
Original Article

***The Divine Husband* and the creation of a transamericana subject**

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Abstract This article reads Francisco Goldman's 2004 novel *The Divine Husband* as a transamerican foundation narrative. The author explains how Goldman's work challenges particular aspects of Latin American foundational texts, specifically via the relationships depicted between women's bodies and state institutions. In the character of María de las Nieves Moran, Goldman has created a woman who refuses to subject her body to any man or state. Moreover, the narrative structure of the work – focusing as it does on women's lives and women's stories – offers a rebuke to historical and literary accounts that have privileged men's lives and men's stories. Finally, in reading Goldman's work as a "transamerican" text, this article proposes a new perspective on the relationship between Central America and the United States. This perspective emphasizes the exchanges that have always taken place between different nations in the Americas, while it also argues for the inherent heterogeneity of Latina/o communities.

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In a tongue-in-cheek reference to the regulatory power of the Catholic Church over the sexuality and bodies of women, the protagonist of Francisco Goldman's 2004 novel *The Divine Husband*, María de las Nieves Moran, conceives her second child via an act that melds sexual agency and religious mysticism. Ever since her days as a novice nun inspired and obsessed by the writings of seventeenth-century Spanish sister, Sor María de Agreda, María had



dreamed “of experiencing mystical bilocation” (432). Agreda “bilocated,” or inhabited two spaces at once, when she appeared to the indigenous inhabitants of what is now New Mexico without leaving her cloister in Europe (14). Years later, and long after her departure from the Church, María nonetheless remains so inspired by Agreda that she *trilocates* – “the first ever in history to accomplish that feat” – by having sex with three men at once (432).

María “corporally manifested” with three men, one historical and two fictional: José Martí, a “mysterious muchacho,” and a “young sailor” (432). While the narrator dismisses this story “as a ludicrous ruse meant to disguise Martí’s paternity of [the] child,” the lack of a named father indicates the central role that María’s body and narrative will play throughout the work (432). Indeed, Goldman notes in an interview that the story of *The Divine Husband* really belongs to María (Allen, 2004, 78). In a much-needed twist on literary and historical discourse, it is the woman who tells the story of her life, her body and her sexual adventures. In refusing to alter her story or name just one father for either of her children, María follows Agreda’s example by steadfastly telling her own truth in the face of incredulous male authority. Indeed, María’s appropriation of Catholic mysticism is indicative of how her character and the novel engage with historical, literary and political discourses; both María and the narrative as a whole reference, alter and undermine stories of social reproduction, political change and literary history.

The importance of female storytelling and sexual agency illustrated by this example is linked in the text to the role of female mobility. María “trilocates” while on board a ship carrying her and her daughter from Guatemala to the United States. María’s body in this instance belongs to no single man or nation but is instead involved in traversing physical, geographic and political boundaries. Physical movement, sexuality and narration are intertwined; as an unmarried, mixed-race, working class woman, María is socially, politically and financially excluded from the Guatemalan nation. This exclusion facilitates her migration and pushes her into a space where, outside the legitimating discourses of sexuality and nationality, she creates her own lineage of family and nation.

While María’s trilocation and her story question the agency and regulation of female bodies in relation to patriarchal and national discourses, the novel as a whole raises important questions concerning Central American-American literature in relation to contemporary Latina/o cultural production and trans-american literary studies. The movement of characters between and among several American nations and the privileging of the story of María de las Nieves suggests the necessity of reading *The Divine Husband* from a transamerican, trans-Latina/o and feminist perspective. Such a reading, I argue, yields a better understanding of the narrative techniques of the novel and allows us to consider such important questions as: Where do Central American and Central American-American figures fit within transamerican Latina/o histories and

literatures? How can contemporary critics and scholars develop a transamerican perspective that accounts for both the dynamics of North–South relations and intra-national relations? How can literary narratives remain attuned to the voices of not only ethnically and racially subaltern subjects, but also recognize the gendering of bodies and nations? And what is the role of cultural production in refashioning and reflecting a transamerican identity?

In content and form, *The Divine Husband* presents a narrative that privileges the perspective of a specifically transamerican female character. The story is told by an omniscient narrator who relies on documents and stories he has received from Mathilde, María's daughter. The nonlinear narrative concentrates on María and her relationships (both amorous and platonic) with a host of male characters, including the British legation secretary Wellesley Bludyar, the entrepreneur Mack Chinchilla and the teacher/revolutionary José Martí. The presence of the unnamed narrator, including his occasional self-referential asides, draws attention to the novel's structure as a story-within-a-story and emphasizes that the focus on María is an intentional one. According to the narrator, she is the figure around whom the narrative threads coalesce; appropriately, her perspective and words are afforded the most space and scrutiny.

In her construction as a woman, lover and mother, María subverts the links between motherhood and nationalism, situating motherhood in a transnational space. By un-mooring María from any particular national context and drawing her through several different ones, thus highlighting the national, ethnic and religious heterogeneity of Latina/o communities, the novel calls on readers to rethink commonly accepted cultural and racial boundaries of *Latinidades*. And by reminding us of the traditional relationship between heteronormative families and the consolidation of the nation-state, the novel requires readers to reconsider the notion of "family," and to contemplate new iterations of biological, political and cultural kinship networks. Reading María as a foundational transamerican character and representative of a heterogeneous Latina/o community privileges not only women's lives, bodies and stories, but also the interplay between history and literature and between the North and the South. Such a comprehensive transamerican Latina/o perspective encourages us to look closely at the interplay between the local and the global, the female and the male, as well as between Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o texts and experiences.

At the same time, *The Divine Husband* offers a powerful intervention into transamerican and Latina/o studies as it argues for and creates a space for the discussion of sexed, raced, gendered and classed transamerican Latina/o issues and experiences. In its focus on Guatemalan history and characters, Goldman's novel stakes a claim about who and what should be included in transnational narratives. The work's privileging of María's life as it intersects with both Guatemalan and US history affirms the importance of Central America within the US imaginary and Central American-Americans within the US Latina/o imaginary. *The Divine Husband* refuses to participate in the rhetoric that



portrays Central American characters as “the abandoned, abused brother or sister to be taken in by the Latino family” (Rodríguez, 2001, 390). Through its setting in the nineteenth century, the text drives home the fact that Central American-Americans are no new addition to the Latina/o “family.”

Transamerican Studies, Trans-Latina/o Studies and Gender

While Ralph Bauer points out that a “hemispheric conception of American studies” originated in the United States before World War II, the past 10 years have been marked by a sharp increase in the use of a transamerican framework as scholars from a variety of disciplines have heeded Shelley Fishkin’s suggestion that some of the most pertinent and intriguing questions are to be found in the works of authors and artists currently involved in the “transnational turn” (Fishkin, 2005, 17; Bauer, 2009, 234). My own use of the term “transamerican” seeks, as does Fishkin’s, to privilege the realm of thought and creativity. Sadowski-Smith and Fox explain that “hemispheric frameworks” are “often linked to developments toward continental integration under NAFTA and other regional trade agreements” (2004, 20). In contrast, a transamerican approach can better account for non-state-sanctioned interactions. To this end, Paula M.L. Moya and Ramón Saldívar describe the transamerican imaginary as an “epistemically valuable way of describing our place in the world and understanding the literature we teach” as well as a “contact zone ... populated by transnational persons whose lives form an experiential region within which singularly delineated notions of political, social, and cultural identity do not suffice” (2003, 2, 4). Although the necessity of a transamerican perspective has been influenced by political, social and especially economic developments, Moya, Saldívar and others suggest that a transamerican approach offers a valuable lens through which to reevaluate both contemporary and historical change. Speaking of debates over the applicability to the United States of the terms “transnational,” “postnational” and “postcolonial,” John Carlos Rowe writes that such discussions “suggest that we can and should push such critical study back into the 18th and 19th centuries, when the nation and its sustaining, often generative imperialisms were the dominant forms of state organization” (Rowe, 2007, 35). This interplay between history and contemporaneity suggests that a transamerican approach to cultural studies is one that is dialectical in nature, recognizing the historical antecedents of current economic and cultural developments as they continue to affect our present moment.

Latina/o studies scholars have suggested the importance of a transamerican perspective and many have turned to the figure of José Martí to explore and theorize Latina/o and transamerican perspectives, lives and epistemologies. Nicolás Kanellos asserts that a transnational framework is necessary for understanding the influx of immigrants from Latin America, the incorporation/

annexation of Spanish-speaking communities and individuals into the United States and the ties that Spanish-speaking peoples have and continue to maintain with their nations of origin (2009, 29). In our current moment, “Latina/o” and “transnational” may reflect back on one another; Kevin Concannon, Francisco Lomelí and Marc Prieue suggest that “Latina/o” “represents transnational features of specific and salient movements and connectivities [including] temporary or permanent migrations to and from the United States; cultural exchanges among and beyond US Latina/o subgroups; the imagination of manifold ties” (2009, 4). A transnational imaginary may be the most appropriate way to capture the historical and contemporary Latina/o reality, a reality grounded in the movement of peoples and lands within the Western hemisphere that necessarily engages with the nation-making processes (including war, settler-colonialism and narration) of several nations. Furthermore, a transamerican outlook can direct our attention away from the Anglo-European influence on US history and letters and toward North–South (and South–North) flows and help us to account for the persistent, though uneven, integration of US and Latin American cultures and ideologies throughout the Western hemisphere. Finally, the transamerican perspective deployed in this article is particularly appropriate given the kinds of national changes taking place in the United States and Latin America during the nineteenth century, the time period in which *The Divine Husband* takes place. As Anna Brickhouse contends, a transamerican literary imagination took root within the United States at a moment when the nation’s “geographic borders were expanding [and] its imagined racial borders were narrowing and calcifying” (2004, 7). Reading *The Divine Husband* from a specifically US Latina/o transamerican perspective allows us to see how the work is in dialogue with both nineteenth century and contemporary political, literary and theoretical developments.

Martí, who lived in five different countries in the Americas (Cuba, the United States, Mexico, Venezuela and Guatemala) and who spoke two of the chief languages of the continent (English and Spanish), is a particularly appropriate focal point for those looking for early iterations of transamerican identities and *Latinidades*.¹ To move toward his goal of “reconstruct[ing] pan-American literary history,” José David Saldívar begins with Martí; the Cuban poet and revolutionary’s seminal essay is echoed in the title of Saldívar’s *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (1991, 5). Dozens of Latina/o studies scholars, among them Hames-García (2003), Ana Patricia Rodríguez (2009) and Rosaura Sánchez (1998), have looked to Martí to explore US Latina/o literary and cultural production. Most recently, Laura Lomas (2008) has argued forcefully for a reading of Martí that understands him as a migratory figure whose presence in New York defied “the notion of progressive radiation from center to periphery or through stages of upward development from the barbaric South to the civilized North” (7–8). Lomas’s emphasis on Martí’s movement to New York is echoed by the

1 Following Marta Caminero-Santangelo, I invoke the idea of plural *Latinidades* in order to imagine a construction that can “reach across national-origin lines but need not account in some comprehensive way for all” (215).



Northern migration of nearly all of the principal characters of *The Divine Husband*.

In making Martí an important, but not central, character in his novel, Goldman gestures toward the importance of Martí within the transamerican imaginary while simultaneously suggesting the necessity of female-centered imaginaries and narratives. By privileging the voices of women and the actions of immigrants, *mestizal/os* and *indigenas*, *The Divine Husband* suggests that a truly *Americano*, hemispheric perspective must do more than simply bring to the forefront of historical and literary discussions the actions, thoughts, ideas and writings of Latin American (male) leaders in a way that complements existing histories that focus on US and European (male) leaders. The novel, rather, suggests that a hemispheric perspective may be “an other” perspective all together, one that is concerned less with leaders, with nations, even with revolutions, and more with the poor, the powerless, the nation-less and the relationships between them. Finally, as both a literary and a historical-literary work, *The Divine Husband* simultaneously suggests that inhabitants of the Americas have always already been “transnational” and proposes that literature and narrative have the ability to both reflect and create a transnational subject.

Foundational Women

The first chapter of *The Divine Husband* centers on the sexual activity of a young woman; however, the framing of this particular female character as well as of her sexuality challenges traditional accounts of the birth of nations and peoples.² When the novel opens, María and her friend Paquita Aparicio are studying and living in a boarding school to which Paquita’s parents have sent her to keep her far away from the eyes of her much older suitor, Justo Rufino Barrios. Based on a historical figure, Barrios is a military leader who would become Guatemala’s liberal, reform-minded president from 1873 to 1885.³ The confines of Nuestra Señora de Bélen are not enough to keep Barrios from contacting Paquita, and in an attempt to maintain her friend’s purity, María makes Paquita swear to remain a virgin as long as she. María then promptly announces her calling as a nun, thereby ensuring that Paquita will never marry the man both girls refer to as “El Anticristo.” Readers are told that María’s vow of chastity will determine the course of future events:

The upholding or breaking of that vow between two thirteen-year-old convent schoolgirls would not only influence the history of that small Central American Republic but also alter the personal lives of some of our American hemisphere’s most illustrious men of politics, literature, and industry. (2004, 3)

2 Doris Sommer’s work on the scripting of gender and nation in the Latin American context offers a necessary perspective on this passage. According to the critic, the national novel is dependent on the love story within it; as she writes: “erotic rhetoric ... organizes patriotic novels” (2). María subverts the standard trajectory of the foundational fiction by failing to

remain a part of any child-producing heterosexual marriage.

- 3 Although the novel presents a cynical, if not critical take on Barrios, Martí was a great admirer of the liberal leader, noting that his government “taxes roads but opens schools with those taxes” and declaring: “Barrios does more than think about the good things; he foresees them” (Foner, 1977, 140, 143–144).

María exerts power and control over both her own body as well as several nations. Noting how her actions will change the lives and histories of not only Guatemala but also of “Our America,” the novel establishes its focus on the role that Central American communities will play within transnational histories. *The Divine Husband* then places at its forefront a story not of a homogenous people or nation, but an entire hemisphere, and stresses that the principal actions will emanate from a woman’s choices.

The focus on María established in the opening chapter continues throughout the novel, subverting any tendency on the part of readers to focus on the historical figures of either Martí or the woman who inspired his poem “La niña de Guatemala.” The novel, in fact, is rather remarkable for the extent to which it fails to concentrate on either the Cuban exile and revolutionary or the “niña” of the poem. The niña, readers only discover several chapters into the over 450-page narrative, is neither María nor Paquita, but rather María García Granados, the daughter of the former president of the republic. Courted by Martí during the year he spent in Guatemala, García Granados dies tragically young. Though the narrator of *The Divine Husband* suggests that she died of tuberculosis or pneumonia, and other characters speculate that she died during childbirth, the narrator of “La niña de Guatemala” asserts stubbornly that the young girl in question died of a broken heart: “*Yo sé que murió de amor*” (Martí, 1997, 42).

“La niña de Guatemala,” or Verso IX, is one of the most beloved of Martí’s *Versos Sencillos*, and the poem’s story of an apparently illicit affair between the narrator and a young woman may be autobiographical. During his year in Guatemala, Martí was engaged to Carmen Zayas Bazán, an engagement possibly referenced in the poem’s description of the man who “*volvió casado*” (Martí, 1997, 42). The extramarital affair at the heart of the poem makes this work an appropriate one to be placed at the center of *The Divine Husband*, as the novel is replete with extramarital, transnational romances, along with absent husbands and fathers. Through the facile movement of its principal figure between women and nations, “La niña de Guatemala” reflects and contributes to the relationship between gendered transnationalism and the construction of historical and literary imaginaries. At the same time, the poem’s form and content is an exercise in Martí’s philosophy of creating works that “[privilege] an indigenous American cultural studies critique” (Saldívar, 1991, 5). The ostensible focus of the novel on two subjects that are not really its focus (Martí, “La niña de Guatemala”) reflects the novel’s challenge to traditional national narratives. That is, by drawing attention to this poem but then refusing to accord it, its writer (Martí), or its subject (García Granados) a central role in the narrative, *The Divine Husband* offers a critique of the privileging of particular lives and stories. The greater attention paid to María, beginning with the opening chapter telling of her and Paquita in the convent, quickly transfers attention away from García Granados and Martí to María. “La niña” and Martí become supporting characters to María, suggesting that the novel does



not tell María's life story in the pursuit of telling Martí's, but rather just the opposite, that Martí's story is only told for the consequences it has for the life of María.

This framing, the use of Martí and other characters to tell the story of María, continues throughout the narrative. While María is partially constructed for readers through the research undertaken by the novel's anonymous narrator, he often lets the young girl speak for herself. In contrast, Martí is starkly overdetermined; the narrator and other interlocutors figure prominently when Martí appears in the novel. The first section of the novel to open with reference to Martí establishes the exile as a subject of speculation, the product of others' discourse:

Rumors that José Martí left behind at least one illegitimate child during his year in Central America have always centered on the subject of Poem IX of *Versos Sencillos*, one of forty-six untitled, often overtly autobiographical poems that the future hero of the Cuban Revolution against Spain published as a single slim volume in New York in 1891, during his decade and a half of exile there. (2004, 98)

Rumors about the revolutionary, not Martí himself, are the subject of this opening sentence of a section that briefly details Martí's legacy in Latin America, including the actor Cesar Romero's claim to be Martí's grandson. Here, Martí becomes a character in others' lives as the narrator concentrates on his effects on others and constructs him as a man formed through the discourse, including rumors and speculations, of others. Similarly, the "niña" of Martí's poem does not occupy a large portion of the narrative. García Granados dies young and with very little attention or character development on the part of the novel's narrator or author. We know only of her status as the daughter of the former president of the republic, and as a favorite pupil and love interest of Martí. Her own thoughts and feelings are absent from the text.

In fact, the common ground shared by the divine husband (Jesus), Martí and García Granados rests on absence. Husbands, readers learn, are nearly as absent from the text as nuns in a nation ruled by radical anti-clerics and atheists. Martí's time in Guatemala occurs during his engagement, while his future wife awaits him in México, but the numerous love affairs alluded to by the narrator call into question the state of this union.⁴ Though Paquita marries in the course of the story, her marriage is short-lived and her husband, Rufino, makes only brief appearances in the story. More than simply a reversal of readers' expectations, the novel's granting of importance to the characters overlooked by its title is a comment on and resistance to dominant modes of storytelling and history-making. In refusing Martí or García Granados starring roles in his narrative, Goldman makes clear to his readers that his is a story not about leaders, elites, wealthy characters, or those already remembered by literature and history.

4 One reviewer described the novel as the story of "Martí fornicating and impregnating his way through the two Americas," a particularly gendered rendition

of the
transamerican
experience if ever
there was one
(Siegel, 2004, 29).

Akin to the narrator's insistence that the breaking or honoring of the vow of chastity of a young girl would affect the outcome of history, men such as the half-Yankee, half-Indian, immigrant-cum-entrepreneur Chinchilla leave lasting influences on the course of history. For example, it is Chinchilla whose influence can still be felt in that most "American" of all North American states – Massachusetts. Toward the end of the novel, the narrator relates his own experiences growing up in Wagnum, MA, a town heavily altered by the Chinchilla-Moran family. "There was even a Chinchilla Road in our town," he recalls, "and a Chinchilla sports complex" (455). This legacy speaks not only to the ability of immigrants and *mestizal/os* to "succeed" in capitalist business enterprises in the United States, but also points to the transamerican origins of "American" business. In placing Chinchilla's factory in Massachusetts, Goldman presents an alternative version of the "discovery" and "founding" of the United States, proposing the story of a *mestizal/o* immigrant and wanderer in place of the story of the Mayflower and the Pilgrims.

At the same time, the fairy-tale quality of the novel's Epilogue once again gestures to its own narrative construction. The narrator pauses in his exhaustive story of María's life and family in the United States to consider a different history and a different narrative. "What if Martí really did father a child ... and what if I had instead dedicated all these years to unearthing the story of that forgotten and anonymous child?" (463). Here, readers are made to consider the capricious nature of the narrator's own endeavor and to recognize how the story we are reading is one of many possible stories. Furthermore, the somewhat implausible coincidences that draw all of the characters together in the United States at the end of the narrative suggests that even the social and racial narrative that we are given – a narrative dependent on an idea of *mestizaje* – is overly simplistic. The novel's many self-conscious references to the construction of the story it tells decenters *any* all-encompassing historical or racial narrative – be it imperialist, anti-colonialist or mixed race – and highlights the fallacy in looking to any narrative as "a totalizing paradigm" (Bost, 2003, 24).

Although their capitalist familial legacy may embody a narrative of immigrant success well-recognized in US discourse, María herself never fails to resist the collusion between femininity, motherhood and the reproduction of nations and families. By failing to marry or disclose Mathilde's father, María remains outside the possession of one man or nation, declining to contribute either to the institution of the nuclear family or the homogenous nation. She thus places herself outside the bounds of heteronormativity, nationalism, patriarchy and patrilinearity. While María's life as an "indecent" woman reflects her racial and class heritage as the (possibly illegitimate) offspring of an Indian woman and a Yankee father, her own actions and decisions challenge the norms of the world around her. Her multiple children by unnamed fathers and her independent behavior (sitting alone with men for hours, smoking cigarettes



and living with only other single women) reflect her unwillingness to subject herself to the norms of heteronormativity and nationalism (Goldman, 2004, 105). In refusing to name the fathers of her children, she refuses to bestow upon them any citizenship other than her own, ensuring that her children, like herself, will remain both mixed-race and mixed-nation. Subverting the links between motherhood and nationalism, María instead situates motherhood in a transnational space. In the act of “trilocation” from which her son Carlos López is conceived, María declares that her body and its offspring exist in a space inhabited by several men and several nations, but belonging to none.

A Lineage of Female-to-female Storytelling

While *The Divine Husband* posits transnational identities as marked by gender, race and migration, the narrative structure also grants the principal characters subjectivity and agency. Female characters enact agency through their participation in a lineage of female-to-female storytelling. When she was a novice nun obsessed with Sor María de Agreda, María read stories about the life of Sor María as well as the nun’s own book, *The Mystical City*. This work purports to be the story of the Virgin Mary, narrated by Mary to Agreda. María’s heroine and spiritual role model is a woman who, like herself, insists on being an active agent in history, not simply someone about whom books and biographies are written, but instead an author and interlocutor in her own right. Sor María’s project elevates not only her own status, but that of the Virgin Mary’s as well. According to Agreda’s biographer, Mary is the Co-redeemer, on the same level as Jesus:

The Queen of Heaven, via the Holy Spirit, told Sor María everything that the Bible leaves out: how she was also immaculately conceived in the womb of her mother Santa Ana; how it was her own idea that her Son by God should take human form and be sent to earth to redeem mortal humanity ... (ibid, 52)

Here, a chain of authorship and communication between women is established. *The Mystical City* points to the importance of women telling their own stories, and warns against the consequences of relying only on male sources. María’s youthful infatuation with Sor María establishes the theme of female-to-female storytelling that continues throughout the novel.

Through María, the novel develops links between female narration, female sexuality and extra or transnational spaces. In her definition of the “feminization of writing,” Nelly Richard considers “feminization” as that which is “produced each time a poetic or erotic sign exceeds the retaining/containing frame of masculine signification with its rebellious surpluses” (2004, 21–22). The stories

that pass from Sor María Agreda through María, Paquita and Mathilde are notable for the multiple instances of excess contained within them. All women at some point in the narrative find themselves in opposition to or completely outside hegemonic male institutions, including the Church, the nation and the family. During their time in the convent, Paquita and María both fail to conform to Church-mandated behavior, and while the former chooses to align herself with the liberal state (through her marriage to El Anticristo) and the latter chooses to align herself with the Church (through her marriage to Christ), both eventually find themselves ostracized from their respective institutions. Although their actions place them in a particular position vis-à-vis the state and the Church, the narrative itself places them in a different location – at the center of important changes within Guatemala, the Catholic Church and the United States.

Furthermore, when María insists on telling (or not telling) her own story and the story of her children, she claims for herself a subjectivity denied to her on account of her race, class and gender. Readers are continually reminded of the tenacity of María's speech during her conversations with Paquita aboard *The Golden Rose*. The friends engage in verbal sparring, during which María often alternates between upbraiding Paquita in her mind and doing so to her face. After one exchange during which María refers to Paquita contemptuously as "Madame Francisca," the former first lady scolds María: "You know when you get to New York you can't speak to me like that anymore" (Goldman, 2004, 86). This conversation highlights María's lower status and her use of speech to resist this status, as well as the significance of the traveling ship as a place where lines of class and race can be blurred and challenged.

In addition, the feminization of writing found within this novel and particularly surrounding the character of María depends largely on the decolonization of bodies and the claiming of extra-national spaces. Richard writes: "Any writing in the position to undo the normalizing control of masculine/hegemonic discursivity ... operates as a paradigm of deterritorialization" she adds that many women focus on the body as "the first surface to be reconquered (to be decolonized)" (2004, 22, 26). María's voyage from Guatemala to the United States involves deterritorialization, whereas the conception of her second child aboard the ship implies the decolonization of her body. Importantly, this decolonization is achieved not only via movement – the self-propelled migration from Guatemala to the United States – but also via sexual and linguistic agency. In her choice to "trilocate" with three men and her decision to reveal (or not) the father(s) of her children, María frees her body from colonial and patriarchal sexual and rhetorical power. This important section of the novel links the simultaneous sexual agency and excess exhibited by María (through the "trilocation" that is responsible for López's conception) to the exploration of transnational space and the (re)conquering of both bodies and speech.



Finally, when María continually refuses to name Mathilde's father, she does so in a way that recognizes the importance of storytelling and her own ability to shape the life of herself and her children through stories. During their journey to New York, Paquita pressures María to reveal her secret; frustrated by her friend's silence, Paquita insists: "Some day, María de las Nieves, you will have to reveal to your daughter who her father is." Confidently, María responds, "One can always invent a story. A story can certainly be a better father than a real one, Paquita" (Goldman, 2004, 86). María implicitly denigrates fatherhood and fathers (particularly the father of Paquita's children), while she elevates the status and importance of storytelling. Humans are not just created of flesh and blood, she suggests, but also from discourse, from stories and especially from stories told from a mother to a daughter or from one woman to another.⁵ Given the absence of fathers and husbands in the novel, María's quip may be a comment on the narrative itself. Through María, *The Divine Husband* speaks not only to the role of patrilinearity, or even matrilinearity, but also to the role of stories in creating subjects, including a transamerican, Central American-American subject such as María de las Nieves.

Rewriting América

Goldman's concentration on the actions of women, *mestizal/os*, immigrants and religious minorities presents a new way of looking at the United States and United States's imperialism. In focusing on characters who migrate to the United States in the midst of a period of national consolidation in Guatemala, the novel places anti-colonial and national processes in conversation with one another. The unflattering portrait of nationalist leaders such as Barrios offers a more complex perspective that sees "Third World nationalism as itself a moment in colonial domination" (Pease, 1994, 26). At the same time, the novel offers a particularly gendered perspective on the interplay between domestic, national and international change. Looking at how ideas of nationhood (both in Guatemala and the United States) are affected by transnational migration and immigration encourages us to see how global structures such as imperialism are "inseparable from the social relations and cultural discourses of race, gender, ethnicity and class at home" (Kaplan, 1994, 16). In focusing on female characters who move between different national contexts, the novel challenges "the binary opposition of the foreign and the domestic" that elevates "the international to a male, public realm, and relegate[s] the national to a female, private sphere" (ibid). Characters such as María and Paquita create a history and story of Central American-Americans within the United States and reverse the gendering of Latin American countries vis-à-vis the United States. That is, the mixed-blood, Central American, sexually excessive, immigrant characters who are the founders of significant lineages – both industrial and

5 Goldman affirms the importance of narrative in shaping individuals when he explains that one of the themes in the book is "the way in which [José Martí] has come down to us through this kind of collective narrative told by everybody, which is this thing we call history" (Chellas, 2004, 67–68).

familial – respond to the feminization of Latin American countries and the US fear of penetration by immigrants by making such immigrants in fact integral to the nation as we know it. Chinchilla’s rubber business and María’s children rewrite the historical relationship between the United States and Latin America by making the latter before, and necessary for, the former.

Although recent scholarship has exhorted us to understand the United States as an historical and current empire and looked closely at the extent of US intervention in “its backyard,” such work may not provide enough space for the voices of subordinate subjects. *The Divine Husband* suggests that history is not only the story of nations, of leaders, of militaries and politicians, but just as importantly the stories of women, of single mothers, of fatherless children, of immigrants and exiles. These individuals are not simply the objects of history, but the subjects as well. The novel suggests that just as US Latina/os have always already been transnational subjects, just as the United States has acted as an empire in its relations with Central American nations, so also have the citizens of Central America been active participants in their own history and the history of other countries. The narrator’s discovery of the lasting effects of Guatemalan citizens on the United States’s social, political and financial landscape in the form of Paquita Aparicio’s home in New York, María’s daughter Mathilde and Mack Chinchilla’s rubber factory proposes a new kind of discovery in direct contrast to the dominant US narrative of unmarked peoples “discovering” and “founding” unmarked land.

In its exploration of how non-normative citizen subjects relate to transamerican narratives, the text speaks to the interplay of the national and the transnational in a manner particularly relevant to contemporary Latina/o studies. That is, while “postnational and transnational phenomena deserve to be understood in the historical contexts of nationalism” and we would do well to look closely at “how the local might in fact *initiate* sturdy linkages with the global,” we must also acknowledge how national and therefore transnational developments unevenly intersect with particular actors (Rowe, 2007, 36; Rodríguez, 2008, 185). The question of how to understand individuals and groups of people who operate within and between several nation-states informs a host of conversations currently taking place inside and outside the academy, including questions about the formation and trajectory of Latina/o studies and debates about immigration. As Gruesz explains, “the lived practices of many Latinos defy the coordinates of temporal and spatial understanding that traditionally attach to progressive narratives of US immigration” (2003, 55). Goldman’s novel contributes to a valuable historicizing of the experiences of supra-national subjects in a manner that attends to the national roots of transnational phenomena, including the relationship between Central America and US *Latinidades*. In its attention to the particularities of Central American and Guatemalan experiences (namely via engagement with the lives of Martí, Barrios and Aparicio), the text is representative of “Central American narratives [that] transect and transcend national political boundaries” (Rodríguez, 2009, 3). As



a whole, the work sits alongside recent Latina/o cultural production (for example, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*) in its insistence on a returning to and retelling of the longstanding relationship between US Latina/o and Latin American histories.

Goldman's novel creates an *Americana* subject that is marked by immigration, indigeneity and the struggle for female independence. This subject calls on us to pay attention to the markings of race, citizenship and gender while requiring us to understand these as modes of agency deployed by, not just marking the bodies of, citizen subjects. At the same time, the novel stresses the role of literary and cultural production in community formation. Just as María suggests to Paquita that a story may make "a better father than a real one," the novel as a whole suggests that the origins of Central American-Americans and transamerican communities may be constructed via narrative as much as they are "discovered" via historical and sociological work.

A New Americana Subject

In *The Idea of Latin America*, Walter Mignolo locates the colonialist thinking behind the concept of "Latin" America. Paying close attention to the historical legacy of colonialism in the "Western hemisphere," (west of whom?) Mignolo traces the concept of "Latin America" back to the Creoles, the descendants of colonizers who wished to emulate and promote their roots in the Latin countries of France, Spain and Portugal. This concept, of course, blatantly excludes and dehumanizes the indigenous and African origins of the countries we refer to as "Latin American." If the concept of Latin America is colonialist in origin and inapplicable to either the historical legacy or future trajectory of these areas of the world, Mignolo suggests that what we need is not only a reorientation but an "other" orientation, another epistemology. Mignolo looks toward indigenous thinkers such as the sixteenth-century Waman Puma and current indigenous-oriented universities and movements as creators of this other knowledge. In addition, he notes that the concepts of "Latin" and "Anglo" are not only colonialist, but also patriarchal, and that those who push for an other thinking will not only be indigenous thinkers, but women: "If 'Latin' and 'Anglo' America are both patriarchal, feminist geo-political concerns today are global and transnational, rather than subcontinental, ones" (2005, 160). María reflects such a feminine, global and transnational concern. Resistant to patriarchal norms that would have her as the bearer of a new race or her body subjected to the ownership of man and nation, she provides a picture of what a transamericana subject is, was and can be. Furthermore, as a literary creation she suggests the significance of literary discourse, asserting that an other thinking may come not from historical tales or known documents, but from the imaginations of artists and intellectuals.

Just as we must appreciate the interplay between historical and contemporary discourses in the creation and dissemination of transamerican thought, we would do well to look at the relationship between historical and literary narratives. The literary imaginary offers a powerful supplement, no less so when applied to Central American and Central American-American narratives. Here the emphasis on the *creation* and thus potential *recreation* of “Central America” becomes important. William I. Robinson writes “Central America was first *created*, and then integrated into the world capitalist system through colonial conquest in the early sixteenth century as part of the system’s genesis and the period of primitive accumulation of capital (mercantilism)” (2003, 64). The creation of Central America by colonial and imperial powers nonetheless leaves the region open for reinterpretation and narrative revision by anti-colonial and anti-imperial discourses. Rodríguez assures us that “it is never too late to reconfigure and reimagine the isthmus along other coordinates and story lines” and “[the] devolving course of Central America’s future history ... can be reversed and redirected, if and when we read the past judiciously, critically, and creatively to produce alternative viable narrative scripts” (2009, 18). Via the character of María and particularly through María’s agency *The Divine Husband* produces an “alternative” script that powerfully reimagines historical events in a way that calls on us to rethink contemporary schema.

Goldman’s novel stresses both the “transamerican origins” of Latina/o communities as well as the historical presence of these communities within the United States (Gruesz, 2002). At the same time, *The Divine Husband* asks readers to rethink commonly accepted cultural and racial boundaries of *Latinidades* by highlighting the national, ethnic and religious heterogeneity of such communities. While the text points to the important role that Central American figures have played in the United States, Latin American and US Latina/o history, the work does more than argue for the simplistic “addition” of Central American-Americans to ideas of US *Latinidades*. In doing so, the work furthers a longstanding challenge within Latina/o scholarship to national boundaries. Sonia Saldívar-Hull names Chicanas’ refusal to remain within recognized national boundaries *transfronteriza* feminism, whereas Michelle Habell-Pallán reminds us that “Chicana feminism cannot be contained by nationalism and national boundaries” (Saldívar-Hull, 2001; Habell-Pallán, 2005, 166). This challenging of national boundaries has been undertaken by non-Chicana/o artists and activists as well; Rodríguez points out that Latina/o writers of the 1970s and 1980s concerned with Central American and Central American-American issues “positioned US Latina/o literature within the larger debates of post-colonialism, transnationalism, globalization, cultural, subaltern, and diasporic studies and US cultures of imperialism” (2009, 165). However, just as feminists of color have critiqued the “add and stir” approach to including the voices of women of color within feminism, it is not sufficient to simply include the voices of non-Chicana Latinas without rethinking the scope and



orientation of Latina cultural politics (Moallem, 2006, 332). In her reading of Nina Serrano and Lourdes Portillo's film *Después del Terremoto*, Rodríguez bemoans the possibility that the film's central character may "adopt a differential consciousness as proposed by Chicana feminists in lieu of other feminist Latinidades that might fully incorporate her Central American legacy of struggles, resistance and resilience" (2009, 151). In contrast to this narrower vision, a comprehensive transamerican Latina/o perspective encourages us to look closely at the interplay between nations, territories and citizens, both within and between particular national and regional contexts.

The Divine Husband contributes to these concerns and conversations by encouraging us to raise larger questions about the abilities of categories such as "Latina/o" to accurately reflect the past, present or future of such diverse communities. In continuously reminding us of the racial, sexual and gender politics behind community formations, the novel questions whether such categories are even desirable. Rather than being concerned that the impossibility of defining US Latina/os according to one shared language, religion, race or national origin weakens the strength of this designation (and its attendant strength as a social or political category), *The Divine Husband* requires us to rethink the sexual and discursive constructions of *Latinidades* and to recognize that the multiple origins of this community reflect a strength rather than a weakness. Returning once again to María's experience aboard *The Golden Rose*, we can read *The Divine Husband* as a work concerned with the movement toward something new as it is with origins. The conception of María's third child demonstrates that the recognition of the plurality of origins can in fact inspire movement, a movement that in turn opens up the space for the imagination of new social and political realities.

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