

Latino Identity in Allende's Historical Novels

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**Abstract:** In her article "Latino Identity in Allende's Historical Novels" Olga Ries analyzes the concept of individual and group identity found in five historical novels by Isabel Allende. Ries argues that while Allende's protagonists come from different backgrounds and different epochs, they share a process of psychological transformation and that affects their identity formation. The result is the formation of a transnational "Hispanic" identity, group as well as individual. In Ries's reading of Allende's texts, transnational Hispanic identity is based simultaneously on the Mexican/Hispanic concept of *mestizaje* and on the US-American concepts of the "melting pot" and the "American Dream."

## Olga RIES

### Latino Identity in Allende's Historical Novels

In the last ten years or so Isabel Allende, laureate of the 2010 Chilean National Literature Prize, has added another genre to her oeuvre, the historical novel, namely *Hija de la Fortuna* (1999), its sequel *Retrato en Sepia* (2000), *Zorro. Comienza la Leyenda* (2005), *Inés del alma mía* (2006), and *La isla bajo el mar* (2009). The novels *Hija de la Fortuna* and *Retrato en Sepia* also form a trilogy with *La casa de los espíritus*, a trilogy of a centuries-spanning saga that describes Chilean history from Independence until Pinochet's military dictatorship. I argue that in these novels Allende develops a coherent vision of Latin American history by focusing on a common "Hispanic" culture and therefore Allende conceives a common "Hispanic" past. This is less surprising than it might seem, since the author lives in the United States, writes for an international readership, and formulates a vision acceptable to several heterogeneous ethnic minority and main stream groups.

Stylistically, all five novels feature a fusion of genres (historical novel, romance, western, biography, documentary) interwoven with elements of magical realism, an element present in her writing since her first novel, and one that allowed her to be catalogued a representative of modern Latin American literature along Gabriel Garcia Márquez or Juan Rulfo (Walter 267). The result is a considerably commodified presentation of Latin American history and culture, one that positions itself largely within US-American Latino culture and weaves together a series of commonplace and exotic images for a conflict-free literary consumption, while maintaining the image as an "ethnic minority" author. These novels cover geographically and chronologically large areas: from Chile to Oregon and from the early decades of the Conquest of the American continent to the early twentieth century. This vista suggests a coherent perspective of Latin America and its past. Centered frequently around popular characters both historical and fictional — e.g., Zorro, Inés Suárez, Lautaro, George Sand, the bandit Joaquín Murieta, the pirate Jean Laffitte, etc. — Allende's texts play with their readers' perception of "truth" and "fiction," intertwining both worlds and also giving "historical" weight and "authenticity" to her novels.

The use of historical figures is particularly interesting in the case of *Inés del alma mía*, a novel that is not only presented as an autobiography, but is intended to resemble as far as possible a *novela testimonial*, a genre of particular importance in modern Latin American literature, as the author herself writes: "on these pages, I tell the facts as they were documented. I limited myself to bind them together with a minimal exercise of imagination" (6) ("En estas páginas narro los hechos tal como fueron documentados. Me limité a hilarlos con un ejercicio mínimo de imaginación" [*Inés* 7]) (for the genre of the *novela testimonial* and its use of authentic data gathered from informants see, e.g., Poniatowska). Throughout the text, Allende uses dates and (usually undocumented) quotes from chronicles and literary works such as Alonso de Ercilla's sixteenth-century epic poem *La Araucana*, includes maps, and even gives a relatively extensive bibliography at the end of her novel, all in order to further deepen the "documentary" construction of the novel. Although the wide scope of her narration — especially Valdivia's biography and the scenes in the Mapuche settlements — makes it impossible for her to maintain the *novela testimonial* structure throughout, obliging her to switch to the third person narrator, she maintains the autobiographical perspective in the entire novel. The novel's central character is Inés Suárez, an important figure in the Spanish conquest of Chile and one of the few known female Spanish *conquistadores*. Her story (and that of Pedro Valdivia, the first governor of Chile) begins in Extremadura, Spain, and moves on to the New World: "He said there grew carnivorous flowers that smell of corpse and others delicate and fragrant but also poisonous, he also told us about birds with splendid feathers and villages of apes with human faces that spy on the intruders from the dense foliage (64) ("Dijo que crecían flores carnívoras con olor a cadáver y delicadas y fragantes pero ponzoñosas, también nos habló de aves con fastuoso plumaje y de pueblos de monos con rostro humano que espiaban a los intrusos desde el denso follaje" (65). Especially Chile is painted as an American garden of Eden, beautiful, exuberant, and fecund, "a beautiful valley, full of oaks and unknown trees" ("valle muy dulce, lleno de robles y árboles desconocidos" [191]) and casting a spell over the arriving Spaniards and leading to the foundation of an earthy paradise, Santiago de Chile.

Inés's odyssey across the continent, from the coast of the Caribbean to Chile's Central Valley, is a repetition of the route of the Spanish conquest of the continent and witnesses the birth of future metropolises such as Cartagena, the rise of colonial Peru, and of course the conquest of Chile and foundation of Nueva Extremadura, the birth of the city of Santiago. Allende describes in rich detail occurrences of daily life — food recipes, everyday routines, even birth control devices — thus allowing the reader a glimpse into a private Inés creating a sense of complicity between Inés and the (presumably female) reader. Allende also develops the image of the female explorer, besides Inés Catalina, the Peruvian healer, who provides Indigenous knowledge and integrates it into European medicine and the Inca princess Cecilia who marries a Spaniard and thus anticipates the future *mestizo* ruling class, suggesting not so much a break as a (not so smooth) transition into *Hispanoamérica*. While new lands are conquered, conflicts between the Spaniards and the Indians, but also between different groups of Spaniards arise, Inés and others around her begin to form a new identity, one that is different from that of the Indigenous population, not identical to the Spanish/European identity but somehow dependent on both. Catalina is Inés's Indigenous counterpart who adapts to the appearance of acculturation but remains inwardly true to herself. This character is an example of how, apart from the exploration of early colonial female identity, Allende also dedicates much attention to the "silent" Indigenous collaborators of the Spanish, without whom the conquest would not have been possible.

With *Zorro. Comienza la leyenda* Allende is the first Hispanic author to write about this character since its first appearance in 1919 (only in 2007 did Univision produce a Spanish language *telenovela* with the same topic, drawing heavily on Allende's novel). Allende's novel is a "prequel" to the well-known story, describing the protagonist's journey from childhood to his first steps as Zorro. Canonical Zorro characters known from innumerable films, TV series, books, and comics mingle freely with well-known historical characters or actual historical protagonists from colonial California. Set between Los Angeles and Spain, the novel contains a variety of locations including California, Panamá, New Orleans, Barcelona, and Cuba thus presenting images that have both familiar and unexpected traits. First and foremost, it is a declaration of love to Los Angeles and California, described as an earthly paradise "where nature was generous and life sweet" (26) ("donde la tierra era generosa y la vida dulce" [*Zorro* 40]), the future city of Los Angeles "a large square with a central plaza, well planned for growth and prosperity, although at that moment it had only four principal streets" (19) ("era un cuadrado con una plaza central, bien planeado para crecer y prosperar, aunque en aquel momento sólo contaba con cuatro calles principales" [31]). Its surroundings are majestically beautiful, stillness reigns, and magic places abound, such as the sacred caves Diego (Zorro) and his friend Bernardo explore as children. Only few similarities to present-day California are discernible, such as fine wines or yearly devastating fires; it is a completely different California, one whose cultural and political focal point is Mexico, whose language is Spanish and whose (secret) ambition is to achieve independence from Spain.

Among other locations in the novel are tropical Panamá, a place almost surreal in its mixture of natural beauty and danger, such as pristine forests, unknown animals, and deadly plants: "Against the unbroken green of the jungle, richly colored butterflies and jewel-bright birds flashed like magical brush strokes. The boys were advised to stay away from tarantulas and the green toads that spit in the eye of the unwary, blinding them. They were also warned of a variety of nut that burns the enamel off teeth and produces lethal stomach cramps" (108) ("En el verde absoluto brillaban, como prodigiosas pinceladas, aves de plumaje enjoyado y mariposas multicolores. Los nativos ... les aconsejaron evitar las tarantulas y ciertos sapos verdes, que escupen a los ojos y dejan ciego, así como una variedad de nuez que quema el esmalte de los dientes y produce calambres mortales en el estómago" [103]). In its function as a principal port it is a place of encounter between the conquistadors and the natives, far more so than in the sleepy California of his time. The Caribbean (including New Orleans) appears as a tropical labyrinth of fascinating colors, smells, and sounds: "Grand Island ... was large, humid, flat and, like the rest of the region, distinguished by an aura of mystery and decadence. That capricious and hot climate, which swung between bucolic calm and devastating hurricanes, invited grand passions" (283) ("Grand Isle ... era vasta, húmeda, plana y, como el resto del paisaje de la región, tenía un aura de misterio y decadencia. Esa naturaleza caprichosa y caliente, que pasaba de alma bucólica a devastadores huracanes, invitaba a grandes pasiones" [282]). However, the speakers of English or the United States are almost completely

missing from the novel and are mentioned only obliquely. When the pirate Laffitte later, through pressure and integration of his territory into the U.S., moves to Texas to become a settler, he integrates into the new society only seemingly and thus Allende's non-English "alternative America" becomes an integral, successful part of U.S. mainstream culture, present as an undercurrent since its very beginnings.

Allende is also the first author to represent Zorro explicitly as a *mestizo*, a term relevant for contemporary Latin American self perception. In film versions, Zorro is first of all a White character, a Spaniard, and therefore acceptable as an element of US-American culture (see Benjamin-Labarthe 81). In contrast, in Allende's text his Indigenous heritage is essential to his identity formation: his first words are spoken in an Indigenous language, he passes an Indigenous rite of initiation in his youth, and the fox — *zorro* — turns out to be his personal totem. Still, it does not make him identical to the *indios* like his friend Bernardo. In spite of partial insight into Indigenous traditions and spirituality, Diego, as a *mestizo*, is an essentially "Occidental" character. However, it is his journey to Europe and back, his passage through different US-American regions and his European education that make his identity complete: a combination of mixed influences, but also the experience of exile and complexity. His place in his native Californian society is between the arrogant Spaniards and the persecuted yet proud *indios* like his mother's tribe and thus the conflict taking place in his very persona and lays the foundation for his future *alter ego*. His origin is a violent confrontation between the *indios* and the Spaniards, an uprising of the *indios*, and his California is split into two worlds, one of the Whites and one of the *indios* who do not interact except in an endless conflict. Zorro's role in it is to be an intermediary, solving the conflict and bringing a more just and less racist California closer. This *mestizaje* story line comes close to interpretations of that topic today, especially by the Chicano community and therefore results attractive as a (however anachronistic) historical perspective.

Allende's recent novel *La isla bajo el mar* is set entirely in the Caribbean of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Here, Allende revisits the setting of Zorro (the Laffitte brothers from this novel also make a short appearance). The title refers to a paradisiacal magic island, a distant memory of Guinea, that slaves dream of and expect to go to after their death. Politically, it describes two major events in the region: independence and the end of slavery in Haiti and the integration of Louisiana into the United States. Like her other novels, *La isla* tells in rich detail about culture and daily life — this time of the enslaved Black Haitians — with dancing scenes, medicinal and religious rituals occupying a central place in the narrative and in the characters' psyche as elements of strength for the Haitians and of fear for the Whites. In the novel Voodoo is a true religion, an important aspect of the slaves' lives and their spirituality and historical characters such as Mackandal or Toussaint L'Ouverture, although marginal in the narrative, maintain the fusion of fiction and historicity known from her previous novels. The novel is told from the perspective of Zarité, called Teté by the Whites, and tells her progress from an orphaned Mulatto slave in Saint-Domingue (her mother, a rape victim, dies shortly after being brought from Africa) to a free woman with a family in New Orleans. Born and raised as a slave, but with conscience of her worth and dignity, all her life is driven by a desire to be free and equal to the Whites or free Mulatto women. A nurse to her master's son and mother to his illegitimate daughter, she witnesses the differences between these two half-siblings, their education and role in society, as well as their tragic love story.

Teté experiences as a child and young woman are far from being in a tropical paradise; on the contrary, it seems to exist in a sordid parallel universe: "from the Age of Reason in Paris, he had passed into a primitive and violent world in which the living and the dead walked hand in hand" (6) ("De la 'edad de la razón' en París, pasó a hundirse en un mundo primitivo y violento en que los vivos y los muertos andaban de la mano" [*Isla* 7]). The lush vegetation serves as a malicious menace: "the garden where the voracious tropical vegetation flourished like a botanical menace" (16) ("el jardín, donde la voraz vegetación del trópico se desbordaba como una amenaza botánica" [*Isla* 17]) and only occasionally, on their flight through the jungle, appear glimpses of a beautiful, generous nature: "in that profound greenery there were sudden brushstrokes of color: the yellow and orange beak of a toucan, iridescent feathers of parrots and *macaws*, tropical flowers dripping from the branches. There was water everywhere, rivulets, pools, rain, crystalline cascades crossed with rainbows falling from the sky and disappearing into dense masses of gleaming ferns below" (98) ("En ese verde profundo de pronto surgían brochazos de color: el pico amarillo y naranja de un tucán, plumas iridiscentes de loros

y guacamayas, flores tropicales colgadas de las ramas. Había agua por todas partes, riachuelos, charcos, lluvia, cristalinas cascadas cruzadas de arco iris que caían del cielo y se perdían abajo en una masa densa de brillantes helechos" [97]), a stark contrast both to the nightmarish life on the island and to the suffering of the fugitives. Further, the revolution, a long-awaited consequence of fear develops into an almost surrealist nightmare where cruelty and magic blend: "Macandal. Beheaded roosters, symbols painted with blood, hatchets in doors, a moonless night, another fire" (28) ("Macandal. Gallos decapitados, símbolos pintados con sangre, hachas en las puertas, una noche sin luna, otro incendio" [28]). Teté exchanges her help in the flight for her freedom, although her owner still manages to keep her enslaved in New Orleans, and it takes all of her courage and energy to be finally free and start a family life with another fugitive from Saint-Domingue.

Louisiana, although still in French possession, appears as a promise of a different future, a possible version of the magical island below the sea, ultimately a variation of the "American Dream": "from the ship, New Orleans appeared like a waning moon floating in the sea. As I saw it I knew I would not go back to Saint-Domingue" (129) ("Desde el barco Nueva Orleans apareció como una luna menguante flotando en el mar, blanca y luminosa. Al verla supe que no volvería a Saint-Domingue" [128]). Tete's years in New Orleans are the years of transition, the slow disappearance of the aristocratic leisure of New Orleans and the rise of US-American pragmatism, a mentality that her children begin to find towards the end of the novel. Her life in Louisiana, although far from idyllic, is marked by greater freedom and entrepreneurship: Teté and her husband own a restaurant in New Orleans thus integrating on one hand into the developing African American culture and on the other hand into the current of "strong women" of Allende's other female characters. Her children and grandchildren will be integrated into US-American culture, free and proud of their mixed blood and this suggests a different take on the *mestizaje* discourse found in Allende's historical novels so far. The concept of *mestizaje* in *Hija de la fortuna* is extolled in the person of protagonist's Eliza's identity and mysterious origin, a key to her self-perception: raised in an European (English) environment, her "Indian" hair nevertheless "gives her away" as someone of the common people: "you have Indian hair" (9) ("tienes pelos de India" [*Hija* 12]), hence the tension that governs much of her life in Chile between the Sommers, an English family of the upper class and their Mapuche maid Mama Fresia (her English heritage is revealed much later in the novel, hinting at the "poor relative" situation of many US-Americans vis-à-vis Europe). That inequality can only be successfully annulled by her emigration, which rewrites her identity although in the sense of personal fulfilment and not necessarily with regard to social or economical status. Eliza's life is set between Chile and California, two extremes of Hispanic America, two extremes also in terms of self fulfilment and identity: Chile appears as green magic, permeated by Indigenous Mapuche magic, ruled by benevolent or malevolent natural powers and magic potions: a visit to a *Machi*, a Mapuche healer — an important episode of the first part of the novel — shows a backward, silent, and conservative atmosphere especially for young women such as Eliza, her friend Paulina, all of whom find a personal way to escape from their lives in Chile.

California, on the other hand, corresponds exactly to the widespread image of the United States as a new beginning, a clean page, a complete reconstitution of identity: "in California neither past nor scruples counted ... it was the land of opportunity, open and generous ... masses of beings came ... hoping to find work and erase the past" (584) ("en California ni el pasado ni los escrúpulos contaban ... era la tierra de oportunidades, abierta y generosa ... entraban masas de gentes ... dispuestos a borrar el pasado y trabajar [392-93]). On the other hand, Chile and the American continent in general also has, although to a lesser degree, this melting pot quality, where persons of different origins form a new identity: Spanish, English, and Mapuche in Chile and English, Hispanic, Chinese, and many others in California). However, this liberating quality is not due to any possible quality inherent to California, but, rather, to its being in a state of constant un-readiness, a mixture of ambition and restless energy where identities can be construed according to one's personal perception of oneself, as is the case of Paulina del Valle and her husband, who abandon their situation of rebels and outcasts in Chile in order to become one of the richest and most respectable families of San Francisco, an example of the "rags to riches" story. Similarly, Eliza is able to erase her self, temporarily even her sex, her fears and solves her relationship with the Sommers family and her idolizing love for Joaquín, her lover. In this case, freedom through emigration takes a different turn as her self-fulfilment is not social and economical, but emotional and of ambition: "she was awaked one morning by the



whinnying of her horse with the full light of dawn in her face, saw herself surrounded by tall sequoias that, like centenary guards, had watched over her sleep, by gentle hills and, far in the distance, purple mountaintops: at that moment she was filled with an atavistic happiness that was entirely new. She realised that she had lost the feeling of panic that had lain curled in the pit of her stomach like a rat, threatening to gnaw her entrails. Her fears had dissipated in the awesome grandeur of this landscape" (452) ("Despertó una mañana con el relincho de su caballo y la luz del amanecer en la cara, se vió rodeada de altivas secoyas, que como guardias centenarios guardaban su sueño, de suaves cerros y en la distancia altas cumbres moradas: entonces la invadió una dicha atávica jamás experimentada. Se dió cuenta de que ya no tenía esa sensación de pánico siempre agazapada en la boca del estómago, como una rata lista para morderla. Los temores se habían diluido en la abrumadora grandiosidad de ese territorio" [305]).

However, the California of the Gold Rush is far from paradisiacal as it is governed by greed, aggression, and racism, an aspect Allende dedicates as much space and attention to as to the concept of personal freedom. Here, all non-English characters merge into a obscure mass that is hardly noticed and certainly not treated as equals by the English-speaking population: Allende quotes examples from contemporary legislation and the press, a pseudo-documental approach she develops even further in *Inés del alma mía*. This is precisely what allows the famous bandit Joaquín Murieta to be Mexican and Chilean at the same time while both groups maintain the distinction between themselves. He thus becomes a locus of identification, maybe even a popular hero for both. Luis Leal discusses the popular mythology formed around this character in California as an example of the Chicano/Mexican viewpoint (see also Neruda's *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta*). It is interesting that Allende does not solve this dilemma, which can be understood as a means to keep a decidedly non (or post-?) nationalist vision of a Hispanic Californian past. Allende's Murieta, with his traits of the noble bandit and (possible) past as an intellectual, desperate young man in Santiago, fits well with Eric J. Hobsbawm's concept of the social bandit, i.e., the concept of the rebel fighting against political and social oppression: "the traditional 'noble robber' represents an extremely primitive form of social protest, perhaps the most primitive there is" (56). In turn, this fits the image Allende draws of the oppression of the non-Whites in California and positions Murieta as a *chicano* hero *avant la lettre*.

In her novel *Retrato en sepia* Allende follows the story of the Del Valle family back to Chile, thus narrating Latin American history, the formation of national states, their interior conflicts, military rule, and especially the War of the Pacific between Chile, Peru, and Bolivia, a conflict that is shown as a trauma on all sides and an open wound (still). These wars are shown to be a dark shadow against the previously narrated idyllic image of Latin America and tell the story of the independent continent's experience with dictatorship and interior strife. These conflicts, both interior and exterior, mark another continuity, a different tone in Latin American history present until recently, but also the direct participation of people everywhere on the American continent in their history, namely the tradition of civil resistance: "when that happened, in 1907, I happened by chance to be there and my photographs are the only irrefutable documents that the slaughter at Iquique occurred, because government censorship erased from the face of history the two thousand dead that I saw in the plaza" (303) ("Cuando eso ocurrió, en 1907, yo estaba allí por casualidad y mis fotografías son el único documento irrefutable de que la matanza de Iquique ocurrió, porque la censura del gobierno borró de la faz de la historia los dos mil muertos que yo vi en la plaza" [334]).

Another new accent in the second part of the trilogy is the inclusion of European immigration as an essential part of Latin American and US-American identity, their social, economic, and cultural development. This immigration is radically different from the early military conquest/immigration narrative in *Inés del alma mía*, but similar to the processes US-America goes through at approximately the same time. Many of the immigrant episodes are comparable to the Californian episodes concerning immigrants, establishing a further parallel in the history of the continent: immigrants' hopes and illusions related to the U.S. shown on the ship to Chile, where the second class cabins are filled with immigrants "with hearts bursting with hope" (236) ("con el corazón rebosante de esperanzas" [Retrato 262]) and the integration of immigrants via their participation in events and developments of history, such as the Croatian doctor in the War of the Pacific and his son, who later will form part of the scientific elite of Chile. These groups also contribute to the development of urbanity and cosmopolitanism which provide an ideal background for Allende's narration of independent

women protagonists. In a parallel fashion, there is an accent on rural South America, one that seems untouched by the changes on the continent, beautiful, heartfelt, and warm, a hiding place during political or military conflicts, but also stifling and poor, a place governed by oppressing traditions and appearances. In *Hija de la fortuna* and *Retrato en sepia*, readers encounter the slow disintegration of the countryside as the heart of Latin American society during the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the five novels under discussion, Allende develops a concept of a continent-spanning Hispanic history that goes beyond national histories and identities, a current especially strong in the United States. Her choice of particularly dynamic epochs, those of the conquest, the wars of independence, the emancipation of slaves, the gold rush, and the War of the Pacific represent a selection of decisive moments in the formation of the continent and that of its people on a supranational level. Allende adapts her texts to the difficulty of determining "Hispanic" as a cultural unity (Dávila 40) by incorporating different groups of immigrants into the narrative or by stressing similarities within Latin American ways of life in spite of conflicts or wars in order to weave a harmonic picture. This does not mean that she negates separate national identities. On the contrary, national identities appear again and again, especially in *Retrato in sepia* and *Hija de la fortuna* and thus the importance of national identity becomes clear with Allende's narration of Chile's national character. However, Allende's protagonists, both male and female, are determined to overcome obstacles and their identity is formed through a geographical and psychological odyssey. The inclusion of characters of unclear, double (Murieta, Zorro), or marginal identity (Lautaro) allows readers to find points of identification throughout the novels, while at the same time the protagonists remain "American" in the widest sense of the term and therefore acceptable to a variety of readers. The American continent occupies a particular space as a place of identity formation as the continent's focal point and literal melting pot. Indigenous groups are included in every novel discussed here, although to different extent, from resistance in *Inés del alma mía* and *Zorro* to the underdeveloped to the poor countryside to no-better-then-their-reputation in *Retrato en Sepia*. However, they never reach the level of complexity Allende endows her *mestizo* characters with.

Another parallelism is the description of lush landscapes and natural phenomena, especially the images of Californian and Chilean nature. The two poles of Hispanic America separated through huge distances, but essentially similar contribute to the creation of a coherent image of the continent via its overwhelming landscapes. A certain intertextual aspect is also present and goes beyond the use of *realismo mágico* and Allende's novels contain protagonists drawn from or inspired by such as Jorge Luis Borges (the map-drawing captain in *Zorro*), Patrick Süskind (Eliza's gift of smell), and Arturo Pérez-Reverte (Diego's Spanish teacher). These "borrowings" allow Allende to integrate her work into the larger currents of contemporary literature. Further, Allende's interpretation of American nature integrates her into current of Latin American literature focused on the relationship of humanity and nature about the problematics of ecology.

When writing about her protagonists, Allende balances the romance-like identification of the (presumably female) reader and the heroine via emotional identification, a focal point in the genre of the romance as posited by Janice Radway. However, enriched with "authentic" or everyday details and reducing the escapist aspect of the genre of the romance in her novels Allende's novels remain escapist because her texts are with one essential criteria of the romance, namely "a reading experience that will make them feel happy and hold out the promise of utopian bliss" (Radway 100). Even if this "bliss" in Allende's novels is different from most conventional romances — e.g., the protagonist of *Retrato en sepia*, who finds her happiness as an independent urban photographer or Eliza who "grows out of" her first love in order to develop a mature and fulfilling relationship — her protagonists differ from the conventional romance in that they do not presuppose psychological relationship or female independence. While the female characters Allende develops are certainly not ahead of their time, they correspond to middle class urban aspirations of the early twenty-first century. Thus Allende's *Latinidad* moves between the poles of sameness and diversity: national, social, ethnic, traditions and modernity and including both ethnic minorities and the main stream. Ultimately, Allende formulates a vision of a Hispanic history that seems formulated with US-Hispanics in mind, one that develops a post-national view.

Simultaneously, Allende produces an easily consumable, commodified version of Latin



American/US-Hispanic history and literature which is also directed for the consumption for a not clearly defined worldwide readership. In this sense, Allende inscribes herself into "postcolonial third world literature" (Huggan 12), a current that markets the exotic and as such is a staple of patterns of postcolonial cultural consumption but also one that negotiates its (and its object's) place in postcolonial society within its limits. By using characters with a marginal position within their particular society (Eliza, Murieta, Inés Suárez, Toussaint), Allende uses the widespread notion of Latino literature as literature of resistance and opposition (Caminero-Santangelo 162), which allows to locate her work within postcolonial criticism (see, e.g., Castellucci Cox). At the same time, while Allende's novels remain mainstream popular literature, her texts are examples of what Graham Huggan terms "staged marginality" (28). A careful enactment of marginality as a token of power and subversion, Allende's (and her culture's) postcoloniality suggests symbolic power and cultural commodity, and thus her novels represent products for an international market (Huggan 28-29). Independently from the critics' and scholars' opinion — not always of positive opinion about Allende's writing — the sales figures of Allende's novels and the multiple awards she received seem to indicate that with her calculated, market oriented writing Allende proves to be an author who positions her writing in a topical context of interest to a large readership in several languages.

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