



**BELONGING BEYOND BORDERS:
Cosmopolitan Affiliations in Contemporary
Spanish American Literature**

Annik Bilodeau

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Narrating Transculturation: Elena Poniatowska's *La "Flor de Lis"*

*México es de quien nace para conquistarlo.
Yo nací para México. México es mío, yo soy de México.*

*(Mexico belongs to whoever conquers it.
I was born for Mexico. Mexico is mine; I am from Mexico!).*

—ELENA PONIATOWSKA, *TINÍSIMA*

In her acceptance speech for the 2013 Premio Cervantes, the most prestigious literary prize in Hispanic literature, an Elena Poniatowska dressed in Mexican national costume shared her first memories of Mexico. She explained that when she saw a map of the country, she was intrigued by the various “Zona[s] por descubrir” (“Zones yet to be discovered”) spread before her eyes. “Este enorme país temible y secreto llamado México,” she said, “se extendía moreno y descalzo frente a mi hermana y a mí y nos desafiaba: ‘Descúbranme’” (“This huge, fearsome, and secret country called Mexico lay dark and threadbare before my sister and me, daring us: ‘Discover me’”; “Discurso Premio Cervantes” 3–4). She claimed that “El idioma era la llave para entrar al mundo indio, el mismo mundo del que habló Octavio Paz . . . cuando dijo que sin el mundo indio no seríamos lo que somos” (“Language was the key to entering the Indigenous world, the world described by Octavio Paz . . . when he said that without the Indian world we would not be who we are”; 4), a reference to Paz’s *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*), arguably one of the most influential works on Mexican identity of the twentieth century. In my view, this

speech sums up Poniatowska's artistic, intellectual, and personal trajectory. Moreover, it alludes to an understanding of cultural identity that resonates with the work that I analyze in this chapter. *La "Flor de Lis"* (1988) is an autobiographical novel, a *Bildungsroman* that depicts the evolution of its author's identity through Mariana, her literary alter ego.²

By combining local, national, and global perspectives, Poniatowska's fiction tackles the tensions at the heart of the conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism in Latin America. While I have used Mariano Siskind's expression *deseo de mundo* ("desire for the world" or "cosmopolitan desire") to describe the desire some authors had, and to some extent still have, to discover and inscribe themselves in the global literary canon, it is my contention that through Mariana, Poniatowska shows what I call a *deseo de México*—that is, a desire or longing to belong to her new country—that compels her to shed her cosmopolitan identity. As she herself stated in a 1997 interview with Walescka Pino-Ojeda, Mariana, although a fictional character, embodies Poniatowska's own desire to belong to Mexico: "Es obviamente el deseo de saber cómo era México y qué era México y eso no lo iba yo a saber sino a través de otras gentes, que además me enriquecieron y me dieron mucho más que lo que podía darme cualquier miembro de mi clase social" ("It is obviously the desire to know how Mexico was and what Mexico was, and I was only going to figure that out through other people, who also enriched me and gave me much more than what any other member of my social class would have been able to do"; "Sobre castas y puentes" 30). She then goes on to describe her love for Mexico as "amor a la gente de México, a la gente que hace, que es la urdimbre, la textura . . . la tela o el telar, la piel de este lugar. . . . Yo creo que ser mexicano no es simplemente pertenecer a un país, cabe más" ("love for the Mexican people, for the people who do, who are the fabric, the texture . . . the material or the skin of this place. . . . I believe that to be Mexican is not simply to belong to a country, it means much more than that"; 32). Through Mariana, Poniatowska was able to explore this love for Mexico and this desire to become Mexican at a time when the historical circumstances—namely, the exacerbated nationalism of mid-century Mexico—did not necessarily facilitate it.

Born on 19 May 1932 in Paris, France, Elena Poniatowska settled in Mexico in 1942, where she went on to become one of the country's most

prolific journalists and authors. Always striving to give a voice to the subaltern, she specializes in works that broach social and political issues and that mostly concentrate on women and the poor. However, the fact that she was born abroad to upper-class parents—her father, Jean Joseph Evremond Sperry Poniatowski, was related to the last king of Poland, and her mother, María Dolores Paulette Amor Yturbe, came from a family of wealthy Mexican landowners who fled the country during the 1911 revolution—meant that she has been seen as an outsider for most of her life. When she started her journalistic career in the 1960s, most thought of her as someone who “knew nothing about the country. She was French by birth and was educated in a Catholic school in the United States. . . . Elena knew about Mexico only what her family talked about, and it was always related to high society” (Schuessler 133). She overcame this perception and eventually published well-recognized testimonials that relate pivotal events in her adopted nation, as well as works of fiction that tackle social and class issues.³

La “Flor de Lis” also tackles class and social issues, albeit in a subtler manner than most of Poniatowska’s other works. The narrative recounts the life of the duchess Mariana, who must leave France in the early years of the Second World War. She journeys to Mexico with her mother, Luz, and her sister, Sofía, while her father remains in Europe to fight alongside the French troops. Upon arrival, the two sisters must quickly adapt to a way of life far removed from the one they have always known. During the war, the sisters discover a new side to their mother and develop a very close relationship with her: she appears to be freer in Mexico than she ever was in France, and she dedicates more time to her daughters—a drastic change in their lives. The transition from Europe to America is easier for Sofía than for Mariana, as the latter feels marginalized in a society to which she has a profound desire to belong but which continually rejects her. Mariana eventually acquires elements of Mexicanness through the presence of her nanny, Magda, who embodies the popular Mexico that the protagonist longs to make hers. Magda introduces Mariana to *her* Mexico by taking the young protagonist out into the streets, where she becomes acquainted with new aspects of the country. She is also a constant presence in her life, unlike Luz, whose attention wanders from one interest to another.

The close relationship Luz had developed with Mariana and Sofía changes dramatically when Mariana's father returns from the front, and again when her brother Fabián is born. The repeated absence of a maternal figure leaves Mariana in a situation of crisis, which in turn brings Father Teufel—a French priest whose last name means “devil” in German—into her life. Mariana becomes obsessed with the priest; the lessons that he imparts about culture in Mexico and the need to transcend class have a profound impact on the teenager. She remains under his spell until he betrays her trust. The novel concludes with Mariana affirming her love for both her mother and Mexico, the former being in her mind a personification of the latter.

Literary critics have often underlined the autobiographical character of *La “Flor de Lis,”* and have typically focused on the role that exile and dislocation plays in the narrative. For instance, Sara Poot-Herrera highlights that Poniatowska “pone su escritura al servicio de su vida, su vida al pedido de su escritura . . . y dibuja el árbol de su genealogía” (“puts her writing at the service of her life, her life bows to the demands of her writing . . . and she draws her genealogical tree”; 100), whereas María Caballero reads it as a work of autofiction (84), mingling biographical elements with purely fictitious ones. As a matter of fact, one cannot help but see Poniatowska floating just behind the protagonist Mariana. Throughout the narrative, the child's voice and that of the adult intertwine as Mariana recalls the strongest memories of her childhood. Mariana's life—from her birth in France to a mother of Mexican heritage, to her escape from the Second World War, to her arrival in Mexico—runs parallel to the life of the author, who left France at ten years of age and has lived in Mexico ever since. Poniatowska herself has acknowledged in various interviews that “los personajes de *Lilus Kikus* y *La ‘Flor de Lis’* son una combinación de varias niñas, ninguna de las dos me refleja totalmente, porque siempre entra el elemento ficción” (“the characters in *Lilus Kikus* and *La ‘Flor de Lis’* are a combination of several little girls, neither one of whom represents me completely, because there is always an element of fiction at play”; *Me lo dijo Elena Poniatowska* 29), and she even claimed that the text “está muy ligado a mi niñez y a mi persona” (“is closely tied to my childhood and my own sense of self”; 21).

Few scholars have focused on the philosophical and intellectual positions elaborated in the novel, and it has yet to be read as an allegory for the evolution of the various philosophical positions in Mexico during the second half of the twentieth century. Examining *La "Flor de Lis"* allows me to illustrate the displacement of cosmopolitanism by concepts deemed better suited to the building and cementing of a strong national identity in the context of 1950s Mexico. To provide a more nuanced study of the novel, this chapter examines the various levels of significance present in the book. As noted by Doris Sommer in her canonical *Foundational Fictions*, allegory "invites a double reading of narrative events" (41). I claim that in the case of *La "Flor de Lis,"* "the two parallel levels of signification" (42) are, on the one hand, the evolution of a young French newcomer to Mexico, and, on the other, the veiled criticism of nationalist proposals, as well as of the cosmopolitan elite present at the time. The novel, then, proposes to replace cosmopolitanism with a Mexican culture of transculturation that would be more fitting to the country's history. In my allegorical reading, Mariana embodies Mexican society on the road to accepting a culture of transculturation, and Luz, her mother, the rejection of elitist Latin American cosmopolitanism.

I also read *La "Flor de Lis"* as a work about the increasing prominence of transculturation, after its conceptualization by Ortiz in 1940, in Latin American intellectual discourse, and Paz's notion of Mexican cultural identity as essentially hybrid. The character of Mariana embodies the cultural movement toward the acceptance of transculturation as a fundamental aspect of Mexican identity, since the text develops the idea that such an identity was formed on the basis of harmony between Indigenous and European heritages.

In my reading, Mariana's evolution mirrors that of a Mexico caught between two ideological extremes. After Mexico obtained its independence from Spain in 1821, civilization became synonymous with Europeanization—and more specifically, *afrancesamiento*, or Frenchification. Mexico's political and intellectual elite built the nation in France's image; it became its political, artistic, and intellectual model. It is this mentality inherited from the Porfiriato—the thirty-four years (1876–1911) during which General Porfirio Díaz ruled over Mexico under an "order and progress" doctrine—that Mariana's family embodies, a

cosmopolitan culture modelled on that of Europe. However, the cosmopolitanism promoted by the Mexican political elite in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is an exclusionary cosmopolitanism—an oxymoron—that only considers practices that its proponents deemed civilized, and that rejects the national elements, such as those of Indigenous groups or the popular masses. Unlike the canonical definition of cosmopolitanism, which posits a universal commitment with a global community, notwithstanding race, class, or gender, this exclusionary cosmopolitanism was at best a *cosmopolitismo de fachada*—a cosmopolitanism in name only, more a Eurocentric affirmation. In large part, this rejection of the major part of the Mexican population led to the Mexican Revolution (1911–20), a popular uprising that promoted nationalism as a politics of emancipation from the European model. It, too, reached an extreme: a total rejection of foreign elements and a nativistic celebration of national elements in the nationalist period that followed the Revolution.

Following the Revolution, the nation was in many ways created again, this time in the image of Indigenous peoples. Various well-thought-out and well-crafted artistic initiatives were implemented in an attempt to foment a more inclusive and stronger national identity after the armed struggle that had left the country divided. In the 1920s, José Vasconcelos, then minister of education, sponsored muralism and its proponents, such as Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco. Their murals, painted on government buildings so that any passerby could admire and learn from them, glorified Mexico's Indigenous past and promoted the idea of a Mexican identity deeply rooted in its Indigenous ancestry. Given the country's suffering at the hands of Europe and the United States, it became unpatriotic to have strong ties to these imperial nations. To be fully accepted as a member of Mexican society, everyone was expected to celebrate the country's hybrid culture. The concept of the cosmic race also helped cement the rationale that the Mexican *mestizo* had been chosen as the repository of a greater purpose, which led to a strong national feeling. Through these initiatives, Mexico became a centre of modernity in Latin America, where artists and intellectuals from across the globe converged. The ambitious education programs spearheaded by Vasconcelos, along with the industrial policies, the land reforms, and the nationalization of oil companies and railways during a period of economic protectionism,

led to what has been dubbed the “Mexican miracle,” a period of growth not seen before or since.

In Poniatowska’s novel, Mariana must contend with the contradictions and tensions inherent to growing up in a post-revolutionary era. Mariana’s Mexico is a country that has not resolved the conflicts between a cosmopolitan elite and a nationalist *pueblo*—both of whom conceive identity and culture in exclusionary terms. It is Mariana who clears a path through the fusion of the two cultures to which she belongs, through hybridity and transculturation.

At this point, it is worth reviewing Ortiz’s conceptualization of transculturation. The prevalence of the discourse of transculturation in the second half of the twentieth century in Latin America is embodied by the celebrated work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. Published in 1940, his *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*) describes the process of transformation that a society undergoes in acquiring foreign cultural material (97–103). Partially in reaction to prevailing American and European anthropological theories that viewed cultural exchange in terms of dissolution of a given culture, Ortiz coined the term “transculturation” to describe “las complejísimas transmutaciones de culturas” (86) (“the extremely complex transmutations of culture”²⁴) to which a society is subjected after coming into contact with another; in particular, he uses the term to refer to a loss or a displacement of culture within a given society as new cultural material is assimilated. Ortiz theorized transculturation as a three-phase process: the loss of one’s cultural elements, the incorporation of new cultural elements, and, finally, cultural recomposition. Acculturation describes the social repercussions in the transition from one culture to another, while transculturation refers to the sharing and mixing of cultures and the creation of a new one. Moreover, the Cuban anthropologist understood this word as an act of resistance. Indeed, in his thinking, Ortiz wanted to replace the word “acculturation” with “transculturation,” since “the process of transit from one culture to another [is] more powerful” than the mere acceptance of new cultural traits (Millington 260). Acculturation involves the loss of an earlier culture and its assimilation into another, while transculturation is a bridge between cultures, a place where cultures meet and interact. In such a process, social groups never completely lose their own cultural

background. Rather, they adjust their vision of the Other and remodel it to fit their ways in order to create new forms. It is this process that Mariana undertakes after she arrives in Mexico.

In this way she embodies Octavio Paz's affirmation that Mexicans are fundamentally hybrid beings, and that only an acceptance of this four-hundred-year legacy of cultural mixing can remedy what Paz deemed the impasse in which Mexico's cultural identity found itself. This work is often discussed in conjunction with transculturation, hybrid cultures, and third space. Paz used the term *hibridismo*, semantically quite similar to the term "transculturation" employed by his Cuban colleague, to refer to the origins of Mexican identity. The concept of *hibridismo* as understood by Paz also differs from that of Nestor García-Canclini in *Culturas híbridas (Hybrid Cultures)* (1995), which serves to identify the mixing of elite and popular cultures, whereas Paz identified the mixing of cultures in the context of colonialism. Finally, *hibridismo* can also be tied to Homi Bhabha's notion of third space, developed in his landmark book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Mariana, growing up in Mexico yet living in a French home, can be seen as evolving in a third space. For the purpose of this investigation, I chose to use *hibridismo* and transculturation to refer to Mariana's evolution toward her identity, for I analyze *La "Flor de Lis"* against the historical background of the evolution of Mexican nationalism and the evolution of those very theories, which are linked to the emancipatory politics of the post-revolutionary context. Novel and theory are then related.

In *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), alluded to in Poniatowska's Premio Cervantes speech, Paz affirms that the identity impasse comes from the fact that throughout history, Mexico's political and intellectual elite have always attempted—often successfully—to deny a culture built on creative interaction during the long process of colonization. Mexicans, fundamentally hybrid beings born of the contact between pre-Colombian and Spanish societies, must accept their nature in order to overcome this identity deadlock. Paz argues that, "Nuestro grito es una expresión de la voluntad mexicana de vivir cerrados al exterior, sí, pero sobre todo, cerrados frente al pasado. En ese grito condenamos nuestro origen y renegamos de nuestro hibridismo" (225) ("We express our desire to live closed off from the outside world and, above all, from the past. In this shout we condemn

our origins and deny our hybridism”⁵). As long as Mexicans negated such hybridity, they would be unable to find their true selves.

El laberinto de la soledad depicts a mid-century Mexico full of contradictions that has yet to experience the cultural decolonization movement, and whose inhabitants are still at odds with their identity: “El mexicano no quiere ser ni indio ni español. Tampoco quiere descender de ellos. Los niega. . . . El mexicano y la mexicanidad se definen como ruptura y negación” (225) (“The Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or a Spaniard. Nor does he want to be descended from them. He denies them. . . . The Mexican and his Mexicanism must be defined as separation and negation”). The Mexican, then, “se vuelve hijo de la nada. Él empieza en sí mismo” (225) (“becomes the son of Nothingness. His beginnings are in his own self”⁶). For Paz, post-revolutionary Mexico needed to become self-aware and recognize the importance of both cultural traditions. Years later, Paz was still contemplating the nature of his compatriots’ identity. In the foreword to *Quetzalcóatl y Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness*, while reflecting on the inherent contradiction that is the Mexican identity, Paz affirms that “La ambigüedad mestiza duplica la ambigüedad criolla aunque sólo para, en un momento final, negarla: como el criollo, el mestizo no es ni español ni indio; tampoco es un europeo que busca arraigarse: es un producto del suelo americano, el nuevo producto” (“The ambiguity of the mestizo was twice as great as that of the creole, but negated the creole ambiguity in that last analysis. Like the creole, the mestizo is neither Spanish nor Indian, nor is he a European who seeks to put roots down into the American soil; he is a product of that soil, a new man; 46, xvi). In Poniatowska’s novel, Mariana, growing up in the 1950s Mexico that Paz describes, personifies this new being, one born of the contact between European and Indigenous Mexican cultures, who has yet to adapt to a new country.

A Transcultural Education

As a child, Mariana is open to adjusting her vision of Mexicans and Mexicanness and remodelling it to carve out a space for herself. And so, despite her cosmopolitan origins, a French Mariana newly arrived in Mexico progressively assumes a Mexican identity, presented as a negotiation between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The change of setting—the

journey from France to Mexico, and the transition from home to street—is the first step that affects both Mariana and her perspective on life. She begins by developing a cosmopolitan outlook by default, modelled after that of her mother, Luz, and, after experiencing xenophobia in her interactions with the fervently nationalistic popular classes, evolves toward an identity that combines European and American influences. In her struggle to define her identity, Mariana clears a path between the pervasive ideologies of the late 1930s and early 1940s—exacerbated Mexican nationalism and racist Eurocentrism—and finds a middle ground through transculturation. Her transcultural identity, found through her nanny, Magda, and her maternal grandmother, embraces all aspects of her complex cultural heritage.⁷

Throughout *La “Flor de Lis,”* the protagonist constantly adjusts her vision of both her cosmopolitan and Indigenous relatives. Mariana’s flight to Mexico with her family marks the beginning of her cosmopolitan overture. The child is surprised to learn that her mother, Luz, is of Mexican descent; indeed, she says that “Sofía y yo no sabíamos que mamá era mexicana” (“Sofía and I did not know that *mamá* was Mexican”; 32). While the child is intrigued by this new discovery, stereotyping and disdain for her immediate family in Latin America mark this awakening. Even before they embark on their journey to Mexico, the sisters are warned that it is a strange and dangerous country: “‘You see children this is Mexico.’ La abuela Beth nos enseña en el ‘National Geographic Magazine’ unas negras de senos colgantes y hueso atravesado en la cabeza. Sonríen, sí, porque van a comernos, son caníbales. ‘This is where your mother is taking you’” (“Grandmother Beth shows us in the ‘National Geographic Magazine’ some Black women with sagging breasts and a bone through the head. They smile, yes, because they are about to eat us, they are cannibals. ‘This is where your mother is taking you’”; 27). La abuela Beth, their American aunt, does not know much about Mexico; indeed, she appears to confuse her neighbour to the south with some African countries. Yet, she nonetheless manages to frighten her nieces, and the first image Mariana has of her new country is one of cannibals who want to devour her. The child internalizes this idea of Mexico and cannot help but wonder why their mother is taking them to such a dangerous place.⁸ Upon reaching the country, she is bewildered when she cannot find any cannibals. While “En tierra en el

aeropuerto de México, [donde] espera nuestra nueva abuela,” she wonders, “¿Dónde estarán las del hueso atravesado en la cabeza?” (“On the tarmac of the airport in Mexico City, [where] our new grandmother is waiting for us, she wonders, ‘Where could the women with a bone through the head be?’”; 32), once she gets used to the country, she realizes that this image was based on prejudice.

Although her non-Mexican relatives’ perception of Mexico is false, Mariana does not recognize this right away, for once there, her family makes a point of maintaining its status as foreign, as such a designation positions them within the upper class. Since the mother expects to return to France once the war is over, she wants her children to retain their cultural ties to Europe. It is these ties to their past that prevent them from completely assimilating into the new culture. While Luz sends Mariana and Sofía to a British school to learn English, they all speak French at home. As for Spanish, they are rarely exposed to the language, for it holds little value in Luz’s world view:

Mamá avisó que iba a meternos a una escuela inglesa; el español ya lo pescaremos en la calle, es más importante el inglés. El español se aprende solo, ni para qué estudiarlo. En el Windsor School nos enseñan a contar en “pounds, shillings and pence” y a transferirlos. Cantamos “God save the Queen” todas las mañanas al empezar las clases.

Mamá informed us that she would enrol us in an English school; Spanish would be for later, to be picked up on the streets, English is more important. You will learn Spanish on your own, there is no need to study it. In the Windsor School they teach us to count in “pounds, shillings and pence” and to convert them. We sing “God Save the Queen” every morning at the beginning of class. (33)

Consequently, the school, normally the crucible in which children’s identities are shaped, rejects most Mexican elements, and when it does present them, it does so through a Eurocentric prism. The girls are thus exposed to British culture, one that is far from being their own, or even being one

they could grow into, simply because it is perceived as more valuable than its Mexican counterpart. Culture, then, becomes a skill, necessary for survival, rather than something one embodies. This is where Mariana's dilemma stems from: she wants to be accepted by Mexico, but is not sufficiently exposed to its culture to assume it properly.

The relationships Mariana's family maintain with other Mexican families are reflective of this same mentality. These families value their European ties over Mexican ones, and consider that their children can only learn how to evolve in the world by spending some time in Europe: "no cabe duda de que el mundo se adquiere en el otro continente, aquí somos todavía muy provincianos" ("there is no doubt that the world is acquired on the other continent, here we are still very provincial"; 50), and associate culture with the elite. This leads them to view anyone who took part in the Mexican Revolution, a popular uprising, as uncultured:

¿Te has fijado cuánto la menciona [a Lucecita] el Duque de Otranto en sus columnas? En la del martes contó de un gigantesco ramo de flores que le mandó Ezequiel Padilla, y Marie Thérèse Redo que lo vio en la sala dijo que era una cosota así, desproporcionada, claro que de mal gusto, del gusto de los políticos, del gusto de la Revolución Mexicana que no tiene el menor gusto, qué le vamos a hacer, la cultura no se aprende de un día para el otro.

Have you noticed how much the Duke of Otranto mentions her [Lucecita] in his columns? On Tuesday he wrote about a gigantic bouquet of flowers that Ezequiel Padilla sent her, and Marie Thérèse Redo, who saw it in the room, said that it was large and tacky, out of all proportion, and of course in bad taste, the taste of politicians, the taste of the Mexican Revolution, which has no taste, what can we do, culture is not something that you acquire overnight. (50)

Once again, as exemplified by Ezequiel Padilla's major faux pas with the flowers, culture is a tool that must be acquired by people who want to be accepted into higher circles. If one does not master it, one is to be ridiculed

and set apart. Mariana develops this art of acquiring elite culture, for she was born into that milieu, but it is not this elitist cosmopolitan culture that she wants to embrace.

While Mariana demonstrates interest in learning about Mexico and Mexicans—their social backgrounds notwithstanding—her mother only looks to the European aspects of Mexican life. Luz’s attitude toward her country and fellow countrymen reveals her disdain toward the Spanish language: indeed, language and nation are closely aligned in her mind, with Spanish being associated with the lower classes and countries with a colonial or neo-colonial past in Latin America. Those who speak it are therefore inferior to the world she has chosen. Although Mexican, Luz prefers to identify as French. She embodies Fernando Rosenberg’s assertion that the rejection of cosmopolitanism as a prism through which to approach Latin America was due to the concept’s imperial connotations, connotations that were rejected throughout the continent, where

La noción de cosmopolitismo está muchas veces asociada con ideas tan desencontradas como las pretensiones universalistas eurocéntricas de la alta cultura, con adscripciones imperiales al nivel de la política, y con el desapego, el desprendimiento, o simplemente la posición irónica, esteticista o hedonista al nivel del sujeto (una vida de lujos y placeres, como dice algún tango, y lo sigue afirmando hoy el nombre del trago). Al cosmopolitismo se lo relaciona con una estudiada distancia, cuando no un menosprecio y falta de sensibilidad, respecto a los problemas locales y/o nacionales.

The notion of cosmopolitanism is often associated with widely divergent ideas such as the Eurocentric, universalist pretensions of high culture, adherence to imperialist politics, indifference, detachment, and even an ironic aestheticist or hedonistic position (eloquently described in a familiar tango as a life of luxury and pleasure, or reflected even now in the name of the cocktail). Cosmopolitanism is thought to relate to a measured distance, if not contempt

and lack of sensitivity toward local and/or national problems. (“Afecto y política” 468)

Mariana’s mother is a shining example of this affirmation: she presents both *una estudiada distancia* (“a measured distance”) from the Mexican people and a *menosprecio y falta de sensibilidad* (“contempt and lack of sensitivity”) toward them. She epitomizes the idea of betrayal associated with cosmopolitanism, as she chooses to deny her past, rejects tradition, and in times of crisis refuses to accept the transcultural society from which she came, favouring the culture she had adopted in the metropole.

Indeed, Luz embodies such elitism, and displays her disregard for her fellow citizens and local problems during a trip to the countryside. When Sofía suddenly becomes thirsty, Luz, used to a life of plenty, expects a farmer to be able to give the child something to drink:

Sofía reclama: “Tengo sed.” Mamá le dice: “Vamos a conseguirte un vaso de leche.” Cuando lo pide, frente a una puerta, la enrebozada hace una larga pausa antes de responderle como si fuera a darle un vahído: “No hay.” Mamá patea el suelo con sus botas, cómo que no hay, si ésta es una región ganadera, no hay, no hay, no hay, repite a cada patada, no hay, en este país nunca hay nada, no hay, en cualquier pueblito mugroso donde te detengas en Francia te dan de comer estupendamente y aquí, no hay, no hay, no hay, lo mismo en la miscelánea, en la trapalería, no hay, no hay, ¿para qué abren tiendas entonces si no hay?, lo que pasa es que no quieren atenderte, no hay, no hay. . . . “Pero ¿de qué vive esta gente, qué come, si ni siquiera tiene un vaso de leche?”

Sofía complains: “I am thirsty.” *Mamá* tells her: “Let’s get you a glass of milk.” When she asks, at a door, a woman wearing a *rebozo* takes a long pause before answering, as if she suddenly had a dizzy spell: “There isn’t any.” *Mamá* stamps the ground with her boots, how come there is none, if this is ranch country, there is nothing, there is nothing, there is nothing, she repeats with every kick, there is

nothing, in this country there is never anything, there is nothing, in any filthy village where you stop in France they offer you marvellous food to eat and here, there is nothing, there is nothing, there is nothing, it's the same at the corner store, at the hardware store, there is nothing, there is nothing. Why open shops if there is nothing? What happens is that these people do not want to serve you, there is nothing, there is nothing. . . . “But what keeps these people alive, what do they eat, when they do not even have a glass of milk?” (69–70)

Luz becomes upset and acts like a capricious child. Instead of acknowledging that they are riding through a poor region of Mexico, she prefers to convince herself that the farmers are making a conscious decision not to help the wealthy. She projects the disdain she feels for these rural people onto them and paints herself as the victim. She cannot fathom being denied anything. Luz erroneously compares Mexico to France: in her idyllic vision, she imagines that French farmers would have fed strangers knocking at their door. She fails to mention that France is now a war zone in which food is sparse and rationed, and that had she stayed, she would probably have been in a situation similar—or even worse—to that of the Mexican farmers.

Instead, Luz quickly shifts her attention to the Revolution, which she blames for taking everything away from her wealthy family, for the lack of milk, and the utter poverty of the region they are visiting: “Habla de la Revolución; antes con los hacendados, todos tenían de todo, ahora el país está muerto de hambre. . . . Pinche revolución tan pinche, sintetiza mamá” (“She talks of the Revolution; before, with the landowners, everyone had everything, now the country is starving to death. . . . Damn the damned revolution, *mamá* synthesizes”; 70). Before the Revolution, the conditions were not any better for the poorer classes, but the neo-colonial aristocracy ruled the country, and as such, could expect almost anyone to be at their service. Mariana, of a more affable nature, listens to her mother but does not internalize her destructive words. In this regard, Cristina Perilli rightly points out that “La desvalorización de ‘la raza’ mexicana dentro del discurso familiar produce, como contraparte y respuesta a la búsqueda

de pertenencia, el discurso de Mariana que la naturaliza y mitifica” (“the degradation of the Mexican ‘race’ that occurs within family discourse, triggers, in counterpoint and in response to the search for belonging, Mariana’s discourse that naturalizes and mythifies it”; 33). Unbeknownst to her at the time, Luz is helping her daughter to become Mexican.

For Mariana’s family, and particularly for her mother, Europe remains the cultural reference, thus preventing the two sisters from truly beginning the process of Mexicanization. Luz makes sure, with help from different strategies—the British school, the piano lessons, their speaking French at home—that the dominant domestic culture remains that of the old continent. Luz hierarchizes and instrumentalizes culture. Mariana discovers that her mother is in fact a product of cultural mutation, typical of the neo-colonial cultural elite of the early twentieth century, the so-called *ciudad letrada*, or lettered city, always turned toward the overseas metropole. Evidently, as it was across all of Latin America at the time, this metropole could not be Spain, but rather France or England, two fundamental benchmarks for Mexico’s national education system.

While Luz embodies the elitism that until recently had tainted cosmopolitanism, the concept of transculturation is primordial in the case of Mariana, who, unlike her mother, begins to build a different identity by slowly absorbing elements of her new surroundings, bit by bit. As a result, the adversarial relationship between Mariana and her mother serves as a starting point for the protagonist’s acceptance, and her eventual integration or assimilation, of her Mexican roots. As a child, Mariana has not yet assumed the racial prejudices of her mother and remains open to the perception of Mexico held by other authority figures, such as her nanny Magda and her Mexican grandmother. The Mexicanization of the protagonist happens in two phases. Mariana first idealizes her mother, which corresponds to the acclimatization period in her new environment; this leads her to establish a link between mother and motherland. She believes that being accepted by her mother will mean being accepted by Mexico too. Then she wishes to be more Mexican than her mother, in order to be accepted by her peers, most of whom are of a nationalistic mind (Hurley 156). Mariana’s contradictory and conflicting desire to finally obtain Luz’s maternal love even though it never seems to be within reach pushes her to develop a transcultural identity.

Even if she is quite young, Mariana feels the sting of not being accepted by the Mexican community. This rejection happens even when she is with her grandmother, who has lived in Mexico her whole life. Although she is clearly Mexican, her upper-class status separates her from most of her fellow citizens. For instance, Mariana feels deeply alienated during a church service:

Casi no hay gente, apenas unos cuantos bultos enrebozados, morenos como las bancas, monitos que se rascan y se persignan, confundidos los ademanes. A veces capto, entre las cortinas del rebozo, el fulgor de una mirada huidiza; la mano vuelta hacia adentro como una garra que se recoge es la de un animal que erró su ataque y tuvo que retraerse. ¿Qué tanto hay dentro de esos rebozos? ¿Cuánta mugre rencorosa, cuánto sudor ácido, cuánta miseria arrebujada en el cuello y en el cabello opaco, grisáceo? Quisiera hablarles, sería fácil acucillarme junto a una forma doliente, pero aprendí que no me aceptan, me ven en sordina, agazapados entre sus trapos descoloridos y tristes, hacen como que no me entienden, todo su ser erizado de desconfianza. Dice la abuela que es más fácil acercarse a un perro sarnoso. . . . “Dios mío, dime ¿qué les he hecho? ¿Qué les hacemos para que nos rechacen tanto?” Espío sus gestos hieráticos, vergonzantes y sobre todo, esa terrible tranquilidad oscura con la que esperan yertos a que el más allá les dé la señal. ¿Qué esperan? Magda me dijo una vez: “Es que no tienen a nadie.” ¿Qué hago entre esas ánimas en pena?

There is almost no one here, just a few bundles wrapped in *rebozos*, dark as the benches, little monkeys that scratch and cross themselves, mixing the gestures. Sometimes I catch, among the folds of the *rebozo*, the glow of an elusive gaze; the hand turned inward like the retracting claw of an animal that missed its target and had to draw back. What lies there inside those *rebozos*? How much spiteful grime, how much sour sweat, how much misery caked in the neck and

the dull, grey hair? I would like to talk to them, it would be easy to squat next to a mournful shape, but I learned that they do not accept me, they see me in a muffled way, crouched between their sad, faded rags, they pretend not to understand me, their whole being bristling with distrust. *La abuela* says that it is easier to get close to a mangy dog. . . . “My God, tell me, what have I done to them? What do we do for them to reject us so much?” I spy on their inscrutable, shameful gestures, and, above all, that terrible dark tranquility with which they wait in stillness for the hereafter to give them the signal. What do they expect? Magda once said: “They don’t have anybody.” What am I doing among these grieving souls? (*La “Flor de Lis”* 51–2)

Mariana is aware of the divide between her family and most Mexicans, and in church, she wishes she could talk to them—“quisiera hablarles”—and make them see her profound desire to understand them, to accept them, and most of all, to be accepted by them. As a child, she does not feel the need to have such a separation between people because of their socio-economic backgrounds. She does not understand what she did wrong to be rejected in this manner, when in fact her mistake is having been born into what is perceived as the wrong class. She finds solace in Magda telling her she did not, in fact, do anything wrong.

Once Mariana begins to appreciate Mexico, the maternal figure she attempts to emulate pivots from her mother to Magda. Magda is present and shows a consistency in caring for the children, unlike Luz’s fleeting love. She ends up having more influence on Mariana’s search for identity than her own mother. Mariana loves Magda, and is aware of the many sacrifices she makes to attend to the family—something Luz could not bring herself to do. In Mariana’s words, Magda “Es sabia, hace reír, se fija, nunca ha habido en nuestra casa presencia más benéfica” (“is wise, she makes us laugh, she notices, there has never been such a beneficial presence in our home”; 58). However, Mariana does not understand why Magda needs to make all those sacrifices for the family while no one else seems to be doing anything in the house:

Veo sus manos enrojecidas cambiando los platos de un fregadero a otro; en uno los enjabona, en el otro los enjuaga. Los pone después a escurrir. ¿Por qué no soy yo la que lavo los platos? ¿Por qué no es mamá la que los lava? ¿O la nueva abuela? ¿O para eso Mister Chips? ¿O el abuelo, tantas horas sentado en Francia? ¿Por qué no es Magda la que toma las clases de piano si se ve que a ella se le ilumina el rostro al oír la música que tecleamos con desgano?

I see her red hands moving the dishes from one sink to another; in one she lathers them with soap, in the other she rinses them. Then she puts them up to dry. Why don't I wash the dishes? Why is it not *mamá* who washes them? Or our new grandmother? Or Mister Chips for that matter? Or our grandfather, who spent so many hours sitting in France? Why is it not Magda who is taking piano lessons when it is her face that lights up when she hears the music we play with reluctance? (58–9)

Contact with popular culture allows Mariana to acquire new values and to understand the differences that exist between her family and the rest of society. She questions not only her role in the household, but everyone else's. Mariana regards Magda as more than a maid and a nanny, and is saddened to see how little she cares about herself: "Ella siempre se atiende a lo último. Para ella son los minutos más gastados, los más viejos del día, porque antes, todavía encontró tiempo para venir a contarnos el cuento de las tres hijas del zapaterito pobre" ("She thinks of herself last. To her, these are the most wasted moments, the last minutes of the day, because even before then, she still found time to come and tell us the story of the three daughters of the poor cobbler"; 59). Through Madga, Mariana becomes aware of the privileged place she has in society. Even though her family was financially ruined during the Revolution, they were able to retain their status. Mariana questions this situation.

Through Magda, who represents contact with two groups, the Indigenous and the popular majority of society, Mariana discovers a Mexicanness different from the exotic image to which she was first

introduced in Europe.⁹ In fact, the relationship Mariana develops with Magda gradually helps her to assume her Mexican identity. Whereas France, and later her grandmother's house, represent closed spaces where European culture flourishes, Mexico and its streets represent free, open areas where an uninhibited Mariana can develop and learn more about her new country. Moreover, Magda's presence in the house causes this otherwise closed space to become porous, and all are touched by a certain degree of Mexicanness. Mexico, then, acquires a sense of normalcy in the mind of the protagonist, rather than the aura of foreignness that her relatives attribute to it.¹⁰

Through Magda, Mariana discovers and falls in love with the Zócalo, the main square in the heart of Mexico City, where she experiences popular culture. Mariana describes the Zócalo as "esa gran plaza que siempre se [le] atora en la garganta" ("this big plaza that gets stuck in your throat"; 58). She develops a strong love for the plaza and, for the first time in the novel, senses that she is part of her new country. By establishing a connection to one of the most important locations in Mexico, she asserts her metaphorical belonging to the country:

Amo esta plaza, es mía, es más mía que mi casa, me importa más que mi casa, preferiría perder mi casa. Quisiera bañarla toda entera a grandes cubetadas de agua y escobazos, restregarla con una escobilla y jabón, sacarle espuma, como a un patio viejo, hincarme sobre sus baldosas a puro talle y talle, y cantarle a voz en cuello, como Jorge Negrete, cuando lo oía en el radio gritar así: México lindo y querido si muero lejos de ti que digan que estoy dormido y que me traigan aquí.

I love this plaza, it's mine, it's more mine than my home, I care about it more than my home, I'd rather lose my home. I would like to wash it all with great buckets of water and a sweeping broom, scrub it with a brush and soap, cover it in foam, like an old patio, kneel on its tiles scrubbing non-stop, and singing at the top of my lungs, like Jorge Negrete, when I would hear him on the radio crying out: Beautiful

and dear Mexico if I die far from you let them pretend that
I am asleep and bring me here. (58)

Not only does Magda introduce Mariana to a symbol of Mexicanness, the Zócalo, Magda also enables Mariana to accept the hybrid nature of her identity, thereby allowing her to become Mexican. According to Mary Louise Pratt, “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (6). Mariana can be likened to the marginal groups to which Pratt refers. Even with her status and class privileges—or precisely because of these attributes—in a country full of Mexicans, she is the minority, the one perceived as the outsider. She is the one who has to internalize the cultural materials transmitted to her by the dominant culture of the country where she now lives; her desire to belong makes it necessary. In some sort of reversed pattern, the nanny, the outsider in the French-dominated house, becomes the vessel of the culture through which Mariana will finally attain a sense of belonging.

Adaptation to a new setting remains a treacherous process for Mariana and her sister Sofía. An adult Mariana comments: “Éramos unas niñas desarraigadas, flotábamos en México, qué cuerquita tan frágil la nuestra, ¡cuántos vientos para mecate tan fino!” (“We were two rootless little girls, floating in Mexico, our strings so fragile, such strong winds against such fine rope!”; Poniatowska, *La “Flor de Lis”* 47). Even if it is easier for Sofía to acclimatize, both sisters are like tightrope walkers on a *cuerquita frágil*, a loose cord, and can lose their balance at any moment. This instability reflects the fact that Mariana is aware that her sense of her place in society is not as deep as it could have been had her family remained in Europe. However, unlike her sister, who is able to pass as a native-born citizen of the country, a blond, blue-eyed Mariana is always branded as a stranger. Children and adults alike question her Mexicanness and tell her she does not look the part, calling her a *gringa*. Multiple times, Mariana asks herself, her mother, Magda—anyone who is willing to listen to her—where she belongs. She never seems to get a satisfactory answer. Rather, she is often deemed not Mexican enough, and told that one does not *become* Mexican, one is *born* Mexican:

—Pero tú no eres de México ¿verdad?

—Sí soy.

—Es que no pareces mexicana.

—Ah sí, entonces ¿qué parezco?

—Gringa.

—Pues no soy gringa, soy mexicana.

—¡Ay! ¿A poco? . . .

Busco trabajo de secretaria:

—No vayas a decirles que no naciste mexicana porque ni caso te hacen.

—Si no eres de México, no tienes derecho a opinar.

—¿Por qué? Tengo interés en hacerlo.

—Sí, pero tu opinión no vale.

—¿Por qué?

—Porque no eres mexicana.

You don't look Mexican.

Oh well, so what do I look like?

A *gringa*.

Well, I'm not a *gringa*, I'm Mexican.

Seriously?

I am looking for a secretarial job.

Don't go telling them you weren't born Mexican because they won't pay any attention to you.

If you are not from Mexico, you have no right to comment.

Why? I want to.

Yes, but your opinion is not worth anything.

Why?

Because you're not Mexican. (114)

Mariana is told she does not have a right to express her opinion since she was not born Mexican. Once again, she tries to belong to a society that constantly rejects her, solely on the grounds of her birthplace. She, her mother, and her sister are called terrible names—"Cochinas extranjeras que vienen a chuparnos la sangre" ("foreign pigs that come to bleed us dry"), "pinche emigradas" ("fucking emigrants")—and are told that being Mexican is a birthright: "Los que no han nacido en esta bendita tierra no tienen derecho a participar. Si no les gusta lárguense" ("Those who were not born in this blessed land have no right to participate. If you don't like it, leave"; 75). However, Mariana believes that she is "mexicana porque [su] madre es mexicana; si la nacionalidad de la madre se heredara como la del padre, sería mexicana" ("Mexican because [her] mother is Mexican; if nationality were inherited from one's mother like that of the father, I would be Mexican"; 74). When she is told that she is not from Mexico and cannot be considered Mexican, her reply makes it clear where her allegiance now lies: "Soy de México porque quiero serlo, es mi país" ("I am from Mexico because I want to be, it's my country"; 74). Indeed, even if

she was born in France, she wants to be Mexican and to belong to Magda's Mexico. She claims her mother's Mexicanness as her own, more than her mother does, and goes one step further when she affirms that nationality is not necessarily something one is born with, but rather something one chooses. Mariana's decision echoes Martha Nussbaum's claims in *For Love of Country*—namely, that “the accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation” (7). In this sense, Mariana behaves like her mother, who identifies solely as French. Even if the world is challenging her, she still chooses to be Mexican.

However, Mariana cannot escape the hybrid nature of her being and her perceived incompleteness. As a teenager, she does not see herself as incomplete; she is made to think she is, which confuses her even more. She commits to being Mexican, but is constantly reminded that she is not, even during the most mundane activities, such as on a trip to the countryside:

—Ay, Mariana, ¿qué no sabías que las mulas son hijas de yeguas y burros?

—¡Ése es el origen de las mulas!

—Por eso las mulas son estériles.

Sammy comentó:

—Hay cierto tipo de cruizas que no se deben hacer, que no se pueden hacer. . . .

Emilio pronunció la palabra híbrido. Híbrido, híbrido . . . se parece a Librado. . . . Híbrido. Librado, híbrido. El maíz híbrido no se puede sembrar. No agarra.

“Oh, Mariana, didn't you know that mules are the daughters of mares and donkeys?”

“That is the origin of the mule!”

“That’s why mules are sterile.”

Sammy commented:

“There are certain types of cross breeding that should not be done, that cannot be done. . . .”

Emilio sounded the word “hybrid.” Hybrid, hybrid . . . it’s reminiscent of *Librado* [to liberate, and also the name of one of the novel’s characters]. . . . Hybrid. *Librado*, hybrid. Hybrid corn cannot be sown. It doesn’t take root. (Poniatowska, *La “Flor de Lis”* 193)

The final portion of this passage is particularly pertinent: by mixing the voice of the adult with that of the child, it anticipates Mariana’s future path. Although both the *mulas* and the *maíz híbrido* are sterile examples of why hybridity ought to be condemned—and thus embody her peers’ rejection of *mestizaje*—Mariana disagrees. The voice of the adult recalls Emilio’s hard words about hybridity—“Emilio pronunció la palabra híbrido. El maíz híbrido no se puede sembrar. No agarra”—while the child plays with them and makes the word *híbrido*—hybrid—rhyme with *Librado*, the name of one of the family’s horse grooms, which also means “liberated.” Hybridity and freedom are then linked in the mind of the protagonist, at least a posteriori. The repetition of the word *híbrido* in Mariana’s discourse reflects her condition, and the difficulties Mexico has in embracing this notion of identity. An allegorical reading makes obvious the reference to identity; hybridity, then, is linked to the protagonist’s freedom.

Mariana’s adolescence, a period of conflict during which her desire to belong is amplified, is accompanied by the affirmation of her Mexicanness. Her friend Casilda puts her finger on Mariana’s sense of self and understands that for Mariana, to love is to morph into the loved one (202), which is why her encounter with Father Teufel, a French priest, is worrisome. Teufel is no stranger to Mariana’s sudden awareness of class disparity and the importance of embodying one’s culture. The priest holds

Marxist beliefs and hopes the young girls he coaches as part of a scout organization will eventually reject their aristocratic heritage, beliefs, and values, and instead personify a new evolution of Mexican society—one that includes the poor and the Indigenous. Teufel is vocal in his criticism of Mexican society, and during a meeting with industrialists, overreacts when discussing these issues:

–Ustedes comparan al pueblo mexicano con los pueblos de Europa, concretamente con Francia, y sólo en la medida en que México se parezca a Francia, se justificará su pretensión de formar parte de la comunidad de los hombres. Esto es muy grave, señores trasterrados, porque ustedes mismos, aunque ya no viven en Francia, se erigen en civilización y pretenden civilizar a un pueblo que desprecian. ¡Oh no, no protesten, me han atestado su superioridad durante todos los días de mi estancia y conozco bien su acción civilizadora; hacerlos trabajar diez o doce horas en lo que ustedes quieren, regular su natalidad cuando este gran país tiene aún tantas zonas sin poblar, terminar con una religión primitiva y ciega, a su criterio pagana, sólo porque su mezquindad los hace incapaces de comprenderla, seguir aprovechando esa mano de obra sumisa, barata, ignorante, como a ustedes les conviene, porque de lo que se trata es de que no mejoren, no asciendan a ninguna posición de mando! Oh, no me digan que ustedes les han enseñado lo que saben, jamás encajarán los mexicanos pobres dentro de su mundo mientras no se parezcan a ustedes y a su familia.

You compare the Mexican people to the people of Europe, specifically with France, and only to the extent that Mexico resembles France will its claim to be part of the human community be justified. This is very serious, exiled gentlemen, because you yourselves, although you no longer live in France, set yourself up as the embodiment of civilization and pretend to civilize a people you despise. Oh no, don't protest, you have shown me your superiority daily during

my many days here and I know your civilizing action well; make them work ten or twelve hours a day at whatever you want, control their birth rate when this great country still has so many unpopulated areas, eradicate a primitive and blind religion, in your understanding, a pagan one, just because your greed makes you unable to understand it, continue taking advantage of that submissive, cheap, ignorant workforce, since it suits you, because the objective is to ensure that they do not better themselves, do not ascend to any position of leadership! Oh, don't tell me that you have taught them what you know, poor Mexicans will never fit into your world as long as they don't look like you and your family. (231–2)

Teufel criticizes the upper class and its Eurocentric views, as well as the Mexican industrialists that treat the lower classes badly. He tells them quite bluntly that they “no encarnan civilizadores ni cultura alguna. . . . Ustedes encarnan sus privilegios” (“do not embody civilizers or any culture whatsoever. . . . You embody your privileges”) and are “¡Racistas, esto es lo que son ustedes, racistas y explotadores!” (“Racists, this is what you are, racists and exploiters!”; 232). He criticizes their need to resemble Europe. He acts more or less the same way with the young girls under his supervision. He shows no respect for the way they were raised, believes the upper class is useless, and expects the teenagers to replicate the outlook of their parents unless they assume his beliefs. He stresses that the girls need to *descastarse*, or shed the class into which they were born and the social privilege that comes with it: “Hay que vivir, descastarse, hí-bri-do, des-cas-vi-bri-do vivir” (“You have to live, shrug off your class, become hybrid, and live without privileges”; 253). For Teufel, becoming Mexican is a two-step process: the young scouts must reject their *casta* and accept the hybrid nature of their identity if they are to truly live. Naturally, this resonates with Mariana.

Teufel often tells the girls who attend his seminars that their way of life is not good enough, since it does not have a higher purpose beyond serving themselves: “Por Dios estudien algo útil, sean enfermeras, laboratistas, maestras, costureras, boticarias, algo útil, qué sé yo, algo que hace

falta. ¿Por qué estudian lo que va a instalarlas en su estatuto de niñas bien? . . . ¿Cuándo van a servir a los demás? ¿Cuándo van a perderse en los demás?” (“For God’s sake, study something useful, become nurses, laboratory technicians, teachers, seamstresses, pharmacists, I don’t know, something useful, something that is needed. Why do you study what will confirm you in your status as well-to-do girls? . . . When are you going to serve others? When are you going to lose yourselves in others?”; 126). The priest wants them to realize how fortunate they are to live in a country such as Mexico, and tells the girls they were born to change the world.¹¹ He wants them to “tomar parte, pertenecer, expresarse, dar” (“join in, belong, express themselves, give”), but what strikes a chord with Mariana is his call to be Mexican: “Ustedes viven en un país determinado, denle algo a ese país, carajo. Sean mexicanas, carajo” (“You live in a specific country: give something to this country, damn it. Be Mexican, damn it”; 155). Teufel’s speech affects Mariana profoundly, especially when he calls on the girls to become more Mexican, a process she has yet to complete. His objective is to get to know every member of the scout organization, and in a private meeting with Mariana, Teufel questions her sense of identity and points out her own contradictions; at this point in her evolution, she has assimilated aspects of Magda’s Mexico, but still clings to her privileged social status. He tells her that being, in her own words, “de buena familia” (“from a good family”) and “educada” (“educated”) does not mean that she is better than “la otra gente . . . la de afuera” (“those other people . . . those on the streets”; 144–5).

Mariana is especially troubled by their conversation about servants, for she has internalized her family’s belief that servants cannot achieve anything better in life. Of course, this view conflicts with the love and respect she feels for Magda:

—Ustedes ¿tienen sirvientes?

—Sí, padre.

—Y ¿comen en la mesa? . . .

—¡Ay no, padre!

—Ah, ya veo, ¿por qué no comen en la mesa con ustedes? . . .

—Porque son sirvientes. No tienen modales. . . . Son criados.

—¿Qué significa eso?

—Son distintos. A ellos tampoco les gustaría comer en la mesa con nosotros.

—Y usted ¿está de acuerdo en que los sirvientes coman en la cocina?

(Como un relámpago, Magda atraviesa frente a mis ojos, pero Magda es Magda.)

—No sé padre, nunca me he puesto a pensar en ello.

Do you have servants?

Yes, Father.

And do they eat with you at the table? . . .

Oh no, Father!

Ah, I see, why do they not eat at the table with you? . . .

Because they are servants. They have no manners. . . . They are paid help.

What does that mean?

They are different. And they don't want to eat at the table with us.

And you, do you agree that the servants should eat in the kitchen?

(Like lightning, Magda flashes before my eyes, but Magda is Magda.)

I do not know Father, I have never thought about it. (144–5)

At this point in her identity formation, Mariana has still not accepted all of her Mexican identity. She remains attached to some family traditions and to her status as part of the wealthier class. Although she perceives Magda as different from other maids—"Como un relámpago, Magda atraviesa frente a mis ojos, *pero Magda es Magda*" ("Like lightning, Magda flashes before my eyes, *but Magda is Magda*"; my emphasis)—she still perceives herself as a *niña bien* who could not work in a factory. Although she sees herself as Mexican and has added many Mexican elements to her world view, she is not as Mexican as Teufel, with his ostensibly Marxist beliefs, would want her to be. However, Teufel's understanding of Mexicanness is somewhat skewed by his perception of himself. Indeed, during a short stay with Mariana's family, he enjoys being served by the maids and by Luz, who grants him his every wish. Although Teufel calls into question Mariana's beliefs about identity, he is deeply hypocritical. When asked what he considers his first language, he states that although he learned Spanish first—a result of being born in Mexico—he considers French his mother tongue for it is "el de [su] gente," or that of his people (233). If language and nationality are closely related, and nationality is something one chooses, then, like Luz, Teufel considers himself more French than Mexican.

While the two main authority figures in Mariana's life reject Mexico and identify themselves with France, her grandmother loves her country and tries to convey—even to pass on—this love to her granddaughter, who is eager to learn. An adult Mariana remembers how her Mexican

grandmother loved her country right up to her final days, and how she told her that she was next in line to embrace it:

Frente a sus ojos veía extenderse su país como la continuación de su falda, inspeccionaba los campos de trigo, se alegraba si descubría panales. . . . Ahora, desde hace tres meses, mi abuela ya no quiere regresar a los sitios donde estuvo aquerenciada.

—Tú tenías el afán de que el país te entrara por los ojos, abue . . .

—Sí—me responde—ahora te toca a ti memorizarlo.

Before her eyes she saw her country extend out beyond the skirt at her feet, she inspected wheat fields, was happy if she found honeycombs. . . . Now, for the past three months, my grandmother does not want to return to the places where she was appreciated . . .

“You were eager to draw the country in through your eyes, Grandma . . .”

“Yes,” she tells me, “now it is your turn to memorize it.”
(177–9)

Mariana’s relationship with her grandmother helps her to accept all the contradictions within her identity, and to finally see herself as Mexican, and therefore hybrid by nature. It is the mission that her grandmother gives her. In commenting that Mariana is actively looking for an identity with which she could be at peace, María Elena de Valdés claims that “the salient truth that emerges is that her own identity is dominated by her apprenticeship in being able to look at herself as an other; specifically, as the other of the persons who share in her life” (128). This discovery of “myself

as an other” is a painful coming of age experience that marks Mariana’s transition into adulthood. With Madga and her grandmother, she eventually accepts the hybridity of her identity.

By the end of her teenage years, Mariana has become a complex, multi-faceted being, still somewhat torn between her double sense of belonging, or as Serge Gruzinski puts it, “between contradictory spaces and loyalties” (*Mestizo Mind* 188). Even if she is more certain than ever of where she belongs, Mariana still oscillates between three identities—the maternal one, the one that her mother wishes for her, and the one she wants to embody. Her sense of doubt returns as soon as she remembers her mother’s wishes, yet the presence of Mexican people soothes her:

No sé qué será de mí. Mamá piensa enviarme a Francia, para cambiar de aire; que no me case joven y con un mexicano como Sofía. “Verás los bailes en París, qué maravilla. . . . Te vamos a poner en un barco, verás, o en un avión, verás, te vamos a subir a la punta de la Torre Eiffel; tendrás París a tus pies, te vamos a poner sombrero y guantes y bajarás por el Sena en un bateau mouche, verás te vamos a . . .”

En la Avenida San Juan de Letrán, arriba del Cinelandia, tomo clases de taquimecanografía. En los días en que el recuerdo de Teufel me atosiga, camino entre la gente hacia la Alameda. Me siento junto a los chinos que platican en un semicírculo parecido al Hemiciclo a Juárez; allí también los sordomudos se comunican dibujando pájaros en el aire; me hace bien su silencio, luego escojo una banca junto a la estatua “Malgré tout” y miro cómo los hombres al pasar, le acarician las nalgas. Las mujeres, no. Me gusta sentarme al sol en medio de la gente, esa gente, en mi ciudad, en el centro de mi país, en el ombligo del mundo.

I don’t know what will become of me. *Mamá* wants to send me to France, to change scenes; so that I don’t marry young and a Mexican, like Sofía. “You will see the dances in Paris, what a wonder. . . . We are going to put you on a boat, we’ll see, or on an airplane, we’ll see, we will take you to the

top of the Eiffel Tower; you will have Paris at your feet, we are going to put a hat and gloves on you and you will sail down the Seine in a *bateau-mouche*, we'll see, we will . . .”

On the Avenida San Juan de Letrán, above Cinelandia, I take shorthand typing classes. On days when the memory of Teufel haunts me, I walk among the crowd toward the Alameda. I sit next to the Chinese people who talk in a semicircle similar to the Hemicycle to Juárez; there are also the deaf and the mute who communicate by drawing birds in the air; their silence is good for me, then I choose a bench next to the *Malgré tout* statue and watch how the men caress her buttocks as they walk by. Women, no. I like to sit in the sun in the middle of the people, these people, in my city, in the centre of my country, in the navel of the world. (Poniatowska, *La “Flor de Lis”* 260–1)

Even with her doubts, Mariana now belongs to *her* city, *her* country. She names them as such, making them her own. For Mariana, to love is to morph into the loved one; as such she eventually melds into Mexico, becoming a part of it. Ultimately, she is able to shift from one figurative space to another, and to find herself in the middle.

Consequently, at the end of the novel, an adult Mariana, confident of the people to whom she belongs, states: “Mi país es esta banca de piedra desde la cual miro el mediodía, mi país es esta lentitud al sol . . . mi país es el tamal que ahora mismo voy a ir a traer a la calle de Huichapan número 17, a la “Flor de Lis” (“My country is this stone bench from which I take in the midday, my country is this slow midday sun . . . my country is the *tamal* that I am about to pick up at number 17 Huichapan Street, the ‘Flor de Lis’”; 261). The title, *La “Flor de Lis,”* already alludes to the allegory of transculturation that is the novel: it refers in part to the noble French heritage of Mariana’s family, while also paying homage to Mexican popular culture, sharing a name with a popular *tamalería* in Mexico City. In this title, two cultures and sensibilities converge, and the protagonist must face both at every step of her development. The title is not only indicative of the autobiographical nature of the narrative, but also of the idea of transculturation inherent within it; as the French symbolism evolves, it

effectively becomes Mexican, and thus takes on a new meaning. It allegorizes transculturation since it represents the idea of cultures coalescing, and creates a bridge between cultures that allows them to meet and interact. In the process, social groups never fully discard their own cultural background; Mariana never entirely forgets her European heritage, but instead adjusts her perspective and reshapes her identity within a new, hybrid culture. In my reading, the selection of the *Flor de Lis* is especially significant: Mariana accepts and appropriates the Mexican aspects of this French symbol, thereby giving it new meaning. However, she chooses, interprets, and adjusts the past in a way that is useful to her in order to affirm her Mexican identity, as well as her right to adopt it and to speak of it. The Mariana who reaches the *tamalería* has embraced and feels part of a Mexico conceived in transcultural terms. Mariana has evolved, from a cosmopolitan identity inherited from her mother, to a transcultural one generated slowly through her interactions with the nation's multiple roots. She succeeds in negotiating a path between the Eurocentric and nationalist extremes, and from then on feels at home at the *Flor de Lis*.

Conclusion

Mariana's transformation, read allegorically, represents the evolution of a discourse on cultural identity in Mexico. In resolving her identity crisis, in accepting her hybridity, and in admitting the role her mother played in the development of her identity, Mariana personifies Mexico's renewal. As a result of the Mexican Revolution, the country has undergone a cultural decolonization and has accepted its culture as born of the blending of various traditions and customs. Poniatowska's novel not only represents the rejection of the poorly conceived Eurocentric cosmopolitanism of the time, but is also a clear example of the displacement or substitution of cosmopolitanism by more politically expedient identity metaphors, in this case, transculturation.

La "Flor de Lis" is also reflective of the fact that cosmopolitanism has always played second fiddle to concepts such as miscegenation and transculturation in Latin America. In post-revolutionary Mexico, there was no place for cosmopolitanism; it was perceived as out of place in a country that was attempting to cater to the needs of the time. The contingencies of

history—too much foreign influence, the rejection of Indigenous culture during the Porfiriato—forced the country to adopt *hibridismo* or transculturation as a driving force. In post-revolutionary Mexico, the only way to be Mexican—even for a worldly person—was by embracing this cultural hybridity, being less concerned with cosmopolitan values, and rejecting nationalist nativism.

While *La “Flor de Lis”* represents the rejection of cosmopolitanism and the adoption of cultural hybridity, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El Paraíso en la otra esquina* and *El sueño del celta* plot protagonists who embody cosmopolitan ideals through the acceptance of cultural diversity. This is a stark contrast; indeed, it is their discovery of cultural hybridity that turns them into cosmopolitans.

