

Worlds of Difference: Transnationalism in literary receptions

The case of Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta

Claudia Berruti

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Introduction

In Latin America from the 1980s onwards we can speak of the *boom feminino*, which is an increase in the publishing of the works of Latin American female writers. Many studies related to women's writing in Latin America were published during the 1990s. For example in 1989 Sharon Keefe Ugalde, published a review article concerning several books on Latin American women literature and speaks of "the current energetic state of women's literature in Latin America"¹ It is worth mentioning that these young writers who took part in the *boom feminino* owe a great deal to earlier writers such as Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska and others, as well as to the visual artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) whose works have increased in significance year after year and who created an important counterpoint to the male-dominated atmosphere, just like these female writers are doing now.

The actual Latin American literary Boom took place before this, in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period in time Latin American literature started to receive international attention and popularity with as a consequence an increasing interest of the global publishing industries in the region. The rise of these Latin American Boom writers and the impressive book sales in the region facilitated the start of the *boom feminino*. However due to the interest of the publishing industries and the success of this Latin American women's literature the products have often been categorised as populist and market-led² and therefore light literature, or in other words, less worthy of critical attention.

Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta are two Mexican writers who are seen as part of the *boom feminino*. In this thesis we will study the criticisms given to these two writers and we will try and explore what factors could have influenced these criticisms. We will notice a difference in the reception of the works of Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta between the United States and Mexico as well as between the two authors. Many factors could have influenced and affected this difference; however we will focus on the social and political changes during the 1960s and 1970s in the two countries, as we will see that those played a major role in the establishment and development of the cultural criticism given to the two authors.

¹ Sharon Keefe Ugalde, "Process, Identity, and Learning to read: Female Writing and Feminist Criticism in Latin America Today." *Latin American Research Review: The Journal of the Latin American Studies Association*, 24.1 (1989) 222-232.

² Lavery, Jane Elizabeth. "The Superescritora Ángeles Mastretta: The Strategies of a Best-Seller Writer in Projecting and Maintaining (Literary) Superstardom." (*Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 16.2, 2010) 118.

In order for us to do so, this thesis is divided in three chapters. In the first chapter we will give a brief introduction into Mexican literature before the *boom feminino*, we will continue by analysing the criticisms given to Esquivel and then Mastretta. This will show the difference in reception, and it will point out the importance of the Mexican literary elite. With this in mind we will continue with the second chapter, in which we will discuss political and social movements in the 1960s and 1970s in Mexico. By looking at the spread of counterculture to Mexico we will find that this caused a political and social struggle in the country which facilitated the establishment of the Women's Movement in Mexico and perhaps also inspired the start of the *boom feminino*. We will find that these social movements are intricately related to similar literary movements, one in particular *La Mafia*, who held great power in the Mexican literary establishment until the publishing industries started to globalise. After having examined these movements and their influence on the Mexican literary criticisms given to Esquivel and Mastretta we will continue with the third and last chapter where we will look at social and political movements in the United States. Here we will look at feminism in the US, as well as the sexual revolution, the New Left and the rise of cultural studies. We will find that these movements, inspired by counterculture, influenced scholars and critics in the United States. The chapter will finish with a critical look at the representation of 'Mexicans' in US literature and by looking at the idea of 'the other', and whether this could have influenced the critics as well as the writers themselves.

In Latin America there was a male-dominated literature sphere which did not help the female writers who took part in the *boom feminino* to free themselves from the term 'light literature'. Volume 14 of the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* is fully focused on Latin American women's writing and we can find insights here on how certain female Latin American writers position themselves within the debate and what their opinion is. For example, Adriana Lisboa, a Brazilian writer, says that she finds discomfort and even surprise in doing so as she believes other factors such as nationality or social class to be far more important in her work than that of gender³. Before continuing this thesis any further it is therefore important to look at the current state and ideas on women's writing.

Women's writing has been a scholarly discipline which developed in the 1970s and is based on the idea that women have experienced history differently because of their gender and is therefore seen as a separate group to study. Recently many works have been published

³ Adriana Lisboa, "Escrever no Brasil depois de Clarice Lispector: armadilhas ficcionais" *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, Vol. 14. (August/December, 2008). 141-145.

on the matter. Adele Parker and Stephanie Young published *Transnationalism and Resistance: Experience and Experiment in Women's Writing* in 2012 and argue that women's writing is of great importance as "it crosses physical, cultural and metaphorical boundaries in resisting traditional gendered expressions"⁴. They further argue that women's role in transnational literature has been neglected and that we should diminish the Western canon through which we read as we should read transnationally and not globally. Further Estrella Cibreiro and Francisca López argue in *Global issues in contemporary Hispanic women's writing : shaping gender, the environment, and politics* that women use writing as a political weapon, or rather as an instrument of ethical and political exploration⁵. They continue by arguing that although feminism inspired the beginning of certain waves of women's writing, women currently appear to be using their influence for the betterment of society as whole and not just issues regarding women. This sustains the point that Thea Pitman argues in the introduction of the aforementioned volume. She says that imposing a term as *boom feminino* on all books produced by women's writing during a certain time period is unnecessary as the themes discussed by the authors are not identical; instead they tend to vary a lot.⁶ Although the authors we will focus on have published works mostly related to women's position in society, it is relevant to remember that the criticisms given will mostly be given through certain cultural perspectives and not like Parker and Young claim we should read, through a transnational perception.

In order for us to further understand the debate around the *boom feminino* being high or low literature, we should look at cultural studies as that is where the distinction between low (popular/mass) and high art was created. The distinction was first mentioned in *the Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Frankfurt School philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in 1944. They first mentioned the term culture industry and argued that in a capitalist society mass or popular culture is homogenized by companies and factories in order to manipulate mass society into docility and passivity.⁷ For these reasons they see 'low' art as unworthy, however, in his book *Cultural Studies, theory and practice* Chris Barker criticises this separation and claims that there were no legitimate grounds for this division between the

⁴ Adele Parker and Stephanie Young, *Transnationalism and Resistance: Experience and Experiment in Women's Writing*. Rodopi (2012).

⁵ Estrella Cibreiro and Francisca López, *Global issues in contemporary Hispanic women's writing : shaping gender, the environment, and politics*. Routledge (2014).

⁶ Thea Pitman, "Introduction: Latin American Women's Writing, Then and Now/Las Escritoras latinoamericanas, Ayer Y Hoy." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, Vol. 14. (August/December 2008) 62.

⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Querido Verlag: Amsterdam (1947)

worthy and unworthy⁸. He argues that as long as people give meaning to popular or mass culture, it is worthy for a cultural studies scholar to research it. Further Richard K. Simon wrote *Trash Culture: Popular Culture and the Great Tradition* in which he claims that the popular culture surrounding us in our daily lives often bears striking similarities to some of the great works of the past⁹. He states that we simply learned to look differently at popular culture which is why we inferiorized it. He further argues in favour of the linking between the high and the low as without the one the other would not exist. Esquivel and Mastretta, both seen as popular writers, are therefore at the centre of this debate, and the criticisms given to the two could be influenced by the spread of cultural studies in the US.

We shall continue by looking at the term identity politics, which rose during the second half of the 20th century and has been used to speak of the interest and perspectives of certain groups with whom people identify. In other words it included the manners in which people's politics are shaped by identifying with certain social organisations, with as central element minority influence meaning the acceptance of certain beliefs or behaviour from a minority by a majority. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger discusses identity politics in his book *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. In his book Schlesinger argues that a liberal democracy requires a shared cultural foundation for a society to function¹⁰. He believes "that movements for civil rights should aim towards full acceptance and integration of marginalized groups into the mainstream culture, rather than perpetuating that marginalization through affirmations of difference"¹¹. However other scholars argue that it is because of the homogeneity of mainstream culture that full acceptance is impossible. Urvashi Vaid, a lawyer and LGBT rights activist, in her book *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* argues that instead of trying to solve the conflict between broader liberationist movements and identity politics, people should accept them as parallel movements that, depending on the issues, can work together¹². She further believes that the liberation of gays and lesbians from injustice can only occur through the transformation of large institutions within society and the family by the cooperation with mainstream groups for inclusion and change. Further identity politics causes problems within the field of psychology as Edward E. Sampson explains in his article *Identity Politics*:

⁸ Chris Barker "Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice" (London: SAGE, 2000) 47.

⁹ Richard Keller Simon, "Trash Culture: Popular Culture and the Great Tradition". Berkeley: University of California, (1999).

¹⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society", W. W. Norton & Company (1998)

¹¹ William Turner, "History of Philosophy", Vol. 3, New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House (2009) p. 112.

¹² Urvashi Vaid, "Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation". Anchor (1995).

Challenges to psychology's understanding. He argues that psychology, like any scientific enterprise, is there to serve the people, including the minorities. "These people have become both more diverse and more restless. Their differences are showing and will not be silenced by appeals to ideas that continue to speak in the voice of their dominators". This way arguing that psychology, if they want their legitimacy to endure, needs to adapt to the needs of the people. This shows us the importance of minorities' movement, as well as the influences of these movements, for example the women's movement, have in the academic and political world, and which then could have influenced the perspective from which the cultural criticisms on Esquivel's and Mastretta's works was given.

We have now established the overall reception of women's writing, and we have seen that women seem to be overall known to use their literature to promote certain ideas; in our case we could say those would be especially feminist ideas. We have also seen how certain scholars do not completely agree with the relevance of the study of popular culture, although it has been overall accepted within the field of cultural studies. For these scholars popular culture especially includes market-led products, however with the globalisation of the publishing industry and those being usually lead by capitalist ideologies, we could ask ourselves how many recently published novels are not market-led? Further we have seen the importance of identity politics and with that, the idea that minority movements are of great importance but, some scholars argue, that they should become mainstream in order to be accepted. In my opinion mainstream and popular cultures mostly go hand in hand. With this in mind we could argue that, if the works of Esquivel and Mastretta are popular culture that at least partly the ideas promoted in their books are accepted within the US society, and perhaps that the resistance within Mexico's literary elite towards these works originates from a lack of acceptance of these ideas. We will now firstly examine the criticisms given to Esquivel and Mastretta, continue with an examination of the relevant movements in Mexico and the United States, and try to find an answer to these questions.

Criticisms on Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta

Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta are two Mexican writers whom have become internationally known during the so-called Latin American *boom feminino*. In this first part of the thesis we will look at their works and at the reception of it in Mexico and Latin America, and the United States and Europe. We will firstly look at the criticisms on Esquivel's works and will follow then with Mastretta. Once we have a clear view of the two writers we will look at the similarities but also at the differences between them. We will establish that there is a difference and change in the reception regarding the books of Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta between the region of Latin America and the US. We will mostly focus on the academic criticism although you will find that the popular opinion is sometimes mentioned if relevant. We will find that Esquivel and Mastretta were at first criticised harshly by both regions, however whereas Esquivel's work in time started to receive more approval from the two regions, Mastretta's work is still seen by Mexico's literary elite as less worthy although the critics in the US did start to appreciate Mastretta's work more over time.

In order for us to start examining criticisms on Esquivel's and Mastretta's work, we will first need to look at the general state of Mexican literature during the 20th century. This will give us better understanding of the context in which the criticisms were given. Within the Spanish literary world, Mexican literature is one of the most influential and productive ones along with the Spanish, Argentinian and Cuban ones. During the 20th century a number of authors started to become internationally recognized, some of the most famous ones are for example Juan Rulfo (1917-1986), Octavio Paz (1914-1998) and Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012).

The Mexican revolution from 1910 until 1920 played a central role in the development of Mexican literature in the 20th century. The Revolution theme appeared in many novels, short stories and plays such as those of Mariano Azuela (1873-1952) or Rodolfo Usigli (1905-1979), it also influenced visual artist Frida Kahlo as she even tried giving her birthdate as 1910 instead of 1907 as she wanted her birth to coincide with the start of the Revolution and the birth of modern Mexico.¹³ This trend was the beginning of the development of 'revolutionary literature' which includes the works of writers like Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) or Juan Rulfo. Contemporary to this, there was also a rise in literature of indigenous

¹³ Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*. New York: Harper & Row, (1983) pp 4.

themes, which tried to describe the life and point of view of the Mexican indigenous people, although ironically, almost none of the writers were indigenous.

During the second part of the 20th century Mexican literature started to expand into many themes, styles and genres. We will try and give a short introduction of two of the most important literary groups or movements that rose during the 1960s.

First of all there was the rise of *Literatura de la Onda* during the second half of the 1960s, which was formed by young writers who wanted to rebel against the authoritarian regime at the time, however since they could not express their opinions openly they chose to produce irreverent literature as a medium to address issues such as sex, rock and roll, the Vietnam war, drugs and others, which were seen as taboo at the time. They also started using urban language for their works and for that they were criticised by the elite. Some important authors that participated in this were Parmenides García Saldaña (1944-1982), René Avilés Fabila (1940-), Gustavo Sainz (1940-) and José Agustín (1944 -).

Another literary movement that rose in the 1960s was *La Mafia Cultural*. This was a group of authors which controlled “all the most influential literary and cultural organs, among them *Siempre*, *Plural* and *Novedades*”¹⁴. This way they excluded some talented writers such as Vicente Leñero (1933-2014), however they also incorporated many writers whom that way gained important access to Mexican cultural organs. It is also important to mention here that literary magazines were one of the main instruments used in Mexico to promote authors. Some important members of *La Mafia* were Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, Salvador Elizondo (1932-2006), José Emilio Pacheco (1939-2014), Carlos Monsivais (1938-2010), Inés Arredondo (1928-1989) and Fernando Benítez (1912-2000) among others.

In 1947 with the publication of *Al filo del agua (the Water's Edge)* by Agustín Yáñez (1904-1980) began what we call the contemporary Mexican novel, which incorporated innovative techniques and influences of European and American writers such as James Joyce, Franz Kafka, William Faulkner and John Dos Passos. Further in 1963 Elena Garro (1916-1998) published the novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir (Memories of the Future)* which by some is seen as the initiator of the Latin American boom as well as the founder of the genre magical realism (a genre also used by Esquivel). This novel is also said to have inspired Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014) to write his most famous *Cien años de soledad* (1967, *One Hundred Year of Solitude*), which also uses magical realism and is said to be one, if not the most, influential Latin American texts of all times.

¹⁴ Raymond Leslie Williams, *the Writings of Carlos Fuentes*. Texas: University of Texas Press. (1996)

After this brief introduction into the state of Mexican literature before the start of the *boom feminino* we can now look at the criticisms given to Esquivel and Mastretta. This background should give us better understanding in the criticisms given, especially the Mexican ones, as we will find that there still is an active Mexican literary elite, perhaps inspired by *La Mafia* criticising and possibly trying to control the Mexican literature.

Laura Esquivel

Laura Esquivel was born in Mexico City on September 30, 1950. Esquivel completed her teacher training at the national college for teacher preparation; Mexico City's *Escuela Normal para Maestros*. Next to teaching she also organised workshops and produced dramatic pieces for children's theatre. She first married Alfonso Arau, an actor, director and producer, with whom she collaborated multiple times, including for the movie adaptation of her most famous novel *Como Agua para Chocolate* (1989, the movie adaptation *Like Water for Chocolate* came out in 1993 and won 10 Ariel Awards). This book has sold over 4.5 million copies worldwide and has been translated into more than 30 languages. With this book she also won the ABBY award (American Bookseller Book of the Year) in 1994, which was given for the first time to a foreign author. "Esquivel has often commented on the influence of her family on the writing, particularly that of her grandmother, in whose kitchen she learned much of the culinary lore that shapes *Like Water for Chocolate*"¹⁵. In the same way her father's death in 1999 became the inspiration for Esquivel's third novel *Tan veloz como el deseo* (2001, translated *Swift as Desire*). Esquivel also wrote *La ley del amor* in 1995 and *Malinche: novela* in 2006 (translated *The Law of Love* and *Malinche: a novel*). Despite Esquivel's serious approach to her work and her undoubted success, she received a critical treatment by scholars since the 1990s, as she is often considered a "popular" rather than a "literary" writer. In order to examine the criticisms on Laura Esquivel we will mostly focus on her first and most famous novel *Como Agua para Chocolate*, as this book has had the biggest impact and has been reviewed most by the literary critics.

Esquivel's *Como Agua para Chocolate* was Mexico's bestselling book in 1990, and once the movie adaptation was released it became one of the most popular foreign movies in the US. This gave Esquivel editorial confidence, which is evident in the number of reprints and in the translation of her other novels that coincide with the release of the Spanish

¹⁵ Elizabeth M. Willingham, "A Biography of Laura Esquivel" in *Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fictions* ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, (2010), pp 2.

version¹⁶. The popularity of the movie definitely added to the initial success of the book and showed that there is no need for the readers or viewers around the world to have inside knowledge or understanding on Mexico's history and culture, nor on the figurative meaning of the main title or the culinary aspects in order to welcome and embrace the story.

When the book first came out in Mexico, as well as in the US, the novel was dismissed and seen as a weak attempt to imitate the male Boom writers. It was immediately universally criticised by the male-dominated literary establishment as light literature¹⁷. Antonio Marquet, a Mexican writer, published an essay in 1991, which soon became the model negative review of *Como Agua para Chocolate*. In this essay Marquet claims that the novel is a calculated result to create a best-seller in women's novels by means of a predetermined formula¹⁸. He further also claims that the popularity of Esquivel and further female writers has to do with two factors; that women read more than men, and that women are currently the most dynamic group within Mexico as they are most curious and most interested in modifying their social and family status, explaining so the popularity of Esquivel's book. After the release of the English translation of the novel, concurrently with the movie adaptation, the US critics adapted the same point of view as Marquet. Suzanne Ruta, from New York, for example places *Como Agua para Chocolate* in the Latin American light or easy literature category¹⁹. She finds that the book lacks of quality and that other books, such as Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969, Here's to you Jesusa, 2001), would have been more worthy of translation, as this is a more serious kind of book.

Within some years after the publication of Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* we can see how the papers started to increase and how especially the North American influenced writers started to point out a vast variety of interesting aspects instead of focussing and limiting their discussion to the food and kitchen space aspects of the novel. Some critics also point out the importance and appropriateness of using the kitchen space as a focus point. Cecilia Lawless from New York sees the kitchen as a "productive site" for female and marginalized discourses; it is a place for women's voices and a private source of power, a site

¹⁶ Elizabeth M. Willingham, "An Introduction to Esquivel Criticism" in *Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fiction* ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, (2010), pp 5.

¹⁷ Debra A. Castillo, "Anna's Extreme Makeover: Revisiting Tolstoy in *Karenina Express*" in *Unfolding the City: Women Write the City in Latin America* ed. Elisabeth Guerrero and Anne Lambright. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, (2007) pp 98.

¹⁸ Marquet, Antonio, "Cómo escribir un best-seller? La receta de Laura Esquivel." *Plural: Revista Cultural de Excelsior* 237. (1991).

¹⁹ Suzanne Ruta, "In Grandmother's Kitchen: review of *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances and Home Remedies* by Laura Esquivel trans. Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen". *The Women's Review of Books* 10.5, (1993) pp 7.

for women's community.²⁰ She also claims that the novel's genre is "unclassifiable" but sees an almost standard structure of a Gothic novel in Esquivel's work, to produce a parody created with the language and spaces of food preparation²¹.

Further in the recently published collection of essays (2010) on Esquivel's fiction we can see how not just female critics from the US started to explore different aspects of her work; Patrick Duffey for example explores the use of gender in *Like Water for Chocolate*²², while Jeffrey Oxford looks more specific at the role of the men in the same novel²³ and Stephen B. Murray explores the absence of God and the presence of ancestors²⁴.

However also in Mexico writers and critics started to give some more encouraging words. For example, Elena Poniatowska, who is considered to be part of the literary elite in Mexico, called Esquivel's novel a new book that did not yet exist in Mexican Literature²⁵. It is worth mentioning here that until the 1980s the publishing industry in Mexico was controlled by a literary elite represented by national presses as well as critics and writers, including Poniatowska, Carlos Fuentes and Fernando Benítez. These critics and writers mostly supported 'quality' literature and when the more 'readable' novel emerged, it was seen as an insult and was therefore considered as unworthy of critical attention. This makes Poniatowska support and interest in Esquivel's novel very interesting and important for this thesis.

Additionally, Alberto Juliano Pérez, an Argentine literary critic, argues that Esquivel's novel brings confusion to the question of category (high or light literature) and praises her for her use of the kitchen space and her original use of the recipes as of central importance to her novel. He further explains that in contrast to other female literary work, Esquivel's work relies on personal experience and is therefore although happening in certain historical periods,

²⁰ Cecilia Lawless, "Cooking, Community and Culture: A Reading of *Like Water for Chocolate*". Bower, (1997) pp 216-235.

²¹ Cecilia Lawless, "Experimental Cooking in *Como Agua para Chocolate*" (Monographic Review 8, 1992) 261-272.

²² Patrick Duffey, "Crossing gender Borders: Subversion of Cinematic Melodrama in *Like Water for Chocolate*" in *Laura Esquivel's Fictions*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 64.

²³ Jeffrey Oxford, "Unmasked Men: Sex Roles in *Like Water for Chocolate*" in *Laura Esquivel's Fictions*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, (2010). Pp 76.

²⁴ Stephen Butler Murray, "the absence of God and the Presence of Ancestors in *Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate*" in *Laura Esquivel's Fictions*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, (2010), pp 90.

²⁵ Elena Poniatowska Amor, "Laura Esquivel's Mexican Chocolate" in *Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fictions*. Trans. Manuel Muñoz and Elizabeth M. Willingham. Ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, (2010), pp 54.

shown in a more isolated place.²⁶ She further avoids using common tendencies while speaking of gender which makes her work interesting and original.

If we shortly summarise what we have discussed here about Laura Esquivel, we can see that most criticisms on her work are focused on her most famous novel *Como Agua para Chocolate* and that although her work was doubted at first and seen as an easy attempt at writing a bestseller, within some years after her first publications many critics in the United States started to explore all the different themes discussed and used in her work. Soon also Mexico's own critics started exploring Esquivel's work more and even Mexico's elite supports Esquivel's work. It is also worth mentioning that Esquivel's *Como Agua para Chocolate* has become a Latin American classic, often used by high schools in their literary program.

Ángeles Mastretta

We will now continue further by looking at Ángeles Mastretta. She was born on October 9th 1949 in Puebla, Mexico, her father, Carlos Mastretta, was a writer and journalist, who positively influenced his daughter's choice of career. Mastretta studied journalism at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, after which she worked for many different newspapers and magazines and made herself known throughout the whole country. Mastretta's first and most famous novel *Arráncame la vida* (Tear his Heart Out) was published in 1985 and received the *Premio Mazatlán de Literatura* in 1986. The immediate success of the novel gave her the opportunity and freedom to spend more time writing. Eventually the novel was translated in over 15 languages and in 2008 the movie adaptation directed by Roberto Sneider came out. This movie adaptation was at the time of production the most expensive movie ever made in Mexico. In 1990 Mastretta's collection of short stories *Mujeres con Ojos Grandes* (Women with Big Eyes) came out, which was partly autobiographical as these stories were inspired by her family tree, to tell to her suddenly gravely ill daughter to make her feel like she was a central connection in this chain of great women. In 1996 her second novel *Mal des Amores* came out (*Lovesick*), with which she won the Latin American literary prize *el Premio Rómulo Gallegos* in 1997. Other novels written by Mastretta are *Ninguna eternidad como la mía* in 1999 and *El cielo de los leones* in 2003 (translated *No Eternity like Mine* and *The Sky of Lions*), she also released other books (non-novels) such as collections of her poetry or of her other short-stories. Hereunder we will

²⁶ Alberto Julián Pérez, "Esquivel's fiction and Latin American Women's Writing" in *Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fictions*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Willingham. (Eastbourne, Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 216.

however mostly focus on her first and most famous novel *Arráncame la vida*, since especially this book has been a centre of attention for the literary critics.

Just like in Laura Esquivel's case we can see how there was a debate around Mastretta's work claiming it to be light literature, and therefore unworthy of critical attention. However Mastretta has won two Latin American literary prizes and has even received the status of literary *superescritora*²⁷ (super-writer). Her works have been criticised by some as to being just simple novels that are being associated with commercialism due to the international popularity and best-seller status²⁸, whereas others have praised her novels for the liberal political and feminist views.

Elena Poniatowska, Mexico's current figurehead of the literary elite, declares Mastretta's books as trashy women literature²⁹. The interesting aspect of Poniatowska's negative comments on Mastretta's work is that the works of these two female Mexican writers has often been compared by different scholars and categorized within the same brand of female Latin American literature, as they share different themes within their works³⁰. Poniatowska also won the same literary prize as Mastretta, *el Premio Rómulo Gallegos* in 2006. Poniatowska is herself a defender of women's rights however instead of praising Mastretta for the way in which she creates these strong female characters, she dismisses it and declares it for entertainment only.

Furthermore Argentine writer Angélica Gorodischer, claims that Mastretta sells books, but that she does not contribute to adding anything new or interesting to the existing literature or to the issue of gender and Aralia López González, a Cuban writer, describes Mastretta's work as 'bad' writing and claims it to be linear and boring with no originality in characters and situations³¹.

Jane Lavery, from the UK, sustains the negative claims made about Mastretta by claiming that "the Mexican literary institution has condemned Mastretta for purposefully producing Latin American and international best-sellers by bowing to publishers' pressures to

²⁷ Nuala Finnegan, *Ambivalence, Modernity, Power: Women and Writing in Mexico since 1980* Oxford, Peter Lang, (2007) pp 150.

²⁸ Lavery, Jane Elizabeth. "The Superescritora Ángeles Mastretta: The Strategies of a Best-Seller Writer in Projecting and Maintaining (Literary) Superstardom." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 16.2, (2010) pp 119.

²⁹ 'Los éxitos y las críticas', Clarín, 2 September 2003, <http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2003/02/09/s-04003.htm>, accessed 10 January 2014.

³⁰ Jane Elizabeth Lavery, *Ángeles Mastretta: Textual Multiplicity* Woodbridge: Tamesis, (2005) 162.

³¹ Jane Elizabeth Lavery, *Ángeles Mastretta : Textual Multiplicity*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, (2005)

produce 'light' entertainment, and 'readable' novels that achieve high sales"³². However there are also more sophisticated critiques that show the value of Mastretta's novels. Schaefer and Ibsen for example examined the many-sided features within *Árrancame la vida* and *Mal de amores* and show that Mastretta's value lays within her ability to relate 'writerly' features with additional important elements, as for example the use of popular romance and the important element of women's oppression in the Latin American male-dominated society³³.

Kathleen Ross further argues that "Mastretta's appropriation and alteration of the concepts and genre of the historical novel provides a stimulating glimpse into the complicated politics of today's Mexico and its relationship to the icons of the past"³⁴.

Further Nuala Finnegan, head of the Mexican department at the University of Cork, explains in her book how there appears to be a difference between the national and international criticism on Mastretta's novels³⁵. Whereas Mexican literary critics tend to refer to the light literature debate and its relation to commercialism, the international reviews, which Finnegan claims are influenced by the feminist literary theory, try to restore the light literature as worthy of critical examination. However some articles published in Mexican newspapers such as *Excélsior* and *la Reforma* counteract the negative evaluations of the literary elite and praise her and find pride in her international success.

It is also worth mentioning that Ross claimed in her review in 1993 that Mastretta's work although popular in Mexico has almost remained unstudied in North America, this could explain why most English reviews found and used in this thesis on Mastretta come from Europe instead of the US. It also sustains the idea that perhaps Mastretta's works are seen as less important and relevant within Mexican literature also by critics from the US which is possibly why her works remain somewhat unstudied. Further Europe and the US have very similar ideologies, which is why hereafter we will mostly focus on the US, although some differences between the UK and US will be mentioned.

³² Jane Elizabeth Lavery, "The Superescritora Ángeles Mastretta: The Strategies of a Best-Seller Writer in Projecting and Maintaining (Literary) Superstardom." (Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research 16.2, 2010) 120.

³³ Kristine Ibsen, "The Other Mirror: An Introduction", in *The Other Mirror: Women's Narrative in Mexico 1980–1995*, ed. Kristine Ibsen. *Contributions to the Study of World Literature*, 80, Westport, CON, Greenwood Press, (1997) and Schaefer, Claudia, "Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico" (Tucson, Arizona UP, 1992) 88–110

³⁴ Kathleen Ross, "Reviewed Work: Textured Lives: Women, Art, and Representation in Modern Mexico. by Claudia Schaefer" in *The Hispanic American Historical Review. Vol. 73, No. 2*. Duke University Press, (1993), pp. 333-334

³⁵ Nuala Finnegan, *Ambivalence, Modernity, Power: Women and Writing in Mexico since 1980*. Oxford, Peter Lang, (2007) 152 and 172.

We have seen that Mastretta has been more criticised by scholars from different regions in the world, especially compared to Esquivel, with as main criticism her works being a calculated receipt for a best-seller influenced by the globalising publishing industries. Further, Poniatowska criticises and discards Mastretta's work, whereas she seems to be quite passionate about Esquivel's work. This brings us to the important question whether Poniatowska, because of her important position within the Mexican literary elite, influenced writers and critics around her in Mexico and is this why Mastretta's works are still seen as of lesser importance?

At the end of this first chapter we can conclude that Esquivel and Mastretta's work has been criticised by many and that especially the international literary critics (perhaps influenced by the feminist literary theory) have a more positive view of these books, whereas the local literary elite keeps a more critical stand. However we noticed an important difference between the two writers; whereas Esquivel's work has at some point received some more positive comments also from the local literary elite such as Poniatowska and Pérez, Mastretta's work is still seen as part of the light literature produced by the wishes of the publishing industry.

Further, perhaps to explain the difference in reception between Esquivel and Mastretta in Mexico we could look at what Perez claims: "For Mexican women writers like Poniatowska, Esquivel and Castellanos, and the artist Kahlo, the individual is the deeper truth, issues of gender, self-realisation and individual and communal struggle and survivor take precedence over History with the capital letter."³⁶ On the other hand Mastretta is known for her use of nostalgia, and her emphasis on the female role in history. So perhaps it is because of the importance Mastretta places on history, and historical events, in her works that affected perhaps partly the bad reception within Mexico's literary elite.

After having established in this chapter the criticisms given to Esquivel and Mastretta, we will now continue by looking at the 1960s and 1970s in Mexico and by analysing the political and social movements active in that period which could have inspired the *boom feminino* as well as the critics and their comments on the works of the two authors.

³⁶ Alberto Junián Pérez, "Esquivel's Fiction and Latin American's Women's Writing" in *Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fictions*. Ed. Elizabeth Moore Willingham. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, (2010) 210.

Political changes in Mexico: women's position in society

In this chapter we will focus on social and political changes in Mexico and we will try and investigate whether, and if so, how they could have influenced the reception of Esquivel's and Mastretta's works in the country as well as the different treatment by the critics of the two authors. During the 20th century in Mexico there have been many political changes as well as social movements and protests. We already had an introduction to certain literary groups at the beginning of the previous chapter, here we will further analyse the connection and influences of those movements with the political development and social protests in the country. We will show that the political state of Mexico and the response to this by society probably influenced the literary elite in Mexico, as well as the rise of the boom feminino. To do this we will start by looking at the state of Mexican politics and the rise of the counterculture during the 1960s and continue by looking at the establishment of Mexican women's movements. Afterwards we will link these social changes to the literary groups discussed in the previous chapter and we will discuss the role of certain important writers during these changes.

We will start by looking at the rise of counterculture during the 1960s, which started in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the US it started in 1960 with the Greensboro sit-ins, a non-violent successful protest against racism and ended around 1975 with the return of the US army from Vietnam. In between there were many protests and social activism that defined the generation of young Americans. Part of this counterculture was for example the 'Hippie' movement which was in a way a response to the Vietnam War, and wanted to promote peace. "*Civil rights, student power, and the crusade against the Vietnam War composed the first wave of the movement, and during and after the rip tides of 1968, the movement changed and expanded, flowing into new currents of counterculture, minority empowerment, and women's liberation.*"³⁷ In the US it further revolved around issues of human sexuality, traditional modes of authority, experimentation with psychoactive drugs, and differing interpretations of the American Dream. Many subcultures started to rise as a result of these new ongoing ideologies and many different artists, thinkers and authors contributed to this. Movies became less censored and rock 'n roll became of great importance within these countercultures.

³⁷ Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and The Sixties*. Oxford University Press, (1995)

The spread of this counterculture to Mexico initiated some important events and changes in the country, with as main event the student protests in Mexico City in 1968. During that period in Mexico there was an ideological clash between adults and younger adults, influenced by capitalism and socialism. At that time in Mexico the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, in English: Institutional Revolutionary Party) was in power. However “starting as a revolutionary party focused on protecting the rights of the poor in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, PRI went on to symbolize corruption, electoral fraud, and privatization of previously nationalized industries”³⁸. Due to some of the restrictions imposed by this government the younger generation tried to take justice into their own hands and tried to find a place for new ideologies that at the time were socially unacceptable. However the older generation found themselves unprepared to accept these new rights and ideals, for example the introduction of the birth-control pill. During the summer of 1968 there was a major rise in student movements protesting against the Mexican government, and although many protests proceeded peacefully, one, on October 2nd of that year in Tlatelolco, a neighbourhood of Mexico City, did not. It has later been named the Tlatelolco massacre.

According to the Mexican government at the time, the protesters were the ones who started the violence and the Mexican military had to respond, however according to eyewitnesses and survivors the military started shooting for no reason causing panic and killing innocent people. Only recently in 2002 did the Mexican government release the previously classified documents and pictures that show the truth of the massacre and the involvement of the government³⁹. There were approximately 10.000 students ready to protest against the government and peacefully listen to speeches when the government drew fire. There has been an estimate of between 30 and 300 deaths and around 1300 people were arrested by the police. A reason for the hard response by the government can be found in the '68 Olympics which started 10 days after this massacre. At the time President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz used a lot of resources and put a lot of effort into the Olympics and wanted to show a modern and peaceful Mexico without civil unrest and tried doing so by suppressing new social movements and their call for political reforms.

Another issue arose because of counterculture in 1971, when the three day festival *Rock y Ruedas de Avándaro* was held in a valley near Mexico City and became known as “the Mexican Woodstock”. This festival scandalised Mexico’s conservative society and caused for

³⁸ PRI at the NNDB. Accessed 25/01/15 <http://www.nndb.com/org/767/000095482/>

³⁹ “Mexico photos” in *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio, February 14, 2002. <http://www.npr.org/programs/all-things-considered/2002/02/14/12997294/>

much unrest in the country, it also caused the government to clamp down on rock and roll performances for the rest of the decade. Rock music was seen as part the counterculture coming from the US that influenced the protests of 1968. Although the festival was marketed as proof of the modernisation of Mexico, during the festival there was the presence of drugs, nudity and the US flag as well as huge unexpected masses. In the end the government had to evacuate stranded crowds and prohibited tours of Mexico by foreign acts until 1989⁴⁰. This happened under President Luis Echeverría (presidential term from 1970 until 1976), whom then also prohibited anything that could be connected to the previous student protests or the counterculture coming from the US censoring all public airwaves, afraid of a recurrence of 1968.

Further during these protests there was an increasing role of women; although in 1968 feminism was not self-evidently on the agenda, many acknowledge a rebirth of feminism during that year⁴¹. Before the repression of the demonstrations started there were already some student movements that gave women the opportunity to actively participate, which helped the feminist ideas to spread and grow. Further the government officials tended to focus their attention on the men within the movements, overlooking the importance of women in these groups. As a result men became the target during the Tlatelolco massacre, leaving the women behind and giving them the opportunity to keep the movement alive and defining its direction for the following years⁴². In the end it still took some years after 1968 before the Women's Movement in Mexico was established.

While in the United States women managed to improve their position relatively rapidly during the 1960s and '70s, the Mexican feminism had to endure a little longer. *"The Mexican Women's Movement has had to struggle on the one hand with the oppressive Catholic double moral that has impinged on the lives of Mexican women and their relationships to their men: in sexuality, family, work, social, and political contexts. On the other hand, the indigenous ancestry has largely been kept "invisible" within the movement as in the larger social arena."*⁴³ The Mexican feminism only started rising in the 1970s by borrowing much from the western model, which will be discussed further in the next chapter, but only in 1976 did the different groups unite and define themselves as a social force. Also at

⁴⁰ Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, (1999)

⁴¹ Sara M. Evans, Sons, "Daughters, and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation" in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 114, No. 2 (2009), pp. 331-347.

⁴² Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: gender, power and terror in 1968 Mexico*. USA: Editorial Dialogos, (2005).

⁴³ Sylvia Marcos, "Twenty-five Years of Mexican Feminism" in *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 22 Is. 4, 1999) pp 431.

the end of the 1990s Mexico's Women's Movement was still seen as marginal although it had been of key importance during social protests⁴⁴.

It is also during the 1960s and '70s that the terms *machismo* and *marianismo* started being used by Mexican and Latin American women to point out the male aggression and violence in the region. *Machismo* relates to the alpha or manly, and to the assumption that the male is stronger and better than the female. It is because of this term that the term *marianismo* rose to represent the supposedly typical Latin American woman; "the power difference in the relationship between a man and a woman not only creates the social norm of machismo, but by consequence also creates the social concept of *marianismo*."⁴⁵ *Marianismo* refers to the Virgin Mary and stands for the female ability to produce life. In a way it represented the ideal moral woman, as was also promoted by the Church. It stands for the woman being semi divine, morally superior and spiritually stronger, however it also suggests the idea of either being a 'virgin or whore'. It also suggests that a woman has no job outside the household as that would question the husband's *machismo*. This type of relationship between a man and a woman is also the one shown and rebelled against in the works of Esquivel and Mastretta.

Another issue still found today in Mexico is the one of gender discrimination in employment. Mexico has a long history of traditions and family is of central importance in the Mexican culture. A traditional Mexican family would have many children and whereas the husband of the family would be the authority figure the wife would exclusively work at home. Although this has changed over the past decades, we can still find that especially outside the cities many women are still not working outside the house. As for those women who do find a job, they have complained of unjust gender discrimination at the workplace caused according to them due to cultural resistance, whereas stereotypically men's description relates it to lack of professionalism and commitment to work⁴⁶.

We have seen how Mexico went through a turbulent period in the 1960s and 1970s and how this helped the Women Movement of Mexico to rise and develop. Although women still face many problems today, we could say that the 1970s were a very important time for the establishment of the movement. The spread of counterculture in Mexico was also of great

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁴⁵ Rosa Perla Resnick and Yolanda Quinones Mayo. "The Impact of Machismo on Hispanic Women". *Affilia* 11.3, (1994) pp 257-277.

⁴⁶ Krista M. Brumley, "'Now, We Have the Same Rights as Men to Keep Our Jobs': Gendered Perceptions of Opportunity and Obstacles in a Mexican Workplace" in *Gender, Work and Organization*. Vol. 21 No. 3, (2014) pp 217-230.

importance not just for the development of feminism in the country but for the establishment of the before mentioned movement *Literatura de la Onda*⁴⁷.

The writers who were seen as part of this movement did not agree with the name given to them by Margo Glantz as it implied their work was of a low level⁴⁸, in other terms light literature. This is a criticism that we could recognise as it is in a way similar to the way Mexico's literary elite at first dismissed the works of Esquivel and Mastretta.

This leads us to the other literary movement in the 1960s; *La Mafia*. Members of *La Mafia* produced important works during the 1960s and especially Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz are of great importance within Mexico's literary history. It is worth mentioning that Paz used to be the Mexican Ambassador of India, however after the Tlatelolco massacre he resigned causing a blow to the legitimacy of the ruling regime. It also caused for many intellectuals and writers to reconsider the actions of the ruling party. Paz's actions and poetry (written in protest to the massacre) were supported by Fuentes and Marquez, and provided a symbol for the growing resistance.

Another writer who was of great importance after the Tlatelolco massacre was Poniatowska whom collected interviews with eyewitnesses and published a book on the issue: *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971, Massacre in Mexico). This book remained the only one on the topic for 20 years and was contradicting the government's version of the events. In this book we can also find poems by Octavio Paz and Rosario Castellanos. This suggests that Poniatowska, although nowhere mentioned as member of *La Mafia*, could perhaps partly be seen as part of the movement, as she would seem to have important connections with some of the members. She also published important and influential works and is seen today, as an important member of the Mexican literary elite.

La Mafia, which later developed into the current Mexican literary elite, has shown to be of great importance for the criticisms given at Esquivel and Mastretta. In her book Finnegan clarifies that in the Mexican literary elite "there is discernible nostalgia for a golden era of Latin American letters, symbolised most forcefully by the 1960s period in Mexico"⁴⁹. So perhaps it is in particular because of this nostalgia that writers like Mastretta and Esquivel

⁴⁷ Inke Gunia, "Qué onda broder? Las condiciones de formación y el desenvolvimiento de una literatura de la contracultura juvenil en el México de los años sesenta y setenta" in *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*. No. 59. Centro de Estudios Literarios Antonio Cornejo Polar, (2004), pp. 19-31

⁴⁸ Margo Glantz, *Onda y escritura, jóvenes de 20 a 33*. (1971)

⁴⁹ Nuala Finnegan, *Ambivalence, Modernity, Power: Women and Writing in Mexico since 1980* Oxford, Peter Lang, (2007) pp 168.

and their new literary ‘phenomenon’ have been rejected by the Latin American literary establishments and considered as unworthy of critical attention. Lavery also mentions another interesting aspect which supports the claim made above. As “it is important to reinforce the fact that it is not only the likes of Esquivel and Mastretta who are dismissed because they produce ‘light’ commercial literature; the same criticism is directed at male authors who in the past ten years have jumped onto the bandwagon of popularity of the so-called *narco literatura* and *literatura de violencia*. Which brings us to the assumption that overall the Mexican literary elite has responded quite critically in the past to new trends within literature, mostly dismissing them at first.

Further Finnegan remarks that the globalisation of the publishing industry also had a deep impact on the published works. At first *La Mafia* used to be in control of the publishing of literature in Mexico and the Mexican publishing houses used to be associated with left wing agendas with the preferment of high over light literature. However due to the merging with global publishing industries these associations changed because of the need for profit. Perhaps this missing control of what should or should not be published caused the elite to develop a more critical perspective on newly published works.

At the end of this chapter we have established that the political situation in Mexico facilitated for the rise and development of the counterculture in the country. This helped the establishment of the Mexican Women Movement by causing a revival of feminism which most likely influenced and inspired many of the women who produced their works during the *boom feminino*. Esquivel and Mastretta were young women, not yet 20 during the student protests in 1968, which suggests that they must have been aware of the situation if not even active themselves: chances are certainly high it influenced their development as young adults. This activism can as well be found in the works of Poniatowska, whom we have suggested could be seen as part, or at least affiliate of *La Mafia* and who has an important role within the current Mexican literary elite.

We further established that the Mexican literary elite has had an overall very critical approach to new movements within literature, which is most likely influenced by the loss of control of the publishing industry, which is no longer local, but has developed into a bigger global publishing industry. This critical look they created could have influenced the view of the products of the *boom feminino* and could also explain perhaps the different reception between the two authors. Mastretta published her first novel four years before Esquivel, being therefore more at the beginning of the *boom feminino*. It is possible that the literary elite were

more critical of the works produced at the beginning of the 1980s as they were not yet as familiar with women's writing, whereas Esquivel's novel was published after almost a decade after the start of the *boom feminino*, and was therefore perceived differently.

Further we have seen that women still struggle today in the Mexican workplace, which shows that equal rights for men and women in Mexico are still not completely accepted. This inequality could therefore also be perceived in the literary world, explaining perhaps some of the negative reviews given by some of the male Mexican authors. This current perceived inequality could also suggest that the rise of the *boom feminino* could be a criticism of the male-dominated nature of the original boom, and by extension of the lack of change for women in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the next chapter, in order for us to further understand the criticisms in Mexico, we will look at the context of the criticisms given by the US critics. We have seen how the counterculture initiated in the US and only some years later actually became important in Mexico. The same way we could assume that movements that rose in the Western world, firstly affected the ideologies in the US and later in Mexico. By looking at the development of certain movements in the 1960s and 1970s in the US, which perhaps did not yet, or not at all, happen in Mexico, we could therefore find an indication as to the more positive reception of the works of Esquivel and Mastretta in the US.

Cultural criticism in the United States

In this part of this thesis we will look closer at the social and political influences and changes in the United States. The revival of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s did not just happen in Mexico; also in the US those years were of great importance for the establishment of women's rights. We will start this chapter by looking at the second wave of feminism in the United States and relate this to the new left and counterculture. Then we will continue by looking at the rise of cultural studies which started during the late 1950s in the UK. This will give us a clear view of the broader context in which the US critics reviewed the works of Esquivel and Mastretta. We will finish the chapter by looking at the representation of Mexico in US literature and further analyse whether this could have changed the view of the critics or perhaps even the Mexican authors themselves.

We will start by looking at the rise of feminism. It is important to know that there have been three waves of feminism; the first one took place during the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and mostly focused on the promotion of equal contract, marriage, parenting, and property rights for women; the second took place mid twentieth century, this time focussing on voting rights and on family laws; and the third wave, took place especially in the US during the 1990s, although this wave was also present in the rest of the world it was mostly actively experienced and reported in the US, this was a response to certain failures of the second wave and focussed on issues around sexuality. We will mostly focus on the second wave, and perhaps third, as that was close before and during the period of publishing of the books we have been discussing thus far.

During the second wave of feminism, the movement was very successful in the United States. Throughout the 1960s and '70s laws were passed in the country that banned sex discrimination in employment, public schools, for creditors and in housing; and that legalised abortion. They also did a lot of effort in helping divorced and widowed women.

One of the most influential figures for the establishment of the movement in the US, and who is also said to have to some degree inspired the second wave of feminism with her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, is Betty Friedan (1921-2006). Her work as a popular writer carried much of the pressing issues for women's movements at the time to the general public: in this she had significant success, perhaps more so than other writers who had begun exploring this topic almost exclusively in academic circles. Already during the 1940s and 1950s Friedan was part of a broad movement that campaigned against racism and supported

women's rights. In 1957 during her fifteenth reunion of her all female Smith College class, she asked her peers to complete a survey about their lives, which ended up being the inspiration for her book in 1963. Many of her peers had to give up work or further education for motherhood, which was a significant shift away from the relative perceived independence women used to enjoy in the 1920s and 1930s⁵⁰. She addressed the dissatisfaction of these suburban housewives, who felt unrewarded by their daily lives as "the problem with no name". Many women recognised themselves in her book and were hereby inspired to undertake action. In 1966 Friedan co-founded the National Organization for Women in the US (NOW), in order to campaign for equality and in 1969 she helped in the launch of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL). She continued her work in the 1970s and 1980s and she is seen as a leading figure of the overall movement in the US.

Further relevant at this point is the sexual revolution, which goes hand in hand with some of the feminist ideals. The sexual revolution, or sexual liberation, was a social movement from the 1960s until the 1980s which challenged the traditional behaviour related to sexuality. It started with increasing the relative acceptance of sex outside the traditional heterosexual, marital relationship and continued with the relative acceptance of the pill, homosexuality, abortion, public nudity or in other words the freedom of sexual expression. In the US by the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s, big capitalist companies were exploiting these newly won sexual freedoms, looking to make money on an increasingly tolerant society.

It is important to remember at this point that the counterculture in the US, discussed in the previous chapter, contributed to the awareness of as well the sexual revolution as the second wave of feminism⁵¹ and this went hand in hand with the political movement of the New Left. The New Left was especially active in the 1960s and 1970s and sought to implement reforms on issues such as gay rights, abortion, gender roles and drugs. However in the US they were also associated with the Hippie movement, with a focus on the anti-war campaigns. In other words The New Left can be defined as "a loosely organized, mostly white student movement that advocated for democracy, civil rights, and various types of university reforms, and protested against the Vietnam War"⁵². Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) is seen as the father of the New Left. Marcuse was a German American sociologist, philosopher and

⁵⁰ Manon Parry, "Betty Friedan: Feminist Icon and Founder of the National Organization for Women" in *American journal of public health*. Vol. 100 Is. 9 (2010) pp 1584-1585.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Escoffier, "The Sexual Revolution, 1960-1980" GLBTQ Inc. (2004) accessed 25/01/15 http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/sexual_revolution.html

⁵² Edited by John McMillian & Paul Buhle, *The New Left Revisited*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), pp 5.

political theorist who strongly criticised capitalism and who argued against any type of repression within a democracy.

Another important factor that is of great importance and that influenced many scholars in the Western society is the rise of cultural studies. British academics from the late 1950s until the 1970s developed and established cultural studies as a scholarly field which theoretically, politically and empirically engages cultural analysis. It does not have a singular theoretical approach; it rather encourages the use of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and practices. In other words, cultural studies seeks to understand how meaning is created, spread, challenged and produced from the economic, political and social spheres, within a particular social setting. Cultural studies scholars therefore would look at cultures not as fixed but rather constantly changing and interacting. It is important at this point to mention a different development of cultural studies in the UK and the US. Whereas in the British version of cultural studies includes overtly political left views and criticisms of the ‘capitalist’ popular and mass culture, cultural studies in the US was more liberal and focused on the understanding of the uses of mass culture. Although this distinction has faded away by now, it is of great importance for this thesis as we will now discuss.

If we shortly look back at what we have discussed so far in this chapter, we can see that in the US, just like in Mexico, the 1960s and 1970s have been of great importance for the establishment and development of women’s rights. Further counterculture can be seen as the main movement here which was supported and reinforced by other movements such as feminism, the sexual revolution and the New Left. The rise of these movements and ideals mostly happened in the 1960s and 1970s in the US. The happening and spread of all these ideas in a relatively short period in time could have influenced the people in the US, and conducted them towards a more open minded point of view. We can find this view within the US influenced cultural studies. Cultural studies in the US suggest that mass or popular culture is relevant to study and of importance as long as people give meaning to it⁵³. With this in mind, we can at least partly explain the interest that critics from the US and the Western world have towards the works of Esquivel and Mastretta.

Another important factor we need to consider, to further understand the US critics, is the representation of Mexico in North American literature. Mexico, being the United States’ neighbour, has been observed and much represented in North American literature.

⁵³ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE, (2000) pp 52.

Unfortunately, this did help the spread of stereotyping and racism against Mexicans. Mexican men were often negatively represented, for example as lazy and stealing whereas the North American writers would often be fascinated by the women. Many different ‘Mexicans’ have been portrayed and there has been a good increase in works over the years. “Yet with all this aroused interest and good will in the portrayal of the Mexican by modern American writers, there still has been, no doubt unintentionally, a falling into stereotype.”⁵⁴

Many of the topics discussed in Esquivel’s and Mastretta’s works are related to the more traditional Mexican culture and history although they might not promote the stereotypes, rather they want to rebel against the in a way ‘stereotypical’ female representation, however they do show and discuss some traditional Mexican elements, which could have stimulated an increase of interest from readers in the US. Yet Leyla Moisés lucidly reflects:

*“All desires depend on the Other, and for most Latin American nationalists the most significant desire often is to have their culture not only recognized but admired by the First World. This affects the production itself of Latin American literatures, insofar as its international reception is favourable when it responds to the hegemonic culture’s own desires for evasion, exoticism and folklore. If less standard or typecast writers are appreciated, their public is much more restricted. The general public of the First World wishes Latin Americans to be picturesque, colourful, and magical; it has difficulty in seeing them as equals who are not quite identical, although our origins and histories give us the right to this recognition.”*⁵⁵

So perhaps it is exactly for this reason that critics in the United States and Europe were more interested in the book published by Mastretta and Esquivel, as they might have produced exactly what the ‘first world’ wanted to read. This idea of producing what the Western world wants to read could be reinforced by the globalising publishing industries.

Further we have shown how women in the United States were, comparatively, less opposed and therefore more successful at an earlier stage in promoting equality for both sexes. In Mexico women have had a different cultural environment to work with which was not in their favour. Except for traditions being of central importance in Mexico, the Catholic

⁵⁴ Cecil Robinson, “The Extended Presence: Mexico and Its Culture in North American Writing” in *MELU* Vol. 5, No. 3, (1978) pp. 3-15

⁵⁵ Leyla Perrone Moises, "Paradoxos do nacionalismo literario na America Latina," and *Latin America as Its Literature*, ed. M. Valdes, M. E. Valdes, and Richard Young, 52.

Church was popular and held a lot of power, comparatively, more than in the United States it would seem. Because in the US the space was created earlier for the Women's Movement to rise, they also saw a rise in women's writing at an earlier stage⁵⁶, giving them a different view on the Latin American *boom feminino* as they had already experienced women's writing and now they were just seeing another cultures contribution to it. It is also worth mentioning that with the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and '70s, facilitated by cultural studies, the study of women's writing was introduced. This was of great importance for women as this created a space for them in which to publish.

In conclusion of this chapter we can see that feminism in the United States was successful at an earlier stage compared to Mexico. They also had a quite successful sexual revolution, which was then used by capitalist companies, to make money. However this also aided the spread and acceptance of the ideals of the sexual revolution, which was relatively less present at the time in Mexico. Further the New Left supported and reinforced the acceptance of the ideals spread by counterculture, as well as a more liberal view and the idea that a democracy should not repress any group or movement. Again, the New Left, was barely present in Mexico as there the PRI was in power and only in 1989 did the left wing create their own party: the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Additionally, cultural studies firstly introduced the study of popular cultures, as well as the study of women's writing in the Western world.

We can see that compared to Mexico, most of these movements and ideas were accepted and further promoted and developed at an earlier stage in time in the US. Whereas by the beginning of the 1970s feminism in the US was settled and actively improving equality for both sexes, in Mexico women's movements were only clearly organised by the late 1970s and even then was still struggling to be fully accepted. The presence of the New Left within US politics, along with the earlier settlement of the women's movement in the US, could have greatly influenced US critics, and given them a different perspective to look at the works of Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta. Especially with the opportunity for scholars to study these, and other (popular) writers within cultural studies, could this very easily explain as to why Western liberal influenced critics would be more interested and more optimistic about the products of the *boom feminino*.

⁵⁶Jessica Bomarito (ed), Jeffrey W. Hunter. "Representative Works" *Feminism in Literature* Vol. 4. Gale Cengage 2005 eNotes.com 28 Jan, 2015 <<http://www.enotes.com/topics/feminism/critical-essays/women-early-mid-20th-century-1900-1960#critical-essays-women-early-mid-20th-century-1900-1960-representative-works-2>>

Also capitalist influenced companies have aided in the spreading of certain ideas and in promoting the so-called popular cultures. However while on the one hand in the US these popular cultures, resulted from the movements active in the 1960s and 1970s, have been accepted and studied by scholars, on the other hand in Mexico we could say that these popular cultures are still not completely accepted as important within society, especially compared to certain 'high cultures' from the past.

Conclusion

We started this paper analysing the criticisms given to the works of Laura Esquivel and Ángeles Mastretta and we found that there was a distinction between the criticisms given by the local, Mexican scholars and by the Western influenced scholars from the United States. There was also a difference between the two authors, as the Mexican literary elite came to accept and support the works of Esquivel but kept a more critical approach towards Mastretta's works. It seemed this difference was caused by the use of history within the works of Esquivel and Mastretta, as Perez argues that in Esquivel's work the individual and his or her struggle is of main importance, and some would argue that in Mastretta's work history has a more important place. It is also notable that within the criticisms on Mastretta's work there is a continuous mention of a pre-determined recipe to produce a best-seller and with that the influences of the publishing industry on the author, whereas the criticisms around Esquivel's work mostly focus on her use of the kitchen space as central point in her novel *Como Agua para Chocolate*. We also suggested that the difference in reception between Esquivel and Mastretta in Mexico, could have to do with the time of publishing of their novels, as Mastretta published more at the beginning of the *boom feminino* (1985) and could so have received a more critical view from the Mexican literary elite, whereas Esquivel's novel was published after almost a decade of women's writing (1989).

We continued the paper by looking at political and social movements in Mexico, which showed us the importance of the Mexican literary elite, deriving from the important literary movement in the 1960s *La Mafia*. We suggested that the elite's reduced power, due to the globalising publishing industry, within the literary sphere in Mexico could have influenced their critical look towards newly established literary movements as well as to new writers. Further we have seen a struggle within the establishment of the Mexican Women's Movement, which caused for a revival of feminism in the 1970s and most likely inspired the beginning of the *boom feminino*. We also saw that some of the discussed movements within Mexico were counteracted by the government, creating dissatisfaction. This in combination with the lack of change of the position of women within society could have also stimulated the rise of the *boom feminino*. In which case, it could be seen as a critique towards the male-dominated sphere of the original Boom and as a protest against the lack of change for women in the 1960s and 1970s.

When continuing by looking at certain movements in the United States, we found that most of them were successful at an earlier stage compared to Mexico. The New Left, the

sexual revolution, the second wave of feminism and the counterculture, strongly influenced society during that time and stimulated people to create a more open-minded point of view. For example whereas in Mexico feminism was counteracted by the Church and only managed to settle towards the end of the 1970s, in the US by the beginning of the 1970s the feminist ideas were actively spread and found within society. Also the New Left and the sexual revolution were barely present in the 1960s and 1970s in Mexico, whereas in the US they were prominent changes within society. Further of great importance for literary critics and scholars was the rise of cultural studies, introducing the study of popular cultures which was and still is actively used by scholars all over the world. The acceptance by society of these movements at an earlier stage compared to Mexico could have influenced scholars and critics in the US majorly, giving them a different, more Western and liberal, context in which to criticise.

Finally, throughout the research one thing has become very clear, which is that cultural studies has given the space within academia to explore popular cultures, although some accept this more than others, it has resulted into a vast variety of opinions on what first seemed unworthy of our attention. Women's literature has currently been studied more than ever, and this is giving us some interesting knowledge on women's view on society, which is important as it has been different in the past.

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