

GENDER AT ITS LIMITS: THE EROTIC AND THE POLITICAL IN FICTIONAL
MEXICAN AND BRAZILIAN 20TH CENTURY TEXTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the representation of the erotic and sexuality in works of Mexican and Brazilian fiction in the twentieth century. I examine how the erotic motif influences the construction of gender and sexuality. Erotic representations apart from the surface function of displaying what is aesthetically pleasing also have the possibility to transform or, at a minimum, disturb gender norms. By analyzing gender, my objective is to show how fluid gender identities are, and how the erotic motif can also have political implications by surfacing feminist and activist ideologies. Most importantly, however, by closely analyzing how the erotic has been mobilized in political terms, I am able to observe how radical authors have become in rewriting the female body and erotic desires. Some of the texts under analysis are *Gabriela Cravo e Canela* by Jorge Amado, *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* by Sabina Berman, *Eu Tu Eles* directed by Andrucha Waddington, among others.

To my Mother, Father and Evangelista

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Chapter 1: Rethinking Foundations and Expanding the Boundaries: Theorizing Eroticism, Sex, Gender, Sexuality and the Body

Not only is erotic desire and sensuous feeling removed from the dominant philosophical tradition with which Kant is associated-and (by extension) from aesthetic pleasure-but sexuality, sexual desire, and the body are all proposed as a *threat* to rational, civilized society. Eroticism, because it is linked to the emotions (from sexual arousal to fear and anger), has the power to agitate the mind, the soul, and to disrupt order.
Alyce Mahon

Introduction

The science television series *Through the Wormhole*, explored the possibility of a sixth sense in June 2011. One of the studies presented was that of Professor Daryl Bem, who believes that humans have the ability to sense erotic opportunities in the future. He theorizes that this precognitive ability developed in humans over thousands of years in order to provide reproductive opportunities. Although controversial, his study reveals that when a subject was presented with two curtains on a computer screen, and had to choose which one had a picture behind it, most of the time the success rate was fifty percent, which are the results that are mathematically expected. When the computer transitions its images and only shows those of an erotic nature, the subjects predict correctly which curtain will reveal the image fifty three percent of the time. Although the difference is small, Professor Bem states that it is statistically significant, and he proposes that humans can anticipate future events when emotions are involved. This experiment reveals the great potential that human erotic desire holds, even within the more resolutely black and white world of scientific investigation. If eroticism has been found

to be a motivator for precognitive learning and predicting future events, imagine the potential that it holds in other aspects of life. How can erotic desire serve as an asset to cultural studies, and what does literature reveal about the erotic potential?

In practice, eroticism does not exist by itself, but is intertwined with the politics of gender and sexuality. Eroticism, sexuality and gender influence one another and their boundaries in practice overlap. Consequently, the erotic is deeply tied to society's prescriptions onto the body and its sex. Based on sex, individuals are taught a gendered way to socialize, behave, think and desire in particular ways. Arguments for maintaining the erotic as a private matter are uprooted when making visible the historical treatment of the erotic, in relation to gender and sexuality. History shows that gender, sexuality and the erotic have all been highly politicized by the state. As history reveals, the erotic is always political. Furthermore, if the erotic for the sake of the erotic is viewed as threatening to social values and therefore is constantly under a careful watch by larger political forces, what could become of an erotic that is public and has a political intent? What is the potential and just how threatening is it to the established social order?

Gender and sexuality are critical markers in the discourse for social equality. David de Ferranti et al. discern that inequality in Latin America is extensive (1).¹ It is also the prevalent factor that characterizes every aspect of life. According to the research conducted by the World Bank, inequality determines "access to education, health and public services; access to land and other assets; the functioning of credit and formal labor markets; and attainment of political voice and influence" (1). Equality is one of the principal objects of the social movements of the twentieth century, principally as stated by the research, because it corresponds to power and representation. Gender for example, is a pivotal demarcation for the allocation of social, political

¹ The work is collective and no individual scholars are cited within the findings.

and economic resources. While over fifty percent of the population in Latin America is female, being female continues to be a salient variable that affects the likelihood of poverty and inequality (Ferranti 81). In the family sector, being part of a lower class translates to less income and more children than middle and higher-class families. In occupations, Ferranti et al. report that women are more often found in low paying service occupations, regardless of their racial and ethnic background (88). As a result, sex greatly affects the social, political and economic opportunities and conditions for an individual.

Inequality in economic and political terms is more easily measured than the inequality that exists within the family and other private spaces, as well as the accessibility to our own bodies. Social class and level of education are influential factors in empowering marginalized individuals to gain fairness in all social aspects; however, it is not always the case. For women to attain equality in all aspects of their lives is a difficult matter. The reason for which the task becomes so challenging, is that it requires the modification of all social centers that produce and disseminate values, including the family, religion and state. In the family, for example, many females continue to be solely responsible for completing the household chores and raising the children. As members of a family, women must also conduct themselves in ways that are representative of femininity with certain dress codes and mannerisms that ultimately secure their marriageability. Sexually, virginity continues to hold a strong value; indeed, the less sexual experience a woman has, the greater social potential she holds. If women do not enjoy gender equality within the household, what guarantees sexual equality as well? Many concur that women have the right to higher education, to mature intellectually. Others agree that women should have the right to choose who they marry and how they construct their identity. All of the posed points are valid and widely accepted statements in the Western world. Unfortunately, the

erotic is not easily obtained by all sexually active women. Many women in Latin America still have to regain their bodies, learn about themselves, and explore their sexual appetites. This also holds true for many transgendered individuals.

There is an evident need to have a more inclusive model when drawing the limits on gender and sexuality. Within a literary discussion, I propose a conversation on the erotic potential and its ability to challenge normative gender practices within society. Traditionally analyzed separately, I believe that a discussion of the ways in which they interact can be productive by demonstrating that normative practices are constantly contested and positioned for new inscriptions. In this dissertation, I analyze a diverse compilation of novels, short stories, plays and films that represent and support three topics. The first topic I address is eroticism, in works where both women and men act upon and know their own erotic desires. Eroticism and sexuality are closely interconnected; however, they differ in that the erotic offers a more complex freedom and union of the body, mind, and emotions. Conversely, eroticism also depends on the validated and critical relations between sexuality and the socio-political and economic made visible by scholarship in the twentieth century. The second area is the reform of the construct of gender, from a clearly defined and boxed practice of gender, to one which is disrupted, where its borders expand to better represent all individuals and their realities. The presentation of gender within the texts is streamed within a political discourse of social opportunities, responsibilities and ways in which it ties back to sex. Lastly, the spark of feminist ideology within the works is analyzed. I specifically focus on the ways that gender and sexual equality are promoted within the works, and on the fact that a principal feminist objective of the subjects having the power to define their own bodies and desires is present in the underlying narration. It is difficult to find all three components in one genre, but the works under discussion

unite these characteristics. As the emphasis is on eroticism and gender, a thematic division is presented.

This dissertation investigates the diverse ways in which the erotic is circulated and contested in Latin America. I focus on the perceptions of the erotic that differ from the Catholic, Western tradition, and instead, are influenced by other regional and migratory ethnic groups. By researching diverse foundations provides the evidence that supports the view that the erotic is a site of potential that unifies and evolves the amalgamation of all the facets that encompasses the bodily experience. *Gender at its Limits* is greatly influenced by Audre Lorde's view on the erotic, that is, as a source of knowledge and social empowerment. For Lorde, the erotic is deep within the body, and is a source of untamed knowledge and a site that possesses our human essence which reminds us of our repressed agency as woman of color, our past outside of privilege, as well as source of energy that helps transcend the individual to move from oppressive circles. Instead of breaking from the historical past or wanting to erase it, she makes use of it as a means to inform how its consequences are visible in the present, and how the erotic as a source of knowledge and non-Western lines have been untouched and untapped resource to transform a legacy of social disempowerment. The erotic is transformed by Lorde as a focal point to defy political oppression and instead hold the potential to restructure an individual's very subjectivity. Lorde informs *Gender at its Limits* by aligning the erotic with knowledge, the spiritual, and as a motivator for positive social impact, especially among politically underprivileged communities due to race and gender. Her work also aids in examining the ways in which the erotic can be made meaningful for women and men, how the erotic motif intersects with gender, and challenges normative perceptions of woman's and men's social roles, desires

and bodies, in order for them to be able to define for themselves who they are and unify the human experience of body, mind and sex.

The erotic is mobilized in *Gender at its Limits* as a transcending human emotion where ecstasy has the possibility to arise personal consciousness which leads to emancipatory fulfillment. Although there are many definitions of the erotic, as it resists homogenization, the erotic has ties to the spiritual essence of an individual. Moreover, it also expresses needs and desires, and looks for the fulfillment of them. The erotic is circulated throughout the dissertation in terms of atmosphere, with the movement of constructive energies that alter a characters perception and practice of gender and sexuality, to the point where the erotic is not only in an subject/object relationship. The reference of the erotic as political is in the wider sense of the term, where it transcends history and space similarly to the ways in which power does. The erotic is sublime, bodily pleasures, ecstasy, all which transcend the body, and by extension, the social limits. As a result, the erotic holds a potential political threat to normative prescriptions of it, which are depending on time and space.

Gender at its Limits developed with the visible unbalance between the Latin American erotic artistic production, and the scholarship that was not analyzing the erotic as a contributing factor to the redefinition of issues pertaining to gender and sexuality. The difference was not only highlighted by the discrepancy between numbers, but also by the risks taken in the ways in which the erotic was perceived. As a feminist approach is the ideal theory to incorporate, I was confronted by how in the U.S. theoretical space it is rarely developed. Due to the erotic's nature to transcend space as well as to be representative of its community, I took a transnational approach of analysis primordially because of the objective of the project, and because of the new possibilities feminism offers through intersectionality and academia through interdisciplinary

studies. An interdisciplinary approach has lifted many borders and has offered the possibility of conducting transnational analyses with focal points of intersection. Transnationalism is closely tied to transculturalism, and, as Rosa Linda Fregoso reminds us, it is part of the cultural exchanges that make visible the shared history of exclusion and subordination within the cultural and political practices of patriarchal nationalisms that structure the lives of their inhabitants (xv). *Gender at its Limits* is conscious of the oppressive legacy between gender, sexuality and the erotic in juxtaposition with particular races, ethnic groups, classes, genders and geographical regions. Nevertheless, a principal objective is to demonstrate that although the erotic is deeply tied to social parameters, it also offers a potential that transcends national borders. The definition of the erotic in this dissertation allows the use of the transnational in order to compare uneven landscapes with different historical trajectories. By redefining the erotic to the political, and as a consequence to transcend time, space, as well as the body with the atmosphere I claim it presents, the erotic puts forth particular global universalities, shared experiences and similar objectives within the texts that I am able to compare with the use of a transnational analysis. One can suppose that erotic literature in Latin America makes use of an erotic devoid of generative social consequences. However, I claim that across national borders, in completely separate regions of Latin America, divided by language and colonial past, such as is the case of Mexico and Brazil, there is a trend in contemporary literature that manifests an erotic potential that can modify the embodiments of gender and sexuality. With a definition of the erotic which holds ties to knowledge and to be a potential to modify the normative, the erotic provides an opportunity to modify existing practices through an atmosphere it surfaces, a window of opportunity to change conventional practices. Since erotic texts are often a minor branch in literature and the recognition and visibility they achieve in Latin America is also inconsequential, Mexico and

Brazil offer a massive literary production that results in a greater selection of erotic texts with all the three categories that are required in the analysis that provide alternative discussions and visions of the erotic. With an erotic definition that is grounded on Lorde's vision, *Gender at its limits* analysis the ways in which the erotic can be meaningful and socially constructive. With the regional emphasis of the research being in Mexico and Brazil, they demonstrate that contemporary erotic trends defy time and national borders, as well as offer a different interpretation of the erotic due to its non-Western ethnic cultures and communities present in Latin America.

Gender at its limits analyzes the representation of eroticism, gender and sexuality. I examine the erotic as a source of empowerment, one that ignites the power to challenge traditional gender roles. In this chapter, I trace the construction of an erotic legacy within the Western tradition and how it relates to prevalent discourses on the body, sex, sexuality and gender, all markers that directly affect eroticism. Chapters Two, Three and Four support as well as modify Western views on the erotic as they are incorporated to the Latin American experience. I also define the project and its objectives in the first chapter. In Chapter Two, the unifying topic between the novels *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate* is food and their erotic appetites. I examine how the erotic becomes a means by which to become critical of social practices and values, and how erotic desire is the incentive to seek nontraditional means of knowledge through a uniquely female experience with food, grounded in popular culture. In Chapter Three, I explore national myths and how the play *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* and the film *Eu tu eles* deconstruct these myths through an erotic motif and construct a historical and economic critique of representation. Finally in Chapter Four, I argue that the novel *Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça* and the short story “¿Quieres que te lo cuente

otra vez?” incorporate the element of storytelling and the structures of tales, as a way by which to expose homoerotic desire and transgendered identity, resulting in the irrationality of binaries as systems to classify and identify individuals. The analysis of representation of the erotic and sexuality suggest that geopolitical contexts of social inequality, and the realities of a globalized economy, result in the inevitable interaction with feminism, which is grounded on gender equality, access to the body and agency over ones personhood. In addition, if normalization is the desirable process with issues of gender and sexuality, the presented texts are examples of how the characters are aware of the threat of their desires, and successfully use normative and national expectations to modify the very system that oppresses them. I conclude that to focus on achieving self-fulfillment in all magnitudes, means equally integrating the intellectual, the emotional and the sexual as sources of illumination into the past, present and future. In conclusion, eroticism proves to be a driving emotional force for the reinvention of the individual, and an effective means to reflect upon our own social conditions.

Western Erotic Legacies and the Latin American Experience

When theorizing the role of the body within the dominant Western intellectual tradition, Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price both agree that the body has been theorized and therefore treated as independent of thought and intellect. As a consequence of this outlook, the subject has been disembodied and rubrics that advocate binaries that divide the body and mind have been institutionalized (39). As a carnal desire bound to the body, sexuality was therefore bound to the status of the body, which was regarded as a site of unruly passions that would propel a human to deviate from the path of knowledge. If sexuality was a mystery confined to the private space and in need of oppression, the erotic was taboo, and therefore relegated to an even lower domain. Since eroticism is driven by the amplification of bodily pleasures, it was placed by society in the

periphery, in spaces of moral decay, and, even though it was obsolete in the doctrines prescribed to the masses, eroticism was a privilege obtained by a few intellectual men who approached the erotic in esoteric circles. However, by the late twentieth century, feminists acknowledged the body and others have theorized on the centrality of the material body and its importance to feminist theory (Price 1). In practice, female bodily pleasures have been reclaimed by many women and writers around the world; nonetheless, eroticism has only been approached in greater depth by a handful of theorists.

The relevance and degree to which individuals interact with the erotic is beautifully expressed by Alyce Mahon who writes that “[i]rrespective of how we choose to express or repress erotic desire, and irrespective even of our differences of opinion over what forms of eroticism are permissible, representations of the erotic inevitably speak to us all” (11). As Mahon registers, erotic representations in art have the potential to arouse strong emotions within each one of us, as we experience it in different ways based on our beliefs and limits. In our Western philosophical tradition, it has predominantly been an area of great concern and in need of supervision because of its power over beauty and reason. Influential philosophers such as Plato, Kant, and Freud, who have significantly influenced Western views on sexuality, have touched upon the erotic directly or indirectly in their work.

Well into the twenty-first century, the erotic continues to circulate in discourses of control. When discussed in literary analysis, it is tied to its aesthetic value, to Freud and its negative link to taboo and deprivation, to past civilizations or to an incessant attempt to separate it from pornography. The political potential of the erotic has been seen throughout the times by voices who are by far a minority and who have struggled and been defeated by the dominant Western view. The twentieth century, marked by political movements, also provides works

which expose a different erotic intention. It is not based on control, but on the need to reform it in order to be more inclusive and its definitions more flexible.

Traditionally, the visibility of eroticism lies in its division between what is considered “art” and that which is “pornographic.” Art is celebrated for its aesthetic value and considered to be appropriate, cultural and normative. It is also intended to have a higher spiritual, moral and intellectual worth. The materialization of the product itself employs the erotic “for a greater moral good,” whereas the erotic is not the desired outcome but the means by which to achieve a goal (Mahon 14). On the other hand, pornography’s sole intents are to stimulate and excite sexually, and to create a profit for its producers (Mahon 14). It is defined as obscene, and it is also subjected to constant surveillance and criticism, controlled, and assigned to particular spaces. It is still evident however, that, even in the “arts,” eroticism still remains a taboo. Latin American authors whose texts address the subject of eroticism often find themselves having to validate their work and differentiate it from pornography. Whether the erotic falls into the realm of art or pornography, it unjustly continues to be treated as a mere aesthetic form which serves as the provocation for fleeting sexual pleasure, and achieves no more than a transient, superficial and informal existence. The struggle of classification between art and pornography is also an indicator of the context of friction which the erotic is consistently part of. It is evident through feminist theory that the private, the personal and the sexual are political. I historicize the erotic in relation to gender and sexuality, which traces its political lineage guided by control and supervision. Due to its potential to influence humans through emotions and perceptions, and, as a result, alter the very philosophical foundation of the society that provides its context, I consider the erotic to be political in the sense that it can potentially disrupt the prescribed codes of conduct. By political, I am referring to its ability to transcend time and space as indicated in

the introduction, as well as its present political implications, ties and potential to restructure the diverse venues, such as gender, which are closely monitored and prescribed by larger national political forces resulting in human limitations through homogeneity.

Compiling a cohesive erotic definition is a challenge because it is altered over time and across geographical areas. Based on the examples that I provide in the following chapters, eroticism explores pleasure itself, allowing for a bifurcation of effects to occur, one which can lead to becoming a social threat, and/or through stimulation and transgression, lead to the formation of knowledge that is not valued or invisible by normative views. As a consequence of an alternative formation of knowledge, or the acknowledgement of previously ignored sources of knowledge, this attributes a political potential to the erotic, such as in the disruption of prescribed gender norms. Other theorists and scholars, such as Georges Bataille, contribute to the general understanding of what the erotic is by adding that it is independent of reproduction, a precept with which I am in agreement and which is a foundational criterion in contemporary expositions of the topic (11). In connection to the social mechanics that filter erotic desire, Alice Mahon writes that traditionally, human sexual desire is controlled by social and moral limits which regulate the body and prescribe codes of sexual behavior (13).² As a result, these codes of control and regulation prescribed in particular ways in diverse communities, affect what we perceive to be a natural attraction, which is not as innate as is often believed, because social limits influence who we desire, who we are attracted to and how we perceive beauty. Mahon observes that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, artists began to employ the erotic for its subversive significance in art as well as the potential threat it posed to the established societal

² Neither in pornography nor in art are beauty and desire often contested much because what is showcased needs to be arousing up to a point where it continues to portray eroticism and not for example, the grotesque.

order, a technique which in Latin American literature is readily visible until the middle part of the twentieth century in the works of authors such as Nelson Rodrigues and directors such as Emilio Fernández (14). It is important to note that the presence of the erotic in art not only challenges power, but as elaborated by Mahon, it simultaneously re-enforces and produces it as well (20). The duality of defiance and support by the erotic for the established views on gender and sexuality consistently enter into dialogue surfacing issues of subjugation and empowerment. In the wider artistic production, the erotic continues to be utilized as a product destined for superficial consumption in esoteric spaces and as a source of destruction, a real threat to social order. The approach taken to analyzing eroticism in literature has not been markedly different.

Within the Latin American context, the manifestation of sexual desire contained by its Western legacy and Catholic foundations has been pathologized, viewed as a perversion and as a reflection of social and cultural decadence which must be under constant surveillance, if not completely repressed. Many references over the centuries by conquistadors, historians, philosophers, politicians and writers have portrayed the erotic as an addiction, an obsession, and a fundamental problem of humanity that threatens the societal balance and daily hierarchical functions within these networks. Depending on the time period, the origin of such dysfunctions were assigned to race, cultural rituals, and to class. In the nineteenth century, a discourse of control that intended to prove the superiority of the European race served to further sexualize specific citizens, in particular, colored bodies who were highly sexualized and positioned to be consumed by those in power.

As a consequence of the negative stigmas placed on practices and representations of sexuality, eroticism as a written art form has been oppressed, controlled, and judged. Eroticism must distinguish itself from pornography in order to validate its place in socially acceptable

spaces. Thus, existing within the spiritual margins of convents which were outside of the reach of the dominating hand of men, the erotic was rarely written by women and was exclusively recorded as part of socio-political projects, such as the nation building romances in the nineteenth century.³

Erotic discourses in present day Latin America can be traced to its long history, from the Pre-Columbian era to the post-independence stage of the nineteenth century. Through national romances, when the newly forged nations were solidifying their identities amidst racial and class clashes, master narratives became the nation's patriarchal foundation and thus established restrictive and fixed identities onto poor and ethnically diverse bodies, as noted by Cristina Ferreira-Pinto (2). As cultural myths became institutionalized, so did stereotypes and sexual appropriations. Women of color were oftentimes represented as 'naturally' seductive, and that excluded the participation of poor and racialized individuals, and women, from political participation (Ferreira-Pinto 11-12). Doris Sommer writes that the nation building projects invested private passions with public purposes in a time where the family, marriage and love coincided (7). The means to such ends, Sommer concludes, is to "bind together heterodox constituencies: competing regions, economic interests, races, religions" (14). Coinciding with the time period, the state became preoccupied with the status of the body and its abilities of production, by merging the erotic and the nation in literature, we have the roots of how the newly formed nation was engendered and how lower class bodies became possessed by the upper class (Sommer 38).

³ I am referencing the works of Saint Teresa in Spain and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Mexico.

When studying the canon from the eighteenth century (post-independence) to the 1950s, there is an evident masculine dominance in the writing process and authored works of literature in the Americas and in the Iberian Peninsula. From medieval times to the first part of the 20th century, men who were part of the elite social classes, who held a title within the Catholic Church, or were educated and/or literate have written the national history and philosophy, and have created our literary movements. Educated and well-to-do female authors that are recognized today began to question the role of women and to produce their own works in a setting where they were previously absent. Rosario Castellanos for example, argues that in Mexico in the 1950s, true feminine culture was non-existent due to the lack of significant input from women in all aspects of cultural productions (41). In *Sobre cultura femenina*, as an educated woman she questions how she is supposed to see herself, if all that has been previously written about her sex is based on hatred and inferiority.

Sé, por ellos, que la esencia de la feminidad radica fundamentalmente en aspectos negativos: la debilidad del cuerpo, la torpeza de la mente, en suma, la incapacidad para el trabajo. Las mujeres son mujeres porque no pueden hacer ni esto ni aquello, ni lo de más allá. Y esto, aquello y lo de más allá está envuelto en un término nebuloso y vago: el término de cultura. . . .En primer lugar me está vedada una actitud: la de sentirme ofendida por los defectos que esos señores a quienes he leído y citado acumulan sobre el sexo al que pertenezco. (80-81)

As a result, the objective of constructing a collective feminine archive of experiences, definitions and desires became a major political undertaking for women writers in the second part of the twentieth century. Furthermore, to contest the long literary, philosophical and historical views on woman meant the need to obtain the power to carry such an objective through. This

empowerment began to deconstruct society's limited view of knowledge, erotic desire, gender and sexuality.

In response to the perceived need to think outside of the dominant system of interpretation, Hélène Cixous made a call to women to begin to write themselves and to create feminine writing as a way of breaking out of a man's world, man's word and man's perception of woman (Hunt 224).⁴ For Cixous, it was time for women to construct their own identity through writing, a calling which resulted in the questioning of the validity of male authored texts dealing with female issues. Another foundational French feminist, Lucy Irigaray, also emphasized the need for women to write about themselves because, within Western phallogentric theory, women were not seen as anything other than reflections and likenesses of men (Hunt 227). Many female voices began recording authentic daily experiences representing woman from different social classes. Therefore, many writers in the second part of the twentieth century began a literary wave of rewriting woman's body's and desire, and questioned the normative views and practices on gender, sexuality and erotic desire. *Gender at its Limits* incorporates precisely texts that arose with these objectives, as well as male authored works that prove up to today to depict in depth sexual concerns, both in woman and in men.

Access to the means to publish was only granted to a few elite women at the turn of the twentieth century, and the number of texts authored by women eventually increased in the later part of the century. Even though women have always participated in their communities, we have few records of women's involvement in the past. Nonetheless, I believe that the active participation of women during the dictatorship in Brazil and the student massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968 in Mexico paved the way for a different type of active woman, a published critic. After

⁴ Referenced by Cixous as l'écriture feminine.

moments of political instability, women began to see the need to create female visibility and reflection, and to rewrite their desires and their historical interpretations, as is the case of the works of Elena Poniatowska. The need to revisit and rethink national interpretations of femininity is crucial if women are to be represented in literature, society and the state, in ways in which they possess greater civic and personal rights to be agents of their own bodies, desires, definitions and futures. *Gender at its Limits* is precisely part of the need to deconstruct previous discourses and to place emphasis on areas that directly affect woman, and where woman themselves have always had a role, such as the erotic and gender performances.

In the twentieth century, eroticism in Brazilian literature gains a greater visibility and is purposely used as a means to be transgressive and to search for self-identity. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto explains that the erotic discourse in Brazilian literature written by women was scarce in the beginning of the twentieth century, because from the very beginning, few women were “given entrance” to the literary canon (39). Ferreira-Pinto traces how, until the 1930s, female writers were creating characters who had a feminine voice and were questioning dominant gender constructions (40). Gilka Machado is cited as one of the main propagators of female erotic desire through her poetry. She did, however, suffer greatly for being labeled as immoral. What was significant about Machado, and as stated by Ferreira-Pinto, “Machado’s transgression consisted of the invasion of a space from which women had been excluded and that, still today, does not quite belong to them: the erotic space, in which sexuality and desire are made explicit, not hidden and not disguised” (49). Ferreira-Pinto does not detect the presence of female eroticism in Brazilian literature until the 1970s or 1980s, dates which my research shows parallel a significant production by female authors (49). However, female eroticism is present in Brazilian literature starting from the middle of the century, although it is scarce and often written by men.

Unfortunately, fear was often found in writers not wanting to be marked as pornographic, which is a fear that is evident in other Latin American writers. The tragedy behind being banned and tagged as immoral and pornographic in the early part of the twentieth century proved to be too much for some writers, when pornography and its visibility and acceptance were not what they are today. Laura Hernández adds that the tragedy consisted in the fear of being disapproved of by the predominantly masculine canon, leading to the silencing of women's own desires. Hernández exemplifies this fear by writing that,

El oficio literario femenino ha sufrido el trance de la pérdida de la inocencia a la hora de escribir; al hacerlo, la mujer se expone al peligro de exhibir su intimidad, de ahí que se cuide, se proteja, mida sus palabras. Padece un temor literario a la crítica y desaprobación masculina. Y esto se agrava más aún, cuando ella intenta explorar su propia piel, sus fibras internas, los deseos insatisfechos que la atormentan por las noches, cuando solamente su almohada la escucha, y la palabra *ἔρως* [eros] se convierte en un intangible sin esperanza moral de lograr la satisfacción que la libre. (13)

The very act of writing about her inner thoughts and desire is transgressive, and a dangerous act that can be socially detrimental for the author. Particularly in the Mexican case, there is little space, if any at all, in the gender models for women to address their own gender and erotic desires. Jean Franco asserts that Mexican women have been very hesitant to venture out of normative gender expectations. Further removing the opportunity to transgress gender norms is Octavio Paz's assertion that national identity is precisely founded on male dominion (101). Franco believes that women such as Frida Kahlo and Antonieta Rivas Mercado forged an identity in a space that was outside of history and the nation (105). While Hernández writes that women transgress by writing about their erotic desires, Kahlo painted much of her insides,

organs and feelings, out in the open for all observers to see. Kahlo serves as an example that demonstrates that even when the erotic is discussed in particular socio-historical moments, it is not embraced. Whether by coincidence, or not, Kahlo's popularity, did not peak until the second half of the twentieth century, after she passed away.

Revealing the erotic is an act of defiance for many writers, and its visibility in daily interactions among all social classes is readily present in literature. Chris Weedon recognizes the importance of the quotidian within a feminist intent, and argues that the daily experiences are sites of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance to them (5-6). Recognized works which enter a discussion of the erotic within a quotidian setting are *Hasta no verte Jesus mio*, *Bestiario domestico*, *Ensayo de un crimen*, *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*, *Gabriela*, *Bye bye Brazil*, and all of the works of Nelson Rodrigues among others. One must consider, nonetheless, that there are controversial representations of the erotic which are exclusively created for male pleasure by objectifying women in works such as *Macunaíma*, *Caramuru: A Invenção do Brasil*, *Carne em delírio* and *Susana*. Other erotic texts focus not on the development of the direct exposition of the body but on feminist perspective or critique, as in *A Hora da Estrella*, *Guida, carissima Guida!*, *Parque Industrial*, *Bestiario domestico*, *Juana Gallo*, or on queer representations of the erotic in works such as *Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça*, *Grande Sertão: veredas*, and *Luzia Homem*.

In general, the symbolic weight of eroticism is underestimated, has easily been overshadowed, and continues to be understudied in Latin American literature. There are persistent patterns in most texts dealing with the erotic. The first is the lack of theoretical development, where the subject is instead confined to its stereotypical ties to momentary pleasures. It has also been treated as a neatly packaged theme that lends itself to discussions

about the past, such as ancient civilizations, and has been grouped into categories dealing with the gods, the origin and meaning of words, exotic practices and religion. Lastly, in contemporary works that focus on the erotic, the vast majority approach the subject within the parameters of the perverse, and offer no alternative to Freud's perspective, meaning that the erotic is often interpreted from the stance that the erotic needs to be supervised and often leads to sickness and mental perversions. This form of analysis is detrimental to the subject because it neglects to recognize the erotic as a powerful force for social reform, and instead relegates it to a tired position of baseness and literary physicality.

The second part of the twentieth century witnessed a significant scholarly contribution in cultural, ethnic and gender and sexuality studies that proposed new emphasis and interpretations. Due to the cultural events that were causing shifts in the spaces and ways people could experience their own sexuality, an opportunity to discuss erotic matters arose. Contemporary foundational and theoretical texts that stimulate discourses regarding the erotic include those of Judith Butler, who destabilized our previous views on nature versus culture. In the 1990s, Butler questioned the way in which gender and sexuality were accepted as inherent to the human body. *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* provided a critique of identity categories, where gender, sex, sexuality and the body are analyzed by Butler as cultural products. She believes that embodied selves "do not pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies" (526). As a theoretical rupture occurred and the opportunity to discuss the erotic even further presented itself, a central focus on the erotic did not occur.

Some academics have questioned the way in which Butler's account of performativity neglects the materiality of the body. Butler argues that in order to move beyond the body/mind dichotomy, one must overcome it, or else fall into the trap which re-invokes the gender

hierarchy. As Butler redefines materiality from that of a site to a process of materialization which produces the effects of boundaries, Gill Jagger argues that Butler's insistence in refusing "the body any role in the process of its construction is much more problematic" (78). Furthermore, Butler's account is accused by Hughes, et al, of "losing its hold on the lived fleshy, experienced matter of (womanly) bodies" (59). As a consequence, eroticism is affected due to its closeness to the body, and although Butler has changed the field of feminism and queer studies, the erotic continues to be placed in the periphery. My project seeks precisely to find a middle ground between the "fleshy" quotidian experience of woman, and that of the non-physical, which seeks alternatives for erotic discourses and its potential to be a factor in the discussions between the political and gender and sexuality.

The erotic is, in its core, controversial and, more often than not, this is precisely the reason why it is not dealt with; it cannot be neatly packaged. However, the erotic needs to be further studied in relation to its potential to destabilize and expand normative views on gender and sexuality, and to be accounted for in ways outside of having to oppress it. For the objective of this dissertation, I analyze how the erotic motif becomes a means by which to defy and expand normative gender practices, thus making visible the emerging contradictions about the natural roles of the sexes. Not only does the erotic speak to us all and engages us in one way or another, but its implications with gender involves one of the pivotal markers for the allocation of political, social and economic resources. By expanding the embodied gender limits, myths about women's social roles, identity, bodies, sexuality, and desires, are deconstructed, and thus, the possibilities for the embodiment of gender are allowed to expand and women, in turn, are allowed to achieve emotional, sexual and intellectual self-realization. In what follows, I will focus on the theoretical and historical treatment of gender, sexuality and the body, which are all heavily linked to the

erotic, and how eroticism intersects with them, and brings forth a powerful political consciousness that can expand normative gender borders.

The Feminist Project and the Body

Within the dominant Western intellectual tradition, the body has largely been viewed with suspicion. It has been regarded as a site of unruly passions that can disrupt the pursuit of knowledge and truth. The search for knowledge led to the split of the body from the mind, where the corporal was denied and the mind was elevated. The Age of Enlightenment, however, gave way to a shift in how the body was incorporated into thought. This time period, according to Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, changed the status of the body/mind binary from being one where the body was of lesser value, to one where it was completely excluded. By interpreting Descartes's work which distinguished *res cogitans* (the powers of intelligence and site of selfhood) from *res extensa* (the machine-like corporeal substance), both agree that the Enlightenment gave way to the rejection of the body, which was considered an obstacle for rational thought (2). As a result, the body was dismissed altogether from consideration. In the post-Cartesian design, Price and Shildrick further add that the body was cast as a fixed biological entity, simply of material essence that needed to be transcended in order to achieve full rational subjectivity (2). What are of critical importance to feminism are the continuation of the mind/body dichotomy and the association of a debased body with the feminine, even in the present.

Feminism has had to address the mind/body division not only in gendered resonances, but also in ways where the body intersects with race and class as a means of seeing, devaluing and marginalizing bodies. Foucault writes that "toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement talk about sex" based on rational

discourses that gave way to “the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public resources” (23-25). The discourses on sex that served as forms of policing and regulating it, also continued in the nineteenth century (Foucault 30). The analysis of the body through conventional biological and racial taxonomies has been detrimental to women worldwide and has resulted in systems of oppression and disempowerment. In the nineteenth century for example, there are many circulated examples of Western society where they portrayed the bodies of women of color as ugly and possessing heightened sexuality. Janell Hobson illustrates that the black body was further marginalized for its distinctive, “freak show” characteristics when anatomist George Cuvier dissected and preserved the genital organs of the South African slave Sara Baartman to further accentuate her racial and sexual differences (1). In Latin America, a similar approach was adopted, as Mayan children were also taken to Europe to be exposed in freak shows. Robert D. Aguirre explains these acts as “the extension of imperial desire from things to persons, debased human subjects who are sought after and fetishized as human spectacle only to be transformed into proof of racial degeneracy” (107). The mestizo projects of various Latin American countries were in direct contradiction of the doctrines in Europe, where it was believed that mixing racially devalued racial purity and resulted in physical abnormalities. In Chapter Two, I analyze the representation of woman of color (both racially mixed and their sexuality heightened) who utilize the very characteristics that have placed them in an object/subject relationship, and instead inscribe meanings to the same characteristics in order to challenges traditional racial and sexual expectations leading them to be agents of their own bodies and sexual evolution.

In addition to the body/mind split and racial assessments, gendered resonances also include the direct ties between women and reproduction. With the advent of medicine in the nineteenth century, feminism continues to challenge several justificatory strategies such as

motherhood which linked the female body to its reproductive system. Hysteria was associated to a woman's reproductive system and in particular received much attention. As Elaine Showalter demonstrates in her article about Jean-Martin Charcot, hysteria supported the view that the female body is volatile, dangerous and in need of regulation.⁵ Possessing a woman's body encompassed being attributed with multiple markers that had the potential to devalue a female's worth as well as her social potential. The indoctrination of a volatile female body, led to the distrust and exclusion of women in public spaces, including decision making within the realm of politics, as well as the right to make decisions about one's own female body. The view of a devalued female body in the twentieth century leads writers to highlight female sexuality as a means to surface its existence and its oppressive state. Both the erotic and the female body, as controversial as their history is, together, can be a force to reinterpret and provide meaningful alternatives for women.

Arising from the suffrage and women's rights movements of the twentieth century, Chris Weedon asserts that feminism makes the history of the body visible by acknowledging that power relations between women and men greatly influence our interactions and limitations in both the private and public space (1). The central political issue for women, therefore, is to reclaim and rewrite their own bodies and desires. Shildrick and Price state that first wave feminism attempted to stress the intellectual potential of women, yet continued to see the corporeal in a negative light (3-4). Second wave feminists, who include Simone de Beauvoir, argued that disembodied subjecthood was also attainable for women and not only for men, thereby mimicking the masculinist fear of the body (Shildrick and Price 4). Ultimately, feminism has from the beginning been deeply concerned with the body as something to be rejected in the

⁵ The first European theorist of hysteria who is well known for his female patients and the spectacle they provided for audiences regarding this disorder (Showalter 71).

pursuit of intellectual equality according to a masculinist standard, or as something to be reclaimed and seen as the essence of what is female (Shildrick and Price 3). Other feminists propose a third alternative, which emphasizes the importance and inescapability of embodiment, and interprets the body as a fluid construct instead of one that is fixed.

With the influence of postmodernism in feminism, the interpretation of the body as a fluid construct leaves all possibilities open. Poststructuralism questions all definitions and advances the idea of leaving things undetermined. In fact, the very notion of the body in constant movement leads to the impossibility of being able to define and mark the body permanently, thereby also acting as a counterhegemonic move. This is especially important to feminism because for centuries women have been historically oppressed and disempowered through scientific and philosophical truths. Women's bodies were devalued and ordained to represent unreliability and repulsion, and as a result, this represented a justification for civil and social subordination.

By assigning fluidity to the body, feminism accomplishes disruption of the material body and establishes the possibility of constructing alternative meanings. Feminism conceives the body, as well as other identification categories such as gender, sex and sexuality, as culturally constructed and dependent upon time and space. Butler's objective, as stated in the preface of *Gender Trouble*, as well as that of many feminists, is to open gender for many interpretations, without dictating which ones should be realized (viii). Furthermore, Gill Jagger adds that Butler's work is significant because she concludes that sex and gender are produced within a binary framework of femininity and masculinity that are induced within a heterosexual scheme, instead of the previously accepted belief that sex and gender are biological matters that precede societal practices (1). Butler demonstrates that identity categories are fictional products of

regimes of power/knowledge or power/discourse rather than natural effects of the body (17). They are fictional in the sense that they do not predate the regimes of power/knowledge but are performative products of those regimes (17). Butler herself concludes that if the material body is constructed by language and practice, then there is also the possibility to disrupt the natural gender and construct alternatives. Closely linked to the body, gender and sexuality are at the crux of feminism and erotic discourses. Habitually, gender and sexuality establish the distribution of political, social and economic resources, thereby also dictating who has access to their own erotic desires and bodies.

In conclusion, *Gender at its Limits* is founded on feminist principles where both the erotic and the body, are fluid and transcend time and space. The body is viewed in constant sexual evolution, and opportunities arise where bodily erotic encounters can be experiences which result in the transformation of views on gender and sexuality, and as a consequence, expand the border that dictate behavior and desire. My project does not attempt to homogenize eroticism, but focus on how the physical and transcending bodily experiences of the erotic serve as a dynamic method to interpret representations of sexuality and analyze the erotic as a productive human motivator for the adaptation of rigid and normative bodily prescriptions.

Cultural and Geographical Specificity: The Brazilian and Mexican Feminist Movement

In order to understand feminism in Latin America, it is crucial to acknowledge that feminism is seen by many as a foreign ideology. June E. Hahner illustrates the constant struggle thusly, “for decades, feminism had been viewed as alien to the Latin American character and situation, despised by the Left as a bourgeois capitalist idea, just another imperialist import, and abhorred by the Right as a menace to the Iberian roots of the region” (Hahner 194). The French-

Colombian scholar and feminist Florence Thomas testifies that in Colombia feminism continues to be seen as a sort of contagious measles which turns women ugly, hateful and sometimes, lesbian (87-89). As a result, feminism struggles to validate itself in several Latin American countries and to hold a strong political presence.

Apart from feminism being seen as a foreign idea, and in particular, strongly associated with the American empire, Maria Amélia de Almeida Teles remarks on the execution itself, making a significant distinction between “movement of women” and “feminist movement.” She defines the movement of women as a group that works towards bettering life and work conditions, versus a feminist movement, which refers to women who combat discrimination and the subaltern position of women, and works towards creating means by which women can become agents of their own lives (12). As evidenced by the discussion of feminism in Latin America, the distinction between the two types of movements is often critical, as it is much more acceptable to promote social change than to challenge gender roles. Nonetheless, in literature their separation is often murky as it is inevitable for them to collide due to the lack of written records on both topics.

In the United States, among other countries, feminism is a strong political and ideological movement that has evolved into different groups. In Mexico and Brazil, feminist theory exists, however its adherents are more involved in practical socio-economic movements related to living conditions and issues related to work. Marta Lamas confirms that unlike the North American and some European movements, the Mexican feminist movement never became a mass movement nor did it succeed in becoming institutionalized, as the Peruvian and Chilean coalition did (114). Feminism is not seen as a way of life in many Latin American communities, as it is often times seen in the United States, but is more likely to be viewed as a political identity.

When looking at Brazilian history and searching for women's participation and contribution to society, June E. Hahner states in her preface that the written records are an inaccurate account of events because they suppress the participation of women due to the fact that most women did not know how to write, regardless of their class before the late nineteenth century. Hahner remarks that our traditional view of historic records, which depends primarily on written works instead of less conventional documents, makes it difficult to see female involvement in society (xi). Hahner explains that "[w]omen's suffrage in Brazil was a largely middle-class movement for a judicial change to give the vote to women who met the same qualification as men, not an attempt to revolutionize the role of women in society, or that society itself" (xvi). The primordial struggle of the time included the Civil Code of 1916, which limited women's rights to make decisions about themselves (xvi). For example, a married woman could not decide to accept or refuse an inheritance. By the 1950s, as the feminist movement earned some degree of political acceptance, it became more conservative (xvi). This conservative shift led the movement to be seen with caution, and the consequences of this decision affected not only the movement, but the other women who had not yet obtained the benefits of political representation.

In addition, another critical difference between early feminism and contemporary feminism reported by Hahner is that elite women did not reach out to their fellow working class women in the movement. As working class women continued to work hard in unsanitary and unsafe factories in order to make a living, but while receiving low wages, women of the elite gained entrance into the professions without losing prestige and eventually gained everything that they wanted (90-91). After the abolishment of slavery in 1888, little change occurred as black women continued to labor in the same jobs (maids, nursemaids, prostitution, etc.), and

being black and female continued to be a double disadvantage for them (Hahner 91). One of the early known feminists, Andradina de Oliveira, supported emancipation through work, and that was the principal idea presented in her newspaper *Escrínio* (119). De Oliveira was openly a feminist, however, she also assured her audience that women needed to work side by side with men, and that women should not lose their special virtues or neglect their duties as wives and mothers, claims which are present even today in contemporary erotic literature such as in *Os 7 Pecados Capitais* (119). A second important feminist figure is Virgilina de Souza Sales, who published the *Revista Feminina* in São Paulo between 1915-1927, which like *Escrínio*, also preached reform in moderation (Hahner 133). When observing feminism in other Latin American countries, a similar defense is made by writers as they emphasize the importance of continued collaboration with men, mainly based on the premises of class struggle. It is clear that feminism was a threat from the onset, and in order to regulate its ideas, special emphasis was placed on their sacred household duties, and the feeling of guilt to sever their ties to men. The refusal of feminists to break from expected gender roles and to confront men made it difficult for feminism to succeed in redefining gender roles.

Feminism in Brazil benefitted the upper classes while excluding the working classes, thereby demonstrating that feminism was not yet seen as a movement for women of all social classes. In order to illustrate how feminism was centered on middle to upper class women, Tarsila do Amaral embodies the tendency to attribute feminist qualities onto someone who does not identify as one. Tarsila do Amaral was born into a wealthy family and was married for several years to Oswald de Andrade. Her wealth and social position facilitated her artistic emancipation. Although Tarsila do Amaral sympathized with the working class, she never became involved in politics nor demonstrated interest in women's political or civil status.

Nonetheless, Hahner writes that Brazilian feminists in the 1920s cited her as proof of their sex's abilities (123). Controversies arise in the Brazilian feminist history when women do not identify themselves as feminists or support it, but are adopted by the movement in some way. Most importantly however, the movement in Brazil must deal with the open refusal to call oneself a feminist while, at the same time, believing in feminist ideology. The consequences for refusing the title of feminist is the visibility to the objectives of feminism and the numbers needed to successfully organize a movement. The same refusal to identify oneself as feminist, but to practice feminist ideologies is a concern present in Mexico. Anna Macías ascribes this reasoning in part to the threatening identity attributed to it by leading community figures such as priests. Priests such as José Castillo y Pina and José Cantú Corro in the 1920s and 1930s condemned feminist ideas as destructive of traditional values. As a result, many pious Mexican women of every class moved away from feminism. The ranks of Mexican feminism were filled with women who came from families that generally departed from traditional religious values. A large number of Mexican feminists were liberal anticlerical, Protestants, agnostics, freethinkers, atheists, anarchists, socialists, and Communists (xiv).

Following the military takeover in 1964, which continued well into the early 1980s, popular groups such as women's organizations largely disappeared (185). As the nation began to retreat from military rule, a new feminist movement began to emerge in Brazil, and, with it, old issues resurfaced. By the 1980s an increasing number of social and political movements arose to address specific women's concerns such as health and child care (181). Sonia E. Alvarez describes women's movements in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s with an unprecedented participation of poor and working-class women who joined community groups seeking improvements in urban services, health care, education, and work environments. She reports that

these women from middle to low classes also organized movements in Brazil that defended their rights as wives and mothers. Even though these rights were assured by the dominant ideology, the political and economic institutions had denied them in practice (25). In the early 1970s women such as Rose Marie Muraro was one of the first women to speak about the liberation of women in her books and to advocate equality between the sexes. In 1971 Muraro invited Betty Friedman to Rio de Janeiro to publicize the Brazilian edition of *The Feminine Mystique* (188-91). Hahner reports that both the Left and the Right were offended by Friedman's views on family planning and abortion. As the *Jornal do Brasil* covered the story by two different perspectives (one male and another female), the political cartoonist Henfil best described the clash of perspectives on feminism through his cartoon. The cartoon depicts how the ball and chain represents the male dominion over women, and the unrealistic depiction that as soon as women hear about American feminist ideology, things will change at once. Instead, the last box depicts the disillusionment occurring on both sides, as Brazilian woman do not accept and readily imitate U.S. feminist ideology.

As *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* supports, third world feminists are not the same, feminism does not mean the same thing to all women, and first world women cannot see themselves as saviors, or as the only face to feminism. This early clash was a result of all of the above, and was later challenged among feminists. By 1975, Almeida Teles reports that the United Nations sponsored the international women's year, an event that impacted feminism in Latin America tremendously, and which resulted in the activity of women's groups being condoned (192). In the same year, the first *Centro da Mulher Brasileira* (Brazilian Women's Center) was founded in Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo the *Centro de Desenvolvimento da Mulher Brasileira*, 'Center for the Development of Brazilian Women,' was also created

(Almeida Teles 192-193). Due to the political “opening” of Brazil after the military regime, groups within academia were formed such as the *Associação de Mulheres* (Woman’s Association) and the *Ação Lésbica-Feminista*, ‘Lesbian Feminist Action’. These groups were divided based on tasks such as organizing themselves around health care, women’s rights, consciousness raising, publishing feminist newspapers, distributing pamphlets on sexuality, violence against women, researching and producing film and theatre (Almeida Teles 193). It is important to note that unequal distribution of information to women became evident for the movement due to their location within the country. The cultural differences marked certain regions such as the Northeast, which were void of feminist movements until the last several decades, in contrast with a strong feminist movement located within the south-central cities. Even with many technological advances and the accessibility to mobility by citizens of Mexico and Brazil, feminism continues to be discussed and practiced only in selective social circles. Furthermore, feminism has yet to become enmeshed in many rural regions and spaces.

As to further problematize the attempt to centralize women in politics, Sonia E. Alvarez also emphasizes that the Left insists that given the context of poverty, underdevelopment, and imperialism, economic issues and class conflict dominate politics in Latin America (4). However, the concern still remains that as the process of capitalism unfolds, problems such as a lack of access to contraception and spousal and sexual abuse will not disappear. Similarly to Maria Amelia de Almeida’s distinction between feminist and feminine organizations, Alvarez also divides women’s activist groups.

Women’s movements can be seen as proactive or reactive. That is, women organize to challenge or to protect their socially ascribed roles. Female gender roles give rise to two basic forms of politicization: one that grows out of and accepts prevailing feminine roles

and asserts rights on the basis of those roles; another that seeks to transform the roles society assigns to women, challenges existing gender power arrangements, and claims women's rights to personal autonomy and equality. (24)

These two distinctions are crucial for the advancement of feminism within communities. Without obtaining a political presence, woman's rights and issues will always remain dependent on the whim of others and in the periphery of political discussion. Women's movements can be the beginning, and a means by which to introduce feminist ideologies. Alvarez claims that the international political climate has been a strong factor that has contributed to the growth of women's movements in Brazil, particularly because those who gave funds to developing countries for women's projects, are thereby supporting new developmentalist discourses that legitimated emerging claims for increased gender equity (79-81). Nonetheless, women's movements and their opposing foundation, is a reflection of the numerous discourses that possess strong points of intersection to other topics, as well as dependent histories.

The Brazilian feminist movement holds an influential presence in elite circles; although some say it is fragmented, it has gained visibility. The same cannot be said of the Mexican movement. The suffrage movement in Mexico integrated itself during a time period that forever marks Mexican nationalism and the rebirth of the nation. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 follows a previous century marked by the country's achievement of independence from Spain, the French invasions and the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz going well into the twenty first century. In 1911, women took to the streets to demonstrate their support for Francisco Madero as president, and also in an effort to call attention to their plight. Shirlene Soto reports that Madero showed an interest in working with them, while Congress, on the other hand, simply named them *mujeres sandwich*, 'sandwich women,' mocking their many signs (40). By 1913, President

Francisco Madero and his wife, Sara Pérez de Madero, had intentions to propose industry projects for women, however, that same year, Madero was assassinated (36-37). This example marks the frustrating experience feminists were forced to endure for decades to come before obtaining any significant achievements.

In one of the places one would least expect, the feminist movement gained a strong voice in the south, an area known predominantly for having the largest concentration of indigenous communities, and clearly marked social and racial inequalities. In 1916, the governor of Yucatán, Salvador Alvarado held the First Feminist Congress with the social belief that the government needed to invest in programs that educated Mexican women and supported women's organizations that aimed to establish personal, political and educational rights (Almeida Teles 146). Jocelyn Olcott writes that, in the 1917 Constitutional Congress, politicians decided not to grant women full citizenship with the right to vote because they had not demonstrated enough organizational power and potential to take arms in the near future. Therefore, being a constant threat to the newly established government like the men were meant being fully acknowledged by the government. It also guaranteed access to the legal system, which included the right to vote (34). Some politicians believed that women would feminize politics or that political involvement would masculinize women (4). More than 617 women participated in the event, mainly teachers, who insisted on providing women with a higher level of education. That same year a second congress was organized in Yucatán, which worked on educating women, supported the idea that women become familiar with their own bodies, and attempted to do away with the prevalent superstitions controlling women's daily lives and views. The teachers in the south of Mexico took the feminist goals to the popular sectors and helped organize the National Congress of

Workers in 1931-1934, the Hospital of the Child, and *Casa Campesina*, ‘the Farmer’s House,’ where they discussed specific issues pertaining to women such as health and suffrage (152).

Beyond fearing the masculinization of women by politics, Ward M. Morton writes that the government still feared the Catholic Church’s influence over women due to the Cristero Revolt in the late 1920s, and was exercising caution in not granting women the right to vote (91).⁶ Due to the reminiscent uneasiness still prevalent in Congress, in 1957 President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines delivered a speech where he confirmed that the presidential election of the following year was open to women. Women’s mobilization was paying off, but the movement as such had many more struggles ahead. In this congressional speech, President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines reiterated the importance of retaining traditional gender practices.

La ciudadana mexicana merece la confianza absoluta de la nación. Con convicción más profunda y arraigada afirmo nuevamente que no la defraudará nunca, y también garantizo que no será desviada de los principios que nuestra constitución consagra para mejorar la vida de los mexicanos en lo moral, en lo cívico y en lo material. Que proseguirá siendo el bastión principal de su hogar, como madre, como esposa, como hija; que no la confundirán prédicas engañosas; que bien sabe cuáles son sus obligaciones para con su dignidad de mujer y ciudadana, para la autonomía de la familia y para la soberanía de la patria. . . (657)

Once again, the feminist movement was one that led towards gaining civic rights, but did not start a transformation of gender roles. Marta Lamas writes in “The Mexican Feminist Movement

⁶ The government’s attempt to completely dismantle the Catholic church, its power and influence in Mexico, causing extreme acts of violence, particularly in the rural areas, when there are accounts of people being crucified and burnt alive.

and Public Policy-Making” that in the second part of the century, as early as the 1970s, there was a resurgence of the feminist movement in Mexico. The new feminism first took root in Mexico City and gradually spread to other cities. For the first ten years it was a vanguard movement, mainly composed of university women and female party militants who aimed to open a space within and gain political recognition from the Mexican left. The movement placed such unprecedented topics as sexism on the political and cultural agenda. However, these groups were not able to sustain or renew their initial political impact, and in the 1990s the feminist movement could not be considered a key participant in the policy-making process relating to women. According to Lamas, the movement is currently disorganized and fragmented. It functions like an underground stream, with little public participation, but with hundreds of feminists scattered amongst disparate professional and political settings. A few women functionaries openly declare themselves to be feminist, yet many more act as feminists whilst not declaring themselves openly to be so (113-114). Unfortunately, the Mexican feminist movement never became a mass movement nor did it succeed in becoming institutionalized.

Having a feminist movement in Mexico that is fragmented, with little political power, one would expect the literature to reflect this. However, there is an intense presence of works that are not feminist, but that present, reflect and support feminist ideologies. They possess a degree of restlessness regarding traditional views on gender and sexuality. Therefore, how is it possible that as feminism does not gain popularity, its view do? Chandra Tapalde Mohanty asserts in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* that “third world women have always engaged with feminism, even if the label has been rejected in a number of instances” (7). The Latin American feminist context is complex, and upholds a thin line between women’s organizations, and a feminist movement. However, as feminist movements continue to organize

and gain support, feminist ideologies are present in cultural representations such as films and literary texts. In the texts under analysis in the following chapters, feminism plays a foundational role that promotes gender and sexual equality, as well as questions the roots that sustains a devalued, segregated and disempowered feminine role in society.

Mapping Gender, Sex and Sexuality

When tracing how our contemporary concepts of sexuality have evolved, one can clearly see the influence of sex theorists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In *Making Sex*, Thomas Lacqueur demonstrates that for centuries, Western societies analyzed sexuality under the one sex model. The one sex model depicts human sexuality as being dependent on the male ontological model, where the vagina was seen as an inside-out penis and the clitoris as a little penis (64). As a result of this model, women are analyzed in relation to the male body, thereby demarcating women as “other,” with imperfect bodies that are dependent on the male organ for sexual gratification. The one sex model has been historically detrimental to women, allocating weakness and incompleteness as part of being the “other,” and continues to influence present day perceptions of female sexuality as dependent on, and whose objective must be, masculine pleasure. Furthermore, it characterized women as inverted version of the normal male body. With her canonical text, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Lucy Irigaray critiques precisely the one sex model and the belief of female dependence on the male phallus for sexual pleasure. Irigaray argues that women are not a faulty version of male sexuality, but a completely separate entity that is littered with pleasurable bodily spots, where erotic contact is inevitable, and pleasure reachable by herself (28). Irigaray’s contribution is important for creating an independent erotic female bodily space. *Gender at its Limits* furthermore serves to reconsider our relationships with the female body, but also the bodily in general, where the “dumb object,” as

page four hundred and twenty six visual culture reader refers to it, is asserted no longer in relation to depreciation or distorted and linked to the feminine, but is a weapon of potentiality. The body, with all its mass and cravings, can be a constructive and active source that flourishes in the different manifestations of sex, gender and sexuality. In addition, this analysis further supports the need to recognize female sexuality and erotic desire not in relation to the male body, but as a source of knowledge to better understand oneself and the role of the individual within amorous matters.

Apart from interpreting human sexuality as being dependent on the male ontological model, this same influential body of writing pertaining to the one sex model also viewed sexuality as a fact of nature. The field, known as sexology, is delineated by Steven Seidman as making use of a scientific approach aimed at discovering the laws of sexuality while using research methods parallel to those of the sciences of economics, political science, sociology and criminology (3). The interpretation of sexuality by sexologists, Seidman synthesizes, was as a matter of biology and physiology (3). They viewed sexuality as fundamental and at the core of what it means to be human with a sex drive no less basic than our need to eat (Seidman 4). Sexology also approached sexuality as a driving force in human behavior, influencing all aspects of our lives from the physical to the psychological (Seidman 4). Lastly, sexologists saw heterosexuality as the natural sexual instinct (Seidman 4). The underlying political implications of the study of sexuality has fostered many polemical conclusions, as indicated by Seidman, namely in that they have been detrimental to people of color with their commitment to racial improvement, in addition to upholding heteronormativity as the normal path to manifesting one's sexuality (5). The intent to make evident the relationship between biology and the natural is at the core of feminism because of its direct ties of power and control over women's bodies. By

proving that particular differences are natural, Chris Weedon exemplifies that this is where “a fundamental patriarchal assumption that women’s biological differences from men fits them for different social tasks” lies (2). The result is the assumption that women are naturally equipped to fulfill the primary roles of wife and mother. As a result, the expectations of women’s emotional and feminine conduct influence women’s access to the labor market and to public life (Weedon 2). The texts under analysis in the following chapters challenge the expectations of natural femininity and present examples of how they to choose to alter the normative values on gender and sexuality, in order for them to represent their own interests. By doing so, they first reclaim their bodies and sexuality, and as a result, their erotic potential.

Sigmund Freud, a colleague of renowned sexologist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, continued the revolution of sexual thought by creating the theoretical foundation for psychoanalysis.⁷ Freud argued that sexual instinct is oriented towards pleasure which could be obtained from sexual intercourse as well as from other encounters such as kissing, touching, caressing, looking, and domination (74-75). He argued that the body has many erotic areas and that there are many ways of achieving sexual satisfaction (74-77). Seidman acknowledges that Freud interpreted sexuality at a more basic level than sexologists perceived by believing that sex was at the core of the self, and the drive for erotic pleasure is precisely what placed the individual in conflict with social norms (7). Freud approached sexuality as not only a type of pleasure, but also as a major focus of psychological and social conflict (Seidman 7). Although Freud acknowledged the erotic potential to disrupt prescribed values, he continued to evaluate all the desires outside of the homogenous norm as taboo or as part of a disease that needed to be eradicated (Seidman 7). Seidman attains that Freud’s work contributed to redefining sexuality as

⁷ Richard von Krafft-Ebing has a considerable amount of foundational texts on S&M.

more than genital intercourse for the purposes of reproduction (11). Freud proposed that sex is as much about fantasies as about physical sensations, where sex is a matter of the mind and the body (Seidman 11). His work dramatically altered the ways we imagine our sexual drives influencing our actions as well as our identities. For Freud, the erotic manifested itself in diverse forms outside of the confinement of intercourse for reproductive obligations. His work however, also led to discourses of what is classified as taboo and which individuals and acts are perverse, and must be eradicated. Freudian attitudes are present in contemporary discourses and mark the interpretation of sexual desire within a discourse of conflict and perversion. Furthermore, what is detrimental within Freud's work is his approach to the feminine, marked within an analysis that continues to be male centered; as Freud famously said in his piece titled "Femininity," "to those of you who are women this will not apply-you are yourselves the problem" (113). The following chapters recapture the complexity of the erotic, but what is markedly different, is that it does so outside of a discourse of control and of classifications of what is normal in comparison with the perverse. *Gender at its Limits* deviates from diagnosing sexual abnormalities to instead focusing on how erotic desire can be a productive means to transform an individual's perception of themselves, their desires and agency in the execution of gender roles.

It was not psychoanalysts, however, who developed a consistent social perspective on sexuality. Rather, as Seidman proposes, such perspectives initially emerged from three social and intellectual movements of the twentieth century: socialism, the women's movement, and the lesbian and gay movement, which bred the three social theories of sexuality of Marxism, feminism and social constructionism, respectively (12). For the sake of the analysis, Marxism will be briefly described, and the latter two will be discussed in more detail.

At the core of feminism is the idea that individuals are defined not only by their class position but also by their gender status (Seidman 18). Feminists highlight the fact that everyone is introduced to the world as men or women, regardless of the economic system. Seidman, among other cultural theorists, agree that feminists argue that we are not born men or women, but we acquire these gender identities through a social process of learning and coercion (18). Fundamentally, the question of the relationship between gender and sexuality is at the core of feminist studies and eroticism. Although in the 1990s there was a resurgence of arguments for separating gender from sexuality amongst queer theorists, Butler argued against this in *Bodies that Matter*, and establishes that gender and sexuality are interconnected (240). It follows, then, that feminist perspectives range from the assertion that the relationship between gender and sexuality almost overlap, and as Seidman asserts, to the view that there is considerable slippage between gender and sexuality (19). The analysis of gender and sexuality add an extra dimension of complexity because similarly to the erotic, the terms are not neatly defined. Feminism successfully questions many theoretical foundations based on biology, and posits instead that identity markers such as gender and sexuality are culturally constructed. In addition, the following chapters trace the evolution of sexuality supported by feminist theories and posit that erotic encounters can induce constructive transitions where the individual adapts a more complex representation of gender and sexuality within the normative scheme.

At the core of feminism is the belief in a holistic paradigm that incorporates the mind, body and sexuality, where in order to achieve women's sexual liberation, women need to construct a sexual life that reflects their own needs, feelings, and desires. Feminism claims that the point is not to liberate sexuality from social control, but for women to claim the power to define their own sexual desires and fashion their own sexual lives (Seidman 22). As Chris

Weedon posits, the principal questions of the women's liberation movement and as a result of feminism as well, were: "what it is to be a woman, how our femininity and sexuality are defined for us and how we might begin to redefine them for ourselves" (1). Having an active role in the representation and construction of women's subjectivity is foundational for many feminists. In the second part of the twentieth century, this objective becomes evident as there are a number of works authored by woman, as well as male Latin American writers that focus on deconstructing myths about woman's identity and bodies. *Gender at its Limits* posits diverse variations of what it is to be a woman in Mexico and Brazil, and puts forth representations of female sexuality and gender norms that restructure the prescribed discourses on female identity that can be traced predominantly to Western thought. As definitions are given a degree of freedom to be undetermined, so are the limits of the normative. Characters in the texts analyzed prove that they can challenge what is assigned as the norm, while still remaining within the embodied limits of the normative. Although the ultimate goal is to do away all together with the structure that limit and homogenize sexuality and gender, variations within the system holds its value as a means by which to achieve the radicalization of markers of identity.

While feminists believe that we are all marked by gender difference, Karl Marx argued that the economy is the most important social force shaping human society, and believed that human nature is shaped by society, and as explained by Seidman, as a result, it consistently changes over time (13). Lastly, by the 1990s a third academic body of research on sexuality had accumulated. Two of the most renowned contributors to the field of social constructionism are Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. Foucault challenged the view held by sexologists and psychologists that sex was fundamentally biological and natural (Seidman 30). Foucault proposes instead that we learn to be sexual beings through the circulating discourses on

sexuality, thereby arguing that discourses on sexuality are part of the rise of disciplinary societies such as the military, church, schools, hospitals, etc., which exercise strict control over the body and, as a result, it is visible through the surveillance, supervision and judgment of those bodies (Seidman 31-32). Seidman writes that “disciplinary control relies less on the power to censor and silence than on the power of normalizing ideas to shape individuals into controllable agents” (32). Thus, the deduction is that by being able to control people’s sexual feelings, behaviors, and identities, it is possible to socially control bodies and actions (Seidman 32). As a result, markers of identity have served as a larger means for defining the masses, although, not as a source of empowerment, but as one which produces unquestionable discourses of truth through the process of normalization and conditioning. Foucault’s insights into the circulation of discourses and their relationship to power is productive to feminists, because it diagnoses various centers of cultural production, and how power relations determine who we are and what we might become (Weedon 1). Furthermore, if normalization is what diverse discourses on sexuality consider to be the desired outcome, the following chapters analyze how diverse characters intrinsically are aware of the threat of their desires, and successfully use normative expectations to modify the very system that oppresses their desires. They do so in a manner where they expand the borders of the normative, in order to incorporate into the larger social system their own definition of self to reach personal fulfillment.

The relationship between discourses and exercising control and power with specific political intentions is at the core of Foucault’s work. As stressed by Seidman, Foucault saw the relationship between sex and power as one which is characterized by repression (8). Particularly, he describes the rise of a sex economy beginning in the eighteenth century as one which created a discourse not solely on morality, but which also incorporated rationality (Foucault 24).

Foucault therefore argues that as the state and family were key agents of social control in the past, today medical and scientific institutions, the criminal justice system, and the mass media are playing key roles in regulating sexual behavior (Seidman 33). The discourses of the previous centuries as described by Foucault are difficult to challenge because of their anchor in medicine, and their focus on sexual excess. It is precisely within a theoretical backdrop of repression and control that Judith Butler provides her theoretical work that counters these particular discourses which have been normalized.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler proposes a performative theory of gender identity, which is useful for analyzing sexual identity and refuting the sexologists' view that heterosexuality is the only natural sexual instinct. Butler argues that the idea that there are two distinct and opposing genders should not be uncritically accepted because we are part of societies organized around heterosexuality, marriage and the nuclear family, thereby supporting the notion that the heterosexual family is natural and normal (10-24). Although I will not enter into great detail, Jean Franco further analyses in *Sexing the Body*, that the two sex system which heteronormativity is deeply dependent upon, is a farce and an illusion which excludes the alternative chromosome combinations whether they are physically manifested or not. The one sex model referenced by Lacqueur shifted to a two sex model system which is utilized to structure society. Nonetheless, contemporary theorists of diverse fields are posing that the binary system is not enough, and consequently, fails to justly represent human sexual and gender diversity. Jill Jagger asserts that, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler analyzes the processes through which sex and gender come to be conceived as natural extensions of a biological body, rather than taking the materiality (or biology) of the body as a starting point (4). Furthermore, in *Bodies that Matter*, in an attempt to answer accusations that she neglects the materiality of the body in

Gender Trouble, Butler develops her account of performativity in the context of Derrida's reworking of speech act theory to focus on the ways in which bodies are materialized as sexed (Jagger 4). Jagger concludes that this is crucial because it allows Butler to link the materialization of the body to the performativity of gender and, in doing so, rethink the materiality of the sex/gendered body in non-essential terms (4). As a result, this theory allows her to conceive a body in process, thereby never fixed, but always fluid. To reflect upon and reclaim the power to rewrite diverse elements of our own feminine identity has significant cultural and symbolic effects in shaping, representing and defining our sexual identities in our contemporary world. The relationship between gender and sexuality are intricate, and literature serves as a source that sheds light on how bodies are sexualized and how gender is culturally constructed and contested. In addition, what needs to be taken in consideration is the role of emotions and knowledge, in an environment where bodies are indoctrinated to depict the ideals of the present. In particular, of information and feelings whose roots are not from dominant Western thought, but a product of transnational relations that result in the consolidation of diverse ethnic groups, as is the case of Latin America.

As the models for interpreting sex and gender result to be inappropriate, so are the subjects being consistently represented. By the 1980s, feminists such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Patricia Hill Collins emphasized that feminism had been erasing other equally important markers, such as race, that have affected women historically worldwide. In the introduction to part two of *Sex, Gender and Sexuality*, authors Abby L. Ferber, Kimberly Holcomb and Tre Wentling agree that discussions of sex, gender, and sexuality are often too limited by the subjects that they study, namely white middle class individuals. Nevertheless, when the boundaries are expanded and we begin to examine the intersections of sex, gender, and

sexuality with race, ethnicity, nation, religion, and age, these narratives have the potential to be sites of resistance (171). Making the diverse experiences of non-white women visible, and incorporating them into a larger, unequal background disrupts traditional exercises of power on specific terrains, often with less visibility and with a lesser voice in the global context. The interplay between sites of resistance for women of color is at the center of this study. The approach of intersectionality that looks at how markers of difference, such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation function simultaneously and cannot be understood in isolation is at the core of feminist studies today, as well as in the analysis of eroticism. By analyzing the relationship between eroticism and gender from Latin American texts, make it possible to analyze the topic at hand from a different U.S. position and knowledge that has the potential to open up a productive space where the erotic functions outside of a discourse of control. The characters themselves choose to identity and dis-identify with normative views on gender and sexuality, provoking new inscriptions on the body.

Furthermore, multiplicity is an important component to our present views on the body, gender and sexuality. Luce Irigaray in 1977 presented the radical notion that women possessed multiple erogenous zones throughout their body. By describing these zones as being “everywhere” where “she finds pleasure everywhere” provides a threatening overflow outside of the controlled normative views on sexuality and the body (28). Irigaray declares independence for these erogenous zones by stating that they have the potential to give pleasure to women without needing the male organ (28). Therefore, the idea of multiplicity holds a strong counternormative potential on traditional views of sexuality. Multiplicity in Shildrick and Price’s work is also posed in their analysis connecting race and class with gender and sexuality, stating that individuals do not possess only one body, but multiple bodies marked by differences such as

sex, race, class, sexuality and mobility status (8). In the case of Latin America, the documentation of bodies to multiplicity is bound to discourses on colonialism, religion and the dominant apprehension towards feminism. Although not all texts are written by woman, what is critical in this dissertation is precisely what Rosemary Betterton postured, “how can the texts be mobilized and made meaningful in different ways by their different women readers legitimating differences and interrogating the relations of power between the authoritative text and its interpretation” (13). A primary objective of this work is to analyze the erotic in constructive terms, and as finely expressed by Deborah Fausch who states that “to take this course is to claim, not that the feminine is bodily, but that the bodily is feminist-not that a concern with the body is a guarantee of nonoppressive attitudes, but that a nonoppressive attitude would include a regard for the bodily. It is to claim that women can have a body without being the body” (426). In conclusion, *Gender at its Limits* prioritizes eroticism as a means by which it can be meaningful for women and men.

The Erotic Tradition

At the moment, the erotic is commonly defined as concerning or tending to arouse sexual desire. Within the literary analysis that follows in the consecutive chapters, the erotic presents itself as a complex articulation of desire and sex, where it explores pleasure, celebrates the physical and incorporates the object of desire, as well as being social threat to the regulated order. The erotic as a source of knowledge is anti-normative, counterhegemonic, and at the source for reinterpreting its potential. An erotic with diverse objectives as well as, a celebration for physical pleasure is clearly exalted in the *Vatsyayana Kamasutra*. The *Vatsyayana Kamasutra* is considered to be one of the oldest known erotic texts and a treatise on erotic love. It is not a book detailing sexual positions, but one which interprets the erotic in everyday life in

order to sustain the socio-economic paradigms. Some of the topics addressed within its pages include maintaining power in a marriage, living as or with a courtesan, and using drugs, among others. However, this Hindu text offers a critical interpretation of the erotic, in a way that is important to this project because it places a value on the topic and gives it visibility by centralizing the role that the erotic plays within our daily lives. Throughout the *Vatsyayana Kamasutra*, the erotic is an art where one must be conscious of one's own pleasure, as well as of the pleasure and body of one's lover. It presents passion, desire, and satisfaction obtained by both lovers, and guided by a philosophy of "no rules". This particular train of thought is not only enlightening and powerful, but also in stark contrast to the influences of Christianity in the West.⁸ The Latin American experiences can potentially contribute to reinterpreting the erotic potential in new ways due to their cultural influences from indigenous, African, and Middle Eastern communities, thereby also possessing erotic interactions that disrupt traditional Western thought. Due to the exclusion of Eastern, African and indigenous interpretations of the erotic in Western culture, a fuller representation of the erotic will only be accomplished when these are recognized. Within the geographical parameters of Mexico for example, the love triangle between the body, mind and soul had a different configuration during its Pre-Colombian era. José N. Iturriagas' work entails Mesoamerican cultures and, in *Ritos de sangre y sexo: erotismo y brutalidad en el México preindependiente*, arrives at the conclusion that the body is the center

⁸ In ancient mythology (Greek-Latin), Susana Constante writes that the relationship between humans and the gods, and the expectations surrounding life were significantly different in non-Christian societies. She claims that a profound shift occurred with the advent of Christianity, when sexual symbols began to be represented as monstrous and tied to insanity and perversion (45-48). In the case of the oriental gods, as Constante categorizes them, the erotic is defined as being pleasant to both partners. For the *śivaítas*, the phallus has a higher prestige for producing pleasure than for the reproductive uses alone (71). The erotic was more important because, through pleasure, it is possible to find knowledge (71).

of social value for the Mesoamerican communities, and that this is precisely what horrifies and destabilizes the European order of mind and spirit over body. Catholicism, which had a tremendous impact on the execution of the erotic, is strongly criticized by Gloria Anzaldúa. She laments the amount of power the Catholic Church possessed and the influence it wielded in structuring Latin American culture. Catholicism embedded a tradition of fear and distrust of the body, and Anzaldúa argues that, in this way, the church has encouraged a split between the body and the spirit, thereby requiring us to kill off parts of ourselves (59). Needless to say, this in turn has affected gender and sexuality. Due to space constraints, I will not be able to elaborate on the contributions Eastern cultures offer on this topic. I believe that non-Western cultures provide ways in which to engage with the erotic by using different points of departure. Nonetheless, as I am dealing with the Latin American experience, I also believe that Catholic views on the body are often challenged due the miscegenation that occurred within the nations, allowing for indigenous and African views, among others, to influence cultural beliefs. As a result of the diverse cultural backgrounds, there is a natural tendency in Latin America to uphold, as well as to find examples that challenge the normative teachings of the body, gender and eroticism.

Traditionally in Western culture, the origin of the “erotic” word is traced to Greece, its representation within mythology, and in particular, to Plato’s *Symposium*. Within the narrative, R.B. Rutherford asserts that Socrates describes erotic love as a path that transcends mere physical desire and aspires to beauty itself (xxi). As *Symposium* demonstrates, the search for truth in philosophy is what judges the erotic within the text. The character Pausinias for example, considers that the body is not lasting, and this is precisely where according to Pausinias the problem lies. If the object of desire is physical, and not psychological and emotional, desire is based on a source that is momentary (20). As a result, the characters in the book pose that erotic

desire can only be justified if it has psychological ties along with the physical ones. Socrates himself disapproves of the calling for emotions rather than the intellect, thereby entering into a discussion of what drives one should give freedom to (xxiii). Resonances of the two examples mentioned can be seen in Western culture's interpretation of the body and sexuality, which were discussed earlier. This interpretation of the erotic subsequently defines the ways in which it is visually represented in the arts, and becomes a marker which distinguishes it as art. The significant shift that occurred in the twentieth century, places the erotic in a discourse outside of philosophical truths, and scientific discourses, and instead repositions it within issues of identity and difference, equality and empowerment, where critical analysis recognizes that gender does shape the ways in which theory is constructed, and searches for ways to redefine erotic desire.

Eroticism in texts is not simply a means by which to attain beauty and truths, it is in and of itself a source of power and knowledge that can result in the transformation of values and interpretations of gender and sexuality. Barbara Breitenberger in *Aphrodite and Eros* believes that many descriptions in *Symposium* are homoerotic and a result of Greek social history, where Eros held an intimate association with the beloved boys inside the symposium and the academia, among other Greek spaces (194). The author is concerned with the origins of Eros, which resulted in its definition, representation and cult following. Breitenberger believes that many of the characteristics we now associate Eros with, as well as his connection as a god and to Aphrodite, was the result of Hesiod and his book *Theogony*, which linked the once separate figures (138). The particularly relevant part of Breitenberger's work, is that it makes evident that when attempting to define the erotic, its very historiography and nature is to be in constant evolution, and this is precisely where it becomes difficult to enclose the erotic to a limited definition, and, as I demonstrate, to an objective. As stated earlier, the intimate relationship

between eroticism and its society is what determines how and in what discourses it will be circulated, causing a continuous geopolitical cycle of identification and disidentification. Apart from the instability of meaning, Eros has many definitions and individuals possess diverse experiences with the concept, as a result, adding to the density of the topic, which cannot be completely encompassed nor represented, with a two sex and gender model. *Gender at its Limits* cites the unstable components of eroticism, as its potential to disrupt the present social confinements.

Defining the erotic as essential to human experience and supporting the impossibility of fully controlling and defining it, is also supported by Laurence D. Cooper, in *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche*, who defines the erotic in the following terms,

Eros seeks wholeness not through constriction, mastery or homogenization but through the possession or incorporation of more and more objects of desire (or else through the more and more complete possession or incorporation of the same object of desire). Eros seeks wholeness not through elimination or control of desire but through the *satisfaction* of desire, and such satisfaction always entails the acquisition of an object of desire. (27)

Cooper's definition has an actual process that entails arousal and consumption, a process that I do not focus on. Instead, I examine in the texts under analysis the atmosphere effects of the erotic in relation to the individual and the effects in the execution of gender and sexuality. I must clarify that not all of the characters' erotic desires lead to sexual consumption. Plenty of sexual arousal and satisfaction is often met through its very presence, as a representation that defies the accepted norms of behavior. What is significant as well as different is Cooper's ties of the erotic to "wholeness." Cooper's definition is more closely tied to Eastern texts such as the *Vatsyayana*

Kamasutra, where the erotic itself is an experience connected to our own subjectivity, and ultimately to knowledge as it is interpreted in the following chapters with the atmosphere that it creates. Furthermore, the interpretation of the erotic in this project has no intentions of homogenizing the erotic. On the contrary, I find that homogenization needs to be reverted to an adaptable and flexible environment, as its rigid borders consistently being challenged in the works under analysis and infiltrated with malleable embodiments of gender.

The concept of wholeness and the attainment of a state of completeness is also implemented by Georges Bataille, who is well known for his work on the erotic in the mid-twentieth century. Bataille nonetheless presents in his study, the continuous struggle between the prescribed ideals and the subjects. Bataille believes that reproduction implies the existence of discontinuous beings, and through eroticism, substitutes “individual isolated discontinuity for a feeling of profound continuity” (15). He theorizes that the nostalgia within humans gives way to three forms of eroticism: physical, emotional and religious (15). Within the Latin American experience, it is not uncommon to encounter references to all three of the erotic forms Bataille characterizes, principally because of the African and indigenous cultural influences in popular culture, and in the way the unknown is interpreted. Bataille observes that erotic has a social threat with the power to break down the regulated social order, which reproduces our discontinuous mode of existence (18). Hence, one can assume that it is within each human, to challenge the social erotic scheme. Furthermore, Bataille argues that not only do humans challenge the prescribed erotic dogmas, but that it is the emotions, and not our logic, that hold a greater influence over us (64). Such an interpretation challenges the traditional institutionalization of mind over body which has influenced Western views up to the twentieth century. In addition, Bataille’s views allow repositioning eroticism from an elite source of

knowledge, to one which is practiced and accessible by all. Similarly to Bataille's interpretation of the erotic in relation to an individual's perception of themselves in their surroundings, *Gender at its Limits* also diagnoses that the erotic has the potential to create an environment where individuals reflect upon their social condition and as a result modify the embodiment of gender and sexuality. With the view that the erotic can provide an atmosphere of transformation and enlightenment, consequently repositions emotions from a legacy of irrationality and chaos, to one with the possibility to be political and attainable by all social classes, age groups, ethnic groups, among all the other markers socially constructed. To further support the reversal of emotions and the mind, the English philosopher David Hume wrote in the eighteenth century that passions, and not reason, are one of the greatest human motivators (12). For Hume, passions should be recognized for their positive effects on human identity (Fate Norton 8). Validating emotions is no easy task; however, it has been a powerful force behind many feminists and in the following chapters plays a powerful role in reclaiming erotic desire. It is precisely passion through erotic desire which indeed becomes the force behind re-visioning gender practices that result in the challenge against normative views and in the attempt to be an agent in the construction of one's own subjectivity.

Perhaps Bataille's greatest contribution is defining eroticism as "a psychological quest independent of reproduction" where the aim is not the continuation of humanity or the family, but the fulfillment of pleasure (11-12). Bataille's definition is a radical idea in a time where sex was predominantly taught as a means for continuing one's social responsibilities and alliances, and not as a fulfilling act in and of itself. With the invention of birth control and the advent of the sexual liberation movement of the second part of the twentieth century, eroticism is more clearly defined without a reproductive responsibility, and instead explores pleasure itself. Pleasure,

nonetheless, must not be confused with emptiness, or lack of value. As Audry Lorde claimed, and as the objectives of this dissertation are guided by, pleasure has real personal, cultural and political consequences, as it is a source that instigates the desire for change in the sectors which themselves are highly politicized, as is the case of gender and sexuality. Eroticism has always had political ties which dictate its limits. To reverse the power relation, between the erotic and the political, is critical in a global atmosphere of inequality.

While Bataille analyzed the erotic in connection to a social struggle to achieve a continuum of completeness and as separate from reproduction, eroticism in Latin America is analyzed in relation to spirituality, meditation and knowledge, a view similar to that of Audry Lorde and other woman of color feminists. In particular, Octavio Paz presents these connections in his influential text *La llama doble*. Paz positions his theories of the erotic in a similar stance to that of Bataille, as he attributes to the erotic an element that transcends the physical by incorporating sex and the carnal, as pathways to the divine (21). What is of importance is that he does not deny the body, but sees coitus as a conduit to achieving more than sexual consumption, as Bataille also insinuates. As a result, he proposes that the function of the erotic is to stimulate and transgress, but also to act as a pathway for obtaining knowledge, a concept at the focal point of this analysis and alluded to by other writers. He does not however provide a deep analysis on how and what type of knowledge can be achieved.⁹ The texts under analysis provide examples where meditation and the birth of a new consciousness of individuals' own subjectivity and desires are the sources for knowledge and action. The body however, is not viewed as purely a means, but as the source of change and as the representation of it in the end.

⁹ A consistent challenge to deal with when most texts that reference the erotic as a source of knowledge, do not enter into detail regarding what types of knowledge can be obtained and what processes lead to it.

Due to highly sexualized content in advertisements and mainstream films, it is easy to believe that sexuality is not oppressed. Appearing in contradiction with itself, a seamless discourse on sex, is what Foucault believes has been multiplied in order to conceal sex, holding with it affiliations of prohibition to implant homogeneity (53). Consequently, Michel Foucault believes that if the repressive link is to be broken from power, knowledge and sexuality, laws need to be transgressed, “a lifting of prohibitions, an eruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required” (5). It is evident that this is a master undertaking that Foucault himself agrees will require a great deal of time before any major accomplishments can be obtained, especially because of the type of power that operates in our society, which is characterized as consistently suppressing useless energies, and most relevant to this analysis, the intensity of pleasures (9). In the literary examples that follow, the emphasis is on providing examples where eroticism, knowledge and gender intersect. In chapter two, I provide examples where by replicating national events, provides a platform of acceptance, where the erotic challenges gender performances in ways where they become incorporated into the norm.

Historicizing the erotic in relation to knowledge, Foucault traces the link between sex and knowledge in the West of the nineteenth century, where sex began to be associated with knowledge in a context of scientific inquiry both in biology and medicine (54). Science as a source that leads to knowledge and information about sex is not what I imply when referencing eroticism as a source of knowledge. Instead, I examine how erotic desire activates diverse forms of knowledge that incite political consequences, such as the reenactments of gender. Foucault historically traces two systems of interpreting the erotic, *scientia sexualis* versus *ars erotica* (58). For the most part, the predominant concepts of the erotic derive from *scientia sexualis*, which is

the route the Western world has taken. The *ars erotica* in contrast is associated with societies which are now present-day China, India and the Arab-Moslem, among others (Foucault 57).

Foucault defines this system in the following way.

In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul. Moreover, this knowledge must be deflected back into the sexual practice itself, in order to shape it as through from within and amplify its effects. . . .The effects of this masterful art, which are considerable more generous than the sparseness of its prescriptions would lead one to imagine, are said to transfigure the one fortunate enough to receive its privileges: an absolute mastery of the body, a singular bliss, obliviousness to time and limits, the elixir of life, the exile of death and its threats. (57-58)

Foucault establishes the erotic within an alternative system of production, one in particular, which benefits the individual, and cannot be easily proven or serve as a contributor to a larger economic beneficiary. The lack of a social contribution is precisely what threatens society, who seeks to control the citizens' bodies for optimal social production. Within the Latin American context, I am preoccupied with how the erotic provides alternative states of being that Foucault references in his definition, but that instead of analyzing it in isolation, I analyze how it intersects with a consciousness that engenders social empowerment by provoking adaptations to how gender and sexuality are manifested. Eroticism is pleasure, and I agree with Foucault whose interpretation encompasses an influence in all the levels of what a human experience is,

physically, and that which transcends the body. Ultimately, the erotic's ability to transcend time and space, provides the opportunity to conduct a transnational analysis within the Latin American context.

Ultimately, the erotic is found in fragments in theoretical and literary texts, and its direct influence on twentieth century Latin American literature and gender is scarce or not elaborated. My dissertation encompasses the literary and filmic representation of female and homosexual erotic desire in twentieth and twenty-first century Mexican and Brazilian cultural productions. In connection or contrast to Cooper, Bataille, Paz, *Vatsyayana Kamasutra*, and Foucault, I analyze the erotic with equal and valid relation between the body and the mind, and as a source of knowledge. I interpret the erotic as that which has the power to arouse, possess, incorporate and satisfy sexually, leading to the celebration of physical pleasure. Eroticism holds the potential to break down the regulated social order, and to lead to knowledge, becoming a powerful source for the birth of a consciousness about one's own pleasure and agency. I examine the erotic with a political potential to disrupt normative gender practices, and as one which transcends time, space, and as a result, social and political limits. Therefore, I redefine eroticism from that which is solely valued for aesthetic purposes and sexual desire, to a perspective that incorporates a social potential to alter gender and sexuality in the following works. The principal question of inquiry is how can the erotic motif become a means by which to defy normative gender and sexual practices, thereby making gender porous and, as a result, expanding the embodied gender limits.

Expanding the Borders: Eroticism as a Source of Knowledge and Empowerment in the Latin American Experience

Feminism in Latin America has a tumultuous history, and women of color feminism provide a platform by which to establish an analysis on the Latin American experience and on the erotic. Some writers like artists have recognized the potential held by the erotic. However, authors like Lorde rewrote the erotic not only as a binary that supports and challenges normativity, but as a weapon that could rebuild something different and directly benefit marginalized communities. Lorde essentially validates the erotic and displaces it from the periphery of thought to the center of activism, and writes that the erotic is power, and that it is needed in order to fight oppression (39). The author views the erotic as a life source where love and creativity can be found and used in the project of reclaiming our identities (55). The erotic then becomes a foundational source for women to seek new truths and be inspired by themselves and their communities to claim new spaces while writing about their desires. The erotic is then not void, but a carrier of knowledge and histories. This ideology is precisely what I intend to link with Mexican and Brazilian literature and film. Not only is there a lack of substance when analyzing the erotic, but a lack of consciousness regarding its potential in conjunction with activism and feminism. Some U.S. and French Feminists have written extracts tying the erotic to social struggle, to power, and contestation, but this view has not been thoroughly developed or even considered by many present day writers. To envision a confluent erotic aesthetic, with a politic intention is a step further from the discussions of art versus porn, and eroticism as casual. Pairing the erotic to the political is in and of itself non-normative. This dissertation expands feminist contributions in the second part of the twentieth century with women of color writers such as Lorde, who have paved the way by which to analyze the erotic in a different light, and

have hinted at its positive social potential. The erotic is transformed into an important mechanism for women to form a critique, voice their needs, and claim private and public spaces while writing and reading about their inner desires. The erotic is not seen as void, but functions as a vehicle for knowledge and personal history that contests “a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society” (Lorde 59).

As a result, I build upon and utilize the erotic in the following ways. I view the erotic as a fundamental aspect of our human experience which includes sexual desire and arousal. The erotic experience incorporates the physical, the psychological, the emotional and the spiritual. Traditionally, the erotic is closely tied to unruly taboo passions and the need for regulation. Due to the negative connotations of these words, and in view of my objectives, I tie the erotic to positive connotations, such as those used by women of color feminists, to a process of construction, and to its political potential. In particular, I circulate the erotic as a foundation for and a source of knowledge that gives way to a consciousness of the position of women within society and to the occasion for reform.

I continue to see the erotic for its aesthetic value, but by engaging with the *ars erotica*, I wield the erotic not only in a continuous struggle to challenge Western power, but, given the geopolitical positioning of the nations under discussion, also to generate it. The texts under analysis support a heteronormative regime, even when homoerotic desire emanates within the works. I have carefully chosen texts that have a visibly erotic presence, where the erotic themes motivate the plot. All of the works have a direct sexual component, with exposure and descriptions of characters’ sexuality. The works are not pornographic, but they do possess strong erotic content. Furthermore, in addition to possessing intense erotically charged language and scenes, the works selected also consistently problematize traditional views on gender and

sexuality. Lastly, the texts share the characteristic that they expose feminist ideologies affecting the main characters, or the main characters to one degree or another, in turn awakening feminist ideology within other secondary characters. To identify works which possess all three qualities explicitly is extremely challenging. However, what I desire to accomplish in *Gender at its Limits* is to analyze the representation of eroticism, gender and sexuality.

A foundational question at the beginning of most erotic analysis consists of the problems involved in the creation of female erotic discourse. It is possible that female desire will always possess ties to male desire. However, it is also apparent that erotic discourses can be constructive. To have access to eroticism implies exploring what Bell Hooks calls the oppositional gaze, where confrontation, resistance and acts that challenge the authority surface as mechanism to question and to bring forth change (94). The right to the erotic also means restoring a presence where it was denied. In essence, it refers to the right for self-representation and to take control of the meanings produced, rather than being represented by others. The erotic interactions never guarantee complete equality nonetheless; I am proposing a discussion that focuses on viewing the erotic as a source for change.

I believe the erotic is a cradle of knowledge and empowerment. Particularly, in literature, feminine knowledge can be prioritized to better represent women's interest. As stated earlier, texts can be made meaningful in different ways by legitimating the information it presents, and rethinking what constitutes as knowledge. Principally, the connection between experience and knowledge is critical for unrepresented individuals, whose knowledge has traditionally been excluded. This dissertation expands the boundaries of the traditionally analyzed topics and bodies by incorporating the Latin American experience in order to examine the intersections between eroticism, gender and empowerment. I examine the erotic and gender as potential sites

of resistance. Lastly, masculine and feminine identities are never fixed, but continually being negotiated. As a result, this leaves the possibility to blur the borders of gender and sexuality.

Sexuality and desire are intrinsically tied to the formation of identity. One of the main objectives of the feminist project is for woman to possess the right and the space to write their own identities, bodies and desires. Eroticism has traditionally been out of reach for woman, and prescribed in small doses. Gender on the other hand has been a demarcation by which to determine how social, political and economic resources are distributed. By rewriting the erotic from that which is only thought of in relation to control, and instead, reimagining the erotic with a positive social potential, many social constraints are ruptured and it allows for a fuller repossession of one's own agency, gender, and sexual desires. In conclusion, *Gender at its Limits* examines the intersections between eroticism, gender and sexuality. By rethinking erotic foundations, I reposition the erotic to a productive space by which to achieve personal self-realization and legitimate its links to the production of knowledge.

Chapter 2: Cannibalizing the Erotic: Food as Allegory for the Subversion of Power in *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate*

Discourses of food and sex traditionally intersect with discourses of control, in particular for the female subject. Rosalyn M. Meadow and Lillie Weissin in *Women's Conflicts about Eating and Sexuality: the Relationship between Food and Sex* concludes that many modern women have resigned erotic relations and have opted instead for the consumption of food. The intake of food takes place in the privacy of the home because it offer the possibility to gorge on unlimited quantities that they demand without feeling ashamed by the gaze of others. According to Meadow and Wissin, the pleasure obtained through food is more consistent than the negotiation and demands required in modern day relationships. Either presented as two separate categories or in connection, food and sex have a long engendered history which has dictated agency, pleasure and consumption. *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, and *Como agua para chocolate*, provide two examples in the Latin American context, where food and sex are celebrated, and provide a female space that renders diverse forms of expressing gender.

Coexisting within a repressive sexual social community, food in both texts becomes a communicative body that allows for the main characters, as well as others, to voice their erotic desires. Carole M. Counihan explains that “food ways are a prime domain for conveying meaning because eating is an essential and continuously repeated activity. Foods are many, and they have different characteristics of texture, taste, color and modes of preparation that are easy labels for meaning. Food constitutes a language accessible to all” (19). The kitchen specifically is a space marked by a gendered division of labor, where women are often responsible for all aspects of the cooking endeavor. Possessing accessibility to the preparation and consumption of food is a conduit by which to experience food in relation to knowledge.

In this chapter, I analyze *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate* as erotic texts within a political framework of resistance. Both novels display a discussion of women's roles in society, while criticizing the pre-established patriarchal values that govern interpretations of gender and sexuality. As evidenced by the title of this chapter and the texts themselves, food becomes a metaphor for sexual desire and it is through food that appetite and the act of devouring lead to erotic manifestations. The platform for preparing food in the two novels is conducive to a discourse that integrates erotic desire and the potential for the characters to express themselves in a domestic space that incessantly attempts to silence them. Therefore, both novels treat the subject of taste and the body in nontraditional ways as both work toward recording alternative sources of knowledge and, as I argue, creating centers for reclaiming projects. Since food plays a central role in the texts, it is critical to historicize the theme in literature as well as in other artistic currents, in order to better understand the political intersections, and how radical notions within the texts are produced within their geopolitical position and time.

With *Gabriela, cravo e canela* in the first part of the twentieth century, Jorge Amado had begun the discussion of women's roles in society, gender relations and women's search for emotional, sexual and intellectual self-realization. Embedded in an intellectual context in search of a national cultural identity, Amado reflects the objectives of intellectuals in the Northeast to valorize its regional culture and Afro-Brazilian citizens, whose role was traditionally subdued at the national level. *Gabriela, cravo e canela* challenges normative gender discourses, particularly by using the erotic as a medium by which to critique the prescribed family paradigm. In the Mexican context, Laura Esquivel takes a similar approach, as she reclaims several genres, such as domestic fiction, which was not taken seriously by the overwhelmingly masculine canon, as

well as magical realism, which was predominantly driven by male writers of the Latin American Boom. In *Como agua para chocolate*, she aids in destabilizing what, up to that moment has been disregarded as good literature. Most important, however, is Esquivel's critique of obedience and the lack of female empowerment in order to be agents of their own destinies. The proposed changes in the novel guide away from resignation and acceptance of one's destiny to a role that questions and modifies female identity. Esquivel focuses primordially on gender, because sexuality in the novel never leaves the parameters of heteronormativity. Both *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate*, advance a foundational sexual base of equality, and one that opens the embodied gender possibilities and that valorizes popular feminine forms of knowledge related to appetite.

In the chapter, I argue that the traditional act of preparing food is cannibalized by the main characters, Tita and Gabriela, and used as a medium by which to express erotic desire. The need to have an erotic space makes evident that the prescribed gender practices are outdated and cannot account for female desire. Hence, the erotic motif propels a critique on social roles, freedoms and responsibilities, and makes evident diverse sources of knowledge traditionally not accredited as such, such as the erotic experience. Both novels are erotic texts that ignite a discourse of change in the options presented to women, both by the way that their protagonists can perform gender as well as by recognizing their sexual desires. A principle objective is to see how precarious binaries really are. Oftentimes, characters simultaneously enforce, challenge and modify gender norms. Women in their daily lives for example, are able to perform multiple gender discourses simultaneously within their communities, thereby allowing the normative gender practices to become porous and mutable, frequently undetected and unperceived as a threat. However, it is these instances that allow us to see the negotiation of normative values, the

expansion of the embodied gender limits and the power the erotic inculcates within individuals as a potential to drive a transformation. I thereby conceptualize the atmospheric effects of eroticism in relation to resistance, knowledge and empowerment. The chapter provides the notion that through erotic desire, food becomes a nontraditional site of social critique, engages with history, and the production of knowledge that results in female empowerment.¹⁰

Contextualizing Food within Cultural Movements, Literature and Historical Events

Contextualizing how food is documented culturally and in literature before the publication of *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate*, assists in establishing their contribution and what the two works imitate from the legacy of representation. In the twentieth century, the role of food and the act of eating is most evidently presented in the Brazilian intellectual circles with the Cannibalist Manifesto in the modernist movement. In contrast to Mexico, the role of food is visible within prescriptive nineteenth century female magazines. The objectives of the literary and artistic movement differ greatly, not only based on time and style, but on the outcomes as well. In *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, the presence of ideals from the modernist movement and the Cannibalist Manifesto is evident. In *Como agua para chocolate*, the author imitates the style of domestic fiction, but takes possession of it in a way

¹⁰ Both novels also incorporate food references in their titles. In *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, critiques agree that the cinnamon describes Gabriela's skin color and the clove her skin odor. In *Como agua para chocolate*, it is not as direct, and critics have offered multiple interpretations dealing with life and death. It has been my observation however, that as with the boiling water described by the title, the attainment of extreme heat manifests itself in diverse physical sources throughout the novel, and some are spectacular scenes, while others are quotidian. Extreme heat is also tied to the expression of feelings and emotions in the novel. The manner in which Tita performs gender and discovers her sexuality in the novel is closely tied to food and the kitchen, connecting her narrations of heat to describe the birth and continuation of her sexual desire.

that better represents women's desires. Although there is a contrast between artistic and literary productions, in comparison to popular spaces, both texts project the value possessed in the preparation of food outside of a formal training in culinary science. The approach to reposition value onto the production by the masses is what parallels the focal point of this dissertation; to mobilize these texts in different and meaningful ways that open a productive space to explore new meanings. Comparable to the act of cannibalizing culture, I reposition the act to the erotic.

Jorge Amado may not be known as one of the main propagators of the manifesto and the artistic movement. Nonetheless, their influence over the author is evident as Amado reproduces their ideologies for an authentic Brazilian identity. Christopher Dunn describes the Brazilian *modernismo* as one that brought together artists who were interested in the aesthetic renovation of the Brazilian arts and letters, and the articulation of a national culture that was original and modern (12). As emphasized by Dunn, this new artistic group saw Brazil as an exporter of culture and no longer simply an importer and passive consumer of culture (12). By the 1930s, the spirit of the *modernismo* was institutionalized under the aegis of the emergent nationalist and populist political regime of Getulio Vargas, promoting Brazilianness (12-13). During this period, key artists and intellectuals sought to explain the originality of Brazilian civilization in terms of its racial and cultural hybridity, thereby establishing a paradigm for a *mestiço* national identity (12-13).

Launched formally in February 1922 during the Modern Art Week in São Paulo, Dunn writes that Brazilian *modernismo* involved a group of writers, visual artists, and composers from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (13). Even more than other Latin American vanguard movements, Brazilian *modernismo* was concerned foremost with articulating a project of cultural nationalism (Dunn 13). The Modern Art Week of São Paulo coincided with the centennial of Brazil's

political independence from Portugal and the event represented the nation's cultural independence (Dunn 14).

In the process of creating a national discourse that separated itself from Europe, Dunn asserts that Oswald de Andrade believed that it was precisely the eclectic racial and cultural makeup that produced an authentic Brazilian identity (18). During the creative articulation of the modernist movement, this prolific writer produced the "Cannibalist Manifesto," which proposes the figure of a defiant and aggressive Indian who violently resists colonial intrusions. For Andrade, there was no national essence, only a dynamic and conflict-ridden process of critical assimilation, or "deglutition" of various cultural influences (Dunn 18).

Bina Friedman Maltz argues that Andrade wanted to revise the Brazilian culture and dominant literary models in order for them to better reflect the Brazilian cultural identity (11). Therefore, to devour is a metaphor of resistance towards the official history and ways of thinking (Friedman Maltz 11). Instead, Friedman Maltz argues that *antropofagia* was a response to a nation with ethnocentric views which impeded the process to recognize an autochthonous Brazilian entity (11). She interprets *antropofagia* as the symbolic act dialectically, to "destruir para construir em cima. Deglutir para, de posse do instrumental do "inimigo", poder combatê-lo e superá-lo. Deglutir o velho saber, transformando-o em matéria-prima do novo" (11). With a slightly different interpretation, for Richard Peña, *antropofagia* meant the process of assimilation, which transforms that which is being assimilated, and destroys it as well, in such a way that the enemy is not simply eliminated, but rather incorporated into the tribal body (199). Accordingly, *modernism* and *antropofagia* were representing and assigning new meaning to what it meant to be Brazilian.

The concerns of *modernismo* and *antropofagia* are also reflected in *Gabriela, cravo e canela* as visions for a new Brazilian identity and culture are proposed through the presentation of popular culture in the work. The anxiety of the intellectuals at the time who sought to explain the originality of Brazilian society was emphasized in the novel as Amado centralizes the cultural value of racial and cultural hybridity through the integration and mixing of races in the novel. Not only were Afro-Brazilians in need of being integrated into the imaginary of an authentic national culture, but the Northeast needed to be represented as part of the Brazilian national imaginary as well. Blacks were very much present in Brazil's colonial history as well as its later history as an independent nation, and yet were marginalized and ignored in dominant discourses. When the modernists attempted to articulate the roots of the nation, and define what made Brazil distinct and original, it was impossible to dismiss the Afro-Brazilian influence and culture, especially when beauty began to be redefined by *mestiço* roots. With the incorporation of food in the novel taking center stage, Amado uses the literal as well as metaphorical implications. At the metaphorical level, it correlates to the Cannibalist Movement's vision, which saw the importance of devouring imported cultural influences and reworking them at the local level, in this case, the African culture into an Afro-Brazilian entity. As *Gabriela, cravo e canela* references several foreign characters who have erotic and economic influence over the land, Amado continues to centralize and develop the local culture instead, such as the regional food and religion. As it is also critical to *Gender at its Limits*, it is about mobilizing texts in a manner by which they resist and legitimize what previously was assigned little value. Amado's ethnocentric resistance is manifested by his exaltation of Northeastern culture above European culture, a pattern which is visibly throughout the work. By digesting the Northeastern history and bringing it to the forefront with the intentions of incorporating it into the national body, Amado

helps articulate the search for identity by representing quotidian practices and molding them into the projection of popular cultural nationalism. Furthermore, with the element of food, Amado also displays the politics surrounding gender and sexuality, as female characters in their prescribed domestic domain also begin to cannibalize on gender expectations and prescribed social roles.

In contrast to Brazil, Mexico's cultural tradition on food originates in the nineteenth century and has direct ties with domestic fiction. According to Maria Elena de Valdes, Mexican domestic fiction was traditionally divided into recipes, home remedies, short poems, moral exhortations, dressmaking patterns and the monthly calendar of church observances (78). Both Valdes and Kristine Ibsen agree that women's magazines came into popularity during the nineteenth century. While providing an alternative space for female discourse, Carmen Ramos Escandón asserts that women's magazines also circumscribed the role of domesticity (45). Representative of the female literary waves taking place in the twentieth century, Laura Esquivel's novel, *Como agua para chocolate*, reclaims domestic fiction and produces a potent text that is female centered with little male interference. It differs vastly from domestic fiction in the sense that it disrupts domesticity through sexual empowerment.

According to Maria Elena de Valdes, domestic fiction within the literati was never considered literature by the establishment due to its overt sentimentality, episodic plots and highly stylized characterization (78). When looking at the spaces it encompassed, namely the kitchen and the home, it is evident that these areas were gendered and encoded for a female audience. The remedies and home recipes present in domestic fiction are traditional practices passed on by the women in the home, and made within the private space. Amalia Chaverri argues that it is precisely their popular and quotidian use that categorizes them as non-institutionalized

practices. Not only are they common, but they are typically practiced by women. Joan F. Cammarata goes even further by stating that the writing of recipes within the text is seen as a manifestation of female power where the technical language employed is rarely understood by men (87). Consequently, a female space is created in literature that assigns value to the culinary arts typically practiced by women, where they have the power to nourish, as it is typically analyzed, but they also have the power to destroy through this means as well, as Tita will demonstrate. I propose that the traditionally feminine assigned spaces and practices are also sources of knowledge that can provide information into how it can be transformed from a site of oppression to one of potential.

The space of the kitchen in *Como agua para chocolate* becomes the backdrop for a series of extraordinary occurrences centering on Tita and her contact with others. These occurrences play on magical realism, whereas Joan F. Cammarata explains that it is reality, and not fantasy, which is the origin of magical realism (88). The characters hold these extraordinary occurrences as true and do not question their validity (Cammarata 88). Helen Price also asserts that within the parameters of the text with a magical realist style, “magical things really do happen” (182). Lastly, what is strategic about incorporating magical realism within the novel, Kristine Ibsen believes that “Esquivel has consciously selected a mode that has become so much a part of the canon that it would be easily recognized by anyone even remotely familiar with contemporary Spanish-American literature” (72). In other words, Esquivel has taken the recognizable literary tradition and used it to make food and sex meaningful.

In order to enter a discussion of food in Brazilian literature, one must first consider the historical absence of food in the Northeast, which has thereby influenced the overall

development in the regional literature.¹¹ Regionalist styles and themes now considered typical of Northeastern literature began to develop in the mid part of the century as they were influenced by *cordel* literature, geographical regions and the human experience unique to northeastern Brazil. Fábio Lucas writes that the consecration of the Northeastern romance novel came about with writers such as Raquel de Quiroz, Jorge Amado, José Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos and Amando Fontes, among others (56). Lucas believes that for the first time since the literature of independence, Brazil began to create a literature to be exported, beginning in the 1920's and 1930's, up to the present time (57). The writers of the Northeast arose as a collective socially conscious voice, where they

Atacam o cenário do Nordeste sob o ângulo da crise social e da peculiaridade das relações humanas ante as condições ecológicas e políticas desfavoráveis, adotando uma linguagem em que o oralismo e o coloquial elevam ao texto a presença da camada popular. Jorge Amado, de modo especial, libera as manifestações regionais da vida e da cultura, sob a forte pressão da literatura popular, com seus mitos e seu diversificado

¹¹ Northeastern literature has its own reoccurring themes. There are no significant works that analyze the trajectory of food in Brazilian literature. Nevertheless, there are two significant movements in Brazil that I believe at some level were synchronized with Amado to the level where food and the erotic interact as they do politically. The first is the cinematographic movement of *Cinema Novo*, and the second is *Antropofagia* from the Modernist Movement. The cinematographic movement known as *Cinema Novo* is dated differently by scholars, with some indicating that it dates to 1960. It cannot be ignored that many of the ideals projected by Amado in *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, are similar to the first phase of the *Cinema Novo* which focuses on the aesthetics of hunger. Whether Amado was influenced by the cinematographic movement, or the filmmakers were influenced by Amado is unclear. Their concerns, however, overlap. The second, *Antropofagia*, occurred in the 1920's, and this was a new wave for interpreting and representing Brazilian culture as authentically as possible through the process of cannibalism.

elenco de personagens. A simbologia local, rica e variada, se projeta no amplo painel do discurso narrativo. (69)

Popular culture and the everyday interactions in literature thus became the platform for socio-political critique that clearly influenced the unequal distribution of wealth and power.

For the most part, studies of food and erotic literature tend to focus on abundance and the control of its consumption. In the particular case of Northeastern Brazilian literature, however; the thematic focus shifts to one of scarcity and lack. Northeastern literature is characterized by its struggles, regionalisms, and search for national validation. Landim writes that the droughts play as a metaphor for the search of human identity within a space of discrimination and social injustice (153). The language used mirrors the colloquial speech of the masses. The third observation entails character development as they cross the Sertão they resign themselves to their misery and desperation and are, defeated, by the loss of their identity. They are forced to resign themselves to their inhuman circumstances and, at times, even lose their ability to communicate as well, in effect animalizing the characters through the loss of the uniquely human ability to speak, as is the case in *Vidas Secas* (154-158).¹² Another important observation that Landim makes is the disintegration of the family as they cross the backlands, either through death, abandonment, or a member who goes missing (155). At times, the family enters a moral crisis, as a female deviates from the norm in order to become a prostitute. Landim cautions the reader, indicating that the droughts are the main factor responsible for economic inequality and skewed power relations, and thus as the cause for women having to resort to these means (187). The exposition of the daily life of the characters and the valorization of popular practices are evident

¹²*Vidas Secas* is originally a novel written by Graciliano Ramos in 1938.

in *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, although not as forward, the text is also an enriched source that records the effects of the droughts and the search for substance.

Grabiela, cravo e canela takes place in Bahia, where internal migration movements in this area have left a legacy in the nation's history. During its colonial state, as a young nation in the eighteen and nineteen hundreds, and up to the present era, droughts have affected the citizens of Northeastern Brazil. The Northeast is one of five regions that the country is divided into, and it includes nine states and one territory. In its totality, the Northeast is 18.2 % of the national territory (Medeiros Filho 15).

Many writers believe that the persistent drought problem is a national conspiracy, where the government refuses to propose permanent solutions because it is convenient for the economic and political powers of the Southeast, to continue to concentrate the national wealth and development in their region. In the early part of the twentieth century, one of the obstacles that the Northeast had to overcome was to make the government see that the droughts were a national problem, a level of attention that they were not granted at the time (Medeiros Filho 37). The dramatic numbers pertaining to the droughts are outrageous, and they simply were not enough to provoke action. The drought of 1900 began with the bubonic plague and in 1915, in Ceará alone, over 500,000 cattle died due to hunger, thirst and illnesses (Oliveira 84-85). In the drought of 1904 in the city of Natal, there were 15,000 refugees, when the 1900 census stated that the city population consisted of 16,056 (Medeiros Filho 72). In the exodus in the drought of 1915, as well as that of 1919, Paulo de Brito Guerra says that the population fled to the Amazon, where rubber had a high value (26-27). By 1976, Bahia and Paraíba reported a massive exodus of young adults to São Paulo (Medeiros Filho 120-123). João Medeiros Filho reports that in the drought of 1983, 150,000 refugees flooded the city of Fortaleza, Ceará (122). In the previous

century, in 1878, Paulo Cesar Gonçalves adds that over 114,000 refugees went to Fortaleza, whereas its original population was only 21,000. The city soon became the metropolis of hunger (107-108). In the same year, Mossoró had 36,000 refugees die between January and October, who had a widespread smallpox epidemic and in the drought of 1800, over 500,000 people died in the whole area (110-112). The deaths and massive human relocations were not sufficient evidence for the government to take drastic measures of reform.

The droughts and the devastating result of lack of food in the area are prevailing themes in the Northeastern experience. Gabriela on the other hand is a character whose personality defies the concerns and limitations of her class and sex. She belongs to a social class who has no education, and who is part of the manual labor work force of the rural area. Gabriela is also part of a generation of Northeasterners who have been affected by the droughts. According to data presented by João Medeiros Filho and Itamar de Souza, from 1900 to 1983, the Northeast had sixteen droughts (28). Oliveira reports that more than 100,000 people died in the drought of 1958, that which meant over 10% of the total Northeastern population (151). In Gabriela's struggle to survive, she becomes a migrant worker who must walk across the Sertão to a city or to another state in search of work. Her character is full of defiance and she refuses to let the regional circumstances dictate her way of experiencing life. Instead, she takes possession of the quotidian experience by choosing to surround herself by the acts that bring her pleasure.

The symbolism standing for the act of eating is present in cultural movements such as the Brazilian modernism and Cannibalist Manifesto. As I have demonstrated, it is also visible in Mexican and Brazilian literature, one as representative of the nineteenth century which focused on normative female practices, and the other on the absence of food in a politically charged climate. Lastly, in Western history food manifests itself through the sense of taste. Taste took

center stage in the eighteenth century with various committees on taste, when according to Denise Gigante, “Britain elevated food to the status of the fine arts, adopting the same juridical language and concern with philosophical principle that define the eighteenth-century discourse of aesthetics” (1). According to Gigante, classical aesthetics differ in that they considered sight and hearing of greater value than taste, especially because they allowed people to contemplate an object at a distance; in contrast, taste is bound to the flesh and is thus associated with excesses, such as gluttony, drunkenness or voluptuousness and is dependent upon bodily instinct (2-4). With the modern aesthetic of taste, also came the emotion of pleasure which came to be understood as its own way of knowing. Therefore, as Gigante positions, the power of taste became a trope for generating a sense of self (2-4). As evidenced throughout the chapter, the local flare to food and the sexual and environmental cannibalization which occurs through food and the main characters is an act of defiance to the constant attempt to control and homogenize the erotic.

According to Gigante, at the national level food does generate a sense of self. In *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, food plays a central role in a national discourse, and is either exhorted for being a representation of national identity or takes a political dimension by being a critique for the absence of it, as the socio-economic issues of hunger and poverty surface. At a communal level, Wenying Xu writes that every human group is bound by food production, rituals and ideology (8). Even in nation building projects, culinary standardization is often used, so that “food and eating often serve as a set of gendering and gendered signs that circulate in everyday life” (5). Food, she argues, is a vital presence in the community’s perception of wholeness, and national or ethnic identification (19). As represented in the title of this chapter, it is through the platform of food, which provokes appetite and the act of devouring, that the erotic manifests

itself, leading to an environment where everyone eats, literally, as well as being a metaphor for erotic consummation. Food and the erotic have political implications; however, they are oftentimes analyzed as devoid of this influence and only infrequently analyzed as encompassing a political objective. Consequently, food and the act of eating are present within nationalistic discourses in the construction of identity in art and literature. Taste has also risen to make meaningful contributions on the individual's perception of themselves. Both novels under analysis treat the subjects of taste and the erotic in nontraditional ways by having both work towards the erotic production of knowledge pertinent to a female domestic experience. The presentation of the erotic in relation to food is counternormative and radical for their time, particularly because in the twentieth century, they are not paired and given a political objective. Furthermore, the taste of the popular masses and eroticism itself, are not typically associated with knowledge as well.

Reclaiming Spaces of Labor and Pleasure and Their Potential as Sites of Knowledge

In the first part of the century, well before the rise of the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies, which is generally considered a time of experimentation and expansion of possibilities, Jorge Amado had already begun the discussion of women's roles in society, gender relations, and women's search for sexual satisfaction. In 1958 Jorge Amado published *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, which commentators saw as a break from his previous socialist realism and a new Amado who had incorporated picaresque humor. Bobby J. Chamberlain states that this new stage in his literary work, made use of humorous and ironic devices that later became hallmarks of the writer's personal style, such as parody, pastiche, ironic narrator, the intervention of the supernatural (32-33).

Jorge Amado continues to be a controversial author even up to the present day due to his thematic development of issues pertaining to female sexuality, gender, religion, and blackness. According to Bobby J. Chamberlain, Brazilian literary scholars have tended to fall into one of two opposing sides, those that defend the author and his detractors. Chamberlain writes that the allegations of the latter group involve such things as “naïve populism and the consequent romanticizations of poverty, sexual and racial stereotyping . . . and failure to break away from timeworn nineteenth-century narrative models” (36). While I concur with the critics that *Gabriela, cravo e canela* portrays female archetypes, I also believe that this novel offers a valuable exposition of the erotic, which was revolutionary for its time, and critical in the larger process in the discussion of women’s roles in society and gender relations, as the novel criticizes the pre-established patriarchal values on gender and erotic desire, and proposes alternative constructions.

The plot takes place in the state of Bahia in 1925. The novel follows the main character Gabriela who must migrate within the region due to a drought. She migrates to the city of Ilheus, where she finds work as a cook for Nacib. He is a middle aged man of Lebanese origins who considers himself Brazilian, but who is bicultural. Nacib dreams of saving money to purchase land and he believes that he can accomplish this through hard work, and by watering down some of his drinks in order to obtain a greater profit. Caught in the middle of a local political transition of power, leadership and visions, Gabriela and Nacib begin a romance that leads to marriage. As Nacib wants to transform Gabriela from a *retirante* into a proper merchant’s wife by dictating a change in her likes and behavior, she becomes very unhappy.¹³ Towards the end of the novel, Nacib discovers that Gabriela is having an affair with his close friend Tonico. At the end of the

¹³ A migrant worker due to the droughts in the Northeast.

novel, after Nacib separates from Gabriela and annuls the marriage, he rehires Gabriela to be his cook out of necessity, and their romantic relationship is rekindled once again.

Most noticeable is Gabriela's personality full of charm, beauty and sexual desire. Her influence affects men of all ages, social status and professions. She has no birth certificate, she does not know when she was born, how old she is, or even her father's last name. Gabriela is poor and uneducated and she was sexually molested by her uncle as a child. The generalized characteristics make Gabriela a symbol of massive representation of Northeastern women, and, as declared by the author himself, a national symbol of Brazilian identity: "Eu queria criar uma mulher que fosse símbolo da mulher brasileira, uma mulher do povo" (81). Although nationalism is predominantly constructed by a male political body, there is the presence of friction and struggle, as is evidenced by the fact that the Northeast has not been fully granted its citizenship rights and its value among the nation state. As a result, it is critical to consider the implications of creating a national symbol from a Northeastern woman. By the 1950's, the nation's historical identity had largely been tied to the Southeast culturally, politically and economically. The Northeast and the North for example, did not obtain sufficient national funds for road construction until the sixties and seventies. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were the cultural metropolitan areas that led the way for cultural movements, and yet, Jorge Amado had fashioned a national symbol from a Northeastern woman. Completely counternormative at the national level, both regionally and racially, Gabriela is also representative of popular culture, the poor and the uneducated masses, the lower class *nordestinos*, *retirantes*, and domestic workers.¹⁴

Jorge Amado presents Gabriela in a discussion of the regional, race, class, and, the religious. Afro-Brazilian and mulatto women have historically been marginalized and ignored in

¹⁴ Individuals from the Northeast.

dominant discourses while simultaneously forming part of a larger body of enslaved beings who suffer multiple abuses.¹⁵ At the national level in the twentieth century, Christopher Dunn writes that by the 1930s, many elite intellectuals agreed with racist theories of biological determinism that placed Africans at the bottom of a racial hierarchy. Some scholars expressed anxiety about the supposedly degenerative effects of racial mixing while others believed that racial mixing, would progressively lead to the whitening of Brazil. In either case, the Afro-Brazilian population was widely regarded as an impediment to modernization and progress (24). Representing a mulatto as sexual is problematic, as is their absence from literary representation. Given Gabriela's remarkable role in Brazilian literature of the time, I focus on her contributions, and exalt her sexual desire within a constructive context of empowerment, while well aware that other critics use these same elements as grounds for negative critiques.

Mark J. Curran describes *Gabriela, cravo e canela* as a nationalistic novel that redresses a revolutionary message by representing the disenfranchised, “*o povo*” ‘the people’ (19-20). Curran argues that the incorporation of popular speech is what makes allows the narration to reflect elements of what is representative of popular history (24). Rosana Ribeiro Patricio, adds that by 1976, *Gabriela, cravo e canela* was reasserted by the northeastern intellectuals as part of a nationalistic culinary movement in the Northeast. The group mobilized to valorize northeastern cuisine, as authentically forming part of a national cuisine through the Regionalist Manifesto of Recife, thereby, placing *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, into a larger patriarchal national frame (88). Her knowledge of taste and sex, however, remain within the popular imaginary.

Granting females the status of protagonists is characteristic of the literary works of Jorge Amado. As noted by Rosana Ribeiro Patricio, these female characters have great influence over

¹⁵ One might argue the opposite with figures such as Xica da Silva, however she is but one example in contrast to a number of other Afro-Brazilian protagonists.

the story development (9). I argue that Gabriela's provocation and mere presence which ignites an erotic atmosphere influences the mentality of the major thinkers of Ilheus, as they begin to articulate a need to change the pre-established norms on marriage, gender and sexuality. She is an embodiment of popular culture, but she also embodies erotic power. Evelyne Accad describes the relationship between power and sexuality as follows:

sexuality seems to have a revolutionary potential so strong that many political women and men are afraid of it. They prefer, therefore, to dismiss its importance by arguing that it is not as central as other factors, such as economic and political determinations which are easily recognizable as the major factors that produce revolution-class inequalities, hunger, poverty, and lack of job opportunities. (237)

In *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, Jorge Amado presents a bold female character with undeniable sexual needs, in a cultural context where female limitations are clearly defined. In the text, readers cannot turn away from female desire, and Amado presents both, traditional erotic purity and explicit erotic desire. As Alyce Mahon confirms in her writings on the erotic force, "the very act of 'making visible' the female sex" lends continued controversy to the novel, which shocks and disturbs readers (19). Even today, the novel continues to be surrounded by representational controversy, due to race, class, and most importantly, its erotic content.

As noted earlier, the religious theme is present within the work of Amado. The erotic power possessed by Gabriela is deeply embedded in *candomblé*, more specifically, her *orixa* or deity. In the dream like section titled, "Do camarada do campo de batalha", "Na pobre cozinha, Gabriela fabricava riqueza: acarajés de cobre, abarás de prata, o mistério de ouro do vatapá", Gabriela and the deity Yemanjá are described as one (434). Luis A. L. Silva writes that Yemanjá is synonymous with abundance and detachment; she is the mother of all the waters (70). At the

quotidian level, I wrote earlier that food and the kitchen, are not valued, but fall under a routine of preparation and consumption. With the integration of *candomblé* in the kitchen, a process of revalorization of food occurs. What is noticeable within the novel is that the food that Gabriela produces enters a new category of valorization, one which is classified as pertaining to the *orixas*, making literal connections in the text with copper, silver and gold. The value added to food production is also evident economically in the space where she resides. Nacib, for example, makes considerable profits from Gabriela's culinary skills. For the first time, Nacib is able to save sufficient money in order to expand his business by opening a restaurant and continuing to save funds for a future investment in a cacao plantation. By assimilating Gabriela to an *orixa*, she projects abundance in worldly pleasures, as well as a spirit that transforms her surroundings. Relegated from a space of repetition and obligation, the preparation of food is rewritten to have everlasting value, and as a result, food is elevated to possess spiritual qualities and worldly benefits and Gabriela is venerated for it.

Apart from the profits that Gabriela and her food provide, the process of preparation is an alternative form of knowledge that the novel presents. The knowledge consists of a lineage of Northeastern cooks, who hold the precision and taste for the preparation of regional food. For example, Gabriela has the knowledge to add precisely the correct amount of spice to her dishes, which include a variety of regional foods, such as *acarajés*, *abarás*, *bolinhos de bacalhau*, *brigadeiros*, and *cuscuz de milho com leite de coco*. She also knows how to dance to popular music such as the *coco*, *samba*, *maxixe* and *polkas*. The fact that Gabriela's character mirrors the popular masses is an important regional valorization of the Northeast, its culture and its people. The type of knowledge that she references is not scientific, but based on guidelines which make use of taste, intuition, and a female archive passed on for generations in the domestic space. This

particular form of knowledge is powerful because it is accessible and practiced in every day routines. Gabriela's erotic energy is also mediated through the consumption of popular food, and her actions as an uneducated and simple civilian in the public space, leads to a questioning and liberation of both sexes. Gabriela emanates erotic desire, but she also ignites a dissatisfaction that challenges societal views on gender and sex.

Her food production is not simply delicious, but her Northeastern dishes rejuvenate the mind and the body of those that consume them and her erotic presence creates a similar effect. The value added to the product, food, is executed in a manner that delights the consumers by igniting sexual rejuvenation and by equating it to economic gains by the business that provides the regional offerings. The effects of food result in the provocation of new emotions which later in the work, allow for flexibility in the rubrics guided by logic, such as the case of infidelity. As a result, appetite takes new symbolic implications, as appetites are desired and sought after. Appetite is not quenched by the consumption of the food, but desired as a process to repeat the experience. Furthermore, appetite is transformed from a ritual of repetition, to one which allows growth, meditation and pleasure. With her presence, Gabriela rejuvenates even the older men, and with her gentle treatment, allows them to feel that she is obtainable at a personal level. They eat her spicy appetizers, which are a Northeastern culinary perfection, and they get to touch her, pinch her, snatch her red flower from her ear, and talk to her. Her erotic power is so strong, that outside of the bar, the colonel's keep bringing propositions to Gabriela to become their cook and partner.

Rosana Ribeiro Patricio writes that Gabriela is in the state of "amorous cannibalism," which assumes the double condition of being a cook and the one that gets "eaten" (83). It is true that the common speech assumes that the men possess the active role. However, based on the

fact that Gabriela is the one that possesses the knowledge for producing such excellent cuisine, spiritual love making, and a profound partnership, I maintain that Gabriela has much more agency than what this coined expression assumes. Gabriela's erotic potential lies in her connection to her food and her degree of agency is clearly seen repeatedly as she denies the propositions of many men. Through the consumption of her food, Gabriela has access to all the men, in a way that allows her to metaphorically create an intimacy with each one. As Gabriela takes the appetizers to the bar and interacts with the clients, Nacib states that "era um prazer para os olhos vê-la" (201). I would go further on to say that if Gabriela is cannibalized through sight as the men devour her visually, in the end she cannibalizes the men through her food by the everlasting results she leaves among their minds and emotions.

As *Gabriela, cravo e canela* does not illustrate many instances of hunger, and taking into consideration the repetitive drought history of the Northeast, it is evident that Gabriela brings abundance and pleasure where she goes, which are two critical, sustaining benefits for the Northeast. In the novel, the large abundance of food, the profits that she brings to Nacib's house, and the pleasure and desire that she arouses within the men, who are interacting with all of their senses, create a close tie between food, Gabriela and eroticism. In 1928, Guilherme de Almeida wrote a love poem in the *Revista de Antropofagia*, misleading the reader to assume that he is writing about a woman. It is not until the end of the poem, that it is revealed that his muse is "food". As a result, food, and the metaphor of eating, can take multiple dimensions, and in this case, it is incorporated to reproduce an erotic and regional force.

The type of knowledge presented by Gabriela clearly speaks about and to an intimate female experience. The novel attributes qualities to Gabriela that are not common, but deep and spiritual in a way that is unexplainable by scientific methods. Juan Fulgencio goes so far in the

novel as to refuse to define her. He states that even though women do not have the right to vote, that Gabriela has the power to attract everybody, that she projects a force that creates revolutions, and that impulses discoveries. This is one of clearly written examples that exemplify the power possessed by the erotic and the potential it holds. It is important to clarify that Amado makes a distinction between Gabriela's eroticism, and her antithesis, Tonico, the don Juan of the novel. Tonico is everything Gabriela is not; he acts maliciously, and plans his seductions ahead. He is described as having no substance, nothing of intellectual essence, and only succeeds because of his family name and good looks. Gabriela on the other hand, motivates individuals to obtain personal freedom, such as the case with Malvina. With the men of the town, which possess power, status and agency, they begin in the novel with a quiet silence after a Colonel kills his wife for infidelity. As Gabriela enters into contact with the men, and defies many social barriers of conduct between the popular and the aristocrat, they begin a process of deconstructing social practices in existence. The critique of particular importance to women include the options women possess in life and the inequality in marriage as men have access to income and prostitutes while women must marry older men and reside in the home waiting to be of service to her husband. It is true that Ilheus is going through an industrial modernization with the building of the port, the roads and buses, but it is Gabriela who brings to Ilheus cultural reflection. As representative of popular masses, Gabriela is uneducated, and does not hold the same foundation of knowledge that the secondary characters possess, such as business skills, familiarity with literature or talent in playing an instrument. She does however, have the wisdom to see what is presently wrong with the social structure, to detect the unequal distribution of freedom and power among the sexes, and to give recognition to what makes her happy. Gabriela makes her decisions based on what she wants, and this in and of itself, speaks very loudly in a novel where

most women do not. Through the connections with the erotic, Gabriela validates emotions to a point that it ignites a psychological quest for reform and freedom among both sexes in Ilheus.

Gabriela's abundant erotic energy would have been impossible in a Catholic paradigm, where a code of decency dictates that the ideal woman can only coexist if she has no sex or sexual attributes. Gabriela on the other hand, is much more representative of religions that connect sexuality to a spiritual realm. Susana Constante writes that in the case of the Oriental gods, for example, they encompass love, desire, and sexual desire, such as is the case with the pair Kāma (love and desire) and Rati (sexual desire) who complement each other (64). Amado translates this same balance of the earthly with godly eroticism, by creating a balance between Gabriela and Nacib so that they complement each other sexually and emotionally. The year of publication, in 1958, Gabriela's character presents a female recognition for sexual desire, arousal and satisfaction. Her erotic desire is impossible to hide in the language of the text and the imagination it provokes its readers. It is undeniable that Gabriela's character is radical for the time. The shock it brings to readers, further highlights the sensitivity in the tone for change.

The erotic imagination is a powerful concept in *Gabriela, cravo e canela*. Octavio Paz analyses the erotic in his canonical text, *La llama doble* and considers it to be the power that transfigures sex into ceremony. In the text, all the men at the bar are aroused by Gabriela and desire her. Around lunchtime, Gabriela develops the ritual of assisting in the bar, in order to take Nacib his meal and to help tend to the clients. The men, on the other hand, begin to expect her presence in the bar, to wait for her to arrive and to circulate to each one as she brings them food and drinks. Through this short interaction, all parties develop a relationship, and have the freedom to carry out erotic encounters through fantasy and the imagination. Eroticism therefore provides an unlimited freedom that leads to consumption and pleasure, through the daily routine

of lunch. The clients consume Gabriela's godlike palatal snacks, and consummate through an interactive ritual taking place at the bar. The freedom obtained, free from social restraints, incites the men of the town, to become critical observers of the patterns of marriage and the engrained life options accepted as normal. It is Gabriela's freedom, and contagious erotic energy, that propels the transformation of several social sectors. Her innocent and natural demeanor allows for the men to create bonds with Gabriela, and they in turn allow themselves to forgive her in the moments when she breaks from the loyalty of marriage. Their forgiveness is not only representative of their social power, but also of how erotic desire can be a conduit for social change.

Gabriela is often described by the critics as naïve and innocent; however, I would argue instead that this forms part of Amado's intent to insert eroticism into a natural state that is carried with individuals wherever they go. Eroticism is not an object that is left at home; it comes with the body, and because it uses the mind, it is not bound by the confinements of the physical body. With the limitless use of the imagination, people can express their erotic desire and fantasy in both the private and the public space, thereby, potentially becoming more threatening to the establishment.

The erotic imagination can also be exemplified in *Como agua para chocolate*, which also brings with it a strong will to express one's desires in our daily interactions. Although not as free as Gabriela, the characters in the Mexican text strive to recover spaces within the private realm that allows them to break from the stern gaze of the mother figure. With little control over their bodies and character, the young women begin to challenge the traditional gender and sexuality prescriptions that they must follow. The erotic consciousness begins with food and so does the communicative body by which emotions are expressed. The second work under analysis, *Como*

agua para chocolate, was authored by Laura Esquivel and published in 1989. The novel narrates the oppressed love life of Tita, who lives with her two sisters and mother in their family ranch near the U.S.-Mexican border. The narrative takes place around the first part of the twentieth century, and witnessing the Mexican Revolution. According to the family tradition of De la Garza, the youngest daughter in the family must never marry, ensuring the mother's care until her death. The conflict arises when Pedro asks for Tita's hand in marriage, and the mother proposes that he marry the oldest daughter, Rosaura, instead, to which he agrees in order to be close to Tita. Similarly to Gabriela, Tita influences others through her food, as she gives voice to her emotions and desires.

The kitchen in *Como agua para chocolate* becomes the backdrop for a series of extraordinary occurrences centering on Tita and her contact with others. In *Como agua para chocolate*, food is an open means by which to communicate and to transmit Tita's emotions. The space in which this occurs, the kitchen, traditionally is analyzed as a place that submits and ties women to household obligations based on sex and gender. Most importantly, the kitchen can also be approached differently, as a cultural site to reclaim women's experiences and identities. As a result, food becomes the language of communication, and the kitchen a space where histories can be recorded. In the text, each chapter is introduced by a recipe, and that recipe takes center stage during a celebration or a daily meal; what is different about this novel is that the kitchen becomes the outlet, and food elevates emotions by manifesting Tita's desires, happiness, frustrations and sadness. Particularly in *Como agua para chocolate*, food is part of fantastical descriptions and similarly to *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, it elevates emotions and influences others through the consumption of it.

Invoking an *mestiza* heritage through Tita's nannie Nacha, she guides her to learn to see the preparation of food as a spiritual undertaking, which connects the cook in the present to loved ones who are no longer living, either because they have passed down the recipe, or because food is the foundation for moments shared with others during meals and celebrations. Laura Esquivel writes Nacha's character as part of a disenfranchised group of working women who were often family servants. Nacha's identity and culinary abilities are part of an ancestry of indigenous roots. This narration in particular is held sacred after the Mexican Revolution, and connected to the origins of all Mexicans as propagated by the state, with or without indigenous blood. Consequently, Nacha is the origin in Tita's life for the lost source of knowledge that has no connection to the valued European culture, but becomes the conduit by which to live, to express erotic desires and repressed emotions, and a biography which records the influence of disempowered women.

As it commonly occurs, Tita's role as a caretaker within the family places her knowledge in a gendered fashion where it is not given much value. She is described by Esquivel as one of the few descendants of a line of exceptional cooks, reaching back to Meso-America. The element of indigenusness in particular is important to Mexican writers because it represents the powerful indigenous heritage. What is exceptional about this text is that it refers to a feminine lineage, and a store of knowledge traceable to labor performed by women as well. The nation has already acknowledged the masculine lineage through historical accounts, placing all emphasis on male endeavors and contributions. Through the element of labor, *Como agua para chocolate* acknowledges all Mexican women who are forgotten, but who have done much for others in their daily acts. The type of knowledge recaptured by Tita consists of nontraditional paths to expose her information, such as tastes, odors and fusions that create intense pleasure through food

consumption, as well as the nurturing of erotic desire. All the elements involved are non-normative, such as the value placed onto food, the erotic and the reliance on the senses. The pairing of the above allows for a different kind of information to be presented and validated.

What is clearly seen in both texts is the eroticization of the kitchen and the connection of food with sex. Food as a plural experience is theorized by Carole M. Counihan who writes that eating is a sexual and gendered experience, where food and sex overlap (9). Counihan argues that eating, copulation and reproduction reveal an individual and a group's beliefs regarding relationships and identities (61). This is best exemplified by Tita's feelings of desire and loss of chastity through visual and culinary contact. For Tita, the reference to or consumption of food provokes emotions so intense, that they influence her body.

The first time Tita felt sexual desire and was attracted to Pedro for example, she could best describe it by comparing her physical changes to those she was accustomed to seeing with food. She compares the feeling of being overwhelmed to that of a heat all over her body, just like a *buñuelo*, feeling her breasts, face and legs bubble with the immediate contact of hot oil.¹⁶ Tita's description not only ties her bodily experience to food, but it also depicts her physical transformation of feeling sexual desire for the first time towards another being. The fusion of food with emotions, and, as a result, a physical transformation due to erotic desire, is present throughout the novel. The physical transformations can be interpreted as magical realism, where for Tita, they really do occur.

Throughout the text, Tita is taught to obey, and to not desire any amorous encounters because her ultimate destiny is to be a caretaker. Robyn Zimberg writes that women have been

¹⁶ Thin flour tortilla deep fried and after being removed from the oil, sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon or honey. This dish is often prepared for Christmas and New Year's.

taught to be benevolent with both food and sex, where it is meant for other people in their lives to enjoy, not themselves (142). The erotic is an important motif in both works, and the manner in which it is represented conveys an ideology of equality for the sexes. *Gabriela, crave e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate* advance a foundational sexual base of equality where pleasure must also be felt by females. Due to the focus of this chapter on the erotic and food, I will limit my examples to those that demonstrate the preparation of food as a reclaimed space of female subjectivity and erotic desire.

The power and the potential of the erotic can be seen in the simple day-to-day details of this novel. The romanticizing of the first non-bodily sexual encounter is better developed, and more erotic, than the actual description of the first time Tita and Pedro have sex. In the actual scene where they were intimate, the writer chooses to be discrete, and insinuates without relating the explicit details of the scene. However, the scene where they experience coitus solely on a metaphorical level, with other bodies serving as hosts, is described in great detail. The day that Tita prepared quails with rose petals, her food not only aroused both Pedro and herself, but influenced Gertrudis and Juan, a revolutionary general. As the consumption of food began in the text, Tita entered a trance, where she was physically present but her soul was absent. Pedro was completely delighted by the food, exclaiming that it was food for the gods, a similar comparison which is also made about Gabriela's food. Joan F. Cammarata describes Tita's food as aphrodisiac, where Tita satisfies her sexual emotions symbolically through her food (91). This is precisely what occurs as she penetrates Pedro through the act of eating, causing an intense sexual arousal. Gertrudis's body manifests the intense oppression of erotic desire wanting to reveal itself, as the effects of the food take hold and she begins to feel consumed by a fire between her legs and a tingle in the center of her core. Esquivel does not make her intentions secret, but

purposely wants the reader to know what she intends to convey, by writing that what is occurring is a new act of communication, where Tita is the transmitter, Pedro the receptor, and Gertrudis the synthesizer (57). This particular scene synthesizes the influence Tita has over other individuals. A power, typically not assigned to cooks. For Tita, her oppressed emotions can only find freedom through other bodies. As a result, when others eat her food, their bodies manifest Tita's emotion, may it be sadness or erotic desire. This form of communication is unique to the text, and erotic desire propels Tita to find ways to express herself. It is this act that compels Tita to begin writing her own recipe book as an equivalent of an autobiography, a way to remain alive through her recipes. Tragically, with Tita's bond to the rules of her mother, she can only obtain emotional freedom through the production of food.

Similarly to *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, *Como agua para chocolate* represents *el pueblo*, the popular masses and in particular, the border experience. Traditional dishes are present throughout the text, as is the representation of colloquial speech through Chenchá, an employee in the family ranch. Daily activities take center stage in the novel, thereby focusing the home and the personal stories of its inhabitants as the principal concern of the novel. The national history of the revolution, which was taking place at the same time as Tita and Pedro's love affair, is subverted, and takes the role of a backdrop, as the novel focuses on the occurrences within the domestic space.¹⁷ In the recorded history of the Revolution, many gaps exist, in particular when

¹⁷ It is important to highlight, as Donna M. McHahon has already noted, that the Revolution is told throughout the novel from the women's perspective. Esquivel presents the war as chaotic and often affecting innocent people through the violence spreading throughout the country. For example, Rosaura's first child's bed nurse was accidentally shot by a stray bullet during a fight. Chenchá, was raped so violently during an ambush by bandits on the ranch, that Doctor John had to treat her with multiple stitches.

dealing with women's experiences and contributions. *Como agua para chocolate* reverses the practice, and makes evident the presence of other histories, who need to be recognized because they are equally important.

I contend that in the two novels, consumption figures prominently beyond the consumption of food, and is also present in sexual consumption, highlighting a process similar to *antropofagia*, where the multiple discourses on erotic desire lead to a political transformation of the erotic by disrupting gender performance. Susan Bordo writes that the spaces that produce food hold metaphorical dualities (21-22). Metaphorical dualities, clearly seen in both texts, include food as a source for obtaining a new lineage of knowledge and as a means by which to express, obtain and consume erotic desire and pleasure.

In the politics of representation, Susan Bordo's study on media forms from the Victorian era reveal that, when women are represented in connection with their appetites, not only is it taboo, but these representations are employed solely as a metaphor for sexual appetite (18). The only times women are allowed to demonstrate their appetites is during pregnancy or after having been near starvation (18). Contrary to the Victorian era, the intent of both of the texts under examination is to rewrite that taboo through the abundance and visibility of food as a means by which to express and give visibility to erotic desire. Hence, I would state that Gabriela and Tita cannibalize traditional limitations on the erotic by forcing a visibility closely tied to regional and national symbols, making their experiences and interpretations impossible to suppress.

The Normative as Chaotic: Containing Gender and Challenging its Boundaries

Understanding how eroticism works with gender as well as independently, aids in understanding how the social becomes embodied. Both novels provide ample examples where

normative gender embodiments, are not so neat in practice, thus revealing its complexity in execution. The need for control and supervision, are also insights into how the normative, is constantly challenged and modified from within, and its borders not so pure and confined as they are often imagined.

With the intervention of erotic influences, the female characters represented in these works simultaneously reinforce as well as challenge normative representations of gender, thereby expanding its borders and providing alternative gender constructions. The desirability of women who are silent and accept their destiny is challenged by both authors, who denounce the limited options prescribed to women. It is worthy to note that in both novels the male characters are somewhat marginalized from the house. In the case of Pedro, not only is he the minority, but he is overruled by Mamá Elena who stands in as the patriarch. In the Brazilian text, due to his business, Nacib is only present in the house at night, leaving Gabriela in control of all of the household affairs. The larger societies depicted within the two novels oppress female erotic desire; therefore, one can see that both novels accentuate sexual themes as a means of validating a female space and experience. By having males be absent from the process, allows the accentuation of female topics in the novels.

Most female characters navigate different and often contradictory manifestations of gender ideals within their roles, thereby, vacillating in a transgendered ideology, not in a queer sense, but by adopting multiple manifestations at the same time. Thelma Rocha Pinheiro's work on the representation of women in contemporary Northeastern literature concludes that the virgin-whore dichotomy is still prevalent (16). Cristina Ferreira-Pinto's analysis arrives at a similar conclusion by identifying four stereotypes about female sexuality established by canonical nineteenth century novels and propagated by twentieth century literature. The four

stereotypical categories include: the sensual mulatto woman, the seductive, unfaithful woman, the pure, white, married woman, and lesbians as perverted and/or frustrated woman (8).

Gabriela, cravo e canela does propagate dichotomist representations of women to a certain extent, such as the virgin/whores and the sensual colored lover/white wife. However, some of Amado's female characters also blur gender performance borders while others become pioneers for alternative gender constructions that were to be witnessed in the decades to come after the novel was published. Gabriela for example, is not the typical protagonist, as she will defy a city's view on fidelity and erotic expression. In each category, Amado incorporates many female characters that rupture gender identities by breaking away from normative restrictions and subjectivities. Anabela for example, is a foreigner who is not easily categorized neatly into a group. She is a mix between a sex worker and a performance artist. As we see in other female characters, there is no definite division that groups them into discreet categories; often times they fit the characteristics of more than one.

As this novel showcases many instances of infidelity and sexual desire outside of marriage, it provides a platform to critique the patriarchy and its views on gender and sexual practices. The following excerpt exemplifies this critique,

Glória, seu doctor, é uma necessidade social, devia ser considerada de utilidade pública pela Intendência como o Grêmio Rui Barbosa, a Euterpe 13 de Maio, a Santa Casa de Misericórdia. Glória exerce importante função na sociedade. Com a simples ação de sua presença na janela, com o passar de quando em quando pela rua, ela eleva a um nível superior um dos aspectos mais sérios da vida da cidade: sua vida sexual. Educa os jovens no gosto à beleza e dá dignidade aos sonhos dos maridos de mulheres feias, infelizmente

grande maioria em nossa cidade, às suas obrigações matrimoniais que, de outra maneira, seriam insuportável sacrifício. (177-178)

The quote, among others in the text, reveals a harsh criticism towards the normative construction of marriage, which often meant wealthy land owners marrying young respectable women, and men continuously circulating new relationships with prostitutes or women from the town. The central couple of the novel, Gabriela and Nacib, will have a failed marriage because of Nacib's one-sided implementation of women's societal roles. Most married couples are not presented as ideal, but as models that demonstrate what is lacking and outdated for the new times that call for a transition in terms of cultural views on relationships and gender.

Known as the most famous lover in Ilheus, Gloria placed a price on sex and love, and detached herself from the romanticized version of love, and as a consequence of this, was also able to change man's social role. An example of this is her first sexual encounter with Josué. After having sex, Josué declared his love and began his gentleman's speech where he described his economic situation as a poor teacher who would offer a life of love in his small rented apartment. Josué assumed that being intimate with Gloria meant that she would be tied to him and would leave the Colonel; however, she immediately rejected Josué's proposition. Instead, she paid him after sex. She requested that he buy a new pair of shoes for himself as a present from her. Thereby, not only did Josué become the lover of another man's lover, but was treated by Gloria the same way that she was treated by the Colonel. Gloria subverts the power dynamic involved with sex for pay, as well as separating sex from love, an option more easily accessible to men in the novel. The critique in Gloria's actions depicts how easily it is to glide from the normative to the non-normative. Especially in an environment where few have many resources, and others have nothing but what their body offers.

The next group of women that I will discuss is that of those that came from powerful families, fortune and prestige. They are represented in the novel as having the least amount of freedom, choices, and ultimately, access to happiness. Bobby J. Chamberlain writes that the “Ilheense woman of 1925 possessed little real power or control over her own life as long as she remained in her “proper” place” (72). For women of 1925, their social class dictated her life options, and as she accepted her role within the family, also became part of the system of control. Possessing agency in selecting a husband, and the social role one opts to follow, is exemplified by Ofensia. One of the most developed characters in the novel, Ofensia became somewhat of a legend in Ilheus due to her meeting and courtly love with the Emperor Pedro II in the previous century. According to the legend told by Ari Santos as part of his attempt to recreate the previous glory, prestige and position shared by his family before they were defeated politically in Ilheus, they met in a party in Bahia, and the Emperor began to frequent her house in the hope of seeing her. Their love affair only consisted of looks, sighs and unsaid promises. When he returned to the court in Portugal, she tried to persuade her family to relocate to join him. However, her brother, who was also in charge of defending the family honor, prevented the move, thus preventing her from becoming the Emperor’s lover. In the end, her brother was a war hero and she died a virgin, always thinking of the “royal beard.” Ofensia is applauded for defying societal expectations of marriage in protest. She chose to become the Emperor’s lover, and once her brother denied her the chance, she decided to remain single and unobtainable to any other man until her death. Moved by the desire to consume her erotic cravings for the Emperor, Ofensia ruptures the patriarchal power over a woman’s coupling, and chooses to be a rebellious agent and defies the expectations of marriage and motherhood. On one hand, she remained in her home and lived under her brother’s control, and on the other, she was willing to be a lover and a dead asset to her

family by rejecting marriage and motherhood. Ofenisia is an example, of how women who are pinnacle examples of normativity, also challenges in diverse ways its boundaries.

It is clear to the reader that *Gabriela, cravo e canela* offers a rich setting for diverse female characters and experiences. Another female character that I discuss is Malvina, particularly, because of her feminist potential. Malvina is a beautiful young woman, with a landowner father and a family name. Malvina's ideas are quite radical for 1925, and yet align with the feminist movement that will begin to take shape around the first half of the twentieth century. The future for Malvina in Ilheus is clear; suffer punishment like Sinhàzinha, who was killed by her husband for cheating, forever remain a virgin like Ofenisia, or live a life of suffering and limitation as a wife like her mother and friends. She demonstrates an interest in knowledge and a longing that cannot be satisfied. The chapter titles and introductory poems are often analyzed as a direct influence of *cordel* literature in Amado's novel. Chapter Three in particular is titled "The Secret of Malvina (Born for a Great Destiny, a Prisoner Always in her Garden)". In the introductory poem, it is evident that marriage has objectified women like Malvina, whose purpose and use is to provide nourishment, housework and sexual release. The poem also highlights a predetermined future, and is very direct in describing the use of her body in marriage, where she will be assigned a home and bear children. Although she may be surrounded by commodities, her lifestyle is not representative of her expectations. With Malvina, we have a female character that initially followed all of the normative patterns of behavior regarding her class and sex. However, her silent defiance and beliefs, and her actions at the end, ultimately lead Malvina to represent a feminist voice within the text.

It is my belief that within these novels, we see evidence of the beginnings of feminist thought and the need for women to have more options in society. Both Tita and Malvina must

distance themselves from the home and the responsibilities placed on them in order to have the freedom to choose their own identity as women, their partners, and their way of life. When Tita began to consciously consider her freedom, she began to analyze her hands as a symbol of choice and not obligation.

Como un bebé las analizaba y las reconocía como propias. Las podía mover a su antojo, pero aún no sabía qué hacer con ellas, aparte de tejer. Nunca había tenido tiempo de detenerse a pensar en estas cosas. Al lado de su madre, lo que sus manos tenían que hacer estaba fríamente determinado, no había dudas. Tenía que levantarse, vestirse, prender el fuego en la estufa, preparar el desayuno, alimentar a los animales, lavar los trastes, hacer las camas, preparar la comida, lavar los trastes, planchar la ropa, preparar la cena, lavar los trastes, día tras día, año tras año. Sin detenerse un momento, sin pensar si eso era algo que les correspondía. Al verlas ahora libres de las órdenes de su madre no sabía qué pedirles que hicieran, nunca lo había decidido por sí misma. (114)

Through Tita's altering moment, we can observe the result of a lifestyle devoid of choice. It is here, where Tita has been able to have her own space to really think about her desires, that she is paralyzed. It is not that she has never recognized what she wants, but that she is able, for the first time, to not only feel but also act as she wishes. The quote is a fundamental description that allows the female voice in this novel to take consciousness of her subjectivity, and decide how she wishes to direct her life; this is a critical step towards a feminist thought. During this same time of self-discovery, John requests that Tita explain to him in writing why she does not speak any more, to which she states, "[p]orque no quiero" 'because I do not want to' immediately followed by the narrator's claim, "Tita con estas tres palabras había dado el primer paso hacia la libertad" (122). Malvina is an example in *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, where she too gains a

consciousness about her what she wants to be in life, and decides to make her own destiny in a new city. It is precisely the act of gaining a consciousness about their own being that empowers both women to have a say about their future. Feminist ideology is clearly present in Tita and Malvina, as they question the structures that oppress them, and regain their agency.

In comparison to Ofensia, Gloria and Malvina, the women in *Como agua para chocolate* are divided based on their degree of power, and their relationship to Mamá Elena. Mamá Elena is the idealized and coveted Mexican woman, who directly contradicts all that is desirable in a wife, and demanded from the patriarchy. Mamá Elena is the castrator, the female version of a male. She becomes the enforcer by maintaining order and demanding obedience and respect. Strangely enough, Mamá Elena also plays a critical reversed role in the novel because she is the means by which to criticize the patriarchy. As narrated, Tita best describes her mother by stating that “Indudablemente, tratándose de partir, dismantelar, desmembrar, desolar, destetar, desjarretar, desbaratar o desmadrar algo, Mamá Elena era una maestra” (101). With a destructive description presented by Tita, it is no surprise that throughout the novel, Mamá Elena is a character that silences, disciplines, and limits. Through Mamá Elena, it becomes evident how detrimental traditional gender models have been for women. Although all the women in one point or another in the novel, defy the prescribed gender roles, in the end, the only two characters, Gertrudis and Tita, that challenge and modify gender and sexuality, will obtain happiness.

Present scholarship on the novels have noted the power struggle of the sexes and the use of food as a means to express what is repressed, their sexuality. What has been overlooked is the intersections and the effects of the erotic on markers of identity, such as gender, and how the erotic has much more to contribute to the discourses of resistance besides being the means to

carry an idea. Both *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate* provide instances where gender breaks away from its tight normative restrictions and begins to provide alternative gender constructions that incorporate erotic expression. The novels also present a platform of reform for gender by criticizing the institution of marriage and its archaic views based on old customs. With characters such as Gloria, the text subvert the sexual power dynamics within relationships, while Ofensia defies the expectations of motherhood. Women like Malvina, and to a certain extent, Mamá Elena, are representative of feminist ideology by seeking independence from male authorities. In addition, both works provide the beginnings of feminist thought, and highlight the necessity for women to have more options in society. I conclude that the presence and influence of erotic desire creates an environment where gender is more porous and less policed. I find that most of the woman represented in the works, both reproduce and challenge normative views on gender and sexuality. Moreover, both Amado and Esquivel propose that all of the female subjects must reclaim their erotic desire in order to defy their destiny and have control over the construction of their identity.

Erotic desire and pleasure in this chapter are deeply connected to appetite. As a conduit for erotic expression, food becomes a means by which to explore and transform sexual self-realizations, and not simply the passage to normative forms of femininity. Erotic emotions that are tightly controlled find public venues where in full arousal, also cause a sensibility for gender issues. The works expose the unequal distribution of power within relationships, including the unbalanced manifestation of sexuality based on sex. With a wide exposition of characters, the two texts provide diverse, ample examples that drive the need to modify relationships and social expectations based on sex and gender. The appetite erotic desire provokes, proves that it can be supervised, but never completely expunged. Humans want to act upon their sexual appetites, and

food with both Gabriela and Tita, is a means of expression, of regional knowledge and influence. Nationally, food is closely tied to the political, and as a result, these two novels utilize a long tradition based on state representations, to put forth the erotic.

Cannibalism in *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, and *Como agua para chocolate*, is a powerful metaphor that references defiance and social empowerment. Using food as a conduit, cannibalism occurs as both Tita and Gabriela enter the minds and bodies of others, to have long lasting effects on their perceptions of society and themselves. Lasting power exist within these influences, because they reference nontraditional forms of expression and validation, such as emotion and the domestic space of the kitchen. It is easy to interpret cannibalism as sexual consumption, but what is not so evident, is how cannibalism can also occur in the mind. *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate* depict through their sex, societal forms of oppression, but they also provide new means to imagine the erotic: eroticism, as a source of knowledge and empowerment.

Chapter 3: Challenging Traditional Gender Roles Through Erotic Androgynous Identities

in *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* and *Eu tu eles*

En casi todas las tradiciones que desembocan en nuestra cultura tiene la mujer una culpa. ¿Por qué esa aversión, ese odio, a ella, tan amada? ¿Cuál sería la razón?

Juan José Arreola

Es bien curioso: cuando te pienso, pienso en tus manos, en tu boca, en tus pechos, tus piernas, en alguna parte de ti. No es hasta que te veo de nuevo que todo se reúne en una persona específica que respira y piensa y está viva. Eso me da pavor, saber que aparte de mí, existes.

Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda

Emilio Pacheco once wrote that Rosario Castellanos was the first woman writer in Mexico that understood the double condition of what it meant to be woman and Mexican at the same time. This is a startling assertion considering that Castellanos' literary production took place in the middle of the twentieth century. Mexico's and Brazil's female literary production fiercely emerged in the twentieth century under a climate characterized by canonical, male-produced discourses widely circulated in a global literary market. The climate for women to voice their ideas was set into motion as access to publication aligned with the cultural revolutions that included the circulation and rise of feminist ideologies and the invention of the pill as a method of birth control. Furthermore, groups began to reorganize with the end of dictatorial governments and women's groups gained further force when 1977 was designated as the year of women by the United Nations.

Female literary production focused on issues pertinent to women, such as social, political, and economic inequalities, the body, gender and sexuality, and race, and also included a

deliberate incorporation of the erotic. Within the literary production that treated issues of eroticism, many works presented the reader with a number of political projects that made cultural limitations evident. As a result, the second part of the twentieth century saw a series of rewriting projects, one in particular involved rewriting the “official history” in order to incorporate multiple histories that would better represent the past. Manuel F. Medina in “La batalla de los sexos: estrategias de desplazamiento en *Entre Pancho Villa y una mujer desnuda* de Sabina Berman” reaffirms that Sabina Berman is part of and a product of a rewriting movement that arose in Mexico in the 1980s and produced an extensive number of traditional works characterized “por su intento constante de renovar versiones tradicionales de la historia, revisar los mitos, reflexionar sobre la manera tradicional de escribir históricos, entre otro” (107). Mexico’s writers became critical of social, racial, and economic inequalities, the outcome of the Mexican Revolution, and violence propagated by the government, such as the student massacres of Tlatelolco in 1968. In the 1970s, Brazilian female writers also positioned the female body as a focal point for political consciousness. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto states that for many female writers, their mission was to deconstruct women’s social roles, myths, and stereotypes and to defy traditional patterns of female behavior (3). These mythic roles had defined women for centuries, assigning their sexual libido based on race and social class (Ferreira-Pinto 3). As new agents of their own bodies, women embarked on a quest for identity and emotional, sexual, and intellectual self-realization (Ferreira-Pinto 3). Unlike *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* ‘Between Villa and a Naked Woman’ (Sabina Berman 1993), the Brazilian film *Eu Tu Eles* ‘Me You Them’ (Andrucha Waddington 2000) is not typically analyzed as part of engaging with the revision of history. The absence of women in history brings with it strong discourses of control, representation, and agency, and as Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price phrase, the effects for

woman are “historical oppression and disempowerment” (3). To engage with history deals precisely with the controversial matters of representation that needs to be addressed in order for women and men to reclaim their own histories, bodies, and desires.

In order to reclaim the unofficial histories, personal experiences and collective group organizations need to be awakened. Collecting detailed records which describe the beginning of women’s organization in the twentieth century is a tremendous challenge for contemporary researchers. In the Mexican case, Anna Macías reports that before the 1970s, scholarship had little interest in what women did. Even when Mexican women had played a significant role in national crises such as the independence movement of 1808-1821 or the Revolution of 1910-1920, most historians had little to say about their participation (xi-xii). Subsequently, there is a limited amount of texts dedicated to women’s groups, and often times they must incorporate diverse information in order to have a fuller picture of women’s political participation due to the lack of documentation of women’s national involvement. Tuñón Pablos asserts that there are historical limitations concerning the representation of women’s participation in Mexico’s history and strongly argues that one should be aware that just because women are absent from historical sources does not mean that they have been absent from the process (11). The limited existing records of women’s participation in history, creates a critical obstacle when attempting to narrate a fuller image of women’s participation within the nation.

Limited records, however, do not preclude the construction of an analysis on women’s national participation and their lives. In particular, when beginning a discussion about women’s attempts to engage with the circulating discourses of sexuality, making translucent the traditional views on femininity is essential in order to see what is being challenged. A critique of traditional views on femininity implies returning to master narratives and their representation of the female

body, sexuality, and desire. These master narratives are critical because they provide both the ideological foundation for a newly independent nation to imagine itself and the ideal model to emulate. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto examines four established Brazilian stereotypes of female sexuality propagated by literature: the sensual mulatto woman, the seductive and unfaithful woman, the pure, white married woman, and the perverted and/or frustrated lesbian (8). As Ferreira-Pinto asserts, these stereotypes are traced to the Romantic period of the nineteenth century, described by the author as the time when myth-building literature was created in order to construct a new imaginary for a group or society whose purpose was to explain the nation's origins and identity (9).

Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions* writes that foundational novels in Latin America “were part of a general bourgeois project to hegemonize a culture in formation . . . that made a place for everyone, as long as everyone knew his or her place” (29). This is particularly true for the working class, women, and people of color. As exemplified by Ferreira-Pinto's categories, women are either virgins who become mothers and wives, or prostitutes who are sexualized and placed in public circulation. By extension, in Ferreira-Pinto's categories, from the onset, the virgin/whore dichotomy is deeply rooted in race and class. The national foundational romances provided a devastating challenge to poor and black women, women who endure essentialist identities even today, such as with the rise of the sex tourism industry, where groups like Europeans travel to Brazil with the preconceived expectation of finding a sensual mulatto woman.

Similar to the Brazilian models of femininity, Mexico's models are also connected to patriarchal desire. The principal difference is that within the inscription of sex and gender, hate and repulsion are strong masculine emotions to overturn in the Mexican experience and as

recorded by writers such as Juan José Arreola and Federico Gamboa. The prescribed gender norms for Mexican women are deeply embedded in a love/hate relationship that patriarchy has institutionalized with women's bodies. Julia Tuñón Pablos explains that due to their physiognomy, women in Mexico are participants in a double reality game where they have been sublimated in myth and are subordinated subjects in daily life (13). Traditionally, Mexican identity affiliates itself with historical events primordially accredited to men, such as the War of Independence and the Mexican Revolution of 1910. According to Tuñón Pablos, the historic model that has been offered to women has mirrored a reflection of what she *should* be. As a result, the proposed ideal alienates her from her reality and from her options. One of the principal repercussions of identifying women based on their physiognomy is the conflicting view where she is admired but feared, sublimed but hated. The connection between hate and women's sexuality is best exemplified by Octavio Paz's analysis on the cultural manifestations of the female sex with linguistics. He believes that Mexican culture sees the female's outer sex organs as never-closing wounds, a *rajada* 'slit' representing what men can never be if they are to retain their masculine position. The slit refers to the verb *rajarse*, which also means to turn back on your word, to be a coward (42). Because of this view, women are feared and considered inferior to men. A clear example of how hatred is projected onto female bodies is the example of Doña Marina, or la Malinche as she is commonly referred to. She is one of the first recorded indigenous mothers of Mexico who is not forgiven for her alliance with Hernán Cortés. Once again playing with the meanings of words, Paz writes that Mexicans are sons of Doña Marina, or also commonly referred to as *la Chingada*, of the violated mother, and as a product of rape, Mexicans continue to refuse to confront their past (94-95). With a violent national past, and due

to the consecration of indigenous and Spanish religious deities, femininity is defined as a recipient and passive creative figure by Paz in Mexico,

Prostituta, diosa, gran señora, amante, la mujer transmite o conserva, pero no crea, los valores y energías que le confían la naturaleza o la sociedad. En un mundo hecho a la imagen de los hombres, la mujer es sólo un reflejo de la voluntad y querer masculinos. Pasiva, se convierte en diosa, amada, ser que encarna los elementos estables y antiguos del universo: la tierra, madre y virgen; activa, es siempre función, medio, canal. La feminidad nunca es un fin es sí mismo, como lo es la hombría. (39)

Little value placed on femininity is problematic. Paz describes the Mexican interpretation of femininity as a justificatory means for her daily obligations and limitations.

Popular gender archetypes of Mexican women include la Malinche, who is characterized solely by her sexuality and who according to official history, betrayed her indigenous roots during the Conquest by affiliating herself with Hernán Cortés, both as a translator and as a lover. Although she gave birth to one of the first recorded mestizos of Mexico, she continues to be despised. The second important Mexican archetype is the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is asexual and represents a motherly figure full of kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness. Lastly, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is viewed by some as asexual and by others as a lesbian, but everyone agrees that she represents the intellectual. She is considered a literary genius who also questioned the state and the Church for their treatment of women, yet (not surprisingly) she is the least employed representation of women in practice. As evidenced by these three figures, there is no medium or compromise between being a sexual being and being a mother. Women must opt either to be consumed by a motherly identity or to expose their sexual desire and be seen as improper or

prostitute-like. The Malinche and Virgin of Guadalupe gender models support the virgin/whore dichotomy, while excluding the intellectual woman as rare and unusual.

As I consider both the play *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* and the film *Eu tu eles* to be texts that should be read in terms of historical rewriting taking place in the second half of the twenty century, this chapter analyzes two national myths. One is a national hero, Pancho Villa, and the other, is the dry, desolate region of Brazil, the Sertão. Both myths include rural citizens, in particular, citizens who are saturated with hyper-masculine manifestations of the macho. The process of challenging history and incorporating new meanings is presented in the two works under analysis which are moved by erotic desire. In both works, I examine the objectives which are grounded in rethinking History and its national myths. The rewriting process requires a certain degree of deconstruction in order to see more clearly the mythic crutches on gender and its paradigms. In an environment where female representation is suppressed and women's participation in history is excluded, females continue to challenge normative views on gender and sexuality and display feminist objectives, even when the characters are not associated with or aware of the movement. In this chapter, I analyze a play and a film as examples of how the erotic motif propels a transformation of gender practices. Furthermore, I identify androgyny as a common thread between the two and analyze how characteristics of both genders are effortlessly present within one body. The use of androgynous elements are used as a form of satirical critique, however, I view it as an inevitable point where gender and sex characteristics are in continuous flux in spaces that allows for them to be further highlighted. Androgyny in both works is a form by which national myths are destabilized and, as a result, allow gender to become porous, permitting variations of it to coexist simultaneously within a heteronormative scheme.

One of my concerns in this chapter is to demonstrate that feminist ideology is continuously set on stage, and that precisely through works such as *Eu tu eles* and *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, there is a persistent search for a female space. The motivation to break free from strict gender confinements does not fade simply because the movement has not fully succeeded. There are many surrounding factors in our environment, as well as our deep desire to possess our own bodies, that mark the film and the play as a repossession of national historical figures, such as the revolutionary hero and the Sertanejo, in order to recreate versions of history that are more complete.¹⁸

Androgynous Eroticism: *Eu tu eles*

Eu tu eles takes place in the Northeast, an overtly politically area with a long artistic tradition that highlights the social injustices and inequalities. In order to begin a discussion on gender in the area, it is first essential to situate the film within its political and cinematographic history that has established particular trends of representing the area and its citizens. In Chapter Two, I discussed the Northeast, in particular, the arid region called the Sertão, in relation to regional literature and the droughts, which have induced currents of hunger and migration. In the film, the numerous manifestations of the erotic are powerful particularly because they are situated within a landscape of extremes and emptiness. As in Chapter Two, I begin a discussion of hardships and artistic interpretations.

The filmic themes of hunger and the representation of the Northeastern backlands, the Sertão, are traced to the first intellectual cinematic movement in Brazil called *Cinema Novo*. Although critics do not agree on the exact date of its origin, it is believed to have initiated in the late 1950s to early 1960s. *Cinema Novo* included three faces, and its first concentrated on the

¹⁸ An individual from the Sertão.

socio-economic and politic issues of the Northeast. The movement was grounded in political and national objectives, intended to develop a national consciousness that would ultimately lead to the bettering of the country.

Cinema Novo throughout its thematic trajectory has brought attention to the Sertão and its perils and reclaimed this body of land and its inhabitants as part of the Brazilian experience. In the film *Vidas Secas* (1963), the viewer sees the hardships of working families in a political structure where they suffer from starvation and, lack of access to education and are forced to migrate around the Sertão in search of work due to the droughts. Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, for example assert that *Vidas Secas* was one of the most important films in the first phase of *Cinema Novo*, which is characterized by dealing with problems confronting “the urban and rural lumpenproletariat” (33). The historically marked context of the Sertão was transferred by the intellectual movement as a center point for the representation of Brazil, its folklore, and the national deprivation of the rights to its citizens. As Carlos Diegues states, the Sertão is a place where authentic Brazilian voices can be heard. Glauber Rocha presented the aesthetic of hunger in a 1965 treatise, and although it took place during the second phase of the *Cinema Novo*, it shed light on the first phase as well: “*Cinema Novo* has narrated, described, poeticized, discussed, analyzed, and stimulated the themes of hunger. Characters eating dirt and roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat” (68). In a state of extreme physical deprivation, Rocha assimilates the theme of hunger to the nation’s cultural deprivation by denouncing Brazil’s neo-colonial oppression and calling on Brazilians to take both their political and cinematic destiny in their own hands (68).

Ivana Bentes exemplifies the role of the Brazilian backlands and the shanty towns found throughout all of Brazil by stating that “the *Sertão* and the *favelas* have always been the ‘other

side' of modern and positivist Brazil. They are places of misery, mysticism, and the disinherited...They are both real and symbolic lands which to a large degree invoke Brazilian imagery; they are lands in crisis, where desperate or rebellious characters live or wander; they are signs of a revolution to come or of a failed modernity" (121). At times the Sertão has been represented like a utopia with surreal settings, microcosms, independent of the nation, with their own struggles and picturesque backdrops. Popular locations in Brazil, such as the urban cities of the Southeast and the backlands of the Northeast, once important sites of cultural reflection in *Cinema Novo*, provide the backdrop for contemporary films to yoke themselves to a particular representational legacy.

Andrucha Waddington puts forth a thematic foundation that presents a stagnant depiction of the characters and the Sertão which reiterates traditional gender roles and presents a landscape in misery. Anthony L. Hall reveals a stunning depiction of the drought zone of Northeast Brazil, writing that the effects of a drought is

... widespread rural unemployment, poverty, starvation and subsequent migration from affected areas. Such characteristics, while to some extent a permanent feature of rural society in the *Sertão*, the interior of the Northeast, become seriously accentuated during prolonged periods of scarce rainfall. (1)

It is precisely the interpretation of "permanence" in relation to misery that is questioned in the second part of *Eu tu eles* in connection to other social themes. Social inequality and the disparate between classes are as extreme as its geographical areas. Besides the weather, another element that makes radical change difficult is the political history of the Northeast and, the system called *coronelismo*. Harrison Oliveira in his *Reflexões sobre a miséria do Nordeste* explains that the Northeast's social composition is exactly what makes *coronelismo* so difficult to eradicate: poor

masses, being the majority, and the elite, which is the smallest group. The extreme division of social classes results in the elite circles who are “bem posicionada, absorvendo todos os privilégios políticos, sociais e econômicos, controlando, enfeixando em suas mãos todos os poderes político e económico” (68). Due to the socio-political structures and geography, change is what many locals are still waiting for. On a national level, Harrison writes that four centuries after colonization, the Northeast also has still yet to receive its just reward for its sacrifices and the efforts that it invested in creating the greatness of Brazil (71). The challenges both to be awarded recognition by the nation and to be valued, are consistent themes present in Chapter Two of this dissertation as well.

Luiz Zanin Oricchio writes that traditionally, the Sertão has been used to depict the nation in crisis (141). Likewise, Ivana Bentes discusses how the Sertão has been historically seen as a barren and unruly land, with destitute citizens who have nothing to lose and who are ready to rebel, causing a geopolitical history of violence. However, she also traces the abrupt change from 1964 to 2000, where the Sertão was inserted into a context where misery was consumed as an element of “typicality” or “naturalness” and where there was nothing to be done (123-124). Naturalizing violence is problematic in the film industry, as Bentes describes how some contemporary films seek to popularize and globalize the industry by dealing with traditional local subjects wrapped in an international aesthetic. This in turn projects a friendly Sertão where violence is internalized and religion and myths emerge as a natural culture (124-126). I do not believe that *Eu tu eles* essentializes or romanticizes Northeastern history and violence. On the contrary, it presents the Sertão in a passive aggressive manner that requires the viewer to possess background information in order to appreciate the script and the scenes.

As discussed, *Cinema Novo* presented macrocosmic national issues through the microcosm of the Northeastern in order to represent the socio-political reality that needed reform, and that conversely made Brazil unique. The films of the first phase of the *Cinema Novo* movement not only represented the hardships of many Northeasterners, but also became both foundational texts that recorded Northeastern history and models for future films.

Among a diverse range of social themes, contemporary Brazilian cinema either continues to portray the Sertão in dark overtones of hunger and death, or provides alternatives for reimagining the backlands by representing it through comedy and stories of survival and success. The film, *Eu tu eles*, presents a plot that challenges traditional representations of the Sertão by redefining family structures and gender roles. It includes a process of disidentifying with stories of fatalism, where the Sertão needs to be abandoned. The backlands, commonly depicted within a stagnant space, *Eu tu eles* provides a productive one where new meanings can be expressed. Desire and happiness are defined by the film in ways that challenge normativity, and the Sertão is legitimized as a productive space.

Directed by Andrucha Waddington, *Eu tu eles* narrates the socio-political challenges of emulating a typical family within the traditional model of mother, father, and children. It incorporates several stages where the main character begins as a single mother and ends as part of a polygamous family. The plot begins with the emigration from the Sertão to Brasília, of a pregnant Darlene, who has been left by the local colonel. The film quickly transitions to Darlene's return back to the Northeast with her son. The film records Darlene's attempt to make a good living arrangement for herself and her son by marrying an older man, Osias. In return for accepting his marriage proposal, Osias promises Darlene his house. She is quickly disillusioned by her marriage arrangement when she realizes that she bears the sole responsibility for

sustaining her family. During the day she works in the cane fields, and during the evenings she takes care of all the domestic duties. Darlene is confronted by her failure to succeed in the Northeast for a second time, and she is absorbed by sorrow, unhappiness, and economic hardship. Unintentionally, and by coincidence, other men begin to join her family. By the end, Darlene lives with three men and has four children, and all contribute emotionally and economically in a way that allows Darlene, the men, and the children to have access to economic stability and happiness. The polygamous relationship permits the family to meet its economic and emotional needs, which are originally restricted to class and location, producing a transformation of traditional views of masculinity and female desire.

Based on when the film was made, at the end of the twentieth century, and in comparison to other erotic Brazilian films made at the mid-century such as *Toda nudez será castigada*, there is a clearly marked difference in the way the erotic is represented, beginning with a Freudian interpretation based on taboo, control, and excess, and moving to a more acceptable interpretation of erotic desire and practice, including gender role reversals.¹⁹ If the main objective of the erotic is the production of pleasure, one can agree that the power of eroticism resides in its ability to permeate all social barriers, because pleasure is sought, after all, by all individuals. Therefore, emotions, and pleasure, in both works under analysis, possess equal, if not greater, importance for the characters as economic security. As a result, desire proves to be an impetus for change within the realm of private relationships, as well as in the interpretation of the Sertão.

¹⁹ The original a screen-play for this film was written by Nelson Rodrigues, a writer who constantly engages the erotic.

Bert Cardullo published the sole article about the film in his book *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art* and describes how the film originated.²⁰ He writes that the director did not create the story line, but based his film on an actual story from the Northeastern state of Bahia, where Marlene de Silva Saboia was interviewed by a television station in 1995; a special broadcast on her unusual domestic arrangement was aired in Brazil (196). For Cardullo, *Eu tu eles* represents a human drama about what it means to be a contemporary woman (201). This conclusion invites the question of kind of experience is Cardullo referring to.

Specifically, the experience of a woman belonging to a lower class in the interior of the Northeast, in the Sertão, is one full of hardships and few educational opportunities. The reality of being a woman and a citizen from the backlands is illustrated by Nancy Scheper-Hughes in *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. In her anthropological work, she reports that in the Northeast in 1987, 47.2% of the population spread over nine states remained illiterate, and the Northeast contributed a quarter to all Latin American child mortalities (31). In the *agreste* zone of the Northeast, where sugar cane is cultivated, men have developed an anxiety towards females working in the cane fields for several reasons. Some men claim that having their wives in the fields proves that they are unable to sustain their families (50). As a result, they feel humiliated. Having to place their wives in extremely physical and harsh working conditions adds to their feelings of humiliation and guilt (50). Furthermore, Scheper-Hughes reports that often, when women and children work, they do so without contracts, on a daily wage system. They are easily cheated and not offered any work benefits, causing the organized men to see them as sellouts and potential threats due to their lower wage

²⁰ The origin of the film is originally explained in the film by the director.

settlement.²¹ In her book, Scheper-Hughes presents many scenarios of single mothers who do not have a partner to lessen the economic crisis found in their homes. Due to death, separation or migration, this pattern is clearly visible within films depicting the area, including *Eu tu eles*.

The Sertão is a semi-arid region in the process of becoming a desert. True to its representation, it is an area filled with hardship, especially since the government has not industrialized the zone to the point where the droughts are not an issue. Chris Weedon in his book on feminism, writes that “women’s subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance of them, feminism generates theoretical perspectives from which the dominant can be criticized and new possibilities envisaged” (5-6). The element of everyday life is precisely why *Eu tu eles* is an important film. It is based on a true story, and it treats a Brazilian region where that is easy for other parts of the country to overgeneralize and view as subordinate. It is within the quotidian realm of existence where any gender changes have a significant value and reach the most number of individuals. This film does not dismantle all regional stereotypes; it is, nonetheless, a regional and erotic piece that deconstructs gender and sexuality and challenges the collage of contemporary and master narratives that depict gender practices as passive and conservative, for most lower class subjects.

I divide *Eu tu eles* into two parts. The first is a thematic foundation that presents a stagnant depiction of the characters and the Sertão, where it reiterates traditional gender roles and narratives that present a landscape in misery. This section is revealing, both in its imitation of how the region and its citizens are represented and imagined. In the opening scenes of the film

²¹ The economics surrounding sugar cane cultivation is an important dynamic that needs to be further analyzed in this film. However, due to the emphasis of this study, I will not be treating the subject at this time.

for example, the audience is introduced to the despot system and lack of opportunities as Darlene, the film's main female character, in her third trimester of pregnancy and dressed as a bride. On her death bed, Darlene's mother gives her a blessing and adds, "que Dios te proteja de ter filha mulher." She leaves her sick mother to go to the town's church, which is deserted, and where her child's father never comes. The town itself is also represented as lacking modern amenities, with dirt roads, few inhabitants, and dilapidated buildings. After Darlene abandons her donkey by the side of the dirt road, she leaves for the city on the back of a commuter truck with a suitcase. Thus far, the audience does not see anything that challenges the traditional family structure, or the national expectations traditionally associated with Sertanejos. One has, however, observed that there is no husband, or children in the poor mud shack, only a mother and a daughter, who will now be a single mother. National expectations include Northeasterners' migrating to the urban meccas of the center, southeastern, and southern parts of Brazil. This is a comfortable position for the nation when people leave the Northeast, it alleviates the pressure of having to confront and act on the needs of that troubled region. With a massive exodus of people, the Northeast does not need to be industrialized, leaving the backlands to continue to be unfertile, undeveloped, and unpopulated. The manner in which the Northeast is imagined by the rest of the country is partly constructed by the belief that Northeasterners are lazy therefore, the area cannot progress. Others imaginings pertaining to gender narrate a discourse of passivity, or male chauvinism, while women are typically portrayed as followers.

Three years later, on the same dirt road, on a similar truck with the same suitcase, Darlene returns to find that her mother has passed away. She also finds that many things in the Sertão remain the same. There are deserted areas, dirt roads, old trucks which carry workers, the presence of donkeys as a form of transportation, and small isolated homes on the outskirts of tiny

towns. It takes her all day, walking most of the way, to reach her mother's home. A narrative of underdevelopment dominates the representation of the Sertão, as the desolate landscape dominates the scenes and shot after shot is taken to depict the slow travel time.

Darlene's intentions are to receive her mother's blessing for her son and return to Brasília, the capital of Brazil. However, on her way to her mother's, Darlene encounters an older gentleman, Osias, whom she must know from before, and comments on his newly built house, joking that it is theirs. A few days later, well aware of her intentions to stay for only a short term, Osias proposes to Darlene. The relationship is a literal contract of protection by the establishment of family. Within the marriage proposal, Osias reminds Darlene that she already has a fatherless child and no home, emphasizing, "caza comigo, e a casa é sua." Looking at their age difference, it is clear why both agree to marry: Darlene for security and Osias for companionship.

As time progresses, the film presents scene after scene of hardship, and the story line induces a discourse of failure and gender inequality. Long days, from dawn to dusk, Darlene must work. Osias on the other hand, lies on his hammock all day listening to his small radio while Darlene works in the cane fields during the day and returns home in the evening to cook, cut the wood, fetch the water, and take care of her child. The film then transitions to about two years later, depicting Darlene physically exhausted and emotionally drained, fed up with the impossible lifestyle of the Sertão. Next to the water hole that is muddy and drying up, she exclaims, "ni agua ni nada aqui presta," referring to a life in the vast brown landscape of the Sertão.

In an attempt to return to the city for a second time, Darlene decides to give her older son to his white, landowning father, a colonel. The film does not show the colonel's face, and focusing instead on his belongings: nice boots, jeans, a knife, a gun, and a hat. Darlene's children, in contrast, barely wear shoes. Their worlds could not be more different. As the colonel opens a gate and takes the boy, Darlene remains outside. Being on the outside is a strong metaphor that can also be applied to the socio-economic hierarchy in place in the area, where a few have always owned the land and are the only ones truly benefiting from it.

On her way to leave the Sertão, Osias, rushes to look for Darlene on his donkey, and it takes him all day to catch up with her. Without a fight, he makes her walk back to the house, not arriving until the next day. Up to this point, Darlene has followed all the prescribed gender roles and family paradigms, only to have every aspect of normativity be a disappointment. In a white wedding dress, she must travel to Brasília alone, as she has been abandoned by her lover. In an attempt to give herself and her child a traditional family structure, she is left to be the sole laborer of the house. The only gift Osias promises to Darlene (in exchange for marriage), he takes back, "a casa foi o trato de casamento, mas agora que tu é mia, tu casa volta a ser mia." Economics is what drives such unhappiness. Subsequently, Darlene barely talks or smiles, as she works to benefit the property owners, both the colonel and her husband, working from dusk till dawn. According to regional folklore and national stereotypes, Northeastern men are lazy and, as a result, do not succeed; they need others to make critical decisions for them. The colonel, who owns most of the land in the area, appears temporarily to claim his son. Sadly, only he can offer the boy an education and a future.

Darlene is a hard working woman, but she is not the sensuous woman often associated with the Northeast. She is fuller and mestizo in appearance. The film never highlights her skills.

Instead, it emphasizes the long work days, the poverty, and the lack of technological advances. In the first part of the film, the Sertão is in misery and its citizens have a miserable life where most social forces are set against them.

Parallels of representation exist between Darlene's life and life in the Sertão; few work opportunities, heavy droughts, lifelessness, misery, patriarchal colonels, and many citizens in need who must continue to migrate out of the backlands. Up to this point, the film draws upon a literary and filmic history of representation where the Sertão is a living hell, a place that gives birth to horrendous stories of survival. Similar to other contemporary films about the arid region, such as *Suely*, the Sertão is represented as old, stagnant, never changing, poor, and dusty. *Suely* presents a story line, similar to *Eu tu eles*, of a young woman who returns to the Northeast, to Ceara, with her child from the Southeast, in hopes of opening a small business with her partner. Soon, she finds herself abandoned, living in a house with multiple generations of women. By the end of the film, she migrates out of the Northeast once again, alone, hoping for a fresh start. Leaving the Northeast is precisely where the story lines greatly differ. *Eu tu eles* takes an approach similar to *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, where the main characters stay in the Northeast and make the necessary changes in order to survive and achieve happiness. The decision to stay and reimagine the Sertão, which at first glance appears to be an illusion and unrealistic, is actually the starting point that breaks the national mythic expectation of migration. The national myth of poverty calls for the exile of Northeasterners and the static conditions of the Northeast. I believe that what makes this film stand out is its ability to take the same spaces and characters and rewrite the narrative and the space into one of possibility, and one that provides room for the erotic to take on real political implications of survival while expanding gender and sexuality norms. Darlene is not a woman without scruples, a prostitute. She is a woman who desires to be

touched, loved, and comforted. Her desires are justifiable and within reason for every individual at whatever age, sex, race, and class. The incitation of desire leads her and the men in her life to share a household.

The first part of the film puts forth a very sad, dusty, under developed Sertão with dirt roads, no public transportation, and no potable water or electric system in place. It is also a place with few inhabitants. These representations are classic in *Cinema Novo*, and in other contemporary films treating the Sertão. The national myth is that the Sertão is the problem: its inhabitants are ignorant and chauvinistic and must emigrate to survive. Darlene has played her part well, representing a submissive wife, who does not protest. She sacrifices herself for her children and her marriage, and she also sacrifices her sexual desires as Osias is unwilling to explore his own sexuality. He demonstrates no sexual interest, the camera capturing, for example, how Darlene waits on his hammock for him to make a move as he pretends to be asleep. The camera stands at an angle with ample distance from Darlene, depicting the distance between what she desires and the emotional emptiness she possesses. She stays in her powerless position by giving Osias all of her wages and working physically taxing jobs to take care of the family. As if this were not enough, she must also take care of all the traditional household responsibilities which include cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. From this point on, I argue that what ignites a transformation in the film is precisely the erotic desire within particular characters.

In the second part of the film, I analyze how there is a movement towards replacing the normative performances of gender developed in the first part of the film, as well as how it challenges the cultural and historical contexts, and myths, by blurring gender expectations through androgyny. In particular, what is of importance is to demonstrate how traditional

discourses can be made meaningful by redefining the erotic potential through fluid gender prescriptions. Zezinho, Osias' elderly cousin, is the only person that comforts Darlene in the film. As Darlene begins to give Zezinho some attention, he is completely rejuvenated. Zezinho begins to play youthful games with Darlene to entertain her in her mundane and lonely quotidian chores. These games, ultimately lead to sexual intimacy. For Zezinho, all of his future acts towards Darlene are motivated by his emotions and his intense erotic desire for her. Using his ingenuity and familiarity with Northeastern culture and traditions, he searches for ways to satisfy Darlene's domestic and social needs. Zezinho is able to make successful and lasting modifications in the ways in which gender is performed by duplicating the predominant social fabric of division based on sex and family. Zezinho utilizes the very system which has confined him, turning it on its head as a way to liberate himself and Darlene. He becomes an important figure at this point in the story because he manifests his masculinity completely differently than Osias, a character that is seen more fitting of traditional roles. *Eu tu eles* challenges male gender performance and offers an environment where labor is not divided by gender and sex, but by demand and individual abilities. Osias speaks very little, does no household chores, and expects Darlene to serve him. Zezinho on the other hand, is compassionate, caring, and loving and develops a relationship of equality with Darlene, characteristics that throw his manhood into question and align him more with the feminine side. Osias himself once describes Zezinho's unorthodox masculinity: "é homem mas não é muito não." It is precisely this demasculination based on Zezinho's expression of emotions, his older age, the fact that he has never been married and his life-long dedication to taking care of his sick aunt, that Zezinho relies on to not be considered a threat to Osias. Osias, who does not consider Zezinho a full man, allows him to move into his home and be close to Darlene. He focuses his ingenuity on providing Darlene

some level of comfort, an approach based on emotions that others might see as a sign of weakness, but that the film presents as an alternative power structure.

Zezinho not only provides a different embodiment of emotional masculinity, but also takes the situation a step further by providing family support within the familial structure in the private space of the house. Zezinho willingly helps Darlene by cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of her boy, and also taking Darlene a warm lunch to the cane fields every day on his bike. Raquel, Osias' older sister, describes the situation to Osias as his having gained another wife now that Zezinho has moved into his house. Osias happily agrees, affirming that Zezinho does all the household chores much better than Darlene. Cardullo writes that Osias is not threatened by Zezinho's presence or by his taking up female responsibilities on the contrary, he believes that Osias "is more than happy to have an extra pair of hands to wait on him" (198). The domestication of Zezinho can be attributed to several factors one is the setting (Osias' house desperately needs a person during the day to tend to the chores) and another is the motivation that comes with erotic love. Zezinho is engaged in a love affair with Darlene and, for the first time, has a woman who displays an interest in him despite his age and his lack of earthly possessions.

The examples presented allow the domestic labor role reversals to appear normative precisely because of the inculcation of these androgynous characteristics. Cardullo simply dismisses Darlene as ugly, representing the common stereotypes of women of the backlands. I disagree. If one were to look closely at all of the characters, one would see that while the erotic motif aids in destabilizing normative views and expectations on gender, it is the androgynous element that reinforces and supports such a transition. Darlene is a thick, tall woman with no feminine graces, but she is full of erotic energy and charm. She demonstrates aggressiveness by

making her interests known when she desires sexual intimacy. She initiates all invitations and relationship moves. When it comes to work, she must wear thick, unflattering clothes, covering her head and part of her eyes, and use a thick machete like knife to cut the cane. Darlene, apart from wearing dresses and having long hair, displays many masculine attributes. Zezinho on the other hand, is short, frail, and gentle. He is always smiling and has a keen eye for detail. It is these characteristics that support the idea that multiple gender roles and practices can coexist simultaneously within one individual. Zezinho's sensitivity and knowledge of household chores defaults from a weakness to a strength greatly needed in Darlene's house. As a consequence of the economic despair presented in the first part of the film, none of the characters can afford to sustain many of the dominant gender constructions if they want to continue to live in the Sertão. Zezinho and Osias are older men, perhaps in their fifties, and the work for income available in the area is in the cane fields. This type of work requires long hours, and harsh exposure to the sun. Based on Darlene's stamina and strength, she is the best candidate to work in this space. Therefore, the responsibilities that Darlene would normally hold in the house and that would embody the prescribed gender roles for women are destabilized because they do not fit the model of survival in this case. Instead of Zezinho's seeing himself as feminine, he simply sees his role as filling in the gap of family work needing to be done, when before it was a need barely being addressed and with great difficulty. Zezinho's character does not transform into an alternative man. His power resides in being able to transform gender roles by thriving in the private space while taking a nurturing role. With Zezinho's integration into the household, the story line breaks down traditional stereotypes of Northeastern masculinity and the idea of the "macho." Both Zezinho and Darlene distort what is assumed to be the performance of traditional gender and sexual representations. Darlene takes the alpha dog stance by being the one who approaches each

one of her partners erotically while also having to be the one who provides economically by engaging in a predominantly male work environment that is physically challenging. Darlene does not break the economic control that the Northeastern oligarchy holds over its citizens; however, she learns to modify it in order to survive and thrive.

Two years after Zezinho's child Edinaldo is born, Darlene meets Ciro at a local dance. Ciro finds a job in the cane fields and is allowed by Osias to stay in their home because he brings food, especially food that is a commodity, like meat and cookies. In the home, Ciro begins to challenge Osias with the birth of his own child with Darlene. Although it is unclear how the anxieties and power struggles will be resolved, it is evident that Darlene wants to keep the family together, and that Darlene and Ciro provide the dual income necessary for the family to enjoy leisure activities. I argue that these characters have created a successful family structure that meets their needs and gives them more in the Sertão. Zezinho and Darlene have modified gender roles and disrupted the national imaginary of Northeastern masculinity and female pacification. They have proven that androgynous manifestations of gender exist within normative regimes, and when erotic pleasure is sought after, it leads to the opportunity to deconstruct rigid gender interpretations and to re-inscribe new meanings. It is difficult for many lower class citizens to survive in the Sertão, much less thrive in it. Darlene's polygamous family structure reinforces heteronormativity, but customizes gender to where it sees fit.

Darlene, in this story of daily survival, is loved by three men, in three different ways, thus multiplying the possible erotic and gender experiences from the "I" "you" "them" matrix. All of the men are her allies in fulfilling the needs of a private space, receiving support and affection, and loving with despair and passion. *Eu tu eles* depicts no presence of a feminist movement, but provides in practice what can be the foundation to challenge and redefine the materialization of

gender and sexuality through an erotic motivation. In particular, the presence of what is traditionally abhorred, such as androgyny, facilitates the rupture of our dichotomous perspectives and allows for the possibility to envision the expansion of gender borders, which in turn allows for flexibility and individual agency. Eroticism in *Eu tu eles* becomes the means to perform a critique of the patriarchal laws and rules of the conduct of marriage and love. Eroticism drives the characters to have a fuller consciousness of themselves and their desires, leading them to negotiate compromise, and rewrite social expectations about their gender manifestations and sexual fulfillment. This is not to say that the erotic family remains without controversy however, it offers more towards a vision of gender equality than towards maintaining normative views that include inequality. *Eu tu eles* offers the possibility to transform a nation's predetermined gender models in order to meet the social, emotional, and sexual needs of its citizens. This film also demonstrates that social parameters can be inverted, expanded, and overturned.²²

Where Darlene is represented as a rough woman, tall, strong, and easily given masculine attributes, Zezinho is frail, both physically because of age, and emotionally, by taking a nurturing and innocent position. This does not mean that one must be weak to conduct traditionally female assigned roles. It does mean that the Sertão, an unlikely place, offers the opportunity to modify labor roles from those that are assigned based on sex, to ones that are exerted based on ability and interest.

The consumption of erotic desire is what impulses Zezinho to take action. He becomes conscious of what/whom he desires, and what he must do to. For Zezinho, what is different from traditional manifestations of love and desire, from crimes of passion per se, is that he uses this

²² Gender role reversal is a distinctive characteristic also present in the Mexican play *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* (as analyzed in the next section).

same energy for something that is constructive. Driving erotic energy and desire into gender equality allows for the presence of feminist ideology, which is based on gender and power equality. Although not all men possess the androgynous characteristics of Zezinho, they do, however, accept and live by the new gender embodiments. There is never a presence of homoerotic desire. All desire is placed onto Darlene and her individualized relationships with the men. The anti-normative family structure awakens all the members of the family, allowing a consciousness of themselves and the benefits of their new structure. Rewriting the very outcomes of their desire is where I believe new forms of knowledge are created. It is about learning new ways of constructing one's own identity, and that knowledge becomes the support for how to interact at the quotidian level. Androgyny does, however, possess a visible threat to normativity due to its initial breakdown of prescribed gender models. The characters, nonetheless, use the androgynous characteristics within the heteronormative scheme, thereby making androgyny docile and nonthreatening, while obtaining what they desire and modifying their social structures at the everyday level.

By proving a similar critique within a transnational setting, I provide examples of how gender is continuously challenged in practice. Gender, is not uniform as we often refer to in theory, in practice it is continuously being negotiated and its established well defined role models, expanded and rewritten. *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* offers a similar approach to *Eu tu eles* by presenting androgynous characteristics and a critique on a national myth; the sex's participation within the Mexican Revolution. Before an analysis of the film can take place, I briefly contextualize women's role within the revolution, in order to see the value and the critique the play provides.

Mexican National Figures and the Mexican Revolution

Works such as Sabina Berman's *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* confront Mexican society with the need to move away from phallogentric interpretations of sexuality and towards instead the recognition of a female sexuality. Mexico's situation is complex due to its national heritage and the lack of importance placed on tracing feminism and women's participation in the nation. The region's geopolitical past puts forth a dual experience of what it means to be a woman and a Mexican that reflects a specific politics of the body. In her book *Plotting Women*, Jean Franco asserts that Mexico has had women "traditionally strong in times of war and civil strife" but that "were slow to challenge the domestication of women and often fearful of taking a step into areas where their decency would be put into question" (93). Franco's observations bring forth the complexity of the execution of gender, which is a network of ideas, bodies to perform these ideals, and members within the communities who reinforce them, as well as a system ready to punish transgressions. In contradiction to the gender norms that are enforced in daily life are the national myths of women in history, who defy and blur gender prescriptions of control and decency. Particularly, androgynous figures in Mexican literature and folklore are common and not traditionally seen as a threat to the heteronormative establishment since they are mostly women. Because Mexico's national identity is founded predominantly on rural practices, a strong woman who can take masculine characteristics has been admired.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Mexico began its Revolution in which women played key roles, leading to the creation of a national myth, "*la soldadera*," who continued to incarnate traditional roles but with the exception that sexuality was incorporated.²³ The

²³ A female soldier depicted in photography and songs of the time, usually holding a gun and wearing bullets across her chest.

soldadera was submissive and docile (few actually fought in battle) and was also referred to as “Adelita”. Adelitas typically followed their soldier men, assisting during battles, cooking on the road, and providing sexual services to their partners. Adelitas are typically represented as masculinized figures of war, with bullet belts, guns, and boots. The Adelitas or *soldaderas* are highly sexualized in contemporary art and their androgynous characteristics viewed as transgressive. Alicia Arrizón describes the present usage of the Adelita iconography by some in the U.S. and Mexico as a woman of action and inspiration who fights for her rights (91). Nonetheless, Amanda Nolacea Harris in *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*, writes that the *soldadera* does not threaten male authority, but confirms it by being the good whore who offers her body to the Revolutionary cause (xiii). It was during the Revolution that these women were viewed as possessing a masculine tint, thereby attributing them with a heroic character. It is worthwhile to mention that there were women who disguised themselves as men in order to fully participate in the Revolution and those that even commanded troops and held titles, such as Juana Belén Gutiérrez, who became a colonel (Nolacea Harris 134). However, as Nolacea Harris notes in her book, the majority of women held a less outstanding rank (134). Many representations do not depict the extreme poverty and powerlessness that they had to endure, while also mothering several children. The lack of art work depicting their struggles is probably due to the main objective of the Revolution, class equality. If the Adelitas were to be more accurately portrayed, they would have revealed the failure of the Revolution and prevented national myths that continue to have a strong grip on national identity and gender models in Mexico.

Jocelyn Olcott writes in *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* that Mexico demanded Revolutionary citizenship, requiring women to cast their agendas as “benefiting patria

and revolution rather than community, family, or themselves” (28). This was a compromise that became detrimental to women since they would not receive government pensions, as their fellow male soldiers were able to secure after the Revolution. It has been my observation that texts dealing with the Revolution also deal with issues of the feminist movement, and vice versa, leading me to conclude that there is a lack of recorded materials detailing women’s participation in the Mexican Revolution. Maria Amélia de Almeida Teles’ distinction between a women’s movement and a feminist movement (as discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation) once again proves to overlap. The Mexican Revolution is hailed as one of the three pinnacle events that helped to construct Mexican national identity and citizenship.²⁴ Contemporary critiques and literature, however, are revisiting both the official recorded national History and the oral myths that it created through a racial, gender, and sexual lens.

A brief overview of the Revolution is necessary in order to see the transparency between the counter attacks on the Revolution’s objectives and its outcomes. The dictator Porfirio Díaz controlled the nation for several decades before the Revolution, and one of his principal governing intents was to Europeanize Mexico. During Porfirio Díaz’s reign, few men owned tremendous amounts of land, workers had few labor rights, and children remained in poverty with little access to education.

Berta Ulloa claims that the Mexican Revolution originated from the decision by Francisco I. Madero and other rebels’ laid out in the Plan of San Luis Potosí to break away from Porfirio Díaz in 1910. From San Antonio, Texas, Madero sent orders, plans, and weapons to begin the civil war. In the beginning, Madero depended on the support of the Democratic Party

²⁴ The presence of the Meso-American civilizations and the nation’s independence from Spain are the other two.

in Mexico City and from the states of Guerrero and Hidalgo. Nonetheless, days before the planned first attack, Díaz found out about the revolt and quelled the rebels' conspiracy nationwide. Before the end of the year, however, uprisings began in the North and the West. One of the first revolutionary groups that made an alliance with Madero supporters (called *maderistas*) was headed by Torres Burgos and Emiliano Zapata in Morelos. As the Northern and Western *maderistas* began attacking Sonora, Sinaloa, Tepic, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Coahuila, Aguascalientes, Tlaxcala, and Yucatan, revolutionaries in Chihuahua and Durango, headed by Pascual Orozco and Francisco Villa, joined the cause by 1911. Lack of topographical knowledge and bad weaponry management contributed to the failure of Porfirio Díaz in this war, as more insurrections arose nationwide (759-62).

Berta Ulloa recounts that as Porfirio Díaz resigned in 1911, Francisco I. Madero was temporarily appointed president before official elections were to take place. The provisional government of Madero did not satisfy the demands of the workers and farmers. As the *zapatistas* insisted on the restitution of their lands at one point taken by the government of Díaz, as proposed by the Plan of San Luis Potosí, there were on the other hand the landowners who were pressuring the government to begin the process of disarmament of the rebels.²⁵ Adding to the complex situation, many companies went on strike nationwide throughout the years of 1911-1912, causing vast economic deterioration (762-6).

As a breakdown began to occur in wake of the early triumph of the Revolution, Ulloa explains that Emiliano Zapata was the first to rebel against Madero in 1911. Early in the year 1912, the North began to break away from the government and declare its own provisional

²⁵ The rebels were named after their leader, Emiliano Zapata, and were situated in the Southern part of the country.

president. As new political instability took hold, multiple plans arose throughout the nation. One of the most famous revolutionary leaders, Emiliano Zapata, signed the Plan of Ayala under the slogan “Reform, Liberty, Justice, and Law.” This plan established the restitution of land, the nationalization of the property of the enemy, and a redistribution of wealth to help the widows and orphans of the war (774). Although assassinated, Emiliano Zapata became the ideological symbol of justice after the Revolution. It might have been Mexico’s size and lack of modern day communication systems that made the union of the different revolutionary groups impossible. What is clear through all these plans, nonetheless, is the chaos and how rapidly political loyalties shifted throughout the Revolution.

Ulloa claims that in 1913 Victoriano Huerta became President of Mexico and began to govern in the very fashion that caused the origin of the Revolution, like a dictator. Huerta’s government slowly attempted to carry out agrarian reform, but this proved to be difficult for the poor who did not obtain a piece of land and for others who could not afford to purchase land. In a different part of Mexico, the government of the state of Coahuila refused to recognize the newly established presidency. The governor, Venustiano Carranza, took arms and began taking the state of Sonora (793). By 1917, Carranza was elected president, but the nation by then was in complete ruin. As Ulloa explains:

A mediados de 1917, el país sufría las consecuencias de la prolongación de la guerra civil: destrucción de campos, ciudades, vías férreas y material rodante; interrupción del comercio y de las comunicaciones; fuga de capitales, falta de un sistema bancario, epidemias, escasez de alimentos y otros tantos clamaban por restituciones y dotaciones; no había confianza en la posesión de la tierra ni en el mercado de los productos; el desempleo era elevadísimo, así como la inseguridad en los trabajos; se declararon huelgas

pidiendo mejores salarios y condiciones de trabajo. El gobierno tuvo necesidad de hacer economías que abarcaran la reducción del número de empleados públicos y, a los que conservó a su puesto, sólo pudo pagarles el 50% en moneda metálica; en otras ocasiones tuvo que suspender los pagos temporalmente, como a los maestros en 1919, y éstos se fueron a la huelga a mediados del año. En algunos estados, especialmente en Jalisco, fue muy agudo el problema religioso. (809)

The Mexican Revolution proved to be a long process beleaguered by violence and political instability. The political party that emerged from the Revolution, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), made sure to reconstruct a patriarchal national identity founded on revolutionary ideals and figures through film, art, and discourses for decades to come.²⁶

Accounts of the Revolution are saturated with erasures nonetheless, and the role of women in the Revolution is contradictory. At times, women's participation is highly profiled in photography, music, and myth, while historically, there is very little written. Shirlene Ann Soto writes in *The Mexican Woman: A Study of Her Participation in the Revolution, 1910-1940* that "the effects of the Revolution had been devastating – rape and pillage, death and the break-up of the family" was all some communities ever saw (38). In another one of her books, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, Soto states that the few records that exist on women's participation in the Revolution present a version where all classes were involved. Upper-class women, for example, donated their time to health organizations such as the Red Cross, middle-class women utilized their skilled and semi-skilled capacities in printing, writing, and organizing, and lower-class women contributed by being close to the men (32). She notes that other factors that make it difficult now

²⁶ Institutional Revolutionary Party

to salvage women's participation in the Revolution include the fact that many women who participated were illiterate, thereby leading to no record of their experiences (3). Unfortunately, it is impossible to seek interviews now because most of the survivors have passed away (3). Soto describes women's post-Revolutionary political reality:

Despite their important contributions to the Revolution, Mexican women leaders remained largely unrecognized during the post-revolutionary period. A few revolutionary women were awarded small pensions, and some were even commissioned with rank, but many of them lived out their lives in poverty and died relatively unknown. Widespread disillusionment occurred when women realized that they were not to receive their promised share of the Revolution's benefits. The harsh reality was that Mexican women were not to attain national suffrage until 1953, and they were not to vote in a national election until 1958. (2)

The communist and socialist leadership deserve its due credit for having tremendous effect on the organization and success of obtaining female rights after the Revolution (Anna Macías xi-xii).

Soto explains that the Adelitas are often mythologized in both Mexican and Chicano art, signifying strong nationalist women. The reality is that they were often Indians and poor *mestizas*, who were there to follow their men into battle due to no other real alternative, or because they had been kidnapped (Soto 44).²⁷ Tito F. Foppa, an Argentinian reporter, wrote that while the Adelitas were well known at the time, he felt that they would be forgotten shortly after their services were not needed (Soto 44). Unfortunately, this is precisely what did occur. Not

²⁷ Of mixed ethnic origins, usually of indigenous and European descent.

only is their suffering and poverty concealed in myth, but so is their racial background. Apart from the photographs depicting their indigenous traits, much contemporary art work has also whitened their bodies in order to suit the Mexican ideal of beauty, which is light skin with strong dark features. Lastly, before entering an analysis on *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, an introduction to Villa is of essence, particularly because it highlights how canonical iconography carries strong gendered embodiments.

Among the most renowned national army leaders that led the Revolution and became mythic national heroes are Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa. Francisco Villa did not earn his fame for defending women, but for his leadership skills often leading to victory through excessive violence, including the rumor that he fathered hundreds of children throughout the nation.²⁸ Francisco Caudet Yarza writes that “cualquier hecho delictivo y/o vesánico sucedió en el norte se cargaba en el debe de Pancho: robos, raptos, violaciones, crímenes y hasta la incineración de una anciana de ochenta años. Desgraciadamente, las más de las veces, la atribución era correcta” (148). Mexicans more often than not, turn a blind eye to the overt violence he set forth, and instead, see him as a beloved national hero.

Francisco Caudet Yarza documents that Francisco Villa was born in the northern state of Durango in 1878, with the birth name José Doroteo Arango. He was part of a working class family and once, upon coming home to a raped sister, killed the landowner who also wanted to take his sister with him. From this moment on, Caudet Yarza records, José Doroteo Arango constantly needed to be on the move, and he changed his name to Francisco Villa. As a nomad, Caudet Yarza explains Villa took up a criminal life, stealing with other partners along the way and, on several occasions, attempted to make an honorable living, only to have bad luck and fail.

²⁸ Known by his nickname “Pancho” Villa.

Caudet Yarza also asserts that once introduced to the ideologies of the Mexican Revolution, Villa decided to enter politics and support Madero. Villa would be one of Madero's strongest allies and remain loyal to him until his death. In 1916, after another coup d'état by Carranza, it is believed that Villa was so angered by the United States and its support of Carranza that he led his troops to New Mexico, where he and his men reportedly burned buildings, held 800 hostages, ransacked private homes, and raped a young woman (Caudet Yarza 148). After this incident, the United States wanted Villa dead. Even after the end of the Revolution, it is believed that the United States offered Villa a million dollars in exchange for his exile (Caudet Yarza 155). Villa instead opted to start a farm and have a family and, in the end, was assassinated by the Mexican government out of fear that he could start and lead a new revolt.

Caudet Yarza reports that during a battle against the *Federales*, the *villistas* would scream, “¡[o]ra changos malos, aquí está su papasito, con un par de pistolones y otro par de cojones!” signaling that throughout time Villa has been imagined as courageous and masculine (151). Francisco “Pancho” Villa continues even today to be represented as a Robin Hood figure, known for his excellent military choices, physiological strength, and, most importantly for this analysis, his fearlessness and overt masculinity.

Androgynous Eroticism: *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*

The play *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* was written by Sabina Berman in 1993, presented on stage in Mexico City, and made into a film in 1996. The plot puts forth a modern sex based relationship between Gina and Adrián, which includes a ritual of seduction, struggle, and abrupt departures. From the beginning, the audience is confronted with Gina's dilemma. She wants to have tea and a conversation before making love to Adrián, while Adrián prefers to call while he is on his way only to retreat shortly after having sex. Both characters are in their forties,

educated, successful, middle to upper middle class, divorced, and with one child. As Gina begins to demand more from Adrián, he complies with all of Gina's wishes only to disappear for three months after committing himself to marriage and children. As Adrián attempts to win her back, Francisco Villa, the revolutionary war hero, appears, giving Adrián advice on how to salvage his relationship, leading only to failure. In the end, Gina relocates to the U.S.-Mexican border with new boyfriend Ismael, her twenty-two-year-old employee and a friend of her son. As for Adrián, he continues in his old ways of seducing women, but now with an erectile dysfunction.²⁹

Emily Hind writes that Berman, with *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, has attracted harsh criticism due to her presentation of cartoonish characters. Priscilla Meléndez adds that the negative criticism arises “por su coqueteo con el teatro comercial y por, alegadamente, a tratar de manera superficial los asuntos feministas con los cuales Berman se ha identificado a lo largo de su producción teatral” (524). It is easy to criticize her thematic development when the play is so short to begin with. However, I also believe that her treatment of Villa also adds significantly to the audience's reaction. People can laugh during the play, but in the end, Villa continues to be a national hero. Octavio Paz, a foundational voice in Mexican cultural studies, reiterates how the ghosts of the past remain in the present:

Villa cabalga todavía en el norte, en canciones y corridos; Zapata muere en cada feria popular; Madero se asoma a los balcones agitando la bandera nacional; Carranza y Obregón viajan aún en aquellos trenes revolucionarios, en un ir venir por todo el país,

²⁹ Although there is a film of the play, I will be focusing on the play since the androgynous characteristics presented in the play are subdued or erased in several characters in the film. The film also makes significant changes that I imagine are made to attract and entertain a wider audience. These changes include sex scenes with Ismael, Gina's changing her mind about her partners, and an ending stretched to add an absurd tango scene between Gina and Adrián. Because of these types of changes and erasures, and because the play holds many thematic points of intersection with *Eu tu eles*, I will analyze the original work, the play.

alborotando los gallineros femeninos y arrancando a los jóvenes de la casa paterna. Todos los siguen: ¿a dónde? Nadie lo sabe. (161)

Paz emphasizes the continuous attraction to our national fathers and, in particular, how mythic and unrealistic they become tracing and remembering not only their stories, but embodying their personalities, as they have become models to admire and emulate. Despite the criticism that she has received for *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, Sabina Berman is a successful and prolific writer whose thematic work is described by Jacqueline Bixler Eyring as “contra el establishment teatral, histórico, sexual y político de su país” (17). Her work is characterized by dark humor and irony, which is evident in *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*. Bixler Eyring also maintains that out of all of the massive Mexican literary production, Berman is the only female playwright in Mexico (21-22). In general, Berman’s plays contain two principal concerns, one is the sexual relationship between men and women, and the other, the historical struggle for power (Bixler Eyring 23). She is concerned particularly with the situation of women in relation to history and politics (Bixler Eyring 24). The themes are very real for Mexican women, and the concerns are salient throughout *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*.

In the play, the erotic and the political are intertwined, allowing for a visible articulation of the erotic within a political intent and context, both by Villa and by the relationship between Gina and Adrián. As referenced by the title, Adrián enters a deadly predicament by having to choose between Villa, who represents the nationalistic and idealistic echoes of the past still seen in the present day masculine gender paradigm that is institutionalized, or Gina, with her nude and sensual body and their erotic desire in a modern romance.

Sabina Berman, in the first act, sets the stage by having character descriptors in which she introduces the term “labia.” The “labia” takes on enormous erotic significance within the play, and, based on the play’s persistent theme of deconstructing masculinity, I interpret the labia as female speech’s taking a master narrative in this case, a Revolutionary one and re-appropriating it to a female space (Gina’s condominium). Women’s perspectives and participations have been limited in Revolutionary texts, and in this play, the Revolution has been taken into the private space. This move is particularly significant because the effects of the Revolution in the private space have often been purposely silenced in order for others to not have to recount or feel responsible for the many losses of property, as well as the multiple crimes committed upon women’s bodies, including rape and kidnapping. The labia within the play, also takes a literal meaning, representing Gina’s sex organs. Her sex organs are taking control of Adrián’s desires as he is desperate to have intercourse with Gina. Finally, the labia in the narrative also references another body part, Adrián’s lips, because of his great verbal abilities. In my experience, the fragmentation of bodies in film typically depicts seductive woman; however, in this case, masculine bodies are the ones being deconstructed.

The interaction and usage of the labia as a form of political critique and as an erotic expression present in both men and women, allows the labia to become the most evident androgynous symbol within the play. Not only does it serve diverse functions, but its ability to interchange in speech, and present in the body of both sexes, proves to be defiance towards the traditional separation of sex and the rigid manifestations of gender. Derived from the Greek roots male and female, Carolyn Heilbrun interprets androgyny as the manifestation of the characteristics of both sexes without being “rigidly assigned” (143). In contrast to Heilbrun, Brenda Mae Woodhill and Curtis A. Samuels interpret androgyny as a balance of both sexes by

an individual, where a “person can best be seen as one who can engage freely in both feminine and masculine behaviors and as one who is equally capable of both feminine and masculine tasks and does not prefer one above the other” (16). It is the unpremeditated ability to move from the gender characteristics of one to the other that allows androgyny to appear effortless. The ways in which an individual must act are not defined by femininity or masculinity, but by what characteristics are best depending on the situation. Woodhill and Samuels believe through androgyny, an individual can competently perform tasks that are associated with either sex (16). In contrast to transgender and as evidenced by both *Eu tu eles* and *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, the characters identify themselves accordingly to the normative markers assigned to sex (female/feminine/heterosexual). Instead of redefining gender and creating a third category, the characters maintain the dual paradigm (as exemplified by Zezinho in the previous section), but extend its border to be much more flexible and accepting.

Adrián’s intelligence and seductive charm are based on his “*labia hipnótica*” ‘hypnotic loquacity’ which has the power to attract any woman. His labial smoothness is only lost when he begins to speak of politics, which leads him to speak too fast, overwhelmed with many emotions. Ultimately, his historical obsession with Villa is the main contributing factor to his failure with Gina. Speaking is traditionally tied to visibility and power, and power is usually affiliated with a masculine body. Men have been entitled to the public space to deal with issues such as education, diversions, and political involvement, while women have often been silenced by the limited number of topics and acts in which they can engage. In the play, Berman has chosen to make the power of speech female and additionally, give it an erotic component. When Gina describes to her friend Andrea the ritual between her and Adrián, both her lips and her genitalia enhance the representation of the “labia” as Gina describes the seductive acts in which she and

Adrián engage one another (24). These descriptions lead spectators to being seduced by both Gina and Adrián as they watch and listen. By feminizing speech, Berman employs a predominantly masculine act of retelling an event. As a consequence of this repossession, Berman engages with the story telling process as a means to critique the construction of history as the official story, which in Mexico's case has excluded women. She also criticizes the construction of national mythic figures such as Pancho Villa, which represent impossible and unobtainable masculine ideals for Mexican men to sustain.

Having speech take on female attributes is significant in the political realm. Berman juxtaposes two different time periods, by placing the Mexican Revolution of 1910 in the urban, contemporary setting of the author (Mexico City in 1993). As Berman parallels the experiences of women in the Revolution with her own, the spectator begins to see the gender politics that were institutionalized after the Revolution. In order to make visible the outdated gender models, Berman sets on stage one of the most famous revolutionary heroes, Pancho Villa. Berman presents Villa, beloved by most Mexicans, with all his wit, masculinity, and thin tolerance for ideas that differ from his own. The spectator begins to see how out of place Villa's ideology is for contemporary relationships in 1993. At the same time, the spectator is able to observe how many Revolutionary gender ideals are still in place today, leading to a critique of the antiquated gender rubric most men imitate. Stuart A. Day writes in "Berman's Pancho Villa versus Neoliberal Desire" that the heroes of the Revolution still haunt the nation, and Ilene O'Malley unpacks this by determining that Villa was portrayed by the media as a force to be reckoned with, the Centaur of the North was "never just a man" (87). These implications are detrimental to gender performance and, as a consequence, to relationships. Not only are gender models impossible to obtain for women, such as with the Virgin Mary model, but also for men, with the

mythic reconstructions of Revolutionary heroes. Day writes that Berman therefore brings forth a critique of the way Villa's myth is employed in the hegemonic process where the "status quo of relations between the macho and those he subjugates, can continue unchecked" (6). Berman however goes further by presenting the results in present day relationships due to the nationalistic and mythic gender models. The lack of national questioning of masculine and feminine ideals results in the absence of new models to follow and ultimately leads, as demonstrated in the play, to failure, frustration, and chaos.

The two moments of the play where Villa is present in his time period, he is not fighting the war on his horse, as he is remembered by photographs. Instead, he is in the private sphere with women. The first woman, whom Villa finds highly desirable, invites him for tea. When he can no longer extend his date with the woman, he kills her on the assumption that she had the intention of poisoning him. With this act, Berman presents the dark side of Villa, his compulsive violent behavior that the national myth has insisted on ignoring. Villa not only steals her earrings after shooting her, but then goes to visit his mother and takes the earrings as a gift to her. After Villa demonstrates compassion and love for his mother, he quickly returns to fighting, supporting analysis that argues how the Revolution loses sight of its objectives through violence and chaos, as men looting and killing in the name of an ideal that they themselves do not know how to define or obtain.³⁰ Berman juxtaposes different types of relationships: Villa's and Gina's and Adrián's. As Gina and Adrián engage in a discussion about their relationship, Adrián finds himself in a losing battle, only to be ill advised by Villa. When Gina reveals to Adrián that she is now in a relationship with Ismael, Villa attempts to enforce male power over a woman's choice, only to be confronted by Adrián's inability to execute his power in 1993:

³⁰ This same conclusion is made by Mariano Azuela in *Los de abajo*, one of the most known texts about the Revolution.

Adrián: No le puedo exigir nada, general. Es una mujer pensante. Se gana sola la vida. ¿Con qué la obligo?

Villa: ¿Cómo que con qué? (Se toca las ingles. . .) Con el sentimiento. . .

Villa: No la deje hablar, chinga'o. Péguale, bésela, interrúmpala, dígale: ay desgraciada, qué chula te ves cuando te enojas. (69-71)

Villa attempts to exercise his control over language by advising Adrián to not let Gina speak. It is well known in Mexico that Villa fathered hundreds of children during the Revolution, or at least that what is believed. Therefore, his masculinity is enhanced by his dynamic ability to procreate. In the first part of the twentieth century, women did not have the right to vote and, during the Revolutionary period of violence, led the act of speech to be predominantly controlled by the patriarchy within relationships and within both the private and the political realm. This mentality is supported by the lack of historical records detailing women's participation in the Revolution and, after the Revolution, the government's unwillingness to administer pensions for women who fought in the Revolution. Furthermore, no matter how visible organized women's groups made themselves to congressmen or in rallies, politicians continued to ignore them for decades, building cases to explain why women should have no political participation. There are vast socio-political differences in 1993, as Gina is an independent business woman aware of her own sexual desire. However, the prescribed gender roles are uncannily very similar to 1910.

History enters into great conflict with the project of recuperating women's experiences. There are scarce records, and the predominant historians have tended to be men, often romanticizing the participation, character, and life of certain leaders, such as Pancho Villa. For example, in a book written by Baltasar Dromundo in 1936, he tells us that he took certain fictitious freedoms within the writing process, and yet the reader has no way of separating reality

from fiction within this historical account. Dromundo throughout his work, elevates Villa into another realm. As scholarship reveals that women have not been fully represented in Mexico's Revolutionary history, Berman confronts the national absence by inserting the female characters in diverse ways, as the past and the present interact within the play. For example, Gina by volunteering to transcribe Adrián's book manuscript on Villa, is thereby presented with a secondary role, one where she energetically inserts herself in the history writing process, and demonstrates how subjective history can be. In Act II, Gina is transcribing a scene between Villa and his mother, and Gina, as the transcriber, begins to take full control of the events she is typing. Villa begins to speak of the machine guns, whose sound is triggered by Gina's type writer, and while Gina's exhales on him, he is reminded of the urgency to return to the battle field. In the writing process, it is Gina who is changing Villa's thoughts, thereby demonstrating how the writer interferes with actual events (42). Gina also takes over Villa's mother. There is a moment where Gina demands answers from Villa, catching the character by surprise, because such demands would not be made by his real mother, causing Gina to apologize and erase her historical intrusion from the paper (43). Gina therefore presents history as more than one official story that must go through a process of selection and exclusion. As Gina is reconstructing past events selected by Adrián, she does not tolerate Villa's abuse of power or his macho ideology easily. Gina becomes critical of Villa's choices and reprimands him (through his mother) in the scene.

Within Berman's attempt to engage, question and inscribe new meanings to a master narrative through the perspective of the labia, strong female characters continue to enforce a transgendered paradigm, as seen in my other chapters. In the same scene where Gina is transcribing a conversation between Villa and his mother, he begins to cry as his mother cries.

Villa is so saturated with the mythical ideal of masculinity that the only woman he is allowed to cry for is his mother, taking into consideration Mexico's devout veneration for the Virgin Mary. His act of crying does not fracture his manhood however; on the contrary, he continues to reinforce gender practices throughout the play when Adrián displays any signs of weakness, particularly towards Gina, reminding Adrián that he is approaching a homosexual identity, a "*mariquita*" (71). Therefore, Villa's masculinity is that which Octavio Paz describes as "el ideal de la "hombría" consiste en no "rajarse" nunca. Los que se "abren" son cobardes. Para nosotros, contrariamente a los que ocurre con otros pueblos, abrirse es una debilidad o una traición" (33). As Villa demonstrates, not only women but also homosexual men need to be separated from the masculine gender ideal. What is of particular interest, however, is the section where Villa calls his mother a man, "Ayayayayay, qué hombre es mi amá" (42). The fact that his mother is complaining about Villa's criminal life and the type of gifts he brings to her (jewelry), which are useless to her, causes Villa to immediately classify his mother as a man. Villa cannot envision a woman's gender performance that includes a critique of him. The denial to redefine or to accept women's gender prescription outside of complacency, docility, and femininity triggers in the example above, an association with the masculine. Within the Revolution, the Adelita was also represented within the masculine realm. Feminists both during and after the Revolution were also given a somewhat masculine identity, thereby institutionalizing from this moment forward, the androgynous gender category for Mexican women.

One of the most distinct androgynous examples within the play is Gina's friend Andrea, who physically resembles her grandfather, with a little mustache and other masculine facial characteristics. It is no coincidence that Andrea is the granddaughter of Mexico's ex-president Plutarco Elías Calles, who was in power for eleven years and is believed to be behind the plot to

assassinate Villa. Adrián himself considers Calles a traitor to the Revolution's cause: "[n]o hay heroes vivos alrededor nuestro; la Revolución está muerta, la de 1910, la asesinó precisamente tu abuelito" (90). Andrea is described as intelligent and direct. In the final scene of the play, Andrea begins to seduce Adrián physically and in convincing him to begin a book about her grandfather. Not only is Adrián enticed to write a book on Calles, but he is also aroused to have intercourse with the women he despised most, Andrea. As the labia plays an important role throughout the play, it reappears metaphorically once again here, where the intimate interaction between Andrea and Adrián, results in Adrián's impotency, a flaccid phallus. The symbolism involved in the end is tremendous, both sexually and historically. Not only do we have Adrián's impotency and inability to perform, but also Villa with a cannon that does not fire, the dynamite ball simply falls out. This dual castration reinforces the reality that the Revolution failed to execute its most cherished ideals. The hegemonic patriarchy, which began a violent revolutionary event and took over national politics, ultimately failed. Adrián himself says that the Revolution is dead, as evidenced by Villa's grandchildren who are left behind in poverty and ignorance.

However, there does, at the same time, appear to be a questioning of the gender practices still serving to be the norm. Andrea is represented in an androgynous position and, to a certain extent, acts as a castrating force for the traditional execution of masculinity. It is also worthy to note that it must not be a coincidence that Berman chose two similar names, Andrea and Adrián. As characters, they appear to be different due to their revolutionary affiliations, but they are very much the same as well. Both do nothing to change the present social imbalance, and are both consumed by their own needs. Andrea and Adrián both exemplify the idea of androgyny. Adrián loses face to Villa, as he becomes weak and accepts everything in order to have Gina return to him, while Andrea begins to manipulate the situation in order to achieve two goals: one, to get

Adrián, a successful writer, start a book about her grandfather, and two, to test if Adrián is as good in bed as Gina says. Erotic desire propels the characters into action, proposing contradictory and alternative gender practices. Androgyny expands to become part of contemporary gender identity and, in return, destabilizes normative gender practices.

In conclusion, the border that encompasses gender in *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* is historically positioned in a way that critiques the national history and the treatment of women, primarily by limiting their power of expression. The play repositions its female characters and gives them the right to question the national legacy. By empowering woman in their agency over representation, the play ignites the need to also evaluate the power dynamics within relationships. As the erotic gains visibility by the characters needs to express and satisfy their desires, so does the androgynous labia that obscures the feminine and the masculine.

In this chapter, erotic desire propels a criticism of institutionalized mythic representations of both a region and a war hero. Myths are conducive to unrealistic gender expectations and the creation of stereotypes. As a result, the deconstruction of myths, as creations in time, allows for the rupture of essentialist characteristics attributed to individuals. Knowledge in *Eu tu eles* and *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* is rooted in national paradigms, and the very consciousness of the cultural network becomes the means by which to re-inscribe new gender performances that allow the characters to lead lives that better suit their needs. By imitating the very system that controls and limits them, in order to integrate ways in which gender is expanded to incorporate new definitions, the characters coexist within normative paradigms while achieving successful modifications. The presence of androgynous traits in characters is a counterhegemonic weapon that blurs the prescribed confinements of gender and sexuality and offers a state of being that naturally gives way to transforming labor roles, identities, and desires. As a result, the

combination of established knowledge, androgynous traits, and the representation of myths reveals that homogeneity is continuously being challenged from within. Although there is little room for reformation, gender and erotic desire are at the core of human experience and the desire to obtain satisfaction in our daily interactions. As a result, control, in connection to gender and eroticism, will always result in the need to find forms by which to liberate our passions and desires. Prescribed cultural models, as much as they are fortified and implemented, do not take into account the borderless inner erotic force within all individuals, and the need to act on it.

Chapter 4: In Between Eroticism: Transgender Tales in *Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça* and “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?”

One of the major teachings of Hinduism is that every man and woman contained within himself or herself both male and female principles. A man was a man only because of the excess of the principle of masculinity, while a woman had an excess of femininity. This maleness or femaleness remained in conflict within the individual and could only be harmonized for very brief periods during sexual intercourse, something which allowed the couple to realize the absolute. Such a realization occurred when each had lost consciousness of his or her own sex and found the other.

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There is the presence of ancient cultural and religious sources that challenged the dichotomous sex/gender model that has propelled modern truths based on two sexes and two rigid definitions of gender. Countless stories and images depict a split of one body into two different sexes, such as Adam and Eve, the union of two separate sexes as described by Bullough and Bullough in the epigraph by way of intercourse, and lastly, the possibility of having both genders and sexes in one body, classically represented by hermaphrodites and angels. This chapter focuses on the third category, a transgendered identity. I base my use of the term according to the definition delineated by Abby L. Ferber, Kimberly Holcomb and Tre Wentling as “persons who change, cross, or go beyond or through the culturally defined gender categories (woman/man) . . . a person whose gender identity is different from their biological or birth-assigned sex” (557).

The presence of gender and sexual ambiguous representations begin to shift with time in purpose and meaning. As second-wave feminists argued in the 1970s that sex and gender are two distinct categories, Anne Fausto-Sterling asserts that contemporary societies continue to be

influenced by the teachings of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who gave way to what Foucault describes as discipline, both as a science as a normalization of the body (7-8). Leading to what Fausto-Sterling describes as the “absurdly oversimplified” depiction of sexuality, and as a result, gender as well (9). The control over the body influences the ways in which individuals opt to embody these categories. The social resistance of many communities to allow both gender and sexuality to be blurred and the persistence to maintain the male/masculine female/feminine division continues to be a persistent struggle.

Similar to the many women who espouse feminist ideals but do not label themselves “feminist,” Drucker argues that there are countless examples of how Latin Americans engage in “same-sex sex” but clearly do not identify themselves as “gay” (12). The prolific discrepancy between practice and titles of identity intimates the existing controversies also within the interplay of gender and sex in diverse developing countries. In the case of Mexico, Max Mejía stresses that the contemporary perception of homosexuality is greatly influenced by diverse origins, such as the current ideologies streamed through globalization as well as pre-Hispanic cultures and Christianity (43).

David William Foster in *Sexual Textualities* makes an important observation: homosexual themes have been present in Latin American literature since the nineteenth century; however, a clearly defined movement, a literary canon and a theoretical framework have not. Foster believes that a space for same sex relationships has been provided, and he refers to it as homo-socialism. What is critical nonetheless is that a homosexual identity has not been constructed or given space to do so (Foster 3). As long as man continues to reproduce the macho prototype, he can have access to both men and women without assuming a homosexual identity (Foster 3). If an individual clearly defines and stays within the prescribed gender roles, their sexual identity is not

necessarily altered by engaging in bisexual intercourse. In the Brazilian case, James N. Green writes that in the contemporary lesbian and gay movement, there is a highly organized and active membership that has become very involved with the Workers Party since the 1990s (57). The overarching polemic among the organizations is their political involvement with the Left, which continues to uphold the very heteronormative system that the organizations are placing into question (60).

Challenging gender divisions allows individuals to expand their identity categories and to uproot gender inequality. The human experience is complex and ever changing, and Fausto-Sterling emphasizes that transgendered peoples “and a blossoming organization of intersexuals all have formed social movements to include diverse sexual beings under the umbrella of normality” (13). For Karen Yescavage and Jonathan Alexander, transgender individuals across cultures offer a more challenging understanding of gender and sexuality (22). The dual categorization system is a social construction, and in this chapter, I argue that the need to act upon one’s homoerotic desires propels the adaptation of tales as a means by which to challenge the two-sex model of masculinity and femininity. The discussions of gender and sexuality are often too limited and are a platform for gender inequality. The authors under analysis, Cassandra Rios and Rosamaría Roffiel stylistically imitate the traditional structures and values of tales and fairy tales, with an intent that I argue is based on their objective to present contested issues of desire involving same sex relationships. By replicating an institutionalized format that provides a legacy of emotional attachments, both texts insert themselves into a resistant readership that is part of the two gender/sex model. However, by imitating a structure similar to the tale’s, the texts under analysis introduce important gender and sex variables that make visible the complexity of both, as well as the limited options offered by a heterosexual society. Using the legacy of

personal exposure to these types of texts, the works under analysis make a claim to human emotion, to rigid heterosexual paradigms, in order to revisit the lack of tolerance and to develop more just social structures of inclusion.

Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça was published in Brazil by Cassandra Rios in 1961. Her novels are traditionally heterosexual plots saturated by erotic desire and its confrontations with social structures revolving around class and gender. Due to her romantic thematic development which incorporates overt emotional responses, the author and her works have not been seriously considered by scholarship. The second text, “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?” was written by the Mexican writer Rosamaría Roffiel and published in 1999. It is the last short story in a collection of short stories that showcase social constraints on gender and sexuality, sexual desire and accounts pertaining to homosexual subjects, such as AIDS, erotic encounters, and the formation of relationships. The author has penned a few other fictional texts, one book on theory, and another on her personal travels to Central America. Both authors, Roffiel and Rios, have rarely been touched upon by critics.

The two selected texts continue to explore eroticism within a political context, where eroticism is not simply describing corporeal and psychological passions. Instead, eroticism is framed within a context that demonstrates the unjust double standards in love: the exclusion and the suffering that exists within subjects as they realize that there is no place in society for them to manifest their gender transformations. As an alternative, the characters search for transgender identities and spaces that better reflect an environment of growth, and not one of oppression.

Georgette: A Tale of a Man and a Woman

Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça by Cassandra Rios narrates the life of Roberto and his desire to be a woman. Raised by a single mother who was abandoned by her husband for another

woman, Dona Maura raises Roberto, along with her older three daughters. Early in the text, the women are puzzled by Roberto's keen eye for female matters. The family sees Roberto, or Bob, as he is often referred to, as displaying an interest in women appropriate for someone with his unique familial background (the absence of a male figure in an all-female household). Bob begins to experience affection for the same sex at an early age. In elementary school, Bob feels an attraction to a classmate named Artur, who shortly after leaves the school for unknown reasons. As a young adult, he will come upon Artur once again, and fall passionately in love with him. The novel traces the development of Bob's love life, from a melodramatic relationship with Artur, to his companionship with an older gentleman named Clovis who provides for him and encourages him to explore his feminine side, leading to Bob's transformation into Georgette. The novel ends with Bob's tragic suicide, when he realizes that he is being manipulated by Artur for money and will never obtain what he desires, Artur, and the life he dreams of next to him.

Since a young child, Bob isolates himself from family members and innocently keeps his attraction to Artur at school to himself. Capturing the politics surrounding relationships, Bob demonstrates that even at a young age, he is aware that he has an attraction for the "wrong" sex, that boys should only invest in girls. As a result, Bob's feelings are taboo and forbidden, and must be kept silent. In his realization that he must keep his emotions silent, Bob begins to daydream and allow himself an alternate life that exists in his mind. The lack of privacy in his mother's house rarely allows him to connect his male body with his feminine gender. It is, however, Bob's reencounter with Artur that marks his coming of age and reignites the desire he feels for him. The space he creates in his imagination gives Bob the full freedom to dream and desire. When the opportunity arises in the real world, Bob makes his dreams come true by applying makeup, thereby fueling the construction of his transgendered identity.

Although *Georgette* is much longer than the Mexican text, and a different genre, it offers an eclectic construction of style, one that references tales. As I explained earlier, before becoming a transvestite, Bob begins to show his dependence on his imagination. This is also the beginning of his construction of an alternate self. I argue that he is first influenced by the institutionalized process of storytelling, as a venue to construct his passions and dreams, before fully transforming his body by cross dressing. Throughout the novel, Rios makes allusions to particular expressions, which leads me to believe that Bob interprets love within the idyllic structures of tales and desires to live a fairy tale ending, a novella full of love. In an instance, Rios writes that Bob day dreams, “[u]m transcorrer de idílios românticos no qual êle se via sempre como o peronagem de um drama trágico sendo conquistado por Arturzinho” (51). Bob wants to be happy, but his homoerotic desire makes him feel that his love cannot be realized in the space he is part of, causing him to constantly place himself in a tragic future. It is quotations like the one above that give insights into how Bob, like many other adolescent girls who comply to normative views, imagine their future romances within a fairy tale structure. They want to be saved, seduced, and taken away by a man that they envision will adore them as much as they adore him. Bob is no different.

Rios presents love in a manner that up to today is easily viewed in soap operas. Placed within a Western tradition, an individual is incomplete until he or she finds a partner. In a continuous attempt to place Bob within a feminine experience, he too craves the man that will complete him, as evidenced in the following quote: “[h]averia de chegar o dia em que Artur viria para completar o seu sonho de amor” (169). Bob’s inexperience and societal sexual limitations provoke him to envision his life in a narrow format with a man that mistreats him. Readers observe the tragic element within the story line, and observe Bob’s naiveté and infatuation with

Artur, similar to that of a young girl. Although Bob's desire is cliché for today's forms of expressing love, it is an insight and exposition of the manner in which girls continue to be shaped to feel and love by being exposed to fairy tales. Additionally, the insertion of Bob within an adolescent girl furthers the author's intent of validating his love. Colette Dowling explores an individual's real desire for another as a means by which to complete his/her personal happily ever after ending:

We have only one real shot of "liberation," and that is to emancipate ourselves from within. It is the thesis of this book that personal, psychological dependency-the deep wish to be taken care of by others-is the chief force holding women down today. I call this "The Cinderella Complex"-a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives. (31)

Bob is not a woman, but he is living through a heterosexual paradigm of storytelling and love, where he wants to be 'normal' and unite his sex and gender difference as well as with the lover. It is the relationship between desire, the body and love expressed in *Symposium* to which both *Georgette* and Dowling refer. Desire, which must be justified by a greater cause besides the mortal flesh, and that, is love. Desire is also observed as a means to get to something else. In the Cinderella Complex instance, it is a sense of completeness through the union of the lovers. As reflected by the above quotation, Bob demonstrates a sign of neediness, waiting for Artur to come and save him. He dreams of the culmination of his novella, where Artur will redeem his love and take him to a space where their love can be realized. The assimilation to female fairy tale desires turns into a deep aspiration to be a woman in real life. Bob's feminine identification

leads him to imitate multiple aspects of femininity, including the psychological quest to have a happily ever after ending, which ultimately leads to his death, since in no tale does a prince rape and betray the princess and still get to live happily ever after.

Steven Swann Jones describes the various objectives of tales, and writes that the “protagonists of folktales remind us of ourselves, and their quests and questions are on a very personal level the same as ours. . . .As a result, we regard folktales as personal entertainment, as engaging fictions reflecting our ability to laugh at ourselves as well as to express our deepest dreams and fears” (9). Considering some of her previous novels, Rios writes about women’s issues, including their love lives. If Rios wrote to a female audience, this would explain her portrayal of men as the source of pain and desire, and women as having to suffer as part of the dynamic struggle in relationships.

Rios’ decision to present Bob imagining his relationship within a folktale narrative structure is no coincidence. I argue that Rios purposely chooses to include in her novel thematic intersections between the folktale and specifically the novella and fairy tale happily ever after ending. The purpose of such intersection is due to her thematic exposition, homoeroticism. What better way to capture the reader’s attention and encourage empathy for the subject in 1961, than to integrate the subject within a format that the reader will recognize and be emotionally attached to. From the onset, readers have their own previous emotional history with particular stories and characters, and although they might not change their mind about homosexuality, there is a chance that they will be more sensitive to the individuals around them who also manifest transgendered identity. Rios, like any conscious writer who meditates on the outcome of her work, proposes an open ended conclusion to her novel. Her ending moves away from whether homosexuality is right or wrong and instead, proposes both and none of the above, complicating

the situation. After Bob's tragic death, and as part of the novel's conclusion, she indicates that Bob descends to hell, or ascends to heaven after his death (230). Such ambiguous wording reiterates the objective of problematizing a one sided issue of taboo and lays a foundation of confusion and uncertainty. Fundamentally, what Rios accomplishes is to shake the very foundation of sex and to create doubt within a subject that has been placed in a radical position of exclusion.

Apart from reaching out to a specific audience and exposing the lack of tolerance and social limitations for individuals like Bob, she also presents the hypocrisies of heterosexual men. Throughout the novel, Rios attempts to uproot the heterosexual masculine figure, the perception of right/wrong, and the idea of heterosexuals as the "natural" majority. The author is able to do this by presenting distinct men, from different backgrounds and ages. I maintain that in order to move away from the male/female, homosexuality/heterosexuality as perverse/normal paradigm, she destabilizes the notion of heterosexuality as the norm and as the "good" and "natural" sexuality. This approach alone is revolutionary for the times, where theorists did not form this same idea until several years after. Take, for example, how Rios presents sexuality to Bob in the novel. The first instance depicts Artur taking Bob to the restroom in elementary school and instructing him to pull his pants down because he has something to show him. Artur's masculinity is never questioned by the characters; he is a leader and manifests ideal gender qualities by being aggressive and a nuisance with the school girls. However, in the bathroom, he is attempting to penetrate Bob, who has no idea of the act of sex or of Artur's true intentions. At this childhood stage, Rios is presenting Artur, the heterosexual ideal, as the debased, not Bob. Artur even declares that Ernestinho, his friend, has already "done it" with his cousin, thereby reiterating that within the heterosexual social setting, there is an evident breakdown, involving

incest too, within the family circle. Rios thus challenges the belief that individuals who blur gender and sex pervert heterosexuals, as it is often believed and represented in popular discourses.

Continuing the discussion on the presentation of heterosexual men in the novel, Bob's second sexual contact comes from a random event that narrates how he met a pedophile, who attempted to take advantage of him. Even in this second instance, Bob is unaware of what these encounters mean. To a certain extent, childhood is rewritten by Rios and is where she begins her representation of perversion and hyper-sexuality, based not on homoerotic desires, but rather on character. The numerous examples of sexual attack onto Bob, both as a child, and later as an adult, are representative of a sexual identity that is not recognized and that as a consequence for its established invisibility, leads to acts of violence onto these bodies. Moreover, through the presence of physical threat, also lies the critique on gender inscriptions. What society most values in women, chastity and innocence, is viewed in the novel as a lack of preparation for the carnage that occurs in relationships. In Bob's case, it makes him a target for violence. Through Bob's body and his reflection of the values placed onto women's bodies, a critique on the patriarchal values of innocence and chastity is formed. The critique involves a potential to redefine femininity in order to better protect daughters and sons from being victims of violence and of love.

The denial of all relationships that do not mimic the rigid borders of heterosexuality is reflected by the novel as all the characters, except for Bob, declare themselves heterosexual. Contrary to what one would find, the most prolific representation of sexuality in the text is that of bisexuality. The three men that I begin a discussion on include the pharmacist, o seu Kurts, Artur and his gang, and Clovis. A declared heterosexual and local business owner, o seu Kurts is

the neighborhood pharmacist who has a crush on Bob, and makes multiple advances as Bob goes to use the phone and purchase products for his mother. In public, o seu Kurts does make declarations that Bob is prettier than his sisters (70). However, he does not openly manifest his homosexual desires. He belongs to the group of men that pretend to be fully heterosexual. This also includes the men Bob provokes in the streets. These men encounter Bob in the public transportation system and, although often described as accompanying female partners, they glance provocatively at Bob. Due to his old age, the pharmacist never causes harm, but he does attempt to force his body next to Bob in multiple instances. Heterosexual female readers must find it surprising to read that an undisclosed percentage of men would have sexual relations with or feel a level of attraction to other men. Rios is once again, shattering the foundational core that heterosexual desire is the predominant sexual norm.

The second group of men also consider themselves to be heterosexual and are not openly bisexual, but actively seek homosexual encounters. This particular group includes Artur and his gang of friends. Artur is beloved by Bob, but he and his gang manifest their desires with violence and secrecy. For these young men, homosexual and transgendered identities include effeminate behavior and a sexually passive role. They exude masculinity and, in the sex scenes, this translates to violence, including rape. The revealing element in these sex scenes is that through erotic encounters, gender roles and identities are stressed, revealing what society deems appropriate for each sex. For instance, the first time Artur kisses and has intercourse with Bob, he notices Bob's delicate hands, his lack of facial hair, and his feminine tendencies to write notes and to cry. These physical attributes and social tendencies put Bob under the female category, because males cannot (supposedly) manifest their sex and gender in this fashion. Artur's response in this scene is to call Bob a "*mulherzinha*" 'little woman' and to project his physical

dominance over Bob's body by forcing him into particular positions. Whenever Bob displays any signs of resistance, Artur threatens to beat him or hurt him sexually. The physical threat complies with the psychological teachings of females, where they must submit in diverse social instances, to the power and will of men. Florence Thomas explains this, the patriarchal dominion of women through silence, states forth that

conociste la esclavitud, los cinturones de castidad . . . te rifaron, te compraron . . . te invisibilizaron, pero sobre todo te callaron . . . cada vez que querías decir algo te mandaban a la cocina . . . fuiste esclava, puta, doncella . . . la señora de . . . fuiste madre y otra vez madre . . . solo excepcionalmente pudieron alzar vuelo . . . oímos más tu llanto que tu risa. . . (22).

For Thomas, violence against women's bodies manifests itself through the lack of equality. Bob's sex marks him as male, but his emotions and gender manifestations identify him as female, creating a dilemma for the reader which destabilizes the natural assumption between sex and gender. In the sex scene described above, Bob ultimately quiets down and Artur forces himself sexually onto Bob.

Although the novel was published in 1961, it is not timid in presenting erotically charged descriptions. With a back and forth dialogue of pressure and resistance, the narrative includes intense details, such as the ones in the sex scene between Artur and Bob:

Sentiu a força do rapaz sobre seu corpo, dominando-o, calcando-o com fúria. Deu-se e abandonou-se à sua vontade. Importavam os beijos que choviam en seus cabelos, pelo seu pescoço, as mãos que o percorriam, que o tinham pôsto completamente nu. Sentia-lhe a língua dentro da bôca e depois os beijos descendo pela nuca, as mãos espalmando-se em

seu peito, decendo para a cintura, indo mais além . . . O outro desceu as mãos. Bob excitou-se. Quando estava em delírio, gemendo, murmurando palavras de amor, que antes nunca pensara dizer, quando a emoção num crescendo de gôzo estava recurvando-lo numa contração de nervos, entrando em espasmódica sensação, o outro feriu-o sem réplica, calcando-se numa agilidade espantosa, misturando a dor e a surpresa, com o arrebatamento e o gôzo. (84-86)

With quotes such as the one above, Rios is able to create further connections with the reader. As I mentioned earlier, folk tales narrate themes that are pertinent to the reader and create a network of shared experiences. In scenes such as the one cited, the readers are enticed, seduced, and aroused by the presentation of erotic desire, an emotion readers crave and/or have experienced. Although the sexual encounter involves two males, the strategic back and forth between dialogue and description allows readers to lose themselves in their own desires, and the similarities in sexual experiences between same sex and different sex couples becomes another common factor in the novel's presentation of sex scenes. This is an example of a deliberate attempt in the text to normalize homosexual desire within a framework that cannot explain desire outside of a dual structure.

An additional common experience pertinent to a female readership presented in the text is rape, one of the most feared and most traumatic experiences for women. In the novel, Bob is gang raped by Artur and his friends, and left unconscious by all the beatings. The reader is once again presented with a sexual identity dilemma: associate with the heterosexual male character, who in this case is a violent rapist, or Bob, the homosexual victim. It is instances like these that craft a space of tolerance and compassion towards Bob, from the part of female readers who understand and fear sexual assault and male manipulation. Although the characters developed in

the novel are male, the issues (also) pertain to female experiences and identities. Foster writes that traditionally in Latin American literature, the homosexual character, the one exhibiting his sexuality in a passive manner, is often portrayed as the victim of macho exploitation (4). This statement applies to Rios' novel, which emphasizes a distribution of power that is retained in all social spaces, particularly, a power and a privilege held by men in the state and within communities. Regardless of class, men continue to be valued more than woman and are authorized to impose their will in diverse ways.

As a male, Bob's integration of feminine characteristics is a point of interest for my analysis. As I mentioned earlier, the physical traits, clothing, and mannerisms that Bob executes are a reflection of his society. The presentation of beauty, for example, holds a privileged position within the text. Those concerned with beauty, would most likely be a female readership. Bob begins to mirror and imitate appropriate gender performances and, like other women, begins to reflect his transformations through clothing, makeup, and body language. Bob even compares himself to other women, developing a narcissistic quality of "*como eu sou belo*" 'how I am beautiful' (69). The element of both the completion between men and the animosity between women is replicated by Bob, increasing to a larger degree with his physical transformation. As Bob replicates the features and characteristics that he considers essential to women, the reader has the option to become critical of those same rubrics, which are fossilized within societal expectations. Because Bob is not the perfect match between sex and gender, the reader pays closer attention to everything that does not follow his socially allocated gender identity. At a distance, female readers for example, have an opportunity to rethink the ways in which gender is exercised by their sex.

The last male character that I want to discuss due to his background and relationship to Bob is Clovis. He is the mature gentleman that becomes Bob's partner through a meeting in the train that results in casual sex. Clovis displays no feminine mannerisms, nonetheless he epitomizes success, both financially and personally. He also happens to have a wife and children is a rich landowner who falls deeply in love with Bob. The author does not want to present Clovis as a pervert; she does, nonetheless, want to present the social contradictions and the lack of opportunities for sexual freedom. Clovis reveals that while engaging in coitus with his wife, he constantly imagines a masculine body. Although he never makes public his homosexual desires, he being passionately in love with Bob. Clovis assumes a husband like role with Bob, and providing a home and economic resources for Bob to beautify himself. Bob has access to a private bank account, expensive jewelry, dresses, and private parties in their condominium where other homosexual couples are invited. In the condominium, Bob ceases to exist, and Georgette is born. With o seu Kurts, Artur and Clovis, masculinity is supposed to be clearly defined. Nonetheless, they make the limits of sexuality and gender murky, undefined, and questionable.

The destabilization of traditional gender models in the novel continues with Bob's transvestite development, his questioning of gender identities, and his manifestation of homoerotic love. Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough provide a cross cultural perspective on cross dressing by stating that it has meant different things to different cultures throughout time (3). Sara Davidmann argues that in the Western world, there is still the assumption that there are only two genders that correlate to biological sex, noting that genitals continue to be the "essential defining feature of gender" (187). There is sufficient textual evidence to suggest that the novel wants to destroy the biological perception of gender. The narrative accomplishes this however, as others in the previous chapters have done by imitating the same normative discourses and

simultaneously contradicting them. Bob, for instance, incorporates clothing and feminine mannerisms that women generally imitate, and his character descriptions, entail weakness and emotional instability (characteristics traditionally associated with women). On the other hand, the text also presents Bob as someone who contradicts the assumption that genitalia matches gender and defies society's perception of gender and sex by suggesting that although his sex and gender do not match, they can still find harmony through another option, cross dressing.

Outside perception of transvestism is best described by Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, who writes that transvestism represents and occupies the place of the "other," while for the transvestitic subject, it is about representing, becoming, and recreating the "self" (3). He emphasizes that "transvestite subjects do not necessarily imagine themselves becoming some other subject, but rather they may conceive of transvestism as an act of self-realization" (4). Bob exemplifies these perspectives throughout the novel, from childhood to adulthood. The first time Bob transforms himself freely in Clovis' condominium, it takes him hours and is so taken aback by the experience that he cannot control his shaking and sweating. For Bob, the experience means a complete physical representation of himself, where his outside matches his inside.

In addition to having entry into both gender worlds, Bob possesses the knowledge of both sexes. His challenge to the male sex and gender is traced back to his childhood and his rejection of the highly valued masculine is witnessed in ample examples. In one particular instance, Bob integrates biological metamorphosis attributed to female bodies into his own psyche, and the author introduces the natural element of love within a gender and sex coupling that is not traditional. For example, there is a moment in Bob's childhood where he begins to connect sexuality to the female menstrual cycle and pregnancy. In his mind, he cannot accept the differences between him and his sisters. It is precisely with these differences, such as his sister

Iliana's monthly routine to throw out her used pads, that Bob's feminine imitation begins. After lunch, Bob goes to the restroom to "*satisfazer uma necessidade fisiológica*" 'to satisfy a physiological need' where he begins to scream to his sisters that he has cramps and needs "Modess," a brand of pads (34). After careful inspection by his sisters, they discover that due to the beet juice Bob has drunk in large quantities, his urine is slightly colored, thereby assuming that he has begun his menstruation. Although the sisters reprimand him and explain to him that he cannot have a period, he remains sick for the rest of the evening. According to the text, he even has a fever, and continues to have fever when he is upset. The presentation of fever as an element of heat, and of his future sexual desires, is also present in *Como agua para chocolate* as the manifestation of intense emotions in one's life. In Bob's mind, he truly believes that he is experiencing his menstruation. As previously described by Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, Bob is not experiencing a state of being designated to female bodies, he is experiencing it on his own body, as if it were meant to be expressed. As this example shows, Bob begins to eradicate traditional notions of gender. The novel, on the other hand, continues the exposition of homoeroticism, as rooted in the human spirit, through the author's careful word choice in describing Bob's necessity to go to the restroom as one of naturalness, rooted in normativity.

Bob is a man who experiences his body, mind, and emotions as both male and female. In her attempt to validate Bob's homoerotic desires, the author carefully crafts a future space for Bob in the domestic realm. This traditionally female space, however, ultimately becomes unbearable for the character. On the other hand, public acceptance and tolerance can only be achieved if the author builds a convincing case of normalcy. Taking possession of the normative in the middle part of the century, possessed more value and had dramatic consequences in comparison to today. Throughout the text, Rios describes Bob's feminine tendencies, and his

feminine physique, with depictions such as “Bob, rostinho fino, bem formado, talhado para homem, desenhado para mulher, bôca vermelha-rosa-pálida . . . A cintura não apertada pela cinta que segurava as calças, poderia diminuir-se até igualar-se à de uma senhorita bem constituída” (77). With descriptions such as these, the author incorporates verbs that convey naturalness, while “*talhado*” and “*desenhado*” imply a sense of construction, fit for both sexes. By introducing both sexes early on as natural to Bob, she eases his transformation and assimilation into Georgette. The objective in the analysis is not to justify and support essentialism, but to recognize a text that necessitates equality among diverse gender and sex identities. Rios goes a step farther and, although imitating the emotional gender influences of her time, assigns Bob the ability to feel love and pain like a woman, meaning that women can feel a greater sense of pain and love, in contrast to men. As a result, Rios appoints Bob “*uma alma feminina*” ‘a feminine soul’ (97). The reference could allude to a part of the human that is another unseen entity, the most basic essence of life, and the everlasting element that remains after the body’s death. Bob, in the text, is not described in discourses of perversion and sin, but of pure human emotion. As Bob weeps over Artur’s betrayal (for promising him a life together if he would help him finance a motorcycle shop, but really just using him), he feels alone, with no one to comfort and understand him. The omniscient narrator claims, “como poder revelar a alguém que aquêlê amor de homem pelo homem era um sentimento humano, um amor igual ao outro amor!” (97). Who can argue that love is experienced differently based on sexual preference? No one can. Charlotte Suthrell writes that the doctrines of gender present what is natural and normal (5). In the case of *Georgette*, Rios wants to incorporate Bob’s emotions into the realms of natural and normal as well. Bob’s pain is equal to any other human, independent of gender embodiments.

As Bob's character begins a process by which he questions the imposition of male desires, roles, and identities, he starts to develop a consciousness of rebellion. Bob begins asking the most basic of questions, such as Why do men have to love women? In his clear rejection of women as sexual partners, and knowing that he is smart in school, he transfers the concept of intelligence to his emotions, declaring that he loves in an intelligent manner. For Bob, his accumulated knowledge of society, of traditional scholarly topics, transfers his conscious formation of information, to an emotional level. He applies his knowledge of gender to his own physical transformation into a transvestite. The transformation is not simply a change of clothes, but a time consuming act filled with many details, the application of makeup, changes in the language of the body, which transitions Bob into someone who emulates femininity. He begins to build a mental library of knowledge about female seduction in order to accomplish flawless transformations. He carefully studies foreign film, actresses such as Ava Gardner, Elizabeth Taylor, and Marlene Dietrich. Bob then observes, imitates, and repeats female expressions of elegance and seduction in order to be a "[m]ulher fatal, adorada, amada, desejada, invejada" (110). As in a similar academic setting, he compiles information, acquires a deep knowledge for a subject, and then applies what he has learned with the hopes of obtaining a desired outcome.

"Éle era ela, finalmente!" 'he was she, finally!' Bob's rebirth is rooted in the soul and rises to the flesh (143). Completely touched and supported by Clovis, Bob becomes Georgette. Bob, like his new name, is a female version of something male. His fulfillment is intense and so complete. Sex, for Georgette, is connected to thought. Bob deliberately transforms himself, and consumes his passion with a full consciousness. Georgette's transformation, and his imitation of a feminine gender, can also be viewed as an archive of knowledge, of what is essential into determining what society expects from a woman and what is considered to be essential for

femininity. *Georgette* is an example of how the flesh and the mind reunite, and with eroticism as the motivator. The main character is propelled by his inner passion to act upon his desires and find the ways with which to fulfill his dreams. As a result, a transgendered identity manifested by cross dressing destabilizes the dichotomous conceptions of gender and sexuality, and makes visible that which exists with the acceptance of only two categories. Cross dressing also clearly marks normative expectations on gender, making visible the imposed markers of femininity and condoned sexual practices.

Rios presents an articulate presentation of how the boundaries of identity can incorporate subjects who are traditionally marginalized for their sexual orientation and the manner in which they embody gender. Through similarities, such as the feminine sentiment, sexual differences are erased as being threatening. Furthermore, Rios reaches out to normalcy, as a means by which to fully integrate the transgendered subject it originally excluded. She juggles the cultural ideologies in extremes, questioning both and inserting doubt into the readers' minds in order to attempt to disturb the exclusionist and privileged patriarchal discourse. In conclusion, *Georgette* is an example of how societal truths are challenged by presenting examples that do not follow prescriptive rubrics of rational. Bob is both male and female, and Georgette is Bob.

The Union of the Princess and the Fairy in “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?”

In 1970, during the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City, an evident concern emerged: the discrimination of lesbians within the feminist movement (Jagose 47). Race is another issue that arose among feminists, in particular, how the movement was presenting an all-white, middle class reality. Sexual orientation and race became equally important categories for consideration and in articulating discourses. Gloria Anzaldúa, a lesbian Chicana feminist, has written on the challenges. In her influential text, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*,

Anzaldúa identifies the process of indoctrinating gender roles in every day family interactions. As part of this process she puts forth the innate contradictions within culture. She writes, “[t]hrough our mothers, the culture sent us mixed messages: No voy a dejar que ningún pelado desgraciado maltrate a mis hijos. And in the next breath it would say, La mujer tiene que hacer lo que le diga el hombre. Which was it to be-strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming?” (40). Women are taught what the ideal characteristics are, nonetheless, contradictory discourses emerge influenced by emotion and the circulation of ideas. In Anzaldúa’s chapter titled “Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan,” she disrupts traditional gender and sexual models that have only two opposite possibilities and expounds, onto the potential of encapsulating both. She calls it the “half and half,” a social evolution that is better and does not fit within the limitations presented by traditionally sexual identities. She claims not only to have “an entry into both worlds,” but also that she is “two in one” (41). Her language use is representative of a transgendered identity, where an individual moves freely between both.

The second text under analysis is written by Rosamaría Roffiel and is found in her short story collection titled *El para siempre dura una noche* and published in 1999. Although the author has written several books, there is no existing analysis on her short story collection. This collection raises issues pertaining to sexuality and to the gay and lesbian community. From the beginning, the title of the collection presents a sentiment that rejects traditional views on love and marriage. Feelings here distinguish themselves from other unions and emotions understood as everlasting. The title reduces forever to one night. It integrates humor and a platform by which to present larger issues pertaining to lesbian relationships, which are often questioned and not taken seriously by their communities. As a result, the reader begins the short story collection with his/her very own foundation of love and marriage in relation to time destroyed.

As shown in its title, “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?” the verb for telling a story takes the same root as the noun for short story or fairy tale, *cuento*. In this case, it is referring to the retelling process of tales. It is a short story that I argue adapts the fairy-tale structure to present an alternate representation of sexuality. “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?” is the story of a mother who tells her son Sebastián a romantic fairy tale before going to bed. In particular, this story explains how he has two mothers. Roffiel emulates the most basic characteristics of a fairy tale, the meeting and union of a couple, and subverts the heteronormative inscription to that of a homosexual relationship. The symbol of heteronormative power is the bad witch. The bad witch can be analyzed either as the traditional character within a fairy tale which haunts the princess, or as the overarching social spectrum that regulates and surveys heteronormativity within both the private and public space. I arrive at the latter conclusion because the witch is the Witch of Fear, the character that has transferred fear of love—and the sense that she will never obtain homoerotic love—to the Princess.

The fairy tale consists of Princesa Mamilinda, or Princess Beautiful Mother, and Hada Terciopela, or Velvet Fairy. Immediately, from the character names, one sees the repossession of language to represent the feminine. Terciopelo is feminized to Terciopela, when the word only exists in the masculine. For the storyteller, the language is changed to better represent her reality. In Spanish, which gives masculine and feminine identities to nouns, the storyteller simply changes the sex of the word to represent a real woman. The value system of the storyteller is also apparent as both the listener, Sebastián and the storyteller, his mother, affirm to the reader the beauty of the tale. As a result, homosexual love is brought forth from the dark spaces of oppression and invisibility and rewritten into something which represents beauty. The simple assignment of beauty and preference to this particular story reorganizes the very value system by

which tales become sources of inculcating the youth with societal expectations and appropriate forms of behavior.

The witch, named the Bruja del Miedo, or Witch of Fear, has placed a spell on the Princess and caused her to believe that there is no one in the world that could love her, leaving her heart empty (131). The scenario of Princess Mamalinda is that of a woman who is afraid to love due to the unaccepted choice of her sexual identity. If her sexual preference is not condoned, neither are her emotions. In a direct manner, the text explains the inner conflicts of not being accepted in society. Lesbian relationships in Mexico are seen with repulsion and confusion because of the impossibility to complete coitus with the basic interplay between the penetrator and the penetrated. As a consequence of this confusion, an imaginary is created, allocating the term “*tortillera*” to a lesbian. *Tortillera* is the name of the person who makes tortillas; however, it is specifically referring to the manner in which tortillas are traditionally made: by hand, involving a circular piece of dough’s being molded and expanded by the act of slapping the piece of dough from hand to hand. As a result, this creates the illusion that while lesbians can touch, even violently, very little can occur. Mocking the impossibility of penetrating one another, homoerotic love is invalidated by normative perceptions on sex. By placing the story line in a romantic impossibility, readers are able to respond with more compassion, in particular because they are trained with and exposed daily to national soap operas whose story lines consistently revolve around frustrated love.

The setting for the Princess is not purely seeped in medieval descriptions, but in regional tones where she is able to see rooftops and television antennas from her bedroom window. She also displays a level of independence. She has her own studio and conducts her own research projects. Before she sleeps, she places a pencil and notebook nearby, ready to write her dreams

in order to remember them and to distinguish between reality and dream. When referring to fairy tales with female protagonists, Steven Swann Jones concludes that they often play passive roles, expecting others to guide and save them (65). Female protagonists are at times also discouraged from speaking their minds and “associated with nature and primitive emotions and values, which the narratives ultimately depict as inferior to the civilized and rationalized representations of patriarchal roles and values” (65). Roffiel destroys the layers that silence female protagonists and displays the story of a female who is about to break her fears and bondage.

In a dream, Princess Mamalinda meets Fairy Terciopela in a forest. Their first encounter is marked by surprise and, specifically, by a beautiful sound that comes from the inside and the outside and causes Princess Mamalinda to be overjoyed and to begin dancing with Fairy Terciopela. The representation of strong emotions, perhaps of love within the story, involves a union between the characters and their surroundings. Swann Jones elaborates on the matter, stating that the tale “promotes total integration of personal, social, and cosmic values. Such a confluence is philosophically very functional and appealing, promoting a sense of wholeness and oneness with the world” (88). I interpret this description as having more relevance to love than on the matter of integrating oneself to the social system. Love, particularly in the Mexican context, is overwhelmingly saturated by medieval notions of courtly love, which includes dramatic portrayals of one’s emotions and tragic encounters with the loved one. Roffiel’s story is attempting to describe the power and feeling of love to a child.

As Princess Mamalinda runs away with Fairy Terciopela, the Witch of Fear follows them, squeaking into the night that if the Princess continues, she will lose her freedom (133). The threat is ironic because a relationship can, and often does, represent in mainstream culture the loss of freedom. In this particular context, however, it is also the opposite—the gain of freedom and the

loss of fear. As the two continue their journey into the forest, they share their lives and comfort one another. As Fairy Terciopela explains, “la tomó entre sus brazos y le empezó a hacer caracolos atrás de la oreja” (134). To be comforted is one of the most important acts within tales. Following a rubric appropriate for children, the erotic is represented in alternative ways. In the forest, Princess Mamalinda’s perception of her senses is heightened. Her sense of touch and smell perceive perfume released by herbs, as her feet feel the wet ground. The description is erotically charged, followed by a full night of caresses and self-discovery. The protagonist shatters the taboo associated with physical contact between the same sex. It also displaces the notion that same-sex desire is perverse.

En route to the conclusion, there is a paragraph that at first glance can quickly be ignored. However, it is its repetitive use of the word “*aprender*” ‘to learn’ that is of interest to this dissertation. The night they spend together in the forest, the Princess and the Fairy learn a new set of vocabulary, including vegetation, plants, birds, the different shades of blue within the night, laughter until one cries, to give oneself, and the difference between love and dependence (135). The most valuable lesson of that night is that the exterior form is the means by which to make way for love (135). Love is and is not beyond the physical, because without the body one does not feel love. However, within a Christian tradition, it is assumed that love is a part that remains within memory, and memory is retained even after death. It is, nonetheless, the new process of learning that both characters have to go through, and what this means within the story, that is intriguing. By including a homoerotic reading, the process of re-learning is a process of re-writing and re-appropriating new meanings and values to language. In a world that rejects Princess Mamalinda’s desires, and in a moment where she accepts her lesbian identity, her interpretation of her surroundings also transform. It is the act of constructing new meanings with

the same traditional ones that allows for a rupture of normativity. Although dangerous to the traditional order, the use of pedagogical rubrics to incorporate lesbian desires within a fairy tale is a double game of resistance and acceptance of social structures. By utilizing normative structures, Roffiel develops a short fairy tale that doubly supports and challenges heteronormative views. Although Princess Mamalinda and Fairy Terciopela are unable to procreate, and thus support a major social value within tales, they do have a son. Gender and sex, similar to *Georgette*, thus enter into conflict with one another here and to not coexist harmoniously within a dualistic framework.

In conclusion, folk narratives, including fairy tales, are an instructional tool that teaches the reader how to conform to societal expectations. They also inculcate social values by supporting marriage and patriarchal family structures, and in addition, prescribe gender roles where female protagonists are passive and male protagonists are admired for their acts that impact the whole community. In a direct connection to gender, fairy tales are preoccupied with sexual identity, as many tales often depict coming-of-age protagonists. As a consequence of such prescriptive methods, gender bias is evident, as is the over simplification of life and the lives of individuals. In this chapter, I have provided examples of how popular normative structures, such as tales, are a means with which to replicate the pedagogical process while incorporating traditionally excluded transgendered and homosexual identities. Through a process of exposure in the storytelling process, the execution of gender can be expanded and inserted within the borders of acceptability. Although the principal outcome for many feminists and self-identified transgendered citizens is to completely erase these borders, the expansion of them is a productive starting point.

As stated by *Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça* sex wears a skirt and a pair of pants. As I have demonstrated, gender and sexuality is political, and the manifestation of erotic desire is much more complex than male/female and masculinity/femininity. Human experiences involving erotic desire cannot easily be contained in a binary system. Love as a pedagogical tool that joins flesh and thought allocates a degree of power to the erotic. *Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça* and “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?” are erotic texts that present political matters. The characters in both texts possess unruly normative bodies that do not fit naturally into the binary classifications. Not accepting and not giving visibility to transgendered and homoerotic experiences in mainstream literature is a way to maintain gender division. Recuperating these bodies and providing more visibility allows for the extension of borders, particularly because *Georgette*, Princess Mamalinda, and Fairy Terciopela embody both genders and, as a result, weaken claims about sexual difference. Falling in between both of the traditional genders and sexes is a successful way to refute the strict confinements of erotic desire, illuminating the fact that human reality is much more diverse and demands many more identities.

Conclusion

The body within a Western intellectual tradition has been part of a dual relationship tied with yet opposed to that of the mind. In the pursuit of knowledge our Western legacy made the body invisible, thereby silencing the individual's very experiences. The body was thus believed to be a fixed biological entity with its own animalistic pursuits which needed to be controlled. As addressed by Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, the mind/body split provided gendered resonances, where the feminine was associated with the devalued term of the body. For people of color worldwide, the consequences were unsettling, including slavery and the establishment of political systems of oppression.

Not only was the body relegated to a lesser domain and the mind elevated, but it was also imagined as a site of unruly passions and appetites that could lead humans astray from the sacrosanct path of knowledge. For individuals who are oppressed and marginalized politically, economically and socially, all sources of knowledge are essential for empowerment. Feminism has made it clear that the mind/body binary must be eradicated in order to make visible how detrimental this split has been for many women and men around the world. The union between the body and mind, as stated by Audry Lorde, can be a source of knowledge, and is a union that must occur if oppressed individuals are ever to reclaim their bodies, and as a result, their own destinies. Ideas alone do not motivate individuals to reassess and empower themselves; it also comes from emotions and desires. The unification of the mind and body is of crucial importance for individuals who seek to integrate their experiences into the system, and obtain fuller citizenship rights. The personal is political, as feminists have claimed in the past, and so is our sex.

Within the Western legacy, women have been ordained to a degenerate body which brings with it shame, guilt and oppression. To go a step further, giving birth to erotic actions and ideas is a masculinized act rarely associated with the feminine. Women were indoctrinated to repress and control their erotic energy, because it leads to perdition and sin. As I have demonstrated above, eroticism is a source of power and knowledge. By the production of knowledge, I mean that it consists of our realities, histories, language, our work, and our desires, everything that encompasses our lives and that is a result of alternative forms of knowledge. In particular, I am referring to those ideas produced under different social conditions of knowledge production, such as the private space. Eroticism inevitably speaks to all of us. It is about the production of pleasure, and about the social structures which focus on containing these energies and denigrating them as useless and threatening to the order. In this dissertation, I have used the erotic as a means by which to address personal, political and cultural issues. Alice Mahon reminds readers of one of the principles which is at the core of this dissertation, namely that the representation of the erotic in texts makes its power evident, as well as its ability to make us think and act differently. Eroticism can be a positive means of empowerment, reform and illumination within our embodied gender limits. Furthermore, erotic desire can inform us about the world around us, and it can motivate individuals to fight sexual oppression, which in turn can affect other forms of social oppression. Reclaiming our erotic desire and expressing it in our daily lives gives rise to reclaiming projects, which are of particular importance to politically marginalized groups that are calling to reclaim themselves in all of their dimensions, to focus on achieving self-fulfillment in all magnitudes, and to equally integrate the intellectual, emotional, and sexual as sources of illumination into their past, present and future.

Under a feminist lens, this dissertation parallels the movement's concerns regarding how our femininity and sexuality are defined and how we might begin to define it for ourselves. The Latin American experience provides a feminist perspective that is prevalent within the texts, demonstrating that the concern for female equality does not preclude concern for fellow oppressed male comrades. Deeply concerned with feminist practice and theory, feminists believe that the politics of the personal, manifested in everyday life, are crucial sites for the origins of the redefinition of patriarchal values. As Chris Weeden exemplifies in his work, the quotidian is precisely a point of interest for feminists to imagine new possibilities as well as to generate new theoretical perspectives. All texts under analysis proffer a view into popular culture and show how, in practice, everyday women and men exercise their desires within normative rubrics. Although the fundamental focus of the dissertation is the status of women, it also revealed the intricate role of men who are part of the periphery, belonging to disempowered circles within the patriarchy. Latin America holds its own challenges, needs and insights; however, what connects women in this geopolitical location to the feminist movement, and to other women around the world, is the continuous need to define what it is to be a woman, and what we might become.

Feminism in the twentieth century has been concerned with demonstrating that gender and sexuality are not biological and dichotomous entities that remain unchanged. The movement has demonstrated that gender and sexuality are social constructs, and that a process for eradicating misconceived notions about women and marginalized individuals due to sexual affiliations, needs to be undertaken. Deconstructing gender as a fixed biological entity, and replacing this definition with that of a fluid social construct is a major feminist contribution. What is of great importance, is that it repositions gender, and as a result, the body, as a site of potential.

What makes gender and sexuality radically important to women is the fact that they are markers of identity that have direct consequences on the power structures that model all areas of our lives, such as our education, the way we dress, how we express our desires, and the roles we have within our family, culture, and workplace. Normative constructions of gender and sexuality narrow an individual's life possibilities. Not only do they demarcate what is appropriate and provide moral insight into what is wrong, but they also construct dominant discourses and myths about a subject's social roles, identity, body, sexuality and desire. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, citizens naturally resist, expand and modify normative definitions of gender and sexuality. Although I predominantly analyzed a heterosexual paradigm, challenging Western binaries of the two sex and gender model, and expanding them, is the beginning so that in the future they can be successfully eradicated. I have also been preoccupied with demonstrating that gender and sexuality are consistently being challenged by subjects who are not fulfilled with the traditional inscriptions. What is considered normative is not as neatly defined and practiced as its discourse depicts it to be. On the contrary, its definitions are too limiting, and even if individuals do not want to do away with the traditional, they do however see the necessity of modifying it in their daily lives. In the four chapters, I have established that by analyzing the erotic in connection with gender and sexuality, we are offered a more comprehensive understanding of ourselves. In addition, I show that the linear borders that define eroticism, gender and sexuality cannot contain human reality and desire. Characters that are unable to conform to pure normative models turn to gender and sexuality variances, resulting in lines of demarcation that are expanded yet still fit within normativity. People go to great lengths to eradicate threats to the norm; however, these disturbances occur regularly at the quotidian level, and in the most conservative of spaces. The

desired outcome is the acceptance of multiple and fluid possibilities for embodying gender and sexuality, founded on erotic expression as a source of knowledge and empowerment.

In Chapter One, I provided a timeline and looked at the intersections between the erotic, the body, gender and sexuality. Providing an individual philosophical history of the treatment of each made it possible to also see their shared history of oppression, and how interdependent they really are. Not only do these areas influence one another, but in practice they often collide. In turn, this enables my argument that the form of analysis of the erotic in relation to a system of oppression, needs to be rethought. I propose that eroticism can be a source of alternative forms of knowledge that lead to the expansion of embodied gender limits. In particular, I circulate the erotic as a foundation for and a source of knowledge that gives way to a consciousness of the position of women within society and to the occasion for reform. By creating a new consciousness in the characters, a pathway to obtaining knowledge of our desires and the environment around us which prescribes gender practices is also forged. Erotic desire seeks to view the desired other and repeat its sexual encounters, and what the subject is willing to do to ensure these encounters is precisely what proves to be a source for destabilizing gender. I further highlight the erotic as a source for knowledge, and it binds knowledge and emotions as fruitful and powerful sources of social critique and action. The potential for a manifestation of gender diversity is at the crux of this dissertation, especially in environments where the normative performance of gender and sexuality is enforced, thereby allowing one to see that even in these situations, the erotic is a source by which the embodiment of gender and sexuality expand the borders of normativity, offering an extension of the limitations within communities.

In Chapter Two, I argued that *Gabriela, cravo e canela* and *Como agua para chocolate*, in the traditional act of preparing food, the main characters express erotic desire. The need to

have an erotic space makes it evident that the prescribed gender practices are outdated and cannot account for female needs. As a result, the erotic motif propels a critique on social roles, freedoms and responsibilities, and makes diverse sources of knowledge traditionally not accredited as such evident, like the kitchen and the erotic experience. Both novels are erotic texts that ignite a discourse of change in the options presented to women, both by the way they can perform gender as well as by recognizing their sexual desires. A principle objective is to see how precarious binaries really are. Oftentimes, characters simultaneously enforce as well as challenge gender norms. Female characters at the quotidian level are able to perform multiple gender discourses simultaneously within their communities, thereby allowing the normative gender practices to become flexible and mutable, oftentimes undetected. The chapter provides the notion that through erotic desire, the kitchen becomes a nontraditional site of social critique, reclaimed history, and production of knowledge that results in female empowerment. Both Tita and Gabriela cannibalize the systems of oppression, and provide inspiration for others around them to become conscious of their social practices, and of the need to expand the borders of gender and sexual embodiment.

In Chapter Three, I explore the absence of women in History, which brings with it strong discourses of control, lack of power, representation and agency. This chapter analyses two national myths; one is a national hero, Pancho Villa, and the other, a region within Brazil, the Northeast. In both works, I examine the rewriting project's objectives which are grounded on incorporating multiple versions to the official history, which presupposes that there can only exist a singular experience, as well as its national myths. Myths are conducive to unrealistic expectations and the creation of stereotypes. As a result, the deconstruction of myths as creations in time, allows for the rupturing of essentialist characteristics attributed to individuals and creates

the potential to provide alternative models. Knowledge in the two works is rooted in national paradigms, and the very consciousness of the cultural network becomes the means by which to re-inscribe new gender performances that allow the characters to lead lives that better suit their needs. By imitating the very system that controls and limits, incorporating ways in which gender is expanded to incorporate new definitions allows the characters to co-exist within normative paradigms while achieving successful modifications. Thirdly, the presence of androgynous traits in characters is a counterhegemonic weapon that blurs the prescribed confinements of gender and sexuality, and offers a state of being that naturally gives way to transforming labor roles, identities and desires. As a result, the combination of the established knowledge, androgynous traits and the representation of myths, reveals that homogeneity is continuously being challenged from within. *Eu tu eles* and *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* offer the possibility to transform the predetermined gender models in order to meet the social, emotional and sexual needs of its members. Both texts have also demonstrated that social parameters can be inverted, expanded, and overturned, with knowledge of the very same oppressive system.

Lastly, in Chapter Four, I argue that the need to act upon one's homoerotic desires propels the adaptation of tales as a means by which to challenge the two-sex model of masculinity and femininity. The discussions of gender and sexuality are often too limited and are a platform for gender inequality. *Georgette: Sex veste saia e calça* and “¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?” stylistically imitate the traditional structures and values of tales and fairy tales, with an intent that I argue is based on their objective of presenting contested issues of desire involving same sex relationships and transgendered identities. By replicating an institutionalized format that provides a legacy of emotional attachments, both texts insert themselves into a readership that is trained to recognize tales. By imitating a structure similar to the tale, the texts

under analysis introduce important gender and sex variables that make visible the complexity of both as well as the limited options offered by a heterosexual society. Using an archive of human emotion, the texts make a claim to human emotion, to heterosexual readers, to revisit the lack of tolerance and to develop more just social structures of inclusion.

Gender at its Limits proves that erotic desire is so unruly, that it offers the potential to blur the borders that homogenize gender and sexuality. By defining the erotic as sublime bodily pleasure that produces a spiritual environment that touches the inner desires of an individual, *Gender at its Limits* analyzes desire as a communicative body and provides examples where the erotic is able to produce a consciousness that repositions nontraditional forms of knowledge in a productive space. Thus, this dissertation demonstrates that eroticism is a means by which gender and sexuality can incorporate plural and often contradictory practices. By valorizing pleasure, desire and emotion, which naturally resist normalization, *Gender at its Limits* exposes how the elements of opposition to homogeneity, not only resist and challenge authority, but most importantly, have the potential to alter the representations of gender and sexuality. In this manner, the examples support the theories that sustain the notion that feminine and masculine identities are never finally fixed, but are continually negotiated. Furthermore, by analyzing the intersections between eroticism, gender and sexuality, *Gender at its Limits* adds and supports the theorists who believe that the erotic cannot be fully accounted for in a binary system of male/female, which subdues the complexity of our daily experience and is not sufficient to contain the more complicated human reality.

In conclusion, *Gender at its Limits* analyzes the erotic potential to disrupt the establishment and to serve as a means of empowerment and knowledge for women and men. Eroticism also proves to be an effective motivator for expanding the boundaries of gender and as

a result, for being more inclusive and representative of people's needs and realities. Political, cultural and economic inequality continues in Latin America; however, eroticism proves to be a driving emotional force for the reinvention of the individual, and an effective means to reflect upon our own social conditions. *Gender at its Limits* records how the exploration of erotic pleasure has the potential to redefine social and political limits, in order for women to be agents of own bodies and desires, determine who they are, and what they might become.

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