend lover, she remembers, as she states in the end, that it is possible to "amar demasiado, con demasiado amor" [too love too much, with too much love](183), which is in itself the title of the text.

That is to say, the act of forgetting, frees her from these tight reigns of this love. In *Easy Women*, Debra Castillo suggests that the title of the text, *Demasiado amor,* refers to too much sex, which obviously is an integral part of the life that Beatriz creates for herself as a prostitute. However, in this analysis it becomes clear that "demasiado amor" represents the strong hold of power that the system has historically had over the people, its authoritative powers to create and forge borders and the manner in which it manipulates the formation of an identity for the country, in a means to unite the people in a patriotic love for their nation. Moreover, this love is also "too much" as it does not represent the people or the diversity of the country, and in similar fashion to how the lover treated Beatriz, it is a love that doesn't account for individuals. As Beatriz reproaches her lover, "Pero sobre todo te odié porque nunca me preguntaste nada de mi"[But because I hated you because you never asked me anything about me] (172). This one-sided discourse of the lover, represents the system as it forges an identity for its people without hearing their voice.

In essence, Sefchovich's text appropriates the paradigm of the travelogue and the role that tourism played in the formation of a national identity, that was at its core

controlled by the central government. Thereby, the text challenges this identity and the effects of said creation on the country. Sefchovich is critical of the borders that constitute her "nation" and how its formation and production have been unilateral and non-inclusive. However, Sefchovich sends a clear message of the need for reform and a reversal of the hierarchy that has been upheld by the patriarchal political powers. As noted by Monica Mansour[130], Mexico has followed a pattern of politics that absorbs and unifies the countries multiculturalism to defend a national identity. Therefore, this text undermines this unification by means of creating a new space, a new nation, where "masks" aren't worn and the multitude of "borders" that have impeded the people as active participants in the national project are erased. In Beatriz's new space, she has power but hears the voices, metaphorically the sexual requests, of her national "family." Hence, although Sara Sefchovich is a writer from the glorified Metropolis, her text makes clear that said identity does not allocate voice to all within this sacred space, but rather that countless metropolitan dwellers are themselves marginalized by the many borders that render them voiceless in this nation-state.

A decade after the publication of *Demasiado amor*, Sara Sefchovich publishes *Vivir la vida* (2000) and confirms with this novel the continual presence of borders in the Mexican nation. This text, like *Demasiado amor*, underlines the multitude of borders that are inescapable, borders that control the people and manipulate the nation, leaving little room for freedom, as noted by the narrative voice Susana, "Y es que lo que yo quería era salir. No podía imaginarme más felicidad que la de ir y venir sin que nadie me lo

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[130] See opening quote. In "Identitdad regional e identidad nacional en la literature mexicana" *Mexico: Literaturas Regionales y Nación* Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1999

impidiera" [And what I wanted was to get out. I couldn't imagine any more happiness than that of going and coming without anyone stopping me from doing so] (155). As this text was published at the beginning of the 21st century, it regrettably highlights the continued oppression and control by the political hierarchy, the aftermath of a feminist boom that still has not gained women equal rights, and the fragil state of the nation. Undeniably, this text contradicts Jean Franco's postulations on the changes in nation-states at the onset of the new century, "As we near 2001, that exclusive center no longer holds and is replaced by a dispersed center flowing in and out of cyberspace; the territories of former metropolitan nations have been invaded, their boundaries crossed, border fences are full of holes, and the male body can no longer stand in as the inviolate receptacle of an identity or the human being" (1999: 222). Sadly, *Vivir la vida* underscores Franco's observations, placing the Mexican nation outside of the borders of this change. Thus, Sefchovich's text paints a nation permeated by borders where once again, like we saw in *Demasiado amor*, the gloried metropolis is not a space of priviledge, but rather a place filled with barbed wired borders, that continue to injure and undermine the rights of the people.

Vivir la vida is the story of Susana--a woman who values her freedom and attempts to live outside of the borders of the stereotypical role of a woman. In a sense, Susana accomplishes said autonomy as she continually abandons and deserts any situation where she is not happy. This includes her first two marriages. However, it becomes clear that there is always an undercurrent of control that leaves her destiny manipulated by the hierarchical political system. As testimony to the power of this system, Susana inadvertently gets a job doing flower arrangements for the president's

wife and becomes somewhat of a confident to this woman. As their friendship grows, the first lady decides Susana will marry a political figure, "Así que voy a dejarte bien acomodada para que no tengas problemas. Y dijo: Te vas a casar. Tu marido sera Antonio José Luján Vargas, secretario particular del presidente....Me encargaré de arreglarlo todo" [So I'm going to leave you well taken care of so you don't have any problems. And she said: You are going to get married. Your husband will be Antonio José Luján Vargas, personal secretary to the president....I will be in charge of arranging everything. (51). Thus, Susana marries the man, moves to his big house in a nice neighborhood and is instructed by his family how to play the role of the respected "Señora"--wife to a government official.

Susana is given make-overs, a nose job, classes in ettiquete, and even clases to improve her hand-writing. She has three children and as she notes with great irony, is apparently living the perfect life, all thanks to the señor presidente, "Cuando me miraba al espejo, con mi nariz perfecta, el cabello impecablemente cortado, la ropa más fina, me emocionaba saber que los siguientes diez, y veinte y cincuenta años de mi vida seguirían igual. ¡Y pensar que le debía todo al señor presidente y a la primera dama..." [When I looked in the mirror, with my perfect nose, my hair impeccably cut, the finest clothing, It made me excited to think that the next ten, and twenty, and fifty years of my life would continue the same and to think, I owed it all to Mr. President and the First lady...] (68). This false happiness suffocates Susana so she leaves and finds work as a cleaning lady in a hotel until her husband finds her and takes her back. This is the pattern we see throughout the text, Susana manages to escape the borders of her controlled existence, but then becomes newly entangled in the web of the system.

We witness this controlled existence, after Susana has returned to her house and her children and the servants all ignore her and treat her with disrespect. As she learns, her mother-in-law has instructed them that because of her abandonment of the family, she has the devil within her. Ironically, as Susana explains to the servant, how could she be the devil? She always treated the help with respect and kindness, whereas the mother-in-law is cruel to them. The maid explains, "Eso no es lo que cuenta, dijo, lo que cuenta es que con la señora todas las tardes rezamos el rosario" [That not what counts, she said, what counts is that with the señora we pray the rosary every afternoon] (91). Therefore, like in *Demasiado amor,* Sefchovich links the powers of the church to the system as seen with the reaction of the maid. For this woman, all of the cruelty of the Señora was erased because of religion. The manner that the mother-in-law, symbol of the church/state connection, as she is part of this governmental "home", controls her "people" is through religion. As previously noted by Roderic Ai Camp, religion forms an important part of a society's culture and the Catholic Church has been historically viewed as a "legitimizing agent" of the Mexican state—a pacifying mediator to minimize clashes between the people and the political system. As the "legitimizing agent", the mother-in law continually finds ways to pacify Susana in response to what she and her son consider to be deviant acts.

As a means of undermining her situation--"jailed" within the borders of her house by the laws of her "governmental" family-- Susana joins the Leftist party and uses the telephone as an escape. She makes phone calls for the party asking people to vote in their favor. As she states of the party, "me agradaban ésos de la izquierda, porque en los anuncios de la television le ofrecián a los ciudadanos acabar con la corrupción y con los

negocios sucios de los gobernantes" [I liked those of the left, because on the television announcements they offer to the citizens to end corruption and stop the dirty businesses of the government.] (93). However, this subversive act (in the eyes of her family/political system) leaves her in a psychiatric hospital. Susana's mother-in law sends her to the "crazy" house for her political desertion[131]. In repeated fashion, this text portrays examples of this dichotomy of subversion/consequence, highlighting the ever-present borders of society, politics and religion. The laws of these institutions over power the initiative of individuals, like Susana, who contradict the established borders and attempt to overthrow their power. As we saw in *Demasiado amor*, Sefchvich highlights again in this text that the margins and boundaries that regulate the nation are present even within this metropolitan space. The idea of centralism and the power associated with this term, is de-constructed in both of Sefchovich's texts. The idea of centralism is limited to a select minute section of the population and those outside of these borders, whether members of the nation from Tijuana or from Mexico City, find themselves regulated by the authority of these hierarchal institutions.

In *Toda una vida* we observed how Marta Cerda utilizes the rape of a young boy as a metaphor, to symbolize the corrupt environment of the country. In this text, rape is also utilized as an allegory for the rape of the people by the system. In this case, when Susana abandoned her first husband she took a bus to Oaxaca where she met an artist, in Oaxaca for, "una reunion de becarios del Gobierno" [a meeting of governmental scholarship holders] (35). Therefore, the reader notes Susana's attempted escape from

[131] As noted by Mary Russo, historically, "hysterics and madwomen generally have ended up in the attic or in the asylum, their gestures of pain and defiance having served only to put them out of circulation" (329).

her husband is also an escape from the borders of the metropolitan strong hold, as she goes to a region alienated from this space. However, the first person she meets has ties to the government. Moreover, this nice, young man as Susana described him then leads her to his hotel where she is gang raped by the group of men there for this convention of artists, on scholarship from the government. This rape comes to symbolize the powers of the nation and the political system when years later, Susana attends a presentation at a government office titled, "Por una cultura de género" [For a culture of gender], where the topic is women's rights and one of the speakers is this rapist. This conference brings to light that at is core, "women's rights" are still controlled and manipulated by the hierarchal political and religious systems in the country. The rape of Susana by this women's activist is testimony to the distressing environment of the situation for women's rights and the underlying hypocrisy of the nation. The borders of this patriarchal nation are not crumbling like the pioneering feminists of the country had believed. This text, at its core, underlines the words of Rosario Castellanos, which as noted in the introduction states, ", "[In Mexico a woman is] a creature who is dependent upon male authority: be it her father's, her brother's, her husband's or her priest's...." (in *The Shattered Mirror* 16). As we see in *Vivir la vida*, Susana does not want to live within these patriarchal borders, but Sefchovich highlights with her protagonist, the incessant and persistent battle by women to weaken the borders and gain autonomy in a nation still dominated by the patriarchal government and church.

As further indication of this crippiling system, Susana falls ill, sickened by the adversities of her nation. Her body becomes the site of suffering, deflated and devalued, like the peso, as she states, "es que nuestra economía estaba en dificultades. Con el

cambio de presidente había habido una devaluación tan fuerte que nuestros ahorros se habían convertido en la mitad. Y unos meses después, a pesar de las promesas del nuevo primer mandatario, volvió a suceder lo mismo y otra vez lo que teníamos se convirtió en la mitad" [Our economy was in trouble. With the change of the president there was a strong devaluation that cut our savings in half. And a few months later, even after the promises of the new leader, it happened again and what we had, was again cut in half] (237). Therefore, we can conclude that Susana's body comes to represent the ills of the country, as Dennis Patrick Slattery observes, "The body is the site of cultural, political, and gender battles, explorations, and assertions" (9). Just as the country is collapsing financially and feeling the wounds of its oppressive borders—Susana's body succumbs to illness.

In the end, Susana decides she is going to commit suicide—an attempt to take control of her life to free herself from the powers that have controlled her. However, as the reader finds out her death was due to a heart attack, following the pattern of Susana's life where her attempts at subversion are always undermined by outside powers, in this case that of her body. Nevertheless, in the last sentence of the text, we see how in actuality Susana has managed to undermine the system. Throughout the text, Susana attempts to write a novel without much success—the borders that thwart her freedom in her life appear to impede her writing. However, before she decides to kill herself, she locks herself in her room--alienated from the controlling borders-- and unknown even to the reader writes a manuscript.

The final pages of the text are emails[132] from Rosalba, who lived with Susana for many years--a daughter figure for her, to her husband in Switzerland[133]. Rosalba has been invited to Mexico to receive a prize for her writing, which unbeknownst to her, was actually Susana's manuscript. The reader and Rosalba uncover this irony when Rosalba finds a receipt in the trash and discovers, "que Susana M. de Lara mandó su manuscrito a un concurso, firmandolo nada menos que con el seudónimo de Rosalba Goettingen" [that Susana M. de Lara sent her manuscript to a contest, signing it with nothing less than the pseudonym of Rosalba Goettingen] (288). Interestingly, when Rosalba attended the ceremony, people asked her how she spoke Spanish so well, and she found it intriguing that a critic who claims, "los escritores extranjeros eran siempre mejores que los nacionales" (274), praised her for her work. That is to say, Rosalba received the award for Susana's writing. Ironically, they believed this book to be the product of a foreigner from Switzerland. Therefore, this irony testifies to the attitudes of the country, where the foreign product/goods continually displace national ones and where the borders of the nation, open and welcome, foreign ideas.[134] This coincides with Marta Cerda's novel *Toda una vida*, which highlights the effects of a culture invaded by foreign corporations--a culture lost among Mc Donalds and Coca-Cola[135]. Moreover, this irony of Susana's

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[132] This recalls of Rosina Conde's use of email, where technology is able to break down the borders of geographic alienation. This highlights in the text the hope for this rupturing of borders---borders that had prevented Susana from writing a text in her country with her name.

[133] Rosalba also lives in Switzerland. She left Mexico years before and had not returned until she was called to do the conference.

[134] This highlights the attitude of the political powers with the implementation of NAFTA.

[135] Journalist Alma Guilleromoprieto highlighted this phenomenon in Mexico City, on the brink of the NAFTA, "Now that Mexico is carpeted with Kentucky Fried Chicken, Denny's and McDonald's outlets, and Coca-Cola is the national drink; now that even

book being confused as an international text, underlines the manner in which women writers have to break through borders to have their voices heard. In this case, Susana's intelligence has undermined the borders of her existence as a woman and a writer in Mexico. By using a foreign pseudonym, she has ruptured the borders that held captive to her voice and her writing.

In the end, *Vivir la vida* embodies the corpus of this project. As it is the most recent publication in the present study , it confirms the validity of the project, emphasizing the vital work of women writers in Mexico, who in their texts highlight the myriad of borders that entrap and control the Mexican nation. These borders, as Sara Sefchovich has so poignantly depicted do not discriminate. Borders are ever present—they permeate the nation—from the metropolitan capital to the alienated periphery. The controlling agents of this still patriarchal nation have withstood the multitude of attempts by the people to shatter these infringing borders. However, through the words of the writers in this study, these borders are exposed and by being printed and published, they are inadvertently breaking down these persevering borders, and through this de-construction, the writers are able to illustrate and expound on new forms of re-constructing and re-structuring the borders of the nation. The written word becomes the weapon for these writers to erase the borders that hinder members of the nation-state from doing as Sefchovich's title suggests, "vivir la vida".

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low-paid office workers are indentured to their credit cards and auto loans; now that the government of President Carlos Salinas De Gortari has approved a North American Free Trade Agreement, which promises to make Mexico commercially one with its neighbors to the north, there is little scope for magnificient sorrow in the average citizen's life" (in *The Mexico Reader* 42). This affirmation highlights satirically how even the expression of emotion has been taken from the people—foreign ideas penetrate their lives leaving them to believe they are living the good life of their neighbors in the north (U.S.).

CONCLUSION

> En la periferia, de acuerdo a [Roberto] Shwarz y a otros, el precio de vivir en la modernidad ha sido el de vivir la realidad de uno mismo en terminos de carencia, fragmentación, parcialidad, imitación e insatisfacción, mientras la plenitud y la integridad son vistas como propiedad del centro [On the periphery, according to [Roberto] Shwarz and others, the price of living in modernity has been that of living a reality of ones self with the terms of lack, fragmentation, partiality, imitation, and dissatisfaction, while plenitude and integrity are seen as property of the center]
>
> --Mary Louise Pratt--

> But destabilization cannot simply be left to the periphery. It is also crucial that intellectuals at the center should begin the process of dismantling their own position of privilege
>
> --Jean Franco--

It seems fitting that this study come to rest with the words of Mary Louise Pratt and those of Jean Franco, as they underline the core quandary of the state of affairs for the contemporary Mexican women writers part of this study: Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich. As Pratt notes, the reality for these peripheral dwellers--in this case, border dwellers located from Tijuana to Mexico City--is

problematic as their space of operandi is not acknowledged as a site of plenitude and integrity, like that of the center. Notwithstanding, as we have seen through an analysis of Sara Sefchovich's work, the presumed center is in itself a convoluted site of borders -- where the barbed wire fence safeguards this "plentitude" only to those within the confines of the powerful and hierarchal political system. Thus, Jean Franco's poignant recognition that the task of destabilization cannot be maneuvered unilaterally by the periphery, but rather demands that the center powers consent to and facilitate this democratization, reiterates and coincides with the vital message Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich put forth in their texts. Said writers highlight the myriad of borders that shape the nation-state, and through their writing, challenge the system to de-stabilize an incongruous conception of nation, emphasizing the need to re-structure and re-construct the borders of a national culture and identity forged and manipulated by the patriarchal political system. Nevertheless, this re-structuring can be problematic as Nestor Garcia Canclini indicates, " how [can we] build societies with democratic projects shared by everybody without making everyone the same?" (in *Critical Passions* 208). Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich respond to this challenging position with innovative approaches to this complex project of subverting, negotiating, and re-writing the nation into a multifaceted, hybrid space of identity.

In the first place, the writers in this study highlight the borders that hinder and prohibit them entrance into the national project, in such a manner that does not compromise the individuality or diversity of their region. This is to say, although they portray with their writing inversions and reversals of the positions of power, disruptions

of social codes, subversions of gender roles, and the creation of new spaces, these techniques are not utilized as a means of erasing difference to equalize or unify identities. Instead, these writers employ difference as a subversive means to challenge the patriarchal powers and demand recognition. In this sense, they underline diversity and hybridity as part of a foundational framework for the nation-state.

In many cases, these writers utilize spaces considered as marginal for women in the present national culture--prostitution, nighttime entertainers, bars, lesbians--a plethora of identities and spaces that don't fall within the acceptable role/space for the Mexican woman. Nevertheless, the writers invert the position of these marginalized spaces so they become sites where women can transgress the laws of patriarchy and subvert the borders of these marginal spaces. In agreement with French feminism, women's bodies in the texts become vehicles for subverting phalocentric law and writing the fe- into the (fe)-male nation. In the case of Luisa, in *La Genara*, her anorexic body speaks allegorically of the situation of the border region and of women's roles in the nation. Her body lacks food just as the border region has been denied voice and participation in the nation. Simultaneously, her ill body represents women's failure to thrive in a country controlled by a system of borders that battle women's entrance into the positions of power. As Judith Butler has noted, women's bodies become the passive medium through which cultural meanings are inscribed. This is also true of Mamá's body, in *Toda una vida*, where her body metaphorically collapses under the patriarchal borders of the metropolis, and as the narrative voice states, she is "broken" just like the country. This manner of representation of the women's bodies in these texts, highlights the nature of the nation-state, where a pattern is established that the protagonists are allegorical of the "others" in

the nation; be it the border region, women, or the nation itself, that is, those outside of the institutions of power. Hence, the writers in this study do not hide behind their bodies but rather write their ills, metaphorically the diseases of the nation, and through this representation they gain voice and authority. As Cixous has theorized, censor the body and you censor your breath and speech (338). The writers in this study undermine the censorship they have endured as women and writers in their border filled existence in Mexico. Thus, the un-censored body is a theme that unites these texts as counter-narratives of the nation.

Through allegory and metaphor, these writers acknowledge the central political system that has manipulated/invented/forged an identity on the country and it's people, without their consent. In a similar fashion, the writers underscore the relationship between the Church and State and emphasize how this powerful pair dictates the borders of the nation, in a country where supposed laws of separation prohibit this relationship. Although in some cases the writers subtly portray the role of the Church, it becomes clear that this powerful entity subdues and controls the people. Rosina Conde makes reference to the rule the church maintains over its people through the actions of Genara's parents and their sustaining belief in Catholic marriage. This speaks allegorically of the borders the Catholic Church sustains for the political hierarchy. The Mexican nation is fearful of challenging the Church, which in turn, serves to pacify the people on political fronts as well. Thus, we note in these texts how the protagonists challenge the Catholic Church, which symbolically undermines the borders of the nation, which is controlled by this church/state hierarchy. In *La Genara*, Genara disregards her parents "imperative" need for her to stay married, In *Toda una vida*, Mamá undermines the priest's request for

her to repent of her sins from her love affair with Hector, and in *Demasiado amor*, Beatriz transgresses Catholic doctrine altogether by inverting the positions of this powerful entity to herself as a prostitute, as seen with the religious language she employs. The manner in which these women writers de-stabilize and re-formulate the doctrine and laws of the Catholic Church, establishes the borders the church upholds in the nation and therein these texts re-write and invert the powers of this religious (political) institution.

On another level, the theme of motherhood in these texts occupies an important role. It is clear that this theme is altogether absent in many of the texts but this absence, along with the manner in which it is treated, speaks metaphorically of the role of woman as metaphor for the nation and the borders that this conceptualization presents. We are reminded of Gayatri Spivak's theorizations in which she states that language is formed as much in its absences as it is in its substance. Spivak suggests that it is the role of the critic or reader to "unmask" these absences in texts. Thus, as we read these texts as women's border narratives of a nation defined and controlled by the patriarchal political system, we continually note the manifestation of the protagonists as allegories of the "others" (regions, women, nation). Therefore, we question how either the presence of motherhood or its exaggerated absence, further challenges the national project. If we turn to Octavio Paz's seminal essay "The sons of La malinche" we see how the role of woman in Mexico, as noted previously in this study by Jean Franco, is that of either "virgin or prostitute". Paz classifies both of these figures as symbols of the mother,

> In contrast to Guadalupe, who is the Virgen Mother, the Chingada is the violated mother...Both of them are passive figures. Guadalupe is pure receptivity, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: se consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms

> passions. The Chingada is even more passive. Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust.....This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition" (in *The Mexico Reader* 25).

This idea of the passivity of the mother (or woman), whose identity is lost in the myriad of borders of the nation, is undeniably one of the border constructs challenged by these writers. As Paz so effectively portrays, all representations of the mother figure in Mexico are deemed as passive.

Thus, as we see in the texts in question, the only two references to actual motherhood are with Mamá and her unborn fetus and in Rosario San Miguel's "El reflejo de la luna", where Nicole the lawyer of undocumented immigrants is pregnant. Instead, we find in the texts more references to the relationships of the protagonists with their mothers, which are problematic. In Rosario San Miguel's story "Un silencio muy largo", when Francis is expulsed from the Las Dunas bar, she determines it is time to reconcile with her mother, underlining the title of the story to be the long silence that has ensued between the two. Moreover, another story of San Miguel's where we see this distanced relationship between mother and daughter is in "La otra habitación" where Anamaría comments on her troubled relationship with her mother, which as reader we deduce to be because Anamaría is a lesbian. In *La Genara*, both Genara and Luisa become distanced from their mother and are critical of her beliefs. In *Toda una vida*, although Mamá is pregnant, she openly rejects the roles of motherhood, noting satirically

how only on Mother's day does she wish she were a mother so she could be given appliances like the other mothers in Mexico. This is to say, it appears that these women writers reject the parameters of motherhood and their ensuing relationships with their mothers are problematic as an allegory of the institution of motherhood as representative of the nation. By undermining the role of woman as mother, and in her historically metaphorical role of either the virgin mother or the Chingada (mother), these writers destabilize at its core the patriarcal political system that created, forged and has continually controlled this identity for women. By breaking down the borders of the institution of motherhood in their texts, these writers are metaphorically breaking down the institutionalization of the nation. Ironically, in 1928 in the aftermath of recovery from the Mexican Revolution, the incumbent president Plutarco Elías Calles delivered a speech before congress in which he stated, "We shall move, once and for all, from being a 'country ruled by one man' to a 'nation of institutions and laws" (*The Mexican Reader* 422). Therefore, as Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich have so poignantly recognized, the borders of the Mexican nation were in fact, transformed from the ruling of a single man, to a nation of institutions and laws, undeniably and regretfully, patriarchal institutions and laws.

Thus, this apparent diffusion of power is representative of the system as the borders of these institutions, as seen by the long-standing rule of the PRI, were and continue to be patrolled by the central hierarchical political powers. In this sense, we can conclude that the absence of motherhood, or the apparent rejection of such in these texts, highlights and therein underscores the figure of mother as metaphor of the nation. By subverting the institution of motherhood, these writers simultaneously challenge the

patriarchal institutionalization of the nation. Hence, as the only portrayal of motherhood in this study that resonates any positive connotation is with Rosario San Miguel's closing story of her collection, "El reflejo de la luna", where Nicole is comforted by thoughts of her maternal milk bonding her and her daughter, we see a message of hope. This is to say, we can conclude that San Miguel's sense of hope is manifested with this protagonist whose authority as a lawyer--helping undocumented immigrants on the U.S. border--places her in a position to represent hope. As David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelson note of the border, apart from the negative connotations associated with this space, it is an exciting place of hybridity, a place for intellectual creativity and a locus of hope for a better world. (3) Therefore, by closing her collection with Nicole and the anticipation of the maternal mother-daughter bond, San Miguel manifests hope, where metaphorically this mother-daughter bond symbolizes a re-formulation of the parameters and borders of the relationship between woman and nation. Hence, throughout this study we have seen how Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich undermine and subvert a multitude of the conceptualizations of the institutions of patriarchy, such as, motherhood, history and nation.

In the end, although much discussion has been given to the work of these writers within the boundaries of their nation, by breaking down said borders and finding mechanisms to enter and participate in their national discourse, these writers open the door to a discussion of their work in a transnational border crossing. That is to say, these texts merit further investigation on the level of global or world literature. As Jean Franco notes of this new era, "the global flow, however, has no outside, only interstices occupied by new space invaders—women, gay writers, the indigenous, the marginal who have

displaced the traditional boundary setters" (Critical Passions 223). Therefore, we can consider Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich as the "new space invaders" whose writing invades not only the border spaces of their nation, but is also beginning to enter this global flow. As a testimony to this phenomenon, we note the multi-language publication of Conde's *Arrieras somos*-- translated both to English and to French. Ironically, this text titled, *Wandering women*, has "wandered" past the borders of the Mexican Nation and is being read in these global literary circuits.

Hence, as these women highlight diversity and individuality in their texts, their writing is able to cross the borders of nations, as readers globally identify and recognize themselves in some aspect of these diverse characters. A final act of subversion for these writers would be to have their literature included not only in the corpus of Mexican literature, but also to be considered as "world literature"--crossing the borders of their nation into the new era of globalization. As evidence of the validity of such a study is the newly published (2006) text, *América Latina en la 'literatura mundial*, where Ignacio Sánchez Prado recognizes the role of Latin America within the context of world literature, citing its slow but progressive entrance into the global literary circuits. Perhaps, Mexican women writers are on the "border"--the edge-- of a new "Boom femenina", one which includes writers such as Rosina Conde, Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich--a "Boom" that would account for the broad spectrum and diversity of women's writing in Mexico.

To conclude, throughout this study it has been argued that borders in contemporary Mexican women's writing are ever-present: geographic, political, historical, psychological and borders of gender permeate the texts of Rosina Conde,

Rosario San Miguel, Marta Cerda and Sara Sefchovich. These women acknowledge the presence of these infringing borders that have shaped and structured the identity of their nation, their regions and themselves as women and writers. Thus, this study has shown how these writers cross, undermine, erase, break-down, re-form and re-establish the borders of the nation--an institutionalized patriarchal nation. Thus, through this de-construction and re-structuring of borders, these writers propose new forms of writing/reading the nation, where the marginalized "others"--regions, border spaces and women--become active speaking subjects in the nation-state.

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