

DEAUTHORIZING ANTHROPOLOGIES AND “AUTHENTICATING” LANDSCAPES IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S *THE HANDMAID’S TALE* AND DIAMELA ELTIT’S *EL CUARTO MUNDO**

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Seeking to perforate meaning by enforcing my entry or breaking it open to dissipate
what is thought to be its secrets seems to me as crippled an act as verifying the sex of an
unborn child by ripping open the mother’s womb.

—Trinh T. Minh-ha (48–49)

Trinh T. Minh-ha’s comparison of the search for origin and authenticity to “verifying the sex of an unborn child by ripping open the mother’s womb” is particularly astute as it demonstrates how the search for the authentic often culminates in violence against the female body. In this article I will demonstrate how the Canadian Margaret Atwood (b. 1939) and the Chilean Diamela Eltit (b. 1949) dramatize the consequences of this particular violence in their literary texts by interrogating cultural landscapes as well as the anthropologies that sustain them. Furthermore, I propose that Atwood and Eltit, like Trinh, interrogate and dismantle the concept of authenticity as a basis for establishing cultural truth or for performing cultural critique.

In her book, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Trinh T. Minh-ha problematizes certain anthropological interpretations, claiming, “One of the conceits of anthropology lies in its positivist dream of a neutralized language that strips off all its singularity to become nature’s exact, unmisted reflection” (53).¹ Taking into account Trinh’s discussion of such approaches to understanding “other”

cultures, or what Uma Narayan calls the “anthropological perspective,” this article will examine particular *anthropologies* that function to deauthorize or disempower certain voices as well as the *process of placing into question* the legitimacy of these anthropologies. Since the “anthropological perspective” purports to be able to understand, interpret, and represent those cultural landscapes known as origins, they will also be re-examined. This article thus aims to demonstrate how *landscapes* serve to authenticate (in this case, invest select groups of people with authority) as well as illuminate the process of *authenticating*—or, converting landscapes into authentic sources of cultural truth, as performed by both historical and fictional (and often male) narrators. Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia, and Bonj Szczygiel, in their introduction to *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space*, propose a re-examination of “landscapes as a system of power relations which are vital to the production of gendered identities” (1). According to these authors, landscape (although defined in multiple ways in this introduction), at the most basic level, “requires a deliberate act of looking and this act engages all sorts of interpretive strategies” (3). As Dowler, Carubia, and Szczygiel describe, this “act of looking” contains multiple variables and, as such, human geographers have made distinctions between vision (what one is physically able to see), visibility (“how vision is constructed in different ways”), and the material landscape itself (3). More recently, as Dowler et al. illustrate, scholars have argued that landscape refers to a “‘way of seeing’ (rather than an image or an object), which incorporates socio-cultural and political processes,” thus further supporting the claim that “landscapes are actively produced, programmed and scheduled. In other words they are not innocent; rather, they are the palette of a specific moral agenda” (3, 7).

357

The early texts narrating the discovery, conquest, and colonization of the New World are prime examples of this interpretation of landscape. Many of these founding narratives, while claiming to report the “facts” of the original discovery of America—technically, a *rediscovery*—are palimpsests that render the “female” colonial landscape an empty space, virgin land, or blank page in order to inscribe it with meaning, to integrate it into the known. As such, these texts have consistently created gendered scripts and employed tropes of sexual reproduction that establish the male “discoverer’s” rightful ownership of American land, and, therefore, the moral legitimacy of his conquests. Annette Kolodny’s *Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* attests to the fact that the “American pastoral allowed a landscape of the mind to be projected upon and perceived as an objective and external ‘real-world’ landscape” (156). However, this rendering of the New World as an empty space is only made possible through the authentication of the discoverer’s narrative voice, which relies on the silencing of witnesses who could potentially undermine that voice’s claims to authenticity.

Consequently, Anne McClintock, who also treats this issue in her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, describes how native peoples, women, and other groups that threaten to undo the legitimacy of conquest

and imperial power are banished to an “*anachronistic space*,” that is, an *uncivilized, pre-historic space* that perpetuates the ongoing stereotype of America as new and Europeans as her “true” discoverers (30). In this way, the existence of the land’s indigenous inhabitants is violently erased and the subjugation of the “female” landscape for the colonizer’s use and exploration is justified. It is my contention that Margaret Atwood and Diamela Eltit respond with defiance to the logic often present in the discourse of the discovery and conquest of the Americas as set forth by McClintock. As such, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and Eltit’s *El cuarto mundo* [*The Fourth World*] (1988) function to return the gaze of the discoverer/conquistador by narrating a new version of discovery/conquest from the point of view of female, indigenous and marginalized groups (who occupy Fourth World³ positions). Their female protagonists (Offred and diamela eltit, respectively) narrate forgotten human experiences, thus composing a new “history of the future” for the New World at the same time that they project the consequences of “foundational fictions”⁴ in which bodies, especially
358 female bodies, become metaphorical and actual sites, or historical landscapes, for the construction of national projects.

Although the conditions for reverting to these founding moments are quite different, Atwood’s and Eltit’s novels demonstrate how institutionalized rape is justified by the “foundational fictions” that the United States and Chile perpetuate.⁵ In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Gilead (read future U.S.) does not have enough population growth to sustain itself and must force its most “fertile” females to reproduce in order to ensure the nation’s continuance. On the other hand, the Chilean government in *El cuarto mundo* sells or “prostitutes” the majority of its population at the same time that it perpetuates the most extreme performance of gender roles, in which debilitated men become empowered by raping their own wives. By Atwood’s reckoning, the female body becomes an empty vessel, exposed to public and private exploitation, pollution, and sterilization; whereas for Eltit, the female body is rendered a battlefield for the lust and greed of the husband/nation and is sold to the highest bidder. In both cases the fate of the female protagonists (Offred and diamela) is determined by the “dignity” relegated to their bodies based on their roles in copulation, roles that are dictated by the regimes in which they live and later reiterated by other male characters (Professors Pieixoto & Wade and María Chipia,⁶ diamela’s twin brother). In that way, the untraceability of Offred’s existence is projected as is diamela’s “defeat”; nonetheless, I argue that these female protagonists resist this rhetoric through their sexual transgressions (adultery and incest, respectively) and their troubling counternarratives.

In the first section of this article, Witness and *Testimonio*, I explain how the narratives of the female protagonists in Atwood’s and Eltit’s texts place the genre of the *testimonio*⁷ in crisis at the same time that they wreak havoc on master narratives. As thinking subjects, these female protagonists have the potential to de-legitimate male authority’s exclusive claims to knowledge by challenging the discourse that describes the female body as an empty space waiting to be filled, a virgin land desirous of being

husbanded, or a blank page in need of inscription. By integrating into their own texts the discourses that deny the validity of their marginal voices, the testimonies of their female protagonists simultaneously pose resistance to the erasure of their voices (i.e., proof of their existence) and their incorporation into the known. Next, in “Problems of Authentication”: Anthropological Perspective[s], I explore the ways in which Atwood and Eltit prompt the reader to reflect on his/her own ability to read, re-consider the implications of America’s founding fictions, and be “curious”⁸ about the enforced performance of traditional gender roles, thereby dismantling the importance of authenticity as it relates to narrative voice. I use Uma Narayan’s *Dislocating Cultures* and Trinh T. Minh-ha’s *Woman, Native, Other* as theoretical tools to demonstrate how Atwood’s and Eltit’s texts situate some of their characters (as well as their readers) as voyeurs of Fourth World cultures and simultaneously challenge the existence of any objective “anthropological perspective.” Finally, in *Open to the Public: Female Bodies, Female Landscapes*, I conclude with an analysis of how Atwood and Eltit project a new history of the future as a warning signal to contemporary political regimes. In this final section, I demonstrate why we should be more skeptical of the invocation of tradition in domestic and foreign policy in addition to understanding the social, political, and economic implications of these practices.

359

WITNESS AND *TESTIMONIO*

In *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, John Beverley sheds light on the nature of the *testimonio* as a genre, which he defines loosely as “the voice of the subaltern,” a voice that “speaks to us as an ‘I’ that nevertheless stands for a multitude. It affirms not only a singular experience of truth in the face of grand designs of power, but truth itself as singularity” (27). For Beverley, *testimonio* “has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself” (32) and most importantly, “[w]e [as readers] are meant to experience both the speaker and the situations and events recounted as real” (33) as well as develop a feeling of solidarity with this voice (37). Given this definition provided by Beverley and the fact that *testimonio*, as a genre, troubles the distinction between historical and literary texts, between nonfiction and fiction, why do Atwood and Eltit choose to fictionalize or aestheticize the testimonial voices of their narratives? My hypothesis is that they see *testimonio* as a viable and recognizable medium through which to convey the voice of the subaltern at the same time that they want to avoid any easy appropriation of that subaltern experience. Likewise, through fictional *testimonio*, Atwood and Eltit are able to represent a collective experience of exploitation as well as the urgency of the current political climate without putting themselves in danger.

Mary Beth Tierney-Tello, remarking on Eltit’s use of *testimonio* in her works such

as *El Padre Mio* and *El infarto del alma* in her article “Testimony, Ethics, and the Aesthetic in Diamela Eltit,” asserts that while “[u]ndermining the view of *testimonio* as a transparent, affirmative, and authentic representation of the subaltern, the testimonial subjects of Eltit’s texts refuse to be fixed and defy an identitarian politics” (81). Likewise, I would argue that Eltit’s third novel, *El cuarto mundo*, creates a similar aesthetic effect on the reader, in which the fraternal twin narrators, diamela eltit and her brother María Chipia, foretell and carry out the fate of the “sudaca” brotherhood.⁹ In “Translating/Transgressing/Torture...,” from a collective volume titled *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance*, Irene Matthews explains that, contrary to popular belief, *testimonio* does not require one consistent narrative voice and in fact, “there may exist multiple *personas* as well as multiple narrative points-of-view in the final product” (92). In addition, Matthews further elucidates that “in *testimonios*, biographical narrative and social consciousness are presented inside a historical framework; this combination is recognized to have a formal (literary) function as well as an informational content” (91). While not officially considered a *testimonio*, Eltit’s narrative functions much like one because of its *testimonio*-style narration, its claims to truth, and its implicit critique of the current political regime. The fact that Eltit chooses (and I use this verb tentatively) to write under the guise of fictional narrative also bears witness to the danger inherent in *testimonio*, itself, due to its subversive content. Taking into consideration the political climate of the Pinochet regime, this “choice” could be a matter of life or death, especially considering the characteristic “political agenda” of *testimonio* “often includ[es] a denunciation of the present system and an appeal for solidarity and for change” (Matthews 92).

Eltit seems to be responding to at least three dominant discourses in *El cuarto mundo*: the patriarchal discourse of the Pinochet regime (Pratt 18), Spanish colonialism, and U.S. imperialism (Norat 143). According to Mary Louise Pratt, the Pinochet Regime “veía en los valores patriarcales un modo de obtener aquello que no podía lograr por sí mismo: la legitimidad” (19; “saw in patriarchal values a way of obtaining that which it could not achieve by itself: legitimacy”)¹⁰ and mobilized patriarchal discourse by invoking discussions of traditional gender roles (19). In addition, Pratt recognizes that the success of this mobilization relies on the extent to which authorities maintain control over the power to interpret and give meaning to female desire, agency, and epistemologies (18). In *El cuarto mundo*, this interpretive and signifying power over the female protagonist is personified in the voice of her twin brother.

Divided into two parts, Eltit’s novel is narrated by fraternal twins. In the first section, the male twin (who is later called María Chipia by his mother) narrates his own conception as well as that of his twin sister (whose name is written in lowercase in the text to distinguish her as a character from the author: e.g., “diamela eltit”). Since their mother was raped by her husband while in a state of fever, she often feels their presence as antagonistic: “Su existencia sólo era real por la rigurosidad vital de su cuerpo, y por ello nosotros no éramos más que instrumentos de los que ella se había valido para fundar una autofagia. Sentía que su propia creación gestante

la estaba devorando” (26; “Her existence was only real because of the vital rigor of her body, and because of it we were nothing more than instruments which she had made use of to establish her autophagia. She felt that her own gestating creation was devouring her”). At other times the twins’ mother seems apathetic to her children, or “sus sueños bastardos” (95; “her bastard dreams”), and her maternal instincts are revived only when her children are on the brink of death or when she is trying to avoid sexual contact with her husband. Although the twins are sanctioned by their induction into the family, they are ill-conceived and the unintended by-products of domestic violence. The awareness of the circumstances of their birth shames the twins and determines their future as members of a nation of illegitimate children of mixed race, or “sudacas.”

While María Chipia often undermines his own authority in interpreting the events of his life and family dynamics, his narrative is more legible than the grotesque second half, when he turns the narrative over to diamela. In her account, the situation is so dire that the twins, who are diseased, starving, and imprisoned in their own house, eventually lose their sanity. We learn in the part narrated by diamela eltit that, in fact, the world that María Chipia seemed to see so clearly is nothing more than a ruse. In actuality, María Chipia and diamela eltit occupy the space where language breaks down, where the material body (especially the female body) is oppressive in its needs and desires, where sharing a meal only occurs as a simulation, where their gender and sexuality is a performance, and where constant interrogation, surveillance, and voyeurism by their own family members and other “powers that be” leaves them with little room for resistance. The second part ends with diamela eltit giving birth to a child that she conceives with her twin brother, which she refers to as an act of defiance, “una obra sudaca terrible y molesta” (114; “a terrible and bothersome sudaca work”). Although the novel seems to occur in chronological order, its ending suggests an incestuous circularity, especially since diamela eltit’s “niña sudaca” is born on the same date that she, herself, is conceived and at the same moment when the novel comes to its completion. Despite all of the odds against diamela eltit and her twin brother María Chipia—abandonment by their family, being sold-out by their nation, the alleged erasure of their existence by “la nación más poderosa del mundo” (124; “the most powerful nation of the world”), and complete isolation—they resist their annihilation by performing and narrating incest, a socially taboo act.

It is clear from the beginning of the novel that María Chipia understands the space of the womb as rightfully his, since he occupied it first. Repeatedly, he imbues natural processes with larger significance, as if diamela were the primary cause that forced him to leave the safe place of the womb, in the same way that Adam blames Eve for his fall from grace. It becomes very significant, then, that María Chipia is the first to narrate, and that he narrates his own conception as well as that of his twin sister, diamela eltit. The weaknesses that he attributes to his sister are in fact stereotypical critiques of femininity (and Eve, its mythological embodiment): her animality (in that she is “enslaved” by her body), her limited capacity to think, and her propensity

for dissimulation. María Chipia cites diamela's first transgression as "la intromisión a mi espacio" (13; "the intrusion into my space") and later in her gender nonconformance in attempting to leave the womb first: "La violenta acometida terminaba por destruir mis anhelos de armonía en el derrame de la sangre que me envolvía, precedida de un terrible eco. La animalidad de mi hermana llegó a sobrecogerme. Creí que ambos cuerpos iban a destrozarse en la lucha" (26–27; "The violent attack, preceded by a terrible echo, ended by destroying my vehement desires for harmony in the shedding of blood that enveloped me. The animality of my sister began to astound me. I thought that both bodies were going to destroy themselves in the fight"). He justifies diamela's inherent inferiority/weakness because she was conceived second (16)—similar to interpretations made of the Biblical Genesis story of Adam and Eve—and reminds the reader of the subordinate position her body occupies in relation to his own, within the womb and outside of it (28).

362 María Chipia's focus on the movements, attitudes, and behaviors of his mother and his twin sister during this first section reveals his anxiety about possible gender alliances that could work against him. In this way, María Chipia also interprets diamela's childhood development and growth as a conspiracy—for instance, he believes that while he was sick with fever, diamela took advantage of the situation to be the first to speak, a right to an entrance into the symbolic order that he should have enjoyed both as a male and as the first conceived. As he watches his sister's language advance to the point that she begins naming objects, María Chipia resolves to use language as "una poderosa armadura" (38; "powerful armor"), believing that "el habla era un hecho misterioso y trascendente capaz de ordenar el caos que me atravesaba" (38; "speech was a mysterious and transcendent act capable of ordering the chaos that was permeating me"). Upon realizing that it was illusory to believe that language could order the chaos of his real life experience (under dictatorship), María Chipia begins to experiment with language in a playful and superficial way (40).

Apparently, as early as his conception, María Chipia thinks that he sees what is obviously already there. When María Chipia admits to being aware of diamela's opinion that "no había nada natural, sino que la tierra misma estaba construyendo el artificio de un espectáculo" (98; "there wasn't anything natural about it, rather the land itself was constructing the artifice of a spectacle"), he interprets this as mere evidence of her delusions rather than an indication of the need to dig below the surface to discover the truth of their predicament. Yet, the reader is forced to question María Chipia's actual ability to make any objective observations, especially regarding his family situation, when he reveals the inner workings of his thought process: "Ejercí la estricta dimensión del pensar. Antes sólo me debatía entre impresiones que luego transformaba en certezas, sin que nada llegara verdaderamente a sorprenderme" (17; "I exercised my absolute thinking capacity. Before, I only struggled amongst impressions that I then would transform into truths, without anything really taking me by surprise").

Like many of the conquerors of the New World, María Chipia thinks he possesses

a particular capacity for discernment, and that the world offers itself up for his interpretation, like a “starving woman”:

Como un adicto de la mirada, mis ojos no me daban tregua. Las horas transcurrían descifrando movimientos y situaciones. En momentos privilegiados llegaba a una sabiduría tan absoluta que temí ser capaz de descifrar secretos campos jeroglíficos. Nada me interesaba menos, pero parecía que el misterio se ponía delante de mí ofertándose como una mujer hambrienta. (80)

[Addicted to the gaze, my eyes did not give me any rest. I would spend hours deciphering movements and situations. In privileged moments I attained a knowledge so absolute that I feared being able to decipher secret hieroglyphics. Nothing interested me less, but it seemed that the mystery presented itself in front of me, offering itself up like a starving woman.]

Here, the “starving woman” could be a textual reference to diamela eltit’s offering of herself to her brother, through incest, to appease her insatiable desire for sexual pleasure. And, this is how he interprets her actions, very literally. Most likely, however, the “starving woman” eludes María Chipia’s capacity to interpret. The “starving woman,” then, could represent the “sudaca” woman’s literal starvation due to economic conditions that force her to prostitute herself, as well as the sale (or selling out) of the “sudaca” brotherhood’s labor to the world at discount prices.¹¹ This interpretation seems reasonable as the bleak future for Chilean women resurfaces through their mother’s fears of dying alone:

Mi madre se veía en el oprobio de la pérdida y del abandono. Imaginaba legiones de mujeres cargando a sus llorosos hijos a través de montes y pantanos. Veía manadas de huérfanos hambrientos, entregados a diversos tráfico carnales. Se ponía, ella misma, en la situación de una anciana reumática y desquiciada, esperando la muerte en el asilo de las afueras de la ciudad. (88)

[My mother saw herself shamed by loss and abandonment. She imagined legions of women carrying their weeping children through the mountains and marshes. She saw herds of starving orphans, devoted to diverse traffickings of the flesh. She placed herself in the position of a rheumatic, crazy old lady, waiting for death in the asylum in the outskirts of the city.]

As their mother envisions it, the displaced women and children of this diseased nation are left with only two options: “traffickings of the flesh” or insanity.

In fact, diamela’s narrative reveals her own fear of abandonment by her brother and the lengths that she would go to in order to avoid “el final definitivo” (148; “the definitive ending”). Here the story repeats itself as this fear of abandonment has been handed down to diamela via her mother, which could point to a larger problem in gender relations when the family is placed in crisis because Third and Fourth World labor has been cheapened.¹² Furthermore, diamela reveals how she consciously constructed María Chipia’s subjectivity, as a discoverer, in order to keep her brother in the home, even to the point of welcoming her own violent destruction:

[C]onstruí para él una interioridad en la que no me reconocía, la interioridad que desde siempre él esperaba, tibia, sumisa y llena de orificios, esperando que él me destruyera. Representé en la pareja adulta la pieza más frágil y devastada. Fue relativamente fácil levantar un misterio común y conocido; fue, también, muy simple observar el placer por la destrucción. Me dejé entrapar en una debilidad que, en verdad, no tenía y hablé, hablé de sucesivos terrores de mi ser fuera de control y preparé la escena para ser abandonada. (139)

[I constructed for him an interiority in which I didn't recognize myself, the interiority that he always hoped for, tepid, submissive, and full of orifices, expecting that he would destroy me. I represented, of the pair, the most fragile and devastated part. It was relatively easy to sustain a common and well-known mystery; it was, also, very simple to observe the pleasure in destruction. I let myself be entrapped in a weakness that, in truth, I didn't have and I spoke, I spoke of the successive terrors of my being out of control and I prepared the scene in order to be abandoned.]

364

This passage reflects diamela's construction of artifice—in terms of her gender and the writing process—thus, revealing her resistance to being understood solely in relation to her brother's narration of her, at the same time making reference to both the act of writing her own *testimonio* as well as the function of Diamela Eltit's (the author's) construction of artifice in writing *El cuarto mundo*.

Given the physical circumstances of her conception and the significance imposed on her body, diamela seems to be most frustrated with the biology that determines her defeat. As her brother's narrative begins, he predicts the end: “será irrevocable la derrota” (9; “defeat will be irrevocable”). Indeed, María Chipia is the one who constantly reminds diamela of the limits of her sex and, in turn, diamela describes her own body as “la cárcel del origen” (135; “the prison of origin”), accusing María Chipia of acting as her “carcelero más feroz” (74; “fiercest jailer”). Furthermore, diamela discloses that María Chipia's narrative, which lays out the originary moments that determined their destruction, reduces the transgressiveness of their sexual acts based on the virtue of their bodies. That is, he diminishes the force of their copula by claiming that their feverish existence as members of the “sudaca” race make them capable of one of the most transgressive and taboo acts—incest. As diamela explains: “María ensaya, ensaya un discurso redentor de las culpas, un discurso en el que transa el peso de nuestra historia. Ensaya su discurso y en sus palabras disminuye el rigor de nuestra hazaña y la dignidad de nuestros cuerpos” (137; “María rehearses, rehearses a speech redeeming us of guilt, a speech in which he negotiates the burden of our story/history. He rehearses his speech and in his words he diminishes the severity of our deed and the dignity of our bodies”). Ultimately, as diamela describes, “María Chipia está haciendo un discurso consagrado a sí mismo utilizando todas las voces que lo habitan, un discurso a sí mismo y al niño” (137; “María Chipia is making a speech dedicated to himself using all the voices that inhabit him, a discourse to himself and to the child”). Here, diamela elucidates the motive behind María Chipia's

discourse as a way for him to reconcile his feelings of guilt and pass on his story to the future, his progeny, thus denying the agency, lust, pleasure, violence, and suffering in their sexual encounter. The revelation later in the text that María Chipia is a transvestite and diamela's claim that María Chipia has multiple voices that inhabit him, forces the reader to place his narrative under further scrutiny. In other words, we remain unsure whether or not the voices that are in María Chipia's head are of his own invention. Does his relationship with his sister really represent the relationship between the two irreconcilable parts of himself—his gender and his sex, or does what he reports actually describe their relationship?

The answer remains unclear, but the artifices that both genders construct surrounding their sexual encounter reveal that what María Chipia often interpreted as the figurative or imagined sufferings of diamela, was actually, to diamela, very physically real. Here Eltit highlights the link between figurative and actual violence. For example, while María Chipia recognizes that diamela “[p]ensó que la familia quedaba atrás” (98; “[t]hought that the family remained behind [them]”) during their incest, diamela's account claims that she is actually physically carrying the weight of her diseased mother's body on her back (120). When María Chipia narrates his first sexual experience, he posits himself as somewhat passive and he considers his later participation in incest as a seemingly nonviolent act, in which diamela, driven by “lujuria,” or lust, offers herself up to him; however, diamela refers to the incestuous act as María Chipia taking “possession” of her, which might imply some kind of initiation on his part (94; 113). Later on, in diamela's account, María Chipia's sexuality becomes bestial; he seems to be ruled by the insatiable hunger of his own body and cannot handle the shame of their situation. Diamela, on the other hand, is resolved that their incest will be inevitable and incessant and her pregnant self is actually positioned on top of María Chipia, “exigiendo a María Chipia que recomience” (142; “demanding that María Chipia begin again”), demonstrating her female agency and sexual desire. María Chipia's narrative recounts his family's fever and gives evidence of some physical abuse, but diamela's narrative gives a full account of the entire family's bodily suffering, which is often manifested through blood and pus. As a result, she provides the reader with an even more unsettling *testimonio*, replete with bodies of evidence.

365

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* also disorients and destabilizes the reader on the level of language when she informs the reader that the terms have changed from the very beginning: “[w]e slept in what had once been the gymnasium” (3). This beginning problematizes what will come, because this space that has been the site of sport, leisure, and recreation can no longer be understood in the same way—instead, it requires a new vocabulary that only our narrator can provide us with. The reader learns about the plight of the Handmaids through the female protagonist Offred, who is the only voice that survives to represent the experience of an entire class of women. The fact that Offred, whose name signifies that she is a possession “of” Commander “Fred,” refuses to reveal her real name makes it difficult to judge the authenticity of

her story. As we continue reading, we are faced with an increasing probability that this story would never reach us from a woman who is denied access to reading and writing under the Gilead regime and where, at least for women, playing *Scrabble* is considered a federal offense.

366 Through Offred's narrative we discover that she is a member of the first generation of a class of Handmaids, who act as vessels for Gilead's progeny and whose bodies are pre-scripted for the sole act of conception. Separated from their friends, families, and children, the first generation of Handmaids can still remember their former lives, a fact that poses a major threat to the regime's legitimacy. Accordingly, the new society, which is a projected future of the United States based strictly on the Puritan principles of its founding, is designed to make them forget their former freedoms and rights by denying them access to the written word in all forms and preventing their communication with those who would give substance to their memories. The Handmaids, stripped of their roles as mothers, must surrender any of their offspring to the possession of those who ceremoniously rape them, i.e., the Commanders and their Wives. The narrator guards her former name as a powerful secret¹³—endowing her self with the sole authority to narrate her story. Powerfully, she recounts the erasure of her existence by the oppressive regime that, at the same time, relies on and demands the presence of her body for its continuance. Aunt Lydia, a member of a somewhat militant group of middle-aged women in charge of re-educating and initiating fertile women into the class of Handmaids, provides us with the governing principle for a Handmaid's proper conduct: "To be seen—to be *seen*—is to be—her [Aunt Lydia's] voice trembled—penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable" (38). This rendering of Handmaids' bodies discursively virgin/inviolable and the covering of their faces and bodies makes them violable and discoverable is paradoxical as they appear to the world as happy and willing participants in their own subjection.

Offred obviously feels the effects of this discourse in her ambivalence regarding her position as a Handmaid when she admits, "nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for" (121). The pre-scripted responses for her interactions with other women, especially other Handmaids, leaves little room for opinion or conversation that does not remind her of her "choice" to sacrifice control over her body for the sake of the nation, thus obscuring the fact that her choices, themselves, were limited. Responses such as "Blessed be the fruit," "May the Lord open," "Praise be," "Which I receive with Joy" express the "desire" of the Handmaids to be made into vessels, willing accomplices in their own rape (25, 26). The responses "yes" or "no" are forbidden, as that would indicate an opinion on the part of the Handmaid as a thinking subject that would be incommensurate with maintaining her position as a "worthy" vessel. Indeed, as Offred observes, Handmaids are to perform no other function than breeding (desire, pleasure, and love are out of the question): "[w]e are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (176). As a result, playing this role well serves to authenticate the "way of seeing," or landscape, that the Commanders have projected onto female bodies.

Likewise, Offred's inability to characterize her relationship with the Commander is a reflection of the conflicts between the discourse that construes her position as choice, her memory of the relationships before the regime, and her need to relate to another person: "I ought to feel hatred for this man. I know I ought to feel it, but it isn't what I do feel. What I feel is more complicated than that. I don't know what to call it. It isn't love" (76). What remains clear is that neither the memory of her former language, nor the pre-scripted language, body movements, and gender performance of the current regime, enables her to adequately express herself. This conflict resurfaces at the level of grammar as Offred has particular difficulty reconciling the past tense with the present tense in her text. The fact that she remains unsure as to whether any of the people from her former life are still alive or whether they live on only in her memory could help explain this inconsistency.

Offred ultimately questions herself as a qualified reader because her vision of the world is structurally limited by the blinders she is forced to wear and the landscape constructed for her is reflective of the worldview she should have. Regardless, Offred demonstrates that she is still able to adapt to her situation and resist a system that encourages her to remain ignorant: "[g]iven our wings, our blinders, it's hard to look up, hard to get the full view, of the sky, of anything. But we can do it, a little at a time, a quick move of the head, up and down, to the side and back. We have learned to see the world in gasps" (40). Understandably, she fears falling prey to her systematically created myopia and struggles to remind herself of the need to maintain "perspective"—literally, by taking more control over her visual frame and intellectually, by forcing herself to remember her previous life and by uncovering information about the system that oppresses her (185).

367

And while the home, the Handmaid's dwelling place, is constructed in terms of the moral code that the Handmaid should uphold in order to be a good "vessel," she soon discovers that "heretical landscapes"¹⁴ do exist, especially when her Commander takes her to the brothel where sterile women were given the "choice" to prostitute themselves or be shipped off to the Colonies, Gilead's dumpsite. There Offred finds her best friend Moira, the staunchest feminist she knew, resigned to her own forced prostitution. As a result of witnessing this other landscape, Offred is able to view her exploitation in light of the varying degrees of exploitation that women experience, which allows her to feel more connected in solidarity with other women.

Moreover, Offred makes a conscious effort to remind herself of the need to distinguish between objects and people, which she finds difficult because people are often regarded as useable and discardable objects—those incompatible with the current regime are publicly reprimanded, hanged, or sent to the Colonies. In contemplating the meaning of the redness of the tulip and the redness of human blood, she tells herself: "Each thing is valid and really there. It is through a field of such valid objects that I must pick my way, every day and in every way. I put a lot of effort into making such distinctions. I need to make them. I need to be very clear, in my own mind" (44–45). Offred's narrative reveals her struggle to maintain mental autonomy and

her resistance to the pervasiveness of the rhetoric that denies the possibility of her independent thought.

Offred, like *diamela*, is frustrated that her biology determines her destiny and for the sake of her own survival, she must perform her gender, that is, make herself into an object (a womb, a vessel) for the Commander's use during the ceremony: "I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born" (82; 86). Her inability to choose the gender role pre-scripted for her parallels the difficulty Offred faces in narrating her own story, or "composing" herself, which would imply some sense of control over her experience. But, on the other hand, telling her story seems crucial to her survival and the preservation of the historical experience of the group of women she represents:

368

I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.
If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.
It isn't a story I'm telling.
It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. (52)

While she may have some agency in her story's reconstruction, her history is dictated by the Gilead regime. However, what this passage highlights is that *any* story that she tells is ultimately a reconstruction and that it remains impossible to fully apprehend or signify her experience.

Offred, in her refusal to reveal her real name and by offering multiple versions of the same story, resists verification and a singular interpretation of her "tale" at the same time that her *testimonio* exposes the conditions of her erasure. As she recounts her sexual encounter with Nick, which she narrates three times, she remains dissatisfied with her narrative ability to capture the entire event or the whole of her experience. Her only resistance emerges in the form of a copula, as demonstrated both by the narration of her story and her affair with Nick. As she tries to make sense of her past and present identity, the gratification of her desire to touch and be touched becomes crucial to solidifying her own existence: "Can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around? Without it I too am disembodied" (132). Critics¹⁵ have argued that Atwood's inclusion of a romance into the text undercuts its potential for doing feminist work, since it reinscribes the man as the hero who acts as the damsel in distress's salvation. I would propose, however, that Offred's affair is subversive in the way that it enables her to reclaim her own body, express her own desire, and "think of [her] body as an instrument, of pleasure, [...] or an implement for the accomplishment of [her] will" (95). Furthermore, the stakes involved better measure the transgressiveness of her acts: she exchanges the condition of being spiritually dead but physically safe for the opportunity to feel alive while risking death.

“PROBLEMS OF AUTHENTICATION”: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE[S]

In addition to challenging the patriarchal discourses of their respective oppressive regimes, both Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Eltit's *El cuarto mundo* challenge the usefulness of maintaining an objective “anthropological perspective.” The “anthropological perspective,” as outlined in Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminisms*, relies on two principal assumptions: “‘It is important for mainstream Westerners to take an interest in Other cultures,’ and ‘It is important that this interest not involve moral criticism of Other cultures by mainstream Westerners’” (125). While the “anthropological perspective” purports only to give an objective, “authentic” account of non-Western cultures, without imposing any moral judgment, Narayan highlights the ways adopting this perspective can become highly problematic:

The commitment to refrain from any critical engagement with issues affecting “Third-World cultures” is no more conducive to an adequate representation of these cultures than is misrepresentation. Granting Third-World cultures, or the views of Third-World subjects, a blanket immunity from criticism might function to assuage mainstream Westerners’ guilt over misrepresentation and hegemony, but it does very little to politically engage with the problems of individuals and groups who suffer injustice and mistreatment within these contexts. (150)

369

This observation proves particularly important for feminists who engage with the Third World and the Fourth World in their work. According to Narayan, then, the argument that cultural critique is only valid if it comes from those who occupy “authentic insider” positions proves false. In fact, “authenticity” should not be the only basis of cultural critique, as the “anthropological perspective” assumes.

Trinh, in her turn, questions the conventions of disclosing anthropological research during conferences where the objects of study are usually not present, which inevitably results in what she calls “scientific gossip.”¹⁶ “Scientific gossip,” according to Trinh, “takes place under relatively intimate conditions and mostly without witnesses; hence the gossipers’ need to act in solidarity, leaning on and referring to each other for more credibility” (68). Instead, Trinh argues, researchers should perform their research as if they are “speaking nearby” the subjects they are observing and they must “acknowledge the irreducibility of the object studied and the impossibility of delivering its presence, reproducing it *as it is* in truth, reality, and otherness” (101; 70).

Atwood, by appending the proceedings of The Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies (a history conference) to the end of her text reveals how the academy has the power to render authoritative certain official documents while trivializing others who represent more marginal positions. As Enloe explains, the trivialization of violence (domestic and other) done to women is often justified in at least four different ways: “[t]he gendered violence can be explained away as inevitable”; the occurrence

of the violence is insignificant or “numerically inconsequential”; the importance of addressing the issue of domestic violence is minimized by “engaging in comparisons” with larger more important issues; or “the credibility of the messenger” is placed into question (74). In *The Handmaid’s Tale* the dogma of Gilead and the keynote speakers at the academic conference employ a combination of these techniques that make light of the violence done to the Handmaids.

370 Professor James Darcy Pieixoto, in his conference presentation entitled “Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (which is to be read as part of the novel) consults historical records in order to confirm the narrator’s existence. In order to (in)authenticate the narrator’s voice, Professor Pieixoto and his co-author Professor Wade look for facts that corroborate the details she gives concerning the powerful men of the regime, and nostalgically wish for more information to understand the inner workings of Gilead. Pieixoto laments, “[s]he could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire, had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy. What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of print-out from Waterford’s private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has deigned to vouchsafe us” (393). Here Pieixoto and Wade participate in the privileging of men’s experiences of history, with the assumption that they are the “prime actors” and their stories are, therefore, the most important to recuperate (see Enloe 102). They are looking for “hard” data and the inner workings of the empire, not the testimony of a woman who experienced the real effects and violence of the empire itself.¹⁷ While Pieixoto and Wade recognize the systematic oppression she experienced as probable and agree to the likelihood of her belonging to the first generation of Handmaids, it is difficult for them to confirm with any exactitude the authenticity of her narrative, which they refer to as “crumbs.”

Because they cannot authenticate her voice, she becomes more and more irrelevant to the discussion, which turns to the circumstances leading to the discovery and transcription of her narrative. We learn that the source for the tale told by the Handmaid is not, in fact, a written text, but a recording of a woman’s voice onto a series of cassette tapes.¹⁸ Pieixoto and Wade also note that the order of the tapes is not specified and only after grueling hours of study in the lab are they able to make sense of it, titling their discovery and product of labor *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The title, seemingly harmless, in effect trivializes the plight of Offred and the rest of the Handmaids, as Pieixoto reveals Wade’s intention to create a pun: tale/tail, which also undermines and belittles the veracity of Offred’s account (381). The audience’s resultant laughter further reinforces their own collaboration in preserving a forum in which scientific gossip is acceptable. Moreover, these acts of naming Offred’s text, transcribing her voice from the tapes, imposing on them a “logical” order, and later inauthenticating her voice parallel the violent erasure and silencing Offred experiences in the Gilead regime. Pieixoto and Wade, with their “anthropological perspective,” once again excuse the violence imposed on the female body by claiming it as outside their domain, rendering them unable to judge:

[W]e must be cautious about passing moral judgment upon the Gileadeans. Surely we have learned by now that such judgments are of necessity culture-specific. Also, Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our job is not to censure but to understand. (383)

This quote confirms Offred's conclusion that "[m]aybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it," thus perpetuating a guiltless Gilead regime that remains free from judgment (174). The historians' stance is that they are unauthorized to make value judgments on other cultures and must appreciate and respect differences. Their logic, however, is somewhat problematic, as many feminist scholars have pointed out, considering that domestic violence is categorized under "internal affairs," and therefore often overlooked in terms of human rights violations.¹⁹ Nonetheless, I would argue that their deposition *does* imply a certain value judgment: it establishes the importance of proving the authenticity of experience in order to integrate that experience into the realm of the known. This further supports the argument that academics who take on the "anthropological perspective" and assert their own objectivity, also run the risk of imposing the same silences onto marginalized groups as do those who oppress them.

371

In addition, Atwood uses Offred's encounter with the Japanese tourists as a further example of the effects of the "anthropological perspective." Upon meeting the Japanese tourists, Offred is scandalized by the amount of skin the women show, realizing how easily Gileadean social norms have been ingrained into her mind and shaped her initial reaction to these women. However, she readily makes the connection a few seconds later, admitting, "I used to dress like that. That was freedom" (38). Although the tourists would like to document their authentic encounter with the natives of Gilead, they are forbidden to photograph the Handmaids. Once again, the Eyes of the Gilead Regime freely act as interpreters of female desire and female bodies, effectively protecting the regime from criticism by masking its exploitation of women by framing it in terms of tradition and personal preference. Accordingly, Offred predicts, "He'll be telling them that the women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation" (39). Because the Handmaids cannot speak for themselves, the Eyes interpret the culture for the foreign observer, reminding him/her to be respectful of differences and, in the process, they prevent the possibility for political engagement on either side. When asked, "Are you happy?" by one of the tourists, Offred has no choice but to answer in the affirmative (39).

Likewise, in *El cuarto mundo*, diamela eltit, the female narrator, resists the appropriation of her work by those who adopt the "anthropological perspective" by revealing her intention to "hacer una obra sudaca terrible y molesta" (114; "to create a terrible and bothersome *sudaca* work"), which refers to both the act of incest and the act of writing; in this way, Eltit represents the "sudaca" experience under an ambiguous light, at times rendering it incomprehensible, and in many instances, alienating

the reader with its obscenity.²⁰ Indeed, in “La navegación de la escritura,” Eltit herself remarked that her political intention in creating literary texts is “conectada con la incertidumbre” (620; “connected with uncertainty”). As Tierney-Tello argues, Eltit presents the reader with the aesthetics of the “sudaca” experience and instead of creating an empathetic relationship with the reader, “[w]hat Eltit seems to strive for is a solidarity *through* the aesthetic, a solidarity that comes about not through pity or a false identity politics but through a recognition that the subject is a producer of culture, of a haunting, disturbingly powerful language that gestures at the psychopathology wreaked by the political violence of authoritarian culture” (84–85).

372 Ultimately, Eltit situates the reader as a voyeur (along with María Chipia, the rest of the family, the authoritarian regime, and “la nación más poderosa del mundo” (127; “the most powerful nation in the world”) and necessarily implicates him/her in the plight of the “sudacas” in *El cuarto mundo*.²¹ Voyeurism, as Trinh acknowledges, is characteristic of certain anthropological interpretations of alterity: “[u]nder the general heading of science and knowledge of man, there emerged a form of legal voyeurism appraised by the gossipers as a great advance toward a personal identification with the natives observed” (69). Diamela, the narrator, brings the reader’s attention to his/her own voyeurism in her letter to María Chipia, describing her position as “víctima de un turbulento complot político en contra de nuestra raza” (129; “victim of the turbulent political conspiracy against our race”). Although addressed more specifically to María Chipia, the use of the “tú” (“you” informal) form stands out, since it is *only* used within dialogue in the rest of the text. She writes: “[c]uando mi madre afirmó que jugaban el juego completo, yo sentí que no te perdonaría, pues entendí que tú formabas parte del complot. La otra tarde te sorprendí mirando extasiado por el hueco de la ventana, y cuando te pregunté qué estabas mirando, me contestaste, mintiendo, que medías la densidad de la luz” (130; “when my mother affirmed that they were playing the whole game, I felt that I would never forgive you, since I understood that you formed part of the conspiracy. The other afternoon I caught you enraptured, peering through the hole in the window, and when I asked you what you were looking at, you told me, lying, that you were measuring the density of the light”). In this particular selection, diamela accuses María Chipia and, indirectly, the reader of participating in a plot against her. Interestingly enough, when he is caught in his own voyeurism, María Chipia defends himself by claiming that he is performing a scientific experiment, measuring the density of light—a critique of the “anthropological perspective” that justifies its own voyeurism on the basis of science. Here Eltit suggests that there is no objective “anthropological perspective” that the reader can take, no authentic truth about the Fourth World experience that s/he can appropriate, except his/her own participation in the formation of its conditions.

What is more, diamela points out that it is María Chipia’s cowardice that motivates his betrayal, claiming that he has acted solely out of fear, and even suggesting his (and by implication, the reader’s) collusion with the most powerful nation in the world: “parece que la multiplicidad de tus sueños te acercara a la nación más famosa

y poderosa del mundo” (130; “it seems as if the multiplicity of your dreams would get you closer to the most famous and powerful nation of the world”). However, this accusation becomes even more complicated when diamela admits that “[p]orque tú eres yo misma, conozco cada uno de tus conocimientos por muy distantes que nos encontremos, pues ambos sabemos la forma única de frenar nuestra extinción y la humillación a nuestra raza” (130; “because you are myself, I know everything you know regardless of how far away from each other we find ourselves, so we both know the only way to prevent our extinction and the humiliation of our race”). In this way she blurs the boundaries between her “self” and her “brother,” between her “self” and the reader, who are both privy to a special knowledge that will prevent the extinction of the “sudaca” race. But the fact that incestuous reproduction seems to be their only way out forces the reader to consider what structural changes could have prevented this dire situation. Nonetheless, Eltit’s text achieves what Trinh proposes as an alternative to writing from this “anthropological perspective”: to “make of writing a site where opposites lose their essential differences and are restored to the void by their own interchangeability” (48).

373

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: FEMALE BODIES, FEMALE LANDSCAPES

The previous analyses have demonstrated how bodies, especially female bodies, become metaphorical and actual sites for the construction of national projects.²² Furthermore, both Atwood’s and Eltit’s references to foundational moments of the colonial period mock the tradition in which the role of male and female bodies in the copula—or what they do—are reflective of an essential nature—or who they are. But the question remains, why do these postmodern, postcolonial contemporary women writers allude to foundational moments of the New World in their fiction? I suggest that both Atwood and Eltit use the colonial period as a point of reference in order to expose the dangers of the increasing militarization of governments, the further expansion of U.S. imperialism, and a trend towards re-valORIZING (and enforcing) traditional values. In addition, they expose the ways in which the rhetoric of Reagan and Pinochet that called for a return to the heteronormative reproductive family, encouraged women to reclaim traditional feminine roles, and relegated women back into “their” domestic spaces is also founded upon violence.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood references Puritan ideals through Gileadean rhetoric, in which the female body (along with God, Himself) is considered a national resource, which becomes property of the state, and therefore must be guarded with the utmost care and surveillance. By creating a copulation ceremony, the Gilead regime claims to be protecting its female citizens from random acts of sexual violence and abuse, but ultimately restricts women’s freedom to choose their partners. Ironically, the former threats of random acts of sexual violence are replaced with systematic

ones that are framed as a woman's duty to her nation. Within this framework, the dignity of the female body is understood in terms of the woman's willingness to open her self up to receive the gift of life. Her reproductive success is, therefore, an outward sign of her "womanness" and of God's favor, conditions that are both unstable and unpredictable. As a result, the use-value of women is reduced to their reproductive capacity, and they become disposable objects—given that "Unwomen" are dumped like toxic waste in the Colonies. According to David Coad, Gilead bears striking similarities to the "fundamentalist New Right Moral Majority of the 1980s in the United States" (63). Ryan Edwardson also remarks that in Canada, "many were increasingly alarmed by American actions, including the irrationalism of McCarthyism [...], the increase in American militarism and the pressure on Canada to adopt nuclear weapons" (Edwardson 133). Atwood (also a social activist) was opposed to the Reagan administration's increasing militarization of the U.S. government and its re-valorization (and enforcement) of traditional values (more specifically, the maintenance of a pro-family, anti-abortion stance associated with evangelical Christianity).²³ *The Handmaid's Tale*, therefore, predicts the potential consequences of returning to our Puritan roots as the basis for traditional American values.

374

Just as the copulation ceremony is the organizing principle of Gileadean society in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Eltit's *El cuarto mundo* begins with rape, a rape that becomes the defining moment for the future of the "sudaca" race. Because the twins' feverish mother does not resist her own rape, she is therefore blamed for her own degraded condition and the suffering of her children. Gisela Norat remarks that this rape serves to "inscribe (Spanish) male aggression towards the (indigenous) female as a reminder of Latin American national origin" (144).²⁴ In addition, Eltit repeatedly references Spanish colonialism and the oppressive nature of the Spanish Inquisition. For example, María Chipia is the name of a woman persecuted by the Inquisition; María de Alava performs the role of an inquisitor (118); the mother's lover (as compared to her husband) is referred to as "un conquistador de carne y hueso" (101; "a conqueror in flesh and blood"). In addition, Eltit employs the racial term, "sudaca," a derogatory term used by Spaniards to refer to Latin Americans, in order to describe the family she narrates. As Norat explains, "[t]he negative connotation that 'sudaca' carries in the land of the Spanish colonizer stems not merely from a geographical vanquished 'Sud América,' but a genealogical territory where Spanish and Indian blood forged the mestizo half breed" (144). Ultimately, the use of the copula as a "foundational fiction" of Latin America performs the same rhetorical function that María Chipia does in order to lessen his guilt; the severity of the acts committed against the "sudacas" are lessened due to the "degraded" conditions of their bodies.

According to Norat, "this profound 'sudaca' dissatisfaction voices anti-imperialist as much as antimilitary sentiments in a Chile where national and armed forces ousted a democratically elected government with the aid of Yankee intelligentsia and capital because the United States vied to protect the foreign investments of North American businesses" (145). Likewise, María de Alava, the twins' younger sister, tells

us that “la nación más poderosa cambiaba de nombre cada siglo y resurgía con una nueva vestidura. Afirmó que sólo la fraternidad podía poner en crisis a esa nación” (124; “the most powerful nation changed its name every century and reappeared in new vestments. She affirmed that only brotherhood could put that nation in crisis”). Here, the most powerful nation in the world could be a reference to Spanish colonialism or American imperialism as María de Alava calls for Latin Americans to unite in resisting their oppression by the First World. As mentioned previously, Pinochet had opened up the Chilean labor force to the world market, severely impairing working class wages; he has also been criticized for selling Chile’s best natural resources to foreign investors. This could explain why Eltit ends her narrative with such a dystopic vision, in which everything is sold (even diamela’s “niña sudaca”) and everyone is sold out, including Chilean citizens:

Se vende el trigo, el maíz, los sauzales, a un precio irrisorio, junto a los jóvenes sudacas que han sembrado. En venta los campos de la ciudad sudaca. En venta el sudor. Un comercio histérico chilla a los compradores, quienes astutamente bajan los precios y compran hasta a los vendedores. El dinero caído del cielo vuelve al cielo y los vendedores venden incluso aquello que no les pertenece. (158–159)

375

[Wheat, corn, entire groves of willow trees are sold at ridiculous prices, together with the young *sudacas* that have planted them. On sale: the countrysides of the *sudaca* city. On sale: sweat. A hysterical commerce shrieks at buyers, who astutely lower the prices and even buy the vendors. The money fallen from the sky returns to the sky and the vendors sell even that which does not belong to them.]

However, this “selling out” occurs not only on the level of production, but also on the level of reproduction: “El dinero caído del cielo entra directo por los genitales y las voces ancianas se entregan a un adulterio desenfrenado” (159; “The money fallen from the sky enters directly through the genitals and the ancient voices surrender to an unbridled adultery”). What is more, the fact that the reader has most likely purchased, or has the power to purchase, *El cuarto mundo*, or what Eltit refers to as her “niña sudaca” (159; “*sudaca* girl”) marks his/her complicity to a greater extent.

In *Woman, Native, Other* Trinh remarks that anthropological writing should be understood as science fiction, rather than be accepted as scientific fact, due to the inability of language to approximate the authentic. Therefore, for Trinh, the “anthropological perspective’s” claim to do so proves illusory. It seems fitting, then, that both Atwood and Eltit would use fiction, if not science fiction *tout court*, in order to interrogate the “anthropological perspective.” Ultimately, both Atwood and Eltit problematize the genesis landscape of a primal scene and its primacy as they ridicule sexual intercourse, especially rape, as the necessary site for nation building by highlighting the dehumanizing effect of their respective “foundational fictions.” As such, Atwood and Eltit incite the reader to become more “curious” about the social, political and economic implications of certain sexual and reproductive ideologies for women in human history. In *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a*

New Age of Empire, feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe observes “it takes resources and access to be ‘heard’ when and where it matters” (20). We never know, according to Enloe, whether by not “listening carefully” (3) enough, we could inadvertently become “complicit in the violence or in the oppression of others” (4). Atwood and Eltit remind us that it is our duty, as critics, to remain “curious” about these voices when they reach us, even when they are (in)authenticated and fictionalized, so that in our aims to establish cultural understanding or to perform cultural critique we remember that the search for authenticity is never neutral and should not be the only measure of truth.

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377

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NOTES

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1. When I refer to “anthropologies” or the “anthropological perspective” in this article, it is not my intention to refer to the field of anthropology as it is currently practiced. Instead, I wish to designate a particular way of approaching literary texts that is disengaged and acritical but also operates under the assumption that texts provide an unmediated and authentic access to the truth of an “other’s” experience. I use this notion of anthropology precisely because *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *El cuarto mundo* dramatize the particular contentions that Trinh T. Minh-ha and Uma Narayan have with certain anthropological approaches to “other” cultures.
2. Annette Kolodny remarks that “when America finally produced a pastoral literature of her own, that literature hailed the essential femininity of the terrain in a way European pastoral never had, explored the historical consequences of its central metaphor in a way European pastoral had never dared, and, from the first, took its metaphors as literal truths” (6). Kolodny calls this “yearning to know and respond to the landscape as feminine [...] the uniquely American ‘pastoral impulse’” (8). While Kolodny’s text covers geographically the U.S. and linguistically English texts, many of her arguments are applicable to the Americas as a whole. Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* takes a step in this direction.
3. Eltit’s text can be best understood in relation to its title, *El cuarto mundo* or *The Fourth World*, as the female narrator, diamela eltit, is doubly oppressed compared to her “*sudaca*” brother (who is called María Chipia), “lagging even further behind the already disadvantaged ‘Third World’” of Latin America that he represents (Norat 148). Gisela Norat defines “Fourth World” as “a further subdivision of the ‘Third World’; which usually identifies the technologically less advanced nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Generally characterized by very weak and largely agrarian economies, poorly fed, rapidly growing, and illiterate populations, these nations typically have unstable governments, and until recently were mostly controlled by Western nations through some form of colonialism” (148). This term has also been applied to racialized subgroups within Third World countries that experience similar economic, political, and social struggles.
4. This term, “foundational fiction,” is taken from the title of Doris Sommer’s book, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. However, my intention here is to draw attention to the fact that the discourse of discovery does not necessarily provide an accurate account of the actual event of discovery, but rather that it constructs a “history of the future” (a title that many millennial works written during the colonial period share), and therefore its inevitable re-performance.
5. As McClintock observes, “[a]ll too often, Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its ‘secrets’ into a visible, male science of the surface” (23). This epistemological approach is particularly understood in terms of gender and sexual tropes, resonating with the description of rape, in which the male forces the female to reveal her mysteries and many “discoverers,” colonizers, or *conquistadores* explained their encounters with the New World in a similar highly sexualized language.
6. Although we learn that diamela’s twin brother is first named after his father, he is referred to later and throughout the text as María Chipia, a name that his mother gives him shortly after his birth. He reports: “Mi madre, solapadamente, me miró y dijo que yo era igual a María Chipia, que yo era ella. Su mano afilada recorrió mi cara y dijo: ‘Tú eres María Chipia’” (29; “My mother, slyly, looked at me and said that I was identical to María Chipia, that I was her. Her slender hand ran across my face and she said: ‘You are María Chipia.’”). Diamela Eltit’s choice to give her male narrator a name designated for a female could be understood by taking into account her observation that the condition of being feminine is often degraded and, therefore, implying that María Chipia has something in common

with his twin sister. Eltit writes: “Si a nivel simbólico, lo femenino es aquello oprimido por el poder central, me parece lícito, en primera instancia, extender esa categoría a todos aquellos grupos que compartan esa condición, pues la condición de desamparo—ya a nivel simbólico, ya a nivel material—no es privativa sólo del cuerpo (social y biológico) de las mujeres.” (628-629; “If at the symbolic level, the feminine is that which is oppressed by the central power, it seems to be permissible, first of all, to extend that category to all groups that share that condition of being forsaken—on symbolic and material levels—and it is not exclusive to only the social and biological bodies of women”) (“La navegación de la escritura: márgenes e incertidumbres”).

7. According to John Beverley, “The word *testimonio* in Spanish carries the connotation of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense—*dar testimonio* means to testify, to bear truthful witness. Testimonio’s ethical and epistemological authority derives from the fact that we are meant to presume that its narrator is someone who has lived in his or her person, or indirectly through the experiences of friends, family, neighbors, or significant others, the events and experiences that he or she narrates” (3). Beverley also defines *testimonio* in generic terms as “a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience” (30-31).
8. Inspired by Enloe’s *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*, I refer to her theoretical approach to feminist work, that of maintaining curiosity, which I have used throughout my article. She states that “One of the starting points of feminism is taking women’s lives seriously. ‘Seriously’ implies listening carefully, digging deep, developing a long attention span, being ready to be surprised. Taking women—all sorts of women, in disparate times and places—seriously” (3).
9. “Sudaca” literally means South American, a shortening of “Sudamérica.” It is a derogatory term used by Spaniards to refer to Latin Americans, often an indication of lower class and/or inferior racial background.
10. Unless stated otherwise, translations throughout are mine. In my translations of Eltit’s novel, I have tried to maintain the linguistic ambiguity of the original.
11. According to Mary Louise Pratt, in the 1980s Pinochet opened the Chilean labor force to the world market, which resulted in a severe wage decrease for a large section of the Chilean population and a sharp increase in poverty (22).
12. In *The Curious Feminist*, Cynthia Enloe examines the processes by which labor, especially women’s labor, has been cheapened through globalization. Commenting on the particular case of the sneaker industry, she argues that “[t]he politics of women in the globalization of sneakers is not understood by looking at simply the impact of globalization on women. Rather, women at several points have shaped globalization. Insofar as the sneaker industry—like the garment industry, like the tea industry, like the textile industry—depends for its bottom-line profits on the ability to make labor cheap and keep it cheap, those corporations’ global strategizing is dependent upon local constructions of femininity” (59-60).
13. As John Beverley observes, Rigoberta Menchú also keeps her Indian name a secret in her *testimonio*, as a strategy of keeping her entire identity undisclosed (38).
14. According to Dowler et al., “landscapes which are an embodiment of moral codes can point to heretical landscapes which, in turn, point to the production of alternative social spaces” (7).
15. Sandra Tomc, in “‘The Missionary Position’: Feminism and Nationalism in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” remarks that “Atwood’s critics view her reliance on popular female romance as an abysmal political lapse, one that is at least as glaring as the heroine’s passive acceptance of enslavement” (87).
16. For a general discussion of gossip in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, see also Brian Johnson’s “Language, Power, and Responsibility in *The Handmaid’s Tale*: Toward a Discourse of Literary Gossip.”

17. One can see the link here to the debates over the veracity of Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio*, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. One of David Stoll's primary critiques is to question the factual basis for select portions of Menchú's narrative. As John Beverley remarks, "Stoll poses as a defender of the fact-gathering and evaluation procedures of anthropology and investigative journalism against which he characterizes as a 'postmodernist' position that would grant authority to subaltern voice as such" (5).
18. According to Beverley, this is characteristic of *testimonio*, which "generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, often a journalist or a writer" (32).
19. For a more in-depth discussion of this topic, see "The Opposite of War Is Not Peace—It Is Creativity" by Zorica Mrsevic from *Frontline Feminisms* (42; 53).
20. Here, we can observe Eltit's playfulness as "obra" can signify a deed, a performance of labor, or a work of art. Based on the context of the novel, we know that she is referring to both the creative processes involved in engendering a text and a child, her "niña sudaca" [*sudaca* girl/daughter]. Likewise, in her essay, "Navegación de la escritura: márgenes e incertidumbres," Eltit signals her own fascination with "el poder del cuerpo que 'crea' incesantemente" ["the power of the body that creates incessantly"] (628). She goes on further to state that "[y] en esa 'creación' define a la mujer latina por sus múltiples gestaciones. Sin entrar en las condicionantes ideológicas impuestas a la maternidad, ni en la problemática social de sobrepoblación, sí me gustaría apuntar al momento de la gestación, de la autoridad de un cuerpo. Pensar en ese cuerpo como desafío creativo" ["[a]nd that 'creation' defines the Latin American woman by her multiple births. Without entering into ideological conditions imposed on maternity or in the social dilemma of overpopulation, I would like to point to the moment of gestation, of the authority of a body. To contemplate that body as a creative challenge"] (628).
21. For this reason, Eltit's aesthetic can be best described, in Djelal Kadir's terms, as a "literature of confrontation" (184). Kadir writes: "Eltit's is an all-out confrontation, not mere resistance, that assails the institutional foundations of Latin American culture and political structures" (180). For an elaboration of his argument, please refer to "A Woman's Place: Gendered Histories of the Subaltern" in *The Other Writing: Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture*.
22. Likewise, Kolodny also warns how metaphors can influence gender constructions and how these metaphors have real world effects: "it is no longer possible to ignore a growing body of evidence that the particular way in which the New World has been symbolized as feminine in American thought and writing bears out a consistent correlation between that set of linguistic images and certain psychological patterns that became codified in our literature and acted out in our history" (149).
23. See *Two Solicitudes* for a discussion of Atwood's observations regarding the Reagan era (especially 74-76). Here Atwood relates her novel to the history of slavery, women's limited access to education and political rights, environmental crises, and more specifically to the rhetoric of former President Ronald Reagan and the fundamentalist Christian Right, which echoes many of the basic Puritan tenets of colonial America.
24. For a reading of the colonial encounter as a sexual encounter between the Spaniards and indigenous peoples in the New World, see Octavio Paz's chapter "Los hijos de la Malinche" in *El laberinto de la soledad*.