La luna siempre será un amor difícil: Bordering on Consuming (and) Nationalizing Narratives

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The spare, static certainty of the aphorisms "Time is money" and "History is progress" obscures the unstable, abstract concepts that constitute them. Along the Mexico-U.S. border, the last thirty-five years have brought rapidly increasing industrialization, urbanization, and transnational investment, often promoted as modernizing progress for Mexico. Yet those living in the region negotiate the variables of the aphoristic equations on a personal (and, occasionally, a collective) level. They barter their time at unfavorable exchange rates, and assess their histories by the satisfaction of subjective desires and basic necessities.

Perhaps no border residents struggle more directly with how versions of modernity and progress are cast in terms of time and money than *maquiladora* workers. Personal accounts of these workers have been collected in several recent works. In the testimonial collection, *La flor más bella de la maquiladora*, Angela, one such worker, tells a story of a daily struggle to control her time and improve her economic situation. After moving to Tijuana from the town of Comala in West-central Mexico, she gets a factory job. At work, she faces constant pressure to produce rapidly: "si no lo hago rápido no saco el estándar, me pongo nerviosa y me regañan" (*FMB* 35).[1] Yet rather than submit, she negotiates the temporal demands on her own terms:

> Ayer por ejemplo, me pusieron a hacer un trabajo que yo no hago. [...] La supervisora me puso ahí porque no me quise cambiar unos días al turno de la noche. [...] Mi trabajo ahí es muy lento, aunque a la máquina se le puede controlar la velocidad, yo la paraba porque

> no me daba abasto [...]. Entonces [a la supervisora] se le ocurrió ponerme junto a una señora bien carrilluda y ella prendía la máquina cada vez que yo la apagaba. (34)

Angela frames her time at work as a battle of wills, contested almost always indirectly and mediated through co-workers and work tools. Yet the stability of this work-struggle has afforded her a sense of security and progress, which she links to her ownership of consumer goods: "Mi vida es otra cosa, tengo mi casa y mis cosas que poco a poco he comprado" (*FMB* 104).

A simple identification of commodities with progress has its cutting side, however. In Tijuana writer Luis Humberto Crosthwaite's 1994 novel *La luna siempre será un amor difícil*, exploitative attitudes toward commercial goods mediate, then interfere with, the time of the protagonists' relationships.[2] The novel underlines this interference by mixing aspects of the colonial era with those of the present. Toward the beginning conquistador Balboa and indigenous woman Florinda meet in Tenochtitlan. As the two are walking together, Florinda feels a sharp pain in her bare foot and sees her blood on the ground because "algún descuidado dejó botellas quebradas de Cocacola y Carta Blanca" (16). The wound caused by the shards of anachronistic brand-name products brings the two together, for when Balboa fights to have the hospital staff attend to her and seems to care only about her well-being, Florinda decides she loves the conquistador. Balboa himself has already fallen in love, but a discourse of conquest underlies his vision of her. For him, she is: "un terreno libre en este mundo frío de tierras conquistadas y gobernantes corruptos. Su ínsula, su continente, su circunnavegación" (15). She represents unclaimed territory he desires to be his own, and in time, such consuming desires threaten to become all-consuming, separating the couple. As the text mixes references to colonial and contemporary eras, it signals the damage caused by materialistic orientations in both.

Crosthwaite's novelistic montage explores the way many Mexicans, like Angela, experience the uneven modernity of their time. The text interrupts the smooth continuity of dominant narratives that equate national history with progress and modernization, shows the jagged edges these accounts hide, and suggests alternative reckonings. On one narrative level the developing relationship of conquistador and indigenous woman itself represents an encounter between two cultures that offers a utopian ideal of resolving national differences through the promise of an erotic union. However, a second narrative level, interwoven with the first, reveals that such a union faces more difficulties due to the temporal disjunctions of a contemporary transnational context.[3] Following the Tenochtitlan scene the novel takes the anachronistic figure of societal *mestizaje* for a bus ride to the present-day border, where Balboa and Florinda face divisive aspects of materialistic values in society.[4] The work thereby signals the marginalization of indigenous peoples that occurs within such a nationalizing narrative and also addresses concerns voiced in *maquiladora* laborers' testimonials, such as those in the work already cited—*La flor más bella de la maquiladora* by Norma Iglesias Prieto—and also *Sangre joven* by Sandra Arenal, and *The Terror of the Machine* by Devon G. Peña. In this essay, I analyze how both these women's narratives as well as Crosthwaite's novel portray conflicts over marking and managing time that are also struggles over conceptions and values of progress. Within

a globalizing system of consumerism rhetorically presented as a "manifest destiny," both texts disrupt the unifying trajectory exemplified by traditional national narratives and point to the development of alternatives.[5]

Both the novel and the testimonies arise within a Mexican context dominated by a unified linear account of modernization promoted by the then ruling party, the PRI, and most effectively constructed by former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. As Budget Secretary from 1982 to 1988, Salinas helped put in place a pro-capitalist, anti-protectionist economic program. *Maquiladora* industrialization received unprecedented support in the northern border region under his direction. During his subsequent six-year term as president, from his first state of the nation address, Salinas pushed his economic package by rhetorically connecting his programs to key national historical rallying points: the nineteenth-century Independence struggle, the Reform War, and the Revolution. Though he spoke of allowing indigenous people more freedom in land management, his privatization laws revoked established rights to petition for land redistribution and dissolved communal holdings. Further, he wove together the symbols of indigenous greatness, *mestizaje*, and nationalism to promote acceptance of NAFTA, a treaty intimately linked with the development of both transnational capitalism and consumerism. Affirming that "las prioridades de la modernización son las que definen nuestra historia" (V), Salinas de Gortari brilliantly manipulated political symbols to fuse the national past and future. His governmental narrative put into effect a modernization program defined by industrial production and commodity consumption.[6]

One of many expressions resisting the governmental narrative,[7] Crosthwaite's novel challenges its construction by breaking the temporal strands that would weave together the continuities of progress and a unified national history. The novel interrupts linear form by utilizing narrative fragments, shifting perspectives, and constant word play. Four sections and an epilogue organize the story. The first section relates Balboa's being fired from his government post, the couple's move to the border, and their experiences upon arriving. In the next section, Balboa crosses the border in search of riches, while Florinda stays with his aunt Onelia and uncle Decoroso. Florinda confronts loneliness, gets a job, makes friends with her coworkers, then deals with Balboa's brief return and sudden second departure. The third section centers primarily on Balboa's activities during the same period. North of the border, he has an affair with a coworker, Mary Ann. When the Border Patrol returns him to Nueva España, he tries to reconcile his divided affections, but goes north again to "finish up" with Mary Ann. In the fourth section, Florinda grapples with her attraction to another man, her newfound independence in her own apartment, and her mixed feelings about Balboa's return. At this point the work breaks off, leaving the reader to imagine the rest of the story. With its fragmented, unresolved plotline and superimposed colonial and contemporary sensibilities, the novel signals that the temporal disjunctions occasioned by migration, *maquiladoras*, and materialism belie the ideal of national unity.

Migration

In portraying Florinda's experiences, the text emphasizes a dramatic temporal

shift, one that takes her from a rhythmic, natural environment to one characterized by the jostling of consumer goods. The section describing the morning of her departure briefly sketches a humble home life. After her mother makes corn tortillas for the day and departs to make daily purchases, Florinda leaves. When her bandaged bare foot touches the dirt floor, she reflects on the sensation:

> tal vez no la volverá a sentir. Ya no el fuego. Ya no el olor a leña ni el calor. Ya no el gallo viejo de la casa [...]. El gallo no cantará en su nuevo mundo. Ya no el mismo sol entrando por la misma ventana, tocándole los ojos. Ya no, nada. (29)

While Florinda does not have a happy home—her father drinks and fights constantly with her mother—the novel registers her migration as a loss, a separation from familiar environments. Subsequent images of modern, middle-class comforts underline that separation. Both she and Balboa experience a new time when they arrive at the border: "el día entra a los ojos [...] como a una casa recién inaugurada" (34). Awakening on the bus presents her with an atmosphere so new that it is defined by things she still has not seen:

> En la alcoba de esta casa, sobre una mesa, se encuentra una televisión a colores. La muchacha jamás ha visto una televisión a colores ni en blanco y negro, mucho menos una videocasetera. (34)

Florinda leaves a hearth fire in a single-room house with dirt floors and wakes up to a change like that of being, for the first time, in a house with electricity and a television.[8] References to a realm of consumer goods characterize this change, signaling in part a distancing from nature, albeit an already domesticated one. The dirt floors become a living room, the wood fire becomes a table, the farm animals disappear, and a conceptual day takes the place of the concrete sun entering her sight. This change represents a drastic shift in temporal reckoning, from the time of natural cycles to that of electrically-lit workdays and nights. For Florinda, the new surroundings mark a loss in separating from an earlier environment more directly sensed as natural.

Many *maquiladora* workers tell of similar shifts that they view positively in the collections of Arenal, Iglesias and Peña. The workers, who are mostly migrants, many from rural areas, experience profound changes upon arrival in Tijuana. The differences run to extremes; one woman states that neither electricity nor mail had yet reached her town (*SJ* 88).[9] Never having been to a city before, she had to learn the vocabulary to speak of it: "No podía decir 'alfombra,' ni 'linólium,' ni 'periódico,' ni siquiera sabía que existían" (*SJ* 89). These new objects can quickly come to define what is modern. Another woman, visiting her hometown, identifies so strongly with such goods that she thrusts her own rural background into a distant past:

> lo teníamos todo, refrigerador, estufa, licuadora, hasta mi televisión tenía [...] y ahí en el pueblo yo sentí como si se regresara el tiempo y fueran las épocas de los abuelos cuando no había nada de comodidad. Ahí seguían ellos, batallando igual que siempre, hablando de que si llovía les iba a ir bien si no, no. (*SJ* 16-17)

The shift in time she notes strongly parallels the change Florinda experiences upon

awakening at the border. The pueblo lacks comforts and orients itself around the rhythms of nature marked by the agricultural seasons. In the city conveniences abound, and successful work determines its own relationship with *el tiempo* (both "weather" and "time" in Spanish). The workers describe the access to a variety of goods and the distinct relationship to natural elements as defining changes in their new industrial urban experience, shifts they characterize as differences in time.

Both the novel and the *testimonios* characterize migration as an introduction to a new world of goods, registered by increased vocabularies, but percieved as distinct reckonings of time. Florinda experiences her resettlement as a separation from familiar surroundings. The workers' statements, by contrast, relate improvements in their lives due to newfound access to services and products. Both narratives speak emphatically to the substantial social and economic unevenness within Mexico as they point to the changes in life rhythms made to satisfy both basic living necessities and transnational labor demands, often for work in *maquiladoras*.

Maquiladoras

In the novel, working in the *maquiladoras* represents an ambivalent time of freedom and restriction as well as a conflicted source of both isolation and social networking. As she faces a new lifestyle in the border city at Balboa's relatives' home, Florinda feels lonely and repressed and seeks to escape the claustrophobic environment. Missing her husband and having little connection with her in-laws, Florinda spends her time alone:

> ella procuraba mantenerse encerrada la mayor parte del día. Nada más pagaba su renta cotidiana (lavar los platos, limpiar el piso, hacer la comida, uf uf uf) y regresaba a su cuarto. (60)

Meanwhile, Balboa's aunt Onelia attempts to have her become the stereotypical silently suffering housewife. Restricted in space and behavior, and in her actions by Onelia's pressure, Florinda finally decides to get a job of her own.

The *maquiladora* work, however, presents its own sets of temporal controls. Through a minimum of details, Crosthwaite's novel portrays the mechanizing factory atmosphere in which Florinda is treated as little more than a cog in the machine. Rather than fostering communication and understanding, the company gives minimal instruction and applies pressure to produce rapidly. Faced with a task evaluated primarily by efficiency over time, Florinda perceives even more acutely the separation from her earlier lifestyle:

> Esto es lo no descubierto. La producción en masa. Qué lejos estás Tenochtitlan mío.]
> Qué lejos está la humedad de tus mañanas, el olor a maíz, el trafique de tu gente.]
> Cautín quema soldadura, soldadura pega circuitos.]
> Otra vez.
> Cautín quema soldadura, soldadura pega circuitos.]
> Otra vez.
> Treinta por minuto. Tal vez más. (64)

The bare, repetitive description of the assembly line work accentuates the rhythm change Florinda perceived upon arriving in Tijuana. While the operation presents only minor physical dangers—Florinda only burns her fingers twice—its speed requires her to focus solely on efficiency. The text emphasizes the demands of the job by men-

tioning only her actions, without qualifying adjectives or adverbs. Other temporal pressures and controls also present themselves in the form of an imperious supervisor, a lecherous manager, and a prying security guard. Through isolation and surveillance, the factory administration attempts to convert Florinda's time into their money, as directly as possible.

In spite of the restrictions on time and movements, Florinda befriends her coworkers and together they offset the isolation of the work hours. The novel depicts a solidarity among the workers as they socialize. The women meet, go out together and share stories, give emotional support, and help each other with difficult tasks like moving. The *maquiladora* job offers a social outlet that counteracts the pressures and restrictions of the mechanized setting.

Similarly, the *maquiladora* workers see their jobs as aiding with a greater sense of autonomy and self-esteem afforded by their time outside the home. Economic necessities factor into most women's decisions to gain employment (Tiano 48-71, 143-45; Carrillo 127). Yet maquiladora workers often assert that increased independence and greater control over their own time motivates them: "yo necesitaba dinero y libertad, así que me salí de casa"; "El trabajo en la fábrica me gustó, pensaba en conocer más gente y ganar mi dinero" (*SJ* 40; *FMB* 107). The time spent outside the home affords the women more freedom and allows them to contribute monetarily to their families' well-being. With this independence comes a keener sense of self and self-worth—as the woman reported above, her thoughts were of not just earning money, but of earning *her* money.

However, the workers also depict their *maquiladora* work experience as a constant struggle over the value of their time. The factories use assembly-line organization and strict time-management techniques to maximize production efficiency. Administrators try to focus all worktime on job tasks, limiting employees' movement, even to the bathroom: "tanto tiempo en la misma posición, sentada, sin poderse levantar y caminar, porque si lo haces ahí está la capataz con sus gritotes" (*SJ* 34). Management emphasizes production goals even at the expense of workers' health. Many women note at least some small physical effects of stress. Others report a larger dilemma of having to choose between maintaining good health and fulfilling job demands. Many workers do not use provided protective materials such as gloves, because the *maquiladoras* require such high levels of production (*FMB* 51-52). The emphasis on speed gives at best mixed signals about the value of their worker's well-being versus the value of their production over time.[10]

The women develop and enact their own tactics to maintain some control over their own time and achieve their own ideas of progress. One woman frustrated her managers' attempts to raise production quotas by slowing her activity when observed:

> They took me to the engineering office and filmed me. I thought to myself, if I work fast I'll screw everyone up. So, I worked at a normal pace, really a kind of slow pace. As it turned out, they didn't raise the standard [...]. (*TOTM* 113)

Faced with rampant sexual harassment and a variety of personal situations, some women come "cada día [...] más arregladas" (*FMB* 121) to gain managers' attention and guarantee job stability, while others passionately fight off sexual advances (*TOTM* 119-20). For many women negotiating these

circumstances, formal union organizing represents a possibility for empowerment. Yet they frequently create informal support networks to affect their job conditions:

> When they speed up the line, we agree to unclasp the [conveyor] belt. I'll do a little at a time, and everyone does their own little part. After an hour or so, the belt comes undone and we take a rest while the engineers fix the damage. (*TOTM* 8)

The *testimonios* stress that workers strive to determine the nature of the time they spend on the job.[11]

Though their on-the-job pressures usually add to, rather than alleviate, the temporal burdens of home and family commitments, many women workers still see benefits in their factory work. Sociologist Susan Tiano points out that Mexican women who are employed continue to perform the bulk of domestic responsibilities (121). One woman with children describes her day as a continual race—"las carreras son muchas"—and recounts a schedule full from five in the morning to nine or ten at night (*SJ* 33-34). Others, especially younger, single women, live for going out and escaping the work at home and on the job. Working mothers, though, confront heavier home and job time commitments: "estamos tanto tiempo metidas en la fábrica que no podemos hacer otra cosa, descuidamos a los hijos y a la casa" (*FMB* 70). Yet benefits exist, as the same woman also says:

> sí me dio resultado el haberme venido para acá, aun con los sacrificios que hemos pasado. Estoy segura que si nos hubiéramos quedado en el pueblo, mis hijos no hubieran estudiado, porque el sueldo de allá no da para más. (*FMB* 115)

Despite various dissatisfactory aspects of the job, many decide that *maquiladora* employment betters their families' lives, both for the present and for their children's future.

In their portrayal of work in the *maquiladoras*, the workers' *testimonios* and *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* reveal largely convergent critiques of the progress the factories supposedly represent.[12] Yet the texts differ significantly in the range and depth of the criticisms they make as well as in their view of the workers' interaction. Both signal that *maquiladora* employment initially attracts women because they percieve empowerment and relative freedom in having time outside the home. Both accounts maintain that rather than complete relief from pressure, the factory jobs instead present excessive temporal demands to produce as well as other oppressive conditions. The novel points to workers' problems of alienation, sexual harassment, and constant surveillance. The *testimonios*, by contrast, delve into these issues, giving a number of detailed descriptions of similar situations in order to illustrate problems perceived as systemic. The women's stories also decry additional concerns, such as health protection. Both narratives emphasize the importance of social interaction as they address how the workers confront those conditions, but differ as to its characterization. Crosthwaite's novel focuses on the friendship between Florinda and her coworkers, making no mention of the women attempting to change conditions at the plant. The testimonial collections, while touching on the workers' socializing, emphasize the effectiveness of networks in negotiating excessive temporal pressures and other poor working conditions. Both narratives depict women as taking active roles in building their own relationships within this difficult work environment and also in negotiating to make

the progress represented by *maquiladoras* take their interests into account as well.

The differences in these characterizations of *maquiladoras* reflect the distinct orientations of the texts. Specifically directed toward inspiring social change, the *testimonios* center on the depiction of working conditions and the worker's efforts to determine them. The collections denounce problems, reveal barriers to the women's own desires and efforts to enact change, and call for actions of solidarity. Social interaction apart from work-related functions (be they company nights out or union organizing), draws little attention. The novel, on the other hand, presents its criticism as part of a larger, humorous narrative about the temporal conflict between developing human relationships and obtaining consumer goods. Thus, the leisure-time relations that Florinda and her coworkers establish provide a partial antidote to worktime isolation. The problems their job environment poses, however, represent only one symptom of the larger phenomenon. In addition to the temporal separations arising from migration and the alienating mechanical detachment fostered in *maquiladoras*, *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* focuses on the severing of intimate relations stemming from a constant striving for material gains.

Materialism

As Balboa and Florinda come to view the world increasingly in terms of consumer goods, their different perspectives toward consumption figure prominently in their relationship problems. Specifically, Balboa's growing preoccupation with commodities worsens the emotional division the couple's physical separation brought about. Back from the consumer-oriented north, he chastises Florinda for not knowing how to open a cereal box correctly:

> ¿Qué nunca te has fijado, so bruta, que el gallo está bocabajo cuando abres una caja? Me refiero al famoso gallo que aparece cantando enfrente del envase para indicar que es mejor comerlas como desayuno […]. (79)

His depiction of the package harkens back to the earlier description of Florinda's home, further highlighting the changes in her environment. For her, corn flakes take the place of the corn her mother would grind for tortillas, and a drawing on a box replaces the rooster outside her house, the animal reduced to a symbol signifying breakfast hours. What she encounters as foreign, however, Balboa represents as an everyday activity. The conquistador naturalizes the task of proper box opening in language that echoes commercials:

> aprende uno durante la niñez, sin necesidad de maestro. Se aprende sólo por el ansia de tener la boca llena de esas sabrosas hojuelas de maíz, con azúcar, remojadas en leche. (79)

He universalizes the desire to consume cereal, transforms it into a knowledge of "proper" consumption, and allows it to color his opinion of Florinda, whom he now calls "india inútil" (79). Yet he refers to a childhood that Florinda never experienced, indirectly reiterating class and race differences between the bureaucrat Spaniard and the poorer indigenous woman.[13] His complaints signal the pair's growing emotional distance, which he makes physical again when he returns north.

The novel deepens the sense of separation by focusing on Balboa's experiences only after this breakup, emphasizing the time apart. Though the second and third sections of the work use a similar structure to recount roughly the same time period, they sharply separate Florinda's and Balboa's perspectives. This textual presentation highlights each character's distinct visions of past and present.[14] Rather than note a series of smaller, interwoven changes that might convey ideas of simultaneous actions or suggest an easy reconciliation between the two characters, the text supports the perception of a larger, divided set of experiences the couple do not share. Thus, the second section, which recounts Florinda's growing disillusionment with the separation, plants a question in its title: "por qué pasa el amor" (49). The third section, which narrates Balboa's apprenticeship in materialism, responds: "vida y obra en el Imperio Nortense" (92). Form and content emphasize the distance between the couple and the difficulty of a resolution.

Both Balboa and Florinda substitute time spent shopping for the time they do not pass together. Balboa goes directly from parting with Florinda to shopping with Mary Ann. In the supermarket, they try to convert their cart—"el carrito de su felicidad" (128)—into a cornucopia. The conquistador defines his happiness here by his potential buying power and identifies that capacity with Mary Ann, just as he identifies conquering the New World with his wife. Florinda, for her part, turns to shoe buying as a defense mechanism. After Balboa departs, she receives and initially rejects the attentions of an unnamed young man. When the new suitor desists, Florinda, dejected, develops a footwear buying addiction. Getting new shoes represents a reaction to her isolation and vulnerability: "unas ganas de llorar le humedecen el mundo. Son los zapatos feos son los días terribles es el cautín es la soldadura" (141). The shoes encase all of her problems—the mechanical routine of her job ("cautín" and "soldadura"), the time alone in the house ("días terribles"), and the pain of emotional wounds. Footwear signifies both protection from the cut she received when she fell in love with Balboa and also a nod to his wishes, since he liked her to wear shoes. By obsessively repeating the action of buying shoes, she works out her fear and pain. Then, when the young man comes courting again, Florinda stops her shopping. Both she and Balboa displace affections, at least partially, onto the fetishes of material goods.

As the novel winds down, the pair's distinct views about consumer products interrelate strongly with their time apart. Florinda, while appreciating consumer goods, maintains other values as well. Balboa, however, now defines his world entirely by commodities. When he tries to win Florinda back and calls up to her apartment, he describes himself as a product:

> Soy el desayuno servido sobre la mesa de tu felicidad, el auto calentándose en la cochera de nuestra historia, las cortinas que cada mañana al abrirlas iluminan el centro de nuestro porvenir. (164)

He has translated his discourse of discovery and conquest into advertising language, and he ends up trying to sell himself. Yet Florinda misses the ad, having gone to get groceries. For both of them, the time for the materialism encouraged in the transnational economy does not coincide with the time of the symbolic union of (a national) romance.

The *maquiladora* workers' accounts also suggest a strong desire to synchronize financial security with romantic interest to create a sense of personal progress. Many women view relations with their work superiors as a way to improve their situation: "Todas creemos que una manera de dejar de trabajar es casándonos, sobre todo con alguien que tenga un buen puesto, como un supervisor" (*FMB* 122-23). A husband represents potential relief from heavy economic pressures for women, especially single mothers. Married women, though, speak little of their relationships. The one worker who mentions interaction with her spouse indicates they spend little time together, for while she tends to their baby, her husband goes out often. Although the discourse of romance intertwines with desires of economic success in the single workers' accounts, those who are married address only the latter.

As a group, the workers portray less a picture of overwhelming greed or an obsession with products than an increased sensitivity to rhythms of consumption amid an expanded market of goods. They develop a range of adaptive tactics in order to manage their households and maintain the value of their minimal earnings. Newcomers encounter a distinct set of activities to manage: "en la gran ciudad aprende uno muchas cosas, entre ellas a vestirse mejor, a comer cosas que allá [en áreas rurales] ni conocíamos [...]" (*SJ* 57). They must attend to different temporalities of style—after all, dressing better is a learned skill. In addition, with debts to pay for furniture, clothing, or automobiles, many have to learn the timing of credit. A large number associate having credit with participating in "la sociedad moderna" (*FMB* 125). Yet managing the time of credit requires skill, especially because work-facilitated arrangements, combined with sharp devaluations (like those of 1976 , 1982, and 1994), complicate the task. One woman notes the problems involved in expenditures deducted from paychecks:

> lo malo es que les descuentan cada vez que se les da la gana. [...] A una amiga que sacó mercancía desde Navidad lleva cuatro meses y no le han cobrado y, como se lo descuentan en dólares, con la devaluación va a tener que pagar el doble. (*FMB* 123)

To combat ever-changing money values, workers buy and sell goods at work, buy durable goods with an idea of resale value, and shop the strong second-hand goods market along the border. Rather than a profound desire for accruing wealth, many women must continually attend to the timing of consumption simply to make do.[15]

Perhaps due to their particular focus, the testimonial collections either treat the women's consumer tactics peripherally or convey a paternalistic image of the respondents.[16] One of the collections takes up workers' goods consumption in a chapter titled "mecanismos de control" and generalizes that "existen muchas maneras de hacer que las obreras compren una infinidad de productos" (*FMB* 119, 123). The texts make little of the distinction between materialist interests in conspicuous consumption and concerns over basic resources. Their perspective also allows for little conception of the women molding culture as consumers. Though the *testimonios* themselves provide evidence of workers' tactics in the border economy, the collections principally depict the women's concern with the timing of consumption as a materialism the capitalist system uses to reproduce itself.

By contrast, Crosthwaite's novel uses the flexibility of the genre to distinguish differing attitudes toward consumption and to present those distinctions as a critique of the values underlying the easy unities of both nationalizing narratives and transnational capitalism. Through Balboa, the text imaginatively fuses the materialism of a bureaucratic, middle-class upbringing with a colonial discourse of domination. The conquistador himself makes this fusion obvious. When he dismisses the problems he and Florinda have as "cotidianidad mercadotecnia," he affirms that their relationship is inevitable: "Es el camino de la Historia es el Progreso es el Destino Manifiesto que todos cargamos en el páncreas" (157). By contrast, Florinda faces several challenges in adjusting the discourses of a poor rural, indigenous background to a new economy of consumer products and industrial work. Aside from her melancholic shoe-buying spree, she does not fixate on consumption and rejects Balboa's predetermined ideas of progress that violently exclude indigenous cultures. The differences, emblematically combined in the two characters, sharpen to a cutting edge as the pair's consumption practices increasingly conflict with their romantic harmony.

In threatening to divide Balboa and Florinda's relationship, *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* also manipulates novelistic traditions in order to make a critique on an allegorical level. Many critics, like Nancy Armstrong and Elizabeth Langland, have held that novels have portrayed matrimony as a resolution to social conflicts since the beginnings of the genre. Doris Sommer argues that in Latin America, romantic unions that interwove associations between the protagonists' heterosexual desire and the resolution of national divisions constitute a canonical tradition against which contemporary writers often position themselves. She also holds that what she calls the "national romances" fueled the desire in Latin America for nation-states that would allow elites to modernize and prosper, but also to retain practically feudal privileges (48). Crosthwaite's novel projects a symbolic ideal of the protagonists' love, but shows that desire to be challenged and frustrated by contemporary societal valuations of materialism. In bringing together such canonically symbolic figures in present-day conditions, the work also bears the influence of U.S. writer Richard Brautigan, who experimented with U.S. tradition of the genre in his novels *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* and *Troutfishing in America*.[17] These rifts that Crosthwaite's novel portrays in Mexican society disrupt the romantic narrative that would unify nation, modernization, and progress. The work highlights colonial and imperial, not national structures, and the pair's frustrations stem from problems that governing powers only worsen.[18] Notably, in the principal plotline, Mexico does not exist as a nation; rather the protagonists' journey leads from Nueva España to the Imperio Nortense. Using the traditions of the genre, the novel emphasizes that, just as Balboa and Florinda do not find the time to establish their romance, the work itself has no time for Mexico.

Instead of the static national romance, the novel hints at a more diffuse, temporary eros of politics through Florinda's relationship with her unnamed suitor. She values their communication; unlike Balboa, he does speak with her. She connects her feeling for him with the stories he tells her: "He conocido a un muchacho que me habla de cine y me cuenta historias que jamás imaginé. Siento por él de nuevo lo que pensé debe sentirse una sola vez" (162-63). The

young man's tales go beyond the limits of Nueva España; he likes *cumbias* and knows the movies of Pedro Infante and Fred Astaire, Churubusco and Hollywood. He and Florinda connect through more eclectic narratives that rehearse a change in imagined communities. Speaking of this type of change, Néstor García Canclini proposes that an interpretative community of consumers might maintain national identity as only one option among many (*Consumidores* 49-50). Along these lines, Arjun Appadurai suggests the possibility of constructing narratives in which "patriotism itself could become serial, contextual, and mobile" (*Modernity* 176). Whereas the indigenous woman and the conquistador symbolized groups forever unified by one territory under one government, Florinda and the nameless young man embody a desire for sharing multiple, possibly temporary allegiances that find expression in narrative terms.[19]

This emphasis on managing such smaller stories links again with the cultural project of the women laborers in their *testimonios*. The novel brings together colonial and contemporary epochs in order to break up the continuity implicit in the dominant narrative that harmonizes national history, progress, and modernization. Further, the tales that Florinda develops with her unnamed suitor suggest an alternative of connecting with others through sharing personal experience. Such a position coincides with the *maquiladora* laborers' efforts to make their histories known, to work together from those narratives they hold in common, and to improve conditions for the future. As one woman states: "Hablo porque usted dice que es importante y [...] esperando sirva para que a las jóvenes no les suceda lo mismo" (*SJ* 15). All three collections present the narrations in order to address the situations as collective problems. The texts record the workers organizing around shared experiences to form communities that have demonstrated their "patriotism" before state powers, the influence of transnational companies, and threats of violence. Both *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* and the *testimonios* depict the construction of narratives that utilize the art of memory to renegotiate the terms of a manifest destiny of national progress.

Notes

[1] Hereinafter I will refer to this text parenthetically as *FMB*. As I turn to the other *testimonios*, I will cite *Sangre Joven* as *SJ* and *The Terror of the Machine* as *TOTM*. A translation of *La flor más bella de la maquiladora* appears as *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana* (1997).

[2] Luis Humberto Crosthwaite has distinguished himself as among the most well-known of a group of writers who established their careers on the border (others include Rosina Conde, Marco Antonio Samaniego, Rosario Sanmiguel, Regina Swain, and Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz) and who have only begun to receive attention on a national level over the last decade. Editorial powers Tusquets and Planeta (through subsidiary Joaquín Mortíz) published Crosthwaite's novel *Idos de la mente: La increíble y (a veces) triste historia de Ramón y Cornelio* (2001), and his collections *Estrella de la calle Sexta* (2000) and *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera* (2002). Crosthwaite established the regional Editorial Yoremito to distribute other northern Mexican writers' work, publishing eleven books to date. An English translation of *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* appeared under the title *The Moon Will Forever Be a Distant Love* in 1997.

[3] In characterizing the novel as a montage, and discussing the possibilities the work presents, my ideas owe a great deal to the writings of Walter Benjamin, especially as interpreted

by Susan Buck-Morss and Peter Osborne. Buck-Morss explains that Benjamin's conception of montage brings together an "originary, ur-image" with "its historically present form" so that this double focus reveals both "utopian potential and simultaneously, the betrayal of that potential" (245). Strongly critical of narratives marrying consumerism and nationalism in 1930s Germany, Benjamin proposed montage as a resistant means of expression.

[4] The pairing of conquistador and indigenous woman carries significant historical and symbolic weight in Mexican culture, which only grew in the early 1990s as groups marked the quincentennial anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. Works by authors such as Roger Bartra and Allan Knight discuss the strong history the concept of *mestizaje* has in the country. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz holds that the image of the conquistador Cortés and the indigenous woman known as La Malinche represents the pairing of greatest symbolic importance to Mexico (87). In taking up this encounter between cultures, Crosthwaite's novel also participates in the resurgence of Latin American historical narratives that began in the 1980s, as a number of works self-consciously reexamined the colonial period of the region, many with a focus on the New World encounters. González Pérez and Hernandez analyze this trend of historical novels. Hernandez has also recently discussed the divisive role of consumption in Crosthwaite's novel ("Las imposibilidades").

[5] In bringing together these different texts, I do not want to erase distinctions between them, nor do I hope to make reality support the validity of fiction or viceversa. In part, I take this tack as a response to a critical tendency to speak of the border abstractly, often to celebrate a hybrid aesthetics. I, too, appreciate many of the creations of artists labeled as "border writers" and "border crossers." However, existing theoretical writing has often focused on such artists, generally from the U.S. side, at the expense of taking into account the expression of those living on the border. I consider here Crosthwaite's novel and the women's testimonial accounts in order to acknowledge and examine the information of the real and the fictive and to open the theoretical dialogue regarding the border to a larger variety of perspectives. In doing so, I would align my project with the work of such theorists as Eduardo Barrera Herrera, Claire Fox, María Socorro Tabuenca, Pablo Vila, and Victor Zúñiga.

[6] A growing bibliography discusses the various aspects of this governmental narrative. Miguel Angel Centeno holds that Salinas combined several heterogeneous policies to form a "single, exclusive policy paradigm" (18). Works by Devon Peña, Leslie Sklair, and Claire Fox address the importance of industrial production, consumerism, and free market capitalism in the narrative, while Gareth Jones and John Sinnigen discuss the way Salinas used indigenous symbols to support his policies. Peña states: "Maquiladoras are part and parcel of the 'modernization' of Mexico" (10). The term *maquiladoras* generally refers to the labor-intensive assembly factories that line the border. The factories offered an employment alternative to the earlier Bracero program, which allowed U.S. employers to use "guest" Mexican laborers. Soon after the U.S. unilaterally terminated the program in 1964, Mexico generated the Border Industrialization Program and began maquiladora development (Tiano 19).

[7] While Salinas and the PRI-ruled government attempted a political and economic restructuring under the guise of modernization, a variety of actors made efforts to negotiate the terms of that process, particularly in the border areas. Like Angela, much of the predominantly female workforce in the northern border *maquiladoras* resisted the mechanizing working conditions in the "modern" factories through methods such as *tortuguismo*, sabotage, organized demonstrations and strikes. A generalized political rejection of the ruling party's narrative in the north showed itself during elections in 1986 and 1988, as the PRI candidates suffered losses to both the more right- and left-wing opposition parties. Some key academics also countered the narrative of modernization as progress. In their work, Roger Bartra,

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, and Néstor García-Canclini (*Culturas*) confront the economic interests behind Salinas's narrative of national progress, pointing to the distributional inconsistencies in Mexico's modernization, particularly with respect to the indigenous populations. With the quincentennial year of Columbus' arrival in the Americas, attention to and support of indigenous populations also grew. Most spectacularly, on the day that was to mark the administration's crowning achievement of implementing NAFTA, the indigenous peoples of Chiapas began an uprising, a "war of position" that continues today. The leaders of this revolt denounce the political marginalization and constant abuse of Mexico's indigenous populations, citing both NAFTA and the constitutional reform of *ejido* holdings as recent examples.

[8] These lines present a paradoxical image that supports the sense of temporal disjunction, but, as is characteristic of Crosthwaite's work, does so in understated, almost throwaway fashion. Florinda experiences uncommon newness in a setting that might seem quotidian for the reading audience. The text accentuates Florinda's perception of being in a new place by referring to a sight that she still has yet to see. She does not see any house with a VCR at the moment, but rather the day enters her eyes like it would into such a house. By noting that she has never seen such a thing, the narrator defamiliarizes the "common" sight, overlaying a sense of newness not occurring at the level of the plot on top of one that is.

[9] I realize that by combining statements from many different workers I run the risk of suggesting that their personal histories might all run together into one. I do not mean to imply anything of the sort; the differences among border laborers are more numerous than the individuals themselves. I am, however, emphasizing that in the works cited, the women speak of experiencing similar conditions. My generalizations here stem not only from the assurances by those compiling all three books that the opinions stated represent commonly held perspectives (*SJ* 12, *FMB* 18-20, *TOTM* 16-17), but also from the repetition of similar statements among the *testimonios* given, as well as other support in Ruiz and Tiano, Tiano, and Valenzuela. While I have referred to Angela by name, I will not do so when quoting other workers because, of the three books I use here as source material, none refer to all respondents by name. *SJ* gives no names—in fact, some of the women request anonymity (15)—and *TOTM* reveals only a few. I take the additional liberty of altering the sequencing of the women's narratives in placing them in dialogue with the novel. Finally, while the editors of the collections accept the workers' accounts as reality, I examine their statements as discursive expressions of time and its relation to the social and economic positions assigned to the women.

[10] A growing body of sociological work treats the factory working conditions. All three *testimonio* collections discuss the temporal pressures and the work organization structures. Norma Iglesias notes that, while in the U.S. a production standard normally refers to a goal to be reached, in Mexico "el estándar es el mínimo necesario que todo obrero debe realizar para mantener su trabajo" (43). Concerning the use of protective equipment, Iglesias notes with irony what the companies want to protect:

> Por algún momento pensé que las batas y mascarillas eran para proteger al trabajador; pero no, son para proteger el material, que ha de estar completamente limpio para pasar el control de calidad. (*FMB* 49)

Sangre joven devotes a chapter to accounts of health problems stemming from *maquiladora* work (51-85); see also *FMB* (53-55) about soldering accidents.

[11] All three collections deal with the women's struggles to unionize and their resistance to management control techniques. Chapter three of *SJ* (95-130), chapter seven of *FMB* (129-46), and chapter four of *TOTM* (especially 103-07, 127-32) center on unionization. *TOTM* (93-94, 119-120), *SJ* (90-92, 110, 115), and *FMB* (74, 121, 122, 132) treat sexual harassment as a control technique and how workers resist it.

[12] Many of the similarities in the depictions presented by the novel and the *testimonios* may have to do with Crosthwaite's own work experience. Reflecting the dominant gender division of labor in the *maquiladoras* favoring males in higher positions (*TOTM* 64-68, 257-62), he managed a number of assembly workers (personal communication).

[13] This portrayal of a deep cultural schism between indigenous woman and Spaniard interwoven with class implications holds strong significance in Mexico generally, and for Tijuana in particular. Bonfil Batalla affirms that divisions based on Mesoamerican and Western cultural economies have deepened as late-twentieth-century Mexican society has enacted a "middle classization," adopting U.S. consumption patterns at the cost of indigenous orientation toward self-sufficiency (*México* 124, 23-38). Tijuana perhaps exemplifies this idea, as middle-income residents outnumber low-wage earners there (Centro de Estudios Fronterizos), and many more affluent residents appropriate practices from both sides of the border, such as rock en español, Spanglish, and the celebration of Halloween and the Day of the Dead (Saavedra; O'Connor). However, the economic disparities of the region frequently divide across racial lines and substantial migrant populations of Mixtecs and other indigenous groups do not enjoy such middle-class possibilities. Anthropologist Michael Kearney holds that

> the castelike relations betweeen Indians and *mestizos*, of which the Mixteca [the native Mixtec region] is relatively free, are highly manifest in Mexico's northwestern cities. (142)

The Mixtecs have struggled to improve their conditions, to the extent that Kearney affirms that the current "Mixtec problem" might be "the major political issue in Baja California" (145). While I agree with Raymond Williams and Blanca Rodríguez's idea that the novel uses the form of a Conquest-era *crónica* to "parodiar la mentalidad y el lenguaje españoles del siglo XVI [...]" (177), I argue that this parody supports a larger critique of modernization discourses in Mexico that echo such colonial mentalities.

[14] The sections begin by focusing on each character's thoughts of the other, recount childhood relations with parents, then tell of the experiences each has in their respective location. Both sections then relate from different perspectives the same tense reunion dinner in fragments titled "Buenos modales," and finally describe the characters' reactions to this frustrating meeting.

[15] A number of newer studies focus on the women's tactics as consumers. *FMB* (104) and Heyman (163-68, 174-78) note the availability of consumer goods on the border versus other Mexican regions. Heyman (175, 186) and Muñoz Ríos speak of the second-hand markets and durable goods as protective investments.

[16] *SJ* and *TOTM* announce their concentration on production in their subtitles, "las maquiladoras por dentro" and "Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border," respectively. By contrast, *La flor más bella de la maquiladora*, subtitled "Historias de vida de la mujer obrera en Tijuana, B.C.N.," offers a view that includes consumption activities.

[17] *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* shares both stylistic and thematic tendencies with Brautigan's work. Both use fitful temporal representation, fragmentary writing, and a non-heroic tone to examine national icons alongside everyday contemporary existence. *Trout Fishing in America*, for example, critically takes up U.S. icons, providing "an analysis of *why* the old pastoral myth of an America [sic] of freedom and tranquility is no longer viable [...]" (Malley 151-52). Crosthwaite confirms Brautigan's influence in his own writing (personal communication).

[18] The novel frames much of the problems the couple faces as part of an uneasy paradigm shift from colonial structures to capitalist empire. In the text, don Carlos rules Nueva España with a hierarchy of Spaniards, *criollos*, and *mestizos* reigning over indigenous peoples. Balboa's boss, the Marquis, pronounces an overblown political rhetoric as he fires Balboa

that satirically echoes Carlos Salinas de Gortari's discourse. The Marquis claims to be committing "un acto de solidaridad ante la crisis," while trying to help his chances to be selected "entre cuatro o cinco candidatos tapa-dos para aquesta ilustre posición [de Virrey de Nueva España]" (20). The passage critically plays with historical frames of reference, equating the Mexican president with King Carlos, weaving in a Salinas catchphrase ("solidaridad ante la crisis") with the Marquis's self-serving speech, and referring to the established anti-democratic practice of candidate selection for the hegemonic party, the PRI.

[19] Studies by Kearney and Velasco Ortiz provide new interpretations of how indigenous groups like the Mixtecs are developing shifting, multiple discourses of identity and community.

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