

INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS: ROSARIO CASTELLANOS
(1925-1974) AND GLOBAL FEMINIST DISCOURSES

by

ERIN LOUISE GALLO

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Student: Erin Louise Gallo

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This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Romance Languages by:

Pedro García-Caro	Chairperson
Cecilia Enjuto-Rangel	Core Member
Karen McPherson	Core Member
Lynn Stephen	Institutional Representative

and

Sara D. Hodges	Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Erin Gallo

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Title: International Interventions: Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) and Global Feminist Discourses

This thesis explores the international dimensions of Rosario Castellanos' writings, which exhibit a constant—and evolving—preoccupation with feminist literature from across the world. The Mexican woman, public intellectual, professor, author, and ambassador dialogued with Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, Betty Friedan, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Gabriela Mistral, and Clarice Lispector, among others, while relating their ideas to Mexican women's lives. Her journalistic production, essays, poetry, and narrative undergo an evolution as Castellanos articulates a unique Mexican feminist project that factors in race, class, and other intersections affecting Mexican women.

I access Castellanos—who has been considered “the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico”—through the lens of global feminism, which considers the varying layers of power and powerlessness when women of disparate regions and cultures seek solidarity. Through a global feminist perspective we see how Castellanos, rather than blindly importing First World women's agendas, carefully intervenes in global feminist discourses with the needs of Mexican women. In her evolution, Castellanos grows closer to a feminist project that, rather than buying into the myth of a global sisterhood, evokes instead a desire for a Latin American sisterhood and for Mexican women's self-definition.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Erin Louise Gallo

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of Nevada, Reno
Universidad de Colima, Colima, Mexico
University of Iowa, Iowa City

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Romance Languages, 2018, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, Spanish Language and Literatures, 2011, University of Nevada,
Reno
Bachelor of Arts, Spanish and Journalism, 2007, University of Iowa

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Mexican and Latin American Literature
Feminist Theory
Cultural Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, University of Oregon, 2011-2018
Language Assistant, Middlebury College at Mills, summers 2012, 2013

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Research Grant, Center for the Study of Women in Society, 2015.
Stickels Graduate Student Award, Department of Romance Languages,
University of Oregon, 2015.
Outstanding TA Scholarship, Program of Core Humanities, University of
Nevada, Reno, 2010.

PUBLICATIONS:

Gallo, Erin. "The Political Becomes the Personal: Rosario Castellanos and the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement." *Hispanic Review* 85.3 (2017): 295-313.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: GLOBAL FEMINISM AND THE MAKING OF A MEXICAN FEMINIST

Usted, señora, abnegada mujercita mexicana; o usted, abnegada mujercita mexicana en vías de emancipación: ¿qué ha hecho por su causa en los últimos meses? Me imagino la respuesta obvia: repasar el texto ya clásico de Simone de Beauvoir, ya sea para disentir o para apoyar sus propios argumentos o simple y sencillamente para estar enterada. Mantenerse al tanto de los libros que aparecen, uno tras otro, en los Estados Unidos: las exhaustas descripciones de Betty Friedan, la agresividad de Kate Millet, la lúcida erudición de Germaine Greer.
-*“La liberación del amor,”* Excélsior, *Jul 20, 1972*

Today, we celebrate the life and legacy of Rosario Castellanos, one of Mexico’s most influential authors. Her poems, stories, and essays were fundamental to the development of the female voice in literature, both in her homeland and across the world. Her master’s thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina* (On Female Culture), inspired an entire generation. Castellanos also served as the Mexican ambassador to Israel, where she ultimately passed away in 1974.

We’re honored to shed light on this incredible artist on what would have been her 91st birthday.
-*“Rosario Castellanos’ 91st birthday,”* Google doodle, *May 25, 2016*

In May of 2016, Google celebrated Rosario Castellanos with a doodle of the feminist author gazing up towards the moon, championing her work in the accompanying text as “fundamental to the development of the female voice in literature, *both in her homeland and across the world*” (emphasis mine). In the image, Castellanos appears as a woman of the world with no remarkably visible racial characteristics, the light of the moon whitening her contented face. Google’s appreciation briefly highlights the international relevance of Castellanos, a public intellectual known primarily within the contexts of the Spanish-speaking world. There is no more global stage than Google’s home icon, so Castellanos’ moment of international fame is a significant gesture.

At the time of Google’s dedication to Castellanos, this dissertation was a work in progress. *International Interventions*—which explores the international character of Castellanos’ life and works with more depth and rigor than the Google doodle could elaborate—departs from a comparable notion that Castellanos’ works speak to and are shaped by feminist discourses around the globe. In just over 25 years, Castellanos’ literary interventions exhibit a constant—and evolving—preoccupation with women’s rights. By “intervention,” I mean the way she mediates feminist discourses in her poetry, essays, novels, short stories, plays, and journalistic articles.¹ For example, in “La liberación del amor,” quoted in the epigraph of this introduction, she establishes herself as an interlocutor of the writings of Beauvoir, Friedan, Millet, and Greer by addressing her Mexican women readers who superficially engage with their writings without fully embracing the feminist cause. In both Google’s doodle and “La liberación,” the author flows between the global and the local, acting as a bridge between her home and the world.

The following pages and chapters argue that Castellanos was deeply invested in feminist discourses emerging across the world with a caveat: Castellanos was a Cold War cosmopolitan who could not escape her marginality as a Mexican when facing other figures of the second wave. Her extraordinary biography illustrates that she was a cosmopolitan woman with the “desire for the world” that Mariano Siskind theorizes, echoing a spirit prevalent in Latin American intellectual circles of the 20th Century. These other intellectuals include Carlos Fuentes, who, as Pedro García-Caro illustrates, wrote with “a cosmopolitan, postnationalist, postmodern style” and rejected “the hegemonic

¹ This word comes from a course I took with Gabriela Cano at the Colegio de México in the summer of 2014. When a student contributed valuable insight to the class discussion, she would thank them for their

epos of national identification” (17). As a cosmopolitan intellectual, Castellanos had the economic and cultural capital to alternate between issues of national and international experience. And yet as a Mexican woman who ultimately wrote in Spanish for Mexican and Latin American readers, she grappled with postcolonial dynamics at home like race, class, and political corruption that were not relevant to First World feminists’ agendas. When we read her alongside Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, Betty Friedan, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Gabriela Mistral, Clarice Lispector, and other less-canonical figures that populate her literature, we see how she intervened in these discourses by negotiating their relevance to her local life as a modern Mexican woman.

In studying Castellanos against other internationally relevant feminist authors, one encounters certain biases that prevent her from being considered an equal. For instance, as I show in Chapter V, Castellanos has been considered “the Simone de Beauvoir” of Mexico. This analogy reproduces the colonial dynamic that assumes Beauvoir must have influenced Castellanos; on the contrary, the opposite is never assumed, despite that the women were contemporaries and occupied similar roles in their respective countries. But Beauvoir could not have yet “influenced” the Mexican woman when we remember that Castellanos’ groundbreaking (and now canonical) 1950 Master’s thesis *Sobre cultura femenina* was published just one year after the publication of *The Second Sex* and before Castellanos had read Beauvoir. These kinds of biases lurk behind what it means to consider Castellanos in the same light as other second wave feminists.

At the outset of my research, I believed naively in the idea of a “global sisterhood” that will be problematized in this dissertation. Rather than presuming Castellanos’ solidarity with women of the world, this study asks the following: To what extent does

Castellanos engage with feminist literature across the globe? Which international feminist discourses does she reject and why? What unique ideas and texts does Castellanos contribute to global feminist discourses? In what ways is Rosario Castellanos an interlocutor of international feminism and in what ways is she an active influence? The answers to these questions lead to a determination that while Castellanos was engaged with women authors across the globe she was also empowered to create a unique, feminist voice that both included and consciously excluded voices she deemed irrelevant and inapplicable to the Latin American women's context. Rather than buying into the myth of a global sisterhood, Castellanos evokes instead a desire for a Latin American sisterhood founded on their commonalities and locally-defined agendas.

Global Feminism: Dismantling Hegemonies

Feminist literature and activism in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s was dominated by women of Anglo-American and French backgrounds. Well-intentioned white women of the First World sought a global sisterhood that was meant to foster solidarity among women who, tired of being subjected to patriarchal society, could unite and assert themselves as equal and competent citizens of the free world. Texts like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* promoted First World values such as sexual and reproductive rights (e.g. abortion, birth control) and political access and representation. These texts and ideas were quickly translated and dispersed across the world. Meanwhile, women of various backgrounds began to compare and contrast their incompatible agendas, finding that in addition to opposing patriarchy, they confronted other challenges such as imperialism, heteronormativity, economic disparities, and racism. Feminist histories like the present one illustrate that there was

never an all-encompassing feminist dogma embraced by women of the world. Rather than breeding solidarity, First World feminism imposed itself on the rest of the world as part of a neo-colonial agenda.

International Interventions situates Castellanos within “global feminism,” a feminist theory elaborated by Inderpel Grewal and Caren Kaplan that analyzes the way feminism in a globalized economy is always in transit via bodies, texts, and ideas. Feminism is always subject to power imbalances, and global feminism proposes to study these power structures. Grewal and Kaplan dispel the notion of feminist solidarity across nations and cultures exclaiming “there IS NO SUCH THING as a feminism free of asymmetrical power relations” (emphasis theirs). The tenets of global feminism make us remember women in their various positions of power and powerlessness on both the local and global levels.

One of the earliest accounts that led to the articulation of global feminist theories was the United Nation’s 1975 International Women’s Year (IWY), held in Castellanos’ home in Mexico City. Although Castellanos’ untimely death in August 1974 came just seven months prior to this momentous event, it was here in Mexico City in 1975 that Castellanos would have likely intervened with eloquence and reverence in these polemic encounters, making her way onto the international stage decades before Google would eulogize her.

Jocelyn Olcott has recently called the IWY, to borrow from the title of her book, “The greatest-consciousness raising event in history.” The conference was the first event of its kind to bring women from dozens of nations together, and the conflicts that resulted from the gathering demystified the idea that any feminism responds to all women’s conditions. Pamela Fuentes’ essay is also indispensable for understanding the impact of the

encounter between women of the First and Third Worlds. As both Fuentes and Olcott attest about the conference in Mexico City, Betty Friedan, whose voice seemed to carry more weight given her hegemonic status as an Anglo-American author and activist, stirred up two spectacles: She prophesized a sexual revolution and criticized the fact that a Mexican man presided over the conference, a decision many Latin American women supported. Her priorities and opinions were not well-received by women of Mexico and Latin America, such as Domitila Barrios de Chúngara, whose main objective was to combat U.S. imperialism in her home country of Bolivia where she and her husband favored to identify along class and national lines. 1975 marks the initial clash of First- and Third World feminisms that would later catalyze Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called my Back*. In this foundational text, the authors hail a feminism that responds to the deep imbalances of women across races and social classes.

After the IWY, “feminism” ceased to be singular, and “feminisms” created space for the survival of differing feminist agendas. Adrienne Rich, in her 1984 essay “Notes Towards a Politics of Location,” offers insight into how she, as a white, North American, middle class scholar, began to perceive the ways in which her own biases were imposing unreasonable demands on global feminist discourses after traveling to Central America and feeling what she calls “the weight of the United States of North America” (220). In this canonical essay, Rich posits a crucial question for the history of intersectionality:

Is there a connection between this state of mind—the Cold War mentality, the attribution of all of our problems to an external enemy—and a form of feminism so focused on male evil and female victimization that, it too, allows for no differences among women, men, places, times, cultures, conditions, classes, movements? Living in the climate of an enormous either/or, we absorb some of it unless we heed. (221)

This self-critique here confirms the First World's blind spots that were reconciled by the transition from the second to the third waves of feminism. It illustrates how in the late 1970s and 1980s women were recognizing the plurality of women's experiences and it is here in this recognition of plurality, a challenge to the colonial gaze of the prior waves of feminism, that feminist history begins to construct a more heterogeneous notion of "woman."

Today, global feminism takes shape in the many hashtag efforts to combat sexism, feminicide, and sexual harassment in social media. For example, just in 2017, Internet users partook in #niunamenos in Argentina, #metoo in the U.S., and #vivasnosqueremos in Mexico. Hashtag movements of the like are a fascinating case of feminism in transit because although they start in their respective countries, their digital presence provides an opportunity for women of the world to relate to the same patriarchal injustices.

#Vivasnosqueremos is a hashtag that has emerged in response to the overwhelming and life-threatening state of womanhood in contemporary Mexico, particularly to the epidemic of feminicide (a term coined by one of Mexico's most important anthropologists, Marcela Lagarde), and the infamous impunity for these crimes. Because this hashtag attempts to bring awareness both within Mexico and without to the extreme conditions women face in Mexico, it also requires a contextualization of feminicide in Mexico, particularly in relation to the post-revolutionary government's neoliberal policies and authoritarian control. For example, because of the state's desire to stifle negative press, they censor (or do not record) statistics that show just how many women are murdered each year across the republic. This hashtag has been a vehicle of great potential for confronting the precarity of women's lives in Mexico and for women of the world to ally themselves with the Mexican cause.

Ultimately, however, their successes and failures as social movements have much to do with the power imbalances they encounter when placed in competition with one another. #Vivasnosqueremos competes for virtual space with a movement that has dominated the feminist discourse in the U.S.—#metoo—a response to sexual harassment and assault bolstered by the public outspokenness of actors, politicians, and other figures in social media. While #metoo allows women to uncover the widespread sexual harassment they face in their daily lives, it is a middle class movement of arguably non-life-threatening conditions affecting women.

A global feminist perspective would consider that while it is important for all women's voices to be heard, #metoo and #vivasnosqueremos are not to be evaluated on the same scale: one hashtag responds to a matter of social injustice while the other deals with human rights and survival, and yet only one of these movements (#metoo) received attention at the 2018 Golden Globe ceremony. The fact that #metoo is less about life and death than #vivasnosqueremos shows the extreme conditions of feminist fight in Latin America and the lower stakes of feminist movement in the U.S. The point between these two hashtags is not to compare suffering but to illustrate how diverse the agendas are between women who share a border and how these agendas are not always bound up in solidarity. It also allows us to see the hegemony of English in global discourses as well as the lack of attention to class-related issues within the U.S. From Castellanos' feminist writings to the IWY in 1974 to the hashtags of today, women of the so-called Third World struggle against the hegemony of certain feminist agendas.

Methodology

This project is an intellectual biography, which breaks with former biographical styles in two ways: First, it is more critical of the subject than were previous biographies that tended to ignore individuals' blind spots and biases; Second, it considers the power institutions hold over intellectual and cultural processes, such as universities, publishing, and prizes. The intellectual biography humanizes the subject by showing her as both exceptional and a product of her environment. Another characteristic of the genre is that while the author's biography and literary output are important, individual stories ought to speak to greater social changes and paint pictures of the interplay between subjects and the hegemonies against which they struggle. How Castellanos experienced, interpreted, and critiqued the globalizing times, then, tells a larger story of the relationships between women within and across borders.

Like other intellectual biographies, such as Sandra Cypess' *Uncivil Wars* on Elena Garro and Octavio Paz's battle for cultural memory, Castellanos as a case study illuminates a momentous period of the 20th Century in which women's bodies and texts were in constant transit, transit in the spatial as well as the social. A globalized transport system meant that in 1950 Castellanos would travel to Madrid via ship while in 1970 the same trip would be made by plane. Furthermore, since Castellanos is considered almost unanimously the "mother" of Mexican feminism, her life story situated within this sociohistorical context shows the international climate from which contemporary Mexican feminism emerged in the 1970s.

As both a global citizen and a Mexican woman, Castellanos negotiated her identity in relation to foreign women of letters like herself. Existing scholarship almost

unanimously reflects that Castellanos' intellectual production is greatly influenced by her reading of international voices. Many of these studies, however, operate under a case-by-case analysis. As I will show in this dissertation, Castellanos has been studied in relation to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Julia Cuervo-Hewitt), Virginia Woolf (Monica Ayuso), Simone de Beauvoir (Sharon Larisch), and Simone Weil (Beth Jorgenson). Oscar Bonifaz writes, for example, "Of particular merit are her essays on Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf, with whom Rosario felt a total affinity, since they were models of her own cause" (38). Unlike close readings of her engagement with these women on individual bases, the distant reading (analytical of a large sample of texts) performed in this dissertation is more comprehensive: Castellanos' dialogues with global feminist literature reveal, at times, a desire for a transnational web of Western women authors, and at other times, the desire to replace the homogenizing Anglo- and European unitary subject. Furthermore, the existence of various voices within Castellanos' literary production shows the hybrid nature of her feminist project and thus the expansiveness of her feminist formation. She scrutinizes the intellectual contributions of women across the world and carefully selects a project that factors those voices and contributions for her own needs.

International Interventions privileges Castellanos' life as an important axis of analysis, drawing from the intentions of the "new biography," which aims to use individual stories to speak to greater social changes (Kessler-Harris). Where the "old" biographical approach tended to praise an individual's extraordinariness in a given period, new biography uses a single life as a portal into larger social structures. It paints a broad picture of subjects and the hegemonies against which they struggle. As Mexican historian Mary Kay Vaughan has argued recently:

Through intimate, detailed focus on one individual, biography gives us

insight into the sociocultural conflicts that gnaw at established structures and conventions and can produce enormous creativity and historical change, even when that change is tempered by the strength of existing structures and conventions. (6)

María Estela Franco agrees that Castellanos is emblematic of the changes in mid-Century Mexico when she claims that “Rosario parece proponerse a sí misma como un testimonio viviente de la lucha desarrollada por la mujer bajo las circunstancias de su condición y de su época” (149). How Castellanos experienced, interpreted, and critiqued the changing economic times has the potential to tell a larger story of Mexican women. Therefore, this dissertation is as much about Rosario Castellanos as it is about women and feminism in mid-Century Mexico.

To access her as a figure and agent of global feminism, I am relying on feminist genealogies, theories of world literature, and postcolonial feminist frameworks. Feminist genealogies paint narratives of influence that show how women construct themselves in relation to their predecessors, allies, and heirs. Castellanos evokes a desire for a global women-authored tradition in order to show how she, rather than being an anomaly, is part of a rich history of dissent and literary excellence in Anglo-American, French, and Latin American literary history. World literature helps us access the literary world as an industry, showing how and why women like Rosario Castellanos do not receive the same recognition as Simone de Beauvoir. And finally, postcolonial frameworks shine light on the way women of the Third World have united based on shared histories of exploitation via colonialism.

A recent attempt to reconstruct feminist genealogies in Latin America is the 2016 *The Cambridge History of Latin American Women's Literature*. Here, editors Ileana Rodríguez and Mónica Szurmuk collect the many women's voices silenced by male-dominated

literary histories. As they write of the thirty-three essays on women's writings from before the Conquest to the contemporary period:

We put forth a diversity of gazes that attest to the ingenuity of women across continents, the inventiveness of genres, the reach and dare of transatlantic connections, the spread of women's qualities of writing, the force and might of their steady entrance into the flesh of the earth in order to make public their plight and publicize their nerve (1).

While none of the essays published in this collection focus on Rosario Castellanos, *International Interventions* seeks to contribute to the project of reconstructing feminist genealogies across borders, genres, and time periods because Castellanos was an important figure in these hemispheric and global imaginings.

Theories of world literature aid us in understanding the nature of canonization. Like all canons, the global feminist canon is made possible by larger systems of power, such as translation, publication, universities, and literary criticism for recognition and distribution (i.e. awards, magazines). For example, women like Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, whose books and ideas reached more markets than those of Castellanos (very few of Castellanos' books have been translated from Spanish), have dominated the feminist canon due to these privileges. Predominant theories of world literature, like Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, show the Eurocentric nature of the literary field when they claim that global literary canons originate with European texts. Casanova uses the "Greenwich Meridian of Literature" to establish Western Europe as the epicenter of global literary production, which precludes the possibility of other centers of production outside of Europe. In "Conjectures on World Literature," Franco Moretti synthesizes that "the study of world literature is—invariably—a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world" (64). Moretti proposes here that a singular global canon does not exist, since the study of world literature includes how texts have struggled

(and succeeded or failed) to become important and influential. Casanova's and Moretti's oft-cited texts have been discussed by scholars like Emily Apter and Ignacio Sánchez-Prado who rightfully call for a reconsideration of world literature's point of articulation, shifting our attention to centers like Mexico and Africa that have been obscured by the hegemony of European and American literary traditions.

The third theoretical lens through which I choose to consider Castellanos is that of postcolonial feminism. This theory emerged in the 1980s as a response to the hegemonic feminism embodied by the infamous IWY in Mexico City. In Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's *This Bridge Called my Back* (1981), the Chicana authors write about the agony of being the only women of color in feminist gatherings where they were subject to white women's problems, problems that did not include racism, ethnic identity, or sexuality. Their text aims to broaden the definition of feminism by including these nuances that First World women do not recognize: "Each woman [included in this text] considers herself a feminist, but draws her feminism from the culture in which she grew" ("Introduction", xlv). Similarly, Grewal and Kaplan historicize second wave feminism as a series of "scattered hegemonies" (to borrow from their 1994 title), meaning that feminism, rather than removing women from oppressive conditions, has further oppressed women by limiting their voices and demands.

In *What is Cultural History?* Peter Burke elaborates on the disciplinary ambiguity of postcolonial feminism within cultural history. He cites how traditional historical approaches (like the "old" biography) were problematically rooted in single narratives and in what they considered objectivity. These histories kept social groups, like women and other (post)colonial subjects, at the margin. He remarks, "One major reason for the reaction against the grand narrative of western civilization was an increasing awareness of

what it left out or made invisible” (47). Feminist cultural histories in dialogue with theories of postcoloniality like the present study look at the history of reading as an ample way of determining women’s predilections for women’s texts and women’s protagonists. Castellanos’ intellectual formation challenges the “grand narrative” of Western feminist history and relocates Mexican women on the global feminist map. When we analyze Castellanos at the crossroads of feminist genealogies, world literature, and postcolonial feminism, we put her interventions into feminist discourses in a comprehensive global frame. This dynamic frame tells an alternative history of Mexican feminism’s coming-of-age.

Like most feminist cultural histories, the research I undertook to complete this dissertation confronted many gaps in the archival record. For instance, in order to document her time as a visiting professor at three U.S. universities between 1966-67—during the inchoate stages of the U.S. Women’s Liberation Movement—I spoke with Deborah Cohn, an expert on Latin American intellectuals in the U.S. academy, who confessed she had never learned that Castellanos was among this literary horde. Her text, *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism during the Cold War*, somehow elided Castellanos as a figure of the 1960s alongside her peers Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso, and Octavio Paz. This elision—not a fault of Cohn’s but one of knowledge about Castellanos’ life—is the epitome of women’s invisibility in cultural history. In attempting to fill these gaps, I interviewed two of her former students from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and Indiana University, Bloomington. Both attested with clarity and fondness to her personae in and out of the classroom. I recovered documents from Indiana University that brought me closer to her self-representation, and I relied on documents that are

limited, such as the letters she wrote to Ricardo Guerra and a number of publications only available in Mexican libraries.

It has been difficult to pinpoint the dates of some of Castellanos' texts. This could be due to the fact that she was not always published immediately. For example, *Mujer que sabe latín* is a compilation of essays on women's writing, but it is unclear when these essays were written. Many saw earlier drafts in her journalistic articles published throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, which was only made visible by Andrea Reyes' 2004 publication of Castellanos' journalistic archive at *Excélsior*. Similarly, her entire poetic production was published in 1972 as *Poesía no eres tú*. In it are more than a dozen poetry collections in chronological order, without making explicit the dates of their composition. In Chapter VI, I have attempted to date one of these, *Viaje redondo*, her final poetry collection, by analyzing her biography and journalistic production in relation to the poems and their themes. In other cases, her publishing history was impacted by politics, which is the case with her play, *El eterno femenino*. As I will show in Chapter VI, it was written in the early 1970s but the author was discouraged from publishing it because it was deemed too critical of the Mexican state, the same institution that employed her at the time she wrote it.

One of the biggest problems facing the reconstruction of this cultural history has been a lack of a unified archive: Castellanos' entire literary body is not housed in one place. Her massive oeuvre encompassing literary and journalistic production is scattered in Mexican and U.S. libraries, in scarce editions and various publishing houses, and her only surviving family member, her son, owns her patrimony. By contrast, Elena Garro's archive is housed in the Princeton University library because following her death in 1998, her daughter, Helena Paz Garro, was an active agent in reclaiming her mother's legacy.

What is more, Castellanos' family members have even impeded access to her archive. One of the texts that will be important to this dissertation is *Cartas a Ricardo*, a collection of letters written throughout the 1950s and 1960s published by her ex-husband, Ricardo Guerra, in 1994. After Poniatowska was critical of Guerra in the prologue to the collection, he decided to prevent another edition. For this reason, *Cartas a Ricardo* is outdated and difficult to obtain in libraries on both sides of the border.

However, it should be noted that there are some formidable attempts to consolidate Castellanos' archive. Andrea Reyes' three massive volumes of Castellanos' entire production in the Mexico City newspaper, *Excelsior*, have been an excellent resource to my project. Although it does not aim to cite them all, this dissertation has exhausted the existing sources permitting us to read Castellanos' life against her works and has identified that the problems to these sources are just as important as the answers to how to remedy them.

In the context of Mexican women writers, there are a few single-author monographs belonging to the same methodological tradition that inspire this dissertation. The first is Sandra Cypess' *Uncivil Wars* (2012), which disentangles the cultural legacy of Mexican author Elena Garro from her turbulent relationship with ex-husband, Octavio Paz. Cypess' reach into Garro's archive and the comparative analyses she performs of Garro's works against Paz's are invaluable to Mexican feminist history. They reveal a history of a woman whose literary talent was hidden by her complex personal relationships. The second inspiration to this dissertation is Beth Jørgensen's *The Writings of Elena Poniatowska: Engaging Dialogues* (1994), which looks at the life of Elena Poniatowska in relation to her work as an interviewer and author. Jørgensen's work on Poniatowska is vital to historicizing the secondary role of women in publishing and literature because it

reveals how she had to transcend the traditionally feminine section of the newspaper—the social section—to assert herself as a legitimate intellectual among her male peers. These two texts blend fluidly the genres of biography with intellectual history and uncover the deep-seated biases against women intellectuals in mid-Century Mexico. Furthermore, because Garro and Poniatowska were Castellanos’ friends and contemporaries, *International Interventions* seeks to contribute to the intellectual biography genre that completes this triad of Mexican women authors.

Rosario Castellanos: The Making of a Mexican Feminist

Castellanos’ life story can be divided into two halves: The first period spans her birth in 1925 to the beginning of her graduate education in 1946, a period characterized by her coming-of-age. In the second period, 1946-74, Castellanos fulfills her literary calling and becomes a woman intellectual and cosmopolitan deeply enmeshed with Mexican national institutions. It is the second half that will be of utmost importance to this dissertation, because it is during this time that she becomes gradually interested in the topic of women’s lives and experiences. Furthermore, because her parents both died in 1949, the second half of her life marks the period in which she became independent financially and socially, since no remaining close family members survived. In a sense, when her parents died within a few months of one another, Castellanos’ was “liberated” from the familial norms that had previously restricted her.

The first half of Castellanos’ biography is recounted in two texts, Oscar Bonifaz’s *Rosario* and María Estela Franco’s *Otro modo de ser*, biographies that are quite outdated since their initial (and only) publications in 1990 and 1989, respectively. Castellanos was

born in 1925 in Comitán, Chiapas, just eight years after the Mexican Revolution ended.² The first half of her biography is influenced by some of the greatest changes in Mexico's socioeconomic structure. Born into a landowning class whose *hacienda* was left over from the colonial period, Castellanos was the privileged daughter of César Castellanos and Adriana Figueroa. Because they belonged to the upper crust of the colonial social system, Castellanos' life was predetermined: she would employ domestic servants, marry an equally rich and privileged man, and carry on the colonial legacy of racial and ethnic superiority. This was interrupted, however, when Mexico's president Lázaro Cárdenas enacted the 1936 Agrarian Reform. This historic legislation restored millions of hectares to Mexico's disenfranchised peasantry by turning lands like Castellanos' into collectively owned *ejidos*. The Castellanos family was uprooted from the generations-old land and forced to move, like millions of other Mexicans, to the nation's capital.

In the second half of her life, from 1946-1974, Castellanos experienced the world as a cosmopolitan public intellectual. Throughout these years, her international biography tells a tale of feminism in transit: In 1950, upon graduating with her Master's degree, she lived in Spain on a scholarship funded by Francoist Spain. She lived in Chiapas two times during the 1950s working with the Mexican state in its efforts to incorporate indigenous peoples into the nation-building project. Throughout the 1960s she wrote extensively for the local liberal print *Excelsior* as one of very few women journalists. From 1966-67 she worked at three state universities in the U.S. as a visiting professor of Spanish. In 1969, she traveled to Chile for an international literary gathering. In 1971, she visited her friend and contemporary, Octavio Paz, in Paris while he was the

² In Mexican historical scholarship there is a debate about the year the Mexican Revolution ended. I consider the 1917 Constitution as the beginning of the modern Mexican state without expanding on the details of the Revolution. Some histories show that the armed conflict ended in 1920.

Mexican Ambassador to France and that same year she was appointed as Mexico's Ambassador to Israel where she would live until her death in August 1974. After analyzing these international travels alongside the massive corpus of literature she produced throughout this time (more than ten poetry collections, five essay collections, three novels, two plays, and three collections of short stories), it becomes evident that her formation as a global citizen is inextricable from the feminist character of her literary evolution.

Rosario Castellanos on the Global Map

The organization of this dissertation will mimic the extraordinary cosmopolitan life that Castellanos led by tracing her engagement with global feminisms in relation to her physical travels. In doing so, it will move in a geothematic fashion. Before Castellanos was a global citizen, she was a Mexican citizen who experienced some of the greatest changes in the country's history. As such, Chapter II begins in Mexico following its revolution and depicts Castellanos' advanced engagement with the national politics and gendered nature of her home country.

In "On the Mexican Feminist Movement: 1968-1971" I look critically at her contributions to the *crónica* genre. This chapter's contention is that through her chronicles the author becomes more invested in the institutional barriers to women's liberation. As she begins to recognize after 1968, an important year for Mexico, economic growth was deleterious for women because they were not incorporated into industries or education; in fact, she goes so far as to say that women are worse off in Mexico's strong economy because they are more domestic and more dependent on commodities through their indoctrination into nationalist discourses of beauty, homemaking, and motherhood.

Like many of her contemporaries, Castellanos was motivated by a Latin Americanist strategy to unite with other Latin Americans, and this strategy seeped into her feminist admiration of Latin American women. Chapter III, “On Latin American Women’s Writing: Canonicity and 1969,” explores how Castellanos forges a Latin American feminist genealogy primarily through her essays and journalistic articles. This Latin Americanist strategy, I argue, is also the antidote to the critical stance she has toward Mexico, as Castellanos connects with Gabriela Mistral, María Luisa Bombal, Mercedes Valdivieso, Silvina Ocampo, and Clarice Lispector. In this period of her career, Castellanos still does not see race or class in her discussion of the continent’s women-authored histories.

Chapter IV studies the year that Castellanos lived in the U.S. during the incipient stages of the U.S. Women’s Liberation Movement. “On the Anglo-American Women’s Liberation Movement: 1966-1967” navigates Castellanos’ relationship with her Anglo-American literary sisters. Her dialogues with Anglo thinkers define Castellanos’ personal practice with feminism as a middle class wife and mother. In the first part of the chapter, I study critically the influence of the Women’s Liberation Movement on Castellanos while she worked in the United States during the 1966-67 academic year at three state universities—the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Indiana University; and the University of Colorado, Boulder—through a collection of letters that she sent to her then-husband, Ricardo Guerra. Considering that she and Guerra finally divorced after Castellanos’ 1967 return to Mexico, this first part argues that Castellanos’ feminist persona was deeply changed by this year. The second part looks comprehensively at the literary admiration she had of Anglo-American authorship such as Virginia Woolf, Emily

Dickinson, Betty Friedan, and Ivy Compton-Burnett, through translation into Spanish and critical comparisons between Anglo-American and Mexican societies.

Chapter V reads Castellanos against the grain of what are traditionally known as “French feminisms.” In “On French Feminisms: Simone de Beauvoir and Simone Weil” I read Castellanos as a contemporary and equal to—not an adopter of—French feminisms. While many cultural histories consider that Castellanos is the “Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico,” I challenge the Eurocentric values behind this statement and argue for a reconsideration of the Mexican author independently of her French counterpart by pointing to the unique contributions she makes in one of her most important literary works, *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950). In the second part, I show that Castellanos how Weil influenced Castellanos’ *indigenista* literature throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

Finally, in Chapter VI, we see Castellanos’ transition from Mexico City to Tel Aviv, Israel, where she died in 1974. In “Toward a Mexican Feminist Project: *Viaje Redondo* (1971) and *El eterno femenino* (1975),” I explore the years of her life spent as the Ambassador of Mexico to Israel. In this chapter I perform close readings of two of what I consider her most evolved literary works. These two works radicalize Castellanos’ feminist stand by relocating Mexican women’s agendas to their home country. They are radical because she departs from her admiration of global feminist movements—such as the Anglo-American Women’s Liberation Movement—and begins to think about what Mexican women *need* rather than what they *lack*. Of course, the intellectual process behind these two texts is related to her own trajectory as a public intellectual, and this chapter explores how a trip to Paris in 1971 and her Ambassadorship to Israel through 1974 were the catalysts to this evolution. In ultimately learning to recenter her attention away from women of the world and back to Mexico, the author is able to identify the

problems with global feminism: that women have infinite interests and needs, and that these must be resolved by women themselves, not prescribed to them by hegemonic cultures.

Collectively, these chapters perform both close and distant readings of the entirety of Castellanos' oeuvre, including her Master's thesis, essays, letters, poetry, short stories, novels, plays, and journalistic production, in order to arrive at a panoramic view of Castellanos as a woman of the world whose interventions into global feminist discourses were significant. The title of the dissertation, *International Interventions*, suggests that she was not a passive participant in global feminist discourses. Instead, she was an active agent who regularly and confidently intervened in feminist issues of the world.

The case for reading Rosario Castellanos within the context of global feminist literature is more evident now than it has ever been. In addition to the 2016 Google doodle, *Publisher's Weekly* announced in early 2018 that Castellanos is one of 12 "essential Spanish-language feminist authors." Add this to the fact that a blockbuster biopic on Castellanos' life will be released in the U.S. after the publication of this dissertation. The film, *Los adioses*, directed by one of Mexico's leading women directors, Natalia Beristáin, is already generating an important international discussion on Castellanos' life and works in French film festivals. The fact that the Mexican woman of letters is occupying so much cultural space is proof of her importance to the contemporary period.

CHAPTER II

ON THE MEXICAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: 1968-1971

¿Quién es tu peor enemigo? El de tu oficio, dice el refrán. Y el oficio de la mujer en México, que quizá es uno de los más duros, cuando ha pretendido un equilibrio mayor entre los sexos, ha encontrado la resistencia más enconada, no entre los hombres, sino paradójicamente, entre las mismas mujeres...habría que preguntarse por qué el feminismo, que en tantos países ha tenido sus mártires y sus muy respetadas teóricas, en México no ha pasado de una actitud larvaria y vergonzante. ¿Es masoquismo? ¿Es temor al ridículo?
“Feminismo a la mexicana,” 1963

In her 1963 article, “Feminismo a la mexicana,” Rosario Castellanos contemplates the deficiencies of the Mexican feminist movement, which she characterizes as having “una actitud larvaria y vergonzante” (250). The adjectives “larvaria” and “vergonzante” deride the women’s movement in Mexico while contrasting with admirable women in “tantos países.” In Mexico, womanhood is a profession or a service—“oficio”—and women preserve the status quo because they are programmed by patriarchal society to fulfill (not challenge or define) their gender roles in Mexico. Contrary to Mexico, in foreign countries there are “mártires” and “muy respetadas teóricas.” These disparaging remarks suggest that Mexican women are to blame for their larval state, since they—not men—are the ones putting forth “la resistencia más enconada.”

In 1965, Castellanos published another unfavorable essay on the state of women in Mexico, referring again to womanhood as an “oficio.” In “Años de transición,” she compares 20th Century Mexican history to European women’s history: “Aquí los acontecimientos se desarrollaron en cámara lenta. El orden porfiriano, al romperse, hizo emigrar a muchas familias de la provincia a la capital...la señorita ociosa se

metamorfosó en criada vergonzante...Pero este oficio era ingrato” (306). Speaking autobiographically (she comes from a family that moved from “la provincia a la capital”), Castellanos criticizes the metamorphosis that occurred in the postrevolutionary period, which was not really a metamorphosis at all, since the “señorita ociosa” of the pre-revolutionary period became the “criada vergonzante” of the modern time.

“Feminismo a la mexicana” and “Años de transición” illuminate Castellanos’ early bias of Mexican women, a bias that has already been noted in critical works on the author. Poniatowska writes of Castellanos’ disparaging view of women in the prologue of *Cartas a Ricardo*, “A las mujeres se nos devalúa” (*Cartas* 21). Similarly, Gabriela Cano documents that in her 1950 Master’s thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*, the young Castellanos does not reference the first two women to receive their doctorates in the Facultad de Letras y Filosofía, Luz Vera and Paula Gómez Alonso, even though they were her professors (Prólogo 20). This is in spite of the fact that González Alonso’s dissertation, in addition to its title “La cultura femenina,” shares what Cano calls “una preocupación parecida” with *Sobre cultura femenina* (20). Castellanos’ early feminist articulations allege that her Mexican sisters have lacked a worthy feminist movement of their own without digging into the structures behind this lack.

While “Feminismo a la mexicana” serves as a starting point for Castellanos’ feminist journey by spelling out a cynical view of feminism as it has developed in Mexico (or rather, remained undeveloped if we remember the adjective “larvaria”), her later works explore more concretely the systems and processes impeding women's liberation in Mexico. After 1968, Castellanos begins to see that women are not to blame for their status as the second sex; rather, they are victims of institutions that oppress them. 1968 was a pivotal year for Mexican politics. Mexico was preparing to host the 1968 Olympics

and the subsequent 1970 World Cup while simultaneously dealing with national turmoil. After this year, her feminist project, rather than abstractly placing blame on middle class women in Mexico, tears at the institutions and processes keeping women from imagining their liberation. 1968 is a decisive moment for her feminist evolution because as a public intellectual, she realizes that the barrier to women's liberation is not laziness or disinterest. The barriers are industrialization, university educations, and Mexican cultural nationalism.

This feminist evolution is attested by one of her most famous speeches, “La abnegación: una virtud loca,” which she gave in 1971 in front of a national audience including Mexico's then-president, Luis Echeverría (1970-76). Here she declares with full intellectual maturity that, “el sexo, lo mismo que la raza, no constituye ninguna fatalidad biológica, histórica, ni social. Es solo un conjunto de condiciones...” (287). Poniatowska argues that this speech marks a point of departure: “Rosario ha dado un viraje de 180 grados: las mujeres ya no son tontas, son simplemente víctimas; (*¡Ay vida!* 90). I contend that this “viraje de 180 grados” occurred years before this speech in 1968, when she was already exhibiting a more positive take on Mexican women's potential.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, Castellanos contributed to *Excélsior* with a Sunday column. In her articles published after 1968, she condemns the institutions that maintain male supremacy: technocracy, the university, the family, television, and cinema. Castellanos' critiques had a large potential reach, given that she was publishing in a newspaper with a readership of one quarter of Mexico's population. Ignacio Corona and Beth Jörgensen in their edited collection *The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle* emphasize the powerful role *Excélsior* had in the proliferation of the genre under the direction of Julio

Scherer between 1968-1976, nearly the same period Castellanos was publishing in the newspaper.

1968 is a central year in Mexican history. Mexico City had secured the hosting rights to the 1968 Olympics and 1970 World Cup, a sign of infrastructural progress, modernization, and economic power in the eyes of the world. Similarly to student movements that agitated France and the U.S. the same year, university students protested and occupied city plazas throughout Mexico City, which was potentially harmful for the Mexican government's international image. The Olympic games were now being broadcast, and negative press could embarrass the country as it made its international entrance as a modern nation.³ Ten days before the opening ceremony, on October 2, the Mexican government—led by the authoritarian president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970)—silenced the students with a violent bloodshed known as the Tlatelolco Massacre.

Castellanos was part of a generation of intellectuals whose writings became necessarily political after the students were violently attacked. As Claire Brewster argues in *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico: The Political Writings of Paz, Fuentes, Monsiváis, and Poniatowska*, 1968 marks a shift in the role of public intellectuals Elena Poniatowska, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, and Carlos Monsiváis against the authoritarian state. Paz, in an act of dissidence to the state violence, resigned as Ambassador to India, and Castellanos published her poem “Memorial de Tlatelolco” in Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Fuentes' *Tiempo mexicano* (1972) satanized Díaz Ordaz and invited a sincere reflection on what price Mexico paid for its modernity. Likewise, Octavio Paz's *Posdata* (1970) commemorated the barbarity of the Tlatelolco events and linked it to the modes of development that were insufficient for the nation as a whole: “debemos concebir modelos

³ The first Olympic games to be broadcast were in 1960 in Squaw Valley, California.

de desarrollo viables y menos inhumanos, costosos e insensatos que los actuales” (101). Like her contemporaries studied by Claire Brewster, Castellanos’ journalistic production mimics the intellectual zeitgeist of her time and interrogates the complex processes that defined her home country.

Castellanos lived through what is known as the “Mexican miracle,” a period of mass economic development in the postrevolutionary period. She is, in many ways, an unsuspecting product of the miracle’s making, having been born in 1925 just a few years after the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). María Estela Franco writes that she comes from a family that “por mentalidad, por situación de clase, por condicionamiento ideológico, [continuaba] alentando principios prerrevolucionarios, porfiristas, tradicionales” (22). From her family’s forced uprooting in Chiapas to her exceptional academic career amid few women in la Facultad de Letras y Filosofía at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Castellanos’ biography, and the way she narrates it in her chronicles illuminates the momentous changes that unfurled across the newly stabilized republic.

Castellanos’ weekly columns mimic the genre of the *crónica*, although she has not been considered in this cultural tradition. As a genre, it sits at the intersection of fiction and non-fiction, using first-person narrative to speak to events of social importance. The *crónica* is unique to Latin America, with roots dating back to the Conquest that begin with the first writings sent from the New World. Chroniclers Cabeza de Vaca and Hernán Cortés mixed newsworthy events with first-person narration, exaggerating their conquests while communicating events of royal importance. Those initial *crónicas* morphed into an intellectual and cultural legacy that has flourished throughout the continent. In Mexico,

the *crónica* has become so important that it was institutionalized in 2006 with the Seix-Barral chronicle prize.

The *crónica* was influential in changing public opinions on issues of social importance in Mexico, particularly after 1968, a date that for many economists signifies the beginning of the end of the Mexican miracle. Carlos Monsiváis writes that the *crónica* post-1968 “allows society to take a peek at the cutting-edge customs of disorder and massification, scenarios of modernity in blue jeans and Walkman, and a sensation of chaos that is infinitely truer than any proclamation of order” (“On the chronicle” 33). Readers of the time “demand of the chroniclers a literature no longer present in journalism, a literature with more intensity, humor, fantasy, and a chaos that orders the postapocalyptic universe” (35). Juan Poblete theorizes that the *crónica* is an effective vehicle for democratization because it engages in dialogue with a marginalized public. Given that it is published in newspapers and other mass-distributed periodicals—and thus a form of popular, or “low” culture—the chronicle allows us to see, as it is best tested in Castellanos’ weekly columns, “no el *orden* sino el *desorden* de lo nacional” (emphasis Poblete’s, 48).

In the first part of this chapter, I will show how Castellanos tackles the technocratic institutions of industrial Mexico and articulates a resistance of the decline of women in this industrial development. She criticizes the dearth of women’s educations in the burgeoning Mexican economy in order to show that women do not have the social avenues to pursue their liberation. The second part will show how Castellanos resists Mexican cultural nationalism, or the way in which the state forged a sense of *mexicanidad* through culture via ownership and sponsorship of cultural products. Castellanos warns against Mexican women becoming robot-like consumers devoid of critical thinking on

their own, which keeps them marginalized as potential economic agents in their own liberation. Through her critiques of technocracy, education, and cultural nationalism, Castellanos reformulates her feminist project to see the obstacles to women's liberation in more concrete terms.

The primary sources used in this chapter are from Andrea Reyes' three-volume collection, *Mujer de palabras* (2004-07), which rescued over 330 journalistic articles from the *Excelsior* archives published almost weekly between 1963-1974. It is the second volume (1967- 1971) that most interests my analysis here, a volume that Reyes writes "se trata de un periodo muy prolífico, de renovada producción literaria, en el que libra un angustioso conflicto entre su ética humanista y la realidad política del país" (13). Reyes adds that of Castellanos' entire journalistic production, 72 of the 108 articles concerned with Mexican national politics were written in this period. While this dissertation shows Castellanos' engagement with global feminism, the present chapter analyzes her position as a Mexican citizen and woman affected by the great changes of her lifetime. The chronicles she publishes after 1968 zoom in on the institutions oppressing women, illustrating her profound engagement with her home country.

The "Mexican Miracle": Technocracy and the Poverty of Women's Educations

The "Mexican miracle," coined by Roger's D. Hansen in his widely cited and idealistic *The Politics of Mexican Development* (1971), was a period of unprecedented economic welfare (hence the miraculous part) created by wide-scale industrialization.

Between 1933-1981,⁴ the year prior to Mexico's greatest market crash, the economy grew an average of 6.13% annually, which for economists is an unimaginable (and unsustainable) figure (Aguilar Camín and Meyer 193). During this postrevolutionary period, the country experienced such great reforms and changes that historian Luis Aboites Aguilar describes them as "acaso tan profundas y radicales como las de los años que siguieron al arribo de los españoles de 1519" (262). As Gustav Ranis observed emphatically in 1974 "Pocos países en desarrollo, y ninguno de Latinoamérica, han podido igualar esta evolución extraordinaria" (22). Mexico was an anomaly across the globe and it was garnering international attention as an up-and-coming nation who had just earned the hosting rights to the 1968 Olympics.

In the eyes of Castellanos, women from her social class had great potential to play important socioeconomic roles during this period. From 1940 to roughly 1968 the country experienced a complete overhaul of the colonial landowning system into emergent nationalist technocratic industries that, in theory, created space for women to find destinies outside of the traditional, domestic sphere of the past. "En los países tecnificados," Castellanos writes in 1969, "se ofrece a la mujer la opción del desempeño de trabajos no domésticos, creadores de objetos o multiplicadores de riqueza, remunerados de un modo preciso y un dinero constante y sonante" ("Instituciones y tecnología" 316). The problem was that in Mexico economic opportunities and cultural notions of women's place in society did not evolve simultaneously. So while the

⁴ The end of the miracle is not conclusive. Soledad Loaeza notes that 1968 was the destabilizing moment of the economy, for it was the year of the student riots that culminated with the Tlatelolco Massacre and thus the end of the purported political stability. Sarah Babb dates the end of the Miracle in 1970 in *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism*. Writing in 1974, Gustavo Ranis considered the economic growth to be still current, although he did note that the miracle was becoming "bitter," to borrow from his title. Another plausible date is 1981 because it is the year prior to the greatest stock market crash of Mexican history. The 1980s would also be a decade of extreme policy shift, from the nationalist import-substitution model to the neoliberal reforms that still structure Mexico's economy.

government managed a liberal economy, supported industrial development, and put Mexico on the global map, women remained tied to conservative gender roles marginalized from economic remuneration. It was only through their relationships with men (i.e. marriage, paternal relations) that women secondarily benefited from economic development.

As the country experienced the (highly-polemic) processes of “progress” and “development” the postrevolutionary political party that encouraged these changes, the PRI, was also invested in projects that defined *mexicanidad* in order to create ideal, productive citizens. The bourgeoisie that survived the Revolution became an agent in this modernization, and it forged the postrevolutionary state, who, for its part, facilitated the accumulation of wealth in traditionally male-dominated industrial sectors, like railroad infrastructure and mines (López-Gallardo). Mexico became more urbanized, centralized, and stabilized after the turbulent Revolution. As an exemplary technocracy, the government adopted and imposed scientific, empirical methods, growing more and more invested in what we now call STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) in order to maintain this purported political and economic stability. Castellanos, a product of the miracle, and the daughter of a true technocrat, witnessed these changes beginning with the 1934 Agrarian Code that led to extreme economic restructuring across the country.

Castellanos’ writings echo others that are critical of the economic inequality produced during the miracle. The term itself, “miracle,” bears a triumphalist tone of Mexican history and assumes economic regeneration begat a betterment of all socioeconomic sectors. Among more recent scholarship, Arthur Schmidt’s influential essay, “Making it Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since

1940,” elaborates on the perils of considering the period miraculous. He calls for more skepticism toward mid-Century Mexico: “A deeper and more dynamic comprehension of Mexico’s experience since 1940 requires approaches that will integrate culture, economics, society, and the state into patterns of interaction with one another in a variety of settings: local, regional, national, and global” (24). Robert Francis Alegre’s work emerges in this disciplinary reform by historicizing the turbulent railroad labor reform that came about because of a “growing discontent among workers that Mexico’s progress had come at their expense” (1). Jocelyn Olcott has been crucial for understanding how women in particular were marginalized from the Mexican miracle in her article “Miracle Workers: Gender and State Mediation among Textile and Garment Workers in Mexico’s Transition to Industrial Development.” The main thread through these texts is that so-called economic progress was at the expense of many groups.

Castellanos experienced the miracle first-hand after she and her family were uprooted from Comitán, Chiapas, where they owned a generations-old *latifundio*. Her family lived in a rural area maintained by colonial social hierarchies and property structures, where her mother oversaw the domestic help and her father managed the Tojolobal and Tzetzal indigenous labor working the coffee-producing land. Her most distinguished novel—*Balún Canán*—is a piece of autobiographical fiction portraying Castellanos in those early years. In the novel as well as in Castellanos’ life, as it has been studied comprehensively by Cynthia Steele and Elena Poniatowska, her future as a wife and overseer of indigenous domestic employees was predetermined by her race, class, and gender. In addition to the racial hierarchies that structured her early years, she saw her gendered inferiority in her nuclear family. Castellanos felt less valuable to her parents than her brother, Benjamín. As she writes on February 20, 1971 chronicling her youth in

Chiapas, “Yo no era un niño (que es lo que llena de regocijo a las familias), sino una niña” (659). This feeling of inferiority was reinforced when her little brother died when Castellanos was eight years old. As she tragically novelizes in *Balún Canán*, the parents lamented that they lost the male heir and not the female.

In 1934, when Castellanos was 9 years old, Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas’ (1934-1940) signed the Agrarian Code, which redistributed millions of hectares to groups of rural Mexicans empowered by Emilio Zapata’s slogan “La tierra es de quien la trabaja.” Through this socialist reform, the Castellanos family would lose their *latifundio* like many other families as the state claimed the land from inherited colonial haciendas and foreign owners. The Agrarian reform created structural and territorial changes that contributed to the unfolding of the miracle because the colonial elite that lost their land moved in masses to urban centers transferring their power to emergent industries. With economic and cultural capital flowing into the country’s capital, Mexico City grew exponentially. The Castellanos family, moving to the nation’s center in 1939, was among those whose wealth was recycled in this socialist agrarian reform.

In a chronicle written on her 45th birthday, Castellanos recalls that because of Cardenas’ 1934 momentous legislation, women like herself were no longer bound to conservative destinies, since in theory there were new opportunities to work and contribute to the emergent industries. The Agrarian Code, which provoked the move from the traditional *pueblo* to the modernizing *capital*, was for her the “acontecimiento decisivo” of her life—more so than any trip, man, or pregnancy. It was her chance to be more than the wife of a landowner and, above all, to study and encourage her own intellectual development (“Lázaro Cárdenas” 482). She cannot imagine how her life would had been different had she followed the same path as her mother, and her

grandmother, and so on: “¿Qué iba a ser de mí? Antes de Cárdenas no hubiese habido ninguna duda” (483).

However, while the Mexican economy was transitioning from agriculture to industrial capitalism, Castellanos’ family resisted the integration of women in society. Castellanos remembers that in her move from Chiapas to Mexico City, her parents tried to re-orient her in her professional aspirations, insisting she should: “estudiar una carrera útil, pero que no deteriorara excesivamente mi feminidad. ¿Secretaria? ¿Química? En fin, algo que me permitiera ganarme la vida sin darme fama de *marisabidilla*” (485). A *marisabidilla*, or a “know-it-all-woman,” would be a social embarrassment. Here, chronicling the way her family embodied the larger social mores, she writes of how certain fields remained off-limits to women whose primary objective was to retain their femininity. Women’s work should instead be in the mechanical work of secretaries and chemistry technicians while avoiding possible competition with men, respecting each gender’s traditional sphere of power.

In the early 1940s Castellanos moved to Mexico City where the family settled into a middle class neighborhood, eventually enjoying enough economic and social capital to pertain to the new, Mexican upper middle class. Castellanos narrates this period of her life in the 1963 short story “Tres nudos en la red.” The three “knots in the net”—named as such because “los tres estaban siempre absortos en sus proyectos, en los incidentes diarios, en sus recuerdos. Ninguno tenía nada que compartir con nadie” (8)—ended up in the ritzy Lomas de Chapultepec in the same house Castellanos would inherit after her parents both passed away within months of one another in 1949. Her father, César Castellanos, was a Harvard-trained civil engineer who like others became the hoard of

technocrats like architects, geologists, and secretaries that shaped the Mexican labor demographic migrating en masse to Mexico City.⁵

Against her family's will, in 1946 Castellanos entered the Facultad de Letras y Filosofía, a male-dominated discipline (although not as masculine as the STEM fields), where she began her career as a philosopher and writer. Castellanos entered the university at an opportune time, since the UNAM at this time was growing exponentially to support the growing industries. Renate Marsiske provides some revealing statistics: between 1945 and 1961, the university grew from 23,000 to 68,000 students (22). Castellanos became a part of the literary group called "los 50" which included Dolores Castro, Augusto Monterroso, Sergio Galindo, Jaime Sabines, and Luisa Josefina Hernández and was named after the year they graduated together. From that point on, Castellanos would be used to being a minority among male-dominated literary circles.

Following her graduation and the 1950 defense of her Master's thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*, Castellanos traveled to Europe with her colleague and friend, Dolores Castro, after which she returned to her home in Chiapas to work with the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI, now called the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas). In this official state position, Castellanos became a member of Mexico's new modernization project to incorporate indigenous rural peoples into the state apparatus. As Carlos Navarrete shows in his analysis of her anthropological work during her years with the INI, Castellanos resigned from her post because she grew tired of the federal project of modernizing rural indigenous areas, which she saw as mere opportunism. In 1961, Castellanos returned to the UNAM to work as the University Press Secretary,

⁵ On Mexican economic and political history dominated by Harvard-educated elites, see Sarah Babb's *Managing Mexico*.

teaching courses on the side as professor of literature in the same department from which she had graduated in 1950. While it is true that she held important state positions and taught courses alongside Mexico's renowned male intellectuals, the fact that she was performing so many duties meant that her work as a woman was precarious.

Given Castellanos' long tenure at the university—which was unusual for women of her time—her chronicles point toward gender-based discrimination in education available to women, especially in STEM. Science and technology fields aided the state's heartiest industries—such as petroleum, mining, and agriculture—areas also reciprocally empowered by the state. The PRI-led government, with the intention of preparing a technocratic work force, subsidized the Mexican formal education system. Nationalized companies like PEMEX needed individuals (i.e. men) trained in mathematics, physics, chemistry, geophysics, and engineering, which effectuated the UNAM's expansion in these areas.

On March 1, 1969, in response to a report informing the public about “las aportaciones de la UNAM al desarrollo del país” (“La universidad” 242), Castellanos writes that Mexico was creating drone-like citizens in its obsession with “development.” For Castellanos, modern education signified choreographed mind-numbing detrimental to the intellectual health of all Mexicans. Despite the fact that Mexicans enjoyed industrial development, their labor and intellect were not oriented toward their self-actualization or the individual's happiness. Rather, the goal seemed to be “vivir tranquilos y prósperos en una sociedad en la que cada individuo sea un operario apto y nada más” (244). This “nada más” at the end of her analysis laments Mexicans becoming cogs in a machine without any potential to think outside of mechanical utility.

Anti-industrial remarks from a hemispheric perspective loom in the background of Castellanos' critique of technocracy, such as Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*. Marcuse's quintessential text vilifies capitalist society, making late-capitalism seem so superficial and void of critical thinking that our perception of the world becomes one-dimensional. By 1968, Marcuse's seminal text had already been published in Spanish in four publishing houses throughout Spain, Mexico, and the U.S. Castellanos' 1970 *crónica* titled "El Hombre Unidimensional: Muera la pornografía y viva lo demás" attests to Marcuse's influence and reach over the Mexican woman of letters. In this essay, Castellanos lambasts the PRI's efforts to demoralize pornography. She writes that pornography is the perfect analogy for the dehumanization of capitalism: "Todos los días, a todas horas, de todos los modos posibles se pervierte el gusto estético, se corrompe al hombre en el nivel de lo imaginario" (424). Theorists like Marcuse helped inform Castellanos' argument against the consolidation of power into the state's hands and the obsession with development and progress.

Her critique of the state's technocratic ways also echoes the interventions of Ernesto Sábato's "Hombres y engranajes" (1951), which yearned to defend the humanities in the face of over-rational sciences and a war-torn world moving into a militaristic technocracy. Worse than the *tecnificación* of the university that Castellanos abhors was that STEM fields did not welcome women's participation. In 1971, Castellanos brings awareness to the fact that a woman "posee una potencialidad de energía," and yet the workingwoman in the Mexican Miracle does not get to partake in the fruits of this labor. Castellanos prophesizes a more equal industrial horizon:

El nuevo mundo, en el que hemos de habitar y que legaremos a las generaciones que nos sucedan, exigirá el esfuerzo y la colaboración de todos. Y entre esos todos está la mujer que posee una potencialidad de

energía para el trabajo con que ya cuentan los sociólogos que saben lo que traen entre manos y que planifican nuestro desarrollo. Y a quienes, naturalmente, no vamos a hacer quedar mal. (“La participación de la mujer” 40-1)

In this prophetic conclusion, Castellanos speaks to sociologists—those who “planifican nuestro desarrollo”—urging them to recognize women as if they were an atom waiting to reach its full “potencialidad de energía.” She uses statistics (the backbone of the technocratic skeleton) because only data can trace economic progress. Here she images a reformed higher educational system, in which women can be an important part of the nation’s projects of modernization and development.

She invokes sociologists directly because sociology was a nascent field that served as the training wheels to modernization throughout the 20th Century. This is to say that sociology provided an entire field with which the state could methodically assert itself through the social sciences. Anthropology also became a field enmeshed with scientific methods, which Castellanos witnessed during her short tenure in the early 1960s with INI in Chiapas. With the economic and political stability brought by the PRI following the Mexican Revolution, sociology inherited the empirical nature of positivism that had punctuated the *porfiriato* of the turn of the Century. Mexico’s sociologists—such as Jose Vasconcelos, Samuel Ramos, and Daniel Cosío Villegas—were institutionalizing social sciences through Mexican universities and professional journals like the *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, (founded in 1939). The state had at its disposition this new field to define the social and structural logics accompanying the nation’s great changes. In other words, sociologists fulfilled a role as consultants for how to construct a society that would subscribe to the state’s modernization project.

On July 19, 1969, reflecting on a recent round table she moderated with her colleague and contemporary, Margo Glantz, Castellanos contemplates how the technocratic model interferes with the social realm of marriage. The table took as a starting point a statement: “La institución del matrimonio ha sido alterada y quizá puesta en crisis por la progresiva tecnificación de nuestro mundo” (“Instituciones y tecnología” 315). In order to address how modernization had influenced the age-old institution of marriage, she began by describing marriage in its traditional sense (“anteriores a la era tecnológica” [315]): “El matrimonio, desde sus inicios, fue considerado como la primera célula de la sociedad” (315). In other words, marriage was the basic institution that kept social order. As she writes in “Instituciones,” Mexico had entered an advanced industrial phase that rendered obsolete the institution of marriage. Recalling her youth in Comitán, she distinguishes how “production” used to be understood in terms of maintenance and survival, such as the *hacienda* that yielded necessary agricultural products. The women who worked in the home contributed to the larger social functions of childcare and food preparation.

The problem for Castellanos was that in Mexico, as the country economically and industrially modernized, the culture had yet to accept a more modern (i.e. equal) notion of husband and wife. The economy changed, but women and men did not share tasks and economic responsibility in and outside of the home. She concludes her analysis with a rhetorical question:

El esposo y la esposa del mundo tecnificado ¿podrán encontrarse, al fin, como amantes, como amigos, como colaboradores, como compañeros, o se enfrentarán como rivales, como competidores en una lucha por la supremacía y el dominio? (317)

This statement—highly autobiographical of her marital problems, as I will show in Chapter IV—summarizes the incongruence of a modernized society whose culture does not evolve with its economic, industrial profile. What she hoped for was for women to be considered partners and equals to their male counterparts, rather than a battle for “la supremacía y el dominio.” And if the husband was still not evolved to consider his wife an equal, then the woman should at least be empowered legally and socially by the option of divorce.

In 1973, in *Mujer que sabe latín*, Castellanos returns to the disparity of women in Mexican higher education (“La participación”). Again she deploys statistics—a sociological method—to count the women in the Escuela de Comercio y Administración in the UNAM that make up only 14% of the student population (29). This bleak percentage is reflected similarly outside the university in the 18% of women in the national doctor registry. Castellanos writes that while these numbers could signify that there are women who have succeeded in becoming professionals in Mexican society, statistics do not reflect cultural changes, since these women cannot get jobs. In order to show how inane it is to assume that an education equals a valuable role in society, she asks rhetorically: “¿Cuántos confían la construcción de su casa a una de las seiscientas y cuatro arquitectas que egresaron de nuestros planteles?” (35-6). Put another way, despite the fact that the nation was gaining female experts in technical fields, traditional and outdated customs continued persist, and women lived in the shadows—whether as housewives or secretaries.

Castellanos’ literature illuminates how middle class women in the Mexican miracle did not benefit from economic growth. To show this, I turn to her poem, “Economía doméstica.” In this poem, the domestic realm is guided by her mother’s

“regla de oro:” “el secreto del orden.” “Economía,” from the poem’s title, is not the same as the financial economy, one in which men generate income and participating in goods and services of a community. In this *domestic* sense, “economy” alludes to the combination of goods and services of the woman’s work, which is portrayed as messy and unforgiving.

“Economía” ridicules the daily routine of a stay-at-home middle class wife whose house is impeccable. The attention to material goods—or commodities—is imposing; we see line by line how she tidies her books, remnants of the male-dominated cultural sphere (“un apartado para las novelas / otro para el ensayo / y la poesía en lo demás”), the scents in her home (“si abres una alacena huele a espliego”), a kitchen complete with a series of appliances and utensils, and the shiny surface of everything (“de lo que sea”). The woman is efficient and productive at keeping the house neat and tidy. But in her tidiness, there are some things that don’t have a place:

Algunas cosas. Por ejemplo, un llanto
que no se lloró nunca;
una nostalgia de que me distraje,
un dolor, un dolor del que se borró el nombre,
un juramento no cumplido, un ansia
que se desvaneció como el perfume
de un frasco mal cerrado.

Y retazos de tiempo perdido en cualquier parte. (*Poesía no eres tú* 302)

Here, the order of the house is juxtaposed with the disorder of the woman’s emotional state. The poet makes this clear by listing a messy string of feelings: “llorar,” “dolor,” “borrar,” and “ansia.” This a chaos that seems out of place in flawless home. The imagery of the bottle of perfume, a symbol of modern luxury and women’s femininity, whose precious liquids evaporate into thin air, resembles the life that’s being sucked out of this woman who spends her days keeping her house perfect and attending to appearances. All of her wasted time surrounds her in *retazos*—“pieces of cloth”—she asserts at the end.

Is the woman to blame for the chaos that orders her life? Is this the larval state she found in her compatriots? No, the poem suggests, it is the institution of marriage that keeps her from true, psychospiritual liberation.

In “El queso y la ratonera: la emancipación femenina,” the autor responds to a recent speech given by Alfonso Martínez Domínguez in front of 4,000 delegates of the Tercera Reunión Nacional, which shows how political discourses of the *priista* government interfere with feminist agendas. Castellanos remembers how he expressed the party’s concern for women’s rights:

que la mujer disfrute de los mismos derechos que el hombre, con reconocerle en plenitud, no solo en palabras sino también en los hechos, en las leyes y en la vida cotidiana, su completa personalidad humana, su importancia en la economía, en las relaciones sociales, en la política y en el desarrollo de la cultura. (325)

When Castellanos examines this seemingly reasonable statement, she finds that it is empty emancipatory material. The woman imagined by the PRI politician must be the traditional homemaker of the past as well as the workingwoman. The modern dilemma is what she calls “una proeza del equilibrio.” The new Mexican woman must still be the “ángel del hogar” of the 19th Century, since men have not undertaken any of the shared domestic responsibilities that should be assumed in a more egalitarian technocratic society. In a middle class workingwoman’s hypothetical day, she must rise at dawn to assure the “cuidado físico, moral e intelectual de sus hijos en proceso de desarrollo y a los problemas que le plantea su trabajo” (326). It is an impossible situation to imagine, she concludes, considering the expectations of women in this new time for Mexico to be virtuous wives *and* industrious workers consumers.

The title of this article—“El queso y la ratonera”—reminds us of how Castellanos sees women’s participation in Mexico: as a mousetrap set by the ruling political party. For

Castellanos, Martínez's speech did not promote liberation in the psychospiritual sense of liberty or the cultural renovation that would free women from antiquated gender norms; rather, it sold false idealizations of the working middle class woman who can do it all. The pretentious content and empty promises of the speech are exemplary of the systematic co-optation of feminist discourses by the political machinery. As this chronicle and others show, Castellanos is attentive to the larger systemic problems—such as technocracy and education—that are manipulating and impeding women's liberation.

Postrevolutionary Mexico and Cultural Nationalism

The PRI-led postrevolutionary government in Mexico invested much energy into cultural nationalism, or the nation-building project of *mexicanidad* through art, architecture, literature, cinema, and music (Vaughn and Lewis). The state funded cultural industries and influenced the content and messages being disseminated about Mexico's national identity, including race, class, and gender. The rapid technocratization of the country touched on in the first part of this chapter heralded a discourse of *mexicanidad* that Castellanos resisted heavily. Her *crónicas* work to counteract national rhetoric and she uses first person anecdotes to talk about larger social problems that relate to women's lives. Identifying the dangers of the PRI-led nationalist project, she perceives what Pedro García-Caro has called “a consensual nationalist discourse promoted by the national bourgeoisie” (34). In the eyes of Castellanos, rather than community building, the PRI's nationalist discourse creates a community of robots, precluding the emancipation of Mexican women.

Castellanos's critiques of nationalism anticipate some of the Marxist feminist theories that would scrutinize women's relationships with developing countries

throughout the 20th Century. Maria Mies talks about the “housewifization” of women, arguing, “Not only had the household been discovered as an important market for a whole new range of gadgets and items, but also scientific home management had become a new ideology for the further domestication of women” (185). Here, Mies reminds us of how the gendered national identity—the same one Castellanos is resisting in her *crónicas*—is crafted through an intricate network of power that begins with the state’s control over cultural production. We can attribute much of the “housewifization” of Mexican middle class women to PRI’s control of public culture, such as television (*telenovelas*), cinema, and other mass media.

In 1970, in the midst of the World Cup currently being held in Mexico City, Castellanos finds nationalism “*peligroso*” and “*absurdo*” when the unity of the nation is nothing but “*un estado de ignorancia*” (“*México, México*” 497). Nationalism is a “*contagio*,” she writes, and she points to the emptiness of the signifier “*México*,” whatever that may mean: “*México*” is just a noun comprised of three syllables that does not encompass a whole people, country, or history, she says. Years before Benedict Anderson coined his “*imagined community*” in 1983, Castellanos was concerned with the top-down political and cultural discourse of print-capitalism and the state’s influence and efforts to forge a modern nation through mass media.

Mexico’s project of cultural nationalism was facilitated by mass media, such as cinema, literature, and print media. Particularly for women, magazines promoted a strict gendered domestic identity. Elvia Montes de Oca Navas studies three women’s magazines from 1930-1950—*El hogar, la revista de las familias*; *La familia, revista de labores para el hogar*; and *Paquita, la revista de la mujer y del hogar*—finding that political or international events were outright absent. Instead, these magazines reduced women’s interests to three

areas: “consejos para el buen funcionamiento del hogar, así como para la salud y el bienestar de la familia, cuidado de la moda y la buena apariencia de las mujeres, acertijos y novelas” (147). In other words, women were groomed toward ideological and aesthetic values of femininity. During the years of the Miracle, while literacy rates were still uneven, these ideologically conservative magazines were oriented toward middle- and upper-class women of urban areas.

Cinema, television, and radio were indispensable for the forging of a sense of national belonging beyond women who read these magazines (rates of literacy were low). The PRI subsidized the film industry with a momentous code in 1949, motivated by President Miguel Alemán who simultaneously secured political support. The PRI “wanted to both support—primarily through restricting competition from foreign films and providing funding—and control” (Zolov 262). From this governmental subsidizing *La época de oro* was born, the thriving period of cinematic production between 1936-1959. Mexican audiences consumed blockbuster films such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936), *María Candelaria* (1943), gender normalizing stories about women’s passive roles in society. These films, subsidized by the government, show how the PRI-led government actively supported traditional gender roles.

Cinema is what Castellanos calls “la fábrica de sueños” in her 1969 chronicle. In the opening lines of “Hecho en México: la fábrica de sueños,” Castellanos recalls the recent screening of *El Santo en el tesoro de Drácula*. She watched the crowd become automatons, who, via cultural osmosis, absorbed the narrative of a Mexican Count Dracula seducing beautiful and indefensible women. Although she recognizes how the film sexualizes the female protagonists, Castellanos is more focused on the on the film’s reception rather than its representation. The audience, hooked, will return: “Volverá.

Seguirá nutriendo su imaginación, su inteligencia, su gusto estético con los delicados manjares que le ofrece la muy patriótica industria cinematográfica” (377). Her comment here speaks to the robotic national audiences who acquire *mexicanidad* through a seemingly noninvasive procedure orchestrated to the state’s benefit, showing that Castellanos was attentive to the ways in which nationalism was omnipresent in the day-to-day consumerism of culture by Mexicans.

Another audiovisual medium through which nationalism was forged in Mexico is the television, which during the Miracle became the most fundamental household appliance. It was a spectacle shared by all Mexicans regardless of geography, class, or race. Anahí Ballent points out that between 1960 and 1970 the percentage of households with televisions almost doubled, increasing from 42% to 73% (56). In addition to the material increase of the television, there was an air of patriotism surrounding this medium because a Mexican, Guillermo González Camarena, invented the first tricolor television in 1939. To no surprise, the state was also influential in the television market by creating a clientelist relationship with mass communications companies. The Mexican long-standing media corporation, Televisa, has exerted almost monopolist influence on television rights by being favorable to the PRI and giving the political party rights and access in return.

According to Castellanos, the television—or what she calls the “Caja Idiota,” mimicking the word “Idiot Box” that was popular in the U.S. during the 1960s—is one of the ways in which women are lulled from their consciousness. In “Las delicias del hogar,” a self-critical Castellanos admits her own relationship with the little screen: “Me he convertido en una adicta a la televisión” (413). The article from January 31, 1970 describes a typical day of the indoctrination of nationalism while passing the hours at

home. She explores the power of television to reproduce the national ideals of race and gender that occur in her own home. The television, as is to be expected, is placed in the most sacred of feminine spaces—the kitchen, or “el territorio que es propiedad exclusiva de la cocinera” (410)—and Castellanos spends much of her day alongside her unnamed domestic help (*la cocinera*) as the two robotically absorb the misogynist messages affirming male domination and female self-sacrifice through *telenovelas*. As she notes in her chronicle, not only does television sell a prototype of woman—passive, commodified, and dependent on a strong male character—television is also a medium that traverses class lines, as the servant characters on the *telenovelas* are cohabitating with their *señoras*, a scene mirroring Castellanos and her domestic servant in the kitchen. Castellanos sees middle class women on the small screen sitting next to their hard-working (and darker-faced) employees at the same time she looks over at her own. This sort of “fractal moment,” or the realization that this is a never ending pattern, allows Castellanos to see herself as a cog in the larger cultural machine.

Her poem, “Telenovela,” similarly invokes the power of the Gran Caja Idiota with a family that routinely and robotically gathers to watch the soap opera du jour: “El sitio que dejó vacante Homero / el centro que ocupaba Scherezada / ... ahora está ocupado por la Gran Caja Idiota.” In this poem, television performs the social function of storytelling that historically demanded intellectual faculties and interpersonal interactions. What interests the poetic voice about these these soap operas are women’s relations with one another: On screen a didactic nurse lectures a doctor’s wife, a daughter is ashamed of her widowed mother’s work as a seamstress, and other women interact disparagingly. But rather than call them larval, these women are programmed to have “hermosos sueños prefabricados” (326).

The poetic language imitates a woman's agitated and violent language when the advertisements appear:

Y hay que comprar, comprar, comprar, comprar.
Porque compra es sinónimo de orgasmo,
porque compra es igual que beatitud,
porque el que compra se hace semejante a los dioses. (325)

The repetition of “comprar,” emphasizes the unintellectual act of watching television, while the “orgasmo” refers to the idea that women's sexuality is repressed while their desire for commodities is encouraged. Like the story Castellanos chronicles in *Excélsior* about her on-the-surface solidarity with the woman working in her home, the “señora y sierva” who sit and watch the same televised program, “declaran abolidas diferencias de clase / y ahora son algo más que iguales: cómplices” (325). This last word—“cómplice”—shows how television controls their social interactions: In reality, the two women's lives are predetermined by class differences, but the telenovela “abolishes” these differences.

Perhaps Castellanos had read Marshall McLuhan's pioneering *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) in which McLuhan condemns what he calls the “commercial education” of capitalist, robotic production in the post-War period.⁶ As he writes in *The Mechanical Bride* about the costumed nature of the capitalistic powers, “Today, the tyrant rules not by club or fist, but, disguised as a market researcher, he shepherds his flocks in the ways of utility and comfort” (vi). This is reminiscent of Gramsci's definitions of hegemony that think about power as invisible yet omnipresent. McLuhan's analysis of the nearly uncurbed power of the modern media conglomerates laments the simultaneous consumerism and loss of intellect, wondering how the consumer can escape from the mechanical method of life ushered in modern technology. Understanding Luhan in light of Castellanos' poem is

⁶ By 1970, McLuhan's seminal texts, *El medio es el mensaje: un inventario de afectos* and *Contraexplosión*, were translated into Spanish in 1967 and 1969 respectively.

crucial to understanding that Castellanos saw capitalism as an institution that hindered Mexican women's rights.

In "Cosas de mujeres: actividad y participación," Castellanos re-contemplates Mexican feminist history. Contrary to the way she called Mexican women undeveloped in 1963 and 1965, in "Cosas de mujeres" there is a positive and salvageable narrative of the history of Mexican feminism: "las mujeres mexicanas fueron, poco a poco, ampliando el campo de sus actividades y de su influencia" (250). Mexican women have attempted to gain equality in the institutions that circumscribe them. They have tried to maintain "un precario equilibrio entre las opuestas exigencias de la vida familiar y la vida profesional" (251). And they have succeeded in pushing the limits of their "actividad y participación," to pull from her chronicle's title. And yet, women have still not been fully accepted as social equals. Thus, it is not their fault but rather the lack of social and cultural support that encourages their equality.

One of the institutions that Castellanos sees as problematic to this end is the award, "Mujer del año," which since 1960 is awarded by the government. She names all ten women who have received the award from 1960-69, summarizing that they illustrate "la variedad y la vastedad de las actividades a las que se dedica, con éxito, la mujer" (252). But for Castellanos, the award is offensive: "El triunfo pertenece a todas...Pero, entre esta multitud útil y valiosa, se elige a una que se considera como la encarnación del mérito de las demás para premiarlo en ella" ("Cosas de mujeres" 251). While the PRI uses it to show support for women, the criteria with which they choose are consistent with patriarchal values, which survive by putting women in competition with one another. The women selected for "Mujer del año" have not found liberation from gender

discrimination; rather, the award is a political gesture that only reinforces the prescriptive characteristics of the “oficio” of womanhood in Mexico.

Castellanos uses this introduction to arrive at what the article is really about: Luz María Díaz-Caneja, a young woman who wants to start a news agency, is in the news for having her business plans rejected by the state. Authorities are demanding she make transparent her reasons and her resources for initiating her business because the government assumes that “No es posible que ella, una mujer, posea los medios económicos para llevar a cabo su proyecto” (252). Díaz-Caneja, according to Castellanos, is a martyr who dually exemplifies the possibility of upward movement and the unlikelihood of it happening, not because of her own doing, but rather because of the institutional resistance she encounters. Far from being “larval,” Díaz-Caneja is a model of women’s ambition and entrepreneurial success.

One historian, Anna Macías, shares Castellanos’ skepticism about women’s activism in mid-Century Mexico in her book, *Against All Odds: the Feminist Movement in Mexico until 1940*. The book spans some of the most important political mobilizing efforts of women throughout the 19th Century and the early 20th Century, such as the 1916 Primer Congreso Feminista held in Mérida. Macías delimits the book’s scope to 1940 because during her period of research she noted that “the role and situation of most Mexican women I knew, whether of upper, middle, or lower class, had not changed dramatically from 1954 to 1971, despite their attainment of suffrage in 1953” (xi). Macías offers six reductive explanations of the “odds” facing women and causing the interruption of the feminist movement: 1) systemic machismo; 2) the influence of the Church; 3) competing factions within the movement; 4) alienation from governmental support; 5) ridicule from the press; and finally, 6) class: they were mainly professional, middle class

women who were working, and thus had “too little time or energy to devote to organizing a movement and raising the consciousness” (xv).

Castellanos would not agree that between 1940-1970 women were silent because they had “too little time or energy to devote to organizing a movement and raising the consciousness.” Castellanos’ literature argues that it was economic prosperity that prevented a noteworthy movement in Mexico because of the way women were subject to the institutional powers around them. This is a sentiment she shares in her famous article “La liberación de la mujer, aquí.” Here, Castellanos summarizes the poor expression of a Women’s Liberation Movement in Mexico in comparison with that occurring in the U.S.: “Todos se refieren a este Movimiento de liberación de la mujer en los Estados Unidos como si estuviera ocurriendo en el más remoto de los países” (352). But, she asks, “Es que no hay mujeres entre nosotros?” The difference, she notes, is that material advances seemed to paradoxically keep women from their liberation:

Yo les advierto que las mujeres mexicanas estamos echando vidrio acerca de lo que hacen nuestras primas y estamos llevando un apunte para cuando sea necesario. Quizá no ahora ni mañana. Porque el ser parásito (que es eso lo que somos, más que unas víctimas) no deja de tener sus encantos. Pero cuando el desarrollo industrial del país nos obligue a emplearnos en fábricas y oficinas, y a atender la casa y los niños y la apariencia social y etc., etc., etc., entonces nos llegará la lumbre a los aparejos. Cuando desaparezca la última criada, el colchoncito en que ahora reposa nuestra conformidad, aparecerá la primera rebelde furibunda. (67)

In Castellanos’ prophetic vision, the middle class woman is a “parasite,” although it is not her fault: it is the result of industrial society. Rather than being larval, Mexican women are “echando vidrio acerca de lo que hacen nuestra primas” and “llevando un apunte para cuando sea necesario.” The middle class lifestyle includes a nanny, a cook, and

cleaner and it is only when women can no longer afford these luxuries that they will see more visibly the gender-based oppression surrounding them.

Conclusion

The economic growth known as the Mexican miracle was far from miraculous for women, as Castellanos' *crónicas* from the time period illustrate. The miraculous character of the Mexican economy, she diagnoses, provided an economic advantage exclusive to the (male) postrevolutionary elite while middle class women were socially isolated through multiple processes, such as consumerism and nationalism. Discouraged from intellectual pursuits, women became consumers of culture through the omnipresent nationalist rhetoric in cinema and television.

Castellanos' life story attests to these great changes in Mexican history and she uses this autobiographical approach to challenge women's marginal roles in modern Mexico: In weaving her life as a Chiapas native, university and state employee, and public intellectual with her literature, we see how, as Mexico transitioned from a land-owning, post-colonial society to an industrial one, women were sidelined from this story.

Reading Castellanos as a loud and frequent dissenter of the postrevolutionary Mexican government and its associated nationalist rhetoric sets the stage for her interest in the rest of the world. She analyzed Mexico with acute awareness of her own isolation as a woman intellectual. While her early feminist denunciations are disparaging towards Mexican women, her feminist project evolves: she sees that women are not perpetrators of their own subjugation, but rather victims of the institutions that oppress them. As she is exploring the causes behind the absent feminist movement in Mexico, Castellanos will reach to global feminist literature to explore alternative modes of creating a liberatory,

feminist spirit in her home country. Ultimately, as I will show in Chapter VI, Castellanos' later works address more concretely how Mexican women should define their needs, which will include the intersections of race and class. In her chronicles from 1968-1971, these intersections are still not on Castellanos' radar.

CHAPTER III

ON LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITING: CANONICITY AND 1969

En la América hispana, continente que aún se encuentra, como decía el conde de Keyserling, en el tercer día de la creación, la figura de la mujer que pugna por liberarse de las tenazas “fuertes y a la vez dulces del patriarcado” (como las calificara Alfonsina Storni, una de las víctimas de este sistema) apenas comienza a dibujarse.
“Historia de una mujer rebelde,” 1965

In August 1969, Rosario Castellanos traveled to Viña del Mar, Chile for the Encuentro Latinoamericano de Escritores, where she and Juan Rulfo would be the only Mexican authors to sign a resolution on the renewed role of the Latin American writer. In her account, from a chronicle published on August 28, the Encuentro was a polemic meeting. Intellectuals such as Angel Rama, Juan Carlos Onetti, and Emmanuel Carballo (who left the meeting as a political statement against the Chilean government's friendliness with the U.S.) contemplated the “condición y función social de los escritores en nuestros países” as well as questions of readership, like illiteracy, the absence of criticism, and “los nuevos lenguajes del hombre que transmiten los medios masivos de comunicación” (“Encuentro de escritores” 339). The official resolution, signed on August 27, evoked a new horizon for Latin American writers:

Se ha gestado en estos tiempos en América Latina una literatura que alcanza hoy categoría de consideración universal. Ello se debe al hecho de que nuestro continente tiene una palabra cardinal que decir en la lucha por su liberación. Los escritores deben asumir en esta tarea un papel de vanguardia. Por razones éticas e intelectuales, han de llevarlo hasta sus últimas consecuencias, como hombres y como creadores. (341-42)

It was an era of literary flourishing later known as the Latin American Boom in which authors were empowered by their new “categoría de consideración universal.” Two years before the meeting in 1967, Gabriel García Márquez published *Cien años de soledad* in

(which was translated into English in 1970) and the novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias won the Nobel Prize in Literature that same year.⁷ There at the Encuentro, writers like Castellanos, who had already grown disillusioned with Mexican national politics after the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre, strategically aligned with Latin America as a broader intellectual community “en la lucha por su liberación.”

Following her stay in Viña del Mar, Castellanos traveled to Argentina, Brazil, and Peru, where, taking seriously her renewed role as a Latin American, she chronicled the political climate of each country. On September 6, she condemned the “prensa servil al gobierno” in Argentina’s current dictatorial state (“Argentina [I] 345), while on September 13 she decried the Argentine state’s censorship of books and jailing of intellectuals (“Argentina [II]). On September 20, she wrote about her stay in Brazil: “Como aquí—lo mismo que allá y acullá—la prensa está censurada, las noticias son vagas y contradictorias” (“Brasil” 350). After Brazil she traveled to Machu Picchu, where her tours were given in English, because “el turista es de origen anglosajón y las excepciones no cuentan” (“Del turismo” 354). In these five consecutive articles, Castellanos compares the unique processes of each country while finding parallels with all Latin American nations based on their shared political, linguistic, and religious histories.

Castellanos was a literary ambassador (not yet a political ambassador) with a great deal of cultural capital by this time, as her invitation to Chile attests. And yet she was often one of few (if any) women. Although Castellanos does not note this, Marta Traba, the Argentine critic, was the only other woman present at the Encuentro in Chile (Albuquerque). As I will show in Chapter IV, she had spent 1966-67 traveling around

⁷ Asturias was the second Latin American writer to receive the prestigious prize. Gabriela Mistral was the first recipient in 1945.

the U.S. as a visiting professor joining her contemporaries, such as José Donoso and Octavio Paz. Because Castellanos was a woman intellectual with a renewed dedication to the Latin American cause, the Encuentro and the Latin Americanist spirit it spawned in her would lead her to a larger exploration of Latin American women's writing.

On June 27, 1970, almost one year after her trip to Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Peru, Castellanos begins to rethink that Latin American literature means “la literatura que se destina a los hombres,” which is not to be confused with “lecturas para mujeres” (“Lecturas para mujeres” 498). In this chronicle, “Lecturas para mujeres: Queredlas cual las hacéis,” Castellanos explains that “En la literatura, como en la vida misma, existen tres subdivisiones” (498). While men read “literature” and children’s literature is important for the foundations of future society, women are subjected to weekly magazines whose contents reveal “una limitación y una monotonía atroces” (499). Literature about fashion, interior design, or fairytale romance, she argues, does not offer a liberatory space for women. On the contrary, this kind of content “nos recomienda que nos hagamos guajes” (499). This word, “guaje,” or “stupid” in Mexican dialect, is for Castellanos why a more ethical women’s literature needs to be established.

“Lecturas para mujeres” is a wager for a reformed Latin American women’s canon: “Todavía nos queda a nosotras, lectoras de estas lecturas para mujeres, *la pièce de resistance*: la novela que nosotras, sentimentales, sensibles y sensitivas, nos merecemos” (500). With the phrase “*la pièce de resistance*,” literature—and particularly the novel—becomes a powerful cultural tool with which women can resist gender inequality. Women of Latin America are signaled through the intertextual reference, “sentimentales, sensibles y sensitivas,” an alliterative sentence from Rubén Darío’s autobiographical poem, “Cantos de vida y esperanza.” Darío is the undisputed founder of the first Latin

American literary movement, *el modernismo*, and in using his words, Castellanos gestures for a reconsideration of women's place in Latin American literature. What Latin American women deserve ("nos merecemos") is a literature by, for, and about women.

In this chronicle, Castellanos rethinks women-authored literature by revering two Latin American women authors: the Chilean Gabriela Mistral and the Novohispanic Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz. The chronicle's title blends Mistral's celebrated anthology *Lecturas para mujeres* with a quote without recognition from Sor Juana's famous poem "Hombres necios que acusáis." For Castellanos, *Lecturas para mujeres* is a good first draft of a manifesto for women's participation in literature, but it needs some revision. Mistral's text, one of the most widely circulated books of the era and one which made an impact in state-funded education in Mexico, begins with the assertion, "Ya es tiempo de iniciar entre nosotros la formación de una literatura femenina" (9). However, Castellanos shows that many of the texts published in the anthology are authored by men and for this reason they normalize women's roles as homemakers and mothers. *Lecturas para mujeres* was commissioned by the male-dominated Secretaría de Educación in Mexico, led by José Vasconcelos, a branch of the postrevolutionary government's cultural program that fostered literacy programs. For Castellanos, the lasting significance of *Lecturas para mujeres* is that it was one of the first missions to think about literature by women, for women, about women, even if it did so inconclusively.

The second part of Castellanos' title—"Queredlas cual las hacéis"—refers to the third to last stanza of Sor Juana's canonical poem, "Hombres necios." In Sor Juana's poem, the speaker tells men to "Queredlas cual las hacéis / o hacedlas cual las buscáis," lambasting how men construct fantasies of women that are never satisfactorily embodied by flesh-and-blood women. Between Mistral's impulse to attract women readers and Sor

Juana's critique of men's representations of women, Castellanos uses these two authors to represent the inklings of a gendered Latin American literary tradition that she intends to continue. Castellanos recognizes their impulse toward a literature by and for women in Spanish, and pledges to continue that task, thus positioning herself as an heir of both Sor Juana and Mistral and undertaking the social responsibility of creating more realistic representations that women "nos merecemos."

As I will argue in this chapter, the Encuentro in Chile and her consecutive travels to Argentina, Brazil, and Peru demonstrate a change in Castellanos' intellectual profile in which she begins to look beyond Mexico to a larger imagined Latin American literary community. After this literary gathering, Castellanos intended to craft a Latin American women's canon that challenged patriarchal imaginings, and Mistral and Sor Juana are two of the most important protagonists. While Mistral's text collects men and women authors disproportionately, Castellanos believes that women should be writing the very texts they read and that just being a woman author is not enough. In addition to celebrating certain authors, she also actively defines what makes them remarkable against their contemporaries: literature that consciously liberates women from traditional domestic roles.

However, even though Castellanos' project intends to recognize certain Latin American women, her project is limited: these imaginings bring together women of the continent, but her Latin American canon still does not see the intersections of class and race that will mark her final years in Israel. Castellanos reaches to the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile) to Chilean authors Gabriela Mistral, Mercedes Valdivieso, and María Luisa Bombal; the Argentine Silvina Ocampo; the Uruguayan Ulalume González de León; and the Brazilian Clarice Lispector as her literary

contemporaries and inspirations. In other words, she reaches to Latin American women who are white, upper class, and cosmopolitan like herself. Furthermore, the authors she celebrates are from some of the same South American countries she visited in 1969, while other parts of Latin America, like Peru, Bolivia, the Caribbean, and Central America remain voiceless in her feminist project.

Of course, a Latin American canon is also the remedy to Castellanos' precarious relationship with the Mexican canon. Castellanos writes that in the 19th Century "La galería de retratos femeninos no es muy abundante, muy variada ni muy profunda si nos atenemos a textos literarios escritos en México" ("La mujer mexicana" 159). The first part of this chapter details how Castellanos' early writings re-evaluate the Mexican canon, which was created and maintained by men. When she recovers Sor Juana, Dolores Castro, Concha Urquiza, Margarita Michelena, Pita Amor, Josefina Vicens, and Luisa Josefina Hernández, she highlights how male critics have determined their value and she offers counter-evaluations of her literary contemporaries. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, her engagement with the Mexican canon is conservative, as she tends to analyze her friends and contemporaries without forging a broader community of Mexican women authors.

The second part of this chapter will focus on Castellanos' evolving admiration for women from the Southern Cone. Castellanos forges a canon comprising of Gabriela Mistral, María Luisa Bombal, Mercedes Valdivieso, Silvina Ocampo, Ulalume González de León, and Clarice Lispector, finding similarities with them as a member of a Latin American citizen. While Mistral occupies a lot of Castellanos' attention in the early 1960s, she later grows more invested in under-explored women, such as those she incorporates into her essay collection, *Mujer que sabe latín*.

The majority of the texts analyzed in this chapter come from four collections of essays and articles in which she dialogues with Latin American women authors: *Declaración de fe* (1959, published posthumously in 1995), *El uso de la palabra* (1966), articles from her weekly column in *Excélsior* (1969-70), and *Mujer que sabe latín* (1972). In the first two collections, from 1959 and 1966, we see Castellanos engaged with the Mexican women's canon and its problems. But after 1969, when she appears to have found a broader Latin American literary community, Castellanos challenges her earlier utterances on women-authored literature in Hispanoamerica: Rather than focusing on how men have been influential in defining women's literature, she invests her energy in defining these women for herself. And as a Latin American intellectual engaged ethically with the continent as a whole, her selections and commentaries mark early interventions into Latin American feminism.

The Mexican Women's Canon

For Castellanos, Mexican literary history must start with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Born Juana de Asbaje, the Novohispanic autodidact who entered the convent in San Jerónimo where, through reading and writing (in Latin and Nahuatl), she grew to fame for her writings which dealt with topics like love, feminism, and religion. While Sor Juana is not Mexican, given that Mexico did not exist until its independence from Spain in 1810, she has been incorporated into the Mexican literary canon as a foundational, yet highly censored figure.

As Julia Cuervo-Hewitt has already said, Castellanos looks to the nun as “predecesora y modelo ante cuyo espejo se contempla” (136). Cuervo-Hewitt's essay

details more specifically how Castellanos, a 20th-Century woman, compares herself to Sor Juana, a nun in colonial times:

Ante el espejo que le ofrece Sor Juana, especialmente en su defensa al derecho de estudiar y de conocer, Castellanos retoma el tema de la exclusión y de el conocimiento, y lo lleva a un contexto diferente, el doméstico, para reflexionar en la creación literaria de la mujer, su derecho al patrimonio del conocimiento, la condición de la mujer tres siglos después de Sor Juana, y especialmente, sobre los conflictos en el Siglo XX en torno a la libertad del ser. (137)

Here Cuervo-Hewitt explains how, despite the seemingly disparate historical contexts divided by three centuries, women in the 20th Century are still fighting for legitimation in cultural and intellectual spheres. This is something Castellanos suggests in her poem, “Autorretrato” through a poetic voice who illustrates the uselessness of education available to women. She writes:” “Soy una señora: tratamiento / arduo de conseguir, en mi caso, y más útil / para alternar con los demás que un título / extendido a mi nombre en cualquier academia” (*Poesía no eres tú* 297). While there are obvious differences between Sor Juana’s and Castellanos’ time, the point she is trying to make in the opening lines of “Autorretrato” is that women’s intellectual achievements have been treated as secondary to women’s social status as wives and mothers. In the eyes of Castellanos, women were subject to the same fossilized gender norms from the colonial period, particularly their distanced role from the production of culture.

While Castellanos sees some of herself in Sor Juana, she also uses Sor Juana as the perfect example of how men manipulate women’s images in cultural production. In her 1966 essay, “Asedio a Sor Juana,” Castellanos revisits three biographies, which she considers hagiographies, of the Novohispanic woman: 19th and 20th Century interpretations by Amado Nervo, Ermilo Abreu Gómez, and Octavio Paz. Her thesis here is that male-authored scholarship has made Sor Juana a symbol of Mexico’s historic

and mythological past by studying her alongside la Virgen de Guadalupe. In these biographies, Sor Juana “ha despertado la imaginación de nuestros escritores,” which causes erroneous and unethical approaches to her life and works by completely eliding her talents as a writer (19).⁸ In his 1983 biography of the nun, Paz posits that Sor Juana’s beauty was more important than her intellectual pursuits: “¿Por qué escogió, siendo joven y bonita, la vida conventual?” (662). This citation is a glaring example of patriarchal readings that show that Sor Juana was not evaluated for being a great writer; she was a pretty face for men to admire.

Castellanos writes that among the few Sor Juana biographies penned by men none actually consider Sor Juana’s literary texts as primary sources. These biographies tend to mute her subjectivity and instead examine her work through a patriarchal paradigm: Was she saintly? Was she a victim of her society in which the only option was to become a nun? Was she pressured by the authorities to end her short career and remove herself from the public sphere? Castellanos’ response to these questions restores Sor Juana’s ability to strategize: “Mejor digamos cálculo. Cálculo hecho entre la espada y la pared” (20). Castellanos proposes an appreciation of Sor Juana by *reading* her, through interpretation independently of some male scholar’s guidance. For Castellanos, as well as for current scholars, Sor Juana should not be treated as a dead, saintly nun but as a

⁸ It is unclear which text by Paz she is referring to; it was probably a preliminary presentation of what Paz would later develop in his 1983 biography, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las Trampas de la Fe*.

woman whose texts are proof of her embodied, lived experience that still speak to us in the present moment.⁹

In her 1966 essay, “Otra vez Sor Juana,” an essay meant as a follow-up to “Asedio a Sor Juana,” Castellanos distinguishes Sor Juana from the other two women who dominate the Mexican cultural imaginary—La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe—each of whom “representa un símbolo, ejerce una vasta y profunda influencia en sectores muy amplios de la nación y suscita reacciones apasionadas tanto de adhesión como de rechazo” (26). Castellanos was writing in the wake of Octavio Paz’s canonical essay titled “Los hijos de la Malinche” (1950) which had framed her as Hernán Cortés’ indigenous wife and translator who, for better and for worse, gave birth to the first Mexican mestizo and “betrayed” the Aztecs and paved the way for 300 years of Spanish colonialism. The other important figure was La Virgen de Guadalupe, the maternal, chaste, and *mestizo* Virgen Mary unique to Mexico’s cultural and religious history.

Castellanos’ argument in “Otra vez Sor Juana” underscores the irony in comparing Sor Juana with La Virgen de Guadalupe or La Malinche. The Virgen is a mythical religious character and the Malinche left no literary or subjective vestiges for the Mexican people, her voice being completely erased from material archives. In fact, the only words attributed to the Malinche by Paz are those that she translated for male

⁹ Castellanos’ worries were not without merit: Sor Juana’s legacy in Mexico continues to be informed by Paz’s 1983 *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe*. Mónica Lavín’s recent publication, *Sor Juana en la cocina* (2015), for example, relies on Paz’s text. The fact that she resorts to a masculine authority when there is a plethora of scholarship written by women attests to how Sor Juana’s importance is subject to patriarchal authority by default. Amanda Powell, in “Passionate Advocate: Sor Juana, Feminisms, and Sapphic Loves,” agrees with the idea that Sor Juana is read through men’s eyes when she writes “within a patriarchal literary-cultural framework, Sor Juana served more as a cautionary note than a vaunted model for young women aspiring to literary or intellectual achievement” (7).

figures of the Conquest, but those words are negatively associated given that, according to the patriarchal cultural logic, she used them to betray her people and collaborate in the Spanish colonial project. Sor Juana is neither a symbol nor a tenet on which to construct a moralizing national rhetoric, but a woman author who, if only we could see her as such, would teach us about women's self-fulfillment then and now: "¿No sería más justo pensar que Sor Juana, como cualquier humano, tuvo una columna vertebral, que era su vocación, y que escogió entre todas las formas de su vida a su alcance aquella que contaba con más probabilidades de realizarla?" (30). In other words, if we are accustomed to denying her experiences as a real, flesh-and-blood woman we are denying similarly the experiences of those today. Sor Juana "no es camino de santidad sino método de conocimiento," and it is through reading her that one can find her own "método de conocimiento" (34).

Sor Juana is explored in depth in Castellanos' 1959 essay, "La mujer en el mundo novohispano." This is a text has been called "uno de los ensayos más lúcidos sobre la monja, sobre sus motivos literarios y extraliterarios" (Mejía 12). Here she argues the case that Sor Juana was not a nun for religious reasons, but because it was how she could carry on her social duty of writing. Castellanos notes that the nun spoke for "el indio, con 'las dulces cláusulas del mexicano lenguaje'; el negro, balbuciente como un niño; el bachiller pedante, el poeta pobre, el hombre de campo, humilde encuentran voz. Y la dama y el galán de la aristocracia" (62). For Castellanos, this sense of duty to the voices who under Spanish colonial rule could not speak for themselves is proof of how seriously Juana treated her public vocation as a writer. She depended on the church for her intellectual pursuits in order to write for those who could not write, not for spiritual guidance or religious fulfillment, a thesis that undermines any purely mystical interpretation of her.

Finally, Sor Juana emerges in Castellanos' literary works. Her poem "Meditación en el umbral" uses Sor Juana of the lived experience to show that we idealize her as an extraordinary woman without glimpsing into the painful parts of her life, such as "concluir las leyes geométricas contando / las vigas de la celda de castigo, / como lo hizo sor Juana" (328). This reference asks us to look at the nun's suffering rather than to glorify her, which humanizes her by showing the complexities of her character, including the bad with the good.

Sor Juana also appears in two other texts that I will analyze in more detail in Chapter VI. The first is the poem "Mirando a la Gioconda," in which Sor Juana is the face of Mexican women looking at Mona Lisa's similarly enigmatic face. The second time Sor Juana appears as a literary figure is in *El eterno femenino*, Castellanos' 1973 play in which characters like Sor Juana, la Malinche, Eve, and the Virgen de Guadalupe assemble with modern Mexican women in a beauty salon. These poetic and dramatic renderings reaffirm how Castellanos engaged with Sor Juana as a member of the Mexican canon.

For Castellanos, Mexican women-authored writing jumps directly over the 18th and 19th Centuries from Sor Juana to the contemporary period, a perspective that elides women who did write during this time. This facet of Castellanos' feminism is rather problematic because rather than trying to recover the voices of Mexican women writers of the time, Castellanos simply buys into the cultural apparatus that silenced them. Emily Hind and Gabriela Cano have signaled Castellanos' bias against many women by showing how in her 1950 Master's thesis she failed to mention female models that surrounded her in her department, such as the first two women to receive their doctorates in Philosophy, Luz Vera and Paula González Alonso. González Alonso's dissertation, "La

cultura femenina” shares what Cano calls “una preocupación parecida” with *Sobre cultura femenina* (20). These unanswered questions of why Castellanos did not pursue González Alonso as a literary sister are important to keep in mind when analyzing the criteria with which Castellanos omitted and selected women authors.

One of Castellanos’ first attempts to engage with women authors in Mexico comes from her 1951-52 article “Dolores Castro, *El corazón transfigurado*.” Here she begins by asserting that women’s poetry is not widely read because in the past “se temía abrir un libro manufacturado por alguna de ellas porque era sabido, de antemano, que de sus páginas brotaría o un chorro de miel...o el grito impúdico de un sexo insatisfecho” (54). She writes that Dolores Castro’s poetry overcomes the stereotype of women’s writing as a sappy show of feelings. Castellanos aims to “elogiar a Dolores,” which is a kind gesture to her friend and contemporary. This article comes one year after Castro and Castellanos spent a year in Francoist Spain (*Cartas a Ricardo*).

In her 1958 essay, “La mujer en la época actual,” Castellanos explores three more Mexican poets—Concha Urquiza, Margarita Michelena, and Pita Amor. These poets, she writes, should be distinguished from “toda esa escuela de poetisas cuyas palabras no imprimen ni la menor turbación a la atmósfera de la región más transparente del aire” (135). Separating these *poetas* from the more derogative *poetisas*, Castellanos argues that Urquiza, Michelena, and Amor’s poetry marks a new era for Mexican women poets.

For Castellanos, Concha Urquiza is:

la piedra angular del movimiento poético femenino que alcanza esplendor y desarrollo en México durante la década de 1940. Y decimos que la piedra angular no sólo por ser anterior a todas en el tiempo y superior en la calidad, sino porque la tendencia que Concha representó ha sido, más o menos inconsciente, continuada y seguida por las demás. (“La mujer en la época actual” 124)

Following this tribute, she writes that Urquiza's poems "han sido considerados como lo más importante que hubiera creado una mujer en México desde la muerte de Sor Juana" (129). And Urquiza's works, while they do possess an affinity for religious themes, should also be read for their erotic tones. As Castellanos writes of this subtle, subversive nature of Urquiza's style, "La poesía de Concha está cobijada a la buena sombra de muy buenos árboles," which the patriarchal literary critic cannot discern (126). We also note in this essay a more conservative side of Castellanos. In her appreciation of Urquiza here, Castellanos celebrates how Urquiza avoided making her status as a woman visible: "[Urquiza] quería llegar a ese centro del espíritu en que las diferencias que imprime el sexo parecen menos visibles y desde allí hablar" (74). In other words, the fact that her sex was not emphasized was a positive thing, showing that Castellanos in 1958 was still more timid in her feminist approach to writing.

In the last quarter of the 20th Century, Concha Urquiza has been revisited as an exceptional poet who, like Sor Juana, was analyzed with a patriarchal gaze. As Margarita León Vega writes in "Concha Urquiza: Poesía mexicana de amor a lo divino," Urquiza's writings were made available after her friend, father Gabriel Méndez Placarte published them posthumously in five anthologies. In his presentation of her work, Méndez Placarte performs a mystical reading of Urquiza while leaving out "cualquier especulación o suspicacia que ponga en duda el misticismo de la autora" (León Vega 200). Because Urquiza's work was scrutinized and defined by a male scholar, Castellanos challenges the assumptions made about her work and performs a more faithful reading of the author's work.

Just like Urquiza's poetry is rich with many layers, Margarita Michelena's poetry is complex and profound, "avanzando en su interior como el interior de una niebla

apagada y amortiguadora” (“La mujer en la época actual” 129). Castellanos furthers that Michelena’s poems, “un color impreciso del que se tiñe el universo” (129), are somber mirages of womanhood. When the poet writes about the tensions between being a poet and a mother, these texts “son los más conmovedores y en los que mejor se transparenta un auténtico y profundo sentimiento” (132). In other words, it is the precarious, dual feeling of being a woman and an intellectual that motivates Michelena’s work, and it is this defiance that Castellanos finds is missing from the majority of women poets of her time. This tension—between being a woman and being an intellectual—is present throughout Castellanos’ own intellectual trajectory.

Guadalupe “Pita” Amor marks the final *poeta* (not *poetisa*) celebrated by Castellanos in “La mujer en la época actual.” Pita Amor was an enigma in Mexican letters: the aunt of Elena Poniatowska and the so-called “11th Muse” of her contemporaries (the 10th being Sor Juana), she was a woman accompanied by so many public sex scandals that her contemporary Alfonso Reyes famously called Amor “un caso mitológico.” To this statement, Castellanos rebukes, “Pero ¿cuál? Hay tantos casos y tantas mitologías que esta afirmación resulta vaga y poco comprometedora” (137). This kind of response allows for another reconsideration of Amor beyond the social gossip and into her most remarkable quality: her work. The objective is “leerla y desde ese momento empiezan a aparecer las causas naturales, las actitudes que en muchos se parecen a los hábitos, la monotonía de lo que es cotidiano y vulgar” (137). Castellanos’ defense of Amor is grounded in the fact that she should first and foremost be judged by the quality of her literature rather than for her extraliterary activities, which male critics have tended to do.

Although in the 1950s and early 1960s Castellanos appreciates (albeit briefly) Mexican women-authored poetry, Castellanos later grows more invested in the genre of

the novel. In 1966, in “La novela mexicana y su valor testimonial,” Castellanos privileges the novel over poetry because of the power that the novel has in its relationship to nationalism. In the 20th Century in Mexico, novels like Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* and Fuentes’ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* became exemplary nationalist texts, used by the state (i.e. promoted, assigned in public schools, and published in state-funded publishing houses) and read abroad as canonical texts with the help of the Latin American Boom. And because these male-authored texts have had such cultural power at home and abroad (Castellanos would know since she had taught literature courses at the UNAM and at various universities in the U.S.) the genre of the novel was an urgent site for women’s activity. In Castellanos’ view, there are few Mexican women novelists, and even fewer whom she considers worthy of inclusion into the national canon.

In the article she points only fleetingly to two novels of recent publication: Josefina Vicens’ *El libro vacío* (1958) and Luisa Josefina Hernández’s *El lugar donde crece la hierba* (1959). In two short paragraphs, and an additional third paragraph in which she mentions by name Lidya Zuckerman (Castellanos spells her name incorrectly as “Lydia”), the French author who immigrated to Mexico in 1952, and Emma Dolujanoff, the daughter of Russian immigrants in Mexico, Castellanos writes that these women’s novels constitute “estos experimentos, más o menos interesantes, más o menos logrados” (129), without paying them the same attention she does to her male contemporaries.

Ignacio Sánchez-Prado has considered Castellanos a precursor and inspiration to Vicens’ *El libro vacío* (1958), despite the scant attention Castellanos gives Vicens in “La novela mexicana.” Sánchez-Prado calls *El libro* “la tremenda ruptura” that marks a change in the novelistic style of the time, away from *la novela social* to one more enigmatic and psychological, an affirmation of Castellanos’ early articulation of the same idea (150).

The novel mimics a matrix as we accompany the main character, José García, through the process of writing his own novel. García collects two books, one for the novel itself and another to record, as if it were a diary, the process of writing the novel. But the fictional character's book is empty—hence the novel's title—while Vicens' novel takes us through the psychological motivations of the protagonist to legitimize himself through writing. Perhaps it is this questioning of representation that most interested Castellanos, for Vicens' novel dialogues with questions of writing and authority which applied to her very status as a woman author.

While the 1966 article “La novela mexicana” engages with Vicens, Hernández, Zuckerman, and Dojulanoff, Castellanos does so only conservatively. She dedicates little space (three paragraphs) to the literature produced by the aforementioned women compared to the five paragraphs (totaling three pages) she spends on analyzing *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and other national novels. This is a curious side of Castellanos' early feminist project: Were women not writing novels? Or was Castellanos not seeing women who were? Was the younger Castellanos doing her due diligence in responding to the (masculine) national canon *as well as* to the women-authored one? One novel she could have mentioned was Dolores Castro's *La ciudad y el viento* (1962), a reading that would have been appropriate considering Castro was one of Castellanos' closest friends.

While Castellanos wants to acknowledge women producers whose literature moves beyond clichés, she is also aware of women's literature that reproduces these clichés. In “La participación de la mujer mexicana en la educación formal,” published in *Mujer que sabe latín* (1973), she scrutinizes María Luisa Ocampo's recent play, *La virgen fuerte*, which tells the story of a nurse who “tiene un alma demasiado sensible en relación con los niños a los que atiende y no puede soportar ver sus sufrimientos,” so the unnamed

protagonist renounces her love life and dedicates herself to her profession (32). This is, for Castellanos, a perpetuation of the saintly, self-sacrificing trope, since she is “una mujer con un carácter sólido y con una vocación muy firme, cualidades ambas que la hacen vencer todos los obstáculos que se le oponen para lograr sus propósitos de consagrar su vida a la curación de los enfermos” (32). Castellanos uses this gender-normative story to show how Mexican women are told that they must either choose their career or family, for the nurse cannot see the two compatible. Rather than tell a story of a modern woman who can work *and* be a mother, Ocampo’s play reinforces the idea that women who choose to find a place in the workplace must also accept loneliness in their private lives, thus reinforcing the patriarchal notion that a woman’s place is in the home.

It should be noted that in the entire collection of Castellanos’ 1973 *Mujer que sabe latín*, there is only one essay on a Mexican woman: María Luisa Mendoza. This single essay comes from a collection of 35; six of these celebrate authors of Hispanoamerica. This is part of the inherent bias Castellanos has towards her *compatriotas*. Emily Hind, in *Femmenism and the Mexican Woman Intellectual from Sor Juana to Pomiatowska*, explores Castellanos’ relationship with her femininity. Relying on the work of Roderic Camp, whose cornerstone *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* outlines the double duty of intellectuals as state employees, Hind argues that Castellanos was integrated into the cultural apparatus as “one of the boys” because that was the only way for her to survive (52). According to this logic, her lack of breadth into Mexican women-authored poetry was due to the fact that she could not steer too far from the male-dominated and male-formulated canon.

But this bias does not go away in *Mujer que sabe latín*, in which only one essay is dedicated to a woman of Mexican nationality. In “María Luisa Mendoza: el lenguaje

como instrumento,” Castellanos praises the journalist and author’s widely celebrated 1971 novel *Con Él conmigo, con nosotros tres*. As she elaborates in this essay, Castellanos thinks Mendoza’s novel is indispensable to the Mexican canon because it marks a new period:

Es así como se incorpora a la galería de retratos y encuentra su sitio entre ellos y deja de ser la soledad estéril que aparece al principio para integrarse a un núcleo humano que, a su vez, se integra a otro núcleo humano más vasto hasta que se adquiere la perspectiva de una nación en cuyo pulso late la historia toda de la humanidad.” (169)

After this hyperbolic statement, Castellanos asserts that the novelty of Mendoza’s novel lies in its compelling nature to bring the narrator into intimate contact with the reader, where the latter is made to feel “primero, un poco el cómplice de los otros y luego su compañero, su amigo, su igual” (170).

Mendoza and the other Mexican women authors Castellanos celebrates are not a comprehensive list of authors hailing from Castellanos’ home country. The national canon to which Sor Juana belongs, is, as Castellanos writes, fraught with male biases and unfair assessments of women’s literary capacities and achievements. But rather than forge a list of authors worthy of recognition, Castellanos treads lightly through her peers, recognizing women in her own social group like Dolores Castro and paying short attention to lesser-known authors, like Emma Dolujanoff and Lidya Zuckerman. This is all to show that Castellanos’ global feminist project was motivated by her complex feelings with her home country and its literary history.

Toward a Latin American Feminist Canon

In Latin America during the 20th Century, intellectuals sought to rethink the continent as a unit rather than individual nations. The Spanish Conquest is what gave the

region its language, religion, and culture, and these historical processes were important precedents to the nation-states that were formed throughout the long 19th Century. At the turn of the century, as the last remaining Spanish colonies Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines struggled for their independence, Latin American intellectuals were inspired to construct the continent's new identity as an independent region. José Martí in his 1891 *Nuestra América* referred to nations as symbolic *hermanos* and prophesized that “los pueblos que no se conocen han de darse prisa para conocerse, como quienes van a pelear juntos (15).” This discourse of solidarity came to its apogee as Latin Americanism, sometimes called Pan-Americanism. Throughout this period, cosmopolitan intellectuals circulated independently of national borders. Various intellectuals lived in New York (José Martí), Paris (Rubén Darío, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes), San Francisco (Gabriela Mistral), and Mexico City (Mistral, Augusto Monterroso), repositioning their ethical duties as Latin Americans. In 1969, at the Encuentro de Escritores Latinoamericanos, Castellanos was a part of this continued duty to the Latin American project of self-definition.

Of her Latin American sisters, the Mexican author writes in 1973 that “cuando una mujer latinoamericana toma entre sus manos la literatura, lo hace con el mismo gesto y con la misma intención con la que toma un espejo: para contemplar su imagen” (“María Luisa Bombal” 144). Here Castellanos asserts that without literature, women do not exist, which is why a women-authored canon is so urgent for Latin America. This essay comes from her 1973 essay collection on women's writing, *Mujer que sabe latín*, in which Castellanos dedicates six of 35 essays to women of Latin America.

Castellanos' interventions into the Latin American canon reveal an early voice in Latin American feminism. Feminist scholarship today finds itself in the midst of a large-scale attempt to recover women authors made invisible in the continent's broad history.

The 2015 publication of *The Cambridge History of Latin American Women's Literature* (Rodríguez and Szurmuk) is the most recent critical collection to trace Latin American women and their texts in transit. Castellanos does not figure into these analyses, despite being one of the most prominent figures to perform this cosmopolitan endeavor.

One of the contributions to this collection, Gabriel Giorgi and Germán Garrido's essay titled "Dissident Cosmopolitanisms," is a useful lens of analysis for the case of Castellanos. Giorgi and Garrido challenge how cosmopolitanism is typically "seen through the lenses of an undisputed masculinity" (261), and propose instead a cosmopolitan woman who sees beyond the nation's structures, institutions, and processes in order to find solidarity with women of larger horizons. In order to explore how women intervened in discourses that went beyond local and national importance, the authors consider the term "cosmofeminism" in the Latin American women-authored context, a term that articulates women's autonomy in formulating a sense of sisterhood with postcolonial *compañeras*. While Giorgi and Garrido's essay is not about Castellanos, the authors study Victoria Ocampo and Clarice Lispector, who are coincidentally two women with whom Castellanos dialogues. Considering Castellanos as a woman of this stature it becomes evident that as Giorgi and Garrido claim, "In Latin America the cosmopolitan has been, significantly and from its inception, also a women's affair" (264).

As I showed in the first part of this chapter, the early period of Castellanos' writings is characterized by an appreciation of women's poetry while in the late 1960s she directs her attention to the novel. In the 1959 essay "La mujer en la época actual," Castellanos asserts that although women-authored poetry "tuvo un inusitado florecimiento en Sudamérica," there still has not been a revolution for Latin American women's literature. She says this about the early modernist poets:

el hecho de que una mujer se dedicara a menesteres que no fueran los culinarios...y sus derivados. Además era una poesía deliberadamente hecha para causar escándalo. El aspecto erótico no se consideraba (antes de Freud, naturalmente), un tema corriente de conversación entre las señoritas bien educadas. (120-21)

This “poesía deliberadamente hecha para causar escándalo” is visible in two canonical poems by Agustini and Storni from the early 20th Century. In Agustini’s “El Cisne” (1913), the Uruguayan poet counters Darío’s infamous swan, which thanks to Darío’s famous poem by the same name, became the symbol of modernism. But unlike Darío’s chaste and mystical animal, Agustini’s feminine poetic voice sexualizes the swan giving him “dos pupilas humanas / grave y gentil como un príncipe... / pico en fuego, cuello triste.” The words “pico en fuego” conjure up the phallus and the burning image of desire. The poetic speaker and the *cisne* enjoy a romantic encounter on the clear lake (“la cristalina página”), and yet she concludes at the end of the poem that this encounter is prohibited given her gender. While the swan “asusta” because he burns red with sexual passion, she, a woman, provokes fear: “¡el cisne asusta de rojo, y yo, de blanca, doy miedo!”

Similarly, Agustini’s contemporary, Alfonsina Storni, exploits the color white commonly associated with the woman’s role in modernist poetry. In “Tú me quieres blanca” (1918), Storni writes against the double standards between women and men, particularly how men want women to be virgin and pure while living drastically different lives. Men want women to be white (“Tú me quieres alba / Me quieres de espumas, / Me quieres de nácar. / Que sea azucena / Sobre todas, casta. / De perfume tenue. / Corola cerrada.”), while their own lives are colored by red and purple, colors of excess and desire: “Las copas a mano, / De frutos y mieles / Los labios morados.” While in the first three stanzas she *describes*, in the final stanza—the longest— she begins to *prescribe* when

she demands using the command form that he go to nature and purify himself. She concludes that it is only when he does that can he continue to ask her to be “blanca...nívea...casta.” Castellanos recalls Storni’s position as a woman in a male-dominated generation: “‘las tenazas fuertes y a la vez dulces del patriarcado’ (como las calificaría Alfonsina Storni, una de las víctimas de este sistema)” (38).

But she takes issue with what resulted from those subversive poets: “esos años de efervescencia y entusiasmo” were in vain, since, instead of setting themselves apart as a new generation of women authors, their literature ushered in “una escuela y un modo que se apresuraron a copiar las escasas mujeres alfabetizadas de nuestro continente” (121). In other words, Castellanos thinks that the most remarkable of women poets are those who step out of the mold of their time; Storni and Agustini were in contrast part of a larger modernist project to copy one another, not foment a unique, women-authored tradition. Ultimately, this kind of argument shows an extreme conservative character of Castellanos’ feminist project, as it becomes more apparent that themes of sexuality fall outside of her literary interests (perhaps, as Emily Hind argues, because she was trying to be “one of the guys”).

This is where Gabriela Mistral falls into Castellanos’ grace: she was a Chilean woman dedicated to more transcendent themes—religion, motherhood, education—than others seeking to “causar escándalo” (“La mujer en la época actual” 121). Castellanos has this to say about Mistral:

La obra de Gabriela es breve pero está traspasada de un ímpetu tal y de una gracia, tiene una raíz tan honda y verdadera, un lenguaje tan nuevo y vigoroso que no se ha necesitado más para que ocupe la primera línea de la poesía americana. (“La mujer en la época actual” 122)

Here she asserts that Mistral is canonical because of her “espíritu apasionadamente religioso, bien nutrido de esencias clásicas y apegado al habla y a las maneras de su pueblo” (122). In both citations, it becomes clear that Castellanos regarded Mistral a woman dedicated to her profession as a writer, a common thread throughout Castellanos’ works. Mistral maintained a depth in her contemplations and an originality of her language, making sure her art served a greater social purpose.

Mistral was something of an idol to the Mexican author who referenced the Chilean author by distinguishing her from the languid situation in her home country. In “La mujer de la época actual,” Castellanos reflects on what she assumes was Mistral’s reaction to the state of Mexican women:

Las extranjeras que han visitado nuestro país (Gabriela Mistral es el más ilustre ejemplo), se asombran y se escandalizan de la pasividad sin protesta con que las mujeres mexicanas aceptan las humillantes condiciones de su vida familiar y social en las que, casi sin excepción, tienen que desenvolverse. (111)

Here she assumes that Mistral is “shocked” and “scandalized” by Mexican women’s unobjected inferiority, which assumes that Mistral comes from a more advanced society in which women are more audacious in their feminist approach.

Dolores Castro, Castellanos’ good friend and contemporary, remembers Gabriela Mistral’s influence on the author:

Tuvimos oportunidad de conocer a Gabriela Mistral personalmente, después de haber admirado su rotunda fuerza expresiva, su manera de ser mujer como quien es maga de la tierra, o ‘árbol acogedor de pueblos’. Creo que Gabriela Mistral influyó poderosamente en la poesía de Rosario, y en una encuesta que realizó la gaceta de cultura *Nivel*, contestó que admiraba a Gabriela Mistral como la poetisa más importante en América Latina. (17)

Emily Hind has illustrated that Mistral’s influence was so deep that she inspired the character Matilde Casanova in Castellanos’ first play, *Tablero de damas* (1952). In this

lesser-known text, Casanova—whose name invokes the astronomical dimensions of Mistral’s chosen name (she was born Lucila Godoy)—“dissuades the younger poet, Aurora, from her normative desire of wanting to be happy by marrying and having children” (*Femmenism* 60).

In 1963, Castellanos continued to be uncritical and eulogistic of Mistral. In “Dos poemas inéditos de Gabriela Mistral,” Castellanos reviews the recent publication of two unedited poems, released by Doris Dana, Mistral’s romantic partner, personal secretary, and benefactor. Castellanos asserts herself as an expert of Mistral’s work, opening with a convincing analysis of Mistral’s poetic trajectory and concluding with the presentation of two poems that show her “ascensión definitiva al reino prometido” (215). She writes of Mistral’s poetic language in exaggerated terms: “la esencia se muestre, y la forma, que olvidó el adorno, se rompe en balbuceos de lo que quiere decir lo inefable” (216).

Within Castellanos’ admiration of Mistral we can also locate a preoccupation with the state of education available to women. Gabriela Mistral was Lucila Godoy’s chosen name, “Gabriela” meaning God’s chosen one (the feminine of Gabriel) and “Mistral” signaling stars, evoking the incredible celestial views one has from Valle de Elquí, her home region. But before she took her pen name, Godoy published “La instrucción de la mujer,” a text that can be considered a precursor to Castellanos’ Master’s thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*. “La instrucción” is a commentary on the estrangement of women from liberal education. She laments how “la luz de progreso irradia mas poderosa sobre nuestro globo” at the same time women shrink into servitude. Raising awareness about the “inteligencia perdida en la oscuridad de su sexo,” Mistral demands that “los libros de ciencia se coloquen en sus manos como se coloca el Manual de Piedad.” Like planets not yet named and space still unexplored, women’s intellectual formation is in its early stages

and has infinite potential to progress. The text concludes with a proclamation for women to be included in local educational systems.

Castellanos also attended to another of their biographical resemblances: the theme of frustrated maternity. Mistral never had children because of infertility, and before having her son Gabriel, Castellanos similarly suffered from two miscarriages. This theme appears in Castellanos' poetic collection, *Lívida luz*, a heart-breaking collection of poems dedicated to her unborn daughter that evoke death, isolation, and grieving. The opening micro-poem, for example, "El día inútil," can be read as a snapshot of the stillborn birth. In this poem, fishing is a metaphor for childbirth, and so after a long night in "el agua nocturna, los silencios," and the speaker finds "la escama destrozada, la sangre y el horror," she returns "a la superficie sin un pez" (177). This poem is a sad narrative of giving birth to a baby that is not alive. In the poem that closes *Lívida luz*, "Presencia," she describes her body as "mi albergue, mi prisión, mi hospital, mi tumba," referring to her childbirth trauma (191). In short, Castellanos saw in Mistral a little of herself: a woman worried about women's educations, and a woman who, in addition to fulfilling a public vocation as a writer was also conflicted by her maternal potential.

By 1966, two years before traveling to the Encuentro in Viña del Mar, Castellanos was already under the assumption that Chilean society was more advanced than in Mexico. In "Historia de una mujer rebelde," she cites Mercedes Valdivieso's *La brecha* as evidence of how divorce is "hazaña que, por lo visto, aún es memorable en Chile" (39). The main protagonist's divorce is remarkable because she has all she needs at home, such as love and money, and yet she seeks something greater: "esta mujer hace uso de su libertad para valerse por sí misma" (41). Furthermore, Castellanos makes a case that sounds like Mistral's essay "La instrucción" when Castellanos proposes that the *La brecha*

succeeds in making the reader feel “indignación” for the fact that man “traspasa las barreras del cosmos” while woman “se afane aún por traspasar el umbral domestico” (41). In other words, this novel shows how divorce is still such a stigmatized move for women to make since the domestic sphere is where they are expected to remain, despite that men are given no limits to their individual self-fulfillment.

Valdivieso’s 1961 *La brecha* is considered the first Latin American feminist novel, which is prefaced in this way: “El personaje de esta novela no tiene nombre pero podría ser el de cualquier mujer de nuestra generación” (8). This feminist spirit develops in the novel through a candid narrator who recounts her marriage, characterized as destined to fail when, on the first page, just after describing her boring, bourgeois marriage (“Ese mundo de las horas de almuerzo, del dedo en alto, guardián de la castidad de las niñas” [13]), she writes of how it ends (“Pero se acabó. Verano, sol, se acabó: invierno” [13]). For Castellanos, while traditional novels about divorce tend to focus on sins and adultery, *La brecha* portrays divorce as liberation, charting new territory for women’s potential. As I show in Chapter IV, Castellanos, due to her long, pending divorce from Ricardo Guerra, was likely invested in this novel because its theme impacted her personally.

In *Mujer que sabe latín*, Castellanos dedicates four essays (three of these are consecutive) to women of the Southern Cone: María Luisa Bombal from Chile, Silvina Ocampo from Argentina, Ulalume González de León from Uruguay, and Clarice Lispector from Brazil. She begins her three consecutive essays with a commentary on María Luisa Bombal in “Maria Luisa Bombal y los arquetipos femeninos.” In this article, Castellanos analyzes the “arquetipos femeninos” in three of Bombal’s works—*La última niebla* (1935), *La amortajada* (1938), *El árbol* (1939), by beginning in the following way: “Cuando una mujer toma entre sus manos la literatura lo hace con el mismo gesto y con

la misma intención con la que toma un espejo: para contemplar su imagen” (144).

Addressing here the problem facing women across the continent (“de un mundo chileno, de una estancia argentina, de una hacienda mexicana” [145]), Castellanos furthers that Bombal’s literature complicates gendered relations. It shows that while men live in a time/place of production and chronology, women live in an eternal non-existence. In *El árbol*, Bombal writes that Brígida, the main character, is relegated to a place called “Siempre. Nunca” (149). This atemporal space of reproduction, cyclicity, and eternity that sits opposite to the time of production, progress, and linearity that men occupy is what Kristeva would call in 1981 “Women’s Time.”

In addition to showing her expertise on Bombal, Castellanos revealed her knowledge of Argentinean cultural politics in “Silvina Ocampo y el ‘mas acá.’” Here Castellanos points to how Ocampo is often referenced in relation to others. For example, she is known for being the sister of Victoria Ocampo, founder of the Argentine magazine, *Sur*; the wife of canonical author Adolfo Bioy Casares; and the lifelong friend of Jorge Luis Borges. For Castellanos, these relational references illustrate the obstacles that Latin American women authors face in their self-determination. Beyond these familial and professional ties is her most important characteristic: “la autora de una obra literaria en muchos sentidos excepcional” (*Mujer que sabe latín* 150).

For example, Castellanos references “Los objetos,” (1959) a cautionary tale about the power of objects over women’s lives. The story traces Camila Ersky’s relationship with family heirlooms (a ruby bracelet) as well as useless and obsolete domestic objects, such as “perfumeros en forma de rábanos,” “la bombonera en forma de piano,” and “el almohadón de mármol,” to name a few [Ocampo 137-38]. As Camila becomes attached to the items that enclose her she becomes more and more isolated from her family.

Ultimately, once she re-acquires all of the objects that remind her of her entire life, “había entrado, por fin, en el infierno” (138). For Castellanos, this is the magic of “Los objetos”: “este mecanismo dialéctico de la posesión en el que somos poseídos por lo que poseemos, en el que nos convertimos en aquello de o que nos adueñamos” (152).

Castellanos’ interpretation of this story shows the dangers of how women’s lives are defined by items (jewelry, household items, clothing, photographs, etc), not some greater self-fulfillment.

Following her homage to Ocampo, Castellanos recovers Ulalume González de León’s 1970 collection of short stories, *A cada rato lunes*. Although González was Uruguayan, she was a cosmopolitan intellectual who lived in Europe and throughout Latin America, eventually settling in Mexico City and publishing most of her works in Mexican publishing houses. She was a contemporary and likely friend of Castellanos. In “Ulalume y el duende,” Castellanos employs the term that González de León uses in one of the stories—“duende” or “ese genio traveiso que preside la creación” (60)—to think through a defense for women’s writing. Castellanos analyzes the *duende* that motivates the short story “Difícil Conquista de Arturo.” In this story, the main character, Clara, is trying to write a story on the difficulties of writing, but the *duende* is not within her control, which is why when she sits down to write she cannot predict what will come of her text: “El duende no firma contratos especificando temas, caracteres, técnicas” (159). What González de León ultimately achieves is a rupture from a formulaic women’s writing.

Finally, so as not to forget Brazil from the Latin American imaginary, Castellanos’ Panamericanist project comes visible when she recognizes Clarice Lispector as one of her Latin American sisters. The article’s title—“Clarice Lispector: la memoria ancestral”—

signals right away that Lispector's work deals precisely with genealogy. She intends to bring Brazil into the Latin Americanist feminist project, citing the following:

Si los otros países hispanoamericanos nos resultan inaccesibles (pues la distancia no queda abolida por las comunicaciones y los intercambios sino que se preserva intacta, salvaguardada por tabúes mercantiles), en el caso de Brasil—que necesita de traductores, además de todos los otros vínculos culturales—la inaccesibilidad adquiere el rango de definitiva y total. (*Mujer que sabe latín* 128)

According to Castellanos, Lispector is a woman author who has been justifiably compared to the grandeur of Virginia Woolf. She writes that in Lispector's great novel—*The Passion According to G.H.* (first translated into Spanish in 1964)—the eponymous protagonist, G.H., “es una mujer a la cual no le interesa contemplarse, detenerse en su imagen, complacerse en la observación de sus estados de ánimo” (129). As the novel develops, G.H. locks herself inside her home and begins to redesign the world in her own terms, a bold act celebrated by Castellanos.

So why study these Latin American women? As Castellanos asserts in the opening of “Clarice Lispector,” “Un libro, un autor genial no surgen en el vacío sino en un contexto que forman la tradición heredada” (127). Mistral, Valdivieso, Bombal, Ocampo, González de León, and Lispector are her “tradición heredada.” Her attention to their literature is meant to create a genealogy to which she belongs, and to forge a canon for other women to continue.

Conclusion

When Castellanos attended Viña del Mar in Chile in 1969, she was already an established cosmopolitan and public intellectual. In the 1950s and early 1960s she wrote about Gabriela Mistral and Mercedes Valdivieso and their importance to Mexican

women's writing. After having attended the Encuentro de Escritores and signing the treaty on her renewed role as a Latin American intellectual, Castellanos grew more invested in a Latin American canon unique to women.

The canon constructed by Castellanos contains texts that intend to free upper and middle class women from their expected domestic roles. They divorce, write, scheme, imagine, and convey their suffering. Castellanos demands representations that are conscious of the fact that Mexican and Latin American women are, and have historically been, marginal figures as cultural producers and disfigured by men's imaginations of them. As she shows about canonization in Mexico, men have control of women's text in cultural spaces when they are the only ones criticizing those texts. But Castellanos' canon still does not see the complex intersections of Latin American women's identities, and her writings explore women of her same social class as a white, middle class, cosmopolitan woman. For example, where are Afro-Brazilians or women marginalized from the few Latin American urban centers in her essays? In 1969, her feminist project still does not see the problems with this ethnocentric formulation.

The fact that Castellanos admires women of Latin America to some extent more than she does in her home country is a repeating pattern throughout this dissertation. What at home she calls a void she seeks to fill with models from foreign countries. Until she is able to recognize her faults in this sort of bias towards her compatriots, Castellanos will exert much energy on gaining expertise in the feminist literary traditions of France and the U.S.—the topic of the following two chapters—before reconciling the postcolonial character of her Mexicanness and thinking about a more inclusive feminism at home.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE ANGLO-AMERICAN WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT: 1966-

1967

Observo a la gente, sus relaciones, y cada vez me siento más distinta, más extraña, como un ser de otro planeta. Quiero imitar las conductas que veo y espero, al fin del viaje, haber logrado—al menos—una imitación. Civilizarse no ha de ser imposible, creo.
Letter from Madison, Wisconsin, September 13, 1966

In September 1966, amidst emotional, marital, and psychological turmoil, Rosario Castellanos began a yearlong stay in the United States as a visiting professor of Spanish at three state institutions: the Universities of Wisconsin, Indiana, and Colorado. It was a decisive year for the Mexican author because as she was coping with her pending divorce from her philandering husband, she was experiencing a promising moment in her career in a radical, American culture that was awakening and responding to the post-War woman's chronic boredom, domesticity, and neurosis. Definitive texts of the era, like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), raised consciousness about the inextricable link between the political and personal dimensions of women's lives. Because "the personal is political"—a popular declaration of the time—American women were examining their complicity in perpetuating the middle class and patriarchal gendered norms of private behavior in the family, with the ultimate goal of attaining professional and intellectual fulfillment beyond those social constraints.

At the time of Castellanos's arrival, the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement was beginning to flourish. Earlier that year, University of Wisconsin professor of political science Kathryn Clarenbach and Betty Friedan co-founded the National Organization of Women (NOW)—often lauded as one of the greatest feminist achievements of the

decade—with the then-group’s headquarters established in Castellanos’s new home in Madison. Rather than simply advocating for political equality with men as the prior generation of feminists had done, the second wave of the 1960s sought not to join the proverbial system, but rather to reform “the Establishment” by challenging the machinery that kept women silent, invisible, and powerless in public and private spaces. As Gloria Steinem, radical liberationist par excellence, summarized in 1969, “Liberation isn’t exposure to the American values of Mom-and-apple-pie anymore (not even if Mom is allowed to work in an office and vote once in a while); it’s the escape from them” (51). For Castellanos, this academic year would mean reconciling the dissonance between her public feminist persona and its self-sacrificing private performance.

Castellanos’ feminist project echoes, and in some ways anticipates, many of the same values and objectives of the U.S. Women’s Liberation Movement. Like many Anglo-American feminist leaders, Castellanos possessed a firm commitment to literature written by and for women as a locus of emancipation. Since her Master’s thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950), Castellanos examined the absence of women authors in Mexican literature, and throughout the sixties her writings engage in analogous interrogations into a Latin American women’s canon. In the U.S., the emergence of feminist criticism, such as the aforementioned *The Feminine Mystique* and Ellen Moers’ *Literary Women* (1976), confronted the dissonance between the realities and fictions of womanhood. The latter of these, published after Castellanos’ death in 1974, has many resonances with Castellanos’ work. *Literary Women* recovers Jane Austen, George Sand, Colette, Simone Weil, and Virginia Woolf and reads them in fresh, feminist ways, challenging the patriarchal readings of their lives and works. In short, Castellanos, a prolific author and ardent

bibliophile, was deeply invested in strategies that Anglo-American liberationists were employing as the movement unfolded.

This chapter is about Castellanos' Mexican understanding of Anglo-American feminisms and of figures important to the Women's Liberation Movement, as well as how Anglo-American literature encouraged her own advancement as a woman intellectual and feminist. The first part of this chapter will consider how Castellanos' personal life was changed in 1966-67 and how her liberation was made possible by the act of writing. The evidence for this will be the letters that she wrote to her then-husband, Ricardo Guerra, during this year as well as the texts she succeeded this year.

In the second section, I will engage the figures of American feminisms that Castellanos admires in her essays and newspaper articles both before and after 1966. Castellanos, in her literary dialogues with Anglo-American authors, seeks sisterhood with (proto)feminist protagonists Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, and Ivy Compton-Burnett, at the same time she explores why the historical continuities differ between Anglo-American feminisms and any corresponding movement in Mexico. On the one hand, Castellanos' writings confirm her belief in Anglo cultures: that the advancement of women was due to an authorial continuity that Hispanic cultures did not have. And yet on the other hand, through her literary engagement with these authors, Castellanos adapts, domesticates, and departs from their positions, using her power and creative license to make their literature relevant to Mexican women.

Scholars tend to agree almost unanimously on Castellanos' increased interest in feminist politics throughout the 1960s without giving her year abroad in the U.S. much importance. Maureen Ahern writes that her stay in 1966-67 coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of women's suffrage as well as with the germinal moments of the Women's

Liberation Movement.¹⁰ This year, writes Ahern, “galvanized Castellanos’s thinking about women, culture, and literature” (4), although a careful review of this assertion leaves the reader wondering exactly *how*. Joanna O’Connell, in her comprehensive study of Castellanos’s prose, *Próspero’s Daughter* (1995), finds that the literature and journalism Castellanos produced post-1964 accomplish a more radical critique than before, neglecting to address anywhere in the text Castellanos’s year abroad. Similarly, Eduardo Mejía, in his introduction to *Obras II* writes that Castellanos’s book of poetry, *Materia memorable* (1969), would mark a significant change in her style and voice:

En los libros posteriores a *Materia memorable*, [Castellanos] fue cruel; despedazó la sumisión, dejó de considerar ser marginal a la mujer como ente individual, y su simpatía fue más radical hacia la heterodoxia voluntaria. (8)

Finally, Gabriela De Beer underlines the clarity and boldness of Castellanos’s poetry during the 1970s that was no longer disguised by “classical or biblical allusions nor feminist concepts carefully veiled by images and metaphors” (11). 1966-67 should be considered an important axis in Castellanos’s journey toward a better balance between her private and public selves, beginning with the nuclear family, or rather ending with it.

Finding the Political in the Personal: The 1966-67 Letters from Madison, Bloomington, and Boulder

The lasting impressions of U.S. liberationist discourses on Castellanos are evident in the 32 candid letters she wrote between September 1966 and August 1967. In them, the author implies that liberation meant three things: independence from Guerra, pride

¹⁰American women voted for the first time in 1920 in national elections, but there were significant political achievements in the decade prior. Many states adopted women’s suffrage and the National Woman’s Party was founded. In 1916, Jeannette Rankin of Montana was the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress.

in singlehood, and self-determination. The significance of this epistolary collection becomes clearer in the context of personal interviews with her former students Louise Popkin and Eduardo González, each of whom offer complementary perspectives on her public and private personae during this period. The juxtaposition of these students' recollections with a close reading of the eighteen letters from Madison and the fourteen from Bloomington (Indiana) and Boulder (Colorado) suggests an interesting cultural history: Castellanos inverted the adage—"the personal is political"—because although she was publicly crafting herself as a feminist intellectual in Mexico, she had yet to stage her liberation in private, intimate terms.

This part of the chapter reconceptualizes the importance of 1966-1967 on her feminist trajectory, which has not been explored concretely in any of the comprehensive texts on Castellanos (Mejía, De Beer, Ahern) because they were published prior to the 1994 publication of *Cartas a Ricardo*. Without these letters, the connection between the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement and Castellanos's yearlong stay would be much more conjectural. The sole essay dedicated to *Cartas*—Cynthia Steele's indispensable work, "Letters from Rosario: Power, Gender, and Canon Formation in Mexico"—was researched and written one year after the letters' release and published two years later. Steele's analysis is more attentive to the letters written throughout the 1950s and what they reveal about Castellanos' rural childhood in Chiapas. My reading of Castellanos's transnational journey is thus enriched by material that was not available during the publication of those earlier texts and looks at a particular year that has been neglected. Re-reading Castellanos's letters in this way allows us to contemplate more seriously the link to the Women's Liberation Movement of the U.S.

Castellanos approached her letters with a certain liberationist agenda: for her, writing functions as the ultimate site of liberation, which makes reading *Cartas* more akin to perusing Castellanos's diary than to a dialogue or informational exchange. Much of this monologue stems from the fact that Guerra rarely responded. Writing to a patriarchy that wouldn't write back, each letter Castellanos drafts "se está volviendo literatura pero no será para publicarse, sino para liberarse" (216). Juan Antonio Ascencio agrees when he writes in the introduction to *Cartas*, "Sus cartas son la crónica de un crecimiento doloroso, la evolución casi novelesca de un personaje que ella llegó a conocer a fondo: ella misma" (9). The literary merit of her letters, then, is not a conversation with Guerra, rather a quotidian account of overcoming fears and insecurities, finding her place in the new foreign culture, and negotiating her role in her immediate family from afar.

The melodrama of Castellanos and Ricardo Guerra begins in the Facultad de Letras y Filosofía in the UNAM sometime around 1950, at which point they began their precarious relationship while Guerra was still married to the Mexican painter Lilia Carrillo. The word "melodrama" here is carefully deployed: Castellanos's friends, in their writings on the belated author, seldom mention Guerra's name when they recall the couple's relationship. They have even questioned the motivations of a man who intended—upon publishing the letters he retained for decades—to reveal the vulnerable, self-deflating, and unfavorable side of his ex-wife. Elena Poniatowska, for her part, does not even mention his name in *Ay vida, ¡no me mereces!*, referring instead to him—when needed—as an anonymous "esposo." This *ninguneo* of Castellanos's ex-husband is significant in how her friends and colleagues render their marriage. With Guerra—a famed philosopher, professor, and public intellectual—as the proverbial elephant in the room in accounts of her life, these non-inclusions suggest an act of female solidarity with

Castellanos, a woman whose marriage was one of the greatest challenges in her personal life.

The Castellanos/Guerra so-called partnership was defined by infidelity, unrequited love, and neglect, characteristics that are thematized throughout her letters. Take for instance that Guerra moved another woman, Selma, into the house while Castellanos was in Madison, a fact that rather than finding out from Guerra himself, Castellanos learned from their son, Gabriel.¹¹ Selma is a recurring protagonist throughout several letters, becoming a topic exploited by Gabriel to denigrate his own mother. For example, in one instance Castellanos recalls her son telling her “que quería a Selma, que prefería a Selma y que Selma era su mama y no yo” (241). This is in addition to the fact that Castellanos was sending money home to Guerra for the living expenses he incurred with his two stepsons, Ricky and Pablo, from Guerra’s previous marriage to Carrillo.

Although it might be possible that Castellanos went to the U.S. to attain physical (but not yet legal) separation from Guerra, her year abroad was primarily motivated by the violent Mexican politics. On April 26, 1966 Castellanos resigned from the UNAM when Ignacio Chávez Sánchez, her friend and then-rector of the university, was harassed and held hostage. Between the marital agony and career turbulence she was experiencing, the Mexican author’s trip to Madison came at a decisive moment in her life, which comes through in the initial letters.

It was also a decisive moment for her career, as the invitation to embark on a teaching tour at three universities was an improbable occurrence in Mexico for women

¹¹ Selma’s last name is unidentified, but Guerra did not marry her. His third wife (after Carrillo and Castellanos) was Margarita Moreno, with whom he later divorced. Guerra widowed his fourth and final wife, Adriana Yáñez, when he died in 2007.

but an extreme compliment to the esteemed woman of letters. This should be kept in mind when deciphering her self-questioning paranoia, such as when she writes “¿soy o no soy escritora? ¿Puedo escribir? ¿Qué?” (*Cartas* 186). The 39-year-old woman was at the height of her career as a public intellectual and decorated author. She won the Xavier Villarrutia Prize in 1960 for her collection of short stories, *Ciudad Real*, the Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz Prize in 1962 for her novel *Oficio de tinieblas*, and in 1967 she was awarded “Mujer del Año” by the Mexican government. Despite her successes, her letters are riddled with anxiety and fear of her professional border-crossing, which left her vulnerable in the new country while she awaited the arrival of her domestic employee, Herlinda Bolaños, and her son, Gabriel, who would join her in November.

During her initial months in the capital city of Wisconsin, Castellanos sends home to Guerra detailed stories of devouring foreign cultural and intellectual production (“Leo todo lo que me es posible,” [221]), getting to know her U.S. students, and preparing for her extremely popular courses—on Spanish-American civilization, the Spanish-American novel, and the Mexican novel. These first letters are frequent and lengthy, likely due to her poor English comprehension and because she was alone in a new city. She was also keen to observe the idiosyncrasies within her conservative bubble in Madison—in a male-dominated Spanish Department and a middle class Midwest university—describing comically the female friends of a colleague’s wife as “una asamblea de damas ligeramente antediluvianas, todas muy amables” (183). This latter comment is a gentle affront on the traditional gender norms within the marriages she saw between the male breadwinners and their domestic wives.

Above all, the eighteen letters from Madison highlight the admiration she had for her American female colleagues and students—seldom mentioning her male students—

paying particular attention to the ways in which they existed in this foreign culture, such as their mannerisms and their intellectual autonomy. When Castellanos refers to the women academics surrounding her, the language she uses indicates that she coveted the attributes they embodied. On September 26, 1966, she describes her colleague Betsy Brooks, a professor of Golden Age literature, as a “típica norteamericana,” which she later qualifies to mean “muy desenvuelta, muy segura” (191). The choice of the words “típica” and “desenvuelta” are most salient here, for Castellanos is declaring that the standard, or typical, American woman appears “at ease” or “natural.” Her comment carries high flattery in its connotation of freedom; to call someone “desenvuelta” is a form of respect. In the same letter, she writes of colleague and now emerita professor, Biruté Ciplijauskaité, noting how she proudly and frequently asserts her chosen singlehood (191). This should not surprise, given that the Mexican author had already explored the pervasive shame in Mexican culture surrounding single women: “Da vergüenza estar sola” opens her 1960 poem “Jornada de la soltera” (181).

Castellanos’ admiring gaze about the perceived progress of Anglo-American people comes to the surface on September 13, 1966 when she writes in her first letter from Madison:

Observo a la gente, sus relaciones, y cada vez me siento más distinta, más extraña, como un ser de otro planeta. Quiero imitar las conductas que veo y espero, al fin del viaje, haber logrado—al menos—una imitación. Civilizarse no ha de ser imposible, creo. (184)

This inferiority complex—visible in her earlier observations of Ciplijauskaité and Brooks, who choose singlehood and are content to challenge the heteronormative gendered roles of the era—aligns with the broader cultural climate in Mexico. In 20th Century Mexico intellectuals like Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, and Carlos Fuentes, wrangled with the

pervasive sense of cultural inferiority in relation to the U.S. The relationship between the U.S. and Mexico has long been characterized as a form of cultural imperialism, and Ramos' 1934 *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* summarized that the challenge Mexicans faced was in their own self-actualization free from European and Anglo-American conceptions. Ramos diagnoses the infamous “sentimiento de inferioridad,” that creates the conditions for “un individuo cuyas ambiciones son desproporcionadas a sus capacidades” (123). The psychoanalytic profile that Ramos describes of the Mexican citizen—problematic in its overgeneralization and depersonalization—offers insight into Castellanos's self-deflation vis-à-vis American women.

One of the self-reliant women she most admired in Madison was a student auditing her Latin American literature course, Louise Popkin, who unknowingly taught her professor something. Castellanos writes on October 26, 1966: “Lo que a mí más me sirve es la manera como ella vive, observarla, aprender. Tiene 27 años y es soltera. Se independizó de sus padres y se las arregla sola para vivir a su gusto” (218-19). What makes Popkin so unique are three things that Castellanos is not: she is single, independent from her family, and a polyglot free spirit who has traveled the world. Furthermore, the use of the words “servir,” “observar” and “aprender” here are indicative of Castellanos' hidden, perhaps unconscious, agenda in the United States: the longing to acquire these attributes.

In a personal interview in September 2015, Popkin recalled the friendship that they fostered during the fall of 1966, an intimate relationship between women of extremely different backgrounds. Popkin, who spent a great deal of time with Castellanos, does not recall hearing her discuss her political views related to feminism, Civil Rights,

the Chicano Movement, or the Vietnam War.¹² Not only did political topics not come up in their many interactions, Popkin told me, “The way she was living her life was the polar opposite of [feminism]. She kept letting Ricardo do this horrible stuff to her.” There seemed to be a disparity between how Castellanos publicly critiqued the self-sacrificing role of devoted wife and how she privately performed it.

As already mentioned, Castellanos was an avid reader during her time in Madison, consuming culture in all forms: films at the cineclub, novels, plays, and short stories. Among the widely-circulated American feminist texts of the time, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; first translated into Spanish by the Catalanian Carlos R. de Dampierre in 1965) may have given Castellanos a new lens with which to analyze her own experience. In her 1972 tribute to Friedan in “Betty Friedan: Análisis y praxis,” Castellanos suggests that *The Feminine Mystique* helped her see how women needed psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and pharmaceuticals to address their discontent with modern society. There are clear similarities in terminology: Castellanos liberally deploys “crisis,” “angustia,” “sufrimiento,” and “depresión” in her letters while in *The Feminine Mystique* they appear as “problem,” “neurosis,” and “dissatisfaction.” Prior to her arrival in the U.S., Castellanos had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital and later underwent psychoanalysis by Santiago Ramírez, a doctor she references many times. Castellanos considered herself neurotic and mentally unstable, making Valium a protagonist throughout the letters, and frequently celebrating the number of days endured without self-medicating.

¹² While I find this absence of political content significant, Popkin speculated that it may have had to do with the fact that she, herself, wasn't particularly “political” at that point in her life; that during many of their visits, Castellanos seemed too depressed to see beyond her personal struggles; and that during others, Gabriel and his friends were running around, making sustained adult conversation difficult.

Valium, she writes in November 1966, “me ha devuelto la alegría de vivir” (227). The drug also motivates, in the same positive manner, one of her most famous poems, “Valium 10.” Following the logic of a woman’s workday, the poetic voice laments “una sucesión /de hechos incoherentes, de funciones /que vas desempeñando por inercia y por hábito” (305). The poem dictates in the second-person that you must be dedicated to the *oficio*, teach class, and in the evening return to work on the writing that “la imprenta /devorará mañana” (306). There is no dialogue with Guerra, who is poetically disguised as “La Esfinge,” making him a petrified, non-responsive deity. In the last stanza, the day acquires a name—“Caos”—and the only remedy to this unbearable condition is Valium, “en la que se condensa / químicamente pura / la ordenación del mundo” (305). “Valium 10,” published in 1971 and plausibly written in 1966—pays homage to the pharmaceutical drug that Castellanos for so many years used to address what Friedan calls “the problem that has no name” (15).

In addition to pharmaceuticals, the act of writing is another form of therapy that the letters permit Castellanos, and she strives for her emancipation via reading and writing it. On October 20, 1966 she writes “Nunca acabo por entender que lo que se me revela en la literatura es lo que hay que aplicar a la vida” (215). Her enunciation here—that she “never” understands how to put her feminist political leanings into personal practice—is ironic. In transferring her feelings and desires to the page, she envisions the influence of fiction on reality. In accessing her own personal experience, she is connecting to a larger political and public denunciation that she can intellectualize even if she can’t yet practice it. So while she alleges she is unable to reconcile those differences, she is actually quite optimistic that bridging the gap between her political beliefs and their personal practices will be possible as long as she keeps writing.

Of course, the letters also contain naïve interpretations of the U.S. and her judgments disregard the racial struggles happening around her. On September 29, 1966, she falsely concludes, “Aquí no parece haber problemas con los negros” (198). This should not be taken seriously, for Madison is in fact a city known for its political activism, and this is reflected on the front pages of the local press, *The Capital Times*. Throughout the month of September 1966, the capital city’s widely-distributed newspaper reported local and national events like an upcoming march led by Dr. Martin Luther King (Sept. 19), updates on the boycott of a local Milwaukee Eagle Scouts chapter that practiced racial discriminatory practices (Sept. 20), and riots in San Francisco motivated by race (Sept. 29). Oblivious to these facts, she later insinuates that her students are disengaged entirely, summarizing that “A nadie le interesa la literatura, excepto en sus horas de clase y de trabajo, a nadie la política, ni el cine ni el teatro ni la televisión ni nada. Yo como que no entiendo este modo de ser.” (203). Despite the Vietnam War protests and the Civil Rights Movement that were igniting the state capital and nation, Castellanos in her Madison letters is insularized about and uninformed by panoramic U.S. political discourses.

Following fall semester in Madison and a road trip to New York with Louise Popkin over the holidays, Castellanos, Herlinda, and Gabriel moved to Bloomington, Indiana for the 1967 spring semester.¹³ Castellanos had visited the university the year prior in February of 1966 for one week, when Octavio Paz was filling a faculty vacancy there, which was probably what solidified her semester-long contract in 1967 (Cohn, e-

¹³ Castellanos was ultimately appointed as an “Instructor” rather than “Visiting Professor,” a fact revealed in the university’s faculty file on the author. After she died, however, Indiana University’s News Bureau announced the death of former Visiting Professor, “distinguished Mexican author” Rosario Castellanos (“Press Release”). The eulogistic announcement noted that “she was well-liked by both her students at Indiana and by the faculty.”

mail correspondence). While the eighteen Madison letters are charged with emotional content and anecdotal evidence (they are also the most frequent letters Castellanos writes to Guerra during her stay abroad), the tone and frequency of her letters change when she assumes her second appointment in Bloomington. There, occupying an important role as the only woman Latin American professor, Castellanos, in her ten letters, privileges business over emotion, particularly in the details surrounding Gabriel's mischief: "¿Sabes qué? Yo estoy un poco hasta la coronilla de Gabriel" (239). On April 24, 1967, she opens a letter with the affirmation, "Cumpló, con la puntualidad que se debe, con mi promesa de mantenerte informado respecto de Gabriel" (243). Where her letters were filled with affect and anecdotes in Madison, in Indiana Castellanos is a mere reporter of news regarding their son.

Indeed, the letters from Bloomington reflect a more confident Castellanos, which is likely in part due to her esteemed position at IU, where so many other members of the Latin American intelligentsia were housed. At Indiana University, Castellanos was the only woman in a rich community of Latin American intellectuals, such as Sergio Mondragón, Homero Ardijs, Juan García Ponce, Sergio Galindo, Juan José Arreola, and José Donoso, who cycled through U.S. universities as visiting professors. Eduardo González, Castellanos's former student, recounted the public debate Castellanos initiated in a talk given by José Donoso: "Lo cuestionó respecto a sus gustos literarios. Por ejemplo, ella no estaba nada de acuerdo con un *putdown* que dio sobre D.H. Lawrence." As Deborah Cohn has already shown in *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism during the Cold War*, these intellectuals were part and parcel of Cold War politics. With the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the utopic communist waves it sent across Latin America, the academy was where the U.S. institutionalized Latin American Studies as a way of

keeping communism from spreading throughout the hemisphere. It was an extraordinary honor to be considered a part of the Latin American canon, especially as a woman.

Eduardo González, a young Cuban in his junior year at Indiana University, recalls Castellanos as a member of this vibrant intellectual circle. That semester he took both courses Castellanos was teaching, one on Latin American literature and another on the Mexican novel, courses she repeated from her semester in Madison. González remembers the meticulous notebooks she had prepared for each session and the charm she exuded to her admiring students: “Era la persona más gentil y más elegante.” Unlike Popkin, whose memories evoke the vulnerabilities in Castellanos’s private persona, González described her professorial presence vividly: “ella representaba cosmopolitismo, comparatividad, apertura, lectura.” He remembers having read Carpentier’s *Los Pasos perdidos* and Cortázar’s *Rayuela*, two canonical texts of the time. In the other class, “La novela mexicana,” students read Mariano Azuela’s *Los de Abajo* (1915) and Carlos Fuentes’ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962). Although Castellanos did not assign women-authored literature (he could not recall whether or not they read Elena Garro), she frequently brought Virginia Woolf and Ivy Compton-Burnett into the class discussions. So although she did not actively promote women’s writing in Spanish, Castellanos was the only professor of contemporary literature to connect Hispanic and Latin American writers to those of the Anglo-American tradition.

Virginia Woolf and Ivy Compton-Burnett—in Gonzalez’s words, “dos rastros de las predilecciones de ella”—are English authors he continues to revere to this day because of the attention Castellanos paid to them. Virginia Woolf is an immediate and undeniable influence on Castellanos, a Transatlantic link that has already been studied by Mónica Ayuso. Her good friend Dolores Castro similarly wrote that “Rosario no fue violenta

defensora de la liberación femenina como se entiende actualmente al estilo norteamericano, pero sí fue feminista en la misma línea de Virginia Woolf, mujer que acude a la actividad el mundo” (19). As these two women show, Castellanos—dedicated to her social role as an intellectual—was drawn to the English author’s call for a “room of one’s own.”

While Woolf has been considered an obvious literary influence on Castellanos’s feminist evolution (and will be explored in the next section), the influence of Ivy Compton-Burnett is less overt. Compton-Burnett is a rather obscure writer even within the English academic discipline, and her novels, which expose complex family dynamics across generations and sexes, might have been attractive to Castellanos because of their focus on the domestic sphere. This is something Castellanos suggests in an essay on Compton-Burnett’s writing, found in the essay collection *Mujer que sabe latín*. Here Castellanos writes that Compton-Burnett’s acclaimed novel, *A House and its Head* (1935) follows a series of deplorable “crímenes,” defined as “el adulterio, la difamación, el robo” (87). The perpetrator is the tyrannical (akin to how she perceived Guerra) head of the household, and the victims of these crimes are never granted justice. Lamentably, Castellanos concludes, the reader is forced to contemplate the ethics of unjust interpersonal relationships, “sin que...sea razón suficiente para que se destruya la paz doméstica, se rompan las relaciones establecidas por el parentesco o por la ley, o las apariencias públicas resulten menos satisfactorias” (87). Castellanos was moved ethically by Compton-Burnett’s literary tropes that mimicked—in terms of extramarital affairs, divorce, and untarnishable public appearances—her own circumstance while she was in the U.S.

Returning to the letters she sent from IU, Castellanos's self-determination is projected onto an object that, over the course of the ten letters, symbolizes her newfound independence: a green Volkswagen Beetle, the same model driven by her student and friend, Louise Popkin. Castellanos first mentions the car on September 29, 1966, imagining for herself "una independencia de movimientos, un coche para salir, para ir a visitar gente que vive lejos, para comprar cosas en el super (sic), para no sentirme una inválida" (201). She writes about how when she returns—"ya con mi poderoso Volkswagen" (205)—she will be a woman empowered by free will and liberty of movement. Vehicular liberation for Castellanos is a larger statement about mobility in social landscapes, becoming an essential component for the single woman to navigate modernity and display her newly encountered femininity.

But the fantasy of the green car becomes a crucial moment of awakening to the obstacles within her own family facing Castellanos in her liberatory process, and Castellanos begins to reproach the systems of male domination that her son perpetuates. "El drama del Volkswagen," as Castellanos calls it, is the topic of a letter written on March 27, 1967 (237). One evening, as Castellanos mentioned her plan to purchase a car in Mexico, Gabriel suddenly became indignant. The author remembers it in this way:

Me dijo que cómo me atrevía a comprar un coche, que cuándo se había visto que una criada tuviera esos lujos...¿Por qué no podía yo tener un coche? Porque yo era una criada. Por eso, por criada, es que no era yo de su familia. Porque él, sus hermanos y tú eran patrones. Muy bien...Y pobre de mí si me atrevía a comprar un Volkswagen, pobre de mí. (234-35)

Her claims here are not directed at Gabriel, rather they critique the source of Gabriel's understanding of his mother's role in the family as the same one as Herlinda, the woman who takes care of the domestic duties so Castellanos can be a public intellectual. She

realizes that his father and his half-brothers, Ricardo and Pablo, have indoctrinated her son into a sexist and classist system, leading young Gabriel to believe, at the young age of 6 or 7, that a woman does not have the right to own or operate her own vehicle and that her social position is the same as that of the domestic help. In other words, she finds the origins of class- and gender-based discrimination in the private sphere of the patriarchal family. Upon realizing and writing about these injustices, Castellanos can no longer bear to be complicit in this mechanism.

The “drama del Volkswagen” is also revelatory of how Castellanos grew to view herself in relation to Herlinda, whom she describes on April 9, 1967 as “el único ser cuerdo en esta casa” (237). The relationship between these two women is indeed fundamental to Castellanos’s journey over the course of this year and beyond. In addition to the fact that Herlinda was her only stable companion throughout her lonely year in the U.S., the two also shared in the stress of taking care of Gabriel, who, according to the letters’ contents, was in a rebellious and rambunctious phase. She writes to Guerra on April 16, 1967 that “Otro día te contaré lo buena que ha sido Herlinda y lo que me ha ayudado” (240). Herlinda, then, seemed to have taken on a more intimate role in her life, which led to the realization that while Castellanos was an ardent advocate for feminism, she had neglected Herlinda as a potential comrade. Recognizing the oppression she perpetuated in her personal life might explain the emergent intersectional sensitivity that Debra Castillo in *Talking Back* celebrates from the author’s 1974 journalistic essay, “Herlinda se va.” In “Herlinda,” written while Castellanos was living in Israel, she recounts how she empowered her domestic help to read and write, and thus live on her own, a radical gesture for the Mexican woman who since her elite childhood had always

depended on other women in the house.¹⁴ In other words, it is possible that Herlinda's own emancipatory process began in Bloomington as Castellanos examined the varying hierarchies within her own family.

Finally, the last apparent influence of the Women's Liberation Movement is evident in one of Castellanos's most commonly cited poems, "Kinsey Report," which addresses the report produced by the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University founded by the biologist Alfred Kinsey. The poem is divided into six portraits of women of varying civil and social types, whose hypothetical responses for Kinsey's "Report" reveal their repressed sexualities: while the married woman loathes the intimate encounters owed to her husband and finds pleasure instead in sleeping children, the promiscuous single woman—called "puta" by the men she sees—enjoys sex but realizes that with her reputation she will not ever marry, meaning she will never be a respectable *señora*. The divorcee does everything she can to not "convertirme en una histérica," for the public shame of divorced women in Mexico—which Castellanos was also fearing herself—was rife. The nun, whose erotic dreams permeate her sleep, confesses a relationship with a doctor whose "masajes" give her sexual release. The lesbian is arguably the happiest of them all despite that "se burlan de nosotras" and she and her partner live reclusively. Finally, the young bachelorette dreams of her "Príncipe azul," an embodiment of young girls' conditioning to desire unrealistic marriages. Although the vignettes appear to simulate women's experiences, the sum of them is nothing but a report by a male scientist, a report which, rather than liberating women from patriarchal notions, only labels them as anonymous types. The prose poem is a subversive satire of

¹⁴ Herlinda was one of Castellanos's two domestic servants; See Cynthia Steele's pivotal essay on Castellanos's relationship with the other woman in "María Escandón y Rosario Castellanos: Feminismo y política personal en el "profundo sur" mexicano" *INTI: Revista de Literatura Hispánica* 40-41 (1994): 317-25.

Kinsey, who—in addition to being a controversial figure for women’s liberationists’ who aimed to challenge the “Establishment” and break free of traditional prescriptions of femininity—was a homegrown scientist at IU.

After leaving Bloomington, Castellanos sends two letters from Boulder, Colorado on June 14 and June 30, 1967, both of which serve as thoughtful reflections of her time in the U.S. In the first letter, after signaling that they will probably live apart upon her return, she writes to Guerra, “ya no quiero sentirme culpable ni victima ni nada, sino libre y adulta y responsable como me he sentido aquí” (266), later petitioning Guerra for clarification on their future plans because “Todo lo que no me sea obligatorio será asunto en el que podré elegir y ejercer mi propia voluntad” (269). And the last letter summarizes her year abroad: “Esta última parte del viaje ha sido la que he disfrutado yo plenamente. En Madison estuvimos todos dados al Diablo. En Bloomington, Herlinda y Gabriel estaban como en el cielo. Pero aquí me he desquitado yo” (270). There is nothing remarkable about the letters she sent from Boulder, which signals a calmer, more meditative Castellanos.

While in the correspondence sent from Madison Castellanos is self-aware of her psychical and emotional dependence on Guerra, toward the latter months her emotion and affect become more interspersed, and her communiqués become simple vehicles of business surrounding their son, their collective bank account, and the plans for how to coexist amicably when Castellanos finally returns to Mexico City. Although she never ceases to express her infinite love for him, she is now aware of the impossibility of their reconciliation. One indication of this is when she signs one of her last letters ever to Guerra on November 27, 1967, sent from Mexico City: “Recibe muchos besos, muchos abrazos y el amor de tu Penélope” (330). Calling herself Penelope is an admission of

hopelessness that her Ulysses will never come. In these last letters, she is determined to define her life beyond marriage, such as in obtaining vehicular independence and growing proud of her single civil state. After her return to Mexico in 1967, the letters continue through December, and the correspondence becomes increasingly more infrequent. Although it cannot be ascertained if she ever procured the green Volkswagen, her liberation manifested itself in other ways. She and Guerra lived in separate homes, finally divorcing in 1971, the same year she was to accept the extraordinary honor of becoming Mexican Ambassador to Israel.

In her letters, Castellanos' personal and political selves come into direct conflict with one another, a conflict that seemed to have brought Castellanos more clarity. Elena Poniatowska reminisces how "Rosario, en esos años de los setentas, se bastó a si misma y de un modo misterioso estaba completa" ("Yo soy" 304). She also cites, without recognizing where, that Castellanos wrote from Israel the following declaration of independence: "yo fui capaz de romper amarras y de partir y permanecer temblando (al principio de miedo y ahora de maravilla) porque tengo entre mis manos ese tesoro desconocido que se llama libertad" (304).

When Poniatowska writes in the prologue to the collection, "Las cartas son un proceso liberador y un triunfo, una guerra compuesta de muchas batallas ganadas por ella misma día a día" (19), it is no coincidence she uses the word "liberating," or that she employs the word "guerra" as an analogy of the state of Castellanos's and Guerra's relationship. The letters, while exposing the difficulties facing the feminist intellectual, underline the importance of the year 1966-67 for Castellanos: they display a woman gravitating toward the post-Guerra application of her own feminist project, wishing to liberate herself from her marriage in a city and country in which liberation is the

dominant feminist discourse, and as a result, challenging the cognitive dissonance between her public and private practices.

The Admirable Continuity of Anglo-American Authorship: Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf

In 1963, four years before she received an academic appointment in the U.S., Castellanos published the first of two articles illustrating her comparison of Anglo-American and Mexican feminisms. In “Feminismo a la mexicana,” published in *Excélsior*, Castellanos reviewed the recent publication of *Personalidad de la mujer mexicana* (1961), a study that attempted to sociologically categorize Mexican women. The book, written by a quasi-anonymous M. Loreto H. (man or woman? why is the maternal last name abbreviated? Castellanos asks), analyzes the way women are subordinated in society through the strongest institution: marriage. For Castellanos, the text is proof of the urgency of why women need to become interested in feminism, and yet she is disappointed to report that “ellas, aun las emancipadas, las creadoras, no aprovechan sus medios de expresión para una rebeldía franca sino apenas para un débil gemido” (250). This “débil gemido” stands in stark contrast to women elsewhere: “Habría que preguntarse por qué el feminismo, que en tantos países ha tenido sus mártires y sus muy respetadas teóricas, en México no ha pasado de una actitud larvaria y vergonzante” (250). These adjectives—“larvaria” and “vergonzante”—are juxtaposed with the reference to women elsewhere whose attributes are “martyrdom” and “respect.” For Castellanos in the early 1960s, the biggest difference between Mexican women and those from more advanced feminist traditions is that the latter had the courage to publicly confront their subordination in private and social spaces, even if it meant becoming a martyr.

In 1970, two years following her appointment in the U.S., Castellanos criticizes again the low visibility of Mexican women interested in liberatory politics in “La liberación de la mujer, aquí.” Here she memorializes the August 26 march of nearly 50,000 women in New York City who were participating in a domestic strike and decrying the failed promises of women’s suffrage on its 50th anniversary. Political rights did not mean equality in other cultural and social spheres. Castellanos writes that although Mexican women are privy to this momentous event via the media, “Todos se refieren a este movimiento de la liberación de la mujer en los Estados Unidos como si estuviera ocurriendo en el más remoto de los países o entre los más exóticos e incomprensibles de los habitantes del menos explorado de los planetas” (58). Her assessment here of Mexican women’s disinterest in international events is often used as her standard unit of measurement: as she continues to uphold from “Feminismo a la mexicana,” compared to women of the Anglo-American tradition, Mexican women have not yet motivated themselves to reach a new realm of consciousness. I The use of the comma in the article’s title (“La liberación de la mujer, aquí”) is a purposeful touch of sarcasm; the pause encourages a critical contrast between the radical expressions of women of the North and the disappointing local absence.

For Castellanos, what women of the Anglo-American cultures have is a history of liberation through writing, a predominant theme in her works since her 1950 Master’s thesis *Sobre cultura femenina*. In this extraordinary thesis, she deconstructs the notion that culture and femininity are mutually exclusive, challenging European philosophers who determined women were lacking intellectual and artistic talent. She draws from long histories of women authors, such as Sappho, Santa Teresa, Virginia Woolf, and Gabriela

Mistral. Here—and in so many other places—she uses Virginia Woolf as an icon of the admirable continuity of Anglo-American authorship.

In order to account for the lack of genealogy for women in the Mexican national repertoire, Castellanos throughout her career explored transnationally the Anglo-American continuity of authorship, a move that allowed her to place herself within this authorial tradition. Looking northward in order to narrate a history of the successes of Anglo-American feminisms, Castellanos emphasizes the women bastions of their past—Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf—portraying as “martyrs” in the heroic cause of the pen-and-paper method of liberation.

In this section, I reveal three modes of feminist practice that shed light on her agenda with Dickinson and Woolf. First, I will look at her role as a translator of poetry by performing close readings of Castellanos’ translations of Dickinson’s poetry into Spanish. These translations show playfulness and a feminist sensitivity, underscoring the breadth of her knowledge and her role as a translator of Dickinson to a Mexican and Spanish-speaking public. Second, I will show how she dialogues primarily with Woolf in the essay form, and even makes her domestically relevant to Mexican women. The essays regarding her Anglo-American sisters exclude a number of women authors that are conscious decisions by the author. Rather than “importing” a Dickinsonian and Woolfian feminist strain, which is typical of the colonial center/periphery model, Castellanos adapts, domesticates, and departs from their positions, yielding her power and creativity and paying attention to the incompatibilities of their geopolitical contexts.

In many ways, Castellanos anticipates a similar literary excavation of protofeminist authorship that would later occur within the Women’s Liberation Movement. In the U.S. academy, feminist scholars revised histories of lettered women of

the past. Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), published two years after Castellanos' death, stands out as one of the quintessential texts undertaking this task.¹⁵ Taking literature as a microcosm of social relations, *Literary Women* addresses the incongruities between women's realities and their involvement and representation in literature. First, one needed to examine how women were overwhelmingly outnumbered as cultural producers by male authors, overlooked since writing was historically a man's job; Second, women had long been typecast as unrealistic protagonists—Eve, Virgin Mary, witches, la Malinche, etc. The lack of diegetic heterogeneity meant that liberation had not yet occurred within fiction, and freeing women characters was another step of the liberatory process. Finally, women were not reading other women, and this contributed to the machinery that kept women out of positions of authorship and thus maintained the lack of diversity of women fictional characters. In short, *Literary Women* was recovering these women from the past to bolster the foundation of the present, a task that Castellanos was already doing for a Spanish-speaking audience.

The first of the major figures applauded by Castellanos, and also a major protagonist in *Literary Women*, is Emily Dickinson, the 19th Century poet from Amherst, Massachusetts, whose words adorn Castellanos' tomb in the famous Rotunda de Personas Ilustres in Mexico City. In her 1964 essay, "Una mujer singular: Emily Dickinson," Castellanos underlines that the most outstanding component of Dickinson's story is the renunciation of a "typical" life in order to find the seclusion and solitude necessary to become an author of their time. In the 19th Century, women had few options outside of marriage, and Dickinson, who had both the resources and suitors to marry, rejected the "existencia normal" that awaited her. She chose instead matrimony with the letters. For

¹⁵ Another was Gilbert and Gubar's 1979 *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Castellanos, Emily Dickinson's life and work reveals the "cierto grado de heroismo" attributed to those women "quienes nos precedieron." This "nos," a pronoun intentionally placed, shows how Castellanos appropriates Dickinson as one of her own literary mothers.

In this brief article Castellanos publishes the translation into Spanish of four poems written by Dickinson.¹⁶ The choice of these four—out of almost 1,800 written by Dickinson throughout her life— suggests two things: First, that Castellanos was drawn to her work because of the parallels between their lives, particularly in how they both led non-normative lives, Dickinson as a single woman and Castellanos as a woman in a conflicted marriage. Second, it shows that not only was she knowledgeable in Dickinson's poetry, she paid close attention to the feminist undertones of Dickinson's style and exaggerated these in the translations.

In the opening paragraph, Castellanos tallies the three major adversities Dickinson faced as a woman author during that time: "la falta de preparación técnica, el aislamiento, la ocultación de una actividad que era calificada por los demás como despreciable o como impropia" (258). As far as the biographical resemblances, like Dickinson, Castellanos was reclusive, a topic that Elena Poniatowska mentions often in her memories of Castellanos, *¡Ay vida, no me mereces!* Also similar to the biography of Castellanos, Dickinson's family was one of status that gave her the resources and encouragement to pursue an education rather than follow the expected routes towards self-fulfillment. It seems, too, that Dickinson's history of "amores contrariados," which many Dickinson scholars assume is the cause of her social reclusion, was another point of

¹⁶ These four poems later appear in Castellanos' comprehensive collection of poems, *Poesía no eres tú* (1972), in which she publishes five more of Dickinson's poems, for a total of nine Spanish versions.

comparison for Castellanos. In short, Castellanos did not just identify with Dickinson as a woman author, she also felt a sense of sisterhood based on their social class and personal suffering.

It should be noted right away that Dickinson's poetry is known as being difficult to translate into Spanish for varying reasons, something Marta Dahlgren studies in two translators of the English author, the Catalán Marià Manent and the Spanish Margarita Ardanaz. First, one must have a deep understanding of Dickinson's life in order to access the idiosyncrasies and events related to her life story permeating her poetry. Second, Dickinson employs unique characteristics that do not necessarily appear in Spanish, such as complex grammar, hymn-like rhythm, and abundant punctuation. Finally, there is the eternal conundrum of translating from English into Spanish based on the languages' rhyming incompatibilities. Naturally, the English language with its monosyllabic words experiences alteration when translated into Spanish, in which multisyllabic rhyming depends on the word-endings. Dahlgren's study shows that Manent's and Ardanaz's translations "fail in accuracy on the syntactic and lexical levels, due to mistranslation and misunderstandings of the original" (1104).

These oversights do not occur in Castellanos' translations. Castellanos' readings are creative in their employment of a simple consonant rhyme, hyper-attentive to the larger metaphors within Dickinson's writing, and respectful of the autobiographical elements within. They also show how Castellanos used her creative agency to domesticate Dickinson, meaning make her relevant to the local audience. For example, in "Una mujer singular," Castellanos asserts that Dickinson's poem, "My life closed twice before its close," is a reference to the only two men she ever loved, Leonard Humphrey and George

Gould, and this information appears to guide her in the lexical choices that stand out in the first four lines.

My life closed twice before its close—
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me

Dos veces antes se cerró mi vida
y yo permanecí para mirar
si la Inmortalidad, sin velos, me guardaba
algún evento más.

Here Castellanos detects the dual meaning of “unveil,” which means “to uncover” in a general sense and “to lift the veil of a bride at a wedding”; she reads “unveil” as “sin velos” to insinuate the latter but also maintains in the line “me guardaba” as in the former meaning of “unveil.” While this is an interesting choice, it makes the poem wordier and less Dickinsonian. Furthermore, the poem in English is in the present tense, allowing a futurity to happen, while the Spanish version is in the past tense, insinuating the lack of hope for “algún evento más.”

Castellanos makes other decisions that modify Dickinson’s poems. In “If I shouldn’t be alive,” the act of writing is a way of remembering someone after death, and the corpse’s method of communicating post-mortem is through the metaphorical “Granite lip,” or writing on a gravestone. In the Dickinson poem, the speaker has no gender. In Castellanos’ version, however, the speaker is a woman, signalled immediately in the first line of the poem (“Si no estuviese viva”). In other words, this is not the immortality of just anyone – it is that of a woman beyond her living years who has left nothing but a few words on a gravestone. There is also a negative spin to the Spanish version that modifies the English message. In the last couplet, the speaker concludes that s/he will continue to speak to the living—“You will know I’m trying / with my Granite

lip!” The present participle in this utterance suggests that communication, or writing on a piece of granite, is an infinite process. The gravestone, a timeless object representing a mortal being like any other written text thrust forth into eternity, will forever be “trying” to speak for the body. Castellanos’ verse (“sabad que entre mis labios de granito / quedaron detenidas las palabras”) spins it negatively with the past-tense preterit, “quedaron detenidas,” implying that the woman’s voice is forever silenced rather than the more positive perspective given by the original. The differences between the poem and the Spanish translation suggest that Castellanos was making Dickinson’s poetry reflect how she understood her own role as a Latin American intellectual. While Dickinson’s poem will forever evoke her voice, Castellanos’ translation of the same poem evokes fear that a woman’s works will become obsolete after her passing. This translation can be read as Castellanos’ perception that literature in Mexico and Latin America is not a woman’s pastime in the same way it is in Anglo-America.

Castellanos’ projection of Dickinson’s gender politics stands out in a comparison of three translations of “She bore it.” Dickinson’s poem marks the death of an old woman who no longer appears “upon the village street” in a “timid bonnet.” The mere first line illustrates that Castellanos was interested in the woman’s subjectivity, something that goes unnoticed in two other translations of the same poem. Dickinson’s poem begins: “She bore it till the simple veins / traced azure on her hand.” When translating this, one is confounded with the verb “to bear,” which in English can be “to wear” or “to put up with.” What is she wearing? In the third stanza, the item could possibly be the “bonnet,” if we are to interpret “to bear” in the sense of the woman’s wardrobe. If it is the alternative meaning, what is she putting up with?

This opening line, in all three translations, reveals varying preoccupations about this one woman's death. The Catalan poet Mariá Manent gives the Spanish reader a material understanding of "she bore it" with her translation to "Llevó aquel sombrerito hasta que las sencillas / venas." Likewise, the Spanish professor Margarita Ardanaz translates the sentence literally to "Lo llevó hasta que las sencillas venas," attributing the verb "llevó" to the bonnet ("su tímido gorrito") later in the poem. In an article that Ardanaz later published on her personal relationship with translating Dickinson, she justifies some of her interpretations based on the fact that the American poet "prefers silence not for any reason derived from her female condition or from any pathological shyness, but simply because she is extremely respectful with words"(256). In other words, the translations by Ardanaz and Manent discard gender as a category of analysis within Dickinson's poems.

Castellanos would not agree with the separation of Dickinson's poetry from the gendered experience. For example, she translates "to bear" in its capacity as "to put up with," so that the poem begins: "Lo soportó hasta que sus propias venas." As the only translator to employ this reading of the verb, Castellanos determines with "soportar" that the woman's source of frustration is part of the female experience. As for the bonnet, the "sombbrero tímido," it is a word devoid of any diminutive modification, which can be a way of minimizing or feminizing items in Spanish. Manent's "gorrito" and "Ardanaz's "sobrerito" insinuate a frailty or infantilization of the old, dying woman, an image that is not present in Castellanos' translation. Instead, the image of the female subject in Castellanos' first line is of a woman that lived until she surpassed her threshold passing peacefully and respectably into death.

The sum of Dickinson's translations and the praising article, "Una mujer singular," speaks to the deep engagement that the Mexican author had with a woman indispensable to the Anglo-American authorial tradition. Furthermore, because she is offering Dickinson's poems in Spanish and for a Mexican and Latin American audience, Castellanos is manipulating the ways in which a Spanish-speaking audience should read Dickinson. By emphasizing Dickinson's gender politics, Castellanos sells the heroism of a woman who lived what many consider a sad life: alone, locked in a room, writing about death and the suffering that comes with life. For Castellanos, Dickinson was a martyr, for her own suffering has left women of today with the tools and the inspiration to create their own literature.

Perhaps more important than Dickinson for Castellanos, however, is Virginia Woolf, the English canonical author who is the subject of two articles by Castellanos and who stands out for her as the most heroic of models for how to confront sexism and gender-based discrimination, not masked by overarching large metaphors, but directly—in essays and novels that seek to deconstruct the histories that exclude women from cultural production.

The subject of a number of contemporary cultural works, such as the 2002 blockbuster film, *The Hours*, Virginia Woolf was and continues to be a canonical writer of the early 20th Century. Her life and works, such as "A Room of One's Own" and *Mrs. Dalloway*, are fundamental to English literature and feminism. More specifically in Mexico, Woolf can be considered one of the most important influences of the 20th Century feminist movement, a fact that inspired the recent 2014 collection of essays, *Escribir como mujer. Ensayos sobre la obra de Virginia Woolf*. These reflections, like Castellanos' project, show their indebtedness to Woolf whose legacy opened new doors for

contemporary women: “Para [Woolf], la literatura representaba un habla, un lugar, una conciencia de las mujeres sobre su cuerpo y su posición en la sociedad; por ello, debemos agradecerle su ayuda en este sentido” (Rodríguez 11). These remarks give some indication of Woolf’s reception in Mexico, but they pay almost no attention—save one meager quote—to how Woolf was mediated by Castellanos into the Mexican feminist legacy, something worth exploring before concluding this chapter.

As in the case of Dickinson, there appear to be many similarities between Woolf and Castellanos: Woolf was married (although her marriage was quite notably happy); she made a living—even if bleak—off of her writings; and never stopped writing throughout the course of her life.¹⁷ The most admirable and successful objective of Woolf’s career, for Castellanos, was to challenge women’s absence from public spaces.

Mónica Ayuso’s article, “Virginia Woolf in Mexico and Puerto Rico” has studied sufficiently how Rosario Castellanos and Rosario Ferré engaged with Woolf throughout their writings. Ayuso, rather than considering Woolf as a precursor and literary model in a unilateral fashion—this is to say, that the Rosarios were mere receptors of a superior model of liberation—is attentive to the ways in which these Latin American writers negotiated their readings of Woolf and how these negotiations evolved over time. She calls Castellanos’ earlier works “the transplanting of Woolf’s works in their own environments,” because Castellanos seems to overlook the cultural and historical differences between their respective countries, such as the Interwar period in England

¹⁷ It should be noted that there might be similarities with how each woman ended her life. Woolf committed suicide in a river in England in March of 1941. By “there may be similarities” I am referring to the inconclusive debate surrounding Castellanos’ death in Israel in 1974. During her tenure as Ambassador of Mexico in Israel, Castellanos was found dead in her apartment in Jerusalem after being electrocuted by a lamp while exiting the bathtub. To this day in the Mexican academy, many claim that her death was an accident given how clumsy she was, while others assert that it was suicide, given that her depression, helplessness abroad, and the finalization of her divorce led her to take her own life. See: Nicolat, Rosalina. “A 34 años de la muerte de Rosario Castellanos.” *Cimacnoticias.com.mx*. 8 ago 2008.

and the Victorian society in which she lived. Yet Ayuso also points out that in her latter works she pays more attention to those disparities and considers “the imprint of the homeland” (4). Ayuso’s work is important because she delineates a latter period of Castellanos’ cultural production, which happens to coincide with the period following her stay in the U.S.

Castellanos’ 1966 essay, “Virginia Woolf o la literatura como ejercicio de la libertad” serves as a starting point to how the Mexican author’s evaluation of Woolf evolved. She summarizes Woolf’s life as comprised of publications delayed by male critics, self-reflection and self-awareness, courage, political activism during the Interwar period, and the refusal to abandon her labors despite the intense criticism she faced throughout her career. Woolf’s legacy—for men and women in England and the rest of the world—is one of consciousness-raising based on a pacific humanism:

Conduce un feminismo bien entendido: a hacer de las mujeres colaboradoras eficaces de los hombres en la construcción de un mundo nuevo, luminoso, habitable para aquellos en quienes lo mejor de la humanidad se manifiesta; la inteligencia, el amor, la justicia, la laboriosidad. (346)

Woolf’s philosophy is based first and foremost on the collaboration between men and women, rather than an antagonism between them, and for Castellanos the author embraces worthy qualities such as love, justice, and the Protestant work ethic. Finally, using her literature “como un ejercicio para la libertad,” to borrow from the article’s title, Castellanos concludes that Woolf need be considered first and foremost in any discussion of liberatory politics of the contemporary period writing that: “Los deudores somos nosotros, a quienes obliga, con su ejemplo, a continuar su lucha, su tarea, su obra” (346).

Castellanos’ later engagement becomes less laudatory and more oriented towards how Woolf can more specifically contribute to the Mexican feminist project in a 1973

essay where Castellanos begins to reconcile Woolf's legacy across national borders. "Virginia Woolf y el 'vicio impune'," while it bears Woolf's name, is not about Woolf *per se*. It is more about the importance of reading other women, which makes this essay rich on interpretive levels. For example, the article is somewhat cryptic in that the "unpunished vice" from the title is never made explicit. It is suggested, however, that the impunity refers to the reader who, afraid of perpetuating Euro- and Anglo-centrism—closes her eyes to foreign traditions precisely because they are foreign. Reading Woolf means opening one's mind to international perspectives: "El modelo puede ser alguien de otra lengua, de otra época, pero esta diferencia no significa ninguna distancia insalvable" (81). In other words, there is the possibility of establishing sisterhood across borders and cultures because the act of reading Woolf and other international feminists means finding one's truth: "La verdad no es el premio al renunciamiento sino corona de la abundancia. Y está derramada sobre todas las cosas. Pero se recoge y se atesora en los libros, en donde resplandece de su propia luz para los ojos del que lee" (82). Thus, this final memorial to Virginia Woolf is much less about Woolf than it is about the Mexican woman who reads her, for it is in reading her, about her, and other non-Mexican women of letters that the Mexican aspiring feminist can determine the conditions of her own liberation.

In evoking Dickinson and Woolf, it seems evident that Castellanos crafted her genealogy by highlighting those who she deemed worthy, but there are many women excluded from this. For instance, the Anglo-American legacy of female authorship begins with neither Dickinson nor Woolf. Where are Mary Shelley, Mary Wolstonecraft, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, or Jane Austin in Castellanos' admiring gaze? Castellanos admits that these writers of the early generation of English women authors are lacking something crucial for her:

Trabajaban en la ‘sala común,’ porque carecían de un cuarto propio: las interrumpían constantemente y ellas (que ocultaban pudorosamente su labor) tenían que recurrir a todos los trucos para no ser descubiertas: la página, a medio redactar, era colocada precipitadamente bajo un papel secante o un simulacro de bordado. El libro concluido se amparaba tras un pseudónimo. (“Virginia Woolf o la literatura como ejercicio de la libertad” 339-40)

These women, although they wrote, were not *authors*. They did not occupy a public space that is afforded by the *oficio* or the vocation, and thus were not employing tactics that resonated publicly. Here Castellanos reveals her extensive literary formation in Anglo-American authorship and a preference for women’s texts that liberate women.

Conclusion

Castellanos’ interpretations of and commentaries on feminist icons such as Friedan, Compton-Burnett, Dickinson, and Woolf, show that she was deeply empowered and inspired by how the U.S. Women’s Liberation Movement was taking shape, and her yearlong stay as a professor in the U.S. encouraged this process. Up until 1966, Castellanos was engaged in the political dimensions of feminism, such as literature as a site of feminist revolution and the public manifestations of women who clamored for societal change. But perhaps what was missing from this position, and what is missing from scholarship surrounding Castellanos’ oeuvre, was the link between her personal life as a mother and wife and her feminist articulations in the public sphere. Reading her letters to Ricardo Guerra during this time opens a portal into how Castellanos began to make those connections. She grew to see how she was also a cog in the patriarchal machine, and this raised her consciousness to break from that cycle, which in turn made her writings more radical and straightforward. Upon returning to Mexico City in 1967, Castellanos continued to be deeply engaged with the Anglo-American tradition of writing

that permeated liberatory discourses, and she became more invested in her own liberation, as well. In short, she found the personal in the political.

These sources—the letters and Castellanos’ writings on the Anglo-American literary tradition—give us a portrait of Castellanos who was privately staging her liberation while publicly crafting herself within the Anglo-American feminist genealogy in what she perceived as the absence of a Mexican lineage. Of course, Castellanos died one year before the Women’s Liberation Movement would culminate in the United Nation’s First International Year of the Woman that took place in Mexico City in 1975. It was here during this momentous gathering of women from around the world that feminist leaders such as Betty Friedan would be forced to reconcile hegemonic notions of feminism with women of diverse classes, races, and ethnicities.

CHAPTER V

ON FRENCH FEMINISMS: SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND SIMONE WEIL

French literary space, having imposed itself as universal, was adopted as a model: not insofar in that it was French, but insofar as it was autonomous—which is to say purely literary. In other words, French literary capital belonged not to France alone, but to all nations.

Paris is not only the capital of the literary world. It is also, as a result, the gateway to the “world market of intellectual goods,” as Goethe put it; the chief place of consecration in the world of literature. Consecration in Paris is indispensable for authors from all dominated literary spaces: translations, critical studies, tributes, and commentaries represent so many judgments and verdicts that confer value upon a text that until now has remained outside world literary space or otherwise gone unnoticed within.

-Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*

Like most Latin American intellectuals of the mid-20th Century, Castellanos was subject to the hegemony of French literature. As a student in 1949 in the Facultad de Letras y Filosofía, where she was completing her Master’s degree, she took “French Existentialism and its Problems” with visiting professor and French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Matthews). Throughout her literary career she proved her fluency in the French literary canon, such as the translations of Saint-John Perse she published in *Versiones*, the various essays on Simone de Beauvoir, and the aphorism dedicated to Simone Weil in her unedited *Diálogos con los hombres más honrados*. In many ways, with French literature historically at the apex of the world’s literary production, as Pascale Casanova suggests in the epigraphs of this chapter, knowing the French canon was imperative for any contemporary Mexican intellectual. Additionally, her friends and contemporaries Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes were the Mexican Ambassadors to France in the 1950s and 1970s, respectively, which points to the more geographic link

between Mexican and French cultural relations. France was a locus that existed in Castellanos' intellectual and literary repertoire.

France was also a place that existed in Castellanos' passport. In 1950, Castellanos spent five days in Paris where she and her friend and contemporary, Dolores Castro, were guests of Octavio Paz, the then-ambassador of Mexico to France. Victor Baptiste, an author who introduces his contemporary and friend as "the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico" (3), notes that Beauvoir and Castellanos met in 1950 in Paris (1). In her letters to Ricardo Guerra, Castellanos was enamored with the city: "París es París. Ni hablar. Absorbente, polifacético y total... Amo a París" (92-93). In another letter she writes that the Louvre is "maravilloso, importantísimo" (92). Twenty-one years later, in 1971, Castellanos brought in the New Year in Paris, which she documented in *Excélsior* on January 1, 1971. In "Año nuevo: ¿vida, qué?" she reflects on her recent awakening of otherness in the foreign country much different from her own, beginning with the question "¿Qué diablos vine a hacer aquí?" She furthers that she is not "esa pata de perro que parezco" but rather a woman who, when she is in France, misses eating *cochinita pibil* and vacationing in Cuernavaca or Acapulco (629). These two writings illustrate Castellanos' evolution *away* from French literary and cultural hegemony on her journey toward a Mexican feminism.

What interests me in this chapter is how Castellanos dialogued with French literature of the second wave throughout her evolution. According to her 1971 chronicle, she grows less invested in showing her expertise on French culture because, as Chapter VI will contend, in this year she starts to rethink the Mexican feminist project independently of hegemonic feminisms. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Castellanos imports the writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Simone Weil, intervening in their work

and translating their ideas for Mexican audiences, such as when she argues for Simone Weil's application to themes related to indigenous peoples in Mexico. Rather than importing the styles, voices, and preoccupations of "las dos Simones," Castellanos is a careful interlocutor who ponders their importance to her as a woman, public intellectual, and Mexican. When we compare Castellanos' life and legacy with that of Beauvoir, we see a typical story of how Third World women are kept out of the global feminist canon.

There have already been important studies on how Rosario Castellanos interpreted Beauvoir and Weil, and the present chapter attempts to widen that perspective by exploring comprehensively their impact on Castellanos' overarching feminist project. In the following pages, I contend that Beauvoir and Weil offered a blueprint for how to orient herself ethically when she was a young public intellectual in the 1950s and early 1960s. In her readings of these women, she elaborates on their relevance to Mexican women and illustrates her knowledge of global literature. However, her engagement with Beauvoir and Weil tapers after 1969, because as I show in Chapter III, it was a year in which she reinvigorated her anti-imperialist duty to resist French and Anglo-American culture and politics.

In 1949, months before Castellanos would defend her Master's thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*, the French feminist second wave was catalyzed by the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Here Beauvoir recognized that cultural differences between men and women—not political ones—were what women needed to confront and celebrate. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Beauvoir and her cohort of Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, became pillars of the French feminist output with their literary and philosophical writings, two fields in which Castellanos also exercised her feminist voice.

Scholarship has already identified a number of similarities between Castellanos and French feminist second wave thought. Carlos Monsiváis' "“El Segundo sexo’: no se nace feminista,” attests to the lineage between Castellanos and Simone de Beauvoir. In “Ethics, Eros, and Necessity: Rosario Castellanos on the Two Simones,” Sharon Larisch elaborates on the “extended dialogue set up in her essays between Simone de Beauvoir’s and Simone Weil’s ethical thought” (105). Maureen Ahern has suggested that Castellanos could be read as an influence to French feminisms:

Considering the privileged position that language holds in Castellanos’ work, we are struck by the many points of convergence with that of the French feminists Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig, whose recognition of language as an instrument of oppression, repression, and exclusion and whose call for another language Castellanos clearly anticipates....clearly there is a great deal more to say about the points of affinity between this Mexican writer and the wide spectrum of attitudes formulated by these younger French writers five to ten years later, the many coincidences of her writing with their practice of what is now recognized as l’écriture féminine, or women’s writing. This chapter remains to be written. (51)

Here Ahern recognizes the fact that Castellanos’ literature “clearly anticipates” the French wave embodied by Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray, and Wittig. In suggesting that we can find “points of convergence” with Cixous, Kristeva (who only published two texts during Castellanos’ lifetime, *Desire in Language* and *Revolution in Poetic Language*), Irigaray, and Wittig, she posits that Castellanos could be read as having contributed to global feminist discourses before these authors would influence the French second wave. Her acknowledgement that “this chapter remains to be written” in part motivates this chapter.

In the 1980s, six years after Castellanos’ death, the French feminist canon was created in Elaine Marks’ *New French Feminisms* and Alice Jardine and Toril Moi’s 1985 *Sexual/Textual Politics*. As feminist historians would later counter, the methodologies employed by these texts were problematic because they grouped authors by their

linguistic and regional identities without keeping in mind the global nature of feminism during the second wave. In “French Feminism vs. Anglo-American Feminism: A Reconstruction,” Silvie Gambaudo summarizes how traditional feminist histories were explained:

Anglo-American feminists (Kate Millett, Virginia Woolf, Elaine Showalter) would be invested in seeking a woman-centred perspective and in defining a woman identity they believe women have been denied. French feminists (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva), on the other hand, would be indebted to Simone de Beauvoir and would believe that woman does not have an identity as such but that the feminine can be identified where difference and otherness are found. (96-7)

Here Gambaudo shows how Moi’s thesis derives from genealogies that seem to lack cross-pollination: Simone de Beauvoir appears to have no influence on the Anglo-American tradition nor the latter having any convergences with the former even though Beauvoir was read in English thanks to translation and French women were reading Betty Friedan and other U.S. feminists. As Gambaudo shows, this separation of French feminism from Anglo-American feminism makes feminism a tradition “reduced to geographical, cultural, or linguistic denotations,” without thinking about how traditions can be and often are locatable on global dimensions (97).

The first section of this chapter critically studies Beauvoir in relation to Castellanos. In it, I challenge the notion that Castellanos has been considered “the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico” and invert it. Through a comparative analysis of each of their *obras maestras*—*The Second Sex* (1949) and *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950)—I contend that Castellanos’ text offers unique commentaries on the perceived inferior status of women’s contributions to culture. I will then show how in Castellanos’ writings throughout the 1950s and 1960s Beauvoir was deployed as a symbol of personal feminist liberation from the most oppressive institution of Castellanos’ life: her marriage.

In the second part of the chapter, I explore how Simone Weil intersects with Castellanos' work with the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI). Simone Weil's literature provides the key to unlocking Castellanos' period of indigenous writings of the late 1950s and early 1960s. More specifically, Weil's philosophies of Eros and "attention" will help Castellanos orient herself ethically in the early years of her career and to establish an understanding of how the "other" is constructed.

Simone de Beauvoir: The Rosario Castellanos of France

Victor Baptiste, in his 1972 book, *La obra poética de Rosario Castellanos*, writes that Castellanos was known as "the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico" after Octavio Paz sent her a copy of *Le Deuxième Sexe* from Paris (3). Castellanos was working on her Master's thesis, a philosophical text addressing many of the same subjects. The two women published their groundbreaking philosophical texts—*The Second Sex* and *Sobre cultura femenina*—within one year of each other, with Castellanos' 1950 Master's thesis being published months after Beauvoir's and reportedly before Castellanos would have read her French contemporary. As Norma Alarcón writes:

Es difícil saber si Castellanos leyó este libro antes de la preparación de su tesis. Victor Baptiste reporta que Castellanos ha sido apelada la Simone de México, y que desde París Octavio Paz le mandó un ejemplar de *El segundo sexo* en 1950. Aunque la influencia de Simone de Beauvoir sobre la obra de Castellanos en su totalidad es evidente, dudo que el libro le haya llegado a tiempo para la preparación de *Sobre cultura femenina*. (45-46)

Gabriela Cano, one of the leading feminist scholars in contemporary Mexican studies, similarly writes that Castellanos "quizá fue la primera conocedora mexicana de *El segundo sexo*," while recognizing that *Sobre cultura femenina* had already begun the same task of

addressing pervasive sexism in intellectual and sociocultural spaces (“Rosario Castellanos y el feminismo de la nueva ola” 3).

Calling her “the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico” is an analogy that—although it was meant to compliment the young author—reproduces the colonial dynamic by comparing her to a European thinker. Rather than assume that Beauvoir empowered Castellanos unilaterally—Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan define the colonial nature of feminist history as flowing “from the West to the Rest” (13)—Castellanos was a unique contributor to global feminist discourses. Castellanos’ friend and contemporary Elena Poniatowska writes in the same spirit that “No es que Rosario se haya obligado a emular a Simone de Beauvoir, es que el único punto de referencia era Simone de Beauvoir, y por lo tanto América Latina, en un afán de ponerse al día, produce desde Picassos hasta Elizabeth Taylors del sub-desarrollo” (*¡Ay vida no me mereces!* 45). Beauvoir and Castellanos were contemporaries and arguably intellectual equals, with texts that undertook women’s social and cultural marginality from strikingly similar angles. Given the concurrent timelines of the authors, Beauvoir could not have yet “influenced” Castellanos. These kinds of biases, often rooted in colonial legacies, lurk behind what it means to consider the Mexican author vis-à-vis second wave French feminisms.

Simone de Beauvoir is attributed with bestowing an enormous legacy on Mexican feminism in general, as the 2009 publication of *Simone de Beauvoir...entre nosotras* attests. This collection of essays pays respects to the French feminist with autobiographical entries from some of Mexico’s leading feminist scholars, such as Elena Poniatowska, Marta Lamas, and Marcela Lagarde, while Castellanos’ role in the Beauvoirian presence is ignored. Marta Lamas, one of the contributors to this essay collection, is in fact so dedicated to Beauvoir’s legacy in Mexico that she founded the Instituto de Liderazgo

Simone de Beauvoir, an institute serving local communities raising awareness of gender as a category for exclusion in contemporary Mexico City life.¹⁸ The entries in *Simone de Beauvoir, entre nosotras* are testimonies of Beauvoir's reaches to these women's individual feminist trajectories, and of how *The Second Sex* was published "en un momento histórico en el que en México no tenemos derecho a votar y la Universidad Autónoma de México apenas ve rostros de mujeres" (Lamas 99).

Meanwhile, Simone de Beauvoir never once engaged Mexican feminists, save one meager instance in which she lambasted Mexican women for being too divisive for global solidarity to occur. In 1976, after the 1975 UN Women's International Year conference in Mexico City in which Betty Friedan and Domitila Barrios de Chúngara competed for a voice for their respective issues (sexuality vs. anti-imperialism), Simone de Beauvoir was invited to give the initial remarks. Although she could not be in attendance, she sent the following message to be read aloud:

Dear Sisters, I am deeply sorry that circumstances do not allow me to be among you today, but I am present in my heart. I hold this meeting to be a great historic event. In contrast to Mexico where women, directed by their political parties, by their nations, were only seeking to integrate Woman into a male society, you are gathered here to denounce the oppression to which women are subjected in this society.

To fight this oppression, for a long time now women have been gathering together in many countries; but these various groups were more or less ignorant of one another. For the first time they will join together, and women coming from all over the world will become conscious of the scandal of their condition. You are right to consider this condition the source of real crimes: the position imposed on women, whether under institutionalized forms or not, leads to unacceptable attacks against the human being; against these, in the vast majority of cases, there is no legal recourse. That is why it is urgent that women should mobilize themselves to combat these crimes by their own means.

Strengthened by your solidarity, you will develop defensive tactics, the first being precisely the one you will be using during these five days: talk to

¹⁸ One might wonder why Lamas chose a foreigner to baptize her institute over the more locally-relevant Castellanos.

one another, talk to the world, bring to light the shameful truths that half of humanity is trying to cover up. The Tribunal is in itself a feat. It heralds more to come. I salute this Tribunal as being the start of a radical decolonization of women. (Russell and Van De Ven 5)

There are a number of observations to make about Beauvoir's words. To begin, she uses Mexican women as the counter-example for the purpose of global feminist gatherings, while discarding entirely that the clash which occurred in Mexico was founded on valid arguments: What right did Betty Friedan have to impose her First World problems on a coal miner's wife who was preoccupied with economic, environmental, and health concerns? Moema Viezzer's *Let me Speak!: Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines* is an extraordinary account of how the 1975 conflict was the beginning of the transition from second wave feminism towards the more intersectionally-sensitive third wave.

Furthermore, regarding Beauvoir's 1976 statement, she accuses Mexican women of being "directed by their political parties, by their nations" without recognizing the nuances behind the actual events that took place. For one explanation of the clash between Beauvoir's interpretation of the event and the actual events, we may turn to Pamela Fuentes' "Entre reivindicaciones sexuales y reclamos de justicia económica: divisiones políticas e ideológicas durante la Conferencia Mundial del Año Internacional de la Mujer. México, 1975." Fuentes' work shows that the only role Mexican nationalism played in the portrayal of the conflicts between First- and Third World feminists was in how the press (an extension of the state) inaccurately manipulated the events in their coverage, meaning that whatever Beauvoir read about the conference was a twisted version of what Mexican women were actually advocating for in their first international forum.

Another startling assertion in Beauvoir's opening remarks is when she writes that women have been "more or less ignorant of one another," which is not entirely true. No Latin American feminist would argue that they were ignorant of French feminist thought, particularly of Simone de Beauvoir's writings, almost all of which were published and read voraciously by women in the 1960s and 1970s, as *Simone de Beauvoir...entre nosotras* attests. Finally, while Beauvoir applauds the UN's attempts to gather women together and decolonize them, it would be safe to say that she was unfamiliar with Castellanos' work, or that of any other Third World feminist author of her time. We can recall that she was not even able to attend an event that was, according to her, important for "being the start of a radical decolonization of women." In short, it seems Beauvoir held a disparaging view of her Mexican sisters while they have eulogized her time and again.

That Beauvoir sometimes acted in ways that were anti-feminist, such as ignoring some of her women contemporaries, is briefly explored by Francesca Gargallo in her essay "La vida para escribir: para una biografía de Simone de Beauvoir" (*Simone de Beauvoir...entre nosotras*). Here she illustrates Beauvoir's indifference toward Luce Irigaray, which Irigaray remembers in her autobiographical text, *Yo, tú, nosotras*. According to Irigaray, she sent Beauvoir her text *Speculum of the Other Woman*—which would later shatter Lacanian psychoanalytical theory on the mirror stage—without eliciting a single response from Beauvoir. This anecdote shows that Beauvoir, undoubtedly crucial for feminist history, is not exempt from the subtle sexism that feminism seeks to expose.

In Carlos Monsiváis' essay "El Segundo Sexo": no se nace feminista," Castellanos' friend and contemporary admits that his own awareness of Beauvoir is due to Castellanos' readings of the French philosopher: "Le debo a Rosario Castellanos la relectura de *El Segundo Sexo*...Castellanos me hizo consciente de las resonancias del libro. A ella, *El*

Segundo sexo la había transformado, al modificar, organizándolo panorámicamente, su entendimiento de la condición femenina” (154). According to Monsiváis, Beauvoir’s text gave Castellanos the theoretical framework with which to lambast patriarchal culture humorously. Monsiváis reminds us that while Beauvoir was indeed fundamental to his own awakening as a *misógino* (the essay comes from his paradoxically-titled *Misógino feminista*), Castellanos was an interlocutor of her feminist ideas for Mexican culture in particular, and that she brought something unique to the conversation: humor.

Monsiváis’ declaration shows how important Castellanos was for bringing Beauvoir into public discourse before the 1970s, the decade in which the authors of *Simone de Beauvoir, entre nosotras* claim she made her mark on Mexican women. My analyses of Castellanos’ engagement with Beauvoir will rest upon the assumption that Castellanos was not “the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico”, but rather that she had her own unique contributions to the emergent global and local feminist conversations. Taking it one step further, it would be possible to highlight that Castellanos was more astute in *Sobre cultura femenina* and that Beauvoir’s ignorance of her contemporary’s text is indicative of a larger pattern in global feminist history.

My interest in comparing *The Second Sex* and *Sobre cultura femenina* is due in part to a series of conversations I had with Irene Matthews, feminist scholar, translator, and professor Emerita of Northern Arizona University. I met Irene in Mexico City in March of 2014, during which she informed me that she had initiated a project similar to mine without ever finishing it. She bestowed upon me the abstract she wrote for an Organized Research Application at NAU in the spring of 1997 with the hopes that I would continue this incomplete project. I am grateful to count on her preliminary research and to continue her comparative work.

As is the case with many other women in this dissertation—like Virginia Woolf and Emily Dickinson from Chapter IV; Sor Juana and Gabriela Mistral from Chapter III—there are biographical resemblances between Castellanos and Beauvoir that are necessary to consider. To begin, both Castellanos and Beauvoir were immersed in philosophy: Castellanos as master’s student in the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras and Beauvoir as a member of the Parisian existentialist clique and also the romantic and intellectual partner of Jean-Paul Sartre. Castellanos was also versed in French existentialism as a student in May 1949 of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s course “El existencialismo francés y sus problemas.” In addition to taking this course with the visiting professor at the UNAM in Mexico City, she participated in the 1950 Third International Congress of Philosophy at the UNAM, during which time existentialism was debated at length (Matthews). As members of philosophical circles, Beauvoir and Castellanos were women who worked in male-dominated spheres and wrote extensively across all genres. They were cosmopolitan, public intellectuals, who gravitated towards questions of gender during a time in which few women did so.

Rather than accept that Beauvoir empowered Castellanos unilaterally—the all too pervasive story of the First World liberating the Third World—I propose to challenge and invert the notion that Castellanos be considered “the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico”. Through a comparative analysis of each of their pivotal philosophic texts—*The Second Sex* (1949) and *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950)—I argue that Castellanos’ text diverges from Beauvoir’s in two incomparable ways: by way of humor and her unique relocation of women’s problems in relation to Spanish colonialism. While Castellanos’ thesis has deservedly received canonical status within Mexican feminist studies, *The Second Sex*

shadows over it like the First World over the Third World, reminding Latin American women of their dependency on women from developed countries.

Humor is, for Castellanos, how she combats hegemonic philosophies. As she would say in 1973 about her affinity for humor, “Hay que reír, pues. Y la risa, ya lo sabemos, es el primer testimonio de la libertad” (*Mujer que sabe latín* 207). As for the second characteristic—the relocation of women’s problems in relation to colonialism—Castellanos’ articulation connects sexism in Mexico to the Conquest and its contemporary legacies, a connection that was unforeseeable to the French woman. By contrast, in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, there is a pervasive seriousness of the topic and her use of history is more Eurocentric and less interested in the intersections of sex with geopolitics. In considering the exceptionality of *Sobre cultura femenina* and studying Castellanos as an author writing independently of her European counterpart, we are able to document a variety of Latin American feminist thought that arose organically—not derivatively—within its particular cultural and historical context; It is an opportunity to bring Castellanos’ philosophy out of the shadow of Beauvoir’s work and into the light of the global feminist canon.

The histories of Beauvoir’s and Castellanos’ respective texts are an interesting case for global feminism. Simone de Beauvoir’s 1949 *The Second Sex* was immediately successful: in the first week of its appearance, twenty-two thousand copies were sold (Bair vii). In 1953, it was translated into English—even if rather controversially—before becoming the Bible of the second wave and being translated to dozens of languages.¹⁹ The publication history of Castellanos’ text is remarkably less climactic: her thesis was

¹⁹ Beauvoir was not translated into Spanish until 1969 by Siglo Veinte in Buenos Aires, so even if Castellanos was reading it throughout the 1950s and 1960s, it was in French or the highly-amputated English translation.

defended in 1950 after which it disappeared into the university's archives, only being recovered in the feminist journal, *Debate feminista*, in the 1990s after her friend, Graciela Hierro, shared her personal copy (260). No published translation exists of *Sobre cultura femenina* to date.

In addition to the publishing histories of each text, the women's biographies must be considered when comparing the successes of their feminist philosophies. Beauvoir did not identify as a feminist until later in her career. In the first of her three autobiographies, *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), she remembers the 1920s in which, amidst a social upheaval of religious, social, and cultural values, she achieved her independence as a young adult from her parents and their Catholic, middle class traditional values independently of her sex. Her personal investment in the feminist cause becomes clearer in the third installment of her autobiographies, the 1963 *La force des choses*, when she realizes about her early years that "ce monde était un monde masculin, mon enfance avait été nourrie de mythes forgés par les hommes" (136). Dissimilar to Beauvoir, Castellanos' feminist coming of age occurred in her childhood, when she lost her brother Benjamín. In this tragic time, which is recounted in her celebrated novel, *Balún Canán*, she learned that her parents would have preferred to lose Rosario rather than the male heir, making the young child immediately aware of her status among the second, less desirable sex. In other words, Castellanos is more aware of the biases she faced as a woman from a young age while Beauvoir writes *The Second Sex* with an intellectual distance. Some have even gone so far as to mention that parts of the text are written in the third person plural "they" rather than the first person plural "we." Finally, the two women were at different stages in their career at the time of their respective texts' publications: Beauvoir was a 42-year old who had already made it as an intellectual in the world-famous circle of

existentialists, while Castellanos, at 25 years of age, was just beginning her literary career with an audacity of youth.

Sobre cultura femenina is, in fact, so audacious from the opening moments that when Castellanos defended it in June of 1950 her committee was alleged to have chuckled at the following sarcasm with which the essay commences (Cano, “Rosario Castellanos”):

¿Existe una cultura femenina? Esa interrogación parece, a primera vista, tan superflua y tan conmovedoramente estúpida como aquella otra que ha dado también origen a varios libros y en la que destacados oficiales de la Armada Británica se preguntan, con toda la seriedad inherente a su cargo, si existe la serpiente marina. (260)

Within these first breaths, Castellanos asserts that it is “superflua” and “conmovedoramente estúpida” to even question if a “cultura femenina” exists.

Comparing this anomaly to the case of the sea serpent, she reminds us that the British Army’s refusal to acknowledge its existence is not about fact but about conviction, despite that they have evidence to the contrary. She furthers that there is “un coro de hombres cuerdos que permanecen en las playas y que desde allí sentencian la imposibilidad absoluta de que monstruos tan extraordinarios como las serpientes marinas y las mujeres cultas o creadoras de cultura, sean algo más que una alucinación, un espejismo, una morbosa pesadilla” (260-61). Following this logic and in a sarcastic tone, her introductory paragraphs suggests that a “cultura femenina” could exist if people removed their biases and were capable of believing such a monstrous truth.

“Cultura femenina” could be translated from Spanish as both “Feminine culture” or “Culture Produced by Women”—the former being a question of essentialism and the latter being one of sociocultural opportunity. This play between woman’s biology and the cultural prospects afforded her is behind the initial sarcasm that sets the tone for the essay. As a thesis on continental philosophy, it explores how philosophers—such as

Schopenhauer, Weininger, Simmel, whom she considers “los profesionales” of women’s cultural inferiority—have convincingly argued against women’s intellectual capacities (276). After citing long passages of men’s deliberations on women’s mental lethargy, Castellanos concludes that philosophy’s expertise on women’s inferiority is a system of knowledge so well-formulated by the purported “greats” that it is impossible to disprove: “Su sabiduría es indiscutible, sus razones tienen que ser muy buenas y las fuentes de donde proceden sus informaciones deben ser irreprochables.” (282). In other words, the most damning condemnations of “la cultura femenina” come from the most seemingly faithful sources—so faithful that they produce “informaciones... irreprochables.” The sarcastic elements of *Sobre cultura femenina* are meant to exaggerate the absurdity of such ideas and in using such erudite words and exhibiting her profound knowledge of philosophic history, she suggests that her own astute perceptions will be discarded simply because they come from a woman. Using humor in an academic thesis and writing with a style that lies on the boundary between philosophy and literature, Castellanos acknowledges that she cannot as a woman penetrate such a masculine field.

Conversely, Beauvoir’s text does not resort to humor at all, and instead maintains a serious take on the question of womanhood in a straightforward, encyclopedic take. Her text is much larger, and although it also tackles many of the same philosophers with whom Castellanos engages, it also includes comprehensively other cultural, historical, anthropological, and sociological, literary, and political approaches. As Deirdre Baird notes, “She collected every scrap of empirical information she could find and came out with the conclusion that wherever and whenever women function in society, a basic inequality with men exists” (438). Beauvoir’s monumental text was written with much

more intellectual authority and legitimacy than Castellanos, for which reason 22,000 copies sold in the first week of its release.

For both the French and the Mexican woman, history is read as a string of narratives that are damaging to women in the present tense, and yet they rely quite differently on history. Beauvoir's text eulogizes European texts, such as in one of her most innovative chapters, "Myths," in which she analyzes D.H. Lawrence, André Breton, and Paul Claudel from a feminist perspective, comparing them to European and Anglo-American women writers such as Louisa May Alcott, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf. France in 1949 was still largely unaware of the aftermath of colonialism as it related to feminism. France was still a colonial power in Algeria at the time of its publication. This is not to say that Beauvoir should be blamed for having colonial biases of a First World French woman, but rather that this is where Castellanos' contribution is unmatched, making her a complement, not a result, of Beauvoir.

Castellanos' text rethinks the relationship between colonialism and sexism through an engagement with the Spanish Conquest as an exemplary case of historical bias. In fact, the rhetorical question with which the essay opens, "¿Existe una cultura femenina?" can be read as a precursor to Roberto Fernández Retamar's 1971 anti-imperialist essay *Calibán*, which begins with a similarly ironic interrogation, "¿Existe una cultura latinoamericana?" As I previously explored, Castellanos uses the case of the sea serpent and the British Army's denial of its existence in order to show how historically knowledge has been held hostage by personal beliefs and convictions (this is reminiscent of the "alternative facts" and "confirmation bias" we see in contemporary political discourses). She adds to the sea serpent analogy, however, with another when she compares sexism to

the alternative facts that prevailed with the Conquest. Comparing feminists to the Latin Americans who must define themselves always against Europe, she writes:

Mucho quisiéramos, como las inconfundibles feministas, protestar airadamente contra un destino tan monótono, tan arbitrariamente asignado y tan modesto. Pero la fidelidad íntima nos lo impide....Acaso no se ha llegado al punto que se debía porque no se escogió bien el camino; tal vez el deseo preconcebido—el prejuicio—era tan fuerte que aunque haya tocado puntos distintos de los que se propusieron, persistieron en considerarlos como si fueran aquellos que habían planeado y en vez de regocijarse y enorgullecerse por el descubrimiento de fértiles Américas continuaron creyendo haber alcanzado legendarias Indias. (281)

In this passage, Castellanos says that women's place in the world ("monótono") has been fixed "arbitrariamente"—just like how the Old World erroneously thought they had arrived at the West Indies rather than rejoicing about the "fértiles Américas" where they found themselves. And yet despite knowing later that it was America, the misnomer "Indian" is still impregnated in modern language. Just as the New World's greatest challenge is the Old World's prejudice, women similarly face rigid, male-formulated diagnoses, embodied here by the words "el deseo preconcebido" and "prejuicio." The problem between "cultura femenina" and the Conquest is that women must battle centuries-old beliefs in addition to whatever their present situation demands.

Like the terminology Old World vs. New World, Castellanos refers to culture as a "world" doubly inaccessible to her as a Mexican and woman:

El mundo que para mí está cerrado tiene un nombre: se llama cultura. Sus habitantes son todos ellos del sexo masculino. Ellos se llaman a sí mismos hombres y humanidad a su facultad de residir en el mundo de la cultura y de aclimatarse en él. Si le pregunto a uno de esos hombres qué es lo que hacen él y todos sus demás compañeros en ese mundo me contestará que muchas cosas: libros, cuadros, estatuas, sinfonías, aparatos, fórmulas, dioses....Ahora, si le pido permiso para entrar, me lo negará. Ni yo ni ninguna mujer tenemos nada que hacer allí. Nos aburriríamos mortalmente. Y eso sin contar con que redoblaríamos la diversión de los otros a costa de nuestro ridículo. (283)

In this fragment, she combines “aparatos, fórmulas, dioses,” which are scientific and religious discourses, with the more traditional narratives found in “libros, cuadros, estatuas,” because culture includes any method of intellectual activity. She later furthers that “la cultura,” is the opposite of the “mundo en el que yo vegeto” because women are expected to anesthetize their intellectual capacity by being passive: “Me basta con ser y con estar” (285). “Culture” encompasses any area of intellectual production, which is the antonym of “domestic” or “feminine” loci.

While *The Second Sex* is undoubtedly an invaluable catalyst for feminism as a global phenomenon, Castellanos’ conclusion offers a practical way to transform—not just understand—women’s intellectual marginalization. She hypothesizes two reasons as to why women are not active in cultural production: The first plausible reason is that women are, in fact, biologically inferior, a topic that both Castellanos and Beauvoir cover thoroughly. *Sobre cultura femenina* like *The Second Sex* recognizes the physical differences between us, such as reproduction and physical strength, which have been used throughout history to justify women’s inferiority. However, as Castellanos challenges, this reductive assessment does not explain women in history, like Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf, who were exceptions to this rule. With sarcasm she argues against the logic of women’s biological inferiority, showing how Dickinson and Woolf wrote and were respected by their male peers. The second reason why women lack in cultural participation —this is the real reason according to Castellanos—lies in “la falta de atracción que la cultura ejerce sobre lo femenino” (286). This is where Castellanos’ feminist ideology institutes a way to remedy injustices: women are raised without the encouragement to express interest in cultural products—“libros, cuadros, estatuas, sinfonías, aparatos, fórmulas, dioses”—and conversely, science and the arts do not

express interest in topics pertaining to women's subjectivities. "La falta de atracción que la cultura ejerce sobre los femenino" is a statement that optimistically allows for us to reconsider these sociocultural values. So while Beauvoir's text famously says, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman," a phrase which best encapsulates its mission to unearth the sociocultural codifications of sex and gender, Castellanos' text raises consciousness around the future continuity of these cultural codes, suggesting that "Woman cannot *be* until we believe she can."

So, is Castellanos the Beauvoir of Mexico or is Beauvoir the Castellanos of France? In the words of Castellanos, this question is "superflua y conmovedoramente estúpida." Feminist histories should explore the unique articulations of women's voices in the plural, not reduce feminism to a string of influences to First World women. Beauvoir and Castellanos were peers and contemporaries with texts that addressed women's social and cultural marginality with strikingly diverse styles and geopolitical positions. To consider Castellanos' sharp and comedic initial denunciations of sexism independently of Simone de Beauvoir means to invert the traditional notion that second wave feminism was developed in Latin America under the tutelage of canonical texts like *The Second Sex*. Through humor and a relocation of herself as a Mexican woman, Castellanos develops an applicable critique of structural sexism, adding valuable insights into the global discussions of feminism and pointing out with a sense of hope that cultural narratives can ultimately be changed.

Beyond 1950, Castellanos uses Beauvoir as a basis for understanding sexism and she builds on Beauvoir for how to understand sexism in Mexico. In August of 1968 "La mujer, ¿ser inferior?," the author responds to a social debate begun recently by Julieta Campos who had called the early 20th Century suffragettes "engendros del siglo XIX," a

term that seemed to denigrate their work by calling them “monsters” or “mutants” (153). To address this public debate, Castellanos references Beauvoir, particularly how Beauvoir finds that “ser mujer u hombre no es un asunto de naturaleza o de destino, sino de situación” (153). Castellanos adds to this by explaining how women’s situation is often conflated with women’s essence. For Castellanos, Beauvoir helps us understand the sociocultural construction of sex, but we need to go a step further to see how the situation becomes confused with “lo femenino.” Here she articulates the way sexual difference translates to gender performance, which is an early formulation of the difference between sex and gender that Judith Butler would articulate in *Gender Trouble* the 1990. “La mujer, ¿ser inferior?” demonstrates that Castellanos builds on Beauvoir to address the specific institutions in charge of controlling women’s beliefs and traditions.

Toward the end of the 1960s, Beauvoir, 17 years older than her Mexican counterpart, was a woman of flesh and blood whose life served as an example for Castellanos’ own situation. In her 1966 essay collection, *Juicios sumarios*, she dedicates four consecutive essays that read Simone de Beauvoir’s three autobiographies against her entire publication history. These essays reveal that although Castellanos was aware of the impact the *The Second Sex* had on any conversation about feminism, what she really venerated were the opportunities Beauvoir carved out for herself in her personal, familial, and romantic relationships.

The first essay, “Simone de Beauvoir o la lucidez,” commends the author for *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée*, the first of Beauvoir’s three autobiographies that covers her coming-of-age in a bourgeois Parisian family. Castellanos writes that Beauvoir represents “otro género de mujeres: las fuertes, las obstinadas, las que desconfían de lo que se les predica, las que se sacuden el yugo que las embrutece, las libres” (233). She finds that

Beauvoir's personal feminist liberation is heroic, like domestic animals that "sacuden el yugo." The long article synthesizes Beauvoir's autobiography ("memorias sinceras, profundas, y ejemplares" [246]) during the period she grew into her vocation as a writer, stepping into her "lucidez."

The second essay, "Simone de Beauvoir o la plenitud," complements the first by showing how Beauvoir, in her second autobiography, *La force de l'age*, grew more "complete" or "whole" (i.e. from *plenitud*). It is here where Castellanos starts to pay more attention to the amorous duo she calls "Simone-Jean Paul," which is documented at length in Beauvoir's memories from 1929-1944. She finds that *La force* shows Beauvoir reaching a state of wholeness through "la conquista de una libertad personal; la integración de una ética congruente; el análisis de los elementos que compone una conciencia..." via her coupling with the young Jean Paul-Sartre (247). *La force* portrays Beauvoir's personal relationship with Sartre, characterized by companionship, mutual growth, and deep respect—nonetheless also plagued by amorous triangles, and ideological differences—but one always founded on the wellbeing of the individuals that comprise the couple.

Like Simone-Jean-Paul Castellanos was also in a relationship with a famed philosopher of her generation, Ricardo Guerra. Yet while Simone and Jean Paul treated each other as contemporaries and equals, Rosario and Ricardo did not. In the prologue to *Cartas a Ricardo*, Elena Poniatowska remembers how Ricardo used to joke with Rosario that "quería un Castillo pero se lo dieron con Castellanos" (19). It has also been suggested informally that Guerra never once read his wife's writings, a sad reality about a relationship that lasted 17 years with a woman as decorated and prolific as Castellanos. And as I also showed in the third chapter, it was in 1967 when Castellanos and Guerra

began their physical separation when Castellanos went to the U.S. as a visiting professor at three state universities. “Simone de Beauvoir o la plenitud,” written in 1966, reflects how Castellanos envied Beauvoir as a woman whose heterosexual partner seemed to respect her as an intellectual equal.

Castellanos delves deeper into the agreement that defines the Beauvoir/Sartre romance in the third of the *Juicios sumarios* essay, “La fuerza de las cosas,” which is a direct translation of the third installment of Beauvoir’s autobiography. She writes of Simone-Jean-Paul again:

Ambos han renunciado a la idea del matrimonio porque tal como se practica en Francia (y en muchos otros países, entre ellos el nuestro) considera mucho más la salvaguarda de los intereses económicos y de la seguridad y estabilidad social que la dignidad y la felicidad de las personas que adoptan este estado civil. Ambos han renunciado a mezclar el amor con el sentido de la posesión, tan indisolublemente ligados en nuestra cultura. Se han comprometido a la lealtad, a la compañía, al apoyo mutuo, al respeto. (263)

Here Castellanos uses the French partnership—which is consciously not a marriage because of marriage’s patriarchal institutional character—as an analogy of what happens in her home country when people marry. In France as in Mexico, Castellanos writes, marriage is “la salvaguarda de los intereses económicos,” not “la lealtad,” “la compañía,” “el apoyo mutuo,” and “el respeto.” Marriage is possession, not love, for which reason living in a relationship outside of marriage is a feminist practice of distinction. Castellanos envied Beauvoir’s libertarian love life, which could be read as a lamentation of her own decision and current life circumstances in a marriage plagued by more conservative and expected routes of obedience without Castellanos having the opportunity to be accepted as an intellectual equal.

Finally, in the fourth and final article on Beauvoir in *Juicios sumarios*, “El amor en Simone de Beauvoir,” we see the most authentic (and panoramic) portrait Castellanos gives of Beauvoir. Here she sews together the idea of love as it has played out in Beauvoir’s life and works, summarizing how Beauvoir, a woman of the modern era with the resources to be an independent thinker and woman, dedicated her essays and novels to the undoing of an archaic notion that women’s destinies depend on men. Beauvoir’s life sets the example that marriage and love are not mutually exclusive, since marriage has been historically a contractual agreement based on women’s submission and sacrifice. Castellanos furthers with evidence from literature such as the tragic Greek myths of Zeus and his 23 wives or the doomed love between Orpheus and Eurydice. Castellanos concludes the essay with examples of romantic encounters in *Los mandarines* (1954) in which the characters arrive at the following lesson: “la de considerar que el otro no es una presa ni un cobrador de tributos, sino un yo con su propio centro de gravedad” (284). In other words, Beauvoir’s literary protagonists possess the qualities she wishes she could see in her own marriage to Guerra.

Castellanos was a dedicated reader of Beauvoir. Her extensive articles show that Beauvoir gave her a complementary philosophical posture that helped her understand herself and the complexities of Mexican cultural sexist standards. But there was something more in Beauvoir, a relationship model of sorts, one that inspired Castellanos to put her feminist ideology into practice into her home life and domestic relationship. Sharon Larisch, in her study on how Castellanos engages with “The Two Simones,” agrees that Beauvoir does not serve for Castellanos a one-size fits all philosophy that is to be wholesaled in Mexico. On the contrary, “Castellanos found in her writings a vocabulary of choice and rights, of liberty and struggle, as well as a model of the power

and exemplarity of autobiography” (105-06). There is a big difference between *idolizing* Beauvoir and empathizing with Beauvoir as they are both women navigating the modern world. The latter approach means the Mexican woman is mediating her and building on her ideas, an approach that keeps Castellanos in frame as a subject with authority on her own experience as a feminist.

Simone Weil: The Limits of Love and Attention

The other Simone, Simone Weil (1909-1943), is layered throughout Castellanos’ literature. In one of Castellanos’ most famous interviews in 1964, an interview with Emmanuel Carballo, she confesses that Simone Weil was influential in her ethical and intellectual orientation (Carballo 38). Elena Poniatowska also acknowledges the importance of this interview when she writes, “No sin razón se sentía Rosario ligada a Simone Weil. Se lo dijo Emmanuel Carballo en una de las primeras entrevistas que le hicieron y que forma parte del libro: *19 protagonistas de la literatura mexicana*” (*Ay vida no mereces* 108). As I will illustrate in this section, Weil can be attributed for having bestowed upon Castellanos solidarity with other marginalized peoples, *campesinos* and rural Mexicans throughout the 1950s before Castellanos’ literature would evolve into middle class women’s issues. Weil’s writings, though not explicitly feminist, helped Castellanos ultimately see structures of power that dominated her home in Mexico and in her own marriage.

In the 1950s, immediately following the successful defense of *Sobre cultura femenina*, Castellanos returned to her home state of Chiapas for two periods: the first from 1951-52, the second from 1955-58 (Navarrete Cáceres 13). There she would work for the INI, a state-run organization promoting the ideology of “indigenismo,” or the movement in 20th

Century Latin America to incorporate indigenous peoples and rural territories into the nation-building projects defining the region. For Castellanos, her time working at the INI—now called the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de Pueblos Indígenas (CDI)—would help her see the disenfranchisement and suffering of large populations of *campesinos* and indigenous people. She deliberates on how and why Weil served her in this time:

Creí que el hecho de abandonar Chiapas a los dieciséis años y de vivir en la Ciudad de México apartada de esa gente y de sus problemas me impulsaría a escribir sobre gente y problemas muy intelectuales. No fue así. La gente que en mis escritos purgaba por surgir era la de Chiapas. En los tres libros no creo haber agotado el tema: es una realidad compleja, rica, sugerente, y hasta ahora prácticamente intacta. Me interesa conocer, en esas tierras, los mecanismos de las relaciones humanas. Para entenderlos, cuando trabajé para el Instituto Nacional Indigenista, me auxilió la lectura de Simone Weil, digo Simone Weil porque no conocí otros autores que me hubieran sido más útiles. Ella ofrece, dentro de la vida social, una serie de constantes que determinan la actitud de los sometidos frente a los sometedores, el trato que los poderosos dan a los débiles, el cuadro de reacciones de los sojuzgados, la corriente del mal que va de los fuertes a los débiles, y que regresa otra vez a los fuertes. Esta especie de contagio me pareció doloroso y fascinante.” (Carballo 38-39)

Here Castellanos explains that Simone Weil’s writings were useful for analyzing the social injustices of places in rural Mexico where indigenous people are marginalized socially, economically, and politically. Castellanos found in Weil a model for social orientation that was not a woman-based problem but one of the “mecanismos de relaciones humanas” that privileged race and ethnicity equally with gender.

As it has already been explored Sharon Larisch’s “Ethics, Eros, and Necessity,” Weil’s writings inspired Castellanos to question issues of love, or Eros. In the epigraph to her poetry collection, *Livida luz*, Castellanos allows for Weil to speak when she cites her eminent axiom “El amor no es consuelo. Es luz” (*Poesía no eres tú* 176). Weil is the author of *Gravity and Grace* (1947) and *Oppression and Liberty* (published posthumously in 1955),

spiritual books that, in addition to becoming influential in existentialism, formed a large part of Castellanos' awakening as an ethical being in the early stages of her career throughout the 1950s and in the early 1960s.

A brief survey of Weil's life reveals why Castellanos was fascinated by her story: born into a Jewish-Catholic family and trained as a teacher, Weil renounced her position in order to work in a Renault automobile factory in 1935 where she could experience first-hand the suffering of the French working class. After a year in the backbreaking and wretched industrial reality, Weil fought with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War where she witnessed the horrors of political and social oppression. In the 1940s Weil and her parents left Nazi-occupied France for Harlem, again living with the poor. Her premature death in 1943 was ruled a suicide because although she was sick with tuberculosis, she refused to eat more than that which was rationed to French soldiers fighting in Nazi Germany, making a political statement of solidarity with her compatriots.

We see in Castellanos' writings that Weil helped the author awaken similarly to the social injustices between rural Mexicans and the creole elite in her home country. Larisch writes that "the qualities that Castellanos attributes to Weil might best be described as virtues, as dispositions of character or directions of desire that lead to good action: serenity in conjunction with torment and suffering, purity able to contemplate impurity, humility, tenacity, conviction, solitariness combined with an active solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the exiled" (105). What Larisch means here is that Weil's desire to find compassion for those who lived in ill fortune in Europe was translated by Castellanos into an awareness of the urgent, racialized tensions in her home Mexico. Poniatowska explains how Weil's biography left a lasting impression on Castellanos: "Rosario adoptó la disciplina férrea, la renuncia, el código moral de Simone Weil. En

cierta forma, al viajar a Chiapas estaba recordando la larga estancia de Simone Weil en la Régie-Renault como fabricanta, y sus deducciones sobre la condición obrera. Rosario busca hacer lo mismo con los indios, aquellos seres entre quienes creció” (107-08).

In another study on the influence Weil had on Castellanos, “Actos de atención: intersecciones en el pensamiento social de Weil, Castellanos y Poniatowska,” Beth Jörgensen similarly finds that Weil had a powerful influence on both Castellanos and Poniatowska, particularly in their treatment of the Other. While Larisch’s study engages with the philosophical nature of Weil and Castellanos, Jörgensen explores not only how Castellanos reads Weil philosophically but also how her literary works set up the stage for her *indigenista* work to materialize.

As Jörgensen illustrates, Castellanos’ early poetry is the most obvious source of reverence towards indigenous people, beginning with *El rescate del mundo*, published in 1950, which contains poems such as “A la mujer que vende frutas en la plaza” and “La oración del indio.” Just the title—*El rescate del mundo*—is an exhortation to the world to witness the indigenous “Other.” The short stories in *Ciudad real* (1960) are also the product of Castellanos’ engagement with indigenous peoples. As Jörgensen summarizes about *Ciudad real*, “tanto los personajes indígenas como los blancos son seres rebajados que sufren experiencias de desgracia, frustración, paranoia, incomunicación, y desilusión en una sociedad regida por una estricta jerarquía racial y sexual” (421). Rather than focusing exclusively on gender, Castellanos’ *El rescate* and *Ciudad real* address the racial politics of Mexico bridging the modern world with the provincial one.

In 1960, the same year she published *Ciudad real*, Castellanos began working as the Press Secretary at the UNAM in Mexico City. This point in her evolution reveals that Castellanos, despite having tried to speak on behalf of indigenous groups, realizes the

limits of this act: she is not indigenous, and therefore cannot speak for them. From this point on, her feminist ideology becomes more oriented towards the problems facing women like herself of urban, middle class Mexico. The absence of *indigenismo* throughout her work in the 1960s is replaced by a deeper engagement of global feminisms. So, while Weil appears to influence Castellanos in the early moments of her career when she was still a dedicated *indigenistas*, Castellanos' global feminist engagement takes shape with other French feminists whose writings and lives are more specifically relevant to the modern Mexican woman.

Conclusions

Upon reviewing the dialogues Castellanos extended with Beauvoir and Weil, we see how she translates their writings to the local Mexican audience. In the early parts of her career, she showed off her literary expertise of French philosophical literature. But if we compare her readings of Beauvoir with her readings of the Latin American canon explored in the last chapter, we see that Castellanos in the 1970s was much more invested in literature written in Spanish by her Latin American sisters. The way French literature is mediated is significant because it reveals that Castellanos saw the limits of French literature on her own situation. Rather than use Beauvoir as a model to follow, Castellanos focused on how she situated herself in relation to her partner and lover, Jean-Paul Sartre. Weil's philosophies helped her understand the racial and class dynamics in rural Mexico, although with time these philosophies fizzled out as Castellanos undertook more urgent questions relating to her individual experiences as a relatively white, middle class, urban-dwelling Mexican woman.

After 1966, when Castellanos publishes her essays on Simone de Beauvoir, the Mexican woman of letters will be invested in Anglo-American feminisms when she lives in the U.S. from 1966-67, a topic I explored in Chapter IV. In the early 1970s, as I will show in Chapter VI, Castellanos will recognize more clearly the power dynamics between the First World and Third World, such as certain components of French culture, that do not translate to her situation at home in Mexico. In thinking of Castellanos' trajectory toward a feminism that is uniquely tailored to Mexican women's needs, we see how she was a precursor intersectional feminism that would emerge in the late 1970s.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARD A MEXICAN FEMINIST PROJECT: *VIAJE REDONDO* (1971) AND *EL*

ETERNO FEMENINO (1975)

“Proposición de la boa”
(A las puertas de la Tour
d’Argent)

No comas nunca nada
que no seas capaz de digerir,
que no seas capaz de vomitar.

A boa, upon entering one of Paris’ finest dining venues known for its exquisite duck plates and long aristocratic history, experiences a *prise de conscience*, acknowledging that the act of eating demands she be able to either digest her meal or vomit it. The word “capaz” reinforces that it is not enough to digest or vomit—one must possess the ability and awareness to do so. Disguised as a boa constrictor, a predator known for its merciless intake of prey whole, the subject is a feminine noun in Spanish that exhibits sexual dimorphism with the female being larger and dominant. The proposal in Castellanos’ scatological micropoem is this: a fierce feminine animal must never forget that she has the ultimate choice over her own nourishment, for without this choice she could choke or be poisoned.

“Proposición de la Boa”—as this chapter contends—is the rejection or “vomiting” of that which the symbolic snake cannot “digest” or assimilate, a gesture of self-determination within Castellanos’ life and works that articulates her most evolved Mexican feminist project. She is ultimately denouncing French hegemony, which is supported in the poem’s subtitle by the boa’s geopolitical location: “a las puertas de la

Tour D'Argent." Tour D'Argent is a Parisian restaurant that, over the course of the many phases of French history, has boasted a strong gastronomic patriotism as well as a cosmopolitan clientele including Ernest Hemingway and Marcel Proust. The iconic restaurant also alleges on their website that they introduced the first forks in France, a fact that further complicates the boa's mismatched presence, remembering she eats her prey whole in a manner *étiqueteurs* would describe as barbaric. In other words, a deep understanding of this French restaurant in particular illuminates the ironic juxtaposition of an animalized Third World woman in such a sophisticated environment.

In the last chapter, I showed how Castellanos grew to be disenchanted with France as a cultural center after having spent New Year's Eve of 1970 in Paris. In "Año nuevo: ¿vida, qué?" Castellanos laments the excesses of Parisian culture, such as "ese restaurant en el que sirven las doscientas cincuenta y cuatro variedades de queso" where she will drink "vinos y coñac hasta que el hígado se me declare en huelga" (628). The image of the liver on strike—a euphemism for vomiting—reminds us of "Proposición de la boa." Castellanos denounces her previous desires to be a "pata de perro," yearning instead to plan a weekend trip to Cuernavaca or Acapulco, and to be accompanied the "nana de sus hijos, que es personaje muy importante en su vida" (627). Wanting to return to her home country and coexist with the indigenous woman of her household is her recognition of the colonial legacy that does not resonate in France but would in France's colonies.

Beginning in the 1970s, global feminist theory began to question the façade of international sisterhood produced by second wave feminist thought in transit. The problem was that when feminism traveled "from the West to the rest" (Grewal and Caplan, "Postcolonial Studies"), it tended to respond only to white, middle class agendas,

thus reproducing colonial legacies of the Old World saving the New World. A local iteration of this was the UN's inaugural World Conference on Women, celebrated in Mexico City in 1975, at which Castellanos would certainly have been an active protagonist had she not passed away the year prior in Israel. During this infamous meeting, Betty Friedan and Domitila Barrios de Chúngara butted heads: Friedan wanted to liberate women from the mystique of femininity while Barrios de Chúngara spoke as an indigenous woman seeking freedom from U.S. imperialism (Fuentes). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan write that unsavory international encounters such as the 1975 conference happen because "these relationships are uneven, often unequal, and complex. They emerge from women's diverse needs and agendas in many cultures and societies." The authors dispel the notion of solidarity across nations and cultures because "there IS NO SUCH THING as a feminism free of asymmetrical power relations" ("Postcolonial Studies," emphasis theirs).

In this chapter, I identify Castellanos' emergent global feminist articulation from 1971 to her death in 1974. Here I perform close readings of two of her last creative works—the poetry collection, *Viaje redondo* (1971) and the play, *El eterno femenino* (published posthumously in 1975). In each of these texts reside female characters well versed in international discourses of feminism with impulses that go beyond the digestion of those various strains. These protagonists see themselves as agents of their own destiny with agendas unique to their own needs. In short, they recognize their own power over their feminist nourishment. Additionally, the protagonists—women of dissimilar backgrounds—rather than dialoguing and building bridges of support with one another, misunderstand and misrepresent each other. In 1971, Castellanos was appointed as Ambassador to Israel, a country that was also a postcolonial nation in its early stages of

self-definition. Considering these works as products of Castellanos' awakening as a Mexican in France and Israel, *Viaje redondo* and *El eterno femenino* reveal themselves as precursors to the Third-Wave feminist movement that later recognized intersectionality in the face of homogenization.

What provokes this change in Castellanos' attitude toward Mexican women and the perceived lack of a feminist consciousness? In *¡Ay vida, no me mereces!* Elena Poniatowska points to a speech she gave in 1971 titled "La abnegación es una virtud loca" to a national audience including President Echeverría: "Rosario ha dado un viraje de 180 grados: las mujeres ya no son tontas, son simplemente víctimas; el sexo, lo mismo que la raza, no constituye una fatalidad biológica, histórica o social" (90). Poniatowska's words here support the idea that Castellanos was growing more aware of the structures of oppression that make women "víctimas," rather than complicit in their own subjugation, a diagnosis that we have already seen in the prior chapters of this dissertation. This speech, for Poniatowska and for this chapter, is evidence of a change in Castellanos' evolution towards a uniquely Mexican feminist project.

The analysis will open with *Viaje redondo*, a collection that simulates a trip. I contend that this trip highlights the clash of First- and Third World feminisms as it explores how women Mexican women are oppressed at home by their country and abroad among foreign women. In the second part, which focuses on her canonical play, *El eterno femenino*, I will reveal how Castellanos subtly references French and American feminist discourses, ultimately problematizing these as incompatible with how the Mexican feminist project should consider the ethnic, socioeconomic, and historical conditions in Mexico. These two texts show how Castellanos no longer had the "desire for the world"—to borrow from Mariano Siskind's definition of cosmopolitanism—

rather, she illustrates her desire to tailor Mexican feminism appropriately to the local urgencies.

This chapter completes the evolution at stake in this dissertation by showing the final phase of her feminist project. As I show in Chapter II, Castellanos saw the disenfranchisement from Mid-Century Mexico by way of education, technocracy and nationalism, and as a public intellectual in 1968, a crucial time for Mexican history, she sought to resist those cultural and political processes impeding a women's movement. In her quest for a global sisterhood, Castellanos was frequently in conversation with women of Latin America (Chapter III), Anglo-American traditions (Chapter IV), and French feminist philosophies (Chapter V). Those incursions into her intellectual biography illustrate Castellanos' profound desire for a global sisterhood that becomes more mediated—via digestion or rejection—in *Viaje redondo* and *El eterno femenino*. In these works it becomes evident that her work in the 1970s is dialogic with competing ideologies. Rather than digesting foreign feminist thought as some of her earlier admirations suggested (such as her glowing admiration for the Anglo-American tradition of women martyrdom), she recognizes that women in Mexican society are still dictated by colonial legacies, and thus must learn when and how to reject incompatible agendas stemming from the First World.

A Boa in the First World: *Viaje redondo* (1971)

“Proposición de la boa” is one of nine poems from Castellanos' final collection of poetry, *Viaje redondo*, an understudied collection in her poetic works. This collection marks a detailed attention to destabilizing colonial legacies, challenging Cold War taxonomies “First-” and “Third World,” and speaking back to the gender-normalizing Mexican state.

A series of women speakers, like the boa, awaken as agents of their destiny to recognize their (in)compatibilities with certain environments. International travel motivates the poetic movement between these nine poems, with the number nine symbolizing sophistication and the international. *Viaje redondo* exhibits a global feminist poetics through the motif of travel, for it is upon traveling that the female speakers recognize their snake-like powers to accept and reject models thrust onto them, taking the control of their feminist sustenance.

There is something uniquely Mexican and feminist about Castellanos' boa that upholds these global feminist politics. Mexican mestizo cultural nationalism of the 20th Century appropriated the general order of the snake as a vestige of its Aztec heritage, with "El águila y la serpiente" found on Mexico's coat of arms. Art historian Ann De León writes that "For Aztecs, snakes were considered sacred animals that represented (through the shedding of snake skin) their vision of cyclical time, rebirth, and renewal" (280). This appreciation for cold-blooded animals is embodied in the statue of Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess with a mutilated body whose name translates roughly to "skirt made of snakes." And yet despite the pre-Hispanic appreciation for Coatlicue, De León has shown how Spanish chroniclers misrepresented the goddess as "seductive, yet dangerous, and ultimately monstrous" (279). 20th Century cultural production, like Martín Luis Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* (1936) and Carlos Fuentes' *Cambio de piel* (1967), similarly solidified the serpentine national symbol as a part of Mexico's non-Western past.

In a similar fashion, Western feminism, in order to combat the age-old association of snakes as vile women that originate in the Garden of Eden, re-appropriated the serpent in an abundance of representations. Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), one of the most illustrious examples, is an essay drawing on the Greek mythological

monster, Medusa, whose coiffure is a looming nest of snakes. In her essay, the Jewish Algerian-French intellectual writes that being a woman—and particularly an African woman—is akin to being an uncivilized colubrine figure, and that the power lies in awakening that savage trait: “We the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths” (878). Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* (1987) elaborates on her identification with the animal: “She—that’s how I think of *la Vibora*, Snake Woman. Like the ancient Olmecs, I know the Earth is a coiled serpent. Forty years it’s taken me to enter into the serpent to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul” (48). But while Cixous and Anzaldúa speak of snakes as a general suborder, Castellanos compares herself to a particular species, one that is both untamed and autochthonous to the New World: the boa constrictor. Considering that Castellanos wrote her poem in the late 1960s and early 1970s, her uniquely Mexican woman snake anticipates the postcolonial sentiments that both Cixous and Anzaldúa would later embody.

The snake is a symbol scattered throughout the entirety of Castellanos’ work that comes to its eloquent expression in “Proposición.” The first parallel of the woman-as-snake appears in her 1950 Master’s thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*. Here “La serpiente marina” is not an image that she develops throughout, but rather an analogy she makes in the opening paragraphs between how sailors disbelieved the existence of a serpent at sea until they saw it, just as Western civilization disbelieves in the cultural capacity of women. In her 1953 poem “Apuntes para una declaración de fe,” published in *Poesía no eres tú*, her first poetry collection, Castellanos uses the image of the snake to describe the American continent’s fundamental differences from Europe, dissecting the

snake/continent to show its lack of blood and veins. These early cogitations of the colubrine woman reach their full potential in Castellanos' works in the early 1970s.

The motif of travel and *desencuentros* between foreign women is immediately recognizable in the title of Castellanos' 1971 poetry collection, which appears to be an awkward translation into Spanish. "Round trip" is not "Viaje redondo," but rather "viaje de ida y vuelta," and the difference between the two iterations is significant: a trip that is "redondo" evokes a full circle, meaning it is cyclical and serpentine, conjuring an image of global movement. It also has a very positive connotation of closure and accomplishment, such as "me salió redondo" or "me salió bien." The nine poems of this collection mimic this movement, since they come full circle—moving from Mexico to France, Israel and back—poeticizing her peripheral position as a Mexican woman in the First World which in turn decenters France and re-centers Mexico.

The first step to international travel is to get a passport, a process reliant on national authority. "Pasaporte," the first poem, simulates the acquisition of a national document, one that categorizes and identifies things such as the citizen's gender and profession. From the opening line, the speaker confirms her gender identity and challenges the interlocutor to define her beyond the simple label of "mujer." Using irony to emphasize her perceived incompetence, she specifies: "Mujer de ideas? No, nunca he tenido una.../...¿Mujer de acción? Tampoco. / Basta mirar la talla de mis pies y mis manos." (339). The poetic voice means to underline her "unimportant" status as a woman writer in Mexico using hands and feet as metonymic devices of one's greatness. In the following stanza, she writes that she is not a "Mujer, pues, de palabra [...] Pero sí de palabras." The difference between the singular and the plural forms of "palabra," serve to perpetuate the stereotypes of women's conversations as gossipy, contradictory,

meaningless, and insignificant, but the speaker personifies these stereotypes by babbling and posing rhetorical questions. Ultimately, she confesses that she is a “mujer de buenas intenciones” who has “pavimentado / un camino directo y fácil al infierno” (339). These last words—“pavimentado” and “camino”—serve as ironic reminders of her otherness as a Mexican woman intellectual; they also comically catalyze transatlantic travel, since the oceanic route from Mexico to Europe is certainly not “pavimentado.” Instead, she is referring to the proverb: “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

In the second poem, “Mirando a la Gioconda,” the subtitle, “(En el museo del Louvre, naturalmente),” places the Mexican speaker in the world-famous Parisian museum, a geopolitical reference of great importance for this poem and others. In one of the only poetic analyses of *Viaje redondo*, Ronald Friis writes that the city is but a literary muse, not a geographical place locatable in time and space: “Paris seems to have triggered an ekphrastic reaction for the Mexican writer” (6). But Friis’ reading elides the multiple tangible, historical sites of Paris that refer to material spaces, such as the reference to the Tour D’Argent and the speaker’s current presence at the Louvre. In “Mirando a la Gioconda,” the speaker, face to face with the Mona Lisa, fails to bond with Da Vinci’s creation:

¿Te ríes de mí? Haces bien.
Si yo fuera Sor Juana
o la Malinche, o, para no salirse del folclor,
alguna encarnación de la Güera Rodríguez
(como ves, los extremos, igual que a Gide, me tocan)
me verías, quizá, como se ve
al espécimen representativo
de algún sector social de un país del tercer mundo. (339-40)

In these opening verses, the speaker finds herself scorning Mona Lisa’s indiscernible smile, lamenting that Mona Lisa only sees the speaker as a Third World woman through

three iconic stereotypes—Sor Juana, la Malinche, and Güera Rodríguez, the *criolla* woman proponent of Mexican independence. Conversely, the speaker references André Gide, which has a double effect: on the one hand, it shows the unidirectional cultural repertoire of the speaker, or the great knowledge of French literature she possesses to invoke the 1947 French Nobel prize winner, which does not surprise given Alejo Carpentier’s remarks in 1931 that “Many American artistic domains live today under the sign of Gide, if not of Cocteau, or simply Lecretelle” (55-56). This can be read as the poet’s braggadocious way of winking at the reader. On the other hand, mentioning Gide evokes an ethos, because the French author is celebrated for his anticolonialist philosophy, which emerged in his 1927 *Le Voyage au Congo*, a novel that violently critiques the evils of colonialism in Africa. However, the speaker’s literary familiarity is an unreciprocated gesture, since Mona Lisa only identifies her through simplified and mythical feminine prototypes.

The use of the “if clause” in Spanish—“si yo fuera / me verías”—reinforces that the speaker is none of these prototypes, continuing with sarcasm that she is but a mere “monolingüe” and “imbécil turista de a cuartilla” who comes to the Louvre to “contemplarte” (340). She goes on to suggest that Mona Lisa has no interest in her story:

Esa sonrisa es burla. Burla de mí y de todos
 los que creemos que creemos que
 la cultura es un líquido que se bebe en su fuente,
 un síntoma especial que se contrae
 en ciertos sitios contagiosos, algo
 que se adquiere por osmosis. (340).

The colonial model here is reinforced through the words “fuente” and “osmosis,” which describe the Latin American dependency on France, one of those “sitios contagiosos” that exerts its cultural capital over the rest of the world. France represents the source of

cultural legitimacy from which Latin Americans must drink, with drinking being an act of digestion. When the speaker uses the repetition of “Los que creemos que creemos,” she refers to the colonization of the mind, a colonial brainwashing dependent on the center’s expertise. In analyzing the woman’s visage (“Pero yo te interpreto”) the poetic voice recognizes the visible cultural differences between her and *Giaconda*, subverting Eurocentric hegemony and reestablishing herself as a self-determining agent to challenge—or reject—what *Mona Lisa* means to her.

After observing the *Mona Lisa*, the speaker moves into a different hall of the Louvre museum, where race becomes an area of comparison between the speaker and her addressees in two poems. In the third poem, “*La Victoria de Samotracia*,” the speaker explores and exploits the paradox of Nike, the headless Greek goddess whose winged body is made of marble. Subtextually, given that the poem does not explicitly remark on the statue’s composition, marble could be an important detail because of its white color and association with “high” culture. As the most famous statue of the Hellenic period, the voice declares that it is celebrated because the woman is “*acéfala*,” and without the weight of the head, and the burden to “*mantenerla erguida, alerta*” the woman “*avanza como avanzan los felices*.” In just seven lines, the speaker concludes that Nike is appreciated for her body—not her head—and least importantly, “*lo que adentro guarda*” (340).

The following poem, “*Comentario al escultor*” complements “*La Victoria*” by engaging in dialogue with a sculptor, presumably Nike’s creator. In this five-line poem, the speaker invokes the man (“*el escultor*”) who “*se lamentaba de hacer su propia estatua con arcilla*,” despite that clay—a brown material—is among the “*materias que nosotros usamos*” (341). She clarifies the “we” of her utterance, saying “*Nosotros, es decir, los*

marginales: / memoria, ensueños, humo, sueño, esperanza. Nada.” All of these words are connected by their ephemeral nature, just like the fleeting memory of “nosotros, los marginales.” Furthermore, invoking clay, a Mesoamerican material, Castellanos seeks darker and grittier statues—not headless, white woman—in order to decenter the hegemonic women models produced in Indo-European mythology.

In “Mirando a la Gioconda,” “La Victoria de Samotracia,” and “Comentario al escultor,” the speaker is dealing with artistic pieces that were crafted by men, which is a gesture of self-representation, both of race and of gender. The implied addressee will know Da Vinci’s work and will understand the male-gendered “escultor.” This critique of how men have “made” women, considering that Mona Lisa and Nike were painted and sculpted by men.

The fifth poem, “Conversación entre viajeros,” features women who, rather than offering support and solidarity, must compete with one another. This competition manifests in the image of two women standing on a train platform. While the poem’s title signals dialogue with at least one man (“viajeros”), the opening line obfuscates this by inserting a female interlocutor: “A una mujer, ya vieja, que entreduerme / mientras el tren avanza” (341). “Se le fue el tren” in Mexico is a metaphoric and disparaging expression for a woman no longer desirable for marriage or the expiration of her biological clock. “Conversación” plays with this popular expression by asking about the single woman’s life meaning beyond conventional options:

le pregunto: Su historia ¿tiene alguna coherencia?
¿El mosaico de sus días y de acciones
formó alguna figura que pueda contemplarse?
¿Se escribiría un libro con su vida?
¿Se pintaría un cuadro con su cara? (341)

The series of questions emphasize the speaker's inquiry of what the two might have in common, be it in history or visual arts. Remembering that the poetry collection has already passed through two important women in the Louvre—the Mona Lisa and Nike—she seems to be asking if this woman could potentially be as important as those two women. And yet in the second stanza, the woman responds to the speaker's question with “repreñión, como a una impertinente,” showing disdain for her curiosity when she says:

que posee una cuenta bancaria como para
comprarse galerías, bibliotecas,
todo lo que los otros han ordenado y hecho.

Y que no necesita de ninguna otra cosa.

It is here that Castellanos' critique becomes oriented towards the socioeconomic disparities, with the bank account being a symbol of woman's liberation and thus the valorization of the financially independent middle class woman. “Conversación” highlights the paradox of their agendas (the woman “entreduerme” at the same time she “corre a la excursion”) shattering the hope that these two women could find a solid platform—to play with the image of the train—on which to stand together.

After “Proposición” we arrive at the seventh poem, the final rendering of France before the poet moves poetically to Israel. “Ninguneo” begins with “En la tierra de Descartes” (342) which immediately evokes the French philosopher who wrote “Je pense donc je suis.” Following this Cartesian aphorism, the speaker reasons: “No pienso, pues pensar no es mi fuerte” so she cannot therefore exist. Referencing Paris yet again, the speaker asks:

¿Qué diablos hago aquí en la Ciudad Lux?
presumiendo de culta y viajada
sino aplazar la ejecución de una
sentencia que ha caído sobre mí?”

In the chronicle she published on January 1, “Año nuevo, ¿Vida, qué?” she poses almost the exact same question: “¿Qué diablos vine a hacer aquí?” (627). Like a boa in a cold climate (“ya que nieva y tirito”) the poetic voice (“culta y viajada”) is in conflict with her surroundings where she stands in front of the stove, an object that both warms and is used for cooking. This could also be read in relation to Sor Juana’s famous comment: “If Aristotle had cooked he would have written much more,” which would make the image of the stove a defense of women’s creative potential.

The speaker turns her gaze toward her home country to explain what this “sentencia” is: Thumbing through the catalogue of Mexican colonial history—mentioning various sources of power from the Conquest such as Magistrates, chancellors, the 13 Aztec emperors, and viceroys—she finds that these bleed into present governing institutions, such as La Comisión de Box, the decentralized state institutions, el Sindicato Unido de Voceadores, “y... / ...y, solidariamente, mis demás compatriotas” (342). Castellanos writes of her “ninguneo” in France, the center of the colonial period economically and culturally speaking, just as she experiences “ninguneo” in her home country, a place that perpetuates these same colonial paradigms. Neither an existing member of the global sisterhood nor of her own national imaginary, the boa seizes the only tool she has—her own voice, her own perspective: “mirar, así que digo / (pues la palabra es la mirada fija)” (342).

In “Nazareth,” the speaker leaves France for Israel. The biblical story “The Annunciation” guides the speaker’s descent into the historically-preserved Nazarene cave (also reminiscent of Plato’s allegorical calve), in which Mary’s maternal obligation was imposed on her by the Archangel Gabriel. The poem begins by signaling downward movement:

Descendiendo a la cueva en que el Arcángel
hizo su anuncio, pienso
en María, ese vaso de elección. (345)

Here she revises history to give Mary agency when she uses the word “elección.” In other words, Mother Mary, like Mona Lisa, Nike, and Sor Juana, is yet another female prototype in dire need of redefinition and it is in Israel that this narrative originates, since the presumed site of the Annunciation is in a well in Nazareth.

In Latin America beginning in the late 1960s, there was an air of idealism surrounding Israel, a country that was still in its early stages as a postcolonial and independent nation since 1948, and in 1967 survived the Six-Day war with Egypt. Authors like Castellanos, who was soon to assume her role as Mexican Ambassador to Israel, and José Emilio Pacheco in *Y morirás lejos* (1967) were in dialogue with the twentieth-century Jewish experience. Darrell Lockhart has even recently called the 1960s the beginning of a “boom” of Latin American Jewish literary studies.

In a chronicle published on January 9, 1971, after Castellanos had returned home from her trip to France and Israel, she documents that Israel—a state founded on a century-old struggle for self-governance—“debería de servirnos un poco de ejemplo a nosotros que no cesamos de invocar ‘el trauma de la Conquista’” (631). This confession in 1971 alludes to her awakening to the imbalances resulting from her international travel, and perhaps even her own identification with the Israeli cause because of how it intersected with being a Third World woman. To top it off, in 1971 the country was led by Golda Meir, the first woman prime minister of a Middle Eastern Country. Poniatowska notes that Meir “admiraba abiertamente” Castellanos (*¡Ay vida!*, 82).

In *Between Woman and Nation*, Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Mino Moallem offer a useful paradigm with which to evaluate Castellanos’ dialectic with

France and Israel. Postcolonial nations, they argue, in constructing themselves on the masculine Enlightenment discourses of democracy, have left women between “the particularistic discourses of nationalism [and] the universalizing discourse of ‘global feminism’” (7). With this they mean to say that women of postcolonial nations have been subject to the masculine hegemonies of their home countries and subject to the hegemonies of white, First World women who dominated global feminist agendas.

These words guide my reading of the final poem, “El retorno,” the longest poem of the collection and the one that has generated the most critical attention. To begin, the poem’s title, “El retorno,” like “Viaje redondo”, is a play on words: In Mexico, “to return” is “regresar” o “volver,” while “retorno” implies the recovery of something lost or the reiteration of cyclical motion. It is also more closely aligned with the French noun “le retour.” The opening line (“Piso la tierra del Anáhuac, que es / la tierra de mis muertos” [344]) brings us back to Mexican soil, where claims these dead people as her ancestors. But despite that they are mute (“No hablan”), they do not need her to speak for them: “no me piden / que yo viva por ellos.” Characterizing these anonymous deceased people, she says: “Algunos, los recientes, con el mentón atado / todavía al último pañuelo.” Kerchiefs are tied around the head of corpses to keep the mouth closed. In this case, it indicates that they have died recently as opposed to the others mentioned that are calcified. Castellanos makes the argument that literature lacks women who have control of their own destinies. The remedy? “Quizá hacer una obra.../¿Obra? ¿Cambiar la faz de la naturaleza? / ¿Añadir algún libro a las listas biográficas? / ¿Hacer variar el rumbo de la historia?” (344). These questions are rhetorical, for the obvious answer is yes.

But the speaker emphatically recognizes the barrier to these possibilities, since her impotence cannot be reconciled if “este es asunto—otra vez—de hombres” that is

addressed “según los criterios / con los que ellos aceptan o rechazan.” These verbs— “aceptan o rechazan”, revert us back to the boa’s digestion and regurgitation. Without this power to accept or reject, the poetic addressee, a Mexican woman, is “Superflua aquí. Superflua allá.” “Ninguneo” poeticizes the idea of impotence by emphasizing the “aquí y allá,” reiterating the interstice between her nation and women of the world, between “los vivientes, que me dan la espalda” and “los que llegan” who think that “hay que destruir para construir de nuevo” (344). This is certainly a reference to the colonial pathology, a pathology that in Mexico led to baroque churches being built on top of Aztec sites, where palimpsests exemplify the Old World’s obsession to start anew, like a snake shedding its skin.

The circularity of *Viaje redondo* is as biographical as it is allegorical, considering the author’s own trajectory and the serpentine fable, “Proposición de la boa.” Through her poetic and physical journeys, Castellanos recognizes her double discrimination as a Mexican abroad and a woman at home. She finds herself antithetical to the women cultural models proffered in the Louvre in “Mirando a la Gioconda” and “La Victoria de Samotracia.” She yearns for museums that contain statues of brown women in “Comentario al escultor,” and dialogues with other women in “Conversación entre viajeros.” Her desire for sisterhood is expressed laterally across the Third World, like in “Nazareth,” where she identifies similar dynamics of oppression and marginalization. Moving in a Transatlantic circular fashion, Castellanos’ poems situate a woman within Mexico and Mexico within the world, a dialectic that produces a new woman ready to seize her power.

On February 15, having returned in January 1971 from Europe and the Middle East, the author reaffirmed her Mexican feminist project in her most daring speech

ever—“La abnegación es una virtud loca.” In front of an audience that included Mexico’s president and personal friend of the author, Echeverría, she differentiated between two types of feminists—those who are “airadas” and those who are “reflexivas.” The “airadas” are those who ignore the local urgency, those who are proverbially in the clouds in a universalizing space divorced from reality. This is the model to reject, the Mexican poet declares. But feminists who are “reflexivas” consider that the Mexican feminist project should begin to define itself by locating itself on a map and getting to know its needs:

Si nos proponemos construir un feminismo auténtico pero, sobre todo, eficaz tenemos que partir de otros postulados, el primero de los cuales sería la investigación acuciosa, el conocimiento lo más exacto y puro que pueda alcanzarse del complejo de cualidades y defectos, de carencias y de atributos, de aspiraciones y limitaciones que definen a la mujer. (78)

Her robust proclamation toward an “authentic” feminism is first and foremost for women to know themselves before they can define themselves—or to learn what the boa can and cannot eat. *Viaje redondo* anticipates the Third-wave of feminism that would follow her, where other authors, like Anzaldúa and Cixous, would inherit similar missions to vomit and digest that which was needed for their own survival.

A Boa in a Beauty Salon: *El eterno femenino* (1975)

El eterno femenino is a play that is doubly international, considering the quantity of international feminist discourses that permeate the text and the fact that it was written between Mexico and Israel. In 1970 and early 1971, after Emma Teresa Armendáriz and Rafael López Miarnau commissioned from her a dramatic piece that would raise questions of gender in Mexico, Castellanos presented a first draft that left her unsatisfied. The author finished her masterpiece two years later in April of 1973 while living in Tel

Aviv, but never saw it published because Emilio Rabasa, the Mexican Foreign Minister in 1973, asked her “not to publish this play as long as she was ambassador, since its criticism of Mexican institutions struck him as incompatible with her diplomatic role” (Steele, “Power,” 74). It was not published until 1975, one year after Castellanos died in her apartment in Tel Aviv. From its first performance in 1976 in which Armendáriz played 14 different characters to its last known performance in 2011 by the director and playwright Elena Guiochins, *El eterno femenino* in all its 11 editions has been celebrated as a riotous but resolute declaration of an incipient Mexican feminism.

The play channels Lupita and her interaction with 32 reductive and essentialized female characters who emerge from different time periods and social classes, including middle class women who echo First World feminist discourses. Lupita, in need of a hairstyle for her wedding, is the lucky test subject of a new salon product—a magical hairdryer—and once underneath it she embarks on a radical and hallucinatory journey toward her future as a mother and wife.²⁰ While *El eterno femenino* puts Mexican women who are “airadas” and “reflexivas” in dialogue with one another, to borrow from the adjectives she employed in her 1971 speech, the play does not offer solutions to their problems, instead initiating a conversation about how Mexican women should begin to take into account their commonalities with and differences from women of the First World.

Intermingling humor with a serious critique of the debilitating social roles of women in Mexico, Castellanos’ dramatic text diversifies *women* over *woman* by enlisting a harem of women uniquely Mexican and in dialogue with global feminist discourses. Even

²⁰ Lupita’s name is a shortened version of “Guadalupe,” the mixed-race version of the Virgen Mary who has ubiquitously become known as Mexico’s mythical mother.

the title engages with the world: “The eternal feminine” responds to the German philosopher Goethe’s belief that women are reducible to an essence unchangeable by environments or time periods. This so-called essence was mythical and unworldly, thus characterizing women as static and detached from their lived experiences. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, contested Goethe’s term by reasoning that just as there is no “eternal masculine” there is no “eternal feminine” that defines women. Similarly, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* interrogated the psychological trauma in the excesses of consumerism in post-War U.S. Castellanos is then playing with Goethe, Beauvoir, and Friedan by acknowledging them, but relocating the problem back on Mexican soil by creating characters that are uniquely and unapologetically Mexican.

In this section, I focus briefly on the characters that herald feminist perspectives leading to the finale: Lupita’s emancipation from salon. The 32 characters surrounding her bring to the table differing agendas for her to accept or reject in her salon makeover. While a barrage of generational and conservative Mexican archetypes express their disdain for feminism, other cosmopolitan characters engage in issues such as the Women’s Liberation Movement in the U.S. and the French feminist author Monique Wittig. One quirky character, Peinadora, is the voice of a 1969 hippie girl who compares a dream-inducing hairdryer to LSD and talks back to the male authority embodied in the Agent. The women are appendages to Lupita, the boa who must learn—through digesting and rejecting feminist discourses—how to mediate her needs as a Mexican woman.

Criticism of *El eterno femenino* has agreed that this play is the climax of Castellanos’ evolution. Maureen Ahern has emphatically called it “one of the most radical plays ever staged in Mexico” (54). Joanna O’Connell calls it a “corrosively feminist piece” (23) while

Monica Szurmuk writes more modestly that it is “la culminación del tema femenino/feminista en la obra de Rosario Castellanos” (37). A myriad of criticism has already explored at length some of the most salient aspects of the play: its use of humor and irony. Nearly all of these studies find that behind this use of humor is a serious manifesto, and they refer to one anonymous Señora’s celebrated declaration in the denouement:

Señora 4: No basta adaptarnos a una sociedad que cambia en la superficie y permanece idéntica en la raíz. No basta imitar los modelos que se nos proponen y que son la respuesta a otras circunstancias que las nuestras. No basta siquiera descubrir lo que somos. Hay que inventarnos. (194)

In near unanimity, criticism of this play emphasizes the gravity of its message embedded in the playfulness of its performance.

None of these analyses, however, have identified the Third World and First World dimensions among the many characters, a trait that I believe reveals Castellanos’ evolving feminist consciousness. In her oft-cited and previously mentioned denouement (“No basta...”) there is evidence that Castellanos was not just talking about self-creation, but rather about self-creation in the face of other geopolitically relevant threats: the first sentence pushes back against modern Mexican society (“que cambia en la superficie y permanece idéntica en la raíz”), a critique of the enduring coloniality in Mexico. In the second sentence of this passage, Castellanos says that some foreign models are incompatible because “son la respuesta a otras circunstancias que las nuestras.” Etymologically, “circumstance” means “the area around which one stands,” so her comment here exhorts women to recenter themselves and their agendas. This climactic enunciation reveals Castellanos’ desire for women to become makers of their own creation, and in doing so she recognizes that it requires mediating existing models. Thus,

Castellanos' political statement is two-fold: her *compatriotas* must be in dialogue with both the patronizing state and the universalizing nature of global feminist discourses, relocating Mexico as the site where the boa can seize her ultimate power.

Where in *Viaje redondo* the snake is in a French restaurant, the main character in *El eterno femenino* seizes her power in the beauty salon, a place lined with mirrors, a metaphor for women's self-creation and involvement in cultural production. In the beginning of the play Lupita—"el arquetipo de la mujer mexicana: sufrida, abnegada, devota," (52)—is the middle class woman of the Mexican miracle secure in her economic comfort and consumerist fervor. Her individuality, identity, and self-worth accrue in the over-arching metaphor of the hairdo, with the ultimate goal being emancipation from the beauty salon and the ability to craft her own coiffure. In the end, the star of the play must imagine a new destiny when the owner of the salon kicks her out, not before telling her: "Si no le gusta nada de lo que se le ofrece, pues p einese usted sola como se le d e la regalada gana" (195).

In the character description of the play, Castellanos anonymizes the other characters—"los que aparezcan"—who turn out to be an unimportant detail to the play's production, because:

Se trata de un texto no de caracteres sino de situaciones. Esto quiere decir que los protagonistas han de definirse por las acciones (que a veces ser an  nicas), por las palabras (que no ser an muy abundantes) y fundamentalmente, por su vestuario y por el ambiente en que se mueven. (21)

From these initial directives—meant to be read sarcastically—the generic characters must be considered vis- -vis the community in which they emerge, for they get to be defined by their actions, appearances, and words—which means both their dialogue in the play as well as their language and literary traditions.

Act One opens with a description of the owner of the salon, Dueña, and her sole employee, Peinadora. Their antagonistic relationship is explained by “las consecuencias que se resienten, en carne propia, de la etapa del despegue en el proceso de desarrollo en un país del tercer mundo” (24). These two women also represent distinct periods of Mexican history. On the one hand is Peinadora, the politicized young woman activated by the student movement in 1968. Peinadora speaks back to authority, and when the salesman critiques her self-assertion, she responds that she grew up “en un lugar distinto a donde a usted le enseñaron las respuestas. Por eso es que no coincidimos” (25). Her boss, La Dueña, on the other hand, has been disillusioned by the post-revolutionary period in Mexico and is a vulnerable business owner who must protect her economic interests. While she is economically liberated in the sense that she owns her own salon, she is dependent on loans from the male government Agent. She is reminded of his authority when he says: “En los países latinos, donde el tullido es alambrista, son frecuentes los cambios de voluntad, de domicilio, de nombre, de temperatura y hasta de gobierno” (25). In other words, they are both products of their time: one is radical because it seems to be in fashion and the other is conservative because she can’t afford to be any other way. Said another way, Castellanos is not embracing an individualistic ideology that women can make themselves because there are too many other factors impeding liberation.

The two women work in a salon that has an “aspecto marciano” of *señoras* attached to tubes and nets that comprise the hairdryers, creating an image that conjures the model of dependency upon which Mexico has existed since the Conquest. Akin to an act of brainwashing, Lupita’s plug-in to the dryer reminds us of Anthony Burgess’ 1962 anti-industrial novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, in which the Orwellian state routinely reforms citizens’ brains to maintain order. This widely celebrated novel—first translated in 1972

by the Argentine publishing house, Minotauro—focuses on the robotic dehumanization of postmodern society. Made filmic in 1971 by Stanley Kubrick’s celebrated adaptation, the novel’s premise looms in the background of Castellanos’ portrayal of Lupita whose hair—and by extension, brain—is being reformed for her entrance into the *oficio* of womanhood as it is convenient for the state.

In Act One, Lupita goes through five hypothetical nightmarish scenes that give insight into her future, in which she sees women of different generations disagree on their social roles. In “La Anunciación” and “La cruda realidad,” Castellanos presents the generational friction in Mexico through Mamá, Lupita I, and Lupita II. In “La Anunciación” Lupita is in the company of Mamá, “una señora muy cargada de razones,” to whom Lupita will announce (faithful to the scene’s title) her pregnancy. Mamá is a walking contradiction who, at the same time she preaches the joys of motherhood, perpetuates patriarchal logic by criticizing her daughter’s every move and privileging her son-in-law, Juan, as the ultimate authority.

“La Anunciación” can be read intertextually with the poem, “Nazareth” from *Viaje redondo*. As I showed in the prior section, “Nazareth” is a short poem that marks the end of a trip that Castellanos made in 1970. The Basilica de The Annunciation is located there, and its name comes from the story “The Annunciation” which narrates how Gabriel descended to announce to Mary that she would bear the Son of God. In “Nazareth”, the first-person speaker rewrites this biblical story to give Mary a “vaso de elección” that is too weak for “el destino que se vierte en él.” (343). But in *El eterno femenino*, the announcement of pregnancy is more akin to a nightmare than to a blessing. By engaging with this Western narrative of motherhood, Castellanos demystifies motherhood as a miraculous and pleasant experience, which is dramatized when thunder

and lightning appear in the stage directions at the moment Mamá begins to explain to her daughter how her pregnancy will change her life.

While “La Anunciación” represents the intergenerational transference between Lupita and her mother, “Crepúsculario” shows Lupita with her unborn daughter, Lupita II, to complete the three generations. An older Lupita says to her daughter, “no vas a ser distinta de mi madre. Ni mi madre distinta de mi abuela” (61). This comes after Lupita has just told her she will only attend the university “sobre mi cadáver!” (61). In other words, Lupita sees herself being a hypocrite in the future, for if she does not change her ways, she will become just like her controlling, conservative mother. Recalling how Castellanos’ elite family members discouraged her from studying at the university, Lupita is perpetuating this antiquated notion that women are not to enter intellectual spheres.

Act Two goes features Mexican women historical archetypes, which reminds us of the speaker’s inner monologue in “Mirando a la Gioconda,” who laments that the European woman only sees her through the prototypes of Sor Juana and La Malinche. Revisiting female archetypes from Mexican colonial and national histories, Lupita in Act Two shares the stage with the Boa, Eva, La Malinche, Sor Juana, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, Carlota, Rosario de la Peña, and Adelita. Raúl Ortiz y Ortiz summarizes that in rescuing these characters from History and bringing them on the stage, “la autora decapita a sus marionetas” replacing them with women who have “nuevos rasgos que correspondan a una realidad individual, familiar, social y nacional” (13). Two of these female characters, Serpiente and Eva, carry on the metaphor of Mexican feminism in the slithery shape of the Boa.

Conjuring the self-aware boa of *Viaje redondo*, Act Two begins with a farcical circus-like male announcer inviting the audience to witness “el fenómeno más

extraordinario del mundo: la Mujer que se volvió Serpiente por desobediente” (72). In this male-dictated narrative, Eve bears the guilt of her sins and is eternally relegated to slither in the grass due to her disobedience. But when Eve speaks for herself she is confident in her global importance when she asserts that “Mi historia no ha dejado de ser interesante. Al contrario. Con esto del Women’s Lib yo ando como chicle, de boca en boca” (74). In this statement Eve is not a passive character but one who is self-aware. She recognizes that women of the Women’s Lib—presumably French and Anglo-American women—are also in the process of re-designing her legacy in their local contexts. Eve’s utterance is also poking fun at feminism as a fad, since, “andar como chicle, de boca en boca” is a way of saying that it is a popular coffee-table topic but not necessarily one that requires serious, intellectual engagement.

The female character, Serpiente, enters “como una figura asexuada con reminiscencias de reptil” (77) to help Eve see how she can create a new origin story for women. Here the snake is an outsider who tells Eve, “He estado en varios paraísos antes de venir a parar en éste, y te aseguro que nunca he visto un sitio más decepcionante” (79). The judging snake is not a boa, since she hails from a place where they wear “hojas de parra,” remembering that grape leaves are a European crop. Naturally, because of her otherness, she scorns Eve’s naked body suggesting she begin working to both financially liberate herself from Adam and to buy herself clothes and reap her own food. Eve admires the snake, telling her she looks “intellectual,” to which the snake responds, “Me hubiera gustado más que me dijeras que tenía aspecto de inteligente. Porque una persona inteligente se las ingenia para hacer lo que quiere y pagar por ello lo menos posible” (82).

These women’s different backgrounds are underscored by a pushy Serpiente who imposes her own ideas on Eve, such as how she should work in the field rather than

navel-gazing in the Garden of Eden. The serpent here is a type character representative of the liberal ideology that she should buy into the values of the market. Where in *Viaje redondo* the boa is a positive source of American power, the serpent in *El eterno* is a negative image that accentuates the two snakes' differences. The fact that Serpiente comes from a different place means that Lupita, rather than buying into her suggestions and in turn falling for a new form of oppression, must not digest all that Serpiente feeds her.

Act Two closes with Lupita's admission that "cuando me comparo con ustedes, con cualquiera de ustedes, pienso que tuve mucha suerte y que me saqué la lotería y que..." (137). But before she can finish, her words are interrupted by a power outage. This is a moment of symbolic combustion, since her perspective is to be proved incorrect. In other words, by the end of Act Two, Lupita has yet to see her own inferiority as a woman, despite that the historical prototypes are trying to show her how nothing has changed since Mexico was a Spanish colony. But this changes once the electricity is cut, meaning that Lupita is freed (forced) to think for herself.

Act Three is where global feminist discourses most echo, since it is here where Lupita begins to dialogue with women of different classes and generations within modern Mexico, developing compassion for them in the process. These women are models Lupita can choose to become, rather than allowing her life to be pre-determined. Through dialogues with women avatars of Lupita's potential future, the protagonist contemplates the path she wants to take. These paths, however, are all within the liberal, patriarchal logic that keeps them in a mirage of vaunted opportunities, so like the boa constrictor contemplating her will versus her pre-determined destiny, Lupita's ultimate responsibility is to think for herself.

Lupita tries on a series of wigs that reveal her potential feminine identity beyond a housewife. With the hairstyle of the single woman Lupita can be a teacher, a secretary, a nurse, or a depressed spinster, but none of these situations appeal to her. The radical Peinadora, voice of the sexual revolution and thus the only one to push a revolution of sexuality on her, gives her the wig of a prostitute, where Lupita ventures into the *oficio* of prostitution. When the sex worker territorially pushes Lupita away from her lightpost, Lupita remarks: “¿Qué acaso ese poste tiene letrero que diga que es propiedad particular de la puta más hija de puta de las hijas de puta de este rumbo?” (149). But after learning about the industry and thus approaching it with more humanity, Lupita changes how she views prostitution. She now sees it as an *oficio* that, unlike how society has framed it for her, is not indicative of abjection or immorality. Lupita confesses after getting to know Prostituta and seeing her as a woman who knows how to manipulate the sex industry, “Lo que no alcanzo a comprender es cómo los clientes pueden ser tan pendejos de pensar que uno viene aquí porque no hay de otra. ¿Y los demás trabajos?” (155). Emphasizing the necessity of this job like all others in industrial society, and removing the immorality commonly associated with prostitution, Lupita breaks with the misogyny perpetuated among women themselves.

In another brilliant moment of class and racial tension, Lupita tries on the wig of the “amante,” or what is known as the “casa chica” of a Señor who divides his wealth and time among his many women, although only one is the official Señora. The class and racial critiques lie in how Lupita is schooled by her domestic worker, Criada, on the precarity of the social apparatus of infidelity known as the “casa chica” and “casa grande.” Criada remembers how the Señor used to visit often, commenting that “Yo

sabía que no iba a durar. Como todos.” (165). In this scene, Lupita’s education comes from the woman who works in her home, even though the Criada does not rebel.

In 1971, when Castellanos chronicled her trip to Paris, she wrote that she was drinking cheese and cognac “hasta que el hígado se me declare en huelga.” It should not surprise then that Lupita asks the Criada to bring her cognac so she can drink her woes away, to which her counterpart suggests tequila because it is more representative of her local culture. Lupita is slowly losing the attention of the Señor, in the process recognizing that she is like tequila in that the nation produces both of them: “Y de paso hago patria consumiendo lo que el país produce” (168).

To be sure, Lupita is learning more about what kind of woman she does not want to be. After having rejected being the “amante,” she encounters the “Mujer de acción” entering into the world of a journalist who goes around interviewing famous women, finding that they are always defined in relation to the men in their lives. Perhaps here she is alluding to Elena Poniatowska, who worked her way up through the newspaper business by transcending the social section where she was initially relegated before she was entrusted with more newsworthy events (Jørgensen, *The Writings*, xiv). In 1954, Poniatowska conducted and published one interview each day for a whole year. In Castellanos’ play, the journalist interviews “important” women, such as the first woman governor in Mexico, who is in the public eye to “server a mi patria” not to earn respect for her intellectual or noteworthy characteristics (174). The female governor, a caricature of nationalist rhetoric, does not believe in women’s oppression since “La Constitución nos garantiza, a todos los mexicanos, sin distinción de sexo, credo, raza ni edad, una igualdad cívica” (174). In short, the women that Lupita interviews remind her that ignorance is not

due to a lack of education (all of these women have economic and cultural capital) but to a lack of *awareness* of the danger in their rigid gender roles.

The final wig that Lupita tries on is that of the university intellectual who wears glasses and moves “con seguridad y eficacia” (180). This description matches the one Castellanos wrote in one of her first letters sent from Madison in which she described her Anglo colleague as “Desenvuelta, muy segura de sí misma” (*Cartas* 191). But the character in *El eterno* is an imposter, since the description reveals that Lupita “está dispuesta a abdicar su independencia en la primera ocasión *conveniente*. Y abdicar quiere decir seguir el ejemplo de su madre o de su suegra” (180). This wig, rather than giving Lupita the tools to be an authentic liberated woman, makes her a victim of the expectations of self-liberation in a system that remains unchanged.

During this stage of the play Lupita announces to the rest of the characters that Castellanos’ representation of them is problematic. In this metadramatic moment, Lupita asks Señoras 1-4 if they know the play is mocking their “más veneradas tradiciones” and “nuestros más caros símbolos” in a “teatro capitalino” (181). She goes on to argue against *El eterno femenino* as it undoes the social values that erect the three most important Mexican institutions: “la familia, la religion, la patria” (182). Castellanos here imagines how women might receive this play with Lupita voicing the play’s defects, such as its unoriginal title from Goethe, its technical problems, and even worse, its imaginative historical disfiguration. Furthermore:

Hay algo más que tampoco tomaremos en cuenta en este momento, y es el modo con que trata nuestra historia. La autora, obviamente, no la conoce. Al desconocerla es incapaz de interpretarla y, como si eso fuera válido, la inventa. Y la invención siempre tiende a degradarnos y a ponernos en ridículo. (183)

When Castellanos delegitimizes herself here, she disproves the idea that women will be saved by anyone but themselves. The diegetic Castellanos, in the words of Lupita emboldened by her own self-authority, says she is illegitimate because she “aprovecha la circunstancia de hallarse fuera del país” (184). This enunciation is important because Castellanos at the time was living in Israel, so as a woman who had enough social and cultural capital to represent her country as Ambassador, she acknowledges the potential backlash she will receive for her cosmopolitan lifestyle and socioeconomic status.

The serpent is invoked one last time when Lupita announces that “Ya desde Chilám Balam el análisis permite descubrir a la serpiente oculta entre la hierba. Y qué veneno, señoras mías, ¡Qué veneno!” (186). She is referring to Castellanos’ 1957 novel, *Balún Canán*. But the fact that Lupita mistakes her novel’s title is Castellanos’ way of showing how her work is unread in her home country by other women. *Chilám Balam* is a real collection of ancient Mayan texts, but Lupita, under the façade of an intellectual, cannot distinguish between the two, further proof of her ignorance. Despite that Lupita tries to dissuade the Señoras who surround her, they demonstrate interest in seeing the play, a moment of optimism for these women since it suggests an interest in their own formation.

Amalia Gladhart has argued that *El eterno femenino* should be read as a “theory play,” a term she borrows from Gayle Austin. According to Austin, a theory play is one in which the sum of a dramaturg’s production takes life in one dramatic performance. Gladhart studies the way the women recognize the performative nature—á la Butler—of their gender roles and interprets the play’s significance in the following statement: “if acting one’s gender is an inevitable necessity, what is required is not to unmask and thus eliminate the performance but to transform it” (66). In other words, Lupita and her

counterparts learn that the characters are implored to *transform* their roles, an assessment that mirrors the image of the boa, subverting and transforming herself and what she eats. Furthermore, Gladhart says in reference to Castellanos' appearance in her own play as a character, "this moment of feminist metadrama seems to reflect not only the process of playwriting but Castellanos' own process of self-creation" (73). And I would add that with the many meta-fictional elements it also interpolates the audience. It is a play of reflections and self-reflections about the place we occupy and as a theory play it underlines the importance of dialogue and education in one's own making.

In a sudden twist, Lupita is not ignorant but the new, Mexican woman, which best comes through when she interprets to her counterparts how to read the play:

Habr  que demostrar, con hechos, que la mujer mexicana no es esa caricatura—o ese autorretrato—que la se ora Castellanos presenta. No. La mujer mexicana es un ser humano, consciente y responsable, que act a de acuerdo con arraigados principios morales, cient ficos, filos ficos y religiosos. Dije que mujer act a, y quiero subrayarlo, porque ahora se trata de que entremos en acci n. (187)

From this moment on, the women debate a dizzying barrage of ideas of how to unify themselves. Seeking political rights won't do since "con o sin el voto, las mujeres mexicanas seguimos estando oprimidas" (188); Some want to break free from standards of beauty; Others want to broach issues of maternity as either obligatory or emancipatory, since you can now have babies without men via artificial insemination.

Global feminist discourses appear both overtly and implicitly. Se ora 4 asks " Qu  sugerir  usted?  La organizaci n de un reino de las Amazonas?" (190). While this question could be read as a reference to the city in Greek mythology that housed and isolated a group of women warriors, it is most likely a reference to Monique Wittig's *Les guerrill res*, the 1969 novel that has been celebrated as one of the most audacious feminist

texts ever. *Las guerrilleras* was published in Spanish in 1971 by Seix Barral. But rather than digest Wittig's proposition, the women decide that the idea of a lesbian island and isolated social structure is too utopic. When Señora 4 says "Yo no necesito ir al teatro para digerir—como algunas de mis compañeras—ni para pensar. Yo pienso por mi cuenta" (192), she represents the danger of not reading and learning about herself, for which reason Lupita responds to her rebuttal: "Y piensa mal."

As the interlocutor of Mexican women—Castellanos has already cast herself as an outsider—Lupita mediates their options: one, they could defend their traditions "modernizándolas, claro"; or two, they could "romper con el pasado como lo han hecho nuestras rubias primas, nuestras buenas vecinas" (193). But the women decide against both of these options, at which point Señora 4 asks, "¿No hay una tercera vía para el tercer mundo al que pertenecemos?" (193). This is when Lupita has her momentous declaration that "No basta imitar los modelos que se nos proponen y que son la respuesta a otras circunstancias que las nuestras. No basta siquiera descubrir lo que somos. Hay que inventarnos" (194). This debate concludes with utter pandemonium on stage that insinuates the difficulties following this *prise de conscience*.

Emily Hind has read this last dramatic gesture as a shortcoming of Castellanos' feminist horizons, since the dramaturge "seems reluctant to hazard a projection of what this invention might involve" (60). She cites the closing line of the play in which Dueña kicks Lupita out onto the street with no hairdo, telling her: "péinese usted sola como se le dé la regalada gana" (195). In this scene, Dueña tells her that her lack of identity is her problem, and her problem alone at this point, Lupita looks to the audience, asking them rhetorically twice: "¿Mi problema? ¿Mi problema? Chin" (196). For Hind and other

scholars, this ending has been interpreted as a pessimistic closing that precludes a more specific methodology for self-invention.

But what if Castellanos' point were precisely not to project any homogenous feminist project on anyone, not even on the star of her play? What if Lupita's job was only beginning? What if this is Castellanos urging Mexican women, both within the play and those who are witnessing it, to think about how they would individually and collectively resolve their problem? On the one hand, we see Lupita abandoned by the women in the salon. But on the other hand, we, the readers or theater-goers, are implicated in her problem, since although we have laughed with her throughout, we also recognize the injustices that face her as a woman. In breaking the fourth wall, Lupita draws us in affectively rather than estranging us.

In considering *El eterno femenino* as a text that challenges both global feminism and nationalism, we see its parallel themes with Hélène Cixous' 1975 canonical essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." This essay, which was mentioned briefly in the opening parts of this chapter, seeks to legitimize women's experiences via laughter and oblige women to imagine the new horizons that remind us of Castellanos' reflexive verb, "inventarnos." Sharon Sieber compares *El eterno femenino* to Cixous' essay "The Laugh" without pointing out that *El eterno* was written three years before Cixous' text. *El eterno* was published the same year Cixous' text pleaded women to: "Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed" (889). Cixous forges the material body with the literary one, giving women the power—and therefore the responsibility—to assert their differences through writing while Castellanos was doing something similar with *El eterno*.

Where Cixous, an Algerian woman whose Africanness made her different from her French feminist contemporaries, uses laughter as a gesture of talking back, Castellanos, a Mexican living in Israel, similarly deploys laughter as a liberating force. Through humor, the author deconstructs the double marginalization of Mexican women, marginalized at home because they are women and abroad because they are women of the so-called Third World. While the characters struggle against the particular nationalist discourses at home in Mexico, they do not find solace in the global discourses because of how those discourses emerged in different contexts. Castellanos' formulation in *El eterno femenino* suggests that Mexican women will need to emerge between these two discourses, identifying their own needs based on local circumstances.

Conclusion

Viaje redondo and *El eterno femenino* are two works that intervene in global feminist discourses by relocating the needs of Mexican women, a shift that concludes Castellanos' entire intellectual production. In Chapter II we saw how in 1963 Castellanos was critical of Mexican women, posing "Habría que preguntarse por qué el feminismo, que en tantos países ha tenido sus mártires y sus muy respetadas teóricas, en México no ha pasado de una actitud larvaria y vergonzante" (101). Those other countries' "mártires y sus muy respetadas teóricas" were women like Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, and the two Simones, women who would constitute a fundamental influence on her writings in the 1950s and 1960s. But from her cynical tone in 1963 to the more uplifting one in 1975 in *El eterno*, Castellanos, rather than comparing Mexican feminist thought to how it has developed in other countries, sees Mexican women's potential as originating with themselves: "Hay que inventarnos."

Castellanos' critics have also noted in blanket statements—without outlining the trajectory—that in the 1970s Castellanos moved towards a less individualistic, less cosmopolitan, and more socially inclusive feminist prophecy. As Diane Marting writes of the author's conclusions in the early 1970s, “women's problems are essentially social and economic ones that involve and reflect on her society as a whole. She was aware that freedom based on the dependence and exploitation of other women and classes is false freedom” (143). Andrea Reyes also summarizes that, “Mes y medio antes de partir a Israel, Castellanos planteaba a sus compatriotas femeninas la responsabilidad de forjar su propio futuro y asumir la categoría de personas; nadie más lo podía hacer por ellas” (25). As these scholars and others have concluded, this is proof of her evolved feminist persona acutely aware of how Mexican feminism should be autochthonous.

Castellanos' story informs the movement of feminist thought across international borders in a period of globalization. Castellanos was a cosmopolitan figure with the privilege to eat in places like the Tour D'Argent and the cultural capital to dialogue with the philosophical, literary, academic discourses surrounding her. But she also grew to know that she was a metaphoric boa in an elegant restaurant. This story of feminist consciousness—epitomized later by the 1975 conference on the Year of the Woman in Mexico City, and theorized in the writings of Anzaldúa, Cixous, and Rich throughout the 1970s and the 1980s—shows the globalization of feminism and the necessity of women to recognize their geopolitical positionality. For Castellanos, recognizing her location in the Third World was the final component of her feminist project although unfortunately for her, she died in August 1974, and would not live to see her legacy unfold.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS: CASTELLANOS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

As I complete this dissertation in 2018, the world is abuzz with feminist discourses. Merriam-Webster defined 2017 with the word “feminism” and hashtag movement across the world—such as #metoo and #vivaslasqueremos—have given voice to the plurality of women’s experiences. We can no longer speak of woman in the singular, as we are compelled to recognize the differences of class, race, and other areas of intersectionality. “The greatest-consciousness raising event in history,” as it Jocelyn Olcott recently called the 1975 IWY in Mexico City, resulted in the truth that women of the world are not bound up in one feminist agenda. Because of this encounter feminism was forced to reckon with the fact that women across cultures and nations are not equal.

Castellanos was not present for this event, because she had died seven months earlier. And yet, as I show in this dissertation, prior to 1975, Castellanos was already attuned to the problems with feminism on a global scale. Her overarching story illustrates a Latin American feminist awakening, an awakening that is marked by her engagement with international and national discourses.

As I showed in Chapter II, “On the Mexican Women’s Movement: 1968-1971” the author’s early feminist articulations were pessimistic towards Mexican women, and by “women,” she meant women like herself. In 1968, however, she begins to dissect the institutions (like education and technocracy) and the processes (like nationalism) that keep Mexican women from forming a feminist movement. Her chronicles from this period, which had not been analyzed previously because these were not published, illustrate that

Castellanos was becoming more versed in the national conditions facing women, although her feminist project does not yet consider non middle class women.

In Chapter III, “On Latin American Women’s Writing: Canonicity and 1969,” I explore Castellanos’ desire to form a Latin American women’s canon that extends from Sor Juana to the contemporary period in women like Gabriela Mistral and Clarice Lispector. In this endeavor, she echoes the Latin American spirit of the period, or the project of unifying the continent bound by its similarities rather than its differences. While forging a canon, Castellanos envisions liberation through literature, and the authors she selects have created women protagonists who break free of traditional tropes.

Chapter IV, “On the Anglo-American Women’s Liberation Movement: 1966-1967,” focuses on the year that Castellanos spent in the U.S. as a visiting professor at three state institutions. This year, I argue, allowed Castellanos to align herself with certain tenets of the Anglo-American movement, particularly as it related to her toxic marriage with Ricardo Guerra. I read the letters she wrote to her then-husband and show how she used writing as a form of liberation from their bond. In this chapter, I also explore her readings of Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and Ivy Compton-Burnett. These readings reveal that Castellanos was an avid reader of the Anglo-American canon, because she carefully selects them while excluding various others.

In Chapter V, “On French Feminisms: Simone de Beauvoir and Simone Weil,” I challenge the notion that Castellanos is “the Simone de Beauvoir of Mexico” by teasing out the innovative characteristics of her feminist project such as humor and the recognition of colonial legacies. Castellanos admires the equal relationship that Beauvoir and Sartre have established, an admiration that is related to the more hostile and traditional engagement between Castellanos and Guerra. Simone Weil has already been

considered an important influence on Castellanos' ethical approach to *indigenismo*, and I add to these studies by locating Weil within Castellanos' evolution.

As I show in Chapter VI, Castellanos' later years in Israel are catalytic. She gravitates towards the blind spots in her own feminist formation and begins to see that "women" includes women unlike herself: She liberates her domestic servant and later says this: "Mientras yo andaba de redentora, de Quetzalcóatl por montes y collados, junto a mí, alguien se consumía de ignorancia" (Castellanos cited in Poniatowska, *¡Ay vida!*, 121). In this chapter I perform close readings of *Viaje Redondo* and *El eterno femenino*, two literary texts in which Castellanos establishes herself in between the local and the global. She deploys the Cold-War terminology of "primer" and "tercer mundo" to sarcastically show how she, as a Mexican woman, is viewed as inferior by the First World. She also identifies the colonial legacies within Mexico that assume she is inferior. *El eterno femenino* shows the final twist in Castellanos evolution: in it, Castellanos proposes that, instead of admiring women's liberation movements in other countries, Mexican women should get to know themselves. To begin, "woman" in Mexico means something else: it includes working-class women, such as the woman she had employed for nearly two decades.

By focusing on Rosario Castellanos, *International Interventions* traces a cultural history of feminist ideas through the development of this one woman. Thirsty for modernity, Castellanos examines, experiences, and then re-positions herself against women authors of the world. She interprets Sor Juana and Gabriela Mistral while finding some resonance with Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir. In *El eterno femenino*, she weaves other women intertextually into the play, such as when she alludes to Monique Wittig's *Les guerrillères* and judges their lack of application/relevance to the Mexican context. She is able to read what those projects meant and place them in the evolution of

those cultures. She then looked towards her own culture and started to create what she found lacking.

My research is important because when we dissect Castellanos' life as a global feminist, we see the way that globalization impacted the Mexican feminist project that she initiated. Her writings were just as advanced as her First World counterparts, and yet, she was not elevated to the same status as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. Few of her texts are translated, and the existing information about her life is not as abundant or profound as other Anglo-European feminist histories.

This intellectual biography tells an admirable tale of feminism across borders in the transitional years between the homogenizing second wave and the heterogenizing third wave. Through Castellanos' "desire for the world" and her attention to her own marginality as a Mexican woman, she reminds us of the tensions that have plagued feminist histories, while at the same time she shows us how the world's feminist discourses inevitably affect her local and national identities.

My work can lead to some practical directions for Mexican and Latin American feminist scholarship. First, it can explore the absence of Latin American women in the global canon. Castellanos is one of many Mexican women whose work is the product of globalization. I am thinking of the contemporary writers Valeria Luiselli and Guadalupe Nettel, who have chosen to live and publish abroad while writing texts about Mexican women. Furthermore, I hope my dissertation can cast new light on Castellanos. Perhaps a greater analysis of global feminist literature will relocate the Third World as an influential site to literature produced in Europe and the U.S.

Castellanos' life story will soon be made available to the U.S. on the big screen in Natalia Beristáin's biopic, *Los adioses*, and the criticism of this film could illustrate some of

the biases I have highlighted in my work. Ironically, the Mexican film by a Mexican director is only being screened in Europe at the moment. This is an interesting unfolding of events: we will see if European audiences capture the international-ness of her life and feminist project, or if she remains to be seen, in their eyes, as a Mexican woman marginalized from feminist modernity.

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