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Femicide in Mexico: From Malinche to Modern Women

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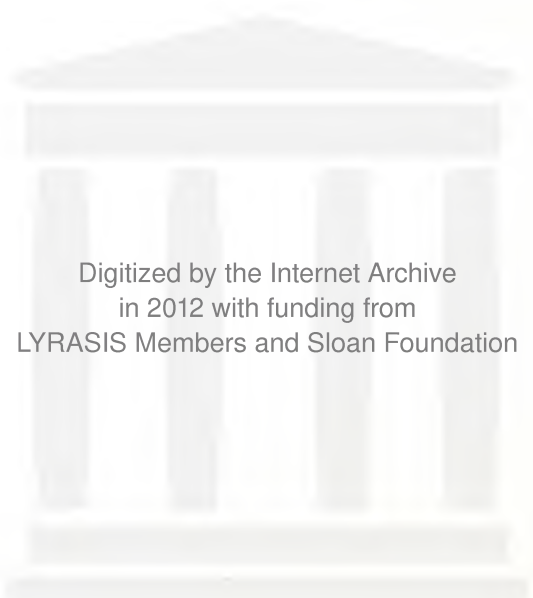
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TEANUCHEE IN MEXICO: FROM MALLINALE TO MODERN WOMEN

Kindall Brako Scarborough



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"Femicide in Mexico: From Malinche to Modern Day Women"

By

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Femicide in Mexico: From Malinche to Modern Day Women

Olga Perez was a typical 20-year-old Mexican girl (Valdez 7). Coming from a poor family, she worked at a local shoe store in Juarez to raise money for college (Valdez 7). Wanting to see her daughter attain her dream of receiving higher education, Olga's mother, Irma, also worked several jobs, including selling hamburgers and hotdogs in front of her house, selling used clothing, and serving as a part-time housekeeper (Valdez 7-8). One evening Olga did not return home after a meeting (Valdez 7). It can be assumed that Irma, being Olga's mother, experienced a wide variety of emotions, including sadness, fear, and anger, upon realizing that her daughter was missing. Irma's worst fear came true upon finding out that her daughter had, indeed, been killed. According to an article by Aileen B. Flores and Diana Rodriguez, *El Paso Times* journalists who have researched *femicides* (systematic murders of women) (Valdez 105), "nearly 750 girls and women have been murdered in Juárez since 1993, and 36 were reported missing this year (2009)" (www.elpasotimes.com). To say that these women were killed does not adequately describe their fate: they were victims of both mutilation and murder. Many women, Olga for example, have had their bodies dismembered—with their breasts having been stabbed, ripped, or bitten off (Valdez 8). Two crucial questions that the present thesis will address are *who* is committing the murders and *why*. We will address the latter question first, in hopes that understanding the reasoning behind the crimes will suggest who might be committing them.

Just as any mother would, Irma attempted to discover what happened to her daughter; however, her search for Olga's murderer/s only brought to the light the powerlessness of her position in society. Instead of attempting to solve the murders, Mexican officials displaced the blame. According to Valdez, the reason why these men attempt to transpose the blame stems from the machismo culture which has long since existed in Mexican culture. She states, "'machismo' manifests itself in domestic violence and in the attitude of the police who belittle reports of sexual assaults of family violence" (14). Mexican officials are unmistakably involved in the murders, but to take blame for those murders and/or to defend the families who seek justice for their deceased daughters would be detrimental to the male psyche in a culture where it is a "requirement to prove one's manhood at any cost" (Valdez 14). As Irma Perez says, "What hurts us, the families, most of all is how the police tried to smear the reputations of our girls. They told the news media that they led double lives. They said they were loose girls or prostitutes. I know my daughter and she was none of these things" (Valdez 11).

With a corrupt Mexican government defending criminals instead of innocent citizens, families like the Perez family have no voice. As it will be addressed later, in many cases the families cannot even attempt to investigate their daughters' cases without receiving death threats. What kind of solution is there for these families living in a world where they are silenced, where their daughters never even have the opportunity to live a normal life and reach their goals? Unfortunately, the practice of murdering or trafficking women from lower socioeconomic classes and subsequently silencing their families is not only a current issue: women at the fringes of society have historically lived in fear of being abducted or murdered, dating back to the conquest of the Americas, if not before.

For the purpose of the present thesis, our discussion regarding the historical occurrence of trafficking and murder of women from lower socioeconomic groups will begin with the Conquest and continue through to the present day disappearances and murders of women in Juárez, Mexico. We will confine our study to Latin America, although the phenomenon is universal in scope. Our intention is to link the fate of the Juárez victims to other women in Latin America who have suffered similar fates and to propose reasons why the practice occurs. We will begin with the written accounts of Cortes' conquest of Mexico and the role that his translator/slave played in the Conquest. We know that these historical narratives were composed by "eyewitness" accounts—often times "soldiers, English travelers and itinerant priests" (Rotker 51) -- who were involved in the conquest of native groups. We will first focus on Hernán Cortés, and he is credited for usurping and in large part destroying the Aztec culture in 1521.

LA MALINCHE, TRAITOR OR VICTIM?

It would be impossible to study the history of Mexico without coming across the name *La Malinche*, perhaps the first documented case of a trafficked and abused woman in Latin America. If the name Malinche is not familiar, then maybe *Malintzin*, *Doña Marina*, or *La Llorona* is? All of these names, plus others, are used to describe the same woman, the indigenous translator and companion of Hernán Cortés. Not many narratives have been written about this woman, but there certainly have been many opinions formed about her. There are some that hate her and others that love her, but regardless, all opinions are based on the little knowledge that we have of her. As was just mentioned, the large majority of the narratives written about the Mexican conquest were written by

soldiers, in this case Cortés and Bernal Diaz, who participated in destroying the Aztec culture, but “hasta la fecha no se haya prestado más atención a las fuentes indígenas que se refieren a Malintzin” (Brotherston 20). Where there is a lack of information, the imagination tends to run wild. It is with these presumptions that myths are formed, and no one would argue that today the life of La Malinche is an enigma. Very little was written about her by her own people. Rather, history depends on these biased soldiers to remember her, the ones who, in the end, destroyed her people and culture. Like the many names for God referenced in Judeo-Christian liturgies, all of Malinche’s names allude to the roles which she has been assigned.

Before discussing her names more in detail, it is important to note that Cortés’ career did not begin with the destruction of the Aztecs; it started much earlier, as a member of expeditions to La Espanola (Santo Domingo) and as a participant in the defeat of Cuba (Montero 128-129). Importantly, he had prepared himself both physically and mentally to attack and settle in the Mexican territory. Despite the fact that he helped to conquer Cuba, “...él quería más: más riqueza, pero sobre todo, a estas alturas, más poder y más gloria” (Montero 129). More than any other reason, pride guided the Spanish conquistadors as they sought to destroy and plunder all of these areas of the world. However, “hay que tomar en cuenta que los autores españoles del siglo XVI ya desde un principio se veían muy obligados a justificar la Conquista” (Leitner 234). Genocide for the sake of usurping another group’s resources was not considered acceptable; therefore, another excuse was needed, one that was more socially acceptable.

To appease the Spanish people who were devoutly Catholic, the conquistadors traveled to Latin America in the name of Christ to “convert” the indigenous, seen as

barbaric people in need of a Savior. Cortés himself, as well as one of his soldiers, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, wrote narratives concerning the conquest, in which they attempted to sway the opinions of their readers. A theme frequently appearing in the chronicles is that because Malinche's father was a cacique or prince, the indigenous referred to her as *Malinali* or *Malintzin*: *tzin* is "una desinencia que indica rango y respeto" (Montero 130). To the Spaniards, she was most often referred as *Doña Marina*, a name like Malintzin signifying prestige and respect. A key question is whether or not she was as respected and praised by the Spaniards as the title Doña Marina suggests? Rosa Montero in her essay "Hernán Cortes y la Malinche: Amor y traición" suggests to us that the answer is no, and that the Spaniard's purpose of calling her Doña Marina was twofold: 1.) to disguise the racism and sexism held by the Spanish towards the indigenous females and 2.) to hide the fact that Malinche was eventually cast aside by Cortés and given to another soldier after she proved no longer useful to the Conquest (Montero 130). An example of disregard shown by Cortés with respect to La Malinche is the fact that in his *Cartas de Relación* he refers to Malinche as "la Lengua." It is true that she was his translator, having to bounce between several different languages, but calling her "la Lengua" suggests much more than simply describing her profession. Identifying Malinche by her tongue robs her from the status of being a woman with a both name and a body because she is identified with only a part of the whole. As well, the tongue can be considered a sensual part of the body and Cortes's use of synecdoche in this instance can result in readers understanding something else (Malinche as sexual object) within the concept (Malinch/tongue) being mentioned.

George Bataille's *The Accursed Share* is helpful to our understanding the threat that La Malinche's talents and powers might have posed to Cortés. Here Bataille explains that we as humans receive more energy than we need to live life, but we can only use this energy for productive purposes as long as growth is possible. When growth is no longer possible, the energy must be wasted (21-22). The energy described in this illustration refers to the wealth that we possess. Enough resources are available that this wealth could be shared without posing a threat to the one expending it; however, the law of economics says that this wealth must be squandered so as to prevent any other group from using it for their own growth. Why would this be an issue with respect to the Conquest and with respect to Cortés's relationship with La Malinche? Significantly, according to Bataille, the "possibilities of life cannot be realized indefinitely; they are limited by the space..." (31) Also, according to the Pauli Exclusion Principle, "two particles of a given type, such as electrons, protons, or neutrons, cannot simultaneously occupy a particular quantum state" (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pauli+exclusion+principle>). In simpler terms, this means that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Thus, since we are limited to a certain amount of space, whoever occupies this space assumes power. Returning to Bataille, space can never be created; what we consider to be "new" space can only be accessed via the death of other space (33). Thus, this "possible growth is reduced to a compensation for the destructions that are brought about" (Bataille 33). This idea by Bataille explains why Spanish nationalism at the time of the Conquest was such a problem, for national pride produced a need to usurp someone else's space. In the specific case of Cortés, in his mind, he knew that he could not simultaneously possess the

same land as the Aztecs, for spatially it was impossible. Instead, he brought to death an entire nation so that that space might be reused for “better,” more industrial purposes.

Interestingly, a number of critical texts suggest that La Malinche possessed a certain amount of political power herself. Gordon Brotherston, author of “La Malintzin de los codices,” writes “los aliados de Cortés la presentan como señora indígena ejemplar que sabe operar y manipular los nuevos valores políticos y religiosos del momento” (21) In fact, Brotherston supports the idea that many of these narratives portray Malinche being as powerful—if not more powerful-- than Cortés himself. For example, concerning the *Códice Florentino*, a visual narrative providing details concerning the interaction between Malintzin and Cortés, it is commented “ambos aparecen como cómplices igualmente aborrecibles” (Brotherston 24). As Brotherston points out, in one of the scenes entitled *Mapa de Tepetlán*, Malintzin “recibe tributo de más valor que Cortés mismo: ochenta pavos, tres collares de oro y—el ítem extra—un *tilmatli* o manta” (25). It can be suggested that the Spaniard’s naming Malinche “Doña Marina,” in order to imply that Malinche was worthy of honor and respect, was, in addition, politically advantageous to Cortés’ dealings with indigenous populations that held Malinche in high regard. In the end, however, regardless of what these manipulative discourse practices regarding Malinche might suggest on the surface, in essence she was a captive slave who was discarded by her “amo”/master, when her abilities were no longer useful and her importance may have become threatening. In sum, after a careful look at Spanish narratives about La Malinche, it can be suggested that they indicate that La Malinche was a captive slave who was eventually proved dispensable to the goals of the Conquest.

Whether or not we perceive of Malinche's childhood as the daughter of a cacique or a slave to the Tabasco people, in actuality her early years have very little significance in distinguishing who she was. As far as the history books are concerned, the only part of her life which now has much significance is the period of time beginning when she was traded/gifted to Cortés and ending when Cortés, in turn, gave her to another soldier, after she had outlived her usefulness to the goals of the Conquest. Thus, simply calling her by "Doña" as a result of her family history does not make much sense. If we want to understand and restore some of Malinche's true worthiness, we need to explore texts other than the chronicles.

"La Malinche y El Primer Mundo" by Jean Franco focuses on two authors in particular who have written books concerning La Malinche, Tzvetan Todorov and Stephen Greenblatt, and here Franco clarifies their arguments as she points to Malinche's true value to the Conquest. First, Todorov wrote a book entitled *La Conquête de l'Amérique* in which he explains that the reason the Spanish were able to conquer the Aztecs was because of the difference in the communication between the two groups. Franco writes, "Para Todorov, los europeos eran expertos en la comunicación intrapersonal, los aztecas en la comunicación con el mundo" (204). Upon reading this statement, questions may arise such as *What does it even mean to be good at intrapersonal communication versus communication with the world?* An example given helps to explain. Todorov in his book talks about another text by Diego Durán, a Dominican friar, in which Durán asks one of the indigenous why they waited so late in the year to plant their crops (Franco 203). The indigenous responds with "todo tiene su cuenta, su razón, y su día particular" (qtd in Franco 203). His comments resemble the

following Biblical verses from the book of Ecclesiastes: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to *plant* and a time to *uproot*....What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He had made everything beautiful in his time” (*New International Version*, Eccl 3:1-2; 9-11a). Although they were not Roman Catholic as the Spanish preferred, most indigenous groups were very religious, being either pantheists or animists (Rondon 157). Their belief that the gods would provide was seen as weakness to the Spanish, for they relied on their own power, strength, and wisdom in making decisions. As Franco writes, “los aztecas se comunican con el mundo y no con los otros, su vida está regida por la exteioridad, no hay voluntad individual ni lugar para la flexibilidad y el oportunismo de un Cortés” (204-205). Whereas the indigenous were cautious to make any move without first consulting the gods and waiting upon their timing, the Spaniards hastily usurped the land and riches of the indigenous, meanwhile forgetting the second most important commandment in the Judeo-Christian Bible: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (*New International Version*, Matt 22:39). It seems as though if the devoutly religious Spaniards were truly seeking to live out this commandment, they would not have abused the indigenous for selfish monetary gain.

Because the indigenous and the Spaniards had different thought patterns, someone was needed to bridge the gap between the different groups. For this purpose, Franco comments, “La Malinche no subvierte la separación de los dos mundos. Cruza, actúa como puente y nos afirma en nuestra modernidad sin transgredir la ley de la diferencia” (204). La Malinche is praised as being the perfect go between person. Instead of imposing herself on either group fully, she was the bridge *between* them, the perfect

“símbolo del mestizaje de culturas” (Franco 205) Thus, Todorov praises La Malinche for her role as a wise communicator, bridging the gap between the two groups.

The other person of whom Franco mentions frequently in her article is Stephen Greenblatt, author of *Marvellous Possessions*. Greenblatt also talks about La Malinche being an intermediary force, but unlike Todorov, Franco comments “la terminología de Greenblatt es económica” (207). For Greenblatt, it was not as important the differences between the two cultures as it was making sure that those two cultures did not intermix (207). Using *La historia verdadera de la conquista de una Nueva España* by Bernal Diaz del Castillo as a an example, Greenblatt discusses how many people justified the conquest by making the indigenous out to be something dangerous-- using cannibalism, human sacrifice, and other assumed barbaric practices as excuses (207). Like Todorov, Greenblatt still viewed La Malinche as a bridge between the two groups, but in a different manner. Instead of being a bridge to connect the two groups, she helped to separate them (207). With both using her as a go to person, this kept the two groups from actually having to face each other. Thus, in creating this barrier “los españoles cortaban la posibilidad de comunicación” (Franco 207). In fact, Greenblatt describes her as an “objeto de intercambio, modelo de la conversión, en la única figura que parece comprender los dos culturas, la única persona en la cual se encuentran” (qtd. in Franco 208). Essentially, she was the only one who could bring together these two cultures and two languages to form a whole new culture (Franco 208-209).

Like Todorov and Greenblatt, there is another author who teaches the importance

of Malinche in positively forming the Mexican national identity, Donna Haraway. Claudia Leitner mentions her in her article “El Complejo de la Malinche.” Haraway proposes the following:

Stripped of identity, the bastard race teaches about the power of the margins and the importance of a mother like Malinche. Women of color have transformed her from the evil mother of masculinist fear into the originally literate mother who teaches survival (qtd in Leitner 224).

Instead of viewing her as something to be feared, Haraway supports this idea that women, especially Chicanas, now view Malinche as a role model. She had no choice but to comply with what Cortés desired, so she learned to adapt. Instead of being portrayed as weak and traitorous, she should be praised as inspiration for women to survive (Leitner 224).

Some fail to view Malinche bridging the two groups as a good thing and criticize her for being a traitor to her own people. In her article entitled “El complejo de la Malinche,” Claudia Leitner mentions a play by Víctor Hugo Rascón appropriately called *La Malinche* in which Rascón seeks to explain the prejudice held against Malinche from a very psychological viewpoint. In one of the scenes we see an analyst questioning Malinche in which at one point he inquires if she has any children. She responds with “muchos” (qtd. in Leitner 219) and that her problem is that they hate her (219). The analyst tells her that that is normal (220), but Malinche quickly ends the dialogue saying “no me comprenden” (qtd. in Leitner 220). If Malinche is the mother of this bastard mestizo race, then who can we presume is the metaphorical father? According to the article, “su padre metafórico es la Cultura que trajeron los españoles, su madre la

ausencia de cultura manifiesta en el mundo de los indígenas, o sea, su falta de emancipación de la Naturaleza” (Leitner 227-228). Following this train of thought, another author of whom Leitner mentions is Octavio Paz. She reflects on his book *El Laberinto de la Soledad* and points out how one nickname attributed to her, “la Chingada,” has stuck as a result of his and Fernando del Paso’s writings (229). Essentially, in English “Chingada” means *the fucked up one*. This is such a harsh term for her, for it promotes this idea that she was weak and simply *allowed* this abuse against her. Concerning this subject, Paz says “Esta pasividad abierta al exterior la lleva a perder su identidad: es la Chingada. Pierde su nombre, no es nadie ya, se confunde con la Nada. Y sin embargo, es la atroz encarnación de la condición femenina” (qtd. in Leitner 230). Thus, returning to the idea that Malinche is the mestizo’s metaphorical mother, Paz emphasizes “del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche” (qtd in Leitner 230). Unlike the woman praised by Todorov, Greenblatt, and Haraway for being a bridge between the two groups and/or a mother teaching her kids how to survive, to Paz and many others she was seen as naïve, weak, and responsible for the physical and psychological deterioration of her children.

As is discussed in the book entitled *Challenging Euro-America’s politics of identity: the return of the native*, there is a difference between the expressions “hijo de la Chingada” and “hijo de puta,” both phrases used within Spanish-speaking communities. It can be assumed from the book that the difference between the two phrases lies in the fact that “hijo de la Chingada” refers to the offspring of women who, as Octavio Paz suggests in the case of Malinche, have been violated. (Fernandes 25) Regardless that they

believe she has *allowed* the violation to happen, she is still the victim of the violation. However, the phrase “Hijo de puta” suggests something different. Instead of being the offspring of a mother who was violated, “hijo de puta” suggests that one is the offspring of a mother who violated someone and/or something else (Fernandes 25). Both phrases suggest that the mother is guilty, whether she allowed the violation to be done against her or she instigated the violation, thus inescapably both phrases imply a negative connotation of women. For example, a child who is born unto a woman who was raped would be considered a “hijo de la Chingada.” Regardless of the fact that a woman raped would never willingly choose to be violated, according to society, the fact she allowed it to happen still makes her a guilty party. On the other hand, a child born unto a prostitute would be considered a “hijo de puta” because she would receive monetary gain from the act of prostitution. Thus, when a woman receives benefits, she is considered to be the violator. Regardless of the fact that prostitution may be her only form of income in order to support her family, she is still guilty and is slandered by society.

ARGENTINE ARITHMETIC: THE ADDITION & SUBTRACTION OF PEOPLES

Just as Malinche has been criticized for her participation in the Conquest of Mexico, being ostracized from her society as a traitor, Susana Rotker also wrote a book entitled *Captive Women* which tells the story of how certain Argentine people groups—such as the African Americans, indigenous, and even captive European women—were also mistreated, both physically and psychologically, and ostracized from society to the point that they were erased from the memory of the Argentine people. How? Simple. They were erased from the narratives written by so-called “historians” in charge of making sure history was properly recorded. She emphasizes the importance in Foucault’s

belief that “Memory is essential in battle for power. Whoever controls memory controls the social dynamic” (3). To go a bit further, Ernest Renan once said “the essence of a nation is that its individuals have much in common and that they have forgotten the same things” (qtd in Rotker 46). Thus, it is not so much that a nation’s history is based on foundational truths, but rather it is that the ones in power have collectively decided what lies should be accepted and passed as truths (Rotker 4). Why would those in power have desired to write so many different people groups off from the pages of history? Referencing *Facundo* in her book, Domingo F. Sarmiento says “the principal element of order and moralization on which the Argentine republic counts today is European immigration” (qtd. in Rotker 30). Having been to Argentina, I can verify that it is a very European-influenced nation. Upon moving to my small “pueblo” not far from the border of Paraguay, there were many who stopped to ask if we were “Italianos” or “Alemanes”. Surprisingly, they rarely see “Yankees,” a term used there to refer to all North Americans. Rotker also mentions a book by Alberdi entitled *Bases* in which Alberdi expresses the reasons he feels the influx of European immigration would be beneficial: “Europe will bring us its new spirit, its habits of industry, its practices of civilization, in the immigrations that it sends us” (qtd. in Rotker 30). Thus, as cliché as it sounds, Argentina supported the “out with the old, in with the new” tactic. Whatever, or better yet *whoever*, those in power saw as threatening to industrialization were soon omitted from society.

Similarly as La Malinche, the first documented instance of a woman in Latin America being held captive, was removed from her home and eventually presented as a gift to Hernán Cortez, there was also kidnapping and sequestering of women in the early

days of Argentina's history. (Rotker 98) Although the Argentine women who were kidnapped were not indigenous women, like Malinche, they occupied vulnerable positions in their own societies. The first documented case of kidnapping of Argentine women is Lucia Miranda, a married, Spanish Catholic woman. There have been so many reproduced versions of this colonization story, but the most common account is that Lucía and her husband, Sebastian, sought peace among the Timbú Indians, but they were martyred for their faith for not complying with what the Indians most desired, the body of Lucía herself. Despite the many attempts the Indians, particularly the chief's son, Siripo, made to try and barter with Sebastian, offering both gifts and other women in exchange for Lucía, Sebastian never accepted. As already stated, eventually both were killed for their rebelliousness, thus making them both martyrs (Rotker 98-99). As is insinuated by Rotker, the indigenous are seen as a foil to the Spanish couple being that "the treachery of the savages is counterpoised with the purity and loyalty of the Christian martyrs Lucía and Sebastián" (98). In essence, "the repetitions and variations of the Lucía Miranda story do not speak of the captive of reality but instead are a way of perpetuating the racial conflict in collective memory and avoiding identification with the Other" (Rotker 101-102). Stripped of their voice and ability to defend themselves, the indigenous were at the mercy of the pen as various authors attempted to make sure that "history" was recorded.

It has always been said that we fear what we do not know, and this could not be any truer in the case of those in power within Argentina who sought to destroy the reputation of the indigenous, labeling them as barbaric and a hindrance from a more advanced, Europeanized nation. As Rotker writes, "The idea of barbarism was in part an exercise of cultural distancing and a way of projecting, onto a foreign group, the fears

that had to be controlled among the whites” (36). To call something “barbaric” is to define it as uncivilized, wild, and even *inhuman*- just to name a few synonyms. (www.thesaurus.com). By debasing the indigenous to a barbaric state, those in power were comparing them to animals that need to be tamed, or worse, destroyed due to their violent and dangerous nature. In fact, as Rotker points out, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his book *Argiropólis* expands this idea in comparing the indigenous to flies. (37) In their very nature, flies are pests. They serve no other purpose but to multiply, carry diseases, and bother humans at seemingly inopportune times. This was the common view held of most indigenous by the powerful Argentine class. It can be suggested that this is an unsound notion, for the Europeans were much more brutal in their destroying of the indigenous than were the indigenous in their natural habitat. So, those Argentines in power saw it as their responsibility to do whatever necessary to make sure that the indigenous were obliterated from society, both spatially in a physical sense regarding their actual bodies as well as spatially within the realm of written discourse.

However biased it might be, one book written which has served as a testament to the indigenous group called the Ranqueles is *Una Excursión a los Indios Ranqueles* written by Lucio V. Mansilla. According to Rotker, this was a book written in canonical form giving the account of an 18 day journey into the land of the Ranquel Indians. In addition, it is presently considered one of the first 19th century Argentine texts to give voice to the Indians (151), but really is this the case? It may speak *of* the Indians, but as Rotker suggests that letting them have their own voice within the text is definitely a different story.

As is the case with *Una Excursion a los Indios Ranqueles*, these historical narratives were written in the first person, meaning that the authors used the personal “I.” What would be the benefits of using first person rather than a third person narrative form? For one, the narrator does not seem as distant when writing in first person. By using the personal “I,” the reader comes to trust the narrator as a knowledgeable source, for typically the narrator has personally been a part of whatever he/she is writing about. His/ her purpose is to tug at our emotional heartstrings and to earn our respect and support for whatever he/she is arguing. The ability of the author to manipulate the text in order to sway the reader’s opinion is coined by Rotker as “discourse of Power” (154). And as was discussed earlier in the text, “writing is a way of culturally transmitting and constructing social memory” (Rotker 78), yet we know “that of which no speaks, that which has no mourners, no words, and no monuments is lost” (Rotker 79), so we are dependent on these texts to preserve our past and ensure our remembrance of the future. However, writing as a way of preserving history can provide an opposite affect than is desired. for as we have already seen in Bernal Diaz’s and Cortés’s texts, the narrator-- although being a first-hand source-- isn’t always truthful in his/her account of what has occurred.

As some historians have already proven, the only problem with these “eyewitness accounts” is that they are extremely narrow-minded and biased. It can be thought in the following way: Within a courtroom setting, two sides of an argument are presented: that of the plaintiff and that of the defendant. A plaintiff essentially makes his case against the defendant, who is being held for some charge. How fair would it be, though, if the plaintiff were able to make his case without the defendant even being able to “defend”

himself? It would be unjust and contrary to moral judgment, for in the court of law one is deemed innocent until proven guilty. An argument cannot be contested unless another position is offered, and in many of these historical narratives aforementioned, the indigenous voice was not heard. In fact, according to Rotker, “The little that is told is slanted and one-sided: thus is history constructed out of images, manipulated incomplete images sifted by the interests of one who composes them” (64). Thus, what we often-times consider to be “history” is simply a one-sided argument, devoid of any other points of view. With that being said, it can truly be argued that history is “incomplete.”

Going along with idea, *Una Excursion a los Indios Ranqueles* is no exception to the rule in being an incomplete narrative. Rotker emphasizes the point that even though Captain Mansilla busies himself in cataloging the Ranquel customs and providing even the most minute details of the area in which they lived, he does it with only one purpose: to record how “the Indians will remain in collective memory only as something exotic that *was* something to be described by remote, entertaining anecdotes, a part of the vague and, above all, sterile and vanished past. A past, that is, that did not engender the present; a past that was not the root of contemporary civilization but an illustration of civilization’s progress and triumph over barbarism” (158).

Thus, with all that has been previously stated it can easily be assumed that the Ranqueles were not included in Mansilla’s text because of their importance within society, but rather their main role was to be a foil for the white urban Argentine society and to validate that there was a need for the white Europeans to seize the land so that the indigenous might be civilized and the land industrialized (Rotker 157-158). In summing up this idea, Rotker writes the following: “In the case of Argentina, if the lettered society

sought order, productivity, and law, it saw the Indians as the incarnation of disorder, laziness, and savagery” (36). So, these authors were able to validate their texts by justifying that the indigenous were a hindrance to society and they stood in the way of everything the Argentine society was seeking to accomplish. These texts were not written to celebrate co-dependence among the different groups, but rather *independence*.

When it comes down to it, the Ranqueles were not able to defend themselves as a productive group of society simply because they were considered *different*. In fact, Rotker speaks a lot about this idea of the powerful European “Us” versus the indigenous “Other.” As she so concisely states, “Every conqueror defines the Other in terms of what he lacks in relation to the self: he is ugly because he does not look like the dominator, he is barbaric because he stammers the language of the master...” (26). To explain Rotker’s statement, the indigenous were set up for humiliation from the start; they never even had a chance. No matter what good qualities the indigenous had, they were not being judged for who they were, but rather for who they were *not*. It all boils down to the fact that most individuals enjoy placing labels on objects, because it makes them feel more in power. For some, when they cannot stereotype people groups, they feel less in control and, therefore, become fearful. Rotker goes on to say the following which presumably stems from Darwinian thought: “The separation between the civilized and savage inherited from Enlightenment thought came accompanied by scientific discourse that created hierarchies among racial types” (36). Thus, in labeling different groups, we create this imaginary hierarchy of classes which provides an excuse for those in “power” to mistreat those considered to be of less value. In addition to those indigenous who were mistreated, I will now shift gears and focus particularly on the women—both the indigenous and the

white Europeans-- who were abused, primarily because of their importance within this project in relation to the women of Juarez who have also been mistreated.

LATIN AMERICAN TRENDS: THE MANY "MALINCHES" OF ARGENTINA

Interestingly, among those mistreated and misinterpreted by the hegemonic power at the time were populations of women in both the indigenous and white European communities. As Rotker suggests in her book, there is a fine line between being considered part of the "Us" as opposed to the "Others." In fact, in many cases once this title of "Us" has been taken from someone, the new status is that he/she becomes part of the "Other." How is it that this fine line exists? The better question remains *who* is subject to teeter this tightrope of roles? More than anyone else, women were victims of this problem. In particular, I will begin by discussing how this problem affected white European females who were captured by the indigenous—many of whom were never seen again. Perhaps it was not so much that the indigenous wanted to take these women because of their own selfish desires, but perhaps it was rather a way of showing the white Europeans what it felt like to usurp something that was not their own. Rotker points out how it is interesting that Mansilla hardly gives these captive women any space in his narrative (165). It would seem as though since these women were *white* and came from *pure* blood that Mansilla would have attempted to write as much about them as he could within his narrative in order to raise awareness for helping their cause. It also would have made sense to give them their own voice, allowing them to express to Mansilla's audience in their *own* words what they experienced; however, he does not give them that opportunity.

It is a fact that people describe in detail things they find to be important. For example, if someone was trying to find my house, I would give them the most detailed directions possible. Why? It is much easier to get lost when directions are less specific. As has been mentioned before, where there are gaps in thought, people are much more likely to use the imagination, and, unfortunately, most of the time our imaginations are deceiving. Thus, if I really cared about the person attempting to get to my house, I would provide such detailed directions that there would be no way he/she could get lost. In this same way, I reiterate Rotker's point that it would have made sense that if Mansilla had really cared about these captive women he would have written about them excessively in his narrative, for his narrative served as an avenue to inform, inspire, and persuade his colleagues back home—"the white, urban consumers of newspapers" (Rotker 162)—to think a certain way concerning the indigenous frontier. For example, Rotker mentions in her book a time in which does Mansilla *does* mention rescuing a captive woman who he sends back to St. Luis, but then she points out it can be assumed since Mansilla does not ascribe many details to this act within his narrative that it is not very important to him. (165-166).

Mansilla's narrative is not atypical. Other narratives have not better represented the views of the captive women. Similar to the treatment the indigenous received in earlier chronicles, as described above, these captive women were not given a right to represent themselves. It was common of this type of nineteenth century narrative to "strip her of all importance," (Rotker 39) leaving her destitute and voiceless (Rotker 104). Another author mentioned all throughout Rotker's book is Domingo Sarmiento. He, too, as one of the most famous Argentine writers of the nineteenth century and leader of the

republic was guilty of purposefully forgetting about these captive women. To him, “the captive women of reality mattered little: in the long disquisition on problems on the frontier throughout his journalistic and literary career, they are scarcely mentioned twice” (36). As a whole, there is nothing more humiliating than to be stripped of one’s own identity, for without our names, there is nothing to distinguish us from other individuals in society. Plus, it is much easier to deface that which has no name, for our emotions are rarely involved with nameless objects. Rotker emphasizes the lack of texts which include the names and surnames of these captive women in saying, “The condemnation to oblivion is so irrevocable that they are denied even the recognition of their individual identity” (71). In continuing, she says, “The captive women of reality never had voices. Unless some soldier decided to give them one in his memories, which was never the norm. On the contrary, if some captive slips into a text from the nineteenth century, she does it through the gaze of the narrator and, obviously, through his frame of reference and interpretation of the world” (53). Thus, even when these women were included in the texts, their *true* voice never surfaced. Their true thoughts and feelings were always submerged beneath the lies and opinions forced upon her through the narrator’s pen.

The primary question for us is *why* only some women were taken and *which ones*? First, it is important to establish how the white European colonizers viewed these captive women in order to understand why they did not care to incorporate them into their narrative histories. The best way in which it is explained in Rotker’s book is the following: if the indigenous were seen as the foil of industrial Argentine society, then anyone associated with these people would also be shunned, due to association. As Rotker emphasizes, it would be absurd to assume that any of these women were happy

with their situation of being captive, for no one in their right mind willfully chooses to be a captive (68), but we cannot assume that these women did not after a certain point become so accustomed to their situation that they would have rather stayed with their indigenous families versus returning to their own blood relatives (68-69). Regardless of the fact that none of these women chose their fate, they unfortunately still paid the consequences.

Returning to Malinche, as is emphasized in the article by Jean Franco, we are careless to consider that Malinche never had a choice in participating in the Conquest of Mexico. We automatically assume that she willingly conceded, as is emphasized in the narratives of the Conquest, but we must never forget that she was the victim. With respect to the Argentine captives, they would never be fully accepted among the indigenous, but they could never return to be a part of the white urban Argentine society from which they came (Rotker 69). Describing the view held of these captive women who were unable to jump between borders, Rotker says the following: "She is one of us who has crossed a boundary is no longer I or they. She ceases to be recognizable, decipherable, or even capable of reproducing the pure white lineage that the nation desires for itself" (75).

When these white European women were taken from their homes and forced to live as captives, they were no longer seen as being a part white European society, but rather they were then considered soiled, unadulterated, not unlike the Aztec's opinion of Malinche. Rotker emphasizes the point that the Argentine captives could never return to their homes in the following quote: "the captive is no longer a chaste heroine who has managed to preserve her 'purity' despite it all...She is now a figure of the frontier, a

woman without identity (without name), condemned for her transgression, no matter that it has been involuntary or forced” (71). In referring to the texts concerning Lucia Miranda, Rotker says “More than the frontier, the body of the captive woman is the site of displacement in these texts; her body is the place of the border, of hybridity and struggle, and the space of the unacceptable; the garden of a past before innocence was lost” (110). Whereas an Indian woman living within white society “may one day be a count; a white woman who goes toward the other side will never cease to be a savage or madwoman” (Rotker 72). Rotker paraphrases an idea in her book which George Moss discusses in his book entitled *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*. As is quoted by Rotker, “in the nineteenth century hysteria was tied to female sexuality, nervousness was considered a vice—including among men, whose virility depended upon self-control—and what was expected of good citizens (especially females) was practice of virtues that would exalt the nation and transcend sensuality” (58)

Once these captive women were brought to live amongst the indigenous, they never returned. Whether they chose that life or not, they left a life behind that they could never regain. For what reason would these women be forever damned from participation in their own society? The answer lies in the fact that the frontier was seen as “an abyss that marks the individual forever” (Rotker 70), thus these women upon becoming the slaves of the indigenous were no longer “pure” in the eyes of white urban Argentines. In fact, Rotker says the following concerning why association with the captive was detrimental to the Argentine efforts of producing a more Europeanized society:

...the figure of the captive was totally inappropriate to this national project: contaminated by her contact with the Indians, she would have demanded that the bourgeois society establishing itself question the values that supported it with regard to the legitimacy of lineage, the family, sexuality and well-being (96-97).

So, it can be assumed that like individuals who had an incurable infectious disease and needed to be kept at a distance, these women were practically erased from society so as to protect those considered unadulterated from being contaminated. As was discussed earlier, the rejection of these captive women had nothing to do with the women themselves and everything to do with the reputation of those white Europeans in power. Those in power could not risk identifying with these women, an extension of the "Other," for "to approach her, to allow her to speak would oblige the political, cultural, and economic states to see themselves as from the other side, an operation that was unacceptable" (Rotker 37).

An interesting concept throughout Rotker's book is that that the captive woman's body is representative of social space (37). It is though it has become a competition among the different groups to see who can control this "space". Thoughts from Bataille's book reverberate in this situation as well. Since the captive women were essentially debased to the point of being chattel, it can be assumed that the competition among the different groups for their bodies is equivalent to man's greed for property, and thus, power. As Bataille emphasizes, being that there is only a certain amount of space to obtain within this world, whoever controls this space, displays the greater power. Therefore, it is not so much that these women are seen as valuable and are worthy of being fought over, but rather they have been debased to the point they are no longer seen

as human beings; they have become *things* to be *owned*. Rotker labels this superiority complex as “one of the most atrocious practices in ethnic struggles even today: the affirmation of power through possession of the female body” (103). Why would these different groups fight so hard for possession? What would be the repercussions for losing these women to the frontier? It has already been established that the frontier was viewed as a place of contamination, a “no man’s land” where souls were lost and names were forgotten. Thus, as was mentioned earlier, these captive women were seen as being contaminated and diseased at the point of contact with the indigenous. Being that contact with the indigenous on the frontier is representative of contamination, Derridaean logic, as Rotker explains, equates these women as being the “hymen of the frontier” (125). As according to www.dictionary.com, the hymen is “a fold of mucous membrane partly closing the external orifice of the vagina in a virgin”. The hymen covers a women’s vagina, so as to protect it from any foreign penetration, in particular, an unwanted penis. Needless to say, an intact hymen is typically only found in women who are virgins, and only is it broken upon contact with a sexual partner. If we revisit the power struggle among the different groups, it can be suggested that if the rich and powerful white Europeans were in control of these women’s bodies to begin with, then this “outside penetration” can be labeled as contact with the indigenous.

Susan Rotker frequently mentions a need for *purity* in a family’s lineage. As previously stated, these white Europeans in power distanced themselves from their own flesh and blood because of this risk of contaminating future generations (Rotker 96). The concept of purity with respect to those holding power was crucial, because they were attempting to create a society based on a pure lineage of European descendants, and

mestizoes, or children of mixed blood-- half Spanish and half indigenous—although in the majority, were seen as bastards (Rotker 96-97). In Argentina’s eyes, they simply could not risk being overpowered by the “Other,” thus if they had to shun some of their own flesh and blood, they were willing to do it. Going back to the authors, such as Mansilla, who wrote about these captive women, it is interesting to note how the power struggle affected written discourse. As Rotker states, “Sexual domination of another person is, furthermore, a discursive symbol instrumental in producing other meanings” (115). But what are these “meanings”? What can we truly take from recognizing the absence of these women within the text? To answer these questions, we will shift our focus and consider what part the Judeo-Christian religion and tradition might have concerning how these women were devalued.

RELIGION AND CAPTIVITY: A PARADOXICAL DUO

As has been mentioned, if a person is stripped of his or her value as a human, he or she then qualifies as a “thing” or an object. Having neither soul nor any emotions, objects are easily manipulated, a fact which will show to be related to the omission of captive women’s experience in historical narratives. Accordingly, in order to better understand the issue of the absence of their narrations, it is worthwhile to consider how women were historically depicted in writing up until colonial times. Beginning with Adam and Eve of the Judeo Christian tradition, the first couple enjoyed a harmonious relationship with God until Eve offered Adam the fruit and he accepted. Interestingly, Eve, here is the agent of corruption, and for her treason both Adam and Eve and all generations of humanity to follow were plagued with an awareness of death, among other

punishments. Although Adam accepted the forbidden fruit, Eve was doubly punished in that childbirth became painful for future generations of women, thus implying that future generations would suffer for the “sin” of their ancestral mother (*New International Version*, Gen 3: 1-24).

It seems that a key question is: Why is Eve typically the only party blamed? The serpent does, indeed, play a role in offering the fruit to Eve, but many would argue it was her decision to partake in eating it. Thus, her decision to take the first bite and then offer it to Adam who then followed suit helps to explain how women have historically been depicted today. Eve, Malinche, and these captive women aforementioned share a common bond: they have all been falsely accused of causing the downfall of different groups of people. Whereas Eve was blamed for the downfall of humankind as a whole, Malinche was accused of being responsible for the destruction of the Aztec people, in a similar fashion the Argentine captive women were blamed for hindering the progress of a more Europeanized and industrialized nation. Unfortunately, many women today, especially those of lower socioeconomic class in third world countries, are still paying for the so called mistake of Eve, being stereotyped as naïve, weak, easily manipulated, and corrupted. Thus, their oppressors often justify their mistreatment by saying that these women deserve whatever punishment has come upon them. Like Eve, these captive women were looked upon as the link that could cause the downfall of the Argentine society.

Continuing our consideration of how religious figures stereotyped women in a negative way, Susanna Rotker comments in her book on a quote by Brother Marcos Donati, a priest who lived among the indigenous, in which Donati says “Be careful that

Eve may tempt Adam. Women have always been the instrument that the common enemy has used to the perdition of many, with the exception of Holy Mary and a few others” (qtd. in Rotker 118). So, it appears that *all* women are held responsible for the downfall of the rest, all except Holy Mary and a vaguely labeled “few others” (118). Mary, being the mother of Jesus, is excluded from the list because she is an emblem for purity, perfection and holiness set into motion and supported by the paternalistic society which has long-since existed. But who are these vaguely mentioned “Others”? It can be suggested that some of them might have been women who, in their efforts to uphold traditional female roles fell short of the mark, in that they rebelled against women’s inability to make their own choices.

Essentially, women had two main jobs: to procreate and to take care of the home. M B Rondon emphasizes “the traditional culture and religious environment results in girls growing up to be mothers and wives, with the Virgin Mary as their role model” (Introduction “From Marianism to terrorism”). Echoing a thought common in Rotker’s book, being that Western culture has frequently supported a very paternalistic society, procreation was seen as a way of continuing future generations of men who would in turn become societal leaders. A woman was seen as either delusional or mad if she sought to fulfill any other role—especially one already assumed by a man—other than those already given to her. This very idea is discussed in an article entitled “Women and Madness: *the critical phallacy*” by Shoshana Felman. Keeping in mind this idea that many feel language constructs a “truth” due to its permanency, Felman begins her article by showing how even our *own* language has stereotypically and inappropriately mislabeled women. *Hysteria*, a word we often use in the English language, was taken

from the Greek word for *uterus* (Felman 7), thus it can rightly be assumed that even those who created our language were biased in that they were affected by societal views of gender. One person who Felman mentions often is a woman by the name of Phyllis Chesler. In her text *Women and Madness* Chesler says the following:

It is clear that for a woman to be healthy she must 'adjust' to and accept the behavioral norms for her sex even though these kinds of behavior are generally regarded as less socially desirable....The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture (qtd. in Felman 7)

The predominant role is that they *serve*, whether that is serving their children or their husbands (Felman 8). Seeking any other role, especially one already held by men in society, was not allowed.

Perhaps the following illustration will be helpful in simplifying this concept of gender appropriation: Electronic dog collars have become rather popular within the past decade. People who desire to train their dogs to stay within certain boundaries often times do so by building an imaginary fence and using these collars. The way the system works is that if the dog goes outside of this boundary, it receives a shock. Although these boundaries are unapparent to the human eye, dogs know them well. Though invisible, they *feel* the repercussions. It is not that these dogs do not want to venture outside of the boundaries, but they are reprimanded if they do so. Therefore, they *learn* to be content. If a dog still continues to try to escape the boundaries after numerous attempts, we often label it as being disobedient and dumb. "Why does it not just learn its lesson?" we ask. However, we never even seek to question why the boundaries were established in the first place. It is the same concept for women. It is not that women enjoy being chained to

rules concerning gender stereotypes, but they are reprimanded if they seek help. Even if a woman is healthy and intellectually sound, Felman reminds us that she is frequently considered sick, dumb, and *mad* if she dares to break the societal mold, refusing to adhere to what the patriarchal world considers to be “normal.” Thus, as Felman emphasizes, far from being an actual medical problem, this “mental illness” of which women are stereotyped is simply a “*request for help*, a manifestation of cultural impotence and of political castration” (8).

Another author pertinent to our conversation regarding women’s roles in paternalistic societies is Luce Irigaray. Irigaray supports the idea that women are viewed negatively because of how they are represented within the field of psychology (Felman 9). Essentially, she argues that men in the past have manipulated both written and psychological discourse, thus they have altered the way in which women are now perceived (Felman 9). “Theoretically subordinated to the concept of masculinity, the woman is viewed by the man as *his* opposite, that is to say, as *his* other, the negative of the positive, and not, in her own right, different, other, Otherness itself” (Felman 9). This parallels the argument that Rotker makes in her book *Captive Women*. Essentially, women are insufficient because they are the opposite of everything male. Felman in her earlier quoted article produces a good argument. She questions how Irigaray can even form the appropriate thoughts to produce an intelligent argument against these patriarchal ideas without having the knowledge rooted within? (Felman 9) Therefore, it is not so much that women have been at a loss for ideas to voice, but as was mentioned earlier, they had been stripped of their *ability* to voice them. The problem is that for so long men

have been speaking *for* women, whereas part of the solution will come when these women can start speaking for themselves. (Felman 9)

TAKING BACK ONE'S VOICE: VOLUMIZING CHICANA TEXTS

One Chicana author who boldly speaks for herself and who has chosen to counter the stereotypical flow is Sandra Cisneros. In *The House on Mango Street*, she discusses her struggles as a young Chicana girl living in Chicago. On the dedication page it says "A las mujeres" (To the women). Thus, it is not only a book written by a woman, but it is written *for* women. Her audience is not the men of her society, for her main purpose is not to change their minds concerning how women are viewed. Her main goal is to change how women view *themselves*. She does not want these women to continue to buy into the stereotype that they are only valuable if they are serving in the home and taking care of their families. Instead, she wants women to see that they are valuable because they are *women*. That their lives have meaning not simply for what they can *do*, but rather for who they *are*. Returning to the theme in Felman's text, Cisneros does not allow anyone else to speak *for* her, but rather she took the responsibility to voice her *own* opinion, one devoid of any other person's voice.

Of the characters in *The House on Mango Street*, the one that perhaps best represents Cisneros's point of view is Esperanza. Ironically "*esperanza*" is the Spanish word for "hope." Although she inherits this name from her great-grandmother, she in no way desires the same fate as her great-grandmother. In speaking about her great-grandmother, she says the following:

She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse- which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female—but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong (Cisneros 10).

In comparing her great-grandmother to a horse, she is making a bold statement. Horses are strong, athletic creatures and are difficult to tame. After being tamed, they are forced to hold back their spirited nature or else they risk being reprimanded by humans. In a sense, her grandmother was “tamed” when her great-grandfather “threw a sack over her head and carried her off” (Cisneros 11). Unlike the common view of Mexican society that women should happily work in the home and take care of the family, Esperanza sees marriage as something that limits women and their power to make decisions for the future. In speaking of her great-grandmother Esperanza says the following:

I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window (Cisneros 11).

What can we presume that her great-grandmother stares at through the window? I am confident that it is the life she never had the opportunity to live, one in which *she* could make decisions uninhibitedly.

Unlike her great-grandmother, Esperanza seeks to live differently. She knows it is not the stereotypical way in which women live, for she is like a stark contrast against all of the other women within the book. For example, she refers to herself as “the ugly daughter...the one nobody comes for” (Cisneros 88). Also, using her hair as a metaphor, she says “...my hair is lazy. It never obeys barrettes or bands” (Cisneros 6). It can easily

be assumed that in this instance both the barrettes and the bands represent patriarchal society. Like a wild horse, she is stubborn and unwilling to be tamed in accepting what societal roles she has been assigned. Unfortunately, often times stubbornness can be confused with laziness, thus it is for this reason that she uses this adjective to describe her hair as well. Though perceived as lazy and stubborn, she prepares for battle and fights the good fight. She aspires to be like the strong women she sees in movies stating:

In the movies there is always one with red red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away. I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate (Cisneros 89)

Esperanza desires to take back the power which she feels has been stolen from her. She does not want to lead a predictable life, but rather she seeks to “drive the men crazy” with her perplexity and to make her own decisions.

One of several female characters who serves as a foil for Esperanza’s character is Sally. Sally, being the antithesis of Esperanza, is like Esperanza’s great-grandmother in that she has been tamed. Her father seeks to control her life, limiting her choices by keeping her locked in the house all of the time because to him “to be this beautiful is trouble” (Cisneros 81). It is not that Sally leads a completely miserable life, for when she’s at school, she’s happy and is even able to laugh. Why? Because she wears makeup and the boys notice her; they think she is beautiful (Cisneros 81). When she returns home from school, however, it is though she returns home to a prison. It is obvious that Esperanza can’t understand the situation fully because she questions Sally:

And why do you always have to go straight home after school? You become a different Sally. You pull your skirt straight, you rub the blue paint off your eyelids. You don't laugh, Sally. You look at your feet and walk fast to the house you can't come out from (Cisneros 82).

To Esperanza, the way Sally's father treats Sally is a sign that she needs to escape from the home; that marriage would only tie down such a beautiful woman as herself. To Esperanza's dismay, however, Sally gets married (Cisneros 100). Despite the fact that Sally claims she married for love, Esperanza knows she did it for other another purpose, to escape. (Cisneros 101)

What Cisneros is suggesting to us is that some women are terrifying, perhaps, because their beauty does not fall within the confines of what is considered acceptable by the patriarchal culture, and, as such, is perceived threatening. To the contrary the women are neither ugly, nor mad, nor contaminated. Contrary to the negative connotation held in Rotker's book if one is labeled as the "Other," it can be argued that Cisneros suggests that it is their "otherness" that makes them beautiful.

Within the House on Mango Street, there are other examples of females who are threatening to male characters because of their beauty; for example, in the story there is a character named Rafaela who "gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid she [Rafaela] will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (Cisneros 79). Also, in the vignette entitled "The Family of Little Feet" Esperanza and some of her friends are given a bag of shoes to play with (Cisneros 40). As the girls are trying them on and having fun, they are reprimanded by Mr. Benny, owner of a local grocery who says, "They are dangerous... You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that. Take them shoes off

before I call the cops” (Cisneros 41). For these girls, it can be assumed that putting on the shoes is a metaphor for attaining their sexuality. Unfortunately, women of all societies are taught that being beautiful is a negative thing. Not long after being told to take the shoes off, the girls run into another man, a drunk who compliments them and asks them to kiss him for a dollar (Cisneros 41). Eventually Lucy boldly exclaims “We are tired of being beautiful” (Cisneros 42). Just like in the story, it is very true today that women are either taught to “take their shoes off”, meaning they are forced to downplay their beauty or they are exploited for their beauty, as is the case with the drunk man. Because women are criticized and objectified as a result of their beauty no matter which way they turn, most women, like Lucy, have learned that being beautiful just is not a valid option.

To Esperanza, women ought to be able to feel beautiful, without feeling criticized by patriarchal society. Reflecting Cisneros’ viewpoint, Esperanza feels that women ought to be loved, respected, and praised for their beauty, if for no other reason because they are human beings. In one of the vignettes, Esperanza compares herself to four skinny trees that she finds comfort in. Concerning these trees she says the following:

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be (Cisneros 75).

Though she is just a child, Esperanza makes a bold proclamation that she will be like these trees and withstand whatever opposition, be it male or female, which seeks to stand in the way of her independence. Just as though the only reason those trees should exist is “to be and be,” women should also exist for the very same reason, simply *to be*.

A cogent article that provides an interesting take on the characters within Cisneros' story is "The 'dual'-ing images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*" by Leslie Petty. As Petty mentions, in one of Cisneros's vignettes entitled "And Some More" one of her characters, Lucy, says the following: "There ain't thirty different kinds of snow... There are two kinds. The clean kind and the dirty kind, clean and dirty. Only two" (qtd in Petty 35). Responding to this passage Pettis says, "According to Cisneros, then, females, like the snow, are not seen in Latino culture as unique individuals but are labeled as either 'good' women or 'bad' women, as 'clean' or 'dirty,' as 'virgins' or 'malinches'" (2). Petty describes how La Virgen de Guadalupe has become such an important part of Mexican society, for she is essentially the "incarnation of the Virgin Mary" (3). She "represents the holy, chaste woman, the embodiment of feminine purity as well as the virtues of nurturing and self-sacrifice" (Pettis 3). As Petty emphasizes, she has become such a tool in forming the Mexican identity due to the fact that she is a Christian transformation of a pagan goddess once worshipped in the Aztec society, thus it is stated that she is a representative of the indigenous culture instead of the Spanish one (2). As goes the story with La Malinche, she is known by many as a traitor to her indigenous people, thus women are seen as either/or, but never the same. This places severe limits on women, as they are rejected no matter where they turn. They are seen as either the beautiful Virgin or the fucked-up, ugly Malinche.

Although some would be eager to classify the Virgin Guadalupe and the Virgin Mary as the same figure, they are, indeed, different figures representing different ideals. Whereas the Virgin Mary is the icon of whom Catholic Spaniards revere, the Virgin

Guadalupe “is the religious icon around which Mexican Catholicism centers” (Petty 120). Just like Malinche who has had many stories produced about her throughout the ages, the original story concerning the Virgin Guadalupe has also become an enigma (Petty 120). I will highlight two points from the text that distinguish Virgin Guadalupe as being associated with the indigenous rather than the Spanish. First, the Virgin Guadalupe appeared first appeared to Juan Diego, an Indian who was a converted Christian, thus showing that Guadalupe’s primary goal was making herself known to the indigenous (Petty 120). Second, Petty mentions a text entitled *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe* by Jaques Lafaye in which his interpretation of the Virgin Guadalupe is that she is the Christian transformation of Tonantzin, the Aztec pagan goddess; therefore, it can be assumed that many, such as Lafaye, feel Guadalupe has her roots in the indigenous culture.

The fact that Esperanza desires her own house has huge implications on who she is as a person. As is quoted in the article: “Although Esperanza’s desire for a house is prompted by her desire for security and autonomy, it also encompasses a degree of compassion and nurturing that represents the noblest qualities of the Virgen archetype” (Petty 8). Thus, just as Todorov and Greenblatt praise Malinche for being the bridge between the indigenous and European cultures, a series of authors, including Petty herself, praise Esperanza for being the perfect balance between two female stereotypes. As is emphasized in the previous quote, Esperanza desires to make her own choices without having to receive consent from patriarchal society, yet she still maintains an empathetic and nurturing spirit to assist any woman who still believes that her only goals in life are to get married and birth children.

BEAUTY: A BLESSING OR CURSE IN DISGUISE?

Not just limited to Latina women, it can be assumed that all women struggle with this concept of image. As has been discussed, within every culture it is taught that to be beautiful is to be dangerous. To put limits on beauty or to manipulate women to perceive beauty as something unattainable is to prevent these women from recognizing their own power and worth. Essentially women have been placed in a box. To confine something usually does not mean that whatever is being confined is harmless. Quite the contrary, typically it is something that is potentially dangerous. Women pose a threat to those in power, thus they are placed in this metaphorical box in which the sides of the box are represented by these stereotypical roles as child bearer and family care taker of which they had to fulfill. As has been discussed, non-adherence to these stereotypes means serious punishment. Being either abused physically or emotionally, these women are destined to lead quiet, desperate lives.

One reoccurring theme found throughout the thesis is that those in power are the ones who set the standards for society. They are the ones that determine what is considered normal versus abnormal. Thus, because women's beauty and potential power is seen as a threat, men have labeled them as dangerous and in need of being confined. All of this parallels the writing of Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish*. The last section of this book is particularly important to our studies, for in this portion he discusses prison and how beginning in the 19th century it became the most dominant form of punishment (231). Foucault emphasizes its apparent role as the "clearest, simplest, most equitable of penalties" (232), for hypothetically one would be judged by his/her

actions and deemed the proper amount of time in prison in due accordance to the extremity of the act committed (232). Despite its apparent simplicity, however, Foucault remarks that it is “dangerous” and that it is a “detestable solution, which no one seems unable to do without” (232). The problem that Foucault has with the prison system lies in its self-evident character, for he emphasizes the fact that prison is much more than a system designed to take away the liberties of its inhabitants; it is a place designed to transform individuals, changing the way they think and act (233). In fact, he describes prison as “a rather disciplined barracks, a strict school, a dark workshop, but not qualitatively different” (233). At one point in his book, Foucault quotes an excerpt from *Motifs du code d’instruction criminelle* in which Jean-Baptiste Treilhard, a 17th century French political figure, says the following concerning the prison’s responsibility to transform individuals:

...let us try to close up all these sources of corruption; let the rules of a healthy morality be practice in the *maisons de force*; that, compelled to work, convicts may come in the end to like it: when they have reaped the reward, they will acquire the habit, the taste, the need for occupation; let them give each other the example of a laborious life; it will become a pure life; soon they will begin to know regret for the past, the first harbinger of a love of duty (qtd. in Foucault 234).

With prison officials dictating every move the prisoners make—telling when to eat, sleep, and even pray—Foucault argues that essentially those in charge have manipulated the prison system into a brainwashing center (236). As Treilhard emphasizes, through the avenues of work and education, the ultimate goal for prisoners is both repentance for

actions and, interestingly, a *pure* life. Thus, it is assumed that the logic of those in power is pure and that of those in prison is defiled. What Foucault attempts to argue is that the prison system is simply a place where those in power attempt to dictate what is right and what is wrong. The goal is to brainwash all of society into thinking the same pure thoughts and acting in the same manner; however, Foucault questions why those in power even have the right to determine what actions are normal versus abnormal. Returning to the issue at hand with women, as Cisneros writes, they, too, have been confined to their own prison. Rather than a physical prison, theirs is psychological. They are taught to believe that getting married and taking care of the family is the extent of their domain; however, as Foucault questions the validity of those in power to make unbiased decisions for the good of society, we must too question whether those in power have selfishly distanced these women, confining them to a life they do not deserve.

Just as Foucault questions the government's authority as a self-evident social body able to use prison as a form of corrective punishment to transform individuals to adhere one pattern of thought, Nancy Caro Hollander, Ph. D., acclaimed author, professor and member of the Faculty of the Psychoanalytic Center of California and the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies, also has written an article entitled "Living Danger: On Not Knowing What We Know" in which she discusses the time period in Argentine history known as the Dirty War in which the Argentine authoritarian militaristic government present during that time in a sense used torture as a means to silence and brainwash individuals (Hollander 690). She emphasizes this is saying "torture is a complex tactic aimed not so much at making a victim talk as it is at silencing an entire society. Its goal is not the destruction of the victim's body so much as

the pacification, immobilization, isolation, and intimidation of the body politic” (701)

She emphasizes how those in power, upper and middle class people, military and church personnel, sought to kill anyone considered to be a political dissident, most commonly intellectuals, middle class professionals, students, and leftist human rights groups, to name a few (694-695).

Before understanding how the Argentine Dirty War psychologically affected Argentine society, however, it is first important to explain what began the war and how it properly pertains to the discussion within the thesis. According to a book entitled “*Violence in Argentine Literature*” by David William Foster, we can limit our discussion of the Dirty War between the years of 1976-1983 (3); however, as can be suggested by Foster, the Dirty War was more of a buildup of extreme political rule rather than an all of a sudden burst of authoritarianism (3). In fact, according to Foster, some texts dating back as early as 1966 and forward prove that, in actuality, “the entire period between 1966 and 1983 can be seen as a single cycle in Argentine social history” (3). We know from the prior paragraph that the result of political dissidence was disappearance from society, which either led to individuals being tortured or killed. For what reason, though, were these individuals taken and never allowed to return to society? The answer lies in the fact that militaristic government sought to ensure its political power, thus anyone who opposed this group in any way quickly joined the rank of *desaparecidos*.

There are two main reasons that the Dirty War is particularly important for this study. First, the fact that many people disappeared and never returned parallels the writing of Rotker as she described how the captive women were banished from society after having had contact with the indigenous. Undeniably the act of subduing the captive

women taken during the late nineteenth century was a foreshadowing of the political domination that would continue to occur in Argentina for neither the captive women nor the political dissents during the Dirty War were allowed to participate in Argentine society again. Another commonality exists in explaining the reason why these groups were forever banished from society: those in power feared that their authority would be negated if anything or anyone were to oppose them. The captive women described by Rotker were kept at a distance so as to keep the indigenous at a distance. As was mentioned earlier, for an Argentine society who sought order, industrialization, and a more Europeanized society, these captive women who had been “contaminated” by the indigenous were too much of a threat to be allowed back into Argentine society.

As is suggested by Rotker in her book *Captive Women*, just as the Argentine government sought self-evidence in the nineteenth century, their pride for political domination still stood in the late twentieth century when the Dirty War began. A fear for their ruin through the implement of democracy caused the government to do away with anyone who posed as a threat. The second reason why the study of the Dirty War is important is because it shows that a common theme throughout history has been, as Rotker and others emphasize, that those in power often times seek to justify the disappearance of groups of people through the erasure of texts which discuss them. Foucault, Rotker, and many other authors firmly testify that if people can be removed from written discourse, then eventually they will be removed from memory. We learned that the texts produced during the late nineteenth century in Argentine were biased, and that even if they did concern the captive women and/or the indigenous, they were still manipulated in such a way so as to appease their readers, white European society. As

Foster describes in his book, the literature during the Dirty War was affected as well. He emphasizes that many texts written during and even before the Dirty War were fragmented, representing the fragmentation in thought that existed in many of the authors during that time (4). As is emphasized by Foster, the specific reason for the fragmentation stemmed from “the fear that one’s works would be confiscated and one punished or eliminated as the result of uncontrolled self-expression” (4). Thus, gaps in information existed in the works of such Argentine authors as Valenzuela and Cortázar due to the fact that these writers could not express themselves fully without risking their own lives in the process.

Returning to Hollander’s article, one important theme which has been briefly touched on is how denial, or disavow, played a significant role in justifying the Argentine citizens’ call to silence. Hollander mentions two psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein, who have been particularly helpful in understanding how denial is a subconscious way of protecting one’s ego. First, in describing Melanie Klein’s approach towards the interconnectedness of denial and manic defenses, Hollander says the following:

For Klein, mania is a defense often stimulated by fears of dependency and is characterized by a sense of omnipotence that wards off phantasies of annihilation and the loss of part of the ego or object (694).

Perhaps the significance in spelling “phantasies” with a “ph” instead of the normal “f” is the author’s attempt to subtly allude that this fear has been produced by those individuals with *phalluses*, or in other words, the male gender. It can be suggested that Klein believes denial is a way in which individuals are able to cope with this fear and maintain an

illusory sense of their own power. If an individual is able to deny the reality that surrounds him/her, then he/she is able to protect his/her ego. Rotker mimics this argument that denial stems from fear of protecting one's ego when she says, "Suppression and rejection of the disagreeable: sometimes for convenience, other times out of complicity, but in the majority of cases it is a way to preserve one's sanity" (4). Thus, preserving one's sanity through denying circumstances which has occurred is often the route taken over dealing with the uncomfortable thoughts which come with remembering.

Similar to Klein, the way in which Freud viewed denial was as a "primal defense mechanism for dealing with the potentially traumatic significance imposed on the psyche by *external reality*" (Hollander 693) As Hollander emphasizes, "Freud emphasized that disavowal, unlike repression, did not erase the threatening idea or perception so much as it did its meaning to the subject" (693). Thus, as Hollander points out and as other philosophers such as Roland Barthes have concluded, denial is not the act of getting rid of an object, but rather it's assigning that object a new meaning (693). In the case of the Dirty War, it was not that the Argentine people were naïvely unaware of the brutal acts the military coup were committing against the political dissidents, but rather many chose for self-protecting purposes to assign a new meaning to the killings and torture. Hollander points out how many civilians even helped to carry out the government's agenda by participating in the events with the government (698), for many "rationalized the military regime as the promoter of social stability" (695). She gives an example that helps to clarify. Many individuals upon seeing friends, neighbors and strangers taken would reply with "Habra hecho algo" (he or she must have been up to something) in

order to “merit the reasonable actions of the state” (Hollander 698). As she puts it succinctly, “denial results in obedient individuals who become potentially punitive of self and others” (698). Essentially, mimicking the argument of Bataille in *The Accursed Share*, it can be assumed that the self will seek to help others only as long as one’s individual power, or one’s ego, is not threatened. Upon being threatened, Bataille reasons that one must defend oneself at any cost, even if it means loss of power for others. Thus, many were silenced not because they were unaware of what was going on around them, but rather the action of helping others would have put one’s own life at risk, something many were not willing to do.

AN END AT THE LIGHT OF THE TUNNEL FOR JUÁREZ

Thus far in this thesis we have covered a lot of material. We have studied about La Malinche and the way in which her life is now an enigma. Also, we have studied about the time in Argentine history in which those in power were attempting to purge themselves all of other races except those purely European. During that time those white women taken captive were never allowed to return to their homes for fear that their offspring, the mestizos, would contaminate the industrialized European nation which was forming. In addition, we studied the life of the first recorded woman in the Judeo-Christian Bible, Eve, and how all women are stereotyped as being “the daughters of Eve,” destined to follow suit in sinning and defiling society. Finally, we have discussed the two main roles women have been assigned, that of child bearer and family caretaker, and how any desire to break away from these roles is seen as stubbornness and rebellion

in the eyes of those in power. Many women have been objectified and abused simply because they those in power refused to share power.

I would now like to return to the main issue at hand: the hundreds of girls from Juárez, Mexico, who have died within the past decade and a half. As I stated earlier in the thesis, the goal of this project was twofold: to determine *who* has and is continuing to kill these women, but, more importantly, to determine *why* history has repeated itself since the conquest of Mexico in that these women are continuing to be killed. In studying Valdez's book *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women*, it is evident that there is not just one killer involved. Drug dealers, politicians, policemen, government officials, Fortune 500 companies, and more are all responsible. When it boils down to it, all of these groups have two things in common: money and power. On the surface level, it appears that all have had different motives for participating in the subjugation of these women, but a commonality exists in that, echoing the ideas expressed in Hollander article, underneath it all pride and the need to defend one's ego has spurred their participation in the killings. According to Valdez, one reason that so many families have migrated to Juárez in the past couple of decades is so they could find work, particularly in the maquiladoras (Valdez 27), being that "The maquiladoras and the drug trade are the twin engines that drive the Juarez economy" (64). Put succinctly, maquiladoras are factories owned by power house corporations that typically use women for cheap labor.

According to an article in the *Council of Hemispheric Affairs*, women are preferred over men for these factory jobs for several reasons, two being "their nimble fingers and obedience" (Sarría: "Femicides of Juárez :"). These jobs do not offer much pay, nor do they offer protection. Many women work all day with few breaks. What

would attract these women to a job where the pay is low and the working conditions poor? Valdez writes about one reason being that in order to receive a visa to travel to the United States, one must have a steady job (30), and thus maquiladoras offer a way for women to save up enough money to venture into “El Norte.” More importantly, however, many of these women have no other choice but to accept whatever jobs are available, for they have to provide for their families (Valdez 28). It is for this reason that “given the city’s demographics, young women from low income homes are likely to end up working at maquiladoras. Also, women with limited economic prospects are more likely to “become involved with women who are drug dealers” (Valdez 41). Because these women have no other choice but to accept what they can get, they are forced to take these dangerous factory jobs where often times they are abused, and worse, killed. It is no surprise that 1/5 of the women killed worked in some sort of assembly plant (Valdez 41), for as Dr. Stanley Krippner, a psychologist and author from San Diego, California, writes “It is likely that someone who resents women who work is involved, even if it is someone who is from a higher economic circle than the victims” (qtd. in Valdez 243).

Two reasons why women are preferred over men to work in the maquiladoras have already been discussed, but the same author goes a bit further to discuss a few more reasons as to why these women continue to be chosen. The reason these women are chosen has a lot to do with the way the Mexican machismo culture has defined these women. Whereas men are seen as “trainable and intelligent” (Sarría, “Femicides of Juárez”), women are seen as the opposite. They are viewed as items which devalue over time and can in the end be discarded (Sarría, “Femicides of Juárez”). An interesting concept discussed in the movie *On the Edge: the Femicide in Ciudad Juárez* is the irony

produced being that the maquiladora owners prefer to hire women over men, yet as is emphasized by Valdez in the aforementioned quote, when these women are hired, they are hated because men are left with fewer job opportunities. The famous Mexican author, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, touches upon this same irony when she writes the following in her “Redondillas”:

Hombres necios que acusáis
 a la mujer sin razón,
 sin ver que sois la ocasión
 de lo mismo que culpáis;... (1-4)

As is suggested by Sor Juana in this text, men have played a guilty part in shaping women’s actions. In the case of the Juárez women, the maquiladora jobs provide for many the perfect opportunity to get out of the home, breaking the stereotype that women are only good to birth children and provide for their family; however, in accepting these jobs women are making it more difficult for men to find jobs. Mentioned earlier, it is believed that one reason that these women are being killed is because men resent women working (Valdez 243). Thus, it is like women are trapped in a labyrinth, for they are stereotyped and held in bondage no matter where they turn.

As is discussed in Valdez’s book, many of the women killed in Juárez were sex murder victims, thus their bodies in some way showed signs of being abused sexually. Valdez mentions a Juárez psychologist by the name of Sergio Rueda who was quoted as saying the following:

We probably have two or three different people who practice the sexual *sacrifice* of their victims. The *modus operandi* might vary, but the goal is always the

same—to sacrifice the victim. This can vary from verbal insults to torture or death (243).

Going beyond simply being killed, Rueda emphasizes the sacrificial element of these deaths. Whereas killing does not necessarily require that one possess an object, it is a requirement that in order to sacrifice an object, one must have something to give up. It is interesting that Valdez also makes a connection of how these murders “invoke notion of ritual, conjuring images of the Ancient Aztecs sacrificing humans to appease their gods” (28). Thus, as Valdez says, these femicides are unique “because they are motivated by a desire to assert power” (60). In my opinion, money was certainly an important factor in killing these women, but above all, the power trip that came in owning and sacrificing human bodies was the ultimate goal in the killing of these women. As is evident in the Judeo-Christian creation story, God chose to create mankind last, symbolizing mankind’s status as the epitome of creation. Therefore, the Juárez cases contain a much deeper significance than is evident on the surface. It can be suggested that in sacrificing the women’s bodies, the individuals committing the cruel deed are making a bold statement that their power even exceeds that of God’s. Despite the fact that the Judeo-Christian God deemed women the epitome of creation, the devoted Catholic Mexican society has shaken its fist at God, so to say, and degraded women to being objects, worthy of being abused and killed.

There are many examples within Valdez’s book that prove that sexually abusing these women was simply an act to obtain more power. For example, she mentions how many of the police officers used rape and other forms of violence to initiate men into the brotherhood or fraternities (122). Also, many gangs have used these women’s bodies to

leave marks representing their particular group. For example, it is no coincidence that many of the girls' breasts—including those of Olga Perez and Silvia Elena Morales—had been stabbed, ripped, or bitten off. It was a sign used to signify a particular gang was the culprit.

THE JUÁREZ MURDERS: THE EVOLUTION OF SOLUTIONS

An easy solution to all of these problems is very unlikely, for if the solution were easy, the problem would have already been solved. Obviously there is a need for those in power to recognize these women as valuable individuals, for this thesis has shown how the problem of female abuse, particularly to those belonging to the lower class, has existed since the beginning of the Conquest and existed to present day. We have simply brought to light the problems that exist in Latin America, but undoubtedly female abuse and femicides is a problem all throughout the world. A solution to begin turning around this trend of killings and abuse must be accomplished, but the greater question is how?

As Hollander emphasizes in her article aforementioned concerning the Argentine Dirty War and the present state of post 9/11 United States, she encourages that psychoanalysts continue to be available for patients, teaching them the tools necessary “for critical thought and agency to combat a social order that demands conformity and uncritical acceptance of official discourse” (691). She emphasizes how during the Dirty War psychoanalysts and other mental health professionals were targets for the Argentine government because they were seen as “containers of their patients’ secrets and thus an important opposition to the social order” (699). The psychoanalytic process of free association was severely limited during the Dirty War due to the fact that when patients

spoke to psychoanalysts about their “traumatic personal situations arising from the politically repressive environment,” (699) they were ultimately putting the psychoanalysts in danger (699-700). Some psychoanalysts during this time allowed themselves to be silenced, but Hollander supports the idea that society must continue to use their critical thinking skills, contemplating and evaluating what is happening in society and how it affects its citizens. In stating her support of the use of psychoanalysis during the Dirty War in which individuals fought against the government in an attempt to thrive emotionally and intellectually she says the following:

The psychoanalytic space was a crucial matrix in which patient(s) and analyst(s) could use their minds together to reflect upon, to symbolize, events in their social world. A collaborative psychoanalytic exploration stimulated by the culture of fear was seen as an important factor in overcoming the sense of dread born isolation and in potentially containing psychotic anxieties mobilized by a terrifying social order (701).

It is apparent that what Hollander supports is a society in which individuals are free to use their minds to the greatest capacity possible. The moment in which they stop thinking critically, they will cease to have the power to defend themselves against the government and a repressive society.

Interestingly enough in the first chapter of her book *Captive Women*, Rotker expresses her frustrations in having been one of the ill-fated individuals who could not recollect her childhood. As was discussed earlier, the fact that many could not remember their past was, as Klein and Freud emphasize, a need to protect one’s own ego. Rotker mentions having tried everything to remember her past, even to the point of looking at

old photos, talking to older family members and neighbors, and even visiting the countries where her parents and grandparents were born and died (1); however, she says, "My effort was in vain: there was no way to recuperate what had been lost" (1). She speaks of times in Caracas where she tried looking for archives and documents to help explain past history, and perhaps, as a result, the reason for the present problem of poverty and corruption in her country. However, she was always told when her research uncovered nothing that "happy countries, like happy women, have no history" (4).

Being the daughter of parents who were Holocaust survivors, she mentions how her parents covering up what took place during their childhoods was a way of exempting them of "the unbearable weight of their memories" (1) Rotker along with many of the other children of Holocaust survivors were taught that one cannot forget what knowledge was never there in the first place (2). It is interesting to note how denial is not a passive verb. In order to deny something, work is involved. What we choose to remember is so because we have actively chosen that we remember that knowledge. Rotker could not remember her childhood, not because events did not occur, but because her parents knowingly chose to deny all of the traumatic events of the Holocaust and what took place thereafter. Rotker emphasizes this point of memory being events which we have chosen to remember when she says, "The past is not simply there, in memory, but must be articulated in order to be converted into memory" (2). In continuing, she says, "To forget and to remember are not opposites; they are the very weave of representation (2). Rotker's lack of knowledge of her past led Rotker to write *Captive Women*, she desired to connect the occurrences of the disappearances of the black race and white captive women in order to connect it with the Dirty War which still has its effects in Argentina even

today. One quote by Friedrich Nietzsche mentioned in her book reverberates in the ears of all those who dare to listen: “The past can only be explained through those who are most powerful in the present” (qtd in Rotker 7). In this day and age, one must fight to be heard, for Walter Benjamin says, “every image from the past that is not recognized in the present risks being irreparably lost” (qtd in Rotker 7).

In referencing Hollander’s article again, Rotker knew the importance of remembering her past. Although the process was difficult, she did not do it alone. She mentions several times in the first chapter of her book how she met with a psychoanalyst in Buenos Aires as someone to accompany her in making sense of what happened in the past. Like Rotker, for Argentine and Mexican families alike, if they are not able to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings due to fear, their true voice will never be heard in order to make a difference. These families must continue to think, and more importantly, act upon their best judgment, making themselves known within the community.

Directing back to prior discussion of Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza is at one point confronted by a group of three women who say the following to her:

When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street.

You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are (Cisneros105).

However, when she’s confronted with the question of whether or not she’ll return, she says “Not me. Not until somebody makes it better” (Cisneros 107). Esperanza knows that she cannot stay, for to stay would be debilitating to her free-spirited character and too much pressure to conform. She has seen too many free spirited women, such as her

mother, her great-grandmother and her Aunt Guadalupe, be tamed, and that is the furthest thing she wants. Serving her name justice, Esperanza has a hope that she can break free from the entanglement of stereotypical roles in order to live out her *own* life and to make her *own* choices, such as what house she will own. For Cisneros, she knows that the only way in which she will be able to retain the right to be heard and to exhibit her power is if she maintains her voice. She knows she must continue to write so as to make sure that no one speaks *for* her. This is reflected in the fact that Esperanza is encouraged to continue in her education and to “keep writing,” for “it will keep you free” (Cisneros 61). ⁶

A point made in Petty’s article is although Esperanza knows that she must someday leave, she makes it clear that this does not mean she will forget the women who are trapped and who desire to escape like her. She knows that to stay on Mango Street would be settling and risking confinement, but she *does* invite any women to come with her! This idea of providing a safe haven for whoever might decide to join her is reflected when she says “One day I’ll own my own house, but I won’t forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I’ll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know what it’s like to be without a house (Cisneros 87). Returning to the idea that Esperanza is the perfect balance between two archetypal stereotypes, Petty says the following:

Although Esperanza’s desire for a house is prompted by her desire for security and autonomy, it also encompasses a degree of compassion and nurturing that represents the noblest qualities of the Virgen archetype (Petty 8).

Thus, the battle against patriarchal is not just a single battle. It begins with the individual and grows. Esperanza does not forget those who have been left behind or those who do

not have a home because she knows they are crucial in the fight for power and memory. One voice often blends in among other voices, but thousands of voices are powerful and can be heard.

Many have decided to act out thorough joining forces and forming advocacy groups which fight against the government and other powerful officials who continue to try to silence those know too much. For example, during the Dirty War in Argentina, there were many children taken from parents who were political dissidents and adopted into upper class families and/or families with political power. Maria Eugenia Sampallo is one of those children who has decided to fight back. According to a recent BBC article, Osvaldo Rivas and Maria Cristina Gomez were recently convicted and jailed for “falsifying documents and hiding their daughter’s identity” (“Dirty War adoption”), one of the many children taken from her parents during the Dirty War. In addition to this couple, captain Enrique Berthier, was tried as well and sentenced ten years in jail for having been the one to steal Sampallo from her parents (“Dirty War adoption”). As was mentioned in the article, this case brought before the federal criminal court in Buenos Aires was significant due to the fact that it was the first time an adopted child has fought back and pressed charges against her adopted family (“Dirty War adoption”). Even though this is the family she grew up with, Sampallo shows no remorse in saying, “They are not my parents- they are my kidnappers” (“Dirty War adoption”) Although Sampallo pushed her adoptive parents both receive a 25 year jail sentence, the maximum amount allowed according to the Argentine law, Rivas and Gomez received eight and seven years respectively (“Dirty War adoption”). Sampallo knew nothing of the truth until 2001 when she was contacted by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo who informed her of what

really happened (“Dirty War adoption”). This situation just goes to show what an influence the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, both groups still actively involved advocacy groups in Argentina.

Another BBC article by David Schweimler discusses what an important role these women have had in changing the lives of individuals, like Sampallo, who had never known the truth, until now. Their march which began in 1977 still continues today, for according to the article, the women still march every Thursday outside of the royal palace in the Plaza de Mayo, wearing “headscarves which bear the names of their loved ones and carry photographs” (“Argentine mothers’ march”). “They marched in desperation because they didn’t know what else to do,” Schweimler writes (“Argentine mothers’ march”). Their daughters and granddaughters had been taken, and simply making themselves known within BA was an act of seeking justice. Also according to the article, these women have traced more than 80 children and helped to reunite them with their real families (Argentine mothers’ march”). One of the founders and president of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Hebe de Bonafini, has played a significant role in seeking justice for the children taken (“Argentina mothers’ march”) Being friends with Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez as well as working alongside the Argentine president, Nestor Kirchner, she has traveled the world making a case for the parents looking for their children (“Argentine mother’s march”). In speaking of the some of the obstacles the group has had to face over the years, Bonafini says the following:

And the more pressure they put on us, the stronger we grew. They kidnapped three of our members in 1977 and we came back. They destroyed our headquarters and we came back. We’re a different organization now but I never

would have dreamed that all those things would have happened (“Argentine mother’ march”).

Every time these women march, they serve as a reminder that the Dirty War did, in fact, happen. No matter how hard opposition comes, it is apparent that they will continue to march. They do not march for themselves, but rather they march for their loved ones who will continue to be an enigma of the past unless they raise their voices and let it be known that there is an opposition who is willing to fight against those who have helped to silence the masses.

Just as there are Argentine advocacy groups to help fight against what happened during the Dirty War, Valdez also mentions in her book many of the advocacy groups which fight for the women of Juárez who have lost their daughters. For example, one advocacy group, *Mujeres de Negro*, formed a protest march in February of 2003 where they dressed in long black dresses and pink hats and marched about 250 miles, from Chihuahua City to the Paso del Norte International Bridge (74). The significance in wearing the black dresses was to symbolize that they are “mothers in perpetual mourning” (74) and that, ironically, the memory of their daughters’ death will never die (74). Another advocacy group mentioned in Valdez’s book, *Mujeres por Juárez*, was founded by Vicky Caraveo (19). What makes Caraveo special is that, unlike most lower class families who try to fight back, she actually has a lot of political power. Being that her grandfather was a Mexican army general (20) and her uncle is a “powerful developer with important political connections” (20), she is considered one of the “affluent elite” (19) in the area. Valdez goes on to add, “In Mexico, it is rare for a woman of her socioeconomic status to become a social activist rubbing shoulders with the underclass”

(19). Considering that the majority of the elite class is involved in covering up the murders of these women, it is unusual that Caraveo risk her political power and position to fight for the families whose daughters have been slain. Regardless most wealthy business leaders “don’t care about poor women” (20), she is an important activist who continues to fight for justice for those who have died. It is evident that Caraveo has been an important figure in bringing justice to the injustices which have occurred, for it was stated in Valdez’s book that by the end of 2003 Caraveo, along with the rest of the *Mujeres por Juárez*, had conducted twenty-seven searches for lost women in some of the poorest areas, such as the deserts of Lomas de Poleo (21).

Towards the end of her article, Hollander quotes Bill Moyers as saying the following:

This is the moment freedom begins, the moment you realize someone else has been writing your story, and it’s time you took the pen from his hand and started writing it yourself (qtd. in Hollander 706).

Just as Cisneros has chosen to do, women must begin to write, for as long as women continue to allow men to write their story, their voice will continue to be silenced. In her article entitled “The Laugh of the Medusa” Helene Cixous also comments on this need for women to begin to defend themselves through writing in saying the following:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, for which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement (347).

She is commenting on the fact that battle first begins in each individual woman as a precursor to women attaining their power as a collective whole. She blames men as being the cause of every woman's problem in that "insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs" (349). She encourages women to not hate what they have been, but rather to embrace what the future holds for them as a result of their expressing themselves and letting their voice be heard within society.

In conclusion, these crimes that have been committed against these women of Juárez cannot be instantly appeased. Countless numbers of families continue to grieve for their daughters who have been killed, but justice will only come when the voice of the weak becomes so deafening that it drowns out the voice of the powerful which has dominantly existed since the Conquest. It is then, and only then, that those considered to be the outcasts of society will be heard and will have the opportunity to seek justice. According to Valdez, "unpunished crime fuels more crime" (263). If nothing is done about these murders that have occurred, she predicts social chaos, increased crime, and political anarchy will also continue to plague Mexico (263). Just as Foucault questions in his book the self-evident nature of the prison system and the ability of those in control to unbiasedly "transform" individuals, we must also continue to question those that are in power and their judgment in establishing the stereotypes which still exist and continue to transform both genders. Reflecting on Bataille's argument, women must continue to fight for their "space" within society, for as we have already learned, the Pauli Exclusion Principle states that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Women are not only claiming their physical space in society when they continue to march, such

as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, but they also simultaneously claim their “space” within memory as well, as Foucault and Rotker both discuss. As Cixous emphasizes, it is our responsibility as individuals, particularly as women, to let our voice be heard. Cisneros has learned this principle and continue to write material which inspires women to write from their hearts. It is only if women continue to write, march, and make themselves known within society, teaming together to form a joint effort, that they will reap the benefits of a changed society in which women regain their power.

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