

## **A Locational Feminist Reading of Isabel Allende's Three Novels**

*by Ma. Elena L. Paulma*

Isabel Allende relates that she was brought up in a male chauvinist society, in a very patriarchal family, where women were not supposed to be creative: "I didn't even finish high school. I didn't have a proper education. No one expected me to do anything but be a wife, a housewife, mother, a good spouse, and maybe have some job to help my husband along at the beginning. I never thought of myself as a creative person, or I never allowed myself to think that I could write something that would be interesting for anybody. Because that's the way I was brought up. At five I was already a feminist and nobody used the word in Chile yet" (Moore, 1994). When the military coup in her country "split her life in half," Isabel had to flee to Venezuela, after which she left for the US because she fell in love. There, she lost her daughter, Paula.

"To write to and for women - and as a Latin American woman": this is what Allende articulates as one of her major aims in writing. She says this of herself: "I'm a feminist; no woman who stops for an instant to think about her future cannot be one" (Pinto, 1991: 39). "I chose extraordinary women who could symbolize my vision of what is meant by *feminine*, characters who could illustrate the destinies of women in Latin America" (Rodden, 2004). This paper seeks to answer this question: What constitutes Isabel Allende's feminism and how does this illustrate her vision of the "destinies of women in Latin America" in three of her novels?

Considered to be part of the Latin American feminist literary awakening, Allende's writing is said to have been influenced by history and culture. Female subordination has been historically evident in every Latin American social institution, with the women ideally identified with the concept of the Virgin Mary - nurturing, passive, and sexually pure. With this image in role conflict with the political realm, women are perceived to be passive to political issues, and vote merely out of civil duty. Allende's writing deals with politics, history, and social institutions in a way that is all but passive (Allende, 2002).

### **Locational Feminism**

This paper will discuss *Eva Luna*, *Of Love and Shadows*, and *House of the Spirits*, using as its main framework the concept of locational feminism posited by Susan Friedman in her article, "Locational Feminism: Gender, Cultural Geographies, and Geopolitical Literacy." Developed as a way to deal with the differences among women, locational feminism is both

local and global. It is local because it acknowledges the overdetermined specific forms of feminism, and it is global because these indigenous forms are widespread, constantly in motion through time and space, influencing other forms of feminism and being influenced in turn (Friedman, 2001:15).

Pointing to the fact that space and time are “unthinkable without each other,” Friedman juxtaposes temporal rhetoric with spatial rhetoric. Rhetoric provides access to the underlying categories of thought which would otherwise remain lost to consciousness. In short, rhetoric points to ways of thinking. Temporal and spatial rhetorics are linked to questions of identity and subjectivity.

Temporal rhetoric, which characterizes second wave feminism, is developmental. Rooted in Romantic notion of the Self and in Modernist’s fragmented Self, it is associated to concepts of awakening, epiphany, revelation, rebirth and conversion, and initiation, after the ironic/nostalgic quest for restoration and redemption. This implies a “before and after,” narratives of “consciousness raising,” “becoming,” or “coming out,” all of which presume a linear series of stages which in turn propagate binaries like asleep/awake, blindness/sight, and an ultimate hierarchy between the uninitiated and the initiated, between those who belong and those who don’t (Friedman, 2001:19).

The spatial rhetoric of multipositionality characterizes the third wave feminist rhetoric of identity. It posits dynamic and dialogic motion through socially constructed spaces, instead of an underlying linear narrative of progressive development. Whereas gender is the main focus of the temporal rhetoric of awakening trends, such cultural categories as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, national origin, age, and so forth interact with gender in the spatial rhetoric of location. This geopolitical and transnational literacy begins in recognizing five tropic patterns: the metaphors of nation, borders, migration, “glocation,” and “conjuncture” (Friedman, 2001:26).

*Nation* refers to one’s concept of and relations to the space one belongs to; *borders* point to the (geographical, psychological, emotional, spiritual) spaces in-between which suggest both intercultural mixing and longings for connection; *migration* reflects the movement of the body through space and time, resulting in the sedimentation and palimpsestic layering of identity; “*glocation*” fuses the terms global and local, pointing to the specificity of local feminism as it is influenced by and influences in turn, global systems; *conjuncture* refers to the juxtaposition or superimposition of cultural formations, of which montage and collage are the two forms (Friedman, 2001: 26-33).

The presence of spatial tropes would reveal a concept of identity that emphasizes the differences among women, and is based on notions of position rather than essence. This difference is mediated not just by gender but by other cultural categories such as race, class, and ethnicity. Spatial tropes focus on identity as it is linked to the concept of nation in all its

local aspects, its links to the global village, along with notions of migrations across borders resulting in hybridization and transculturation (where a culture redefines another in its own terms).

Key to my reading is the identification of these temporal and spatial rhetorics. Are the plots linear or conjunctural? Are there other manifestations of conjuncture in the novels such as collages/montages of time, space, images, and concepts? How are the characters, specifically the women characters, portrayed? Are they essentially universal stereotypes? Or do they reveal, through their glocational, border or migrant position(s) in the world of the novel, their differences? How are they constituted as Latin American women?

### **Isabel Allende's Poetics**

Since rhetoric reveals ways of thinking, any conclusions this paper arrives at will necessarily point to the mediator of meanings in these novels. Following are some excerpts from interviews with Isabel Allende where she talks about her writing strategies, the characters in her novels, and who and what she writes for. It is hoped that this will expand not only our understanding of the meaning(s) of the texts, but also of the greater purposes for the writing of this paper.

Allende claims that through her writing, she recovered her roots: "My roots were no longer in Chile or in a family, they were in this book, in these memories that I had invented. I realize that I could invent my own life, recreate it every day by writing about it" (Moore, 1994).

Isabel Allende describes her books as having elements of 'imagination': "There is hyperbole; there is gross exaggeration; there is recurrent use of premonition, of coincidence – of things that happen in fiction that wouldn't seem to happen in real life; but, actually, if you pay attention, they happen often enough. In that sense, there are elements of magical realism in some of my novels – but not in all of them – and they always have a logical explanation if you look for it" (Zapata-Whelan, 1999). She sees a close relationship between journalism and literary creativity and thinks that journalism is important because it helps her to control her language: "It forces you, in very little time, to grab your reader and not let her go, so that she becomes involved..." (Pinto, 1991:25)

She admits in a 1991 interview that life in an English-language environment is affecting her writing: "My sentences are shorter, there's less ornamentation, fewer adjectives. The language is more straightforward, and . . . the text is more restrained." She also admits that she has moved away from magical realism to a more straightforward literary realism (Rodden, 2004).

She speaks about the ‘marginal’ characters and protagonists in her books: “Marginal in the sense that, for example, my protagonists are either foreigners, immigrants, exiles, homosexuals, thieves, uneducated and poor women, orphans: people who are not born in privilege. Ever. And if they are born in privilege like in *The House of the Spirits* there is something in their lives that makes them marginals. They don't fit in. They are exiled from the big umbrella of the establishment. I like people who stand on the edge and therefore are not sheltered. And that is when you have to bring out all the strength that you have inside and if you live sheltered you never use it, because you don't need it. But when you go to a situation that is extreme – like a war or whatever or when you're a martyr – then you need all of that strength and you realize that you have this incredible source of energy inside. That it's there when we reach for it” (Richards, 1999).

When asked about whether her feminine characters are ever weak, she answers: “More than strong, they dare take a risk. They feel that they don't belong. They're poor and have no place in the establishment. Most of my strong heroines make terrible decisions. They're so stubborn. They *have* to have extraordinary lives. Weak people don't make good characters. They make good former spouses” (TLA, 2007).

Summing up her first decade of literary development, Allende told one interviewer: “each one of my books corresponds to a very strong emotion.” She associated *The House of the Spirits* with “longing,” a desire to recapture a lost world; *Of Love and Shadows* with “anger” in the face of the abuses of dictatorships; and *Eva Luna* with “accepting myself, finally, as a person and a writer.” Allende also affirms that *Eva Luna* led to her self-acceptance of herself as a storyteller (Rodden, 2004). Having claimed that she writes for her country and for Latin American women, Allende simply says: “What do I do with my truth? I write it” (Rodden, 2004).

### ***Eva Luna***

This is the story of the life of Eva Luna, told in the first person by Eva Luna herself. It is a text within a text, made up of stories of lives within a life. Three main stories run parallel along each other: The story of Rolf Carle, an Austrian émigré filmmaker haunted by his father's Nazi past, and Eva Luna, an illegitimate scriptwriter and storyteller. Snaking in and out of all the other stories, is the “turbulent coming of age of her unnamed South American country”(Allende, 2002). It is peopled with migratory men and women of mixed races, classes, and genders, moving across the jungle terrains and metropolitan spaces of Latin America, to a warring Europe, and to such isolated places as La Colonia and Agua Santa.

Consuelo just appears one day and grows up in the jungle mission. She is sent to the convent where she learns about the Catholic religion and her “manners.” She is then brought to the house of a foreign professor who preserves the dead. There she reads books written

by masters from the West. She takes care of a snake-bitten gardener and gives birth to a child nine months later, without the knowledge of her employer. She names her child Eva.

Eva grows up in the professor's house among cadavers and on her mother's stories. When Consuelo dies, her *madrina* takes care of her and brings her to the *patrona*, from whom the *madrina* collects Eva's wages. Eva runs away after committing the terrible crime of pulling out her *patrona*'s hair and saying "No!" She meets Huberto Naranjo, but feeling homesick, goes back again to her *patrona*, where she pines for Naranjo. She has to leave again when the *patrona* could not anymore bear her *madrina*'s harassment. She lives with several employers for a while including a *patrona* who teaches her how to make a special plaster which would come in handy later.

When Eva runs away from a Cabinet Minister, she is once more saved by Naranjo who brings her to the La Senora and Melesio. She lives a pampered life there until civil unrest breaks out. She is found by Riad Halabi, a hare-lipped Indian who brings her to Agua Santa where she serves him and his wife Zulema. Halabi's relative Kamal enters their lives, and is seduced by Zulema. When Kamal runs away, Zulema takes her own life and Eva is blamed for her death by the police, but not by the community. Soon, the community turns against both Eva and Riad for living under one roof and Riad sends Eva to the city. They make love before she leaves.

Eva decides she has had enough of following everybody else's orders and decides to strike out on her own, in a city in chaos over another civil disturbance. She meets Mimi (formerly Melecio) who takes her into his home. Eva meets up with Naranjo and they become lovers. She becomes involved with Naranjo's revolutionary activities but leaves him after realizing that she would never mean as much to Naranjo as the revolution did. Eva is wooed by an officer but she refuses him. She finally meets Rolf Carle, whose story runs parallel to hers throughout the novel.

Rolfe is the son of a Nazi officer whose perversion and violence strikes terror in his family and hatred in his students who finally murder him – with the community's and the family's hidden compliance. He runs away from both home and country to his Uncle in Latin America who has settled peacefully in a community created by other Europeans. He grows up there and has a sexual liaison with his two blonde cousins until they both get married. He becomes involved in the nation's revolutionary activities through his camera and meets Eva during an assignment.

Eva, has become a scriptwriter of radio dramas. The novel ends with a romantic description of how Eva and Rolfe end happily together. This ending is told in the same humorous tone with which the rest of the novel is told. Eva herself qualifies all that has been told by saying, "But then again, maybe that's not what happened."

## Analysis

There are three parallel stories in the novel – that of Eva, Rolf, and the unnamed Latin American country. Why did the author choose to juxtapose the life of a man from the West belonging to the white race with the life of a woman of mixed blood from the Latin Americas?

The stories of Rolf and Eva run parallel to each other, revealing how the effects of war, violence, oppression, and injustice are both global and local, and how each country is linked to another so that what occurs in one continent affect others across the globe. Rolf is the product of a household brought up in fear of the patriarchal power of his father whose sexual perversity brings shame and pain to his mother. Eva is brought up by women servants like herself, and she is treated like a piece of property by whomever she serves. All throughout, the story of the country, including the injustices being done to the peoples of the unnamed Latin American nation and the effects on its people, is told.

Violence, oppression, and injustice are strands of the same thread running through these three stories. The patriarchal rule, with its prevalent economic and political manifestations, is both global and local, affecting not just women, but men as well (as shown in the lives of Eva and Carl).

This novel is broken up into segments, like parts of a radio drama very much like the one written by Eva towards the end of the novel. The last paragraph begins with the words: “Or maybe that isn’t what happened ... I exaggerated slightly.” Was all this Eva’s writing? Were all these events but mere segments of a soap opera that she continues to write? The significance of this writing act will be discussed at length at some point in this paper.

The linear development of events could be an indication of temporal ways of thinking. It brings forth such global, universal thoughts as: There will always be chaos, there will always be suffering and pain. But we all have different ways of responding to what this life has to give. Suffering and oppression, especially the kind experienced by women, in this case Latin American women, is overdetermined, experienced and responded to in specific ways, depending on the constitution of the individual woman mediated by her class, ethnicity, age, and race. At certain interstices of the novel, we are reminded that there is a narrator and that what we have before us is a story. There are also, in the course of the narratives, conjunctural insertions of Consuelo’s “spirit,” and the juxtaposition of past, present and future time. This spatial rhetoric will be addressed later on in this paper.

Are the women characters in *Eva Luna* stereotypes? Essentialist and universalistic representations of women? It would seem so. Yet we need to look closely at how Allende portrays the heretofore obscured sexuality of women, their silence, and their passivity. Allende draws for us the varied facets of the suffering of Latin American women.

Zulema is brought to Latin America from her Indian homeland to marry a husband she has never seen in person – a husband whose repulsive (to her) appearance belies his kind heart. Zulema, in contrast, is portrayed as a woman who is lazy, incapable of assisting her husband, a role which is taken over by Eva. Allende puts a kind heart in the “oppressor” and creates a maid-to-order bride who relinquishes her role as the caring, loyal partner, in a quiet resistance that will culminate on the night Kamal surrenders to her, when her female sexual power will break the “natural” bonds that keep wives in their places. She becomes alive again and she “defeats” Kamal who succumbs to passion over societal taboos. Kamal leaves, unable to face the consequences of his rupturing of the unspoken “order.” Zulema stays and waits, deteriorates emotionally, and finally takes her own life, yet the power of her desire and her ensuing breakage from “what is and should be” remains with Eva. In her final act, the foreigner, the woman who has been taken and chosen, makes a choice and breaks loose from all that suppresses and oppresses her.

This female sexual power is also embodied in the two female cousins of Carl, who pursue him and “share” him underneath the covers of their bed in a totally unconventional manner. La Señora, peddler of women’s wiles, draws the male scions of the “higher” society into the secret marginal world over which she rules. This power, though held in check by Carl’s mother and even denigrated by his father’s perverse sexual fantasies, shows its face in his mother’s unspoken approval of the father’s death.

Eva’s *madrina*, the one responsible for her being baptized, and the one who collects the wages from Eva’s employers, gives birth to a two-headed child whom she throws into the garbage bin. This is taken against her and her society makes her suffer from it. The *madrina*, already marginalized by her class position and gender, ends up a crazy woman. In this Latin American country, being different, or producing anything that varies from the norm gives its society the license to judge, to persecute, and to drive a woman not only to the edges of society, but to the edges of her sanity.

In this novel, Allende’s concept of the Latin American *feminine* is neither essentialist nor idealist. In the person of Consuelo and Eva Luna, she reveals her vision of the “destinies” of Latin American women.

Consuelo was not “born” in the novel. Her simply *appear(ing) one day*, apparently without any known origin, is reminiscent of spatial locations, which posits identity as “an ongoing process of becoming without origin and end.” She crawled *across the footbridge from the dock*, suggesting even before she could walk, a material “border-experience.” The *savage naked cub, caked with mud and excrement* is juxtaposed with *a tiny Jonah vomited up by some freshwater whale* which is a Christian image. The “cub” being likened to a major prophet from the Holy Book can be read as a parody of Western representations of dirty natives from the jungle. However, does this not also perpetuate the image of the wild and

uncivilized native? This also invokes the rhetoric of “borders” and “migration” which are spaces of transculturation and palimpsestic layering. Spatial rhetoric suggests “fluid and flexible ways of being” as the image of water in this narrative here connotes. When missionaries took Consuelo in before she learned to walk, *drap(ing) her in a diaper to cover her shame* (2) the implications of “glocational”, border, and migration ways of thinking with its intersections of race, gender, religion, and class are set in place.

Although it was not explicitly stated, certain descriptions and reactions to Consuelo tells us that her looks were foreign. Her “satan’s tail” was red, and she had pale skin. Thus *“Consuelo grew up without any fixed niche in the strict hierarchy of the Mission. She was not exactly a servant, but neither did she have the status of the Indian boys in the school,... I think she knew nothing of her origins or how she had come to be where the missionaries had found her”*(2).

Consuelo’s “border” experience was many-layered. In the convent, Consuelo and the other girls *“learned to wear shoes, eat with a fork, and master a few elementary domestic skills, so that later they could be employed in humble serving positions, for it was assumed they were incapable of anything else”*(7). The image of the native female as uneducated and poor, needing the white man’s aid, is augmented by this motif .

“Transculturation is one culture’s absorption and redefinition within its own terms what it takes from others” (Friedman, 2001: 16). One such “multiple contact zone” is at the Chapel of the Sisters of Charity where Consuelo struggles to *“recite the rosary, but soon she would be lost in needless adventures in which her memories of the jungle alternated with the figures of sacred history. Consuelo made the attempt in good faith, but never succeeded in accepting the tyrannical god the nuns preached to her about; she preferred a more joyful, maternal, compassionate god”*(8). Eva tells, in parodic manner, of her mother’s encounter with this foreign religion when she asks about the Virgin Mary (8), a situation which Eva herself experiences later upon going to confession (59).

In the house of Professor Jones where she lives as a servant, Consuelo is exposed to Western culture through the books that she reads there, and in the privacy of their room, she breaks her silence and tells her stories. These stories remain in the memory of her daughter: *“her stories dissolve the walls to reveal incredible landscapes, palaces crowded with unimaginable objects, faraway countries that she invented or borrowed from the Professor’s library”* (22). This silence and the use of words and storytelling as modes of rebellion against the patriarchal hegemony can be construed as traditional. What makes it ironic is that the voice that must be used against the “oppressor” must come from the oppressors themselves.

Her “migration” from the jungle to the capital, from the Mission to the convent, and to the house of a foreign immigrant produced in Eva’s mother an identity that was



“sedimented”, acquiring “palimpsestic layers each of which reflected the locations through which she had moved, each of which influenced the other layers and her identity as a whole” (DeKoven, 2001: 29). “She maintained intact her memories of her childhood in the Mission; she retained all the anecdotes she had heard and those she had learned in her readings” (22).

Although most of Consuelo’s life was lived in isolation, (“no profane babel penetrated these (convent) walls, nor any of the national prosperity...”), away from the center of all the action that comprised the growth (or decline) of her nation, she was nevertheless and inevitably constituted still by her nation’s story. Her images of her nation is drawn by Eva thus: The professor, who was given conflicting information regarding the embalming of the President, “was muttering as he left the Palace that he would never understand these tropical peoples and the best thing he could do would be to return to the beloved city of his birth, where the laws of logic and urbanity were in full sway – and which he should never have left” (15). We see here a classic representation of the “third world” by a man from the “first world.” For “her, the difference between dictatorship and democracy was occasionally being able to attend a Carlos Gardel movie – formerly forbidden to women...” (17). This simply emphasizes the view of the Latin American women as passive to political issues.

How does Consuelo live within these shifting marginal spaces which her class, race, and gender positions allow her to occupy, where “time is bent and distances deceive the human eye, persuading the traveller to wander in circles” (22)?

On the long journey from the jungle Mission to the convent, Consuelo “wept all the tears stored in her soul, leaving none in reserve for later sorrows. Once her tears were exhausted, she closed her lips, resolving from that moment forward to open them only when it could not be avoided” (5). She displayed no emotion when she discovered her pregnancy, the fruit of a strange liaison with a snake-bitten Indian gardener, telling no one about it until she was discovered after giving birth. Later, her daughter Eva would describe her as “a silent person, able to camouflage herself against the furniture or to disappear in the design of a rug. She never made the slightest commotion – it was as if she was not there” (22). This silence, stoicism, and invisibility could also be read as traditional modes of defining identities. However, this could also be read as a spatial description. When one is in constant motion, one who is always becoming rather than just being who one is, the lines between here and there become blurred, and spaces are never fully occupied.

Even at a young age, Consuelo supplanted with poetic flourishes what she lacked in information, as when she replied that she was born on the year of the comet when interrogated by the Mother Superior. Her daughter Eva says of her mother: “In the privacy of the room we shared however, she was transformed. When she talked about the past, or told her stories, the room filled with light... Words are free, she used to say, and she appropriated them; they were all hers... reality is not only what we see on the surface; it has a magical

*dimension as well and, if we so desire, (we can) enhance it and color it to make our journey through life less trying”(22).*

This is how Consuelo lived within her spaces: *“She manufactured the substance of her own dreams, and from those materials, constructed a world...”(22).* Born without a name nor origin, living within the parameters of her society, and dying without a cent to her borrowed name, Consuelo’s only legacy to her daughter was this “world.”

Eva appropriated, not just her mother’s world, but also her gift with spaces: *“Space expanded and contracted according to my will; the cubby beneath the stairs contained an entire planetary system, but the sky seen through the attic skylight was nothing more than a pale circle of glass. One word from me and abracadabra! Reality was transformed” (25).*

All the places peopled by all those who passed through her life are told by Eva in a “conjunctural” collage of stories. Often, in the middle of a telling, we are reminded that what we are reading are narratives told from a particular point of view, in this case, Eva’s. The past or the future is often inserted into the present telling. For instance,

*She (Consuelo) learned to hold her tongue, and prudently suppressed the treasure of her prodigious flow of fables until I gave her the opportunity to unloose the torrent of words stored within her (8).*

The linear development of this realistic narrative would place the novel within the framework of second wave feminism. At the same time, the threads of narratives create an “epistemological juncture in which each discursive system interrupts each other” (DeKoven, 2001: 31). Into these juxtapositioned tales of such characters as Rolfe, *madrina*, La Senora, Huberto Naranjo, and Melesio, Consuelo’s “presence” inserts itself through the consciousness of Eva; while woven into the interstices of these separate but interconnected lives is the story of the nation, *“where the dwellings seem to drift amid silent canoes, garbage, carcasses of dogs and rats, and inexplicable white blossoms...” (2).* Even in the remoteness of Consuelo’s Jungle missions, or in Rolf’s utopian La Colonia, in the enclosure of Eva’s convent, and in such hidden places as Riad Halabi’s Agua Santa, and no matter how ignorant they are of it, penetrating the lives of each character is the story/discourse of the nation --

where powerful people such as the El Benefactor free political prisoners because of a comet; or a high-ranking official such as the Minister keeps a special chair in his room – a chair with a hole in the middle from which he dispatches his duties, both official and unofficial; where the rich and privileged import snow for a debutante swooning in her furs high above the guests and the pool which, instead of turning into ice, turns into a gelatinous gel;

where “in many places people did not know of the overthrow or that the general had been in power for several years; where people lived on the periphery of current events” (177); at the same time, “this is also where they boasted of being a uniformly brown people and, ... even allowing for a history of colonization, political bosses, and tyrants, it was the promised land” (211); where it is considered “bad luck” to be born a girl; where boys (and not girls) are educated; where men had it best (45).

These descriptions of the political and economic situation in Allende’s unnamed Latin American country, is told with humorous exaggeration, in itself becoming a serious commentary on “nation,” and how race, class, and gender position women.

Years later, Eva would reach the conclusion that her *madrina* was right (about men having it best), but she also says this: “Although I still cannot imagine myself in a man’s body, with hair on my face, a tendency to order people around, and something unmanageable below my navel that, to be perfectly frank, I would not know where to put”(45).

Amidst explosions of revolutionary fervor, and riding the uncertain waves of national development and turmoil, Eva realizes that “for Naranjo, and others like him, ‘the people’ seemed to be composed exclusively of men; we women should contribute to the struggle but were excluded from decision-making and power. His revolution would not change my fate in any fundamental way. Perhaps it was at that moment I realized that mine is a war with no end in view; I might as well fight it cheerfully or I would spend my life waiting for some distant victory in order to be happy”(232). Quite clearly, these words reveal the ambiguous relationship that women have with nation and nationalism.

Eva inhabited a nation of conflicting groups, views, landscapes: “All ages of history co-exist in this immoderate geography”(177). From the very start, global and national events flowed in and out of the life of Eva: “While in South America embalmed bodies were accumulating in the house of Professor Jones and a copulation inspired by a serpent’s bite engendered a little girl whose mother would call her Eva so she would love life, also in Europe reality took abnormal dimensions. The war sank the world into confusion and fear. By the time the little girl (Katharina) was walking... peace was being signed on the other side of the Atlantic on a continent in ruins” (29).

Postwar Europe was driving people like Rolfe to migrate to “little Europes” in Latin America like *La Colonia*. This diaspora was further encouraged by the General who “opened the border to anyone wanting to flee the misery of postwar Europe” (75). The movement was not confined to entries into the country for with every revolution was a corresponding outward movement which consisted mostly of corrupt officials like the “Man of the Gardenia who left in his private plane to live in luxury in Europe, where he is today, very old but elegant, still, writing his memoirs to set the record straight.”

Revealing a “glocational” mode, the local/private/domestic is “constituted in relation to global systems,” and conversely, such systems acquire a “particular local inflection.” There is a plethora of cultures and subcultures in the spaces in which Eva finds herself. The landscape of Eva’s nation consists of such places as La Colonia, an “unbelievable town clinging to a tropical mountainside” (294); Agua Santa, “prodigal in fruit and flowers, a paradise protected from all evil” (141); and the city which was “growing shapelessly, like a malignant tumor assailed by lunatic architecture: Italian marble palaces, Texas ranch houses, Tudor mansions, steel skyscrapers, Japanese teahouses, Swiss chalets...”(61).

During her early years at the house of the European Professor Jones, she is “brought up on the theory that all vices issue from idleness, an idea implanted by the Little Sisters of Charity, and cultivated by the learned doctor with his despotic discipline”(23). Eva’s mind is filled with stories by her mother who, to stop her from going to where the cadavers were kept, “gave a name to each body and invented a past for everyone,” thus populating her world with a hybrid mix of *spirits like elves and fairies* (24). The transculturation process never ends, for she also lives with her *madrina* who “believed in all the catholic saints, some saints from African invention and still others from her own invention” (47).

In a world where women and children are mute and invisible, Eva works for her first *patrona*, but she never sees her wages for her *madrina* collects the money every two weeks. After her *madrina* loses her mind, Eva lives a life of constant “migration,” from her first *patrona*, to the Yugoslavian born lady whose skills in creating the *porcelana* also awakens Eva’s interest in the culture of Egypt. After another revolution scares this particular *patrona* back to her country, Eva is found by Riad Halabi and brought to Agua Santa which becomes one of the sites of Eva’s romantic and sexual constitution.

These “migrations” and “glocations” engendered in Eva “border” experiences of utopian longing and desire for connection. She speaks of her memories of Elvira: “We had been together for more than three years; she had given me affection and I had filled her head with romantic stories... Our affection needed no words, and we would just sit and look at each other the way we used to before I was taken away”(107).

These, along with her memories of Zulema and Kamal which haunt her relationships with other men, her relationship with Huberto Naranjo which leads her to get involved with the revolution, and her memory of her mother, all constitute palimpsestic layers of her self. The “conjunctural” insertion of her mother’s invoked presence also serves to fill that liminal space where the “paradoxical processes of connection and separation” are highlighted. Eva speaks of what she feels about her *madrina* after running away from the Minister of the special chair: “I had the sensation of having lived through this desertion before. I invoked the spirit of my mother to give me courage and, with the manner of someone setting off for an appointment, I started off instinctively toward the center of the city”(113).

Global economics brought the radio into the world of Eva, and she speaks of it with her usual sense of humor: *“proclaiming the virtues of this land blessed by God with all manner of treasures, from its central position on the globe and the wisdom of its leaders to the swamp of petroleum on which it floated... I learned to sing boleros and popular songs and to follow the beginning English class... This pencil is red, is this pencil blue?”* (72). Another “glocational” manifestation is recounted by Eva: *“For lack of commercial vision in this country, her ideas (La Señora) were grabbed up by the North Americans, who now hold her patents and sell her models around the globe”*(124).

She says the same thing about her writing: *“storytelling seemed an art that had been passed by in advances of radio, television, and movies: everything transmitted by airwaves or projected onto a screen was true, I thought, while my tales were almost always a string of lies, and not even I knew where they came from”* (212).

These “migrations” were not only physical, but psychological and emotional as well: *“My body developed slowly, but inside something was raging out of control, like an unseen river. While I felt I was a woman, the windowpane reflected the blurred image of a little girl”*(70).

Eva runs away after she rebels against her first *patrona*, but she returns out of homesickness. By then, she had met Huberto Naranjo: *“Every time I looked outside from the balcony, I realized that I would have been better off had I not come back. The street was more appealing than the house...”* (71).

This desire to take to the streets once more is a border experience of longing for connection. She realizes that home is no longer a place, but in the person of Huberto: *“I often thought of him, placing his dark face on all my fairy-tale princes”* (71). And when they meet again after many years, she says: *“I would hug my pillow and praying that my legs would grow out and my breasts would hurry up and grow”*(127).

She comes to live with La Señora and Melesio, the man who longs to be a woman, and describes that place as an in-between house, reminiscent of border experiences: *“That was a good time in my life, in spite of having the sensation of floating on a cloud, surrounded by both lies and things left unspoken. Occasionally I thought I glimpsed the truth, but soon found myself once again lost in a forest of ambiguities. In that house, day and night were reversed, you lived at night and slept during the day...”* (126).

Another “interstitial location of syncretic transculturation” is La Colonia. The place becomes a metaphor for the psychological, spiritual, and cultural borderlands which Eva had visited in her lifetime: *“We walked through the twisting streets of that unbelievable town... a relic from another century... I had the feeling I was in a world so new that sound had not yet been created. For the first time I was hearing real silence. Until that moment there had always*

*been noise in my life: often barely perceptible, like the whispers of Zulema's and Kamal's ghosts or the murmurs of the jungle at dawn; other times thunderous, like the radios in the kitchen of my childhood... I wanted to capture that mute space and guard it forever as a treasure... when Rolf Carle spoke, the spell evaporated and I was left with the same frustration I had felt as a child when a handful of snow turned to water in my hands"(294).*

Spatial modes of thinking are fluid, dynamic, multi-layered, palimpsestic. The words contradictory and conflicting are often used to describe such a rhetoric, as when a little girl whose life and whose very dreams are denied her finally allows that which is smoldering underneath to come out *"A monumental NO! swelled inside me, choking me; I heard it burst forth in a scream that came from my toes, and watched it explode against the patrona's powdered face"(60).*

Travelling, in reverse, the same route she had taken years before in Riad Halabi's truck, Eva gives us a glimpse of these spatial modes of thinking about identity: *"I sought clarity of mind to review the past and take stock of the possibilities that lay before me. Until that day, I had followed other people's orders, starved for affection, with no future beyond the next day and no fortune but my stories. It took a constant effort of imagination to fill in the parts of my past that were missing. Even my mother was an ephemeral shadow I had to sketch in everyday.... I looked at my hands roughened by domestic chores; I ran them over my face, feeling the shape of the bones; I buried my fingers in my hair and sighed, Enough! I repeated the word aloud Enough!!" (203).*

Given the "limits of this social order," being finally able to speak out and say "No" and "Enough," to take charge of one's life after years of always bowing down to the will of others would amount to the power and strength of the women characters that Allende speaks about. This, however, could remind us of temporal notions of the developmental Self "associated to concepts of awakening, epiphany, revelation, rebirth and conversion."

How does someone like Eva occupy the many spaces she must move through? How does she describe where and how she is?

*In the motionless sands where my stories germinated, every birth, death, and happening depended on me. I could plant anything I wanted in those sands; I had only to speak the right word to give it life. At times I felt that the universe fabricated from the power of the imagination had stronger and more lasting contours than the blurred realm of the flesh and blood creatures around me. (188)*

How does Eva live within her spaces? She writes. "How does one write?" She is asked by General Rodriguez. And she responds: *"I just do what I can. Reality is a jumble we can't always measure or decipher, because everything is happening at the same time... I try to*

*open a path through that maze, to put a little order in that chaos, to make life more bearable. When I write, I describe life as I would like it to be” (300).*

And indeed, it seems as if even the world of reality has succumbed to the world of words and imagination as *“the characters became so real that they invaded the house...”* and Eva speaks of being *“totally immersed in the world I was creating with the all-encompassing power of words, transformed into a multi-faceted being, reproduced to infinity, seeing my own reflection in multiple mirrors, living countless lives, speaking with many voices” (297).*

Indeed, spatial rhetoric is also described as being polyvocal and often contradictory. The novel begins thus: *“My name is Eva Luna, which means ‘life,’ according to a book of names my mother consulted. It would seem that from the very start, the life of Eva Luna is intertwined with the world of texts. Yet these are the first words in the last paragraph: “Or maybe that isn’t how it happened...”(307)*

Eva Luna does create her own world, but she is also, paradoxically, being created by this world, these spaces she lives in. The constant back and forth movement between storytelling and acknowledgment of the act disallows her being “swallowed up” by the text she is creating, for she herself knows that she is a text, constituted by the people and places and multiple positions of race/class/gender she is compelled to move across and back:

*...but as soon as I had begun dusting off memories and weaving destinies, I saw I did not know where I was going, or what the resolution would be – if there was one. I suspected I would reach the end only at my own death, and was fascinated by the idea that I was another character in the story, and that I had the power to determine my fate, or invent a life for myself... (252). Or maybe that isn’t how it happened... (307).*

What else is this novel trying to say? We write stories of our life in our minds to make sense of it, to find order out of the constant flux and chaos that is life. We are actually saved by the fact that we can tell the story, for in order to tell it, it must belong to the past. The movement from the past to present transforms the suffering, making it powerless.

It would seem, from our discussions above, that the patterns often found in spatial rhetoric or third wave feminism can be identified in Eva Luna. There are, however, elements in the novel that would cause us to question this conclusion. Allende’s self-proclaimed use, evident also in this novel, of the realistic fictional form would be problematized by third wave feminism. The realistic mode is identified by Toril Moi as belonging to traditional humanism, demanding “realistic images of women” (Moi, 2002:6).

Although her mother’s “presence” strengthens Eva, and her friendships with Elvira and La Señora allow her a reprieve from her misfortunes, it is the men in her life who save her from the cruelty of other women (madrina, patrona). First, there was Huberto Naranjo,

her first love, followed by Riad Halabi her second love, and finally Rolf Carle with whom she “lives happily ever after.” The narration of this final romance, however, ends with a tone of scepticism, in keeping with the rest of the novel which is filled with humorous exaggerations and hyperbole. The sarcastic humor with which many parts of this story is written serves to communicate the derision that Eva feels towards the oppressive situation in her country caused by economic, political, religious and patriarchal rule. Allende speaks of this humor herself: “It’s as if deep down they make fun of those rules that men try to impose on them; they shake them off with a swish of the hips and a flick of the eyelashes” (Pinto, 1991: 40).

Consuelo is referred to as a “dirty naked cub,” saved by the missionaries, taught in the ways of the cultured and civilized West. This education is continued, albeit without the knowledge of the professor, as she is exposed to the Western books at the professor’s house. Does this not perpetuate the image of “natives” as wild, uneducated, and in need of the white man’s aid? Doesn’t her silence and invisibility augment the image of the “voiceless and powerless” woman? It is an image which happens to be repeatedly presented to the reader in the person of the unnamed wife of the Nazi Carle, her weak daughter Katharina, the patrona who kept her screams to herself, and the madrina who eventually became crazy. Yet these women did somehow find their voices: Consuelo in the presence of her daughter, Rolfe’s wife at his death, the patrona who was finally able to scream in her own house, and Eva Luna in her writing. For Toril Moi, such madness as the madrina’s can be a revolt against the regime of patriarchal order, “a disruption of symbolic repression by unconscious forces” (Moi, 2002: 12).

Allende describes her women characters as strong, despite their being marginalized and oppressed. Yet the women in *Eva Luna* seem to portray the opposite of this strength, with their silences, their madness, their invisibility, their dependencies. The rhetoric of location is not concerned about whether these women are essentially strong or weak. It is concerned about how identity is continually negotiated within the limits of the social order (Friedman, 2004:27). No woman is essentially and always either strong or weak. In a lifetime, a woman can be both. These women are “sedimented” subjects moving between borders, and straddling multiple positions. Although they have not (because they *could* not) totally escape the limits of the social order in which they find themselves, they have learned to find their own spaces, even if it would lead to madness (as in the case of *madrina*) or even persecution and death (as in the case of *Zulema*).

### ***Of Love and Shadows***

The novel is about the love that grows between Irene and Francisco as they enter the shadows of violence and brutality that have engulfed their country. Irene is the daughter of Beatriz Beltran, who was abandoned by her husband for unknown reasons. Irene is also the fiancée of a captain in the army, Gustavo Morante. Francisco Leal is the son of a Marxist professor.



On a writing assignment for the magazine they both work for, Irene and Francisco travel to a farm in Los Riscos to do a story about Evangelina Ranquileo, a girl who is rumored to have strange psychic powers. At noon each day, Evangelina has convulsive attacks during which the whole house shakes and clatters. The people in the community would come for healing and miracles.

While Irene and Francisco are there, an army troop led by Lieutenant Juan de Dios Ramirez arrives. Evangelina's brother, Pradelio, is a soldier in the troop, and has told Lieutenant Ramirez about Evangelina's strange illness. The troops let loose a hail of gunfire, thinking they would frighten the girl out of her attacks. But when Lieutenant Ramirez draws near Evangelina's bed, she attacks him, lifting him up and hauling him out of the house. The troop of soldiers depart.

Lieutenant Ramirez secretly returns and lines up the Ranquileo family at gunpoint. He arrests Evangelina, to repay the humiliation that he has suffered, and he drags her away in his jeep. Evangelina never returns. Irene and Francisco help her mother, Digna Ranquileo, search for her. They go to the morgue to look for Evangelina's body, but they do not find her body among the many cadavers of people who have been beaten or tortured to death. Irene begins to see how concretely the brutal and repressive nature of the military dictatorship has affected the people.

Irene, realizing she has fallen in love with Francisco, breaks off her engagement to Gustavo Morante. Sergeant Faustino Rivera, a friend of the Ranquileo family, reveals how he has witnessed the murder of Evangelina by Lieutenant Ramirez. Evangelina's brother, Pradelio, was sentenced by Lieutenant Ramirez to solitary confinement in prison. Sergeant Rivera managed to release Pradelio, helping him to escape to the mountains.

Digna Ranquileo asks Irene to help Pradelio get out of the country. Pradelio's younger brother, Jacinto, leads Irene and Francisco to the cave where Pradelio is hiding in the mountains. Pradelio tells them about the abandoned mine in Los Riscos where the bodies of abducted and murdered victims of Lt Ramirez can be found. Irene and Francisco, finding the abandoned mine, unearths Evangelina's body. Francisco shows the photographs of their discovery to his brother José, who is a Catholic priest. José gives the photographs to the Cardinal, since the Catholic Church is the only institution which has not been crushed by the military government. The Cardinal forms a commission composed of journalists, attorneys, and international organizations who order the opening of the mine. More bodies are unearthed and cases of "lost" persons are solved.

A truck runs over Sgt Rivera and Irene is shot down by gunfire. She survives but the threat of death remains. Lieutenant Ramirez is found guilty of murder by a military court, but is set free on a decree of amnesty by the General of the military government. Irene's former fiancé, Gustavo Morante, is now disillusioned with the corruption and brutality of the

government, and plots to overthrow the General. But Gustavo's plans are discovered by the Intelligence Service, and he is arrested and executed. Francisco helps Irene escape from the hospital. With the help of their friends, they travel to the frontier, the novel ends with their escape from the country.

### Analysis

In this novel, the journalistic tone of Allende is brought to the fore in her use of the third-person omniscient narrator. Written to bear witness to the atrocities of the military power (which held sway over Chile in 1973) and the wide swath of violence, injustice, and fear that spread across the country, cutting through all classes and races, Allende does away with alternative writing strategies, or a different narrative form, or the sarcastic humor, exaggerations and hyperbole so apparent in the other two novels of this study. The detailed description of the hidden mass grave stands out and is actually placed in the center of the novel as a symbol, the culminating point of all the economic, political, social ills of the unnamed Latin American nation.

The story is told in a linear, realist mode. Although they are very few, there are still traces of conjunctural thought. This montage of images is Irene's recollection of her discovery of the "baby who fell from the sky": "...brigands had invaded the house, and Rosa was lying stretched out on the bed with her throat slit from ear to ear; she was being devoured by carnivorous rats that had swarmed up from the cellar; bound hand and foot, she was being violated by a madman"(145).

The following images of a nation is a mix of the fantastical and the real: "... a land of hurricanes, earthquakes, rivers broad as the sea, jungles where sunlight never penetrates, where mythological animals creep and crawl over eternal humus alongside human beings unchanged since the beginning of time; an irrational geography where you can be born with a star on your forehead, a sign of the marvellous; an enchanted realm of towering cordilleras where the air is as thin as a veil..."(205).

The linear development of the plot points to the temporal mode of thinking that created it. What happens within the boundaries of this framework only emphasizes the oppressiveness of a seemingly unsinkable, unshakeable power structure that shapes the lives and persons of the characters, especially the women characters of this novel.

Hilda Leal is the woman who, from within the limits of her role as wife and mother, manages to show a spiritual and emotional resiliency that sees her through a war, separation from family and country, and the death of a son. As an essentialist/idealist portrayal of a "gentle yet strong" woman, she holds the family together with her love. Her migration from Spain separates her from all that is familiar and sets her apart from the rest: "Until the coast of Europe vanished in the distance, all the voyagers stood at the rail singing songs of the

*Spanish republic in voices hoarse from weeping; all, that is, except Hilda, standing confidently in the bow, the baby in her arms, gazing toward the future” (97).*

As a woman foreigner she stands on marginal ground in the nation which she inhabits, and occupies a peripheral role in the lives of her husband and children. Nevertheless, she is the source of their strength, she – the mother of Francisco, the only woman in the family. Her border experience reveals an important choice she had to make: *“Hilda made up her mind to be selective in her memories.... It was better to erase the pain of nostalgia, homeland, family, and friends left behind, never to speak of them again”(95).*

Hilda does not isolate herself from the nation which has adopted her: *“As for Hilda, she used a unique method to resist the dictatorship... She thought it possible to defeat him through systematic prayer and faith in her cause... She met with a constantly growing group of pious souls who were steadfast in their intent to put an end to the tyranny. It was a national movement, a chain of prayer”(98).* This nation which Hilda has come to call her home, is actually a melting pot of races and cultures from around the globe: *“Here all races are mixed in the crucible of violence: feathered Indians; voyagers from faraway lands; itinerant blacks; Chinese stowed like contraband in apple crates; bewildered Turks; girls like flames; priests, prophets and tyrants...”(205).*

Beatriz Beltran is depicted as a seemingly frivolous upper class woman, concerned only with her social standing, what others might say about her and her family (considering the fact that her husband has been missing and the family is in dire financial straits), and finding her own joy in her young boyfriend, typically oblivious to the injustice and oppression that’s tearing her country apart. Ensnared in her upper class world, Beatriz could only appreciate the effects of the global system on her country: *“... the clean streets, the freshly painted walls, the courteous and well-behaved people. She looked at the shop windows filled with exotic merchandise that once had been unknown in this country... Japanese automobiles so delicate they looked disposable, as well as enormous chrome-trimmed executive motorcycles, crowded the streets”(177).*

Her position, however, does not place her in the “center” of her society. She is continuously marginalized by the absence of her husband (thus revealing the multiple stratifications of single women, women who are married but separated, women who are separated from their husbands and the reasons for the separation, etc). Trapped within the barriers set up by her society which she embraces, she finds a way to deal with her uncertain situation by putting up the home for the aged, and going off to another country with her lover Michel.

If Beatriz Beltran is the quintessential upper class woman, Digna is the quintessential peasant woman trapped within her social, economic, and political position. She is befuddled by the switching of her baby with that of another’s, helpless in the face of a bureaucracy who

refuses to correct the mistake, and powerless against a military system that condones the kidnapping, torture, and killing of innocents such as her daughter. For Digna, nation is confined to her home. She is a “country woman who had lived her entire life in the place where she was born, and who knew only the nearest towns”: “She could not imagine the size of the world beyond the peaks outlined against the horizon, but she suspected that the world stretched to regions where they spoke in other tongues and where people of different races live in unimaginable climes”(155).

The blatant and unresolved switching of the two Evangelinas at birth is symbolic of how, from the moment they are born, the women of this Latin American nation lose their identity, their power, their voice, their rights. They are interpellated as objects by the political, economic, and social systems of their nation. When she makes an attempt to recover her child, this is the response she gets: “The hospital director was indignant: Stupid thoughtless women! Instead of being grateful for the care we’re giving you, you’re creating a disturbance”(17).

When Digna seeks the aid of a priest to exorcise her daughter, the global religious system comes into play in this *glocational* description: “In recent times, the Vatican had frowned on these rituals, avoiding even the mention of the Devil, as if it were better to ignore him”(61).

At the disappearance of her daughter Evangelina and the threat of death placed upon the head of her son Pradelio, she has *border* thoughts, not of connection but of separation: “In those regions it was easy to stray from the straight and narrow and be swallowed up by bad luck, but to go was better than dying”(155).

Evangelina, the frail girl with magical powers, is the location of oppression on multiple levels – gender, race, class. Her being different draws the unwanted attention of the military, and culminates in her death. She is the main victim, as well as the center of the novel around which all the action occurs. It is because of her that Irene finally realizes the extent of the injustice and brutality propagated by the military power in her country.

Irene already occupies the fringes of the upper class, and the gender group to which she belongs. Her clothes, her thoughts, her actions and reactions to her despairing Mom already mark her as different. Brought up within the safe confines of the upper class educational and family institutions, she could not however, be spared from seeing instances of oppression and violence in her nation: “One day she had seen a car screech to stop and several men overpower a pedestrian and force him into their vehicle; from a distance she had smelled the smoke of bonfires burning blacklisted books; she had glimpsed the outlines of a human body floating in the dark waters of the canal”(118).

When she decides to enter the Morgue in her search for the body of Evangelina, she comes to face to face with the reality of how her people has suffered : *“Horried, she stared at the extensive marks of beatings on the body, the burned face, the amputated hands... when she left, Irene Beltran was no longer the same; something had shattered her soul”* (118).

She makes the ultimate crossing from innocence to the shadowy land of reality – the reality of a nation wrapped in the oppressive system of power set up by the military. This temporal epiphany, this awakening of consciousness, does not necessarily bring her to a place of unification, but of further fragmentation as she unearths layers of many truths about the nation she loves and the self she must live with. At the edge of a precipice, this is her border experience: *“She had suspected from the beginning that she held the end of a long thread in her hands that when tugged would unravel an unending snarl of horrors. Intuitively she knew that Evangelina was the borderline between her orderly world and a dark unknown region”*(127).

The presence of temporal elements such as the novel’s linear development, “stereotypical” women in Beatriz and Digna, notions of awakened consciousness in Irene, and the ideal woman in Hilda would seem to describe a feminism that fails to emphasize the differences among women. But several factors contribute to locational considerations such as the presence of the spatial tropes which reveal the fluidity with which these women move within, without and around their gender, class, and racial positions.

The temporal elements mentioned above point to the universality of women’s oppression, but their stories actually reveal the specific nature of oppression as experienced by the Latin American woman, pointing therefore, to the notion of “difference” being posited by third wave feminism. They are “stereotypical” only by virtue of the positions imposed upon them within the social, political, and economic orders in which they find themselves. This only points to the overpowering hold of the prevailing patriarchal order. The aim of the novel is not to outline liberation and resistance. The aim is to unearth the graves and to shed light on the morgues hidden behind the word “government.” The violence, oppression, and injustice underlined and grimly portrayed in this novel in the person of Evangelina and in the image of the bodies piled inside the mass grave remains central to this novel, central to the lives of the Latin American women who continue to seek their spaces within this Latin American reality.

### **House of the Spirits**

The dog Barrabás arrives at the del Valle house when Clara the Clairvoyant is a young girl. Her sister Rosa the Beautiful is poisoned in place of her father, Severo del Valle while her fiancée, Esteban Trueba is off in the mines trying to make his fortune. In order to forget the death of his Rosa, Esteban moves to their family property, Tres Marias, where he exploits the local peasants and their women. The first of the many illegal children he sired was by the

peasant Pancha, who gave birth to a son named Esteban. He also meets Transito Soto who borrows money from him to move to the city. When Esteban's mother is on her deathbed, he returns to the city, where he pays a visit to the del Valle home and upon seeing Clara, decides to marry her. The couple moves into the big house in the corner accompanied by his sister Ferula.

Clara gives birth to their daughter Blanca who falls in love with Pedro Tercero, the son of Pedro Segundo who is the peasant foreman of Tres Marias. The twins Jaime and Nicolas are born days after the death of Clara's parents who are killed in a car accident. It is Clara who finds her mother Nivea's head which they had to hide. Over the years, Ferula and Clara develop a deep friendship. Ferula and Esteban become rivals over Clara's affections. Esteban kicks Ferula out of the house when he comes home one morning to find Ferula in Clara's bed. Ferula leaves, cursing Esteban.

Blanca and Pedro Tercero's secret love is exposed to Esteban by Jean de Satigny. Esteban hits Clara in his anger, and she does not speak to him again. Blanca, who is pregnant with Alba, is married off to Jean and she goes to live with him in a foreign country. Esteban goes after Pedro and tries to kill him. Jaime becomes a doctor involved in helping the poor while Nicolas dabbles in spirituality and inventions. Esteban becomes involved in politics, becoming a member of the Conservative party, and is elected Senator. Esteban and Clara eventually return to a civil, if silent, relationship.

Meanwhile, Blanca discovers Jean de Satigny's unusual sexual practices and leaves him, giving birth to her daughter Alba as soon as she arrives home at the big house on the corner. The only member of the family who develops a loving relationship with Esteban, Alba is raised by her entire family. Blanca does not tell her until later that it is Pedro Tercero, the revolutionary singer, who is her father, and not Jean de Satigny. Clara soon dies. At eighteen, Alba enters the university where she meets Miguel, the little boy who witnessed her birth from a closet, and they fall in love. Alba and Miguel become involved in the anti-conservative protests.

The socialists win the elections and Pedro Tercero joins the government. When Esteban tries to stop the peasants from taking over Tres Marias, he is taken hostage. Pedro Tercero intervenes and saves Esteban at Blanca's request. Esteban and the conservatives help stage a military coup. Jaime, friend to the Socialist president, is killed. Miguel joins the guerrillas, and Pedro Tercero goes into hiding in Alba's house.

The military dictatorship is well in place. Esteban Garcia, son of Pancha and Esteban Trueba is in power, and he abducts Alba. She is saved with the help of Transito Sotito. Towards the end of the novel, Alba is just beginning to write this story...

## Analysis

Told from multiple perspectives (1<sup>st</sup> person: Esteban and Alba, 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient) this novel is polyvocal, the voices dialogic and contradictory, which is a mark of third wave feminism. Although the novel progresses in a linear fashion as one generation gives way to the next, it begins and ends with the phrase, "*Barrabas came to us by sea...*" suggesting a cyclic motion. It is also interspersed with conjunctural montages/collages of time and space. The first paragraph refers to present and future time: "*She was already in the habit of writing down important matters, and afterward, when she was mute, she also recorded trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own*"(1).

Marvellous realism lends itself to conjunctural thought. Rosa's unchanging beauty and early demise defy linear developmental growth. Her white skin, green hair, and yellow eyes makes her a figure of fantasy, but her human need to wash her hair with special herbs and protect her skin from the sun makes her very real. In this novel, in the person of Rosa, difference does not elicit persecution, but admiration.

Clara's clairvoyance is but one aspect of her conjunctural person, for with an uncle like Marcos who told her stories of his travels: "*She knew about the lamas who take salt tea with yak lard and she could give detailed descriptions of the opulent women of Tahiti, the rice fields in China, or the white prairies of the North, where the eternal ice kills animals and men who lose their way, turning them to stone in seconds*" (17).

The predominantly linear development of the novel only serves to delineate the prevalence of patriarchal rule, but within this frame can be located a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, images indicating not one but multiple sources of knowledge and power. In the following images of *nation*, we see this multiplicity.

A picture of an impoverished nation is drawn for us: "*...down dark back streets in which garbage was piled up against the walls of factories, in a forest of smokestacks that shut out the sky. Stray dogs sniffed at the grime, and beggars wrapped in newspaper slept in the doorways*" (239). And next to these images, a glocational collage that contrasts vividly with the first images: "*The upper class, in whose hands were concentrated all the power and wealth, was unaware of the danger that threatened the fragile equilibrium of their position...The rich amused themselves by dancing the Charleston and the new rhythms of jazz, the fox-trot, and some Negro 'cumbias' that were marvellously indecent. Steamer crossings to Europe were resumed, after being suspended during four years of war, and new routes, this time to North America became the rage*"(67).

We are given, in one paragraph, a picture of how global systems affect not just local politics and economies, but cultures and societies: "*The upper middle class and the economic*

right, who had favoured the coup, were euphoric... Nor did they put much stock in international condemnation, which lumped them in the same category as the other tyrannies of the region, because it seemed a small price to pay for the defeat of Marxism. When foreign investment capital began to flow into the country, they naturally attributed it to the stability of the new regime, ignoring the fact that for every peso that entered the country, two were lost to interest. When almost all the national industries were gradually shut down and businesses were beginning to go bankrupt, defeated by massive importation of consumer goods, they said that Brazilian stoves, Taiwanese cloth, and Japanese motorcycles were superior to anything that had ever been manufactured in the country” (384).

Thus is drawn for us an image of the nation inhabited by the people who live in the house of spirits. In the midst of war, economic and political strife, some consequences are inevitable: *“In a few hours the country was split into two irreconcilable groups, a division that began to spread within every family in the land”*(341).

On a minute scale, the invisible dividing line between rich and poor, educated and uneducated is given in concrete (glocational) detail in the persons of Esteban and the peasants: *“Thus it was that he learned about the war in Europe and was able to follow the advances of the troops on a map he hung on the school blackboard, which he marked with pins. The tenants watched him in amazement, without the foggiest idea of why anyone would stick a pin in the color blue one day and move it to the color green the next. They could not imagine the world as the size of a piece of paper spread over a blackboard, in which whole armies were reduced to the head of a pin”* (61).

Esteban, the patriarch, and one of the central consciousnesses of this novel, is located at the center of this family saga. He is portrayed as a blustering, rigid, abusive, violent, oppressive presence. The mainstay of the linear development of the novel, he symbolizes the centrality of patriarchal power in Latin America. With only Alba as the exception, nobody really loves him, not even his wife.

We wonder why Esteban is allowed the first person point of view in this novel. Being able to enter the mind of Esteban, is being able to enter the patriarchal mind which is arrogant, unjust, oppressive, and unbelievably violent. *“Word of his cruelty spread throughout the region, provoking jealous admiration among the men of his class. The peasants hid their daughters and clenched their fists helplessly because they could not confront him”*(63).

The patriarchal mind which is abusive and exploitative has far-reaching effects, of which it is most often blind to, as seen in the glocational after-effects of an earthquake in the country: *“The rest of the world, too busy with another war, barely noticed that nature had gone berserk in that remote corner of the globe, but even so shiploads of medicine, blankets, food, and building material arrived, all of which disappeared in the mysterious labyrinths of various bureaucracies and were still available for purchase years later, when canned vegetables*



*from the United States and powdered milk from Europe could be bought in the most exclusive stores at the same price as any other gourmet food” (162).*

Esteban’s angry spells are told in a journalistic matter-of-fact, almost humorous tone which makes the violence all the more powerful. At the same time, it also speaks of Allende’s feminist views, for we are given glimpses of a human being who cries, is afraid, and gets hurt. This is a very third wave feminist aspect of this book, for it does away with prioritizing one or the other gender. For all his blustering, at the center of Esteban’s life are the women in his life, for whom he lives and breathes – first there is Rosa, then Clara, then Alba.

The novel rests largely on temporal binaries between the rural and the urban, the peasants and the landowners, those who have and those who don’t, feminine and masculine ways. The women are located and dislocated, positioned, displaced and repositioned within these frames as exemplified in the nation’s customs: *“It was the custom, then, for women and children not to attend funerals, which was considered a male province” (34).* Besides the war, political strife, and economic debilitation that the women had to contend with, there existed an oppression directed on their simply being women. In *Tres Marias*, women were not equal to the men: *“Even though they worked as equals with the men, the women did not receive this sum because, except for widows, they were not considered heads of family”(60).*

For the majority of the Latin American women, being subordinate to men as objects of oppression is a daily thing: *“Since when has a man not beaten his wife? If he doesn’t beat her, it’s either because he doesn’t love her or because he isn’t a real man. Since when has a woman ever done the same things as a man? Besides she was born with a wound between her legs, and without balls...”(106).*

Transito Sotto, a woman marginalized several times over (class, gender, profession) has this to say about women: *“They need a man to feel secure but they don’t realize that the one thing they should be afraid of is men... Whores are the worst... they throw their lives away working for some pimp, smile when he beats them, feel proud when he’s well dressed, and when he goes off and takes off with another woman half their age, they forgive him everything because he’s ‘a man’. No sir, I don’t like that”(117).*

Unlike Pancha whose class and gender already give men like Trueba the license to oppress and abuse her, Nana is located in the social center for she is the one who took care of generations of upper class del Valles. However, because of her social class, she remains in the margins: *“She had been born to cradle other people’s children, wear their hand-me-down clothing, eat their left-overs, live on borrowed happiness and grief, grow old beneath other people’s roofs, die one day in her miserable little room in a far courtyard in a bed that did not belong to her, and be buried in a common grave in a public cemetery” (124).*

Ferula, almost stereotypically portrayed as bitter, angry, lonely and hungry for love, embodies marginality. She is the single woman who is ridiculed and rejected, yet she is the mainstay of the Trueba household, the one who takes care of all the practical matters in the house. She reveals the struggles of women located on the borders of society: *“It bothered her to have to stay locked up within these walls that stank of medicine and age, to be kept awake at night by the moans of her sick mother, always attentive to the clock so as to administer each dose at the proper time, bored, tired, and unhappy while her brother had no taste of such obligations. Before him lay a destiny that was bright, free, and full of promise. The day she sent the telegram telling him of Rosa’s death she had felt a strange shiver, almost joy”* (44).

Except for that time after the earthquake when she begins to be concerned with practical matters, Clara seems to defy the stages of personal development as Rosa did, for she retains her unusual character till the end. She is the one who teaches Alba that hugs are better than medicine. She foresees her marriage to Esteban, and finds Nivea’s severed head when everyone has given up on ever finding it. Her clairvoyance makes her “abnormal” but she is also the most human. She is loved by all. She is the source of the energy and life in the house. Her silence could be read as a traditional response of women, but it also shows how free she is, to choose to withdraw from the world of symbols set up by the prevalent order. Hers is a world that is unreal to the world of logic and government and economics, but it is an open, alternative space nevertheless that she finds and shares with others. Clara and all the “unusual” characters in the novel could represent a “new” order, a new perspective, an alternative to old, rigid ways which have brought so much pain and suffering. In turning to this “other” world, she is still very much in touch with all that is happening in her nation: *“She was busy tending to the poor in a task that had neither beginning nor end. She left the house early in the morning and at times returned close to midnight. She emptied the wardrobes of the house, taking the children’s clothes, the blankets from the beds, her husband’s jackets”*(134).

Blanca bridges the gap between classes, aligning herself with the peasant Pedro Tercero, refusing to ask for financial help from her father and using instead her hands (unusual for her class) to work for economic independence. Like Clara who does not depend on Esteban, Blanca chooses not to attach her life to Pedro, maintaining her “single” status. If her mother Clara travels between her world of spirits and her world at the house in the corner, Blanca travels between the city and Tres Marias. These travels produce in her a sedimentation of identity: *“She was considered timid and morose. Only in the country, her skin tanned by the sun and her belly full of ripe fruit, running through the fields with Pedro Tercero, was she smiling and happy. Her mother said that that was the real Blanca, and that the other one, the one back in the city was a Blanca in hibernation”* (143).

When Blanca falls in love and becomes pregnant with the revolutionary peasant Pedro Tercero’s child, her class standing does not spare her from the restrictions of the prevailing social order: *“The scandal would be the same whether she gave birth to a bastard*

*child or married the son of a peasant: society would condemn her in either case” (212). Blanca portrays a sexual repression shared by many women across the globe, as she is caught in a border experience of longing and internal sedimentation: “...she dressed up in her best clothes, her perfume, her whorish underwear, which captured Pedro Tercero, which she hid, red with shame, in the bottom of her wardrobe, imagining the explanations she would have to give if anyone discovered them. This woman who was so down to earth and practical in all other aspects of life sublimated her childhood passion and lived it tragically. She fed it with fantasies, idealized it, savagely defended it, stripped it of its prosaic truth, and turned it into the kind of love one found in the novels”(312).*

Brought up in a household marked by a conjunctural mix of personalities, Alba’s difference already sets her apart: *“For Alba, who until then had never heard of sin or proper manners for young ladies, who was completely ignorant of the boundary between the human and divine, the possible and the impossible, and who was used to seeing one of her uncles performing karate leaps completely naked in the hallways and the other buried under a mountain of books, not to mention her grandfather smashing telephones and the flowerpots to pieces with his cane, her mother sneaking out with her clownlike valise, and her grandmother moving the three-legged table and playing Chopin without opening the piano, the school routine was simply unbearable”(300).*

In Alba, being different gave rise to border feelings of alternating desires for connection and separation: *“During recess, she would sit in the farthest corner of the courtyard so no one could see her, trembling with the hope that someone would invite her to play and simultaneously praying that no one would notice her” (301).*

Alba is not spared from the shaping influences that abound outside the big house in the corner: *“Her grandmother had taught her that everything associated with the human functions is natural, but later on, at school, she learned that all bodily secretions except tears are indecent.”(324)* In spite of her being marginalized for her being different, Alba involves herself, like her grandmother and mother before her, with the task of healing the ills in her society. She speaks of it to her grandfather: *“The families of prisoners, disappeared people, and the dead have nothing to eat. The unemployed don’t, either. The children are so undernourished they fall asleep in school” (379).*

Alba’s eventual torture at the hands of Esteban’s son, peasant turned military Colonel, could be read as the “payment” for the violence Esteban has inflicted on the peasant women. Also named Esteban, he is Esteban Trueba’s alter-ego, the face that is hidden from the public, the evil that turns against himself. Alba is violated in turn by the son of the peasant woman who was powerless to defend herself against Esteban’s advances. This “objectifies” her, places her within that space, that gap between generations and genders, classes and economic stratifications. She is the fluid “border.”

The temporal rhetoric of awakening, linear development, and binaries can be found in this novel. Yet the presence of the spatial tropes also point to the porous borders occupied by the women as they traverse the various spaces appointed to them by the patriarchal, feudal rule. What is revealed are the ambiguous relationships the women have with their nation and the men who rule it, as with Clara who helps out the victims of the national government ruled by such men as her husband.

The oppression and ensuing violence engendered by the influence of global systems on the national condition is manifested in the clashes between the classes both in the private and the public spaces. The border experience of marginality as embodied by Ferula (who belongs to the upper class, but by virtue of her gender, must forego all her personal desires to take care of her mother), or by Clara (whose “abnormal” magical powers and gender places her in the margins, yet whose class places her in the center) brings to light the sedimentation that occurs within women who are neither on the inside nor the outside.

The big house in the corner, the house of the spirits, serves as a metaphor for the novel. The house is a single, solid structure depicting the predominantly singular line the novel follows as the generations of one family, one patriarch moves across its thresholds. Yet in the hands of Clara who extends the family make-up with artists and magicians, the house becomes a labyrinth of hidden rooms and passages that end nowhere, much like the sudden twists and montages of time, events, spaces, voices, and images marking the many-leveled surfaces of the novel.

As the novel ends, we recognize the “I” as Alba, of the generation who must write about the past, but a past already written by the hand of one who has seen the future.

## **Conclusion**

Spatial rhetoric is an aspect of locational feminism posited by Susan Friedman as a way of engendering an awareness of the differences among women, in response to universalizing concepts of woman-hood. Focusing on gender alone as the only site of oppression limits our understanding of, and responses to the issues and concerns that women must face. This singular vision is reiterated in our ways of thinking about the development of identity. Spatial thought would posit a multi-directional growth rather than a linear path. The transformations that necessarily occur in an individual, must therefore consist of dynamic and often contradictory movements, not just between binaries (of values/thoughts, etc) but within overdetermined positions. This reading has basically been a “mapping” of the multiple ‘contact zones’ in which Latin American women in Allende’s novels found themselves.

As discussed earlier in this paper, a close study of the rhetoric employed in the novels would reveal the writer’s ways of thinking. Allende’s works reveal both temporal and spatial

rhetoric. Temporal rhetoric, characterized by a developmental way of perceiving identity, presupposes essentialism, binaries, and a monolithic focus on gender. The assumption is that these ways of thinking would reveal a failure to acknowledge the differences among women. Allende appropriates these ways of thinking, but these are used in such a way that they emphasize and underline the prevalence of the patriarchal order. The presence of the spatial tropes brings into her writing an awareness of other cultural categories through which the identities of the women are negotiated. Awareness of other categories that mediate gender issues allows for a broader understanding of oppression, injustice, and ways of responding to these prevalent conditions.

Allende reveals, through her use of both temporal and spatial rhetoric, a way of thinking that continuously places her within the many walls set up by the patriarchal order but also continuously challenges her to engage in the struggle to redefine herself. This is shown in her predominantly non-idealistic portrayal of the Latin American woman, revealing her vision of new perspectives and spaces for their continuing search of their “destinies.”

“I can be the voice of the many who are silent. I can convey the truth of this magnificent, tortured Latin American continent” - Isabel Allende

### **Bibliography**

Allende, Isabel. *Eva Luna*. U.S.A.: Bantam Books, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *House of the Spirits*. U.S.A.: Bantam Books, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Of Love and Shadows*. U.S.A.: Bantam Books, 1988.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. “Locational Feminism: Gender, Cultural Geographies, and Geopolitical Literacy. *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*. Edited Marianne Dekoven. U.S.A: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Pinto, Magdalena Garcia. *Women Writers of Latin America: Intimate Histories*. Translated by Trudy Balch and Magdalena Garcia Pinto. Univ. of Texas, 1991.

Rodden, John, ed. *Conversations with Isabel Allende* . USA: University of Texas Press, 2004.  
Retrieved December 15,2008 from  
[www.utexas.edu/utexpress/excerpts/exrodc2p.html](http://www.utexas.edu/utexpress/excerpts/exrodc2p.html)

Internet Sources (interviews):

Aida Edmariam (2007). *The Undefeated*. The Guardian. Retrieved December 15, 2008 from [www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/apr/28/isabelallende.fiction](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/apr/28/isabelallende.fiction)

Bob Baldock and Dennis Cernstein (1994). "Skirting the Brink: America's Leading Thinkers and Activists Confide Their Views of Our Predicament" Retrieved January 4, 2008 from [www.womenshistory.about.com/gildynamic/offsite.html](http://www.womenshistory.about.com/gildynamic/offsite.html)

Carol Zapata-Whelan (1999). *The Difference Between Fantasy and Imagination*. California State University. Retrieved December 15, 2008 from [www.angelfire.com/wa2/margin/nonficCZWEnglish.html](http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/margin/nonficCZWEnglish.html)

"Isabel Allende." *Dictionary of Hispanic Biography*. Gale Research, 1996. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale. 2002. Retrieved December 15, 2008 from [www.isabelallende.com](http://www.isabelallende.com)

Linda L. Richards (1999). *January Magazine*. Retrieved December 15, 2008 from [www.januarymagazine.com/profile/allende.html](http://www.januarymagazine.com/profile/allende.html)

Steve Moore (1994). *A Conversation with Isabel Allende*. Off the Shelf Productions, Womankind Educational and Resource Center. Retrieved January 4, 2009 from [www.womankindflp.org/newsletter/interviews/allende.html](http://www.womankindflp.org/newsletter/interviews/allende.html)

Texas Library Association (2007). *San Antonio Express News*. Retrieved December 15, 2008 from [www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/stories/MYSA041007.3c.allende.html](http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/stories/MYSA041007.3c.allende.html)