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# Creating a 'third space' through narration in *Maldita yo entre las mujeres*[1]

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## Introduction

This article analyses how Mercedes Valdivieso uses her re-visioning of historical figure, Catalina de los Ríos y Lisperguer, in *Maldita yo entre las mujeres*, to challenge and criticise perceived truths of fixed identities in a Eurocentric, patriarchal Chilean society. Applying postcolonial and feminist theories of identities, a close textual analysis of the novel reveals that Valdivieso's narrative techniques facilitate the author's endeavour to criticise and undermine dominant discourses and hierarchies as represented in the novel. In creating a fragmented, contradictory and, at times, cyclical narrative, Valdivieso produces a text which could be considered a 'third space' as defined by Homi K. Bhabha. It is argued here that this 'third space' is created specifically through the, seemingly incoherent, narrative as an opportunity for negotiation of new identities, which do not conform to Euro- and androcentric visions. While other critics have recognised the value of the narrative structures created by Valdivieso to challenge dominant discourses, these studies have not considered this fragmented, fluid narrative structure as a potential 'third space'.

## Catalina de los Ríos y Lisperguer: Previous Historical and Fictional Portrayals

Catalina de los Ríos y Lisperguer, a seventeenth-century Chilean historical figure, is best known as, la Quintrala. Lucía Guerra states that '[e]ste apodo proviene del quintral, una planta de flores rojas que crece en los bosques del sur de Chile y que se aferra al tronco de los árboles

[1] I presented an early version of this article at LALSA 2016, where comments from delegates helped it take shape. I am very grateful to Kate Quinn and Rubén Peinado Abarrio for their comments on the initial iterations, to the anonymous reviewers whose suggestions helped me nuance and solidify existing arguments, and to Nazaret Pérez Nieto and Claire Gorrara for counsel on drawing the final version together into a cohesive narrative.

hasta causarles la muerte' (Guerra 1998: 48). Of mixed heritage, with Spanish, German and indigenous ancestry, De los Ríos y Lisperguer was a powerful woman for her time and enjoyed high social status through both her European and indigenous ancestries. Yet, her reputation is not based on her social standing, but rather the legend surrounding her alleged murder of numerous men in her lifetime, including her father, former lovers and servants. The influence of her powerful family meant she was never convicted of any of these crimes. Despite this fierce tale, like many women in history, she was but a footnote in Chilean chronicles.[2] Her story was passed orally through the generations until the nineteenth century, when Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna produced his text *Los Lisperguer y la Quintrala,* which overtly claims that the reason why la Quintrala carried out such heinous crimes, was because she was of German (interpreted as protestant) and indigenous (non-European) ancestry (Vicuña Mackenna 1972: 79). This mix, according to Vicuña Mackenna, was lethal, '¿Había en esta mezcla de razas fundidas rápidamente en un solo tipo algo que predisponía al crimen y al mal?' (Vicuña Mackenna 1972: 79). The impact of this text on the development of la Quintrala's narrative, during this period and subsequently, has been analysed elsewhere (Lee 2007, Olea 1998, and Ward 2001). It is important to note that Vicuña Mackenna's text laid the foundations for a number of historical novels produced throughout the twentieth century (Arratia 1966, Arriaza 1963, Petit 1946, Yankas 1972). Each text used the figure to comment on the anxieties that a transgressive woman from the colonial period inspired during the period in which they were writing. While la Quintrala was the protagonist of many of these texts, they uncritically reproduced the concepts put forward by Vicuña Mackenna and failed to engage explicitly with her condition as a *mestiza* woman who felt oppressed by the Eurocentric patriarchal authorities.

[2] According to Lucía Guerra, 'Los únicos documentos que han quedado son los siguientes: la donación y traspaso que doña Catalina hizo de su dote a su hermana Águeda, el 31 de junio de 1626 (Archivo General): el poder para testar que hace su esposo, don Alonso Campofrío Carvajal, el 24 de noviembre de 1626 (Archivo General); su primer testamento, redactado el 10 de mayo de 1662 (Archivo General); su segundo y último testamento, del 15 de enero de 1665 (Archivo General); y el sumario de su confesión frente a oidor, sumariamente, el 28 de julio de 1664 (Archivo de la Real Audiencia)' (Guerra 1998: 48).

**Negotiations in the 'Third Space' through Narrative Techniques**

Valdivieso's *Maldita yo entre las mujeres* (1991) provides space in its narrative structure to explore this oppression from a postcolonial feminist perspective. It illustrates the protagonist's struggles with her own gender and ethnic identities, being a *mestiza* woman who refuses to conform to societal norms. The development of Catalina's identities, in addition to the identities of those around her, illustrates a more complex reality than that considered in the patriarchal colonial society. In this article, identity is considered a social construct, which is fluid and never complete. In her discussion of gender in Chile, Sonia Montecino affirms that since gender identities are social constructs, we must also recognise that they are multiple, with various combinations that change, according to the historical period or cultural norms, as well as the other forms of identity that complement them, such as class, age or ethnic group (1993: 168-169). Jorge Larraín supports Montecino's assertion as he indicates, with reference to the blends of ethnicities in Chile: '[H]ay identidad sí, pero no en el sentido de ser una cosa única, englobante y en la cual estemos todos de acuerdo. No, eso no existe, existen versiones, múltiples versiones de lo que es la identidad chilena' (cited in Stuven 2007: 35). This concept of multiple versions of Chilean identity is reflected well in the narrative structure of the text, which is sometimes contradictory, as well as polyphonic. Ana María Stuven criticises the tendency in Chile to consider identity as an historical fact, rather than something that is in process and constantly undergoing change. 'Al dejarla estática, se borra la diversidad del territorio y sus habitantes; al generalizar, se somete al chileno que no se asocia con esas definiciones a la soledad de no pertenecer' (Stuven 2007: 14). This serves the dominant groups in society to reinforce hegemony and social hierarchies across a range of elements including gender, ethnicity and social class. Through her nuanced narrative, Valdivieso challenges the hegemony and depicts unstable, incomplete and sometimes contradictory identities in her

characters. Therefore, this text is a form of 'third space' as defined by Homi K. Bhabha, in which fragmented identities are under constant negotiation, are never fixed and always fluid. Bhabha affirms that since all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity,[3] 'the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerge, rather hybridity [...] is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge' (cited in Rutherford 1990: 211). While Bhabha's work is informed by the postcolonial experience of former British colonies, his theories surrounding hybridity and liminality resonate with postcolonial situation in Latin America. Theorising in a Latin American context, Joshua Lund suggests that a methodological invocation of hybridity, in an analysis such this, pays particular attention to in-between spaces of cultural production, focusing on mobility and cyclic processes (2006: xii). This is what I intend to do here. The narrative techniques employed by Valdivieso aid the development of this 'third space', which in turn undermines the colonial and patriarchal discourses, which seek to fix identities, whether gender or ethnic, in static positions. The plurality of the narrative techniques reflects the complex, nuanced illustrations of identities in the colonial period.

Valdivieso's text is ground-breaking, among the texts produced on this figure, in many ways. Its protagonist is Catalina, the person, not la Quintrala, the mythical figure, making her more relatable to the reader. This is the first text in which she is the subject of the narrative, not the object. Furthermore, in an attempt to defy social norms, the author displaces the powerful European patriarchy of the colonial society, introducing an indigenous matriarchy. Rebeca Lee (2007: 116), correctly argues that a substitution of one power structure in favour of another that continues to subjugate, does not challenge the status quo. However, it could be argued here that rather than simply inverting the typical centre/periphery dichotomy,

[3] I use the term hybridity to encompass cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic mixing, unlike *mestizaje*, which could be considered synonymous, but has also been used to refer specifically to racial mixing (Lund 2006: 207), or syncretism, which tends to have religious connotations.

Valdivieso's text hybridises the power structures, refusing to reproduce such a Manichean perspective, thus creating a 'third space' of ambivalence and uncertainty. By displacing the histories of the colonising and colonised societies that have constituted this interstitial space, the text sets up new structures of authority (Bhabha cited in Rutherford 1990: 211). While the protagonist prioritises her indigenous heritage, acquired through the maternal line, European men and the Catholic Church, continue to hold some power in the text, forcing Catalina to continuously negotiate and reconfigure her sense of self. It is in this liminal space, where the struggle for power of the typically dominant andro- Eurocentric over the contending power of the indigenous matriarchy, that the contestation of hybrid identities is played out. Starting with a fictitious official letter from the Governor of Chile to the Viceroy in Lima, the protagonist then takes up the narration for the majority of the text, with her narrative being interspersed with four sections beginning with 'dicen que'. The first-person narration is cyclical in nature, reflecting the concept of fluidity mentioned earlier. The fragmented nature of the narrative is in keeping with Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' as a liminal space where nothing is complete, and several elements negotiate within it forming hybrids, which are often contradictory.

The text opens with the fictitious letter from the Governor of Chile, Alonso de Ribera to the Viceroy, don Luis de Velasco, in Lima. De Ribera details the progress the conquistadores have made thus far in the fight to seize and retain land from the indigenous groups in Chile. He affirms his appreciation for the Mapuches resisting the oppression of the Spanish. '*No son grandes los mapuches, pero en su cortedad de altura y carnes se aprieta una fuerza y un odio al extranjero que los crece y los anima para las más severas campañas y si pierden, también para sus castigos*' (Valdivieso 1991: 8; inflection in original). He subsequently requests reinforcements in the form of soldiers and weaponry to aid the Spanish cause, before continuing his description of life in Santiago and how its influence has changed his perspective. The

Lisperguer women, in particular, have influenced him. He claims that '*[m]e hacen cavilar estas mujeres de las Indias, magas o doncellas tienen algo en común, otra forma de naturaleza que a mi inteligencia de hombre se escapa y, por qué no decirlo, asusta*' (Valdivieso 1991: 11-12; inflection in original). In writing these lines, de Ribera fails to acknowledge that it is not only as a man, but rather, as a Spanish man, that he is unnerved by the freedom with which the Lisperguer women live. Located at the opening of the text, this letter seeks to emulate similar letters written by conquistadores, the contents of which helped form a Spanish history of the conquest and colonial period in Latin America.

Valdivieso's decision to place it at the start of her feminist narrative is perhaps a mock homage to the socio-political hierarchy of the seventeenth century in Chile. To the unsuspecting reader, positioning the letter in prime position could indicate a certain reverence towards this androcentric colonial communication, which seems to celebrate the apparent success of the Spanish thus far in Chile, while also expressing a need for more reinforcements to complete their conquest definitively. However, this potential reverence is dispelled as the remainder of Valdivieso's text embarks upon dismantling and rejecting the patriarchal Eurocentric vision which de Ribera's letter represents. In an interview with Andrea Puyol, Valdivieso claimed that the letter "'[e]s la visión del hombre, del conquistador que ha sido conquistado por estas tierras y sus mujeres'" (cited in Puyol 1991: 230). Having narrated the successful seduction of the Governor of Chile—symbol of Spanish, patriarchal power—the text proceeds with invoking the sympathy and consideration of the reader for Catalina, unlike previous portrayals of the protagonist. This serves to deconstruct the barrier created surrounding her in previous texts and encourages an approximation between protagonist and reader. Valdivieso's decision to produce a fictional letter in her historical novel coincides with Fernando Aínsa's suggestion that authors of historical novels will do so when they distrust historical material already available. 'La crisis de las fuentes documentales ha llevado a que en

algunas novelas históricas todo se invente, porque se desconfía o se califica de "mentiroso" todo lo que se presenta como realidad' (Aínsa 2003: 97). Ronda Ward suggests that during the colonial period, there was a tendency to uncritically accept details presented in formal letters such as that reproduced in this text. She points out that even though they were an official source, they were not void of deception and contained inaccuracies (Ward 2001: 88) which served the writer's purpose, creating disputes between chroniclers and historians at the time. This obvious distrust in so-called historical sources is evident in *Maldita yo entre las mujeres*, where in her polyphonic narrative, Valdivieso seeks to undermine perceived historical truths about Catalina's life.

For the first time in the history of fictional representations of Catalina, the protagonist is made the subject of the text.[4] Though ten of the fourteen remaining sections of the novel are narrated by Catalina—in her Catholic confession prior to marrying Alonso de Campofrío—and she is given prime position to discuss her experiences, the text is not unencumbered by third-person interference. Scattered among the ten chapters narrated in this form, there are four which begin with *dicen que*. The author claimed of the voice in these sections that: '[e]s el que repite los parámetros que deben ser. Es la sociedad establecida' (cited in Zerán 1991: 5). These four sections represent the popular opinion of Catalina, as an evil woman, the legendary Quintrala. This narration details the popular beliefs and rumours regarding Catalina which were passed through generations in oral tradition and which were given further validity in Vicuña Mackenna's text and the subsequent works of fiction produced relating to la Quintrala. The contradicting narratives are the author's attempt to contest the perceived truths regarding la Quintrala's tale, and enter into dialogue with *Los Lisperguer y la Quintrala,* which Vicuña Mackenna claimed to be objective in its depiction of the colonial era in which Catalina de los

[4] Taking a psychoanalytical approach to her depiction of Catalina's life, Olga Arratia, before Valdivieso, attempted to make her protagonist the subject of her text, but Ivonne Cuadra argues that in Arratia's text: 'el personaje de La Quintrala no logra una voz propia; sigue siendo más bien un objeto de la narración' (Cuadra 1999:132).

Ríos y Lisperguer lived. ‘De esta suerte, sin fatiga para el lector, se desenvolverá a su vista un dilatado panorama, a veces fantástico, a veces horrible, pero siempre verdadero’ (Vicuña Mackenna 1972: 5). However, the nineteenth-century historian’s text uses markers that represent more personal opinion than one would expect from an objective text: ‘Los casos de impúdica y feroz liviandad de que la tradición inculpa a doña Catalina de los Ríos, son varios, y todos más o menos horribles. Pero nosotros no haremos caudal de ellos, porque escribimos una historia social’ (Vicuña Mackenna 1972: 86).

Raquel Olea indicates the strength in Valdivieso’s decision to construct simultaneous narratives.

> En su construcción de hablas, particularmente en el habla de Doña Catalina, la novela pone en escena una ficción que desmonumentaliza el mito, fragilizándolo, abriéndolo a la precariedad de lo (in)significante doméstico, familiar, pulsional, lo que pone en crisis la voluntad de consistencia significativa y la objetividad de la historia, sea esta culta o popular (Olea 1998: 110).

Its strength in destabilising perceived facts opens up the possibility of alternative perspectives. In line with the challenge to hegemonic beliefs in the themes the novel tackles, Rebecca Lee claims that the ‘overall dynamic of the narrative is one of resistance as the protagonist struggles against the normative discourse and mandates of traditional Chilean society’ (Lee 2007: 112). According to Angélica Rivera, Valdivieso rewrote the manuscript several times before appropriating the perspective of Catalina (Rivera 1991: 227). Her protagonist’s voice elicits pity from the reader when we witness first-hand the restrictions that are imposed upon her by the patriarchal powers. As she listens to the men in her family plan a marriage to Enrique Enríquez, whom she has no interest in marrying, she exclaims: ‘[m]e enfurecía escucharles disponer de mi vida’ (Valdivieso 1991: 18). This line of discussion—with which one can easily empathise—, coupled with the *dicen que* narrative that reinforces the perceived truths of the myth of la Quintrala, develops a heterogeneous narrative which creates new possibilities of understanding the realities of Catalina’s life. The *dicen que* narrative offers the perspective of

the androcentric, European opinion on Catalina's life and is extremely critical of her resistance to conforming to their norms. '[D]icen que ya era hembra de mal ejemplo y guárdate, doña Catalina de los Ríos, irreverente con Dios, la ley y su padre' (Valdivieso 1991: 79).

Catalina has first-hand experience of gender inequality in her interactions with Enrique Enríquez. In her own narration, she outlines the derogatory way in which he expresses his intentions towards her. Contrary to the usual discrepancy between the protagonist's narration and that beginning with *dicen que*, the popular voice's account of Enríquez' intentions reconciles with her own: 'levantando su copa, juró que gozaría a la Quintrala contra todos los rie[s]gos que su gusto le costara' (Valdivieso 1991: 110). His use of Catalina's moniker, la Quintrala, further objectifies her, placing him in a position of power over her. This nickname was used historically, in oral and written tradition, to refer to the mythified character that grew from the historical figure. However, in Valdivieso's text its use is minimal, only appearing on a few occasions in the *dicen que* narrative.

Catalina struggles to conform to the rules established by society for young women. She appears to be more comfortable in some situations behaving in the manner that is expected of young men, though, sometimes, even that is not sufficient for her. The *dicen que* sections of the text detail a young girl who is inquisitive and energetic, beyond the expectations of young children. 'Sus conocidos iban a recordarla haciendo preguntas que nadie hacía, aventajando a sus primos en juegos de varones, y adivinando lo que decían si trataban mal de ella' (Valdivieso 1991: 77). These comments suggest that her actions are perceived negatively. According to the patriarchal norms, as a young girl she should not be impertinent or display strength beyond that of boys her age. Catalina is unfortunate in that she does not adhere to the norms of either men or women since it is suggested that: '[n]i semejante a varón ni a doncella, sino una especie ajena a sus tiempos, Catalina era' (Valdivieso 1991:137). She is not male because her physical attributes are so characteristically female, yet, her behaviour does not coincide with that

identified as a woman's. She finds herself on the threshold between the strict definitions of male and female expectations within their society. Contrasting the critical *dicen que* narrative with the protagonist's narrative, the novel highlights this artificially rigid gender binary created by the colonial society, while simultaneously subverting it with the first-person narrative. With the protagonist's narration, the legitimacy of such boundaries of colonial discourse is called into question, allowing for a liminal, 'third space' to be created in the text. Valdivieso uses her protagonist to underline the unrealistic tendency to strictly segregate male and female attributes while portraying the difficulty faced by those who fail to conform. The author describes her protagonist stating: '[e]s una persona muy sensible y de una soledad infinita' (cited in Puyol 1991: 230). Knowing her granddaughter and understanding her need to break free from the constraints of societal norms, Águeda warns her '"[v]as a sufrir mucho, mi Catalina"' (Valdivieso 1991: 95). This is not in an attempt to deter Catalina from her chosen path, it is rather to make her aware of what is to come.

The techniques used by Valdivieso humanise Catalina, creating distance between her and the legend of la Quintrala. Critics at the time appreciated Valdivieso's narrative structure and understood what she was hoping to achieve. Olga López Cotín claims that '[l]a heteroglosia de la novela articula una inversión de la jerarquía convencional […] Propuesto así el orden narrativo, la voz subjetiva se erige en portadora de una verdad desconocida que sigue su propia lógica interna' (López Cotín 1996: 210). Norberto Flores asserts that '[b]y putting history into the mouths of the ignored [...] Valdivieso creates a polyphony of voices that reveals the invalidity of a discourse that has erected itself as truth bearing, based on patriarchal monologism and arbitrary selection' (Flores 1994: 283). There is a celebration of the deconstruction of the influence that history, as a homogeneous meta-narrative has retained over Catalina's tale. Valdivieso's technique embodies the critical invocation of hybridity which Lund suggests typically manifests as a 'deconstructive lever' (2006: xii) of the hegemonic

discourse of a particular society, which 'reverse[s] and displace[s] authoritative rhetorics and discourse' (2006: xii). This coincides with Bhabha's suggestion that through hybridity, polarities, as they have been presented in colonial society, 'come to be replaced by truths that are only partial, limited and unstable' (1994: 278). Valdivieso's fluid, fragmented narrative form, reproduces this deconstructive, disruptive element to which Lund and Bhabha refer.

Valdivieso's decision to incorporate the letter and especially the *dicen que* voice into the greater narrative structure has been praised by many critics. The author acknowledges the difficulty in providing a reliable narrative for her protagonist. '"Es como retomar una voz femenina que ha sido bastante maldita"' (cited in Maack 1991: VII). Valdivieso engages in a feminist agenda to 'rescatar mujeres' (cited in Maack 1991: VII) from the silence of history, which has long isolated them in the peripheries. Rosa Sarabia says of the *dicen que* perspective 'a pesar de su distancia no logra poseer fiabilidad y objetividad por contrapeso a la seducción que ofrece la primera, la de Catalina, quien domina el resto de la narración' (Sarabia 2000: 43). By presenting this counter narrative, which the reader tends to distrust, Catalina's narrative is afforded more credibility. The fact that Valdivieso's protagonist is also acutely aware of the rumours spread about her, '[l]as recaderas me acercaron los decires que mi trabajo levantó entre mis vecinos, contrarios a mi condición de hembra y enseñados por el diablo' (Valdivieso 1991: 120), further reinforces the legitimacy of her position as primary narrator since her awareness indicates a form of self-reflection and critical analysis of her own situation. Lee suggests that the back and forth between these two narrators 'is an attempt to reconstruct narratively the protagonist's resistance to and eventual overcoming of the dominant paradigm that constrains her' (Lee 2007: 114). This gives further merit to the strategic functions of Valdivieso's narrative, since they reflect the protagonist's struggle to assert her own, complex identity.

**Atemporal and Cyclical Reflections: Recreating the Real and the Oneiric**

While evidently set in the seventeenth century, the narration in Valdivieso's text creates an atemporal situation in the way in which it presents events. Catalina's narration opens and closes with the death of Enrique Enríquez, which Silvia Cristina Rodríguez argues 'reproduce la concepción del tiempo circular, como reflejo de la idea cíclica del devenir, propia del pensamiento mítico original de las culturas precolombinas' (Rodríguez 2004: 132). In contradistinction to the Western tendency to discuss temporal development as a linear process, the indigenous cultures in South America view it as a cyclical one, which occurs and recurs. This technique, adopted by the author, further strengthens the other narrative tools employed to undermine perceived facts in a European patriarchal society, while also reinforcing the notion of this text as a 'third space'. By creating a cyclical, atemporal narrative, the emphasis is displaced from Eurocentric perspectives to indigenous ones, providing space for hybrid permutations of identity.

The narrative is not only cyclical, but is sometimes fragmented and blurred in an oneiric manner. While Gabriela Mora suggests that this reflects 'los vaivenes de la memoria de Catalina' (Mora 1994: 63), Bernardita Llanos argues that this incoherence allows for unimpeded transitioning between Catalina, the protagonist, and Catalina, her mother, so it is not always possible to clearly distinguish between them 'En tanto que realidad y sueño coexisten a través de la simultaneidad temporal, la imprecisión temporal permite que las acciones, los deseos y los sueños de Catalina, su madre y su abuela existan a la vez' (Llanos 1994: 1032). This serves to reinforce the bond that exists between the women of Catalina's lineage as she defines it in the closing lines of her confession (discussed below). The atemporality of the narrative is reinforced by la Tatamai's presence in the lives of four generations of the Flores women. She is an indigenous woman who functions as carer, advisor, servant and confidant to the protagonist. Lucía Guerra suggests that la Tatamai serves to

consolidate the connection elaborated between the women of indigenous descent in Catalina's family: '[d]e manera significativa, la Tatamai, mujer mapuche fuera del tiempo, es el enlace primordial en esta saga de mujeres' (Guerra 1998: 60). The ambiguous nature with which la Tatamai enters the lives of the Flores women, and the idea that she has served them since the protagonist's great grandmother, Elvira's time, introduces an element of the fantastical to the text. She seems to exist outside the chronological development of time. The protagonist insinuates that la Tatamai can even control time. 'La Tatamai recordaba el tiempo a su voluntad y hacía que una se pudiera vivir de antes: encendía un sahumerio, abría el sueño y se venían adelante, mi bisabuela, mi madre y yo misma' (Valdivieso 1991: 38). The ambivalence and doubling (Bhabha 1994: 119), evident in the episodes described, serve to rupture essentialist perspectives of the self/Other and the concepts of time. The continuity created by la Tatamai's presence contradicts the fragmented, incoherent progression of narrative elsewhere. This disruption of the structure aids the subversion of hegemonic narratives in the text, contributing to its formation as a 'third space'.

Emphasis on the idea of mirrored, fragmented representations within the texts can be identified in Valdivieso's treatment of Catalina de los Ríos y Lisperguer and Catalina Lisperguer y Flores, the protagonist and her mother respectively. Ivonne Cuadra asserts these two characters

> parecen repetirse y confundirse en el texto. Las unen el sentimiento de odio hacia el padre/esposo, el placer que encuentran en su sexualidad, el poco apego a la idea del matrimonio, las creencias mapuches y la reputación que han alcanzado en el medio social. Aparecen ligadas a un mismo destino y se defienden con su herencia femenina (Cuadra 1999: 137).

At stages throughout the narrative, each character is portrayed simultaneously as herself and as the other, with Gonzalo de los Ríos, the protagonist's father, confusing them: '"[e]res un doble", dijo, y se persignó, "la otra duerme o vuela, que es lo mismo en ella"' (Valdivieso 1991: 59). Cecilia Ojeda suggests that both Catalinas accept their similarity as a bond 'que no

requiere de palabras y que las hace superar la ideología colonial maniqueísta que opone y separa adscribiendo cada conducta a las categorías de lo angélico y lo demónico' (Ojeda 1998: 96). Raquel Olea concurs with Ojeda asserting '[l]a madre se sigue en la hija, se perpetúa en ella, ambas se funden en una identidad que produce un poder de sangres y cuerpos femeninos, donde no hay ni una ni otra para ser la misma' (Olea 1998: 111). This fluid, fragmented disruption of the Manichean perspective, so strongly advocated by the Eurocentric society, ensures that the indigenous identities are reinforced in the narrative and through the Catalinas.

The blurring of borders between both individuals is strongest during the night, when there is an aspect of an oneiric sequence in play, and the distinction between wakefulness and sleep is also undefined. Llanos argues that this sleep-like state proves beneficial in deconstructing the patriarchal law and authority that rules their society to find new ways of expression outside it.

> La atmósfera onírica de la narración ahonda en la represión impuesta por ese poder [patriarcal] y un deseo femenino que intenta expresarse fuera de sus límites. Dentro del régimen colonial, no hay un espacio público para la experiencia de la mujer ni para el desarrollo de su identidad. La autonomía y la libertad se pagan con el encierro conventual o el enjuiciamiento, ambos castigos sufridos por Catalina (Llanos 1994: 1036).

There is an incomplete cyclical nature to the scenes in question where the significance of distinction is less important than the message that is being conveyed at that point. These unequal, blurred positions aid the development of less essentialist readings of the individual and collective identities in the novel.

Contradiction and fragmentation in reality is further intensified in the text through an interaction between the protagonist and her mother. In an oneiric encounter during the night, Catalina is awoken by 'La Señora', a term used as an equivalent to 'El Señor', referring to God. The way in which 'La Señora' is dressed depicts a syncretism that the protagonist has failed to attain. '[L]a Señora llenó el espacio de una suavidad dorada. Era lindo mirarla en su chamal de

tela mapuche, los aretes pesados y el trarilonco sonante' (Valdivieso 1991: 63). She invites Catalina along the passageway, at which point she lights a fire, and through the flames she proclaims in 'una voz conocida: "¡te hago a imagen y semejanza mía!"' (Valdivieso 1991: 64). These, God's words uttered at the time of creating Adam, are used to indicate to Catalina her importance. It is as though she is the first of a new human race, one which will not subjugate women or people of indigenous descent. Having recognised the voice Catalina raises her head to look at her interlocutor. 'Miré su rostro y era el de mi madre: '"¡madre Dios!"' (Valdivieso 1991: 64). At this point of the narration there is no doubt that the protagonist has identified her mother as God in her trance-like encounter. Guerra affirms that in 'esta experiencia mística de los orígenes, se tacha la noción del dios y creador masculino que se impuso con el ascenso del sistema patriarcal' (Guerra 1998: 63). This substitution of 'El Señor' for 'La Señora' creates a parallel narrative which plays to the overall ploy in *Maldita yo entre las mujeres* that seeks to subvert the patriarchal imposition of knowledge and hierarchy. The mixing and undermining of religious rhetoric with what appears to be an indigenous ceremony constructs the 'third space', wherein hybrid ethnic identities are contested and constructed. Guerra highlights the syncretic nature of the actions described in her analysis of this passage:

> el ritual del fuego, muy semejante a la frotación del cuerpo con yerbas en la ceremonia de la limpia, se realiza con una planta americana, el ají. Y, al otorgarle su corazón, esta madre Dios está modificando también el rito de la eucaristía el cual, en la tradición cristiana, abstrae el cuerpo y la sangre de Jesucristo en una transubstanciación del pan y del vino (Guerra 1998: 64).

Drawing this conclusion, Guerra indicates a connection between this episode and the overall tone of the text that seeks to subvert apparent truths and provide new ways of presenting hybrid depictions of life in seventeenth-century Chile. This oneiric narrative, thus, serves a double purpose: to challenge the male-dominated traditions of Christianity, inserting women in spaces from which they are typically excluded, and to produce hybrid permutations of ethnicity and tradition through the syncretic image of 'La Señora', the ceremony, and her attire.

On her deathbed, Catalina Lisperguer, mother of the protagonist, believes she is expecting another child. She feels abandoned by her daughter, Águeda, who has left with her husband to live in Lima. She claims: '"esta niña que espero nunca buscará irse como tu hermana, para mejorarse de mí. Y será tan feliz como yo fui al engendrarla. Es lo justo, hija de padres contentos"' (Valdivieso 1991: 130). Her existence contrasts greatly with that of the protagonist who was born to an unhappy couple and who disappointed her father by being born a woman. In the threshold between life and death, anything is possible for her. As her delirium continues, Catalina Lisperguer starts to envisage her ideal world:

> La oía anunciar a sus Catalinas, la que esperaba y reía en su vientre, y las que traería el tiempo. Todo sería posible en el mundo de sus Catalinas. 'Un mundo al revés', oyó Perdón del Socorro a una de las señoras (Valdivieso 1991: 131).

The suggestion of a reversed world is palimpsestic when considered with Valdivieso's whole narrative. The principal theme elaborates the displacement of a male-dominated European and the introduction of an indigenous, woman-led land where even 'El Señor' becomes 'La Señora'. This liminal, 'third space' in which Catalina Lisperguer exists on her deathbed is space wherein she can negotiate her gender identity and her ideal reality for future women.

**Alternative Spaces of Confession**

Valdivieso, perhaps in an attempt at furthering the 'authenticity' of her text, claims of the novel '"[e]ra como si me lo dictaran, lo escribí tal cual me lo dictaba doña Catalina al oído"' (cited in Puyol 1991: 88). She claims, '"[l]e di voz y descubrí que era inteligente"' (cited in Puyol 1991: 88). Her protagonist is intelligent in recognising her subjugated status as a woman in androcentric colonial Chile. The nature of her account of her life, like Catalina herself, is transgressive. The protagonist's first-person narration, is novel in the way it makes her the subject of her own story where she can describe her own experiences. Most curiously, it is her

confession to the priest on the eve of her marriage to Alonso de Campofrío. For the duration of her narrative, Valdivieso's protagonist details the many ways in which she has rejected and subverted the patriarchal/church ideals to suit her goals through engaging in pre-marital sex and carrying out acts of violence. She has expressed a preference for her indigenous ancestry which comes from her maternal lineage. Nevertheless, in order to marry Campofrío—in a marriage she is not entirely happy about—she must make a confession on the eve of her wedding. Yet, her confession does not conclude in the most typical of manners as she pays tribute to all the women who have come before her in her maternal line:

> Esa soy, padre,
> hija de Llanka Curiqueo
> que es hija de Elvira de Talagante
> que es hija de Agueda Flores
> que es hija de Catalina
> que es mi madre,
> que soy yo
>
> Todas hijas de Dios, Catalina, creadoras de linaje.
> La confesión.
> Me confieso, padre (Valdivieso 1991: 141-143).

In these closing comments she reminds her confessor that while she is a member of the church, and is willing to offer her confession in preparation for her arranged marriage, the women of her family, each with varying degrees of indigenous heritage, remain her focus. While the confessional space in this patriarchal institution could potentially serve to curb the protagonist's transgressions, her simultaneous appropriation and subversion of systems of power through her defiant unrepentance facilitates an emerging interstice (Bhabha 1994: 2) in which she continues the complex task of negotiating her multifarious identity.

By prioritising the indigenous and the matriarchal in the novel, Valdivieso has created alternative structures of knowledge transmission. This places the protagonist explicitly in a "third space" in which the confessional space is only a partial narrative framework, with religious laws frequently flouted, by Catalina and the women of her family. To the final words of the text, the uncertain conflicting loyalties in Catalina remain constant. Rodrigo Cánovas discusses the paradoxical nature in which Catalina makes her confession stating: 'la verdad aparece sellada en el secreto de la confesión, que no oiremos. Paradójicamente, la institución que espiritualmente la juzga, le sirve también de amparo' (Cánovas 1992: 150). Catalina's version of events will not reach past the ears of her confessor, and it is unlikely she will be persecuted for the crimes she has admitted to throughout the confession. Through the structure of the narrative, however, Valdivieso has created alternative spaces, in which the perceived limitations of the confession to the patriarchal institution of the Church are partial. The contradictions created through the fragmented narrative, complemented by the protagonist's irreverence towards the sacrament of confession, through her unwavering preference for the women of her family and their indigenous roots, serve to challenge the Church's dominance in their society.

**Concluding Thoughts**

It is clear that through the narrative techniques of *Maldita yo entre las mujeres*, Valdivieso provides space to undermine and challenge the dominant patriarchal and colonial discourses of the society portrayed. The text illustrates complex ethnic and gender identities which are negotiated and redefined, in a fragmented, contradictory and cyclical manner. This reflects the reality of these identities as social constructs, under constant interpretation as indicated by Montecino, Stuven and Larraín, writing in the Chilean context. Through the oneiric sequence, where reflection and blurring of boundaries between one character and another is cleverly

illustrated, possibilities of new configurations and redefinitions of gender and ethnic identities become possible in this liminal, 'third space'. Similarly, the ambivalence and slippage produced through the contesting forms of narration (letter, Catalina, *dicen que*) reflects and supports the construction of multiple and contradictory identities. Thus, considering the narrative structure of the text as a 'third space', wherein already complex identities enter into further negotiation to create new hybrid forms, is beneficial. The narrative structure of the novel is complemented by Valdivieso's displacement of the typical societal narrative from the colonial period, offering alternative and competing spaces of power. By hybridising the power structures, the author further undermines the hierarchical structures of the Eurocentric patriarchy, which has sought to fix the identities in place in a Manichean, self/Other space, creating alternative spaces in which the negotiation of identity can be played out. These examples serve to prove the value of applying the concept of the 'third space' as a starting point from which to understand and theorise on the heterogeneous identities portrayed in the novel. In fact, applying this postcolonial reading of the 'third space' to other historical novels, with similarly complex narrative structures, which are produced in Chile and other Latin American contexts, could facilitate a more nuanced approach to understanding the complex forms of identities portrayed in the postcolonial settings of such novels.

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