EXILE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY
Chilean Women in Canada

by

Monica Escobar

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counseling
Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Monica Escobar (2000)
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
Exile and National Identity: Chilean Women in Canada
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
year 2000
Monica Escobar
Department of Adult Education/Community Development/ Counseling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This research is about exile and national identity as reconstructed and narrated by women twenty years or more after having moved into exile. The analysis is based on the life histories of ten Chilean women, plus myself, living in Toronto, Canada. Their stories provide an excellent opportunity to problematize hegemonic and universalizing categories that tend to exclude or silence the experience and narratives of marginal groups. Based on in-depth interviews this study addresses the following questions: How these refugee women experience and perceive the ‘imagined community’ called nation? What happens when ‘bodies’, such as these Chilean women, cross borders as refugees? How does their involvement in different social spaces in Canada - social, linguistic, and ethnic communities - enter into their sense of national and gender identity?

The study describes and explains how constructions of national identities have disadvantaged these Chilean women in both their country of birth and the country of asylum. Touching upon different features of their life history I map out how they construct home, community and nation from the perspective of the various spaces they occupy. The inequalities concealed in the vision of a common nationhood collide with women’s sense of belonging - or being in a place that is understood to be ‘home’.

I argue in this thesis that these women in exile inhabit a space ‘in between’, a space that in territorial terms does not coincide with one particular country but falls in between two or more countries. With regard to the production of knowledge women’s experience of this ‘in between’ space can be seen to provide a view that is situated between the global and more generalized views on ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’, commonly found in dominant discourses, and the localized singular and more specific
views of those lacking this ‘in between’ experience. Lending voice to this lived experience provides for a more fluid representation of the concept.

Exiled women’s relationships with both countries are based on different and conflicting loyalties, memories and expectations. Three features appear particularly important. Memories about their past (from childhood to young adulthood) result in a longing for their homeland. At the same time, Chile (as a nation) is being subjected to a political critique. Secondly, Canada’s politics of integration and a social structure of race, class and gender relations impact upon their life in this country. This forces them to negotiate and construct an identity that is viable. Finally, the duration of exile adds new uncertainties and dilemmas regarding women’s life.

The analysis points to the dialectical tension of having a disaggregated or diasporic identity, being partially Chilean and partially from the new surroundings. Thus ‘nation’, as a territorial and imagined community, once an important reference point and force in the lives of these exiled women – particularly during the days of their involvement with the national political project of Unidad Popular – does not play much of a role in their sense of identity and belonging. Other communities and forms of attachments have emerged from their new locations including projects that give ethical meaning to their life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This doctoral study has been a long, difficult journey the completion of which depended in great part on intellectual, emotional and economic support from people around me.

I am deeply grateful to the women refugees from Chile whose interest in this study and willingness to share their lives with me provided me with the opportunity to carry out this research. I hope that I did justice to their stories and that it contributes to a better understanding of the condition of women living in exile and post exile.

My deep gratitude goes also to Kari Dehli for taking up the role of supervisor at a critical moment of my thesis when I was in doubt whether or not I should continue. For more than a year she gave me her undivided attention, showing amazing ability to read my mind and heart. She gave me her unreserved support, trusting my judgment an enriching my thesis with her comments and inspiring advice.

I owe a very special debt to my teacher Katheleen Rockhill with whom I started this thesis project. Her encouragement to explore areas of personal and political interest led me to a research design that was meaningful to me. I have benefited from her teaching and guidance, particularly from her critical approach to the various qualitative research methodologies. My thanks go also to Daniel Schugurensky and Shahrzad Mojab, members of my committee, for their challenges, insights and encouragement. I have been especially blessed with the support of my friends Marlinda Freire, Beatriz Cordero and Gabriela Bravo, their caring, interest and solidarity throughout this undertaking kept me going.

Finally, I like to mention my immediate family. My daughter Marcela Fajardo and my son Matías Fajardo expressed great pride in me doing this thesis, and furthermore showed understanding of my work schedule that did not allow me always to be with them when required. Particularly important for me has been the support of Hubert Campfens, my partner, who sustained me all along the way as I struggled with this project. His help was emotional and intellectual, providing me with a sounding board for my ideas and always respecting my views as a woman. His academic rigor and attentive listening made this thesis richer. Thanks to him this thesis has never been a lonely project.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................................... iv
CHAPTER 1 ............................................................................................................................................. 1
INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................................... 1
   Chilean Diaspora: Exiles, Post-Exiles or Refugees? ........................................................................... 7
   Auto-Biographical Notes .................................................................................................................... 10
   The Movement for National Reconstruction and A Rude Awakening .......................................... 11
   My Exposure to Nationalism in Quebec (1974-83) and Peru (1983-90) ..................................... 12
   The Move to Toronto (1990) and Experience with Ethnic National Identities ............................. 13
   Thesis Organization ......................................................................................................................... 13
CHAPTER 2 ............................................................................................................................................. 15
LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................................................... 15
QUE CUENTA LA LITERATURA ............................................................................................................. 15
   What is a Nation? ............................................................................................................................... 16
   Nation as a Constructed Category ..................................................................................................... 19
   Nation and State ............................................................................................................................... 23
   The World Geography and the Problem of Spatial Division ......................................................... 27
   Common Sense Assumptions about People’s Ties to a Territory ................................................. 29
   The Construction of National Identity: Exiles and Diaspora ...................................................... 31
   Examining Ethnicity, Race, Nation, Class and Gender Identity ................................................ 37
   Race, Ethnicity and Nation ............................................................................................................... 39
   Social Class ........................................................................................................................................ 44
   Debate about Gender ...................................................................................................................... 45
   Problematic Nature of Gender in the Field of Research .............................................................. 48
   Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 51
CHAPTER 3 ............................................................................................................................................. 52
METHODS AND MEANS ....................................................................................................................... 52
HABLAMO DEL METODO ...................................................................................................................... 52
   Overview ........................................................................................................................................... 52
   The Role of Subjectivity .................................................................................................................... 53
   Experience as the Basis of Knowing ............................................................................................... 56
   Locating and Selecting Research Participants ............................................................................. 60
   The Auto-Ethnographic Dimension ............................................................................................. 63
   The Interview ................................................................................................................................. 64
   Interpreting Data ............................................................................................................................ 67
CHAPTER 4 ............................................................................................................................................. 73
WHO ARE THE REFUGEES? ................................................................................................................ 73
QUIENES SON ELLAS ............................................................................................................................ 73
   Ana .................................................................................................................................................... 74
   Tania ................................................................................................................................................ 78
   Emma ............................................................................................................................................... 83
   Julia .................................................................................................................................................. 88
   Soledad .......................................................................................................................................... 91
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 8</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKING CONNECTIONS</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATANDO CABOS</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusions and Exclusions within a Nation</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Changing Borders of a Nation: Political Struggle and the Sovereignty Issue</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Borders as Experienced by Refugee Women</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of Our Continuing Relationship with Chile</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our National Identity in Relation to Chile and Canada</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Diaspora, Supra- and Sub-National Collectivities</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFTERTHOUGHT: WORKING IN TWO LANGUAGES</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The identification of a person and community with a particular nation has been viewed as a fundamental characteristic of contemporary life ever since the onset of nation states. As one of the most quoted researchers on ‘nation’, Benedict Anderson (1991, p.5) stated that each one of us has a nationality just like we have a gender. One only has to consider the many conflicts and wars of the 19th and 20th centuries in the name of nation and national interest to appreciate the importance that has been placed on a person’s national identity. Therefore, the sudden loss of one’s nation, finding oneself forced by political circumstances to move into exile – in contrast to immigrants who usually leave their country by their own volition – inevitably has a radical impact on the very essence of such a person’s being.

This research explores the meanings of national identity as reconstructed and narrated by a specific group of women twenty years or more after they moved into exile. The analysis is based on the life stories of ten Chilean women, plus myself, living in Toronto, Canada. I give particular attention to the period of these women’s involvement in the socialist reforms attempted prior to the military take-over in September 1973 of Allende’s democratically elected government, the repression by the Pinochet regime that followed, and the long period of exile and post-exile. Specifically, the themes addressed in the thesis concern how Chilean women living in exile relate to the concepts of nation, gender, family, social class, ethnicity and race, work and language. I am also interested in how these concepts have shaped these women’s identity and influenced the new spaces they created for themselves in exile.

Anderson has contributed greatly to our understanding of what constitutes a nation by suggesting that it is an ‘imagined community’. The question of specific interest in this thesis is how these refugee women experience and perceive this ‘imagined community’ called nation. How do they experience it prior to being uprooted abruptly, and during the period of exile and post-exile? I wish to examine whether national identity
for these women who have been excluded from their country of birth is somehow reproduced in different ways in the new place they inhabit.

Much of the literature has presented ‘nation’ as gender neutral when, in reality, nationhood appears markedly gendered. For instance, Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) in their study of gender relations and national identities in Latin America showed how differently men embody the ‘national’ from women, “Men appear in the histories of battles, government and monarchs, whereas women appear as icons of national domesticity, morals and private sociality” (p.147). And Diane Kay (1987), based on her research of Chilean exiles in the United Kingdom, stated that little changed in this regard even during the Socialist government of Unidad Popular led by President Allende. She wrote that, even when Unidad Popular was able to draw women from their private home environment into the public world of production and government, “men tended to occupy the more highly-valued sectors of public life, while... women formed a separate and subordinate female public world ” (p. 17).

Thus it appears that ‘nation’ is presented to us as narrated by a social system of firmly established relations between the genders, and furthermore that the two genders have a different location within the hierarchy of a national community. Various studies from other regions of the world, and not only from Latin America, have pointed out that the symbolism and beliefs about ‘nation’ are narrated in very diverse ways, using the arch types that embody the male and female. Wilford (1998), who reviewed this literature, with its focus on relations between nation and gender, concluded that women generally appeared on the margin of the public arena and at the center of the private world of the family and household. Men, in contrast, are invariably represented as the chief agents of the ‘nation-state’ and as principal beneficiaries.

Based on the analysis of this reality, some feminists have gone as far as to question women’s commitment to nationalist struggles, including the one we were involved in as Chilean women during the movement of Unidad Popular in the early 1970’s. They argue that experience seems to bear out that once the intended changes pursued by such movements have been achieved, women are being silenced again and expected to continue serving the male world in all their privileges (Pettman, 1996b; Vargas, 1991).
The study undertaken by me reflects primarily on how women in their telling of a life history make sense of the experience of nationhood. Similar to the feminist scholars cited above I question that ‘nation’ is gender neutral. By focussing on women’s perspectives on, and understandings of, ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’, this research assumes to add new knowledge and understanding to a subject matter that has traditionally been interpreted from a male vantage-point.

Chilean women in exile provide a special opportunity for examining how they view their belongingness to a national community and how their solidarity with a political project of national scope was played out in Chile. We strongly identified ourselves and contributed in various ways to that project, referred to as the ‘Chilean Road to Socialism’, which achieved its peak between 1970 and 1973. As Mestiza¹ and educated urban people we occupied a central place in the building, or rather reconstructing, of our nation at that moment of history. At the same time, and with the benefit of hindsight, we can see now that we were kept at the margins of that nation by the mere fact of our gender. Having been so deeply engaged in a project of such magnitude that embraced the whole nation begs the question how these women exiles constructed their national identity during that period.

The idea of ‘nation’ and ‘nation-state’ appear to have taken center stage, though in quite different ways, in the lives of these Chilean women in the post-1973 period. First, a new Chilean government ruled by the military subjected them to acts of organized repression, followed by the loss of their country of origin as political refugees. They then moved to another country – constituted as a very distinct nation-state from Chile – where they lived in very different conditions as exiles. The very condition of living in exile problematized the whole issue of national identity. This is one of the principal issues analyzed in this thesis, from a woman’s perspective. What new forms of identity emerge from their narratives, how do they ‘imagine’ community in these changed circumstances, and how do they create home and a sense of belonging? Since these women lost their

¹ I use Mestiza to refer directly to mixed blood of native people and the Spanish colonizers. The term Creole often also found in the literature includes people who were born in the territory of Latin America and at the same time descended from Spanish
homeland and now reside in Toronto, they have lived at least in two countries, having had to deal with quite distinct systems of values, beliefs, language and historical memory. This means that their perspective on ‘nation’ is likely to be complex, going well beyond the more singular views represented by those who have experienced only one social system or national community.

I argue in this thesis that women in exile inhabit a space ‘in between’, a space that in territorial terms does not coincide with one particular country but falls in between two or more countries. With regard to the production of knowledge women’s experience of this ‘in between’ space can be seen to provide a view that is situated between the global and more generalized views on ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’, commonly found in dominant discourses, and the localized singular and more specific views of those lacking this ‘in between’ experience. Lending voice to this lived experience should enlarge our understanding of nation, providing for a more fluid representation of the concept.

Some feminists have referred to the particular perspective brought to the subject of nation and national identity by women who inhabit this ‘in between’ space of countries as the ‘transnational’ perspective (Heitlinger, 1999). Other researchers use the metaphor of border crossings, ‘borderland’, or ‘hybridity’ (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1994; Garcia Canclini, 1990). Trinh Minh-ha (1992) also emphasizes the importance of considering the displaced person or community as an appropriate source of knowledge. As she points out, "The question about identity is no longer ‘who am I’? But, ‘when, where and how am I’?” (p. 157).

This research, then is about women’s experiences of exile and national identity. It is based on the life histories of exiled women from Chile. Their stories provide an excellent opportunity to problematize hegemonic and universalizing categories that tend to exclude or silence the experience and narratives of marginal groups. Based on in-depth interviews, this study will addresses the following questions:

1. How do these women talk about national identity? How is their loyalty to something, to someone, or to a place played out? And how do they resolve the uncertainty arising

colonizers. Both the Creoles and the Mestizos fought jointly in the wars of independence against Spain.
from having to choose between returning to Chile after so many years and remaining definitively in Canada?

2. What happens when gendered ‘bodies’, such as these Chilean women, cross borders as political refugees? How do personal biographies intersect with discourses of nation, and how do women negotiate the multiplicity of collisions in national and diasporic discourses. How does this affect their identity?

3. How does their involvement in different social spaces in Chile and Canada - social, linguistic, and ethnic communities - enter into their sense of national and gender identity?

The focus of this study is on women. It excludes men and families who also make up the Chilean community in exile. In the context of this focus I wish to analyze the interplay between women’s personal biography with the meta-narrative or dominant discourse of nation in order to understand how and at what levels women living in exile relate to a nation’s territorial space. I justify my focus on women by wishing to contribute a woman’s perspective to the ongoing discourses on nation and national identity. I have been concerned about studies that do not distinguish between men and women, as women’s perspectives are lost in prevailing narratives that tend to be male dominated. Therefore, my study joins the concern of a growing number of scholars who have begun to include gender in their studies on refugees and exiles, as well as in analyzing national identities. In this case I will concern myself only with the views of women without comparing them with those of men.

Furthermore, my decision to seek out and hear women’s voices comes from my own experience as a Chilean woman. I witnessed personally how women’s voices were marginalised during the time of the Unidad Popular and later as exiled women, whenever political or public issues were involved. Chilean men frequently assumed, and continue to assume even today, that women’s interests coincide with theirs on all matters of

---

2 Doreen Indra (1987), studying Indochinese refugees in Canada, presents an extensive review of the literature on South Asian refugees in Canada and concludes that “Without exception, studies assume that people are refugee first, women and men second…. Gender is never a variable.” Since that time Indra and many other feminist scholars have tried to fill the gap, approaching different aspects of the refugee situation from a woman’s perspective. See also Helen Moussa (1993)
importance. Therefore, when they speak they feel they also speak for women. This view of women, as not having their own perspective on national or public issues, makes them appear as having little to add to these discourses beyond the private world of the family. Living in exile, in Toronto, I also have witnessed how Canadian professionals, such as human rights lawyers or journalists seek information from men only, evidently regarding them - and not women - to be the competent, best-informed and proper spokespersons of the Chilean community.\(^3\) Chilean women have rarely challenged this social practice publicly, perhaps because they have been socialized into a 'machismo' culture. I intend with this study to break with this practice by giving voice to Chilean women and their perspective on national identity and belongingness. In this I follow in the footsteps of feminist researchers who argue that women experience the world in particular ways because of our socially constructed sexuality and gender.

In summary, the women I have selected for this study are Chileans who were forced to leave the country after the political upheaval in 1973 and who relocated in Toronto, Canada. Based on their life histories I look at how they have experienced nation, national identity, the loss of country, crossing borders, and living in exile and post-exile. In addition, I look at how they construct home, community and nation from the perspective of the spaces they occupy in the host country. In other words, this study reflects on the sense of belonging - or being in a place that is understood to be 'home' - from the perspective of these exiled women. In this effort of trying to understand what these women have become, I touch upon many different aspects of their life history.

---

\(^3\) One notable and recent example of this is reported by Patricia Verdugo (1999) a Chilean journalist. She writes in her book *Bucarest 187*, about how impossible it was for her to obtain the extradition of two former Chilean nationals, residing in Canada as presumed exiles whom she claims, based on information derived from the judicial process in Chile, have been responsible for the torture and death of her father in Chile. Their extradition is considered essential to find out who were the superiors giving the orders to have them torture and kill her father and others like him. As she states in her recently published book, the lawyer acting as representative of the human rights commission in Canada acted principally on the information and advice provided by one Chilean male who presented himself as the spokesperson for the Chilean community in Canada, rather than hear also her version of the facts. I believe that this bias toward men as informants didn't allow this lawyer to find out perspectives from more reliable sources such as the detailed documentation carried out by this female journalist.
including their relationship to their family back in Chile, the nature of their community life, work, immigration/refugee proceedings, language barriers and their relationship with Chile and Canada. I wish to emphasize that my intent is not to build a particular theory about nation, but to show how this small homogeneous group of women holds such diverse and in some instances conflicting views on nation.

**Chilean Diaspora: Exiles, Post-Exiles or Refugees?**

The Chilean diaspora started in 1973 with the departure of thousands of Chileans suffering persecution or fear of persecution from the military dictatorship. The search for sanctuary took different forms, which has led to a debate about who are properly speaking exiles, and who are refugees or immigrants?

Some opted for asylum in foreign embassies and ambassadorial residences, which became the only viable places of refuge. The Mexican, Italian, Argentinean, French, Swedish, Venezuelan and Canadian Embassies, among others, took in thousands of asylum seekers. Then there were those who got out of the country by irregular means, fleeing across obscure Andean mountain passes or northern desert trails, and using false documents. Around four thousand Chileans were formally expelled from the country under Decree Law 81 passed in November 1973, which gave the regime virtually unconditional authority to expel citizens.

For most of Chile's exiles, departure, after this draconian period of military rule, was somehow less dramatic and abrupt. The majority left the country legally, using their passports. Still, they suffered one way or another from the repressive measures taken by the dictatorship to discipline the population at large, and encourage its enemies to leave. Those measures took the form of blacklisting workers or employees who were suspect, or firing them outright; carrying out home searches; incarcerating an estimated 90,000 individuals, often accompanied by torture. Family members of those considered dangerous were arrested and all those regarded as suspect by the new rulers were subjected to harassment. A broad range of people fell victim to these terrorist acts of the

---

new state. These included low-profile party members, bureaucrats, students, journalists, professionals, intellectuals and others whose only crime was to have been directly involved in the socialist dream of reconstructing the nation, or by mere association with the Left. Among these were the tens of thousands of women who moved into exile. Some left because of their marital relationship with a husband who was the primary target of persecution; others because of their mere association with a blacklisted husband that made them suspect and subject to persecution as well. And then there were those women who feared for their lives as a result of their own active participation in the Leftist political project. Even though the Chilean diaspora is constituted by people who fled as a result of political persecution, each assumed a status according to the prevailing norms and procedures of the receiving countries. For example in Canada, Sweden and Australia many Chileans were received formally as ‘immigrants’. Only those who arrived without legal papers were designated, for a while, the legal status of ‘refugee’ or ‘stateless’ person coming under the protection of the United Nations’ High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

In contrast to Cuban exiles in Miami, the geography of Chilean exile was such that no single continent, country, or area within a country could be identified as its primary destination. It is commonly estimated that Chileans settled in more than 110 countries, and possibly in as many as 140 (Wright and Oñate 1998 p. 91). This research does not aim to study the Chilean diaspora as such, but will touch on various aspects of this cross-national community since the narratives of Chilean women in Canada form part of this diasporic experience.

Chileans who arrived in Canada, even those carrying the legal status of ‘immigrant’, were often identified informally by the two labels of refugees and exiles. ‘Refugee’ has a legally defined status and offers the person so designated with the right of sanctuary in some country. It is the UNHCR that is the body responsible at the international level for mediating and supervising the situation of the millions of refugees seeking sanctuary. In spite of this legal status and right, being labeled as such frequently evokes in the minds of the population of receiving countries images that are inferiorizing, of forming part of the masses of poor people fleeing from ethnic and religious conflicts or
natural catastrophes, living in inhuman conditions. As such, refugees are often seen as ‘persona non grata’, accepted by countries only on the grounds of compassion.

‘Exiles’, on the other hand, do not fall into a legally defined category. The term refers to the punishment these people are subjected to, being prohibited from returning to one’s ‘patria’ or country of birth. As such, the reference to exile evokes images that in contrast to the label of refugee gives the person a certain prestige. Typically, exiled people are viewed as men being excluded from their country for their ideas, their political position, as individuals who often are illustrious and important in their own country. Ariel Dorfman (1999) illustrates well the various sentiments that surround and circumscribe these various labels. When a UN official, he writes, visited him at the Argentinean Embassy in Santiago where he sought refuge he was asked whether he wanted to be designated as a ‘refugee’. The offer and the protection such a status carries with it were rejected by him, naming himself instead as an ‘exile’. He explains his decision as follows:

Perhaps that is why I have refused to be classified as a refugee: so that people like her (the UN official), people in the outside world, will recognize me as an individual and not part of the helpless masses that flood the newsreels and the TV screens and appear in photos in far too many books and newspapers, overwhelmed by forces outside their control that they do not seem to comprehend. Inside me, milling around, are the Jews during and after Hitler, the Palestinians that those Jews displaced, the endless straggling lines from Pakistan and Biafra and Southeast Asia moving across frontiers and rivers and time, holding on to their suffering as if it were their only identity, their sole weapon. When the woman from the UN had said the word ‘refugee’, that is what came to my mind: the camps in which people without a country stagnate amid the filth and the flies. (p. 237)

There was something Byronic, defiant and challenging about being an ‘exile’, something vastly more romantic and Promethean than the fate embodied in that recently coined word ‘refugee’ that the 20th century had been forced to officialize as a result of so much mass murder and wandering. I was, of course, just as much a victim, just as doomed, as the blurred constellation of anonymous beings who had preceded me, but by rejecting the passive term and opting for the more active, sophisticated, elegant one, I was protecting my odyssey as something that originated in myself and not in the historical forces seething outside my grasp. I conceived myself as ex-cluded, ex-pelled, ex-iled. (p.238)
Whereas the term 'exile' refers to people who are forbidden entry into their own country, 'post-exile' implies the possibility of return. The 'post-exile', presumably, has made a conscious decision to remain in the host country. In using this term, as I do in this research, one holds on to the idea of exile since it implies something else besides being expelled. It also means to be an 'outsider', even though the prohibition of entry into one’s country of origin has been lifted. Exile in this latter sense is a continuing condition of life, feeling – and in some respects actually being - excluded from many spaces of the old country, as well as of the new country one has come to inhabit. The 'exiled' person in this case joins others who for reasons of being excluded from the dominant narratives live a sort of exile.

Although the metaphor of exile suggests best what this research tries to problematize I also use the terms refugee, immigrant and post-exile at different points of the analysis. My reason is not based on which of these terms is the ‘correct’ one, but rather to highlight particular aspects that each of them convey in the context of a certain part of the analysis of the women’s narratives.

Auto-Biographical Notes

My own personal experience forms an integral part of this analysis, sharing in many respects the social locations of my interviewees. My intervention, though, is a highly selective one, made from the vantage point I have occupied in Chilean society, and afterwards in Canada. I was born and raised in Chile as part of a middle class professional family, with a Mestiza background going back to the beginnings of Chile’s modern history. My family is the result of a racial mix between Spanish colonizers and native people. Regardless of these roots I grew up with the belief that as a Chilean family we had nothing in common with indigenous people. By the same token my family took great pride in having direct links with ancestors who became famous for their participation in nation building. It was only at the end of the 1960s, when I started my university studies in philosophy, that I began to become more aware of ethnic differences among the Chilean population, the sub-ordinate position of indigenous people in our
society, and the general silence among Mestizos on their real roots and relations with their ancestors.

**The Movement for National Reconstruction and A Rude Awakening**

Thanks to the university student movement I also gained awareness about class differences and quickly became involved in political protests against the dominant class. The student movement did not act in isolation, though, since the Christian Democrats who were in power from 1964-1970 had already talked extensively about the need for social reform, thereby setting the stage for later more radical social changes. The student movements in France, Germany and the United States also influenced Chilean students, particularly the ones taking place during 1967 and 1968. It was an experience that had a great impact on me to the extent that I took an active part in the occupation of the Catholic University of Chile in Santiago in 1967, in which we demanded to have the University secularized and have radical reforms in the curriculum that would make Marxist studies available at all levels. I learned that it was possible to challenge the traditional, mostly Catholic upper class and win. This idea of being able to bring about fundamental changes in the relations of power in society reached its zenith during the time that the government of Unidad Popular, under the presidency of Salvador Allende, was in power from 1970 to 1973. This whole period deeply influenced my thinking and my life ever since. Without having occupied any position of importance in partisan politics, I still considered doing political work as a necessary and fundamental task.

The coup d'état in 1973 was a rude awakening and the most eloquent proof, for all of us involved in this movement, of the established hegemonic power and how it operates at the global level. At the personal level it interrupted the development of my professional life, the projects and dreams in which I was caught up. Moreover, the coup and our fate as refugees left us with a number of disturbing questions about the firmness and concreteness of that place we assumed would give us protection, that place we call our country, our homeland. My study tries to elucidate how these attachments to a nation have been constituted.

I came to Canada with my two kids (two and three years old) in March 1974, following my husband who had left in January that year as he felt the circle closing in on
him, putting him in serious danger. We were able to leave Chile through a special program introduced by Canada at that time for Chilean refugees. This allowed us to obtain a flight ticket\(^5\) and most importantly, Canadian ‘landed immigrant’ status. At the point of departure from Chile we truly believed that we would return in one year, or two years at the most. And with an updated Chilean passport we thought we could go back any time. However, we soon learned that the new rulers of the country were not prepared to let in people again who had left, and especially people like my husband, whose name appeared on the ‘black list’ of people forbidden to return. This we found out once we arrived in Canada.

The experience of crossing national borders has become an important issue for me, ever since I left Chile. It raised many questions, once I began to reflect on it, about my identity and how it became constituted as I moved to different places. What limitations did it place upon me and what different possibilities did it open up in my life? How do places and social discourses affect bodies and how can one deal with it?

**My Exposure to Nationalism in Quebec (1974-83) and Peru (1983-90)**

From Chile I moved to Montreal where I lived for nine years. There I became immersed in the dynamics created by the Separatist movement among the French-speaking people in the Province of Quebec, and their understanding of nation. Later, as an international cooperator taken on by CUSO and CECI, I moved to Peru, where I lived from 1983-1990. This was the time when the Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path) guerrilla movement was at its peak, having declared war on the Peruvian state in 1980. Like the Separatists in Quebec, the focus of the struggle centered on the idea of nation. They sought to build a nation based on the indigenous civilization of the Incas that preceded Spanish colonial rule and the later rule by a Mestizo-dominated nation-state (Desco, 1989). In time, the Sendero Luminoso became a serious threat in their armed struggle and authoritarian utopianism to the existing system of power, and a great danger to the life of Western citizens and visitors. This struggle also resulted in many being tortured, either by the Senderos or military; others ‘disappeared’ or were assassinated.

---

\(^5\) Bought with a loan from the Canadian authorities and paid back in time.
And hundreds of thousands of rural, primarily indigenous people where uprooted through repressive measures taken by both sides, thereby joining the growing millions of ‘displaced’ persons in the world roaming around in the interior of their own country or outside (Degregori, 1988).

**The Move to Toronto (1990) and Experience with Ethnic National Identities**

 Returning to Canada in 1990 and settling in Ontario, I found myself for the first time in my life in an environment where the narrative about nation did not engender the kind of passions I had become used to. Yet, in many of the neighborhoods of Toronto - the city ‘par excellence’ of immigrants and refugees - residents talk, live and celebrate their respective national identities. For instance, in the Greektown section of the city where I reside, the immigrants who entered the country from Greece in different waves organize yearly parades to remember historical events of their country of origin, considered important to them. In addition, they conduct several religious ceremonies in the street, hold various musical events, and in the spring and summer turn their cafés and restaurants inside out overflowing the sidewalks. Clearly, here I found a living example where nation and culture are intermingled.

**Thesis Organization**

 In chapter 2, I examine the notions of nation and nation-state, public and private domains, as well as space and place in relation to nation and gender, the two major social categories guiding this research. A second set of concepts is related to crossing borders such as exile, refuge and diasporas. With respect to this I will comment on diasporic studies and border theorists. The chapter will end by scrutinizing the debate regarding the interlocking systems of gender, class and race, and how they interact in the constitution and understanding of national identity.

 Chapter 3, Method and Means, elaborates the interpretative method that I used to analyze the narratives of the ten Chilean women exiles, within an auto-ethnographical approach. As my interpretations of the interview data are situated in my dual roles as researcher and research subject, special attention is given to the role of subjectivity as a
feature of this study. Furthermore, the chapter explains how I interpret what women tell me from an outsider-insider perspective. I counterpose women's stories/narratives to the dominant ones about nation, refugee woman, homeland, 'Latin America' and other forms of classification, to provide new insights about the location these women occupy and their understanding of the social world.

Chapter 4 presents a summary of the taped interviews. Each life story is unique, not only because it presents a personal biography, but also because when the women talk about similar experiences (such as using English as a second language in everyday life), they convey a number of contrasting and conflicting reflections. In these summaries I try to capture as much as possible their own meaning, realizing at the same time that my understanding of their experience defines in some way what I see as important in their narrative and what I select for the reader. It is not my intention in this chapter to make explicit my own understanding of what the women say and how. The aim is rather to give the reader a profile of the ten life histories that may serve as a useful background for reading the chapters that follow.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7, analyze how the women make sense of their life. Chapter 5 examines in considerable depth Ana's life-story, trying to maintain the tone of her account. The analysis centers on what appears to be the crux of her narrative, namely her experience of Chile at the time of Unidad Popular. In this context I analyze what and how her story conveys social narratives regarding the Chilean gender system, intertwined with political parties and the state. Chapter 6 focuses on Emma's account, and looks particularly at the construction of belongingness and home. The perspective of Emma as an unmarried woman adds new layers to social discourses such as family, motherhood, fatherhood, friendships and aging. Chapter 7 brings all the women's voices together. It focuses on their shared experience in having to leave the country, looking specifically at their difficult journey and how they re-negotiated their identities once they resettled in Canada. Finally, I look at how Canada as a nation appears to them.

The concluding chapter summarizes the various meanings of nation played out in the life-stories of these women, and how their identities have evolved moving beyond the limitations set by their so-called national identities. I end the study by sharing with the reader some of my thoughts and feelings about doing and writing this thesis.
A large body of literature, too numerous to list here, has portrayed the pain and suffering resultant from the condition of exile. Many examples abound of groups of people who have been persecuted for political, religious, or other reasons that forced them to leave their country of birth and seek a safe haven. This is true for many Spaniards after their country's civil war during the 30s; the Jews in Europe, especially in Nazi Germany prior to and during the second world war; many Argentineans, Uruguayans, Salvadorians, Chileans and Brazilians in Latin America fleeing their countries' dictatorial regimes during the 1970s and 1980s. The importance of one's nation has become very evident in recent years with the rise in nationalist movements, found in different parts of the world, claiming a certain territory for one's own ethnic or religious group to the exclusion of others. This phenomenon has been most apparent in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has reached its most extreme form in attempts at ethnic cleansing during the Bosnia wars and the Serb clashes with Albanian ethnics over Kosovo. However, nationalist struggles are not only confined to Eastern Europe but can be found in all parts of the world, such as the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the search of Kurds for a homeland in the Middle East; the continuing struggles of the Basques in Spain; in East Timor, in Tibet and others. I myself, as pointed out in the 'Introduction', experienced in person the Separatist movement in Quebec, and the armed struggle of the Sendero Luminoso in Peru.

How is it that people experience such a strong identification with a unit called 'nation'? Why are such constructions as 'nation' and 'nationality' so important to everybody's identity?
What is a Nation?

Traditionally, scholars have viewed nation as a natural extension of kinship relations and a universal phenomenon. 'Primordialists', such as Geertz (1963) and Van den Bergue (1979) have seen nation as timeless whose essence is immutable.

Benedict Anderson (1991) proposed that we think of nation or nationalism as mental constructions based on people's experience of kinship and also on religious imagining about human existence, grief, death and desire for immortality. As phrased by Anderson, "I think it makes things easier if one treated it (nation and nationalism) as belonging to 'kinship' and 'religion' rather than to 'liberalism' or 'fascism'" (p.5). Using a historical analysis he shows that the idea of belonging to a community has existed since ancient time, while the identification with a unit called nation has emerged only since the eighteenth century. He states that nationality "or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple meanings, nation-ness as well as nationalism are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" (p. 4). Once created they become an important force capable of merging with different other social forces of a political or ideological nature.

Modern nations according to Anderson share a number of characteristics. First of all, nations are limited "because even the largest of nations has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations" (p.7). Secondly, nations are imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.6). To say, however, that nation is part of imagery is not to consign it to the category of mere fiction; even if it is a dream it is one possessing all the institutional force and affects. Thirdly, Anderson adds, "Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity or genuine-ness but by the style in which they are imagined" (p.6). Fourthly, nations are imagined as sovereign "because the concept was born in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution, which destroyed the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Nations dream of being free" (p.7). And finally, nations present themselves as communities "because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, nation is always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (p.7).
A key question of interest to this research is how people come to imagine their belonging to a nation. In finding the answer to this question I will draw mainly on Anderson’s work because he has produced a well-documented historical perspective on the issue in his book, *Imagined Communities*. He shows that the very possibility of imagining nation only appears when and where some fundamental cultural conceptions have lost their validity, leaving space for new beliefs. Nationalism, for him, must be understood “by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that precede it, and out of which it comes into being” (p.12).

In Anderson’s analysis an important factor in imagining community, in whatever time in history, is language. He argues that language works in quite different ways in the modern national community when compared to the sacred communities of earlier periods in history. Prior to the rise of nationalism the imagined community had a common language. This language was shared by a multiplicity of groups and regions because of its ability in providing access to an ontological truth, for instance Latin for Christians or Arabic for Muslims and so on. Today, a nation thinks of itself as having its own language, a territorial language that operates over and above local dialects, and through which the press and other media communicate. Anderson indicates that the evolution of this new type of community follows the discovery of print. The print language, according to him, made possible the emergence of national consciousness. Print created or strengthened particular languages through which a large number of readers could communicate ‘below’ Latin and ‘above’ the spoken vernacular. These fellow readers connected through print, formed the embryo of a nationally imagined and secular community, in spite of their invisibility to one another (p. 44). Newspapers, for example, enabled the nation to be represented by the juxtaposition of daily stories drawn from different parts of the country. Similarly, a nation could be differentiated from others by the presentation of ‘international’ and ‘foreign’ news.

What makes it possible to conceive nation as an imagined community, according to Anderson, is a combination of old certainties and new developments. The great diversity in human languages and the development of a technology such as print enabled people to belong to new forms of community. Print together with the new capitalist order
created a condition that allowed for large masses of people to read, something that had essentially been denied to them before. As the role of language changed, people’s identification with a community became defined in terms of a fixed predominant language established by the print. I should emphasize here that the concrete formation of nation-states did not necessarily coincide with a particular print language. As Anderson points out, almost all modern self-conceived nations - including nation-states - have ‘national print languages’. Many of them have these languages in common (as in the case of English being shared by many countries); and in others, only a tiny fraction of the population used the national language in conversation or in newspapers as in the case of Ghana and Bangladesh where English is only used by the elite (p 46)

Taking Europe as an example, but also making reference to other regions, Anderson (1991) shows how the religious struggles and the development of vernacular languages ended up with the disintegration of sacred communities. But there were other changes in historic traditions that resulted in the rise of national consciousness and nation-states. In the pre-modern era, belonging to a community was also related to the belief that society was naturally organized around absolute monarchs who were persons set apart from other human beings, ruling over their subjects by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation (p. 36). These monarchs were able to rule over immensely heterogeneous populations; and kingdoms changed borders through the closing of family alliances or warfare. They started to decline, though, by the end of the seventeenth century, being slowly replaced by dynasties, and democratic nation-states.

A final comment made by Anderson, of relevance to this discussion about the genesis of nationalism, is the change in the concept of temporality, which at an earlier time in Occidental history was perceived as a sort of simultaneity of the past and future in an instantaneous present. What replaces this medieval conception of simultaneity along time was the idea of ‘homogeneous empty time’ (a definition Anderson takes from Walter Benjamin), which emphasizes the progression in time, “measured by clock and calendar” (p. 24). ‘Empty time’ coincides with the idea of a nation as a solid community moving steadily through history.
In sum, the rise of nation and nationalism, as examined by Anderson, has come about as a result of several historical developments which include the introduction of print, the development of a capitalist system that made possible the massive production of printed merchandise and resorting to the use of vernacular languages. The latter replaced the more traditional languages such as Latin that were used by only a small elite across Europe. Furthermore, the fixed territories of often-democratic states replaced the previously elastic borders of kingdoms dependent on imperial families, resulting in a new geography of political power. Nation and nation-states also imply the emergence of a new consciousness of belonging to a community. This belonging to a community is imagined as a form of horizontal comradeship, as a social unit with a long past history and an eternal future. This imagined community somehow conveys religious feeling, representing a sort of individual and collective transcendence being expressed, or given form, in a number of national rituals.

Major factors contributing to the idea of the modern nation as reviewed above constitute important concepts that frame the present research. In the analysis of the idea of belonging to a place and the loss of one’s homeland, this research considers the role of language, the modern meaning of ‘temporality’ as ‘homogeneous empty time’ (related to nation as a community moving steadily through history), and the role of nation-state in shaping people’s life.

Nation as a Constructed Category

The discussion about the nature of a nation can be summarized into two major positions. The first sees nation and nationality as constructed nature. It signals that nationality is a relational term whose identity derives from its inherence in a system of differences. Benedict Anderson (1991) and others, such as Bhabha (1994) and Balibar

---

6 Bhabha (1990) in *Nation and Nationess* argues rightly that there is no privileged narrative on nation. Nor can ‘nationalism’, when described in general terms, capture adequately these different and contradictory forms. Balibar (1989, p.9) adds that nationalism does not work everywhere in the same way: in a sense it must work differently, this is part of the national identity. So, on the one hand, nation is a category that everybody recognizes as important in its own identity with common characteristics.
(1989), argue that similar to other terms defined reciprocally - such as man and woman, black and white - national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it is not. Nation is ineluctably "shaped by what is opposed" (Anderson, P. 1991).

Political scientists and historians frequently ignore this constructed nature of nation. For instance Parekh (1995), a political scientist and professor at the University of Hull, challenges the idea that the 'nation-ness' of a polity can be defined only in its difference with other nations and presents a different position. Taking the example of a person's identity, to illustrate his idea of what constitutes the identity of a nation, he states that:

Identity and difference are logically interrelated concepts in the sense that to know something is also to know what is not. However, the two are neither identical nor of equal ontological importance. One person differs from another because each is constituted in a specific way, that is, because each has a specific identity. Identity is logically and ontologically prior to difference, and the latter cannot be its basis or criterion. If the others were to become like us such that our difference from them diminished, that would not in the least affect our identity. They have changed but we have not (...) we do not cease to be who we are when others cease to be different from us (p. 256).

He goes on to say, "A territorially organized society then is a body of individuals bound together by virtue of their participation in a shared way of life. What varies with the individual and is not habitually shared by all or the bulk of its members is not part of the collective identity" (p. 258). Thus, whereas Parakh views nation in substantive terms, Anderson considers it as a constructed category.

Bhabha questions the assumption of a nation as the spatial expression of a unitary people on two accounts (1994, p. 144). First, a nation becomes something quite different when it is seen from a hegemonic or subordinate position. In support of this contention, he refers to the diametrically opposing worldviews of master and slave that account for the major historical and philosophical dialectic of modern times. And second, Bhabha states how differences among individuals in a national unit are affected by many

and, at the same time, nation, a single term, has been defined differently involving different meanings.
interlocking factors. Only the negation of these differences makes possible to imagine a homogeneous and horizontal community, and thereby validating a dominant culture as universal.

Different stories of domination and subordination can change national narratives, and thereby put into question the prevailing dominant view. The conflicting views and ambiguities involved in the use of nation as a constructed category become an important dimension of this research. The group studied in this research has not been in a position of power. They are women. They have been part of a political movement struggling against the dominant class in Chile. For this reason they have been expelled from their homeland and taken refuge in Canada. As refugees in Canada they become part of what is commonly referred to as a 'minority group'.

This research will take into account the view articulated by Anderson in *Imagined Communities* that national communities are cultural constructs where people imagine their collective identity as if they were members of a small town where everyone knows each other face to face. Such national communities also imagine themselves as if they were internally homogeneous, territorially continuous entities with well-demarcated borders. The pertinent question for this research is how or whether people living in exile play out this assumption? Do they, after twenty years of residence in a host country, see themselves as outsiders of a homogeneous group?

Reflecting on nationalist projects of the 19th century and the different experiences of people in exile, Anderson (1994) concludes that people's ideas of home or national identity are less experienced than imagined. Home is imagined through a complex of mediations and representations. At the simplest level this imagining occurs through visual symbols such as flags, maps, statuary, and ceremonials; at a more profound level, through self-government and representative government. Individually, legislators represent particular interests, localities, and prejudices; collectively and anonymously, as Parliament, Diet, or Congress, they represent a unitary notion or sovereignty (p. 319).

As discussed earlier, a single nation identifies itself in opposition to other nations. On the other hand, the term nation is also constituted by opposition to other communities or places such as local ethnicity, the transnational corporation, a sub-national local unit,
the ex-colonial territory, or the diaspora (i.e. the dispersion of people from a particular nation often spread far beyond their homeland, as in the case of Chilean refugees). Sedgwick (1992) concludes that there exists, for the nation, no 'normal' way to be defined or define itself.

This research assumes that nation, rather than being timeless and immutable, is culturally variable. The same can be said about nationality. One can not automatically assume - because a person is born in a particular place and carries its citizenship - that she or he equates this particular legal status with her national identity. Many people across the world cannot identify themselves with the nation that they are supposed to belong to, as is made clear in separatist movements, attempts at ethnic cleansing, and tribal and religious struggles. However, even though nation is a blurred category that can not easily be defined in itself or by what it is opposed to, it in fact is an important characteristic of people's identities. What is it that draws people to identify with nations?

By emphasizing the imagery or mythical nature of a national community Anderson has made a significant contribution to our understanding of nation. His research showed the split between language and reality, and the possibility of creating a national temporality based on the notion of 'the homogeneous empty time'. However, he does not take into account the more dynamic nature of national communities involving relations of inequality and resulting power struggles. For example, he does not discuss gender as an integral part of imagining nation. Studies of national communities from the standpoint of a subordinate, marginal, or excluded group, such as this study on exiled women from Chile, is expected to give a different perspective on nation and national identity that is more heterogeneous.

As a conclusion to this review of issues related to nation as a constructed category, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) and Yuval-Davis (1997) add that the construction of nation can be based on three different ideas that should not be conflated. There is the notion of common origin, of common culture, and nation based on citizenship. Different aspects of gender relations affect each of these three dimensions and therefore make a gendered view of nation and national identity so important. Relations between genders have an important role in the idea of common origin or shared
blood and genes, as for instance in the treatment of issues like birth control, euthanasia, or government policy incentives to increase the procreation of national members. In relation to the idea of a common cultural origin the essence of nation is seen as a symbolic heritage provided by language, religion, or other customs and traditions. Gender again places an important role in the reproduction of this symbolic heritage, as well as the creation of collective memories, the maintaining of languages and beliefs, among others. Gender relations also regulate the access to the state, which affects the nature of people’s citizenship and opportunities. This is evident from studies on refugee populations admitted to Canada, which have found that women, and especially single women with children, are grossly under represented (Escobar, 1998). It appears that the administration of immigration policy ignores the gender of applicants and instead focuses on their fit with occupational demands in Canada. Feminist scholarship has called attention to the particular barriers women face in seeking entry into Canada – either as refugees or as immigrants – that are linked to class, race/ethnicity and gender (Giles, Moussa, & Esterik, 1996; Hyndham, 1998; Oosterveld, 1996). It appears that factors such as having a large number of dependents, an inadequate socio-economic profile, and the lack of an adult male breadwinner have an adverse effect on their selection for settlement in Canada. I will return to the debate about gender and nation further on in this chapter.

Nation and State

Miyoshi (1993) takes the vantage point of a de-colonized person to examine the conflictual interests as well as the contradictory moments of identification that have haunted the new nation-states of Africa ever since their creation. The hatred of their colonizers mobilized people towards liberation, and developed a certain identity. This experience shows how politically powerful a collective identity that integrates notions of a long common history can be, being rooted to a place and a shared culture. However, Miyoshi notes also that in this case the development of a common identity, for the purpose of engaging in a struggle for liberation, is not enough to manage a nation-state. Native people have problems in identifying themselves with a newly created nation that ignores inequalities among various religions, tribes, classes, gender and ethnicities.
Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, discussed at length earlier, focused on ‘nation’ that may or may not include the idea of a state. Nation-state as a social unit - with its own political organization, government structure, civil service, and armed forces - assumes that there is complete correspondence between the boundaries of the nation and the boundaries of those who live in a specific state. But countries often involve more than one nationality. This is the case of Canada where, beside people with English and French ancestry - known as the ‘founding nations’ -, there are the First Nations people who are not recognized as nations in the constitution. Like Canada, Chile does not have one homogeneous national community either. Even though the majority of Chileans are descendants of Spanish and Aboriginal people, there are a number of native communities, such as the Araucanos in the South, and Polynesians on Eastern Island who claim having their own national community different from the Chileans. There are also nations that have no state, such as the Palestinians or Kurds who live dispersed across several states. Because of all these differences, the state has been understood as a separate sphere from nation. Yuval-Davis (1997) comments that “theorizing about the state as a sphere separate from both ‘nation’ and ‘civil society’ is vital in the analysis of relationships between gender and national projects, in which the state often plays a crucial role” (p. 12). This research starts from the assumption that Chile and Canada are nation-states. It should be noted, though, that each operates in very different ways. The way the state was organized and power has been exercised in Chile during the Pinochet years was what caused the large exodus of the country’s citizens. The Canadian State, in contrast, is more liberal in organization and generous in public policy giving asylum and protection to refugees. Yet, its recruitment of newcomers is very much influenced by the country’s labour market needs in any particular year, and therefore self-serving as a policy. Noting these differences between both countries is an important piece of this study.

Pateman (1988) analyzed theories regarding the relationship between state and society based on the classical notion of ‘social contract.’ She indicates that civil society in this tradition has been understood as being divided into two spheres. The public domain, which is politically relevant, has included concerns about nation and nationalism and excluded women and their interests. The second sphere, the private domain,
involving the activities and interests of family and households in which women have traditionally played a dominant role, has been seen as not politically relevant.

Many recent scholars have argued against such a division between public and private when thinking about nation and family, particularly women. Mosse (1985), for instance, demonstrates that the rise of the bourgeois family, with its particular morality, was linked to the rise during the twentieth century of nationalism in various fascist nation-states. Parker (1992) also attempts to break with this paradigm that treats nation and gender/sexuality as discrete and autonomous constructs, arguing that gender and sexuality are constitutive elements of nationalism itself, even though certain sexual identities and practices are less represented in nationalism (p. 7).

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989 and 1992) define the state as:

A body of institutions which are centrally organized around the intentionality of control, with a given apparatus of enforcement at its command and basis. This does not mean that the state is unitary either in its practices, projects or its effects. Different forms of state involve different relationships between coercion-control that is the residing characteristic of the state (p. 22).

On the other hand they suggest that:

Civil society includes those institutions, collectivities, groupings and social agencies which lie outside the formal rubric of the state as defined, but which are formed and informed by them. More specifically, civil society includes the family, ethnic and national groupings, as well as institutions such as education, trade unions, community and citizen organizations, and the means of communication like the media. They produce their own ideological contents while being subjected at the same time to those of the state (p.23).

The distinction made between civil and political societies is a functional differentiation, relating to the same national community and the people within it rather than marking, as is usually the case, two kinds of groupings whose boundaries partially overlap.

Nation-states are sovereign with sole rights and jurisdiction over their particular territory and people. In addition to having power in their own territory, states form the basis of the international order. In spite of this international recognition of national communities as states, national liberation or autonomous movements (as pointed out
earlier) show the artificiality of national borders and the strong belief, among various people across the world, that every separate nationality requires its own sovereign state. Based on this belief and in order to eliminate ethnic tensions within their nation some countries have resorted to inhumane practices of ‘ethnic cleansing’, with all their abuses against international covenants and agreements on human rights.

Bhabha (1990) analyses this tension between nation as a homogenous collectivity and the presence of a diversity of people in the nation-state who create counter narratives to the hegemonic views of the so-called homogeneous collectivity. People at the margins of a nation are engaged in a continuous process of reconstructing nations from their hybrid position. Looking at nation as a social construction one should take into account two aspects that give to a nation some unity but also the possibility of changes that allow for the integration of new elements. Bhabha (1994, p. 155) notes that people live their national affiliation as subject and as object resulting in considerable ambivalence between the pedagogical and performative discourses. Nation as a pedagogical object finds its legitimacy in past generations, in people’s traditions, in historical baggage that has the tendency to totalize the social in a ‘homogeneous empty time.’ This powerful discourse is confronted with the reality of contemporary life in which groups of people often act as subjects presenting their own discourse as a minority people. It is what Bhabha calls ‘people’s performative discourse’ on public identification, which often contradicts and therefore antagonizes those in power who tend to generalize and attempt to forge a sociological solidity out of the nation.

Bhabha also refers to what he calls a ‘supplementary discourse’. This discourse comes ‘after’ the original or in addition to it. The power of a supplementary discourse is to emphasize the social contradiction between the past and present; its force lies in the renegotiations of those times, terms and traditions through which we turn our uncertain, passing contemporaneity into signs of history.

What is involved in this process is a mutual accommodation, which requires change in the dominant position of a nation and not only from the newcomer group.

These various insights reviewed above help us to understand better and interpret the different positioning of the exiled women - who serve as my research subjects - vis-a-
vis the Chilean and Canadian nation and nation-state. For instance, the gender system in Chile, as reported by Kirkwood (1986), places them in a marginal position in relation to the state or public sphere. But as middle class and Mestizos they took on a central position in the building of the Chilean nation. In Canada, as I show in my analysis, they basically occupy marginal positions, as they don’t belong to the hegemonic group and are not part of past generations, of people’s traditions and shared memories. By their education, though, they gained some access to central positions in Canada allowing them to perform a discourse that contrasts and sometimes even contradicts the dominant ones in this national community. In the sense of Bhabha, they represent a ‘supplementary discourse’ on the Canadian nation, which is being examined in this thesis.

The World Geography and the Problem of Spatial Division

Nation-states appear in the popular mind as a set of culture regions or homelands identified as separate countries. In other words, society and culture appear as an appendix to nation-states. Much of the literature on nation and nationalism assumes that the world is composed of sovereign, spatially discontinuous units (Malkki, 1992, p.26). ‘Real’ nations are conceived as being fixed in space and recognizable on a map. Several scholars have contested this common belief of nation being equated with spatially discontinuous countries with each one embodying its own distinctive culture. By the same token, many argue against the idea of taking ‘space’ as a central organizing principle that functions like a neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory and societal organization are inscribed. In The Location of Culture Bhabha points out the disjuncture of culture and place, particularly for marginal people or minorities such as refugees and immigrants. It is widely acknowledged today that culture areas often overlap several nation-states, or that many nation-states are multicultural. Scholars such as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) assert that spaces are not neutral and naturally disconnected, instead they are interconnected with a hierarchical ordering. The experience of space is always socially constructed. They add that it is necessary to look at the processes through which spatial meaning is established. How are they established?
And who has the power to give meaning to such spaces, and who contests this? Who benefits and who loses from this process?

Following the insights of the Dependency Theory\(^7\), Miyoshi (1993) focuses specifically on the relationship between nations and the unequal distribution of wealth and power, showing how some regions end up with most of the economic and political power while others become dependent on them. Wealth, as he comments, is not necessarily found in places from where the manufactured goods originate. Quoting Reich, he argues that wealth in the post-industrial society accumulates at the site where managers and technicians carry out research and development. Said (1979) views the differences in regions of the world as historically constructed with the Western world having served earlier as colonial masters and currently being the dominant player and major beneficiary of the world’s economic system. Analyzing Western literary narratives in relation to the East, Said shows that the West has represented itself for several centuries as rational and scientific, and culturally and morally superior to the East. The East, in turn, has been depicted as uncivilized, irrational, unscientific, culturally inferior and immoral.

Other researchers, studying refugee movements from the South to the North, have identified a number of stereotypes and beliefs about life in the South held by people from the North, which obscure the complexity of the refugees’ universe and have made the conditions of life for refugees in host societies more difficult. In his research on refugee relief Harrell-Bond (1986, p. 206) concludes that there exists in the developed North a “convenient belief that people from other cultures do no suffer either physical or psychological pain in the same way as do ‘white people’ (...) they are used to death and suffering and therefore no longer feel these things.” A survey conducted by the Canadian Council for Refugees (1996, p.2), focussing on the experience of refugees with visa posts and immigration officials, offers a number of examples of racialized behavior similar to

---

\(^7\) Dependency Theory was first formulated in Latin America during the 1960s. Influential theoreticians include Andre Gunder Frank in Chile, Brazilian Celso Furtado, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Chileans Osvaldo Sunkel and Enzo Faletto. The neo-marxists Theotonio Dos Santos and Mauro Marini. See Franz Hinkelammert (1970) and Blomstrom and Hettne (1984).
those just quoted. Razack (1998) summarizes, "The plethora of images and texts establishing First world superiority is integral to what constitutes knowledge in refugee discourse."

In the case of Chilean women refugees who have been admitted to Canada, the move from a Southern country to a Northern one involved not only the experience of having to deal with a different culture, but also having to deal with a move between two regions that are highly unequal regarding wealth and political power. In her study of the Chilean refugee movement to Canada, Simalchik (1993) documents the initial resistance of the Canadian political power system to the idea of opening the door to a wave of refugees coming from the Third World and to those whose political orientation is to the Left. Tomic and Trumper (1993), in their study on the selection process of Chilean refugees, also show evidence of subtle behavior of racism, sexism, classism and discrimination on the ground of political ideology which resulted in favoring a certain type of refugee for settlement in Canada, and for benefits granted on arrival. They found that the majority of Chileans, who entered Canada as a designated class, were chosen from middle class families who had completed secondary or post secondary studies.

**Common Sense Assumptions about People’s Ties to a Territory**

The idea that countries are separate units recognizable on a world map with each territory embodying its own cultural identity, is frequently confirmed in the naming of countries and attitudes towards them. In English a nation often is named as the land of a particular national community, as for example with England, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Ireland, Poland, Finland, Greenland, Swaziland and Thailand. The territory becomes a national soil with a very clear identity. The attempt to forge a solid national identity in many instances contradicts reality. Switzerland is a case in point with three clearly identifiable ethno-cultural groups, each of which inhabit separate cantons. Even the United Kingdom is very heterogeneous as a country that includes Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (which has its own parliament though), without naming its many groups of immigrants. The connection between people’s identity with a soil is also performed by other powerful metaphorical practices, such as people going in exile taking
along a handful of soil (or seeds, or a sapling). Politicians or religious leaders often kiss the ground of a ‘national soil’ to express their loyalty, emotional ties to or respect for a nation. The Pope enacts this as a public ritual whenever he visits a different country. People think they are rooted to a place, deriving their identity from that rooted-ness. Malkki (1992, p.28) points out that this naturalized relationship of people to a place is often represented in plant metaphors. Like a tree, people are rooted to a native soil, called usually motherland or fatherland, which suggests that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it.

Deleuze and Guattari state that the representation of the relationship of people to a place, land or soil, conveys patterns of thought similar to those found in other experiences or bodies of knowledge quoted by Malkki, (1992 p. 28). Interesting to note here is how the metaphors of the tree rooted in the soil, with its various branches, has dominated Western thought and reality. This is evident when considering all the various fields of knowledge ranging from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology and all of philosophy (Grund, racine, fondement), thereby lending a foundation to these systems of knowledge. Even in Western academic language we find this rootedness in the soil or ground expressed in such terms as ‘grounded’ theory or ‘branches’ of knowledge.

All these ways of thinking about people’s ties to a country show how our thoughts are deeply embedded in essentialized images. Refugee people, in turn, are relegated to peripheries that are invisible or to zones that are perceived as dangerous and strange. To use a horti/agriculture metaphor, they are like weeds out of place. To further understand exile or other forms of displacement I consider it essential to invert the focus of the inquiry, recognizing that people in the modern era have become increasingly mobile thereby becoming ‘moving targets.’ This calls for analytical frameworks that place exiles at the center. The condition of refugees, finding themselves outside of the family of nations, provide scholars with an excellent opportunity to understand the complex ways

---

8 Isabel Allende’s book Paula, describes the ritual of taking soil from Chile when leaving for Venezuela as exile. With this gesture she describes her feelings of being uprooted from her country.
in which people construct places as ‘nation’ or ‘homeland’ and how these categories affect their identity.

**The Construction of National Identity: Exiles and Diaspora**

Exiles and diasporas have much in common. Said (1984) states that exiles see the entire world as a foreign land. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions. For an exile their habits of life, expressions or activities in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus, both the new and the old environment have a vivid, presence, being actual and occurring together in contrapuntal form like in music where two or more tunes are played at the same time.

This characteristic of exiles applies also to their experiences of diaspora. But, whereas the focus in the study of exiles is most often on individualistic experiences, the experience of diaspora emphasizes the creation and maintenance of a network of communities away from home. These communities serve as a public space, whose operation allows for a sensation of continuing to live ‘inside’ one’s nation, albeit with a difference. This ‘hybridity,’ presented by exiled experience, has inspired many contemporary writers who subscribe to post-modern or postcolonial theories. They remind us that ethnicity, a cultural identity, is not a fixed essence. Instead, it is constructed through a blend of memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. This trend of thought sees the exiled condition as an ideal vantage point from which to examine the processes of social and cultural articulation with its presumed differences. The exiled condition constitutes an interstice where the inter-subjective and collective experience of ‘nation-ness’, community interest or cultural value is negotiated (Bhabha, 1990; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Hall, 1990; Malkki, 1992). In the analysis of the life histories of my sample of Chilean exiled women, this study takes into account their diasporic experience.

As a group, Chileans in Canada formed part of a network of communities made up of Chilean exiles throughout the world.
After having identified some similarities and distinctions between exile and diaspora, we need to address the question of how people in exile construct national identity? Several researchers have focused their exploration on the meaning refugees ascribe to national identity, homeland, exile and refugee-ness, concluding that they construct a variety of forms of national identity. They show how people who move from one place to another are marked by the difference created by national boundaries. In addition, as pointed out, differences in the construction of national identity, as manifested within nation-states are also affected by gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, personal biography and relationship to the state (Afshar, 1996; Stasiulis, 1990).

Malkki (1989) especially, provides an interesting concrete example to illustrate this point. She studied two groups of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, one living in refugee camps and the second being dispersed in non-refugee neighborhoods. The former group saw themselves as a nation in exile, and defined exile as a moral trajectory of trials and tribulations that would end in the recuperation of their 'homeland' in Burundi. In contrast, the group of Hutu refugees dispersed in towns did not share such a distinct collective identity with a 'promised land' that could function as a moral destination. They tended to seek ways of assimilating and of manipulating multiple identities. They saw themselves not essentially as 'Hutus' or 'refugees' or 'Tanzanians' or 'Burundians,' but rather just as 'broad persons'. In the process of managing these 'rootless' identities in township life they were creating not a heroized national identity but a lively cosmopolitanism. For town refugees, homeland was not a moral trajectory or destination but simply a place. They created lives that were located in their present circumstances, not trying to replicate lives of the past. These town refugees were unsure if they would ever return to Burundi, even if political changes would allow them to do that. Malkki concludes that this cosmopolitan attitude, which trivializes the necessity of living by radical nationalism, provides a strong challenge to the belief in cultural and national essentialism. All of the ten Chilean women I interviewed have been mostly urban dwellers while residing in Chile and again in Canada as exiles and post-exiles. I am interested in knowing if these women experience similar feelings about their homeland, as do the Hutu refugees from Burundi living dispersed in urban districts of Tanzania.
The Uruguayan writer Viñar (1990) presents his own experience of living in exile and his choice of repatriation. He suggests the importance of memory and personal biography in the choices that people make. The multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through the experience of living in, remembering and imagining them go beyond the mere idea of place of birth. Drawing on psychoanalysis, he explains the attachment or sense of belonging to a nation, using Freud's concept of 'tracing' (or memory sketch), in which memory of body and senses comes first, followed by memories of cultural specificity such as history, ideals, music, landscape and national symbols. Viñar concludes that belonging to a nationality, which includes a linguistic community, history and culture is inherent in today's human condition (p. 162-163).

These researchers suggest alternative ways to conceptualize relations between people and place. In contrast to the common sense view that sees people's identities fixed and rooted to a place, they suggest that identity is always mobile and processual. It is partly the result of self-construction, partly categorized by others and partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield or a fund of memory.

Let us now turn to the question of how home is constructed by people living in diaspora. Diaspora, subverts the concept of nation-state and, at the same time, is defined and constrained by this reality. The modern concept of nation-state, as discussed earlier, implies a limited territory with people sharing a common national culture, ethnicity and common race. In contrast, diaspora unites territories, presupposing dispersion of a multiplicity of connected communities communicating with one another over large distances. Diaspora is living separated, like exiles, entertaining the idea of returning eventually to their homeland. Diasporic forms of longing, memory and identification are shared by a broad spectrum of population groups such as refugees, immigrants, expatriates, guest workers, exile-communities, overseas communities, ethnic communities all of whom share this diasporic experience even though there are some discrepancies (Boyarin & Boyarin, 1993; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1995; Safran, 1991).

Safran (1991) defines diaspora as expatriate minority communities characterized by the following criteria: 1) They are dispersed from an original center to at least two peripheral places. 2) They maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original
homeland. 3) They believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country. 4) They see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right. 5) They are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland, and 6) Group consciousness and solidarity are shaped by their continuing relationship with the homeland (p. 83-99).

Cohen (1995) establishes two clear meanings of diaspora. One follows the original Greek meaning of pre-modern time, where diaspora signified the dispersion of communities like the Greek because of trade, military conquest and voluntary emigration. This form of diaspora can be found also in the European settlements abroad during the mercantile and colonial periods. The second describes a forcible dispersal of people and their subsequent unhappiness and longing for their homeland. This version of diaspora is the most commonly accepted today and is used in scholarly literature and in common language. Clifford (1994, p.305) asserts, however, that there is no ideal type of diaspora. None fully conforms to the ‘ideal type’ of the Jewish diaspora, and even large segments of the Jewish historical experience do not meet the test of Safran’s last three criteria. The Jewish diasporic identity is not national, not genealogical, nor religious but all of these existing in dialectical tension with one another as pointed out by Boyarin and Boyarin (1993). Clifford adds that in the late 20th century all or most communities had diasporic dimensions.

Diaspora can not easily be defined, not by an essential feature nor by opposition to something else. I subscribe to Clifford’s suggestion to view diaspora as an adaptive constellation of responses to ‘dwelling-in-displacement’ (p.310). In this sense, the Chilean exiled community in Canada can be identified as a diaspora. Since the 1973 military coup, Chilean exiles are known to have organized themselves into communities in different cities throughout the world to struggle against the dictatorship in Chile, maintain their memories, live the Chilean culture in diaspora, and uphold the longing for eventual return. Besides being able to examine this part of the adaptive constellation of responses, the diasporic identity allows me to view these Chileans - ‘dwelling-in-displacement’ - as people being impacted upon as well as participating in the common cultural life of their surroundings. Analyzing the life histories of Chilean women in
Canada, this research keeps the dialectical tension of having a dis-aggregated or diasporic identity, being partially Chilean and partially from the new surroundings.

The relationship of Chileans living in diaspora to the Canadian nation-state is different from other distinct communities. For instance, Canada's First Nations people have struggled for continuity in habitation and aboriginality, and often express a 'natural connection' to this land. Immigrant communities are most often not living in diaspora either. Immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only while they are in process of becoming part of a new home in a new place. Narratives of nation designed to integrate immigrants, such as multiculturalism, and assimilation don't work in the same way within diasporic populations such as Chileans. On the one hand, the diasporic discourse emphasizes non-assimilation through the ongoing functioning of a transnational network, which includes the homeland. My own personal links and experience with the Chilean community in Montreal and Toronto tell me that their organization and identity has been to a great extent caught up with the political struggle in Chile. In this sense the desire to return to Chile takes on special meaning, as part of the political project for return to a democratic order.

Inevitably, Canada as host country - by its actions and conditions - influences Chilean exiles in either holding on to, or changing their projects and their self-definition. Canada's politics of integration and the social structure of race, class and gender relations leads refugees having to negotiate their presence and develop a viable identity vis-à-vis this country. Furthermore, it is assumed that the fate of the exiled population, over time, is bound up with developments in the home country. As the duration of exile is prolonged and new uncertainties and dilemmas appear Chileans will have to renegotiate their relationship with their homeland as well as with the host country. My analysis, particularly of Ana's history but also of the chapter on 'Constructing Canada', examines those issues in greater depth.

Recent literature has pointed to the existence of diasporic traits in the case of large communities usually not regarded as refugees or living in exile, because of class and race exclusion. This includes Afro-Americans and the so-called new immigration movements of non-European people of color to the USA and Canada; and Algerians, Moroccans and
Tunisians living in France united in their Maghrebi diasporic consciousness. These groups are found to be sub-ordinate to the established system of racial exclusion. At the same time, the common histories of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation, and sub-ordination create in these communities solidarity and longing for a homeland.

In concluding this review of issues related to nation and national identity I would like to make some reference to 'border' theorists, and how they differ from studies focusing on the phenomena of diaspora. Anzaldua (1987), Rosaldo (1997) and others argue for the centrality of marginal histories of those people who have crossed borders. Borderland approaches presuppose a territory defined by geopolitical lines, joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication. Diaspora theorists present a different geographical and historical paradigm. They presuppose trans-nationality of a community for which there are no geopolitical boundaries. However, there is some overlap between these positions and both provide a challenge to national hegemonic narratives.

Both diaspora and borderland peoples show selective accommodation with the political, cultural, commercial and everyday life forms of dominant society of a nation. At the same time, people in exile, in diaspora and in borderlands, share the experiences of marginalization, as do people who are not migrants such as indigenous people, for example. The feeling of belonging to a place becomes problematic for all kinds of people including Chicanos, Aboriginal people, working class and poor people, gays, lesbian and disabled people. All of these groups are excluded from some center (Anzaldua, 1987; Lumbres, 1990; Moraga, 1983; Steedman, 1987).
Examinining Ethnicity, Race, Nation, Class and Gender Identity

In their attempt to analyze multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies, a growing number of writers in Canada and elsewhere have sought to link notions of ethnicity and race with class, gender, sexual orientation and nation. The need to take into account these various categories has been stressed, and problematized, by many scholars as they are seen as ways to analyze people's identities. In general, identity is perceived as being shaped by a combination of different forces operating in society and in the psyche of individuals and groups (Butler & Scott, 1992). Hence, there exists a plurality of identities in a single subject, as each person occupies different positions in the social order. It is also widely recognized that there is a great diversity and difference among people belonging to the same nationality, as well as the same gender, race or class. The existence of such a diversity and difference can also be found among Chilean exiles in Canada.

Chileans are part of the Latin American people. As such we are not clearly cast as a racial or subordinate group. Preoccupation with race in Canada and in the USA tends to be cast by the hegemonic discourse in a white and black dichotomy, eclipsing the complexities of the Latino experience. Latinos are a fusion or mixing of racial and ethnic groups, ranging from indigenous native groups to African, European and Asian. In Canada, they are considered as belonging to one of the four-disadvantaged groups⁹ called 'visible minorities' in contrast to the 'invisible' white Caucasian majority. The Employment Equity Act of 1986 defined them as "people, other than aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white color." In the USA, Latino immigrants and refugees, and even those who trace their ancestry and citizenship in the United States back for many generations, often feel they are not accepted as equal citizens of the very country in which they were born. Latino Americans are considered as second class citizens, even when they have full legal status and citizenship. In this sense, to be a

---

⁹ The Employment Equity Act in 1986, issued by the Federal Government, recognizes systemic and institutional barriers to employment for four disadvantaged groups: women, visible minorities, disabled persons, and First Nations people. Due primarily to the weak enforcement mechanisms of federal legislation, the impact of this Act has been
Latino American in North America is a problematic condition, as pointed out by much of the literature of this group of people (Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga & Castillo, 1988; Oboler, 1995; Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). Obviously, some people experience more discrimination than others, since they carry multiple markers that position them in a major discriminatory situation.

The Latin American community in Canada is enormously varied, due to people’s link to a great number of different countries of origin, the period of their arrival in Canada, their socio-economic background, level of education, age and gender of its members. Rockhill and Tomic (1992) looked at the differences established in Canada between Latinos from the southern continent and those from Central America. They found that those from South America were seen as fitting better, and coming closer to the type of immigrant Canada has historically wanted, than other “Third World” immigrants (p. 13). Canadians, in contrast, considered Central Americans as fitting less well the European and more the “Third World” image, forming thereby the base of a constructed racism (p.14). The wave of forced migration from Central America in the 1980s, as Rockhill and Tomic indicate, has been characterized as less urban, belonging to a less privileged social class, holding lower levels of training and having fewer chances to speak either of Canada’s official languages upon arrival. Individuals from Chile like those from Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, are not identified as visible minorities in the Ontario Employment Act. Although they may experience barriers similar to those faced by people from Central America or any other visible minority group, they are not considered to be at a disadvantage as a result of their ‘race’ or ‘color.’ In the particular case of Chileans, who arrived after the political upheaval in their country, they were mainly urban, politicized, middle class and highly educated. Nevertheless, as confirmed by the study of Rockhill and Tomic, Chileans refugees were confronted with the Canadian racialized practice of devaluing any education obtained outside North America and Europe resulting in many Chileans suffering severe setbacks in class location (1992, p. 8).

insignificant. At minimum, there seems to be a consensus among governing bodies that discrimination does exist for the designated groups.
Chileans in many respects occupy a particular ‘in-between’ place. They have been strongly identified, as mentioned earlier, as a politically articulate and organized diasporic community with a longing for but also a political critique of their homeland. On the other hand they are seen as able to ‘pass’ or ‘fit’ as Canadians, yet also facing the daily degradations and humiliations of racism and discrimination. This in-between place calls for special attention to categories that define identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, class and nation. Questions regarding a proper definition of these concepts and the way they interrelate will be discussed next.

**Race, Ethnicity and Nation**

These categories are terms used in the literature to distinguish or classify human groups according to physical and/or cultural as well as territorial characteristics. No one of these categories presents a clear boundary in relation to the other. By the same token, it can be assumed that none of them can exist in isolation of the other since ethnicity and class, for example, always combine with gender, race and/or nation. However, as Anthias (1992) states, these categories can be distinguished by their different discourses or projects, often influenced or determined by political intentions. For instance, a person from Chile can be defined by different ethnic, religious, racial or national labels using terms like Latin American, catholic, colored and/or Chilean.

Race, ethnicity and nation are not natural phenomena but constructed categories. Comparing two ethnic labels that Latino American people receive in the USA, Hispanics or Latinos, Oboler (1995) shows how the use of each label involves a very different political intention. U.S. government agencies use the label of Hispanic, who as a people comprises a population of more than 23 million with a variety of national backgrounds. Such use ignores the different experience that exists between people who are longtime native-born U.S. citizens (Chicanos, Puerto Rican) and the more recently arrived economic immigrants. Creating the ethnic label Hispanic, the U.S. government obscures rather than clarifies the varied social experience, reducing people’s identity to imputed common traits. The Latino label, in contrast, emerged from the Latin American people themselves in attempts to embrace all Latin American nationalities, including those that
neither have had colonial ties to Spain nor are necessarily Spanish speaking (such as Brazil and Haiti). This label highlights its regional origin as well as the opposition of Latinos to American imperialism.

The struggle about proper labeling in categorizing people from South and Central America is an ongoing issue in Canada as well, and acceptance of either of these labels depends largely on the context. For example, the Latin American Women’s Collective in Toronto fought against the ‘Hispanic’ label that the Native Women’s Caucus tried to impose on all non-native Latin Americans, in order to cast them as part of the oppressors. This Latin American organization strongly rejected such a label. San Martin (1998 p. 84) recalled, “We did not feel ‘Hispanic’ and even though many of us could trace some European ancestry in our heritage, we did not identify with it. For us it was important to recognize our mixed heritage.” In this thesis I use the terms ‘Latin American’ and ‘Latino/a’, and not ‘Hispanic’, for the same reasons given by San Martin.

Another process occurs among the other categories of identity such as race, ethnicity and nation. As pointed out by Wetherell and Potter (1992), the categorization of nation implies very different theories of identity when compared to the subject position constructed in the use of race: each ordering encourages a contrasting model of intergroup and broader social relations (p. 118). Anthias (1992) points out, however, that what is common in a racial, ethnic or national collectivity is the social construction of origin and a common or shared fate, which can be mythical or real with a historical, territorial, cultural, or physiognomic basis. Furthermore, such commonality can be internally constituted by the group itself or externally imposed, or both. This common trait of a collectivity, whether national, ethnic or racial is an important issue that I address in this research. Chileans, like any other people who have been exiled, and who have lost contact with the source of their culture, find themselves entering into a no-one’s land of rootedness. They don’t become automatically ‘real’ Canadians. One of their major losses, following Benedict Anderson’s (1991) idea of nation, is the loss of belonging to a community who travel together through time, acting collectively in their own space and with a common fate. Also, once in the host country, refugee people not only lose their
country and culture but also often become racialized in different ways. This impedes their efforts to reestablish their sense of belonging, this time to a new national community.

Race, racism and racialization together constitute a family of concepts to understand mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion in today’s world. Two major problems account for a lack of consensus on their meaning. First, the signifiers chosen to predicate these concepts, and second, the process of how these concepts intertwine with class, ethnicity, gender and nation is unclear. (Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1992; Ng, 1993; Stasiulis, 1990; Wetherell & Potter, 1992)

The term race, in itself, is already problematic because it tends to classify human beings into types that easily establish a hierarchy among them. Race typologies derive from the widespread practice of western physical anthropologists and biologists, adopted during the colonial era, in phenotypically isolating specific groups of people and placing them in distinct categories. Since then, views on race expounded in the literature have oscillated principally between two opposite positions, those who think that race is an objective condition and others who see race as an ideological construct. A third position sees the concept of race “as a marker of the infinity of variations we humans hold as part of our common heritage and hope for the future” Omi & Winant (1993 p. 9).

The biological foundation of race, which classifies individuals based on phenotypical traits, has been totally discredited. Many researchers nowadays have argued that the meaning of race is always changing (Guillaumin, 1988; Miles, 1989). The essentialist notion of race based on biological difference has been displaced largely by the notion of cultural difference as a basis for excluding and inferiorizing. Stasiulis (1990) in a review of the work of Canadian historians on labor and immigration - such as Heron and Storey (1985), Iacovetta (1986), and Ramirez (1986) among other - remarks that such studies have documented in detail the process by which aboriginal people and different groups of immigrants have been racialized throughout Canadian history. Groups such as the Irish in the nineteenth century and East and South Europeans, well into the 1950s, were perceived as different from the White English norms of physical appearance and culture. Stasiulis writes “Canadian racism has been evoked not only by skin color, but also ‘ethnic’ markers based on language, religion, and other components of ethnic
culture" (1990 p.78). The racist practices towards Aboriginal people, throughout Canadian history, and towards immigrants and minority workers show how race has often been defined based on markers other than presumed biological characteristics. It also indicates how unclear the line is between racial and ethnic markers.

Race denotes a particular way in which differences among collectivities and individuals come to be constructed. Omi and Winant (1993) remark that race as a category has been used over half a millennium, or more, and through this time has produced and reproduced enormous effects in thinking and acting that guarantees that race will remain a social reality across the globe, despite its lack of intrinsic or scientific merit. At the level of experience, of everyday life, race is an almost indissoluble part of our identities.

To deny the biological basis of race theories is not to deny that race and racism are socially constructed categories having real cultural as well as a political, economic and social effects. What needs further examination here is how race relates to ethnicity, and to belonging to a community. As Anthias & Yuval Davis (1992) indicate, differences come to be constructed through race. Therefore, in using this concept in the analysis it is necessary to understand the axis upon which the phenomenon of race depends. Anthias & Yuval-Davis argue that race must be positioned within the wider category of ‘ethnos’ that provides its analytical axis (p. viii). These scholars contend that race is one way whereby certain groups of people construct their belonging to one collectivity and others to other collectivities. It is always grounded in the separation of the human population by notion of ‘stock’ or collective hereditary traits. Belongingness, however, is postulated through notions of common origin or destiny. Anthias & Yuval-Davis argue rightly that collectivity and belongingness are about boundaries by which the mechanisms of both inclusion and exclusion categorize individuals into those that can belong to a particular ‘imagined community’ and those that cannot.

Racism, on the other hand, is a mode of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation justified on the basis of assumed biological or immutable cultural differences (Stasiulis, 1990) There is no unitary system that can be labelled purely racist even though South Africa’s apartheid regime approximated such a state. A number of

Essed’s (1991) study of racism experienced by Black women found how the cultural elements of racism became more prominent after World War II. As the notion of racial inferiority - based on pseudo-scientific theories and colonial practices - has become less acceptable among dominant groups. it is being replaced by the much more subtle ideology of cultural inferiority. Now, as Essed demonstrates in her study, Black women especially are in double jeopardy as they continue to be confronted with racism based on the colonial model and also suffer the effects of the more subtle ideology of ethnicism, based on a ‘cultural pluralistic model’, that views them as culturally inferior (p.15). Less evident are the ethnic-directed forms of oppression or subordination. Nation-states such as Canada and USA endorse the model of a multi-ethnic nation, with Canada viewing itself as a multi-cultural society ‘par excellence.’ In these models, ethnic groups are seen as part of an equal, plural and diverse society. Razack (1998) shows, though, that while ethnic minorities are invited to keep their culture they do not enjoy equal access to power and resources (p. 61).

Ethnic and national communities, as collective constructions and collective identities, are what people make of them. The displacement of the concept of race by ethnic difference, allows for new forms of racial domination. In some ways these are more insidious, because they are more subtle than the former practices of colonial racism. By the same token new types of opposition have emerged. Omi & Winant (1993) state that it is possible to resist this more subtle form of racial domination by creating new identities, new collectivities that are less permeable to the hegemonic system. More concretely (Lopez & Espiritu, 1990) point to the emergence of “pan-ethnic” communities of Latinos that bridge subgroups of ethnic collectivities that are seen as homogeneous by outsiders. In some instances, there have been efforts at creating transnational Pan-ethnic communities that have language in common, as well as a particular culture and political interest. This phenomenon, similar to diasporic models open new options to old alternatives such as integration vs. separatism and assimilation vs. nationalism.
Social Class

Another category important to this research is social class, introduced as a concept by Karl Marx based on his observation of economic relations in nineteenth century European society. Classes emerge, he argued, when one dominant group forces another to labour in order to satisfy its subsistence needs, and engages in exploitation of that labour. Class as a concept, and economic exploitation as lived reality became a central issue in the political struggle of the Allende regime in Chile, which tried to change economic relations that allowed for this type of exploitation. This attempt resulted eventually in a military coup supported by the political right. Marxists and Neo-Marxists, focusing on production and class relations, also argue that economic relations have primacy in the understanding and production of other forms of oppression. For instance, orthodox Marxist analyses of racism consider all racist phenomena (ideology, antagonistic attitudes, and discriminatory practices) as having their roots in the colonial phase of capitalism. Racial prejudice is viewed as a social attitude propagated by an exploiting class in order to stigmatize some group as inferior and thereby justify their economic exploitation (Cox, 1948). Racial and other forms of non-class divisions are seen as mere reflections of production and class-based relations. For instance Miles (1984 p. 229), consistent with other neo-Marxists, argues that race is an ideological construction rather than an analytical category. He, therefore, gives social class priority over race thereby overriding the effects of racialization. In the context of this debate, an interesting point to pursue in my research is to ask how these refugee women from Chile, having been engaged in a fierce class struggle in their country of origin, understand this experience in relation to Canada, where race and gender struggles have taken precedence over class conflicts, at least since the mid-1970s.

Neo-Marxist thought has gone beyond the position of seeing economic relations as the single dominant cause of social divisions in society. Nevertheless, they maintain the need for including the larger context of global and national economic realities to understand how different forms of oppression intersect (Gabriel & Ben-Tovim, 1978; Hall, 1988; Hall & Jacques, 1989). They also acknowledge that ‘class’ has a reciprocal
relationship with ‘race’, in which the articulation between the two is crucial, not their separateness (Hall 1980 quoted by Solomos, 1986, p.92 and Stasiulis, 1990, p.273). This Neo-Marxist position can be useful in trying to understand the fluidity in the identity of exiled women. I agree with Hall’s argument that we can not separate the national economic realities from the dynamics of inferiorization of people coming from the Third World. Their class, gender, race and ethnic backgrounds intertwine differently when they move from one country to another. And analysis of the different national economic realities, within the classical Marxist model can not fully explain gender or racial oppression.

**Debate about Gender**

Mainstream social research and policies about migration and refugees rarely acknowledge gender. Government and academic research regarding border crossings of refugees and immigrants has been largely gender blind, if not gender biased. The invisibility of women, or the simplified representation of them, in immigration studies and policies has been pointed out by a number of scholars (Abdo, 1997; Giles et al., 1996; Indra, 1996). Such exclusion, or biased view, distorts the history and significance of these migrants’ experiences. Understanding gender debates like those about nation and national identity is crucial for my research on Chilean exiles, as women. It helps to reflect on the various ways in which gender intersects with nationalist projects and discourses. Notions of femininity and masculinity are constructed within nationalist discourses and the relationship between women and men affect and are affected by the discourse of nationalist projects.

Feminist scholars concerned about women’s oppression present different views on what should be considered as the organizing principle that determines the difference in experiences and power between men and women. Central to the feminist debate has been different theories concerning patriarchy and sex/gender system. Much of the explanation on power differences between the two genders has focused on women’s location in social relations subordinate to men. While men are regarded as being involved principally in public domain activities, women have been largely relegated to the private sphere (family
and household), being essentially excluded from the body politic and remaining close to nature (Riley, 1988). Such an analysis explains why, in most cultures, women are less valued than men are.

The search for a ‘universal’ original reason that can explain the subordination of women carries the danger of tending to generalize and ignore the great diversity in cultural situations of different societies. For instance, the notion of patriarchy is problematic since it involves a generalization of a number of different gender systems. Also the idea of ‘women’s interests’ as being shared by all women regardless of race, class and sexuality has become highly contested. Waylen (1996) points out that this belief resulted in references to a ‘global sisterhood’. It allowed First World feminists and academics to build onto the analysis about Third World women without really locating themselves as Western feminists, assuming that more unites women from different races, classes and sexuality than divides them.

Yet, when those same feminists recognize differences among them within the framework of ‘global sisterhood’, they refer to all ‘Third World’ women as non-Western, or as ‘other’ (p. 9). Papart and Marchand (1995) point out how the literature of many development projects characterize women (and children) in the South as vulnerable and helpless victims, ignoring gender analysis that could help to address the complexities involved in diverse women’s locations.

Particularly scholars from the South and activists (although some live and write in the North) have taken issue with attempts at applying universal categories to women, arguing that women across the world differ in locations, interests and their struggles. Mohanty, using Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined communities’, proposes a framework that allows women from different parts of the world to build alliances among them. Rejecting the notion of women facing a common, essentially universal struggle, she instead advances the idea of an “imagined community of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but systemic” (1991 p.4).

Since the 1980s, feminist debate has shifted its focus by examining ‘difference.’ This issue has led to two major debates. The first is about the ontological bases of
differences between women and men: Are these differences determined biologically, socially or in combination? The view that holds that 'difference' is fixed and based on sexual biological differences takes a generalized position on the nature of men and women each involving half of the world's population, and placing little emphasis on cultural variations. The second major position about 'difference' emphasizes cultural variability. It claims that sexual division of labour, power and dispositions are not biologically but socially constructed. Adherents of this position indicate the importance of differentiating gender from the general notion of women and men. I tend to favor the gender side of this debate using it as a tool, as proposed by Mohanty, to understand some particular struggles. Gender is a socially constructed notion of men and women that permeates through every level of society. I will try to summarize here the points presented in the feminist literature by Waylen (1996); Torres (1991); McSpadden (1996); Johnson-Odim (1991) and Indra (1996) all of whom argue in favor of gender analysis.

First, research centered on 'women' as a category presumes the existence of similarities among women and risks ignoring, trivializing or masking important differences among them. Second, the concept of 'women' focuses attention on sexual differences leaving out the social, political and cultural construction of gender in specific contexts. Third, the study of women 'as women' has been based on a western-oriented feminist analytical model constructed in opposition to a male-oriented worldview. Women's experience in such an orientation is mostly understood in terms of a white, middle class, Western, and heterosexual background. Such analyses are not helpful for analyzing the experiences of women in other parts of the world, where different realities are operating. Also, Third World feminists, working class women, women of color and lesbians maintain that Western representations of women as a universal condition have little or no relevance to their experience and may negate them, in fact. And finally, it is important to the analysis of women's condition to make visible critical aspects of diversity in experience and perceptions. Women's identities are based on the sex-gender systems of societies, as well as other cultural constructions such as race, nationality, age, ability, social class and parental responsibilities (Butler & Scott, 1992).
Feminist conceptualizations of gender, in contrast to the universal idea of women and men, point to the urgent need for research that highlight the difference in conditions among different refugees. Some feminist scholars, studying particular groups of women, have already demonstrated the uniqueness of the situation of different women, including studies by Agger (1994) on refugee women from the Middle East and Latin America in Denmark, Moussa (1993) on Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women in Canada and Kay (1987) on Chilean refugee women in England. These authors point to the importance of taking into account differences in circumstances and characteristics among exiled women. As Indra (1996, p. 32) notes, "to feminist theorists the historical problem isn't so much the actual invisibility of women, but rather how they have been and are being represented, and analytically characterized."

**Problematic Nature of Gender in the Field of Research**

A major epistemological debate is about how to produce knowledge from a gender perspective. It is clear that 'standpoint theorists' have contributed a great deal to the debate about how to understand the differences between genders and among women. However, there is a problem between the claim of a true knowledge and the multiple locations women occupy that generates multiple and even contradictory bodies of knowledge (Hartsock, 1983; Rose, 1986; Young, 1980).

Feminists that integrate knowledge coming from the 'linguistic turn', postmodernism and poststructuralism such as (Crosby, 1992; Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1993; Rockhill, 1995; Scott, 1992) have further developed the formulations of 'standpoint' theoreticians. They argue that the dichotomy between concepts and reality cannot be resolved by embracing reality and rejecting concepts. The two elements of the dichotomy are interdependent. Furthermore, this split denies that the lifeworld is, like every other human activity, discursively constituted (see also Borland, 1991; de Laurentis, 1984; Minh-ha, 1989; Stacey, 1991).

Feminist knowledge has started off from many women's different lives. There is no typical or essential woman’s type of life and therefore no universal woman’s standpoint. Women's lives are opposed to each other in important respects. This
postmodernist position presents two problems. First, the difficulty is how to construct a viable method for feminist analysis that provides the basis for a feminist politics. If there are a multiplicity of standpoints, systematic analysis as well as political action becomes impossible. Ultimately, every woman is unique from this perspective so the ability to speak for certain categories of women is lost. Second, if we acknowledge multiple standpoints, how do we discriminate among them? There is a contradiction between seeing identity as socially constructed in multiple ways and maintaining, at the same time, that there are identifiable oppressed groups. Postmodern understandings of differences can lead to see all identities as having equal validity.

Some feminists try to overcome this problem and give some political weight to the knowledge produced from a marginalised position. Reflecting on the case of Black American women, Collins (1997) proposes that the so-called ‘standpoint’ position refers to groups having shared histories based on their location in relation to power. Her argument is that race, gender, social class, ethnicity, age and sexuality are not descriptive categories of identity applied to individuals. Instead, these elements of social division emerge as discursive/everyday practices that foster social inequality (p.376). She furthermore argues that groups who share a common placement in the hierarchical system of power relations also share common experiences in such a system. Such shared angles of vision lead those in similar social locations to be predisposed to interpret these experiences in comparable fashion.

The relations of domination and subordination established in society situate groups in a hierarchical way, according to different social divisions. (Razack, 1998) suggests that we adopt the following approach to mediate the multiplicity and ever changing identities of women with the necessity of taking political action to change their world:

While I have relied on post-modern theories for understanding the construction of subjectivity, I tried to keep a modernist eye on domination. Who is dominating whom is not a question I reply to with the answer that we are all simultaneously dominant and subordinate. While we are all simultaneously dominant and subordinate, and I have varying degrees of privilege and penalty, this insight is not the most relevant when we are seeking to end specific hierarchies at specific site (p.161).
This research assumes the multiple nature of subjectivity, and attends to the complex ways in which we construct meaning. At the same time, I take the position that there are power relations operating in the world which dramatically affect people who are in a subordinate position.

The discussion of gender from different feminist perspectives illustrates well how diverse women’s condition can be, and sometimes even contradictory. For instance, feminists who conceptualize the historical and contemporary circumstances of Black women and other women of color reject the universality of central categories, such as the subordinate status of women as mothers, wife and workers, as they are seen by white feminist analysts. Black feminists argue that the family is commonly experienced by them as the least oppressive institution, functioning more as a shelter of protection and resistance, and offering opportunities for egalitarian relations between minority women and men that are denied in dominant or main-stream societal institutions (Davis, 1983; Jones, 1985). Black feminists also state that they are not commonly dependent financially on male wage earners. The rate of labour force participation has been generally higher for Black and minority women than for their white counterpart in Canada and the USA. Furthermore, Black women have more often the sole responsibility of earning an income and supporting dependants than have white women (Bruegel, 1989; King, 1988; Miles, 1984; Stasiulis, 1990).

A final example of oppression analyzed by women of color is related to state regulations. For instance, the racially restrictive immigration and refugee system in Canada affects not only who is accepted to this country and who is not, but also discriminates on the basis of culture, class and gender. The system is defined and operated from a white, middle class, Western worldview position (CCR, 1996; Ng, 1997; Razack, 1998; Stasiulis, 1990). A good illustration of this position is how official ignorance of the functioning of diverse forms of kinship and household structure in different cultures often leads to immigration decisions that result in the separation and eventual destruction of migrant families.
Conclusion

The above literature review has attempted to highlight and examine concepts that are central to the analysis of narratives of refugee women living in exile. The major approaches in analyzing these narratives, as indicated in the review, are based on issues that have emerged from the debate related to nation and gender.

Regarding the discussion of nation, which involves also a review of nation-state, national identity, exile and diaspora, three concepts have emerged as having particular relevance to this study. These are the role of language, the role of nation-states in shaping people’s lives, and nation as an object of minority people’s performative discourses, which tend to challenge those who attempt to forge a sociological solidity out of a nation.

Respecting gender, the review focused first on identity in relation to race, ethnicity, and social class, and their ideological forms as expressed in the practice of racism, ethnicism and classism. In relation to the specific debate on gender and what theoretical approaches seem most appropriate to the analysis of the narratives of women refugees, a critical review of this literature indicates the importance of taking into account the new insights provided by post-modernism and post-structuralism feminist perspective. This approach provides an understanding of the individual’s sense of self, not as naturally given but as socially and historically constructed. To analyze how women make sense of their lives, in their telling, is to look at the complex ways they negotiate meanings. At the same time, what should not be lost sight of is the necessity to understand the position of refugee women in the context of the system of power relations in the world and how it operates.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND MEANS
HABLANDO DEL METODO

Overview

This qualitative study deals with the lived experiences of ten Chilean women exiles as constructed by them in research interviews. My interpretation and reflections of these interviews are situated in my dual roles as researcher and research subject, I am a Chilean exiled woman. I am particularly interested in what specific meanings women living in exile and post-exile give to their situation, providing a woman’s perspective on the nation as a major division of space that creates the refugee condition. The sense they make of their experience, what they remember and their hopes and dreams are intricately related to my own experience, memories, hopes and dreams. This makes it possible to build on an auto-ethnographic study.

I regard women’s lived experiences shared with me through their narratives as an interpretative reality, relying on selective memory of events that took place many years ago. My own role in this study is reflective, going beyond merely recounting women’s interpretation of their experiences. I consider the physical, social, political and historical conditions in which their stories were lived and in which they are being told. This serves as context for a more in-depth analysis and my interpretation of their stories. Thus I will take a certain narrative passage and analyze its statement in view of the narrator’s living conditions at the time of the event, her social class and gender, her political affiliation and sympathies, and so on. It is quite apparent that conditions have changed significantly since we left Chile in the early 1970’s just as Canada has changed, with both countries caught up, though differently situated, in worldwide globalizing trends. These changes have come to challenge traditional notions and feelings about space, place, and belongingness.

The analytical approach used in this study attempts to show how women provide a very different perspective on their situation as refugees and exiles than the one generally understood. The underlying assumption of my study is that identities are
constructed in society within systems of classification of people that convey the particular values and views of hegemonic groups. I question prevailing dominant views on refugees, nation, nationality, women and Latin Americans in the sense that they tend either to silence or simplify what really are complex phenomena. The stories of Chilean women living in post-exile are rich with meanings, going well beyond the common romanticized stereotype or nostalgic remembering. In my attempt to give insights about their location I look at how they construct the major events of their life, and how in their stories the 'other' and 'us', and 'our place’ and ‘other people’s place’ are constituted.

**The Role of Subjectivity**

A characteristic feature of the interpretative method of research used in this study is its subjectivity. The approach contrasts sharply with the more classical tradition represented by the positivist school of social science, which regards neutrality, disinterest and objectivity of the researcher as absolutely essential to its validity. The researcher in that tradition is supposed to report accurately and truthfully about the existing world, taking careful measures not to have the story contaminated by the researcher’s personal history or ‘body’.

In their reliance on rationalistic structures and preoccupation with objectivity positivist researchers have ignored the role and influence of their own subjectivity in the production of knowledge, leaving unexplored different forms of dominance and oppression. Many scholars analyzing diverse forms of subordinate positions have called attention to this shortcoming of positivism, expressing concerns about the connection between the rationalistic structure of mainstream scientific knowledge and the male, white middle class of Western culture (Haraway, 1991; Millet, 1971; Said, 1979; Said, 1983).

---

10 The term ‘body’ as used in this research refers not to the universal category of body but to the existence of actual physical bodies. Body differences in terms of color, language, age, able/disabled, and geographical location in the world prevent me from looking at the stories of these women from a universal view on refugee women. My own body with its characteristics gives a particular, as well as limited, understanding of the stories I analyze. The body is always present and can never be absent as objects can. ‘Yet it is not present to me as are my thoughts, as a continuous flow of consciousness’ (O'Neill, 1989, p. 14).
Even today, while our sensitivity to the influence of social and political forces on science has grown considerably, there continues to be a strong urge in the social sciences towards the confinable, rational, objective, revelatory statement about human society (Millen, 1990 p.57). There still exists a belief among many that there is a fixed and absolute truth to be arrived at through rigorous adherence to the positivist paradigm of research.

Some scholars (Crosby, 1992; Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1986; Hawkesworth, 1989; Keller, 1985) have pointed out that social scientists for a long time were oblivious to the fact that white middle class men produced much of our scientific knowledge, and that such knowledge evolved under the formative influence of a particular kind of masculinity. The ideal scientific personality, in this traditional view, is to possess certain qualities - such as rationality, objectivity and detachment - that have been culturally valued as masculine. A large body of feminist research literature critiques androcentrism, ethnocentrism, cause-effect signification and pretensions to objectivity and neutrality in the process of arriving at truth. (See for instance such collections as Gluck & Patai, 1991; and Buttler & Scott, 1992).

I felt it necessary to call attention to this debate about positivism and objectivity due to my own position as researcher and my close relationship to the 'subjects' of this study. In fact, I am one of the subjects. My argument is that my own lived experience as a woman in exile from Chile and the inevitable subjectivity entering into the analysis of the other ten women make this study no less scientific. As implied above, much social science knowledge up until the present has been produced in and through gender association of men, and specifically white European men. This is also the case with refugee studies (Aga-Khan & Bin-Talal, 1986; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Stein, 1981). Using 'refugees' as a global category for analysis it would be difficult to differentiate between people coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds, or to show variation within each group in terms of gender, class, race, age, personal biography and the like. In arriving at a more complete and balanced understanding of the situation of refugees and exiles it is imperative to undertake research that takes into account all these factors. The present study focuses on Chilean women who are 'not-quite white' originating from the Third World.
In taking this position I contest the view that the reality of women in exile can be known as something 'out there', separate from the subject who is the knower. There is no neutral knower discovering the objective world, as feminists such as Haraway (1991) and D. Smith (1987) have demonstrated. I adhere to the view that our gender, class and race (among other categories) shape what we see and how we see it. In my person and experience I combine the reality of women in exile, being the knower as well as the producer of knowledge reflecting on that reality. My insights about women in exile derive from my particular social location. I am a middle class woman from Chile, a Third World country, having lived in exile and now in post-exile in Canada since 1974. I am also heterosexual and a graduate student. I am both marginal and centered, as are the other women in the study.

Like Foucault (1982) I operate on the assumption that knowledge production is related to a 'subject'\textsuperscript{11} constituted through 'discourses'\textsuperscript{12} that produce and reproduce power relationships in society. When examining women's narratives I consider how dominant discourses on the subject frame a woman's particular perspective.

I contest the 'universal claims' of scientific research based on criteria of objectivity and rationality, which have kept in place unexamined forms of dominance and oppression that are central to my concerns about women in exile. While I believe in knowledge I also believe it to be situated and therefore partial. My attempt in this research is to give 'voice'\textsuperscript{13} to formerly ignored subjects and to challenge the prevailing dominant discourses about women in exile and national identity. It is precisely from the

\textsuperscript{11} Foucault attaches two meanings to the term subject, i.e. subject to someone else by control and dependence, and subject to one's own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault, 1982).

\textsuperscript{12} Discourse is defined here as the linguistic and non-linguistic practices that carry and confer meaning in a field characterized by the play of power relationships (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). Of course, not all discourses carry the same weight and this is the problem of hegemony.

\textsuperscript{13} Terms such as 'voice', 'women's language' or 'words' are routinely used not only to designate everyday talk, but also much more broadly to denote the public expression of a particular perspective on self and social life. It is the effort of representing one's own experience rather than accepting representations of those in power. Silence, on the other
vantage point of their location as exiled women having a diasporic identity, and as a minority in Canadian society placed in a subordinate position, that their reflections on central narratives such as ‘nation’ and ‘refugee women’ are so important.

Narrative and reflections call for an informal, relatively unstructured and open-ended interview in which women can share their lived experiences. This study departs from the notion of the authentic refugee woman constructed by hegemonic voices. Instead, I focus my study on the particularities of the stories of a group of women coming from Chile, acknowledging the diversity in lived experiences and perspectives. The relevance of the interpretive method used in this study and its emphasis on subjectivity derive from my critique of the positivist paradigm that has dominated so much of traditional and mainstream research, and the resulting views permeating the dominant discourse on refugees. There is an excess of images and texts in the general literature on refugees and exiles in which gender remains a neutral or obscure factor. Moreover, the male gender is implicitly used as the norm in international definitions, conventions and treatment of refugees by immigration personnel. Other texts imply that refugees in their very location, originating from Third World countries, regardless of their social status and personal achievements back home, are inferior to First World people (for critiques, see Indra, 1987; Moussa, 1993; Razack, 1998). By taking a more subjective research approach I hope my study will correct some of these shortcomings and biases. In the following pages I will provide more detail on the approach used.

**Experience as the Basis of Knowing**

This study analyzes women’s narratives of lived experiences. It is therefore important to consider whether experience can serve as a legitimate basis for knowledge about refugee situations, and what are its epistemological limits. According to Collins’ *English Language Dictionary*, experience is “all the events, knowledge and feelings that make up an individual’s life or the character of a society.” Stated differently, it is “the state or process of feeling something or being affected by it” (Collins, 1987).

hand, is seen not only as the inability or reluctance to enter into conversational exchanges but also as a failure to produce one’s own separate, socially significant discourse.
Some feminists, inspired by Foucault's approach to history and the social, as well as by the critical approach of linguistic theorists, claim that treating experience as a foundation of knowledge is problematic and flawed. They argue that experience always comes to us mediated by its social and ideological constitution. People's experience is always socially located. And each social location that an individual occupies in society involves a struggle about the meaning of such a position. Joan Scott (1992 p.26) makes a related point when she argues that "it is not individuals who have the experience but subjects who are constituted through the experience." Experience is not immediate, true and authentic, "being there does not guarantee access to truth" (Britzman, 1995 p.236).

While these critiques of experience as a basis of knowledge are valuable, I agree with Rockhill's observation that personal experience is important as it is always there, framing what we do and do not see, and how we think about what we see (Rockhill, 1995).

What these scholars do convincingly argue is, that our capacity to know and represent our experiences is always partial and situated. Experience is not unproblematic, we only see it in a mediated way. This highlights the importance of the subjective dimension in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality. And subjective experience—since it is the way in which people make sense of their lives—is a necessary starting point for this study.

The stories I seek from women in exile serve to explain how their vision is structured, how the difference between their 'self' and the 'other' is established. Because subjects can have different positions according to socially constructed categories (like class, race, gender, nation, age and so on) their knowledge is situated. Experience is shaped by different relations established in society, such as the relations of production, patriarchy and white supremacy. In turn, the categories or concepts by and through which we structure experience are themselves historically and culturally variable (Flax, 1983 p.452).

It is particularly important for me to focus on women refugees and not on refugees in general. I assumed that in addition to the gender viewpoint that women bring to the study they also contribute with emotional knowledge to express dimensions of attachment or lack thereof to a nation that are rarely found in male accounts. Women experience the world differently because they are situated differently within it. They must
attend, for example, to social relationships, the well-being of the family and particularly take the responsibility of education and psychosocial well being of children (Smith, 1987, p. 19-23). In the performance of those roles women also experience emotions and sentiments, beyond rational dimensions. In that sense, they can throw light on experiences where feelings are important for understanding, such as attachments to a place, belongingness and home. Unfortunately, feelings are rarely validated as important parts of knowledge production. As Oakley (1981) stated, while everyone has feelings our society has tended to define cognitive, intellectual or rational dimensions of experience as superior to emotional or sentimental ones (p.40). Thus, when I examine how women relate to an 'imagined community' called nation, and how women construct the idea of home and belongingness in exile and post-exile, I expect to get a perspective that is often missing in mainstream thought. In the sex/gender system of a patriarchal society women have found themselves on the side of the oppressed, being invisible or simplified in hegemonic social constructions on 'nation'. The same situation occurs regarding social constructions on refugees and exiled people, which are shaped by dominant perspectives.

The fact that these women are refugees and not 'normal' immigrants also makes their move from one country to another a very different experience. Everyone who is in exile has deep feelings about the loss of their country and certain perceptions about the new place. Their condition calls for the need to construct a new place of belonging being conscious that they have crossed borders. Evidently, other migrant people have similar experiences and feelings, but as pointed out often in the literature, there are some key differences between those who move voluntarily to another country to build a better life and those who are literally pushed out of their own country by political circumstances (Aga-Khan & Bin-Talal, 1986; The-World-Guide, 1997/98).

The understanding of experience and knowledge as situated influenced my approach to the interviews. I decided to take a non-judgmental stance. I wanted to listen to the stories of these women not in terms of whether they are true or false, but to explore how their experience is constituted, how social discourses are interwoven into their account and give their stories a meaning that is convincing. In short, I wanted to hear women to talk about their experience, but listen with the awareness that their telling of the story is partial and shaped by discourses and histories prefiguring their representation.
Therefore, my analysis, in addition to representing what the women said, focuses on how the stories are told, and what factors structure the telling and the retelling (Fine, 1994). In this sense I try to show from where their experiences come, how they relate to material social practices, the power relations that structure them and the mediations of knowledge. Language or discourse therefore plays a central role.

Another mediation of experience in this case is public or community memory, or how the past is remembered through more or less official practices of communication. This mediation/resource of the experience is quite significant in the case of refugee women from Chile. Their stories suggest the important work they are doing constructing and maintaining what Foucault would have called ‘counter memories’ of the Canadian and Chilean nations and the meaning of exile. The mediation of discourses and language does not make less valid what women know from, and about the experience. Rather, it is to pay attention to how knowledge is organized, to know how a particular experience is embedded in social discourses and what social relations make possible the discursive practices.

The experience this research is focused on comes from the particular location of Chilean refugee women who are part of the middle class. From their particular and complex positions, being on the margins of society but also with some access to the ‘center’, they can provide interesting insights into how power and domination are organized and practiced in ways that insinuate themselves into the most personal aspects of life for those who are ‘othered’ by it.
Locating and Selecting Research Participants

My research group, consisting of the ten Chilean women in exile and myself currently living in post-exile in Canada, may appear as a homogeneous group. However, there are some marked differences among us in terms of personal biography. In some sense we constitute a group embodying\(^{14}\) a common story. However, the analysis must take into account the tensions that arise from our similarities and differences. I believe that by considering our similarities I can find some common construction of our situation as ‘borderland’ people, or people living in between two cultures. Our similarities, however, can only be understood by also acknowledging differences.

The women who were to become my research interviewees had to be like me, women who were adults when leaving Chile following the Pinochet coup in September 1973, living in exile and post-exile in Canada. At the time of the interviews, conducted over a period of 14 months from October 1997 to December 1998, these women would have been in Canada for at least two decades. I assumed that by then each of them would have passed the various steps involved in the adaptation/integration process and all that this entails. Roughly these steps include learning the language, finding gainful employment, knowing one’s way around the city and the new country, establishing a support network, and generally having been able to create a place for oneself in Canada. The research question that I was interested in was to examine with them the nature of that place they had come to occupy in Canada, and how they related to Chile as post-exiles.

The participants for the study were located by linking up with the Chilean network in Toronto. Since I was relatively new to this city, having first lived as exile in Montreal, I needed the assistance of key people in that network who could identify potential participants and refer them to me. One of the two who was instrumental in this task was employed by a municipal board of education within the Toronto region, and the other worked with the region’s Hispanic Development Council. They immediately lent

\(^{14}\) Embodiment is a social construction. Our bodies are socially constructed as women, as Chileans, as refugees. We share also to some extent the same race, class, and gender location.
their cooperation after I told them about the nature of the research and my search for women willing to be interviewed. I pointed out that the study called for middle class women who were articulate, well informed and aware of what was happening to them, willing and able to tell me their story in a spontaneous and intimate way.

I ended up with more referrals than I needed because of the interest the study seemed to have generated among members of the Chilean community. I chose participants on a first come basis. One was referred through another woman whom I had already agreed to include as an interviewee. Of those being approached only one decided not to go through with it since she began to realize that the subject was still too painful, 'reopening old wounds', as she told me. This doesn’t mean that the other women found it easy to speak about how and under what circumstances they ended up in Canada. Most of them cried at one point or another during the interview. Sometimes I cried with them as their stories brought back painful memories for me as well. I felt tremendously grateful to them for their generosity in time spent and their willingness to open up so much, and talk about their lived experiences and feelings. This generosity increased my commitment to do justice to their stories and complete this project. The final number of participants selected was ten. Since this was to be an in-depth, interpretative study rather than a quantitative one, the number of women to be interviewed could have been one, six or other. While the decision to include ten was somewhat arbitrary, it served to lend greater diversity and richness to the study.

In addition to these ten women I interviewed another five who had returned to Chile on one of my travels to Santiago. Initially, I intended to include them as well to compare their experience and views about nation and national identity with those who remained in Canada. However, it became clear to me that there were other factors in their personal biography besides national identity that led them to return. Furthermore, I learned that several among my ten selected women had traveled back and forth to Chile and that they would be able to address some of my research interests. Therefore, the recorded narratives of the five women who returned to Chile did not become part of the analysis that I have written up here. They did serve as background knowledge, though, increasing my understanding of the complexity of the notions of national identity and
refugee status. Their stories helped to enrich my interpretation of the narratives of the ten women whose accounts form the core of this thesis.

Prior to the research I did not know any of the interviewees directly. It would somehow have felt unnatural to interview friends and acquaintances, whose stories I would have known already. Besides, I thought it would be difficult to maintain my 'researcher role' with them. This role called for a certain distance that would allow me to pose questions that in an ordinary conversation could be seen as probing too much. It seems to me that the distance, provided by the fact that we were desconocidas (i.e. not known to each other before the interview), made it possible for them to construct their stories for me anew. On the other hand, knowing that we shared the same 'Chilean experience', there seemed to exist a tacit understanding between them and me, a mutual comprehension of our cultural background, as well as a common experience of being forced to leave the country we loved, and relocate in Canada. The fact that they knew that I was one of them put them at ease. It facilitated their sharing of feelings and views on Canada and Chile that they might not as easily have shared with others.

Clearly, we shared the feeling of being part of the same national group in exile, and we had similar understandings of Chilean history. However, Chileans in exile are not a homogeneous group. They are divided by interests and diverse political strategies connected with Chile. Women form an integral part of those divisions. Because of this divisive reality within the Chilean community I was struck by their willingness to collaborate in the study without questioning me on my affiliation with one or other political group.

What may have influenced this cooperative attitude was the fact that I was recommended by two prestigious members of the Chilean community in Toronto. Another factor may be that I had not lived long enough in Toronto to be caught up in the fierce debates that were raging during the 1970's and 1980's about how to reestablish democracy in Chile. I used to have a closer relationship with Chileans in Montreal. There it would perhaps have been more difficult for me to access subjects from different groups, having been marked by my position in 'Chilean politics.' The timing of the research, carried out at the end of the 1990's, may also be a factor since political differences among us are now less pronounced.
The Auto-Ethnographic Dimension

As indicated above, it is I, the researcher, who decides what is important to emphasize in the woman's account of her life history. These decisions are, of course, subjective but not quite arbitrary. I explicitly include part of my autobiography, which grounds the study in my own person along with the other ten women. Consequently, in retelling women's narratives, my particular perspective comes to play a significant role. This is just because I decide what is included or not and how to make sense of what the women told me. This approach to research shares features of what many authors call auto-ethnography, which I will now discuss.

The auto-ethnographic approach blurs the boundaries between ethnography and autobiography as each discipline concerns itself with how the self is produced in a narrative. In auto-ethnographically-based writings, authors have departed from the tradition of conventional autobiography. Instead of trying to show the 'real' experiences of their own life these authors use their experience to see how they - women in our case - are constituted as subjects. From a marginalised position they try to reflect, for example, on how race, heterosexuality and class identities have been lived. Examples of this kind of narrative can be found in the writings of several authors (Anzaldua, 1987; Lorde, 1988; Moraga, 1983; Steedman, 1987).

Cherry Moraga, for instance, illuminates the distortion in social discourse that shaped her identity as a Chicano woman. She was able to unmask regulatory forces at play in disciplining her body that did not correspond to her own perceived reality. While exploring her experiential history of shifting across her racial identities, she became aware of how the Anglo in her disappeared and the Chicano was reasserted; or when she explored gender identities, she observed the shifting from lesbian girl/woman into a heterosexual woman. Autobiography in this case is a reflection of how the body is

---

15 I am in debt to Kathleen Rockhill (one of my major research advisors) for my understanding of auto-ethnography, which is part of the research strategy I use in this study.
defined in a particular place and time in history, and how the ‘self’ is constituted through this interplay.

This autobiographical approach, where the culture of the writer is textualized and where the researcher and researched are the same, has been called auto-ethnography (Van-Maanen, 1995). In my case the object of analysis is not only the researcher but also others, sharing similar social locations, who contribute with their narratives. What is central in the analysis is the use of narrative, examining how the self is produced and how the subject reproduces social regulation. In her auto-ethnography, Mendoza (1996) studies her own process of becoming feminist, along with others while participating in the making of the Honduran feminist movement. She shows how the researcher involved in a social movement can be an object of investigation, as well as the other participants in the movement. By moving constantly back and forth from individual accounts, including her own to community context - teasing a story through sameness and differences - she bring a richness to her analysis that I wanted to captivate as well in this research.

After looking at how women tell their stories I provide descriptions and interpretations to give some new insights to keep the conversation going. Ultimately, ‘it is a conversation through which we can come to know ourselves and others and the position from which we speak’ (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992 p.6). The analysis of my experience, as well as that of the other women, goes back and forth between a passionate insider’s perspective and an outsider’s, who tries to be detached and empathetic, managing multiple selves and roles, even when I am reflecting on my own experience.

The Interview

Following the first telephone conversation with the woman referred to me, we arranged to meet at her home or any place that was convenient for both of us. In our first meeting together I again explained the study and my interest in the topic and she was asked to sign a consent letter that detailed what the study was about. The letter would give me the permission to use her story in my further research.

The interview appeared to me to be the right medium to problematize the subject position of a refugee woman. It had the advantage of being able to explore the woman’s
subjective experience in an informal, dynamic and interactive setting, with me as the interviewer who guided the process. In response to my opening question about how she grew up in Chile and came to live in Canada, she essentially related her autobiography, an account of her life. My role was to keep the subject visible, away from generalizations and theoretical orientations, so that I could problematize the discourses that regulate the story from the subject’s position. Specificity and detail in the narrative were considered the important criteria that guided me in my interventions during the interview.

Of course, the women were already familiar with what I was looking for from a letter of introduction passed on to them by one of my two major contact persons. Briefly, the letter asked for Chilean women willing to share their life story with me. I indicated that I wanted to know about their experience of growing up and living in one country, and about having to move as refugees to another country, Canada, where they had lived for more than two decades.

Specifically, I was interested in three areas. First, I wanted to find out how women understand and construct the concept of ‘nation’, usually defined from a male perspective. I hoped that their life histories would allow me to analyze the inter-textuality of their narratives. I wanted to look at the way the discourses of their daily life are interconnected with other discourses and institutions, such as family, religion, political parties and places that are part of a nation-state such as Chile and Canada. In this way I hoped to identify continuities and discontinuities between their knowledge and the dominant ones derived from the social context.

Secondly, I wanted to explore the social location that these women as refugees occupy living on the margins of two countries. Here I rely on the metaphor of ‘crossing borders’ from authors such as Anzaldúa (1987). How do these women see themselves as refugees, as exiles, or as post-exiles? How does their particular experience of ‘crossing borders’ become narratively constituted, or how is it produced and reproduced in the context of the various identities that can be ascribed to them? And how do they keep in tact their integrity with shifting and multiple identities?

Thirdly, I needed to find out about women’s self-representation. Being marked either by gender, nationality or other location, how do these women struggle against
being pigeonholed into any particular category and claim themselves as unified and whole subjects?

At first, I had wanted the women to start telling me their story from the moment they tried to get out of Chile. But after my first interview I decided to take a more unstructured approach letting, them know they could tell their story in any way they wished. Most seemed to feel comfortable in sharing their life history in a chronological order. This turned out to be beneficial for me as well, since I could understand better the places and people they talked about when first referring to their past history of childhood and adolescence.

The tape-recorded interviews must be seen as a point of intersection of two subjectivities – that of the women and mine – their memories and my questions, their hesitations and my encouraging words or gestures, their sense of self and my own. No longer can we hold on the belief that the story has some transparency that reproduces the reality ‘behind it’. A number of scholars have recognized that the interview situation depends on a certain type of interaction, and the reading of it must consider the intertextuality derived from this interaction (Fine, 1994; Oakley, 1981; Patai, 1988; Van-Maanen, 1995).

The interview was conducted almost like a dialogue, with me assuming the role of an active listener, interjecting with questions for elaboration or with personal comments establishing connections with my own history. After all, I was not a complete stranger to the experiences of these women. I am part of that group of Chileans who arrived in Canada after the military regime began to terrorize the population. Having said this, the two of us engaged in the interview were not equal participants in the dialogue. The woman being interviewed was aware that as the researcher I have the final say over its conduct and interpretation. I was perceived as the person who had a particular agenda, deciding what to use and not to use from the narrative. This was evident from comments made frequently during the interview by women saying, for instance, “I don’t know if this interests you?” After I gave the positive signal, the woman in question would usually feel encouraged and continue telling me about an experience that she considered important.
One of the women asked me after completion of the interview for a copy of the recording tape, which I was happy to supply, just as I was willing to do this for any of the other women who might be interested. She called me shortly afterwards thanking me for my gesture. What seemed to be the issue for her was that she expressed doubts about the usefulness of her life history for the purpose of my study. She felt it was not structured enough. When I indicated to the contrary, that her story interested me very much, she offered to help me by elaborating on it in an additional session.

The women’s concern about what would be included and excluded from their narrative is real and legitimate. But, being accountable to my research plan and with the help of the taped sessions, I hoped that these women’s own construction of their life history would emerge and somehow be communicated to the reader of this research record. Of course, I was well aware that the stories collected by me were themselves not pristine or unchanging. The story of the same life history may well have been different when told to another person, and in another situation and moment. The recovering of the past is not fixed and absolute, it is rather an interpretation. Some researchers have pointed out that the interviewee becomes a storyteller and, therefore, frames the story for her own purposes (Personal-Narratives-Group, 1989). While this may be regarded by others as a limitation in research based on life histories, I would argue with Moussa (1993, p.24) that what is remembered is important knowledge about people’s identity precisely because it is remembered.

**Interpreting Data**

I reiterate that the primary data for my work are recorded life histories collected through interviews. These stories derive from the particular context of women living in exile and post-exile. The meanings given to the stories are also occasioned by the particular relationship between the researcher and the researched. Therefore, the nature of this context and my understanding of the nature of the research relationship are important data as well. There are no ‘separate’ sets of data, rather, the data intersect and overlap.

The data derived from the interviews are complemented by those coming from fiction and non-fiction writers and filmmakers about Chileans in exile and other Latin

Each of the life stories were taped and transcribed in Spanish by me almost word for word. In this task I tried to be as accurate as possible. However, the actual form in which the story appeared on paper – the terminology, the formation of sentences and paragraphs, the punctuation and so on - depended much on my hearing well and understanding correctly the speech and use of language. The fact that the interview was held in Spanish and my first hand knowledge of the Chilean context minimized misunderstanding and error.

I worked with the transcribed material, reading and rereading the stories for hermeneutic analysis. As a result different themes began to emerge, linked with particular moments of the lives of these women. Thus their life in Chile coincides with their childhood, adolescence and young adulthood up to their early or mid twenties. Every one of them got involved one way or another with the political project referred to as the ‘Chilean Road to Socialism’ that culminated in the election of Salvador Allende as President in 1970.

Another distinguishing moment is the political turmoil that followed Allende’s election, with determined efforts by the Chilean ‘Right’ (with unofficial support from the American Central Intelligence Agency) to undermine and block the democratic process that resulted in the military coup in 1973 and the persecution that followed. Some of my interviewees told their stories focussing very much on events related to this struggle and their move out of the country as refugees, crossing borders.

Arrival in Canada and living in this country becomes the third moment of importance. I wanted the women to talk about these two places – Chile and Canada – two nation states between which most of the women moved back and forth in order to survive or in search of home, a place to belong. Places and crossing borders acquired meaning in their stories, as they tried to make sense of their life history.

Besides women’s lived experience in Chile, in Canada and in crossing borders, I found a number of other themes emerging that criss-crossed these three moments. The principal ones were family and friendship, encounters with Canadian Immigration and Manpower officials, dealing with English as a second language, the workplace and career
development, engagement with political parties and Chilean community organizations in Canada. As part of my analysis I decided to look closer at how these themes were constituted in their stories, focussing particularly on the first three.

Another important theme that surfaced from doing repeated readings of the written stories of these women was their reaction to social labels such as: 'Latin American', 'Chilean', 'Canadian', 'woman refugee', 'immigrant woman', and 'single woman' or 'married woman'. All these themes are intertwined in important social narratives on refugees, gender, family regulation, and national identity. My analysis aims to make explicit the continuities and discontinuities present in women's narratives with respect to the prevailing discourses in Chile and in Canada.

In essence my analysis involved 'interpreting' the stories obtained through the interviews and look at multiple meanings implicit in the text. The problem with dominant discourses is that they tend to classify people in dichotomous categories such as Chilean and Canadian, black-white, men-women, married-single, citizen-refugee woman, us-them. This form of dualism is very much ingrained in our way of thinking, reproducing a restrictive framework that holds identities in place. By defining and presenting people in terms of stable polarities, dominant discourses have disregarded all kinds of 'in between' possibilities that need to be examined.

In my analysis I take a text and look at how dominant discourses and alternative ones provide often very different, sometimes opposing interpretations. I start from the assumption that there are ways of interpreting the reality of women in exile that go beyond the dichotomized world as presented in dominant discourses. In this effort I needed to turn my attention at times to the specific language used, and consider how it may engender certain meanings and suppress others; or how the stories as constructed point to other texts, that is to their inter-textuality.

---

16 Interpretation, in contrast to deconstruction 'uncovers' meanings, which the speaker or writer intended but did not articulate.
17 Considering language as a discourse, it operates in a larger sense as a relational meaning-maker. As Spivak points out, the speaker is subjected to language rather than being the master of it, "a mother tongue is something that has a history before we were born. ...We are inserted to it, and, without intent we 'make it our own'". In
It was not just me who was involved in this process. The women I interviewed took part as well. When referring to questions of their identity they would comment on how the meaning of being Chilean, for example, was constantly changing, particularly when moving from one social context to another. Their narratives also indicated how they struggled with the dominant discourses that attempt to define them in ways that they often don't agree with. This struggle was evidenced in the momentary lapses interrupting the flow and coherence of the story. Sometimes it was just by a gesture, a moment of silence, or a smile. At other points it was through a clear statement that showed they were aware, and often in disagreement, with the dominant discourse on the subject matter. Even though I focussed usually on what women said, now and then I considered what was not said that would give the story a very different meaning.

My analysis did not simply consist of combining and recombining the collected data from the women's interviews using the three major moments – Chile, Canada, and crossing borders – as anchor points. All the strategies of reading that I have described were useful to see how belonging to a place, identities and identifications are played out in women's stories. I also drew on my own experience about these three major moments in our lives as women in exile to determine which data is relevant. In addition, I was guided by my research questions and my desire to build on a representation of the location of women in exile that departs from the dominant one.

My analysis was also influenced by strategies proposed by Wetherell and Potter (1992). I share with them the idea that discourse is constituted by both social and psychological processes. For these authors subjectivity, individuality, social groups and social categories are constructed, defined and articulated through discourse. Thus, when reading the narratives I attempted to understand how women express their attachments and give meaning to their constructed social location and how they play out categories and systems of classification that are operative in society.

Material, economic and political conditions are forces in addition to social discourses, which affect people's lives, influencing their narratives and representations of lived experiences. My particular interest is to make sense of the representations made by
women in exile, placed most often in subordinate position in the material, economic and political sense. Being critical of the way power is exercised in society, I find it necessary to give voice to these women and claim other versions that differ from the general understanding of what is a woman in exile, what is family or nation.

Concretely, I take the concept of nation and examine – from the perspective of social discourses and social conditions – how we women in exile have acted out our identity with nation (nationhood) in particular situations or moments. For instance what does nation mean when participating in the Socialist project of the early 1970’s in Chile, when crossing borders, and when trying to settle in the new country? How do the women in their stories speak about their attachment to places and people? And through what discourses do they construct their location as ‘borderland’ people in relation to both countries?

The notion of interpretative repertoire offered by Wetherell and Potter (1992 p.51) has been very useful for my analysis. They define it as broadly discernible clusters of terms that constitute in themselves systems of signification. Their analysis focuses on what is achieved in the manufactured versions of actions, self and social structures. To understand what is achieved they propose to look at where and in what context a construction is applied. For example, in my analysis I identify at least two versions of the impact of having to speak English with a Spanish accent. For one of the women (Julia) it clearly is a source of devaluation and suffering. For another woman (Isabel) it is not a problem at all, she sees it as a challenge. Looking closer at their situations, their separate versions could be explained by two distinct contexts in which each was pursuing very different objectives. It is not that the respondents could not reconcile these two constructions, as I show in my analysis, but they were doing different sorts of work with these two meanings about English in their discourse.

This kind of analysis provides important understanding on how subjects and objects are manufactured in discourses. As these authors point out, people in everyday conversation have access to a compendium of different interpretative resources which they blend together to produce a wide variety of different effects. To explore everyday
talk they propose to look at what they call the rhetorical construction. Text and talk are organized in specific ways that make a particular reality appear solid, factual and stable. These authors proposed to look at the language in use, what is achieved by that use and the nature of the interpretative resources that allow that achievement. In my analysis, for instance, I look at the use of ‘cultural repertoires’ that have something of the status of socially accepted clichés, acting as common places, or something taken for granted. They appear self-evident to those who share the same culture and, therefore, do not require any further explanation. Wetherell and Potter’s contribution to my research is that they propose that discourse is constituted by words and expressions organized through a range of devices and techniques that the speaker uses to give solidity to her version of events. It seems unlikely that I could have understood these complicated patterns of social practices by using other research strategies or techniques, such as identifying particular sets of words and then coding and counting them.

In summary, my analysis is informed by theoretical positions that understand that knowledge is produced by situated subjects, who themselves are affected by regulatory discourses and practices. Secondly, my analysis is based on women’s narratives, as well as my own experience. And thirdly, the research method used is interpretative. With regard to women’s identity and identification, as they appear in the narratives, I examine these in terms of tensions that exist between fixed categories prevalent in dominant discourses, and the multiplicity and changes of the self.
CHAPTER 4

WHO ARE THE REFUGEES?¹⁸
QUIENES SON ELLAS

The stories presented below are extracts from taped interviews, held during the period from October 1997 until December 1998, with ten Chilean women. These women were part of a massive exodus of people who left Chile because of the military coup in 1973.

I tried to find out the sources and types of identification they had as women refugees with Chile and Canada, with each interview being developed around three key moments of their life history:
1. Their lives in Chile, from childhood to adulthood.
2. The circumstances that obliged them to leave Chile and the problems they experienced in crossing borders.
3. Their lives in Canada, from their arrival onwards.

Without much apparent interpretation, this chapter records the stories as presented by the women and summarized by me in brief extracts. Its aim is to provide the reader with a quick overview that highlights the lives of these ten women, who left Chile as refugees, moved to Canada as exiles, and decided to remain in this country as post-exiles. No deliberate attempt is made here to interpret the data. My analysis and interpretation of their narratives will be the focus of the three chapters that follow this one.

My approach used in the interviews, and discussed in greater detail in the preceding chapter on 'Method and Means', was mainly unstructured letting each woman tell her story in any way she wanted. My selection for this summary was guided principally by the interest of this research, and therefore in aspects of their stories that may suggest attachments to a place, space and home in interplay with their gender.

¹⁸ Names, places and other references appearing in the narratives of the ten women refugees have been changed to protect their anonymity.
My first encounter with Ana was rather casual. While sitting one day in the cafeteria of one of the libraries in North Toronto, reading over some research notes, I heard some people speaking in Spanish. Turning around in the direction from where the voices came, I noticed a middle-aged and a young woman who were discussing a book they carried in their hands. My interest increased when discovering that they were talking about *Paula*, the most recent publication at that time of the celebrated Chilean novelist Isabel Allende. Judging by their accent, I knew that they had to be Chileans, like me. I also was curious, wondering if the book they had in their possession might be the Spanish version I had been looking for but had not been able to find. Only the English version of the book was available here in Toronto.

As I approached them, asking about *Paula*, they told me the book in its Spanish version, had just arrived at the library. Our common interest led them to invite me to join them. From the first moment an immediate and open communication developed between Ana, the older of the two women, her daughter and myself. We learned that we were of the same group of Chileans who arrived in Canada after the military coup. Ana’s children like my own have all grown up in Canada and taken up university studies.

We continued our conversation for the remainder of Ana’s break from her office, a few blocks from the library. We talked of our lives here in Canada, since we arrived, what we are doing now, and shared our view on the current situation in Chile. Ana showed so much interest in the subject of my thesis that I decided to visit at her office and continue our acquaintance. She was very up-to-date on what was happening in Chile. One year after our first meeting I asked her to be one of the interviewees for my thesis. She readily agreed. We had three interview sessions of ninety minutes each.

Ana, born (1947) and raised in Chile, was 27 years old when she left her country in March 1974 with her husband and two very young children, a daughter of three and a son of two. A special program introduced by Immigration Canada allowed Ana’s family and other Chileans who were politically persecuted to enter Canada.
She grew up in Chile in a middle class family as the youngest of three siblings. While her father was employed as an administrative official, her mother worked as a dressmaker for people who formed part of Chile’s high society. The family experienced many economic problems on account of her father’s alcoholic problem, which made it necessary for her mother to work as well. “My mother was a hard worker and quite strict, being very Catholic. She raised us very much being guided by the ethical code typical of the middle class, a class that feels that one must follow all the rules, even though frequently the upper and lower class, for different reasons, do not”.

She first attended a school run by Catholic nuns. A university education with several years of study was out of the question, due to the family’s lack of money. Instead, Ana’s mother had her and her siblings take up some short-term training for a technical career, which in Ana’s case was secretarial. She also took an additional language course in English. “When I finished the school I had the crazy idea of studying law, but I even didn’t have the chance to make a decision about that because it would make me a financial burden for the family. Thus, I started searching for a job.” She found a job as secretary at an important government office in 1967. That particular time, when Ana was living with her parents, was marked by serious economic problems in the family, impacting her deeply. She began to dream about living in comfort and about having access to opportunities open to other members of the Chilean middle class with more money. Living under these circumstances she began to question her religion which favored charity over social justice. And at fifteen she declared herself an atheist.

This period as a young adult left an indelible mark on her that influenced much of her life that followed. She met her future husband, Juan, when starting her studies at the technical college. Juan was a militant member of the communist party and an activist in the student movement.

When he met me I wasn’t a person whom you could say was from the Left. He was four years older than I was; he came into my life as an activist on the take. It didn’t take him much to convince me of the correctness of the Leftist position, being myself only 17 years old. From that moment on we lived together and married in 1969. (…) I do not remember much of the first years of our married life. I do remember well though the marches I participated in as a pregnant woman with a big belly, and the birth of my children. It may sound absurd, but that which we were
experiencing made me feel was more important than having a child. Such was the mystique at that moment for me...and my children know that.

The political process Chile was undergoing from 1970 to 1973 was for Ana a privileged moment in her life.

We were in a thing that took hold of us all and lifted us up. We were living a dream, thinking that it was possible for the most dispossessed to have a place, and in fact during these three years people from the popular class had a place for the first time. But it turned out to be a short-lived illusion. The end for me was like having lost the greatest love of my life. I swear to you that for me seeing that process rudely interrupted by the military coup has left me with a greater pain than if I had lost a relative or some loved one. Because we thought, rationally or irrationally, that that process was more transcendental than whatever human relationship.

Ana talked at great length about her involvement in Chile's politics during the turbulent years since the second half of the sixties. She collaborated first in the political tasks her husband was carrying out, much of which focussed on the election of Leftist candidates. At one point she decided to become a militant herself. "When the government of Unidad Popular arrived I felt it necessary to become more militant, it was like saying here I am offering my services, count on me." She joined a different political party from her husband, "for no other reason than that I did not want to be in the same party as my husband." But Ana never assumed major responsibilities in her party. In fact, she was disappointed that the party did not have a clear position on how to face the difficulties of the moment, and often she felt manipulated.

Shortly after the military coup in September 1973, her husband was taken prisoner at his place of work. Ana, in turn, was fired from her job, together with hundreds of others, three months later. She began the search for her husband, going to different places. Eventually, she found out that he was being tortured mentally and threatened with death. After two months of such treatment he was let go. Juan and Ana decided to leave the country when they found out that several of their friends had been taken prisoner. Since they belonged to the same group of people they feared they would be targeted next. Some Canadian Oblate Fathers known to Juan and Ana advised them to apply for immigration at the Canadian Embassy. Two months later they arrived in Toronto.
I did not want to go, I felt like abandoning ship, an ignoble act. (...) I told myself though that, 'well, I have to concern myself with my husband's security... it is the duty of a wife'. I say this to you, something I have never told anyone else, that the security of Juan at that moment was not really my first concern. Interestingly enough, leaving my family did not distress me as much as leaving my country, and not being part of the 'shit' that the rest of the Chileans who stayed behind had to put up with. I felt deep down that my responsibility was not to leave. In the final analysis, I can tell you that I am at peace now with the decision taken at the time.

To come to Toronto was decided upon for them by the immigration officials, probably because Ana spoke English. She became the spokesperson of the family. And two months later was able to find a job as secretary. She moved up quickly, being promoted several times. Her husband, on the other hand, did not do so well, experiencing much difficulty with English. He finally landed a job in a factory, staying on for more than a year. This new situation, in which she received more social recognition and a higher income than her husband, created problems for their relationship.

Soon, Ana, too, began to involve herself in those activities that other Chileans in exile often were engaged in to combat the military dictatorship. In addition, she financially supported her husband when he withdrew from his factory job to start a specialized computer study program offered at one of the community colleges. Slowly, they were able to create a space for themselves in Toronto, with both ending up in good jobs and their children well adapted. They also developed friendship with a group of Chileans and several Canadian colleagues from work.

Nevertheless, in 1979 they decided to return to Chile. The dictatorship, which they thought would last for only one or two years, seemed to be never ending. By going back they believed they could work more effectively from within and contribute thereby more quickly to the fall of Pinochet. Also, their relatives were all living in Chile. Ana spoke about the nostalgia she felt while living in Canada, especially on Sundays.

I had this nostalgic feeling for years... on Sundays one had time to feel (...) Besides, Sundays for me had a strong family connotation because in Chile we used to spend Sundays together with other members of the family. Normally, we spent those days in the house of Juan's family.
Ana eventually returned to Chile with her two children, one year before her husband. She immediately found work as a bilingual secretary with a large mining company, being well paid and living in the house of her parents. Juan continued to work hard in Canada for one more year, trying to save as much money as possible. Ana found, upon her arrival in Chile, that her parents, already well advanced in age with a small pension, were facing much economic hardship, as did all members of both families. Her brother was unemployed like so many others. She felt she had to help out. But she lost after only a few weeks work, when her employer discovered that her husband was still listed by the secret police. The company did not trust her and they let her go. Ana did come across a new job but realized that because of their former political involvement she could not expect anything better. Things were even more difficult for her husband, who could not find anything at all. She spoke of how exhausting the struggle for survival became, not being able to engage in any political work in a police state, with people being misinformed and spied on all the time, and where it was so hard to develop any friendship because of fear and lack of trust.

With her husband unemployed and her salary being insufficient to support the family, they decided to return to Canada. From Canada they would be better able to help their family and relatives economically, and reintegrate in political activities in solidarity with Chile. They realized - through hard experience – that they were not able to do so in Chile. While she had to start all over again from zero, she is currently at the top of her career. “When I went up into the plane, even though I cried for leaving my parents and relatives, I felt a tremendous weight being lifted from my shoulders.”

**Tania**

I came to know about Tania through the help of various well-placed people in the Chilean community. In our first contact by telephone I told her about my thesis subject and search for Chilean women refugees who were prepared to share their life story with me. I explained I wanted to know what had been their experience of being part of a national community and of having had to leave and live in another country. Tania responded with great interest, agreeing to participate in the study. She also told me then
that she identified closely with what I was doing as she herself wished to enter a similar doctoral program.

Tania was born in 1950 and was raised in Chile, growing up with two brothers. The family lived on the coast in Viña del Mar until she reached the age of five, when they moved to Santiago. She attended a prestigious and expensive school run by English nuns who focus on educating children of the higher and comfortable classes in Chile. Even though her parents found themselves in a precarious economic situation, she was able to attend on account of a scholarship received from the college, and because her mother and grandmother had been educated there as well.

But I had a difficult time when I reached my teenage years because I was the only one whose family did not have an auto nor a ‘hacienda’ in the country. My parents, therefore, transferred me to another college. I very much liked my secondary school experience with the Teresianas sisters.

She finished her secondary school in 1968 and entered the University of Chile, where she eventually received her degree in early childhood education in 1973. In the meantime she had been working for a public day care center that formed part of a settlement of homeless people who had invaded a piece of land outside Santiago. She started dating her future husband when she was fifteen. “We were very young, he was the only boy friend that I had. I was also his only girl friend. We courted each other for five years, then married in 1972 and soon after I got pregnant. Martin was born in April 1973.”

Tania and her husband, like many other young people during the early 1970’s, were politically active. Her own work as an early child educator included that of assisting the homeless people in drawing up a radical leftist oriented proposal. But Tania didn’t have any explicit political function like her husband: “I always played a much more secondary role than Juan. But I did participate. (...) He was brilliant, a natural leader. killed a few days into the coup.”

Everything changed for Tania on the day of the military coup, when her husband decided to join the resistance. Tania’s parents tried to dissuade him by offering him their help and making use of their contacts. “He told my papa ‘I prefer to die fighting than be buried like a rat’, and well, he left, he left. He did not tell me where to for security reasons. On the day of the 16th of September he was to meet with other people at 3
o'clock in the afternoon, he did not arrive. He was gone forever." She began the search for him and met a person who claimed to have seen him while being arrested by the police. Several reports seemed to confirm that he was dead and buried in a common grave. From then on she lived with the idea that those reports might be mistaken and that he was still alive: "Never did they allow me to see him. I tell you I doubted for years and years. I said well, for example, in films they show how much happens when people lose their memory, why can this not happen in real life? I don't know, even now I have doubts ... I know it can not be, but I am never hundred percent sure."

This experience had a decisive effect on Tania's future. She felt much anger, pain and a strong desire for justice. As she was unable to care for her baby alone and support herself economically at the same time, she moved in with her parents. The new management at the day care center decided to fire her from her job. They told her it would be a waste of her time to search for another job in the public sector, as she would not be offered employment there. Her chances to find something in the private sector were no better: "They asked for references, the usual criminal record, and they told me no, although they had accepted me before." From 1976 to 1978 she managed a day care center from the garage of her parents' home. With that income she was able to achieve independence from her parents and live on her own with her child. In 1978 her house began to be watched, her parents' telephone calls were being monitored, and even some of her friends in Paraguay were detained and interrogated with respect to her. At this point she felt she had to seek refuge.

Entering an embassy would be extremely difficult, as they were all under police vigilance. Fortunately, her papa knew the ambassador of Venezuela who was ready to help her. He made arrangements to receive her as a guest in his home, and gave her instructions on how to enter the embassy without being detained. Once inside she was interviewed by a high official of the United Nations and obtained the protection and documentation required to go to Venezuela.

She arrived in Caracas with her five-year-old son at the end of 1978 and stayed there until returning to Chile in 1981. She felt like a real stranger in Venezuela, knowing almost nobody and having little money. However, one Chilean family known to her parents took her in for the first few days, after which she met an acquaintance of this
family who offered her to look after his house while he was on vacation. Her son, Roberto, became sick, suffering from anxiety. Clearly, she lived a very difficult situation. Subsequently, her parents came to visit in January 1979 and brought along some money. This allowed them to stay for a month and cover expenses for Tania and Roberto, as well as their own. They then returned to Chile, taking Roberto, while Tania stayed behind in Caracas alone. She found a secretarial job with a construction company. There she also made friends, became accustomed to the new life around her and began to think of continuing to live abroad, including seeking admission to the University of Mexico. I no longer had any desire to return. But my papa, especially, found it hard to accept things. He told me we were all suffering so much by living apart and that now it was possible to come back, why did I not come? Furthermore, my son needed me, and well, with all of this I felt obliged to return, which I did. (...) In 1981 Chile experienced an economic ‘boom’. Just the same it cost me much effort to reintegrate there. I missed Venezuela very much, but realized I had to stay, well, little by little I got used to things again.

She remained in Chile from 1981 until 1987. Returning to her country of birth was above all a chance to meet the family, “we had always been very united and always kept up contact with everyone even when I was abroad.” At first she lived with her parents but was able to go on her own with her child later that year because of a small inheritance. It allowed her to buy a van and with it began to pick up and transport children to and from school. She also bought a small house in a working class neighborhood.

To assist her in carrying her expenses she rented out a room of her house to a young man who, without her knowing, turned out to be an active member of the resistance movement who had been involved in several assaults on the military. The militia entered her house by force, and took her along to be detained. They questioned her for two days, even though she did not know anything about him. They threatened her and finally let her go, but kept a close eye on her. This was the period when an attempt had been made on the life of Pinochet, leading to strong repressive measures all across the country.

I realized that wherever I was going they were following me, the telephone was being checked all the time, and thereby was putting
everyone at risk. I could no longer visit many people because I knew they were checking up on me. At the Vicar’s office of the Catholic Church they had offered to get me out of the country (...). I was given two possibilities, Canada and Australia. All of us, including my brothers, thought that Canada would be easier and closer by.”

She arrived in Toronto on the 30th of April 1987 with her son, who then was fourteen. The Canadian government provided economic assistance, giving her a family allowance and a six months ESL (English as a Second Language) course. With the help of a Chilean, whom she knew from back home and who mastered the English language, she was able to go through all the official steps. This person became eventually also one of her best friends. After a few years she had developed quite a network of friends, especially with Chileans and Argentineans. “When one arrives here one immediately feels attracted to someone who is from one’s own country in the sense that you have so much in common, things that one knows and understands about other persons.”

She took a writing course, the Toefel English Language Test, and afterwards entered McMaster University in Hamilton, where she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in social work. This was followed by a Master degree from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, finishing in 1996. Her wish is to pursue doctoral studies, “to do two things, one to continue working as a community social worker and also be able to teach at the university. I wish to do both things in order to keep both my feet on the ground. But with my many years of studying I accumulated a large debt, having had to declare bankruptcy. Now I have to find work.”

Her son finished his secondary school here in Canada and decided to go back to Chile, where he continues to live with his grandparents, counting on the help from both sides of the family who are protecting and caring for him. Tania herself feels well in Canada and does not think of returning to Chile.

Here I feel free, I feel free in spite of everything. I can do more things. I can live my life more like I want. Of course, I miss my family, but I can do many things I can’t do in Chile. Here, I truly feel free. Nobody is going to follow me. I can say what I want, nobody is going to have problems with what I say or where I am going.... My parents agree completely with me. They know that I feel good here, therefore they want me to continue here.
Over the years she has learned about other cultures and also had come to know about racism. She herself experienced discrimination because of her way of speaking English. But she has taken up the struggle against racism as a personal one, “that is what happens to me, but it happens to many people, if we remain quiet the public may never learn about the damage done by racism”.

**Emma**

When I first met Emma, she had just returned from Chile after trying to live there for five years. She showed a strong desire at our first and unexpected encounter in the street to tell me all about her experiences, but appeared also very tired. For this reason, but above all because I did not have a tape recorder with me, I asked her to hold on to her story until we could meet for a scheduled interview. I was concerned that she would not repeat her story if she was going to share it with me informally at this first meeting.

Emma is a single woman who has made many moves in her life, most of them on her own. She was born in 1945 and raised in Santa Barbara, a fishing village in the South of Chile, as the oldest and only girl in a family with four children. While her father, a sailor, spent most of his time away from home, it was her mother who looked after the family and earned some money by dressmaking. Her mother was also considered an important member of the village, as she was the only person who knew how to give injections to patients. Emma was apparently a great support to her mother: “We were very close. Since I was the oldest it was I with whom she conversed most of the time. Together we made decisions about what to do with my brothers and about money. I felt responsible for her and the house. This situation, I believe has influenced me for the rest of my life”.

She characterized her family as working class, “At the age of fourteen I was already clear about the distinction in social class and told my father that he was of the working class, but with a uniform.” She remembers that poverty in her village was widespread. “We were the family who could afford shoes. On many occasions though I felt like hiding my shoes before going to the school since I wanted to be the same as the others.”
In order for her to continue her primary school education she had to leave her village which offered only four grades. She traveled to a larger town that had a school with all six grades. And so she began her experience of living alone in lodgings far from home at the age of ten, visiting her family on weekends. Later on she had to move again to a more important town where she could pursue her secondary education, entering a public boarding school, a Lyceum. But entering the boarding school was not a simple task. Practically all people of her hometown needed to be mobilized to have Emma meet the many requirements set by the school. They helped in sewing all her clothes and nightwear. Emma’s mother had to buy a bed and other furniture on credit that met the norms of the school.

Emma has experienced many moves in her life, living in countless places. After high school she moved to Concepción, then to Santiago and from Chile to Mexico, from there to Canada, returning to Chile for a while, and now back again in Canada. She remembers each place well in terms of what she was doing or what was happening at the time. Her studies and work were responsible for the many moves made within Chile. At the age of 28 she had to leave the country for political reasons. Twenty years later she traveled again to Chile for family reasons, remaining for five years. After that she returned to Canada, where she thinks of staying permanently.

She entered the University of Concepción at the age of sixteen to start her studies in political and administrative sciences. While there, she had to contend with sexual harassment from one of her professors. She was able to impede his efforts of violating her, but not his harassment, which continued. "I abandoned my studies not knowing how to resolve the problem. There seemed to be no one I could confide in, even less so in my parents. Consequently I appeared to them as lazy." She decided to go to Santiago in search of work. As she told me: “My mother followed tradition in raising children and serving as a house wife. I wanted something more out of life. But I didn’t know yet in what sense.” She arrived in Santiago, wanting to stay with an aunt. “It was around 9 p.m. As I walked alone with my luggage in hand towards my aunt’s home, men kept following me. I almost died from fear as they approached me and called to me ‘my sweet one come with me’.”
Thanks to the contacts of her aunt she obtained employment with the Ministry of Economics and one year later she was offered a job at one of the universities of Santiago. She enjoyed her work there and stayed on until the coup d'état in 1973. She started working in the administration at the university, moving up rapidly and becoming manager in charge of a section of twelve employees at the age of 24. It made her feel in complete control of her life. In the meantime, she took studies in Business Administration for three years, being interrupted by the coup. She was also instrumental in getting two of her brothers into engineering at the same institution. Her active involvement in politics began in 1968 when she joined the Socialist Party.

I was always part of the rank and file, sometimes functioning as a delegate from my place of work, but never a leader. (...) I was motivated by a desire that there might be more social justice. In some small way I was involved in a movement aimed at achieving university reform. They were trying to set up university-related institutes for the common people where they could receive some technical training, and have culture reach them with theatre and music right in the very communities where people lived.

Emma eventually joined the Folklore Ballet group of the Technical University in the capacity as volunteer, raising funds to enable the ballet group to visit the most distant communities across Chile. “That was what I lived, to take fine arts to places where it never arrives.”

In that period she also developed an amorous relationship with a man with whom she would live for two years. Her real dream was to become a business manager, “we had to create a community with administrators who had a social conscience.”

There was total chaos in Santiago the day of the coup, with people acting spontaneously. Emma joined a group from the university who decided to go to one of the factories to assist the workers in their resistance activities. “I went as the only woman in the group, but we could not enter with the militia there.” They took her oldest brother prisoner and her father, a retired soldier, who was not a Leftist activist. Thus began her odyssey of trying to find them, so that they might not disappear. The police, in turn, was after her, visiting her house twice at times when she was not at home. She felt she could not seek asylum for herself until she was successful in locating her father and brother. They were set free after two months at which point she decided to leave the country,
urged on by her brother who had been tortured during his imprisonment. It was practically impossible to get into the embassies, because they were so well guarded by the Chilean militia. Fortunately, she knew about a network of people who helped those like her who were in danger. Thus, she was able to make contact with a woman willing to assist her. While this woman, a complete stranger to Emma and dressed up as a prostitute, was trying to distract the police at the front gate, Emma could scale the pointed fence of the Mexican Embassy at the back. “I was able to get in with my purse and my knees bleeding.” A committee made up of exiled Chileans questioned her there. “The interrogation my Chilean compatriots subjected me to was much harder than that of the Mexican authorities.” Apparently they were checking carefully for any possible infiltration attempted by the secret police.

She found herself among 300 persons enclosed in the Mexican Embassy, waiting for three months until finally ending up in Mexico. Since Mexico could not take all the Chileans who arrived there, Emma did not stay long. Several countries decided to open up their doors to the many exiles stranded in Mexico. “They offered us France, Holland, Canada, it sounded like an inventory list. It was difficult to make a decision on the basis of total ignorance of any of those countries.” She chose Canada, thinking that she could reach Chile from Canada by land. Also, English appeared to her easier to manage than any of the other languages. They assigned her to Toronto.

They gave me a colored piece of paper that said ‘Nationality: Stateless’. This made me feel quite content, after all it was better not to have a state than belonging to such a state as Chile… I was given a provisional status which they called ‘Ministerial Permit’, which was not a refugee status.

They then drove her to a hotel where other Chileans had been sent, “On the following morning I got up early to get in touch with other Chileans there. I felt integrated, protected from them on.”

It took some effort, apparently, to be accepted for one of the ESL courses. She did not qualify since she was not a ‘head of a family’. Her employment in Canada began with an insurance company, which offered her a job as a clerk. “At the end of the first month my supervisor said you are capable of much more and passed me onto the office responsible for data control where they put me in charge of 10 persons after two months.”
After a few years there she requested a temporary leave without pay to study to become a travel agent. Once she obtained her license she set up her own travel agency with a partner. In the meantime, she got to know a Greek refugee, exiled in Canada because of the military regime in his country, with whom she lived for ten years.

After several years in Canada as refugee, Emma learned in 1988 that she was on an official list of exiles that were permitted to enter Chile again.

It had taken two years after arriving in Canada before I began to unpack my luggage. I didn’t buy anything during that period. For six or seven long years did I have a suitcase ready to return home. At some point though I lost interest, and not because I was living with this Greek, but because I was losing connections with Chile. There were no more friends there, only my family.

Nevertheless, with permission to enter Chile, she decided to pay a visit to her family in 1989. During this visit she was being followed constantly and threatened, with her family very concerned about her safety. She made another trip in 1992. “I felt lost then with people speaking in symbols and ways that I did not understand. I felt I was on another planet, with people’s interests focussing on money, it was the beginning of what were called the Boom years.” She was back in Chile again for the funeral of her mother, who died in 1993. Seeing her father being left behind alone at the age of 80 she decided to keep him company. “I left briefly for Canada to close down my home. I gave away practically everything... the only thing that interested me was to do something for my father, to do something to keep the family together. I left Canada with two suitcases and three thousand dollars.”

Her hope was to accompany her father and together set up and manage a tourist center. Her plans, however, did not materialize, as her father treated her in a subordinate manner and did not confide in her. “He told me literally that I was a failure for not having a husband and a child.” Emma did not feel well among the Chileans there. She felt rejected at times, “They like you to be one of them and to think like them. I always had the sensation of not belonging there I felt I have to hide the fact that I had been living in Canada.” Her friends from before were all dispersed across the globe and she didn’t have new friends in Chile. She put it as follows,
I did not have the opportunity to get together with others who had returned from exile, and decided to go back to Canada. I realized that over there in Chile I have a blood related family, but here in Canada I have a large family which I formed myself and with whom I do not need to explain anything in order for us to understand each other... My human country consists of Veronica, Soledad, Teresa, I could name you others, most of them are Chilean by birth, but I also have a great Polish woman who came to see me in Chile when I was there with my father. With her I converse in English and in the language of friendship.

**Julia**

Julia was raised in Santiago by her aunt since her mother died when she was born in 1943. Her family consists of her aunt and daughter who have been like a mother and sister to her, and her aunt’s husband, an army official who in time was promoted to general. After finishing her high school education at a public Lyceum Julia entered the Pedagogical Institute at the University of Chile from which she graduated in 1965 with the title of Teacher in History. It was while she was a university student that she became politicized into leftist causes.

My family always felt that the worst that could happen was to enter the Pedagogical Institute. They considered it to be a hotbed of communists and where I had, in their opinion, become infected with a sort of cancer. Of course, in studying history it was difficult to avoid learning about what was happening in society, difficult not to question the injustices.

She got to know her future husband at the age of 16, marrying him later in 1967 and giving birth to two children, a boy in 1969 and a girl in 1971.

Julia was never an active member of any political party, although she clearly identified herself with the position of the Chilean Left. Her husband, on the other hand, was a militant member of the Communist Party.

I always believed that being actively involved in a political party meant that you had to give up your liberty which I could not accept ... I realized also that even if less effective I could still be supportive. All things considered I was not prepared yet to submit to a political party’s discipline and give up my right to question things.
She began her career as a history teacher at a private college attended by students from the upper class. During this time she was also actively supporting the teachers union and the JAP\textsuperscript{19}. The political struggle at the time was both exciting and frustrating for her.

I saw myself as a person who could contribute only in a very small way to a social system that would become more socialist, more democratic, and better. But with the system as it was a person like me made little difference... I was part of a relationship that just wasn’t fair. It was not right that when arriving home after a hard day’s work for both of us, that he could read the newspaper and that I was expected to busy myself with the children and other domestic tasks. After all, I was also interested in reading a paper, desiring very much as a teacher in history to keep informed about what was happening in the world”.

Maintaining contact with her family was difficult for Julia during this period since they criticized her strongly for her support of Allende’s government. “This affected me deeply... well, it was difficult to establish whom I was in my private life and in the public sphere.” The installation of the military regime left Julia and her husband without a job. Her husband was fired immediately and Julia lost her position at the end of the school year, in December 1973. She was able to obtain a half time contract at a school for secretaries to teach a general course on culture, but had to be constantly on guard in a system where everyone was being watched all the time. She acted as if she was in complete agreement with the actions of the military regime, thereby hoping to avoid any denunciations. Julia also worked as history teacher at a college that was willing to contract teachers who had been purged by the Right. There she found herself with students whose families were being intimidated and persecuted. “We were suffering, collectively, a terrible pain.”

Julia’s husband, being branded a Communist, was unable to find employment and her own earnings were insufficient to support the family. In addition to these difficulties she began to develop health problems. She was diagnosed with cervical cancer on which she was successfully operated. Even under these circumstances she still did not want to

\textsuperscript{19} Both the teacher’s union and the JAP were organizations headed by the Chilean Left. JAP, a neighborhood based organization, consisted of a board of supplies and pricing. Its objective was to stop black market operations and facilitate the distribution of merchandise in the barrios, during a period when the Right tried to frighten people by impeding the arrival of basic consumer goods to their communities.
leave the country. “I felt I had to stay, since it would be terrible for me if I left and later was able to return thanks to the efforts of those who had stayed behind.” It was her husband who took the decision to leave Chile and apply for entry into Canada. “I did not really have any arguments to change his decision and no energy to fight with him”.

Their application was processed through a program specially set up in that period for those coming from Chile. It still required them to pay their own airfare. They entered Canada in 1976.

When I arrived here I developed a terrible mouth disease (piorrea) and was unable to marshal any inner defenses. The dentist informed me that he would have to pull my teeth since there was no other remedy. It was a symptom of my state of mind, he told me, and so he took out four teeth.

Julia became very active in the school of her children and together with other persons organized an association of parents who spoke Spanish. Being denied enrollment into an English course, she took some lessons with some older volunteers in a local library. Her early employment consisted of cleaning private homes. After being in Canada for two years she separated from her husband. She became a single mother with two kids, receiving little help from him in raising the two children. “He helped me perhaps a 25%, it wasn’t very substantial.”

She wanted badly to move forward and improve her situation. At some point she contacted a woman’s center, which helped her to become more oriented and who suggested for her to apply to graduate school. She did, and eventually started a Master’s program in 1978. Prior to being accepted into the program, she had to pass the Michigan Language Test for which she prepared herself by taking ESL classes. She learned English,

But that did not change my sensation of still feeling so inadequate with the language. I felt that one of the strengths I had was my capacity to articulate myself in Spanish, my mastery of the language... that was all that I had to show to the world, and then all at once ‘plop’. They took it away from me, having to communicate in a foreign language... I did get my degree in education but it was an agonizing experience.

Starting university studies was the beginning of a new phase in her life. Following her Master’s studies she devoted herself to community development, a field that
interested her very much. For seven years she worked with a women’s center, becoming eventually the coordinator. She founded a Spanish-speaking group of seniors, which still exists. She also worked in a local school board and involved herself in some activities in support of the New Democratic Party. “I worked more to help out individual members than support the Party as such, as I am rather disappointed in its leadership.”

As for Chile, she has never tried to go back. “I realized that I would face unsurpassable obstacles as a separated woman there. The one thing left for me is working towards seeing my children grow up…Most of my friends here in Canada are Chileans and Latinos. This group of reference, my intimate friends, makes up my family in exile…they are all women.” She currently lives with a man from Europe, and ironically dreams of living in Chile, even if it would be for six months of every year, “my children will remain here and I would go back and forth.”

**Soledad**

Born in the South of Chile in 1946, Soledad’s parents divorced when she was only five years old. She ended up in a situation where her mother disappeared from her life and with a father who, while gaining custody of the children, did not assume responsibility for their upbringing except for providing some money for their maintenance. From then on she lived with different relatives. “I was treated like a parcel post living among relatives, being sent from one place to another… I was travelling constantly, from my place of birth to Santiago, to Concepción, etc. until the moment I took the reins into my own hands. That was about when I reached fifteen.”

Her extended family was of a middle class standing. Her grandmother, with whom she lived for some time, was particularly preoccupied with her social standing, unable to show Soledad any affection. This was the case with the other relatives as well. The love she craved came from the poor, the hired domestic personnel of the house, the women who received her at her home for lunch hour, the nannies. “Thus for me it were the common people, the farmer, the workers, who have always been a part of me.”

At the age of fifteen she started working in Santiago doing cleaning and errands at a lawyer’s office. She set herself up independently from the family, renting and living
alone in a room. She finished her high school by following evening courses, after which she took a job as secretary. What she remembers from this period is that it serves a woman well to be beautiful in finding a job and gaining approval in one’s educational pursuits.

Fortunately, I was attractive, which I believe helped me a great deal. I remember a professor of English who approved my final examination for that reason, as he looked at my legs and told me ‘you have such beautiful legs, my dear one, that I have decided to give you a 3,5 and help you to pass. Never again did I see that professor.

She first met her future husband, a medical student, when she was eighteen years old, marrying him two years later, in 1966, after he had finished his studies. From then on, her life began to revolve around him, his professional career, his persecution by the military dictatorship, and his final destiny. In 1967 they moved to a small town in the South of Chile, Lolol, where her husband was appointed medical chief of the only hospital, serving a region populated largely by poor farmers. Soledad joined her husband in his works. He developed a program in community health in which the education of the local population took a central role. The farmers who participated in the program learned how to deal with various illnesses, particularly those of children, through improvements in environmental hygiene, developing proper nutritional habits and by recognizing the symptoms of basic problems, such as diarrhea and bronchitis, and how to treat them.

To reach as many ‘campesinos’ as possible, her husband would provide health training first to a group of delegates from each of the communities making up the region. He also encouraged the formation of local health committees that would make possible the education of all people, including those who lived far away from the hospital. Soledad’s contribution consisted of serving as secretary, as educator and even as a nurse on some occasions.

First I would accompany Pedro without any specific objective. Then I began to see how interesting it really was what he was doing. He had to make proposals that needed to be taped and an innumerable number of other things. I went along with Pedro to the various health posts, supporting his work by giving advise to women, listening to their problems, teaching them the value of eggs, vegetables like spinach... it was truly a wonderful experience.
This community health program turned out to be so successful that Pedro was
given the award as best physician of the year in 1971, bestowed upon him by the
country’s medical college. His work was published and President Allende decided to
extend the program to the rest of the country. Pedro accepted only a role as advisor to the
national program, as he wanted to specialize further and become a surgeon.

Soledad was never active in any political program. “With respect to politics I was
aware that I could not embrace anything that labeled me, however I could embrace
causes, which is different.” Her husband, on the other, had signed up with one of the
parties of the Left, although all of his activities continued to focus on his medical
pursuits. Regardless, his activities were apparently still condemned, as a terrorist group of
the right, Fiducia, made an attempt on both their lives and burned down their house. Once
the military coup took place, the national program that her husband had initiated was
discontinued and Pedro became a target of repression. They took him prisoner in October
1973, tortured him, and kept him incommunicado until February 1974, when he was let
go thanks to the intervention of officials from the United Nations, who shipped him
directly from prison by plane to Buenos Aires.

From the time her husband disappeared in October 1973, Soledad spent much
time trying to locate him. Seeing her left by herself with the care of her three children and
for fear of seeing her break down, the farmers came to her assistance, sharing their food
and showing their solidarity and gratitude. Once freed, Soledad and her children joined
her husband in the flight to Argentina.

The tortures Pedro had been subjected to began to have their effects on their
relationship. “I found myself back with a man who had been emotionally destroyed.” He
distrusted her and became jealous and paranoid. Soledad’s state of anxiety was very acute
while living in Argentina those first few months.

It was the most difficult time of our period living in exile. At that moment
I went as far as to apologize to him for living. Nobody was aware that I
also had to struggle alone in such an inhospitable place after the coup in
Chile where everybody turned their backs on you.

The experience in Argentina was also difficult, because of the bad material
situation in which they found themselves.
There we had no work, no house, arriving as a UN refugee... I don't know how we were able to manage... Eventually, together with other refugee doctors and their wives, we rented a house until the money ran out. After that we were offered a large shed to live in by an Argentinean family where we stayed for eight months, applying in the meantime to different countries of the world for entry.

In October of 1974 they arrived in Canada. They were transported immediately to Walker House Hotel, which they found to be a depressing place. "Suddenly I heard a knock on our door and in marched a Chilean with hamburgers from Mac Donald... We didn't know anyone there yet, but it appeared that the place had a welcoming committee... It sure was a beautiful gesture." The early period in Canada was quite hard. "Everything during that period was like sleepwalking... I felt very alone inside me, fearful, anxious, not experiencing one gratifying moment... I also felt quite worried about my children, being very protective of them." Soledad, but not her husband, was offered attendance in a course in English, with space for her children in a child care center. That was in March 1975. Pedro, in the meantime, used his time by preparing for an examination in medicine, which he passed successfully, with the exception of a test in conversational English. In 1977 he also passed that test and obtained an internship at a hospital on the East Coast, where they resided from 1977 to 1982.

While her husband worked on his specialization, she took up English and afterwards found work in the cloakroom of a museum, supporting the family with the little she earned. As soon as they returned to Toronto, her husband set up a private practice, with Soledad serving as secretary and receptionist. Pedro died in 1989 from a heart attack. "We lived all those years so close together, that when he died I felt very much up in the air." She did not consider returning to Chile, as there was nothing left there for her. "I am very grateful to Canada. Here I found a life of tranquility and my children grew up in peace having had the opportunity to develop themselves."

She returned to Chile for the first time in 1985, which she remembers principally for her visit to Lolol, where she and her husband used to work.

The word spread quickly that I had arrived in town and soon after there gathered a lot of people, finding myself in the midst of all of them. They remembered me well, and Pedro, and the children. I thought that Pedro should have come because I believed I was merely representing him at that
moment, and people wanted really to know about him. That is the only thing that had any impact on me about that trip to Chile.

She went again to Chile in 1989, this time with her husband. "That was our first vacation together. Our life had been one continuum of commotion, never having time to approach each other and say 'hey, let's have a good time, let's give ourselves some vacation, let's enjoy life'. That we did not until 1989, which turned out to be his final year. We were in Chile for four weeks, snatched away to Constitución where a friend lent us the use of her house on the coast. It was the only vacation together. It was absolutely wonderful.

After Pedro’s death Soledad began to study community development at a college in Toronto, and worked full time as a counselor with a shelter for women. In this work she had a similar sensation to one that she experienced when working with the 'campesinos' in the South of Chile. "There is a type of people who, I believe, give me more than I give them. It’s like feeling useful to someone."

She has friends, many of whom are Chilean and by whom she feels supported, and she has also friends who originate from other countries. Her co-workers are particularly important to her. "Between us who work there full time there exists a real unity, no matter what happens, we face it together." Her children are adults now, having only one daughter and her grandchild live with her, she feels at peace with herself.

**Isabel**

I got in touch with Isabel through one of my resource persons. What struck me about her at our first meeting was her strong interest and availability. She told me that having the support of the person who put us in contact with each other was the best reference I could have had. Also, she wanted to contribute to research whose focus for once was not just on the working class. She claimed that there was a lot of research on working class refugees, but almost nothing on professional, or higher educated women arriving in Canada as refugees or immigrants. She thought the same phenomenon existed in Chile, where there are many studies related to poor women, but few on the situation
lived by women from the middle class. Consequently, she framed my interview with her as a study of a middle class Chilean woman.  

Isabel was born in 1944, in an important city in the South of Chile. A few years afterwards the family moved to Santiago. There, she received her primary and secondary education in a school run by nuns. She came from a professional family in which her father was a lawyer, her mother an English teacher and her two brothers, eventually, becoming engineers. As for herself, Isabel followed in the tradition of her father, grandfather and uncles by becoming a lawyer, at the age of twenty-three. All those years she lived in with her parents residing in an upper middle-class neighborhood, until the military coup. During her university studies she became increasingly involved in the political struggle of that time and joined the Socialist party. She recalls Chile as a place full of possibilities with many avenues open to her for the practice of law. She also remembers the close feelings she had for her nuclear and extended family. She expressed her feelings towards Chile as follows:

Never before (the military coup) had I been outside Chile. There were some two or three opportunities, which I never took advantage of because I felt fantastic being in Chile and traveling around the country. So I never made any attempt.

She opened a law office together with two other colleagues and also did some administrative work for the Labor Ministry. As legal advisor she helped refugees from Brazil (escaping military repression) in obtaining their official papers to stay in Chile. Shortly after the military coup in Chile, in 1973, Isabel was arrested. Being the niece of a General, she was lucky to be released almost immediately. Her boyfriend faced more serious problems with the new regime because of his political activism. He arrived to a point where he ran out of hiding places. And so with the help of Isabel he hurried into the embassy of one of the Central American countries close to her house. When he left the country she decided to follow him. Since then they have lived together, giving birth to two children born in Canada, and who now are 21 and 23 years old respectively. She remembers her decision to leave, “Most of all I came for sentimental reasons because

---

20 While social class is part of my analysis of the women’s narratives, it is not central to my study. However, it should be noted that most of the women I selected for this study
there was no security for Roberto in Chile." Nevertheless, leaving Chile was very upsetting for Isabel.

It was extremely difficult to leave my parents, because I had lived with them right up to the coup. I know that my father, a man of few words, suffered much since I am his only daughter and the oldest but he never raised any objections. Both of my parents were very supportive, telling me that if I wanted to return I could count on my room, my house, my parents, my brothers, everything. Furthermore, I had to leave my two friends (a man and a woman) who were my emotional support. To leave all of that was very, very difficult and yet I was determined because it had to do with Roberto. I would never have left Chile alone. If Roberto had decided not to leave, if Roberto had been taken prisoner, sick or dead, I would never have left Chile. And not for fear of leaving by myself, that didn’t scare me in the least. But I believed that all of us leaving (Chile) was not a solution.

Isabel remembers with pride the courage displayed by her father after the coup.

My father was very republican in his beliefs detesting anything related to the military ideology. After the coup took place he became very vocal. While most of the people in our neighborhood pulled out their flags and champagne to celebrate the coup d’etat, it was my father who hung the flag at half-mast expressing his sadness. He said, if they come to search for me ... well what can I do?

She left Chile by plane to join Roberto in Central America where they immediately applied for entry into Canada. I asked Isabel what idea she had about Canada and under what status she arrived. She answered that it was very confusing for her to be referred to as refugee, and the little she knew about Canada didn’t help her to feel more confident.

Look, I didn’t put a name to my situation. Although, imagine, when I learned that we would be going to Canada, being a lawyer I knew enough about these conventions on refugees. Theoretically, I knew about the experience of other refugees in Chile, but I didn’t know how it was going to be for me. In emotional or personal terms I believe I didn’t consider myself as a refugee in order not to frighten myself. So I came without fear, although with some apprehension.

I read about Canada what I could find, once they approved our application. But it was difficult to imagine how we were going to support ourselves. I was aware that I could not practice law in Canada, having to study all over

had access to the privileges of the Chilean middle class, to greater or lesser degree.
again. I received the Minister’s Permit and Roberto was named a political refugee.

It took tremendous emotional energies to establish themselves in Canada, as Isabel told me. She found a way, though, to survive this difficult situation. In spite of finding themselves in a bad material and social situation, she decided to start a family.

After about two or three months of being in Canada, I asked myself what I was doing here … we already had hit bottom and I had never felt so low as here. Here I was, just another ‘fucking’ immigrant and there (in Chile) this would never have happened, I always had a good life. So I was thinking that if we were able to keep going during those two or three months without falling apart emotionally and we managed to keep ourselves fed, I believed that we could do it also with a baby, and I told Roberto so. I also told him that I was already 30 years old, and that I felt prepared physically and emotionally. Having a family will give us lots of reasons not to be drawn into this terrible thing of living in exile.

Little by little they learned the language and secured a full-time job. Isabel indicated that she had no difficulty with English, while her husband took at least five years in managing it. Although she never obtained a legal title in Canada, she was able to find the kind of job that allowed her to draw on her previous training as a lawyer in Chile. It also led her to become the economic pillar of the family. Roberto, not having had any professional training, was less fortunate. His various jobs consisted of working in factories and on construction sites. Later on, Isabel had the opportunity to resume her professional studies in Canada, but decided not to.

I understood Roberto’s character, knowing very well that he was not going to accept the idea of his compañera being totally dedicated to her professional career when for him the political thing was most important. I saw, as if looking with x-rays into the future, that we would be growing apart. I had seen it happen in Chile with the people who arrived as refugees from Brazil when the man or woman in a relationship decided to pursue a professional or academic career. Because, there is this dichotomy in which the political and the family are on one side, and the professional on the other.

Ten years passed by before Isabel went back to Chile for her first visit. The thing that impressed her during that visit was how different she had become in her views and values from the rest of the family. They ascribed it to her many years of living outside
Chile. One of the advantages as she told me was that every one of them began to freely share their personal histories with her, something that didn't occur between them because of the rigid value system that exists in Chile. Referring to her two sisters-in-law, Isabel stated, "They are professionals, yet they are not employed because my brothers have good jobs and don't want their wives to work. Consequently, they have chosen not to work.” And speaking about taboos, Isabel tells me the story pertaining to a homosexual cousin.

Every-one in the family talks about him, but without confirming anything, saying, 'it appears so-and-so might be'. When I met him and seeing him with his partner I asked him directly if they lived as a couple. My cousin said, 'I can tell you because you were always so different Isabel, the only person in the family who knows is you'.

Isabel continued calling attention to how the many years in Canada had shaped her values and ideas in ways that differed so much from the ones held by all the other members of the family who stayed behind in Chile. For instance, she said, “I believe that I acquired my self-confidence here in Canada...I am sure that over there I would always have been treated like the ‘daughter’. I realized that when I was there my mother began to irritate me within five minutes, addressing me as if I was still 17 or 19 years old.”

With respect to her life in exile she remembers that they kept their suitcases packed for several years. In the meantime, she dedicated herself to her job and family and Roberto focussed, above all, on political activities related to the Chilean community in exile. Regardless, after a while they gave up the idea of returning to live there again. It was Isabel, though, who took that decision. Roberto still has dreams, at times, of going back.

I am very realistic. I told myself, I am 46 years old and I am not going to start all over again in Chile. Because it was clear to me that I could not economically support the family there, Chile is saturated with lawyers. In contrast, here I always have had good jobs and I feel good about myself. This (the decision to stay) coincided with the phase when I began to dream in English and think more in English. Right now I definitely think more in English than in Spanish.

Isabel expressed the opinion that Canada offered her economic security and to some extent also professional recognition. In contrast, she received no gratification at all
from being a member of the Chilean diaspora. She lived apparently a social life that she felt she was drawn into by circumstances, and which she found difficult to put up with.

I feel we deceived ourselves for many years. We thought by being Chileans in exile we were all equal to one another. But now that the dictatorship has come to an end I ask myself what remains of the Chilean community that binds us together? People were beginning to recognize, very slowly though and in private, that the Chilean community was not homogeneous at all... We were questioning this already in 1989 and 1990. Whatever friendship we felt for each other, before, was the result of the political circumstances we found ourselves in. Not surprisingly, it did not last. In spite of the efforts to revive the Chilean organization, our community disintegrated into small groups of friends. I think we all knew by then that there never were any common interests beyond the political struggle that had kept us together all those years. We arrived in Canada having different backgrounds, with different levels of education and aspirations.

Isabel’s circle of friends consists of some Chilean families and some Canadians who share the same values and interests. She mentioned that there is an enormous diversity in styles of life among Chileans residing in Toronto, some of which she strongly objects to and in some instances rejects outright.

Some Chileans do not tolerate that we have friends who are homosexuals. There is much racism too among some of them. And now we have the ‘new-born-Christians’. There is an incredible number of Chileans who have come to see the light. I believe that they formed part of another social group when they were still living in Chile. And I have to say it out loud and clearly that they are not the kind of people we socialized with in Chile. But that was something you did not dare to admit some years ago.

Isabel spoke at the same time of her worries regarding the possible influence these trends might have on her children.

Never did we expose them to the existing differences between social classes among Chileans, even though they often wonder out loud why all Chileans don’t speak like us. Until a cousin came to visit us from Chile and told my children, with certain contempt, that they had friends who spoke like *rotos*. At this point I had to explain to them that Chileans were not all equal. For them, though, class differences do not appear that clearly. I do accept their friends, what I don’t like is their behavior. Perhaps, the problem is me for not acknowledging that I am a classist.
Two good women friends and their families in Canada have replaced her family of origin in Chile in meeting Isabel’s needs for affection and friendship. She often gets together with these women after work and with them also plans for occasional joint family events. At this stage, her life seems full of possibilities.

I don’t have any clear goals in terms of what I am going to do, I don’t really want that. I am content not having to worry about the dictatorship and having to constantly keep an eye on the kids to make sure they arrive home in time. I belong to a small group of very good women friends who share a common past. We encourage one another to reflect, through readings and conversations, on what is happening to us, our lives here, and at our age. What keeps us together is the language, it is a pleasure to converse in Spanish.

Commonality in language, though, is not a determining factor for Isabel in forming friendships. As a matter of fact, she pointed out that she associates with another group at work, of four or five women, with whom she also has friendly relations, even though they communicate in English. They only meet at work where together they talk much about their lives and preoccupations, and where they also offer protection and support to each other in a world they regard as very male-dominated. She highlighted this point by calling attention to the fact that of the 51 professionals at their place of employment only 12 are women. “We do not just share our lives at work, we also socialize beyond working hours. At times we even go on vacations together, only the women.” But most important for Isabel has been that small nucleus of two Chilean friends and their families who make up her ‘family’ in Canada,

Without these close friends I would not have been able to move forward. My friends are like me, and their families are like mine. We have created a small enclave in which we can share our lives.

She reasserts at the end of the interview that she would definitely not return to Chile.

I would not feel comfortable in Chile observing all those women who have so little control over their lives. I don’t wish to imply that this is true for all Chileans but it does apply to the circle I move around. Their double standard of life exasperates me. They all present themselves as ‘virgin Marys’ when we get together. But when you see them individually they will tell you amazing stories about the other women in private, which they wouldn’t dare to talk about in public. In contrast, here with my friends we
don’t have any compunction about telling each other in the open what we have done on some occasion. This we do not only among friends but also in large gatherings. I attended a conference here in Toronto, and in one of the workshops there was a Chilean who identified herself openly as a lesbian. And everything went well, nobody felt scandalized. Of course, one has to admit that this was a relatively well-protected environment. In other Chilean circles this would still be unacceptable.

**Paulina**

Paulina was born in 1956 and raised in the southern part of Santiago, largely inhabited by the laboring classes. Her father, a train conductor employed by the State-run Railways, was a militant member of the Socialist Party who had great influence on Paulina’s political inclination. The mother, twenty years younger than her father, in contrast, tended to a more conservative position, being very traditional in her ways and very religious. Paulina’s mother descended from a father who was Mapuche, a native tribe from the South of Chile, and a mother who was German. “We never got to know the German part of the family... As the Germans were so purists about race they closed the doors when my German grandmother got together with my Indian grandfather. The only thing that my grandmother was able to take with her was her ‘mate’. And I still have her mate as a momento.” Paulina’s family lived with her paternal grandmother until she reached five, after which they moved to a house purchased in San Miguel. That particular sector of the capital city was considered ‘Red’, as most of the people there always voted for the Left and were supporters of Allende’s Government. At this location, at the age of fifteen, she met Alfonso, the man whom she would marry. Her secondary schooling took place at a technical collegiate, where she followed secretarial and accounting studies, finishing at the age of seventeen. She then started working as an assistant to an accountant, followed by secretarial jobs in different commercial houses until she left Chile.

She remembers her childhood and teenage years in Chile, the various gatherings held in her grandmother’s home in the countryside outside Santiago, with the extended

---

21 Mate is a round teapot that imitates a small pumpkin, made from different materials. It serves to prepare a special type of herb tea. To drink the hot liquid it is necessary to use a straw usually made from silver.
family preparing meals together. "The smell of amphora makes me absolutely cry because it brings back to me all these memories." She also mentioned the train rides with her papa as conductor, with the little compartment at the back of the train that included a dining area, a bedroom and bathroom that were at his disposal since he traveled weeks on end. He would frequently take a couple of children along for an entire week to cross the various regions of Chile.

The military coup occurred when she was seventeen years of age. She helped her father in his political activities in the barrio, while her boyfriend Alfonso was active with another political party of the left. No one of her immediate family was taken prisoner, in spite of the activist role they played. But the coup gravely affected her father's mental state. She saw him being vulnerable for the first time, incapacitated.

I remember the day of the coup when my papa told me, 'Paulina, this is serious, you don't know whom those people are, those assassins, Nazis'. I saw him being afraid for the first time. He always appeared to me strong, solid, but he was telling me something like, 'neither I, nor anyone can protect you'... My father fell depressed, which ended for him the reason for living any longer... This affected me deeply, as my father had been an emotional rock for me, and now I saw him dying spiritually. I realized then that life is terrible, you feel unprotected, vulnerable.

Paulina continued being politically involved. She often had to fight with her mother who urged her not to risk herself. At some point, when they took her cousin prisoner, torturing him, and friends began to disappear, she started to feel afraid and began to develop an aversion for her country.

You have to look behind you to see if you are being followed. You begin to watch, to listen, because you are afraid that you are being kept under watch, afraid that you talk, and soon this situation begins to wear you down. First of all, I hate my country, a totally reject what was at one time my patria... because you become conscious of the fact that you have been turned into a prisoner. You have no voice, you can not say anything, you can not move around by bus, by micro, or be in the street.

She and Alfonso decided to marry but did not want to live any longer in Chile. "I thought then that I did not like to have a child who would be part of those people. I wanted my child to be born in freedom. My decision was influenced less by a desire to seek protection for myself than have my children born in liberty." Through sponsorship
of his brother, who preceded them in 1974 to escape the danger, Alfonso was able to enter Canada in 1977. He, in turn, applied for her entry, which took place in February of 1978 when she was 22 years old. A week after her arrival they married in a civil court. Later, they were married in the Catholic Church to celebrate the anniversary of the Socialist Party.

The person, who was directing the Socialist Party in Toronto, was responsible for the cleaning of a church in town. The priest, a friend of his, had this idea of celebrating the anniversary of the Party with baptisms and weddings of our community. And so we got married that day at the church. We had a feast that was beyond anything I had imagined. There were 200 people whom I didn’t know, ten turkeys, and I was married with music of Violeta Parra.

In her first year in Canada she took a course in English and had her first and only child. They lived with her husband’s brother until her son was born, after which they moved out on their own. The money earned by her husband from work at a factory was not enough to support them. For this reason she took on the night shift at the same factory.

We almost didn’t see each other, not only because of our different work schedules, but also because on weekends he dedicated himself to activities carried out by the resistance movement in Canada against the dictatorship in Chile... I had big fights with my husband, as he was busy with his political pursuits and practically abandoning the child and me. He only left me the money for the house, that’s it.

This situation began to improve when they moved into an apartment building of the Mormon Church, where many Chilean and other Latin families lived. “We got into this building thanks to a Chilean who informed us that people from Chile were welcome there. In that place my life changed because there were people I could talk with, sitting on the staircase taking ‘mate’.

With the help of a Canadian woman married to a Chilean, living in the same building and directing a center for training of immigrants, Paulina started studying ‘mail room’. That course opened the doors to other types of work, beginning with a company that processed discount coupons for retail stores. She took on various responsibilities as a
receptionist, assistant to the accountant, some computer work, and bank transactions. In 1986 she changed to another company, moving into a much higher position.

I had a tremendous knowledge in working with the computer, which I had not taken much note of before...then I met people there who looked at me as an equal...the president of the company often turned to me for my opinion... I set up a system for them on the computer and prepared their first illustrated (pictorial) work. It made me the expert.

Her life in that period took on a rapid pace. Besides working full time, she studied accounting to obtain a title that was recognized, and was busy in transporting her son to his extra curricular activities and in managing the house. Her husband also moved up, leaving the factory to work in a department store in their computer department, where he was able to apply and develop knowledge he had gained during his training in 'informática' in Chile. A car accident in 1990 immobilized Paulina for a while, and she became very depressed. She decided to leave her place of employment and together with her husband opened her own computer business. Whereas Alfonso continued to work outside, she assumed the major responsibility in managing the business. This new situation made her feel comfortable and helped to diminish her level of stress and demands.

Paulina has visited Chile on two occasions. That experience left her with the feeling that she does not belong anywhere in particular.

One of the things I learned is that I have become a human being without country, like an orphan. In Canada I will never be a Canadian, in Chile I lost being a Chilean. I don't know why I don't like to be Chilean. Now I am international. I want to feel that I am part of the world. I am trying to get to know other cultures, because we are really all part of the same race. In that sense I feel that I belong not to any nation but to the human race.
Carmen

She was born in 1943 and raised in Antofagasta where she lived her early years with her parents and only sister. Her father, was an intellectual who besides being a medical doctor and teaching at the University of Antofagasta wrote articles and occupied various diplomatic positions in different parts of the world. That gave Carmen the experience at an early age of living in other countries. Her mother acting as housewife also, at some moments in her life, ran a fashion-designing workshop, working principally for people who were friends.

The changes Carmen experienced in her life were to a great extent determined by needs related to the professional development of her husband. Due to his chosen specialization they had to move to Valparaíso in the central zone, on the coast of Chile. Her own specialization was more the result of these circumstances. “I began to see that being in Valparaíso on account of my husband, the only thing I could do was taking advantage of a scholarship offered in anesthesia. In Chile there was a great demand for such specialists, and the study would take only two years”. When her husband finished his specialization and continued his training in Santiago, Carmen and the children followed him. There, they bought a house located in the eastern zone of the capital. Soon after, Carmen started to look for work near home to remain close to her two children. She found herself a position as anesthetist at one of the hospitals of the Armed Forces “I had a contract of six hours a day that left me time to be with the children. I used to walk to the hospital after leaving the children at their school. This was in 1972”.

Carmen had been in contact with the ideas of the Chilean Left since early in her life as her father was Communist. And while studying, she herself joined a Communist youth organization. Later on she quit her more activist involvement. Her husband was an active member of the Socialist Party and supported the Leftist program22. His position

---

22 Chile’s Left, traditionally, has consisted of two main political parties: the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Allende’s Government was supported by a coalition of parties from the Left, but depended to a large extent on these two principal ones. Both proposed opposite strategies for bringing about social change. While the Communists wanted to consolidate the gains made in the first years of government, the Socialists proposed to forge ahead with the process of reforms so as to establish a socialist society
gained notoriety during a long strike of the medical doctors against the Socialist Government of Allende. Together with other medical professionals Fernando, who opposed this political strike, continued delivering emergency services across the country. This involvement labelled him. Immediately after the coup he was told to take a vacation, but without pay. The medical chief at the hospital pointed out that of the three lists drawn up by the Pinochet regime he was placed on the list of political activists, which put him in a dangerous situation.

Carmen continued her work at the hospital of the very Armed Forces, which brought about the military coup. She and her husband did not think of leaving then, as they believed this situation to be transitory and that things would improve shortly. However, they were targeted. First she learned that her husband would not be allowed to work at any public hospital in the country. The situation became untenable when an article appeared in the newspapers about a search at the hospital where Fernando used to work, and accused him of subversion. “According to the police they had found arms there, claiming that my husband possessed several guns including a machine gun. We never knew what a machine gun was”. At that point they realized they had to leave the country right away.

The search for Fernando’s asylum began. Carmen linked up with a network of women who helped her in her attempt to get her husband into anyone of the embassies. Several of these attempts failed due to all of the embassies being heavily guarded by the military until finally the wife of the Honduran ambassador was able to get him into that embassy. “I decided not to seek asylum at that time having two children and expecting another one. I preferred to stay with my mother until the delivery had taken place, and then decided to leave for Honduras with my children”.

The departure from Chile was a horrendous experience for Carmen. First, the delivery of her third child at the hospital where she was employed was badly attended to, presumably due to her political position. The doctors there, in spite of being her colleagues, neglected her leaving her with little confidence of coming out of there alive. Secondly, the steps she had to go through in order to leave the country without having to
worry about her own safety were never ending, humiliating and threatening. Such procedures as obtaining her passport, her criminal record\textsuperscript{23}, the permission to bring along her recently born child without the father's authorization, all showed clearly how things had changed in Chile in such a short time. The judicial power had become a partisan of the new government, a military power that was omnipresent, leaving citizens without any rights.

But, she finally did arrive in Honduras with her three children in December of 1973, staying there with her husband until August 1974, at which date the whole family departed for Canada. They found themselves in a quandary in Honduras where rules did not permit them to work without residence, but at the same time they could not find a residence without work. To support the family her husband got a job being paid very little under the table. Canada gave them an opportunity to leave this situation. Two officials arrived in Tegucigalpa to interview those Chileans who had applied for entry in Canada. Their application was approved, they were given a Ministerial permit and five tickets, the cost of which would have to be repaid at a later date, plus 70 dollars pocket money. The itinerary from Honduras to Canada had to be changed several times on account of countries like the United States and Mexico which did not extend them visas nor transit opportunity to Canada. British Honduras allowed them to pass on to Toronto.

Carmen does not remember having had any particular image of Canada. "The only thing I remember was our strong desire to leave Honduras because I could not imagine my life without being able to practice or work in something". Like others who arrived at Walker House Hotel, she found the place extremely depressing. Fortunately, through a system of mutual aid developed and operated by exiled Chileans who preceded them, they quickly moved out being taken in by a medical couple who were friends back home and who had been set up before them. That couple in turn brought them in contact with others. Carmen and her husband ended up renting an apartment in one of the high-rises in Scarborough where many other Chilean families resided, which facilitated efforts in finding work immediately. There they also met other medical doctors from Chile, and

\textsuperscript{23} A criminal record certificate was required in Chile when applying for a job including when asking for a passport.
together began to prepare themselves to meet the requirements for medical practice in Canada. Another group of Chileans, who had been studying in Canada on a scholarship at the time of the military coup, helped out gathering clothes and furniture for the recent arrivals. They also had organized themselves, since the coup in September 1973, to pressure the Canadian Government together with other Canadian organizations in opening the country’s doors to Chilean refugees.

Exiles like Carmen and Fernando, at that time were not automatically entitled to a course in English. Her husband was able to gain access to a course for two months. As for Carmen, she had learned something about English in college and especially during the time when her father served as a diplomat in the Philippines where she had to take all her courses in English. In spite of that she felt this language to be a great barrier for her. The early period in Toronto, when working as a relief nurse in a hospital, she didn’t understand what her working companions were talking about and felt isolated. Even seven years later when beginning her scholarship studies in a medical specialization she still experienced the barrier of English.

Fernando, after one year in Canada, passed his examination of ratification and was accepted to pursue his specialization at a hospital in Edmonton. And so the whole family traveled to the West. Carmen assumed complete responsibility there for the care of the children leaving space for her husband to develop himself professionally. And for all those years in Edmonton she worked to earn some additional income for the family. Once Fernando had completed his medical specialization in 1980 they all returned to Toronto because of a position offered to him that interested him. “We came, after all I wasn’t doing anything important”. In Toronto she took a year of preparatory studies to have her title recognized in Canada. She passed the examination and then proceeded to study for a specialization in medicine, which she completed in 1985. Since then she worked at one of the hospitals in the city.

They decided to return to Chile in 1993, despite the high professional and economic status they had achieved in Canada. Carmen gave various reasons for this decision.

I began to feel lonely, I needed to share my life with more people, I needed to communicate in Spanish. By the time Friday arrived I felt
exhausted in my dealings with the gringos, who moreover are so cold in their human relationships. To give you an example of the kind of relationships we experienced here, our neighbors who have lived next to us for 10 years, except for saying ‘hi’, ‘nice day’, there has been no other attempt to get closer... I also missed all my extended family and my friends there. Furthermore, you feel you have to be consistent, if one left Chile for a particular reason and that reason doesn’t exist anymore, what are we doing here then? My return to Chile was emotional more then anything, the need for friendships, family, the social life. For my husband it was the possibility to contribute to the rebuilding of Chile, to contribute with all that we had learned here.

The return to Chile included their two youngest children. The older one was already a lawyer and married, and did not join them. The younger children, though, stayed only between six months and a year since they felt frustrated by not coming across any place they liked to develop themselves, and thus returned to Canada. Every year Carmen and her husband came to visit their children in Canada, and finally after 5 years decided to stay here.

What did not function well in Chile, and which made them change their opinion and return to Canada, was their experience at their respective places of employment. Their colleagues were not very appreciative that Carmen and Fernando were so well prepared, bringing along new ideas that would put their own positions at risk. No one gave any support to their proposals, and no one understood why they had come back to Chile. Despite all obstacles Carmen was able to reform the program for chronic patients in the hospital, and apparently her reforms continued to operate even after Carmen left. But the cost to her of this initiative was high having to deal with uncooperative personnel, corruption, and the indifference of the hospital administration. Her husband also didn’t receive much support in his work. Besides, salaries in Chile are very low. “Soon we realized that the money wasn’t enough to travel to Canada, so that every time we came to visit our children we had to take out a portion of our Canadian Registered Retirement Savings Plan.” At the level of family and friends Carmen encountered much more satisfaction, receiving much support and company. They also joined a group of friends who were former exiles. “They understood you, they knew what we were going through because they experienced the same. The general feeling though was that there was no space for those who returned to Chile, no one was interested in your story”.
In 1998 Carmen and Fernando returned to settle again in Canada and were able to take up their old positions. "At least here we have the stability in our work, relative tranquility, good remuneration, the family, the children. What remains is the sensation of loneliness that one has here".

**Gabriela**

The oldest of five children, Gabriela was born in 1940 and grew up in Valparaíso in a working class family. She had to quit school at the age of eleven to look after her mother who fell seriously ill, while her father had to go to work. A year later her mother died, leaving her with the full responsibility of the house until she married at the early age of 14. Her husband was a steel worker who worked for the Chilean navy and was often away at the sea. With him she had seven children. Her father in the meantime remarried, producing four more children with whom Gabriela developed good relations. Later on, while in Canada, where she arrived at the age of 34, she continued to look after not only her own nuclear family, but was also like a mother to three of her brothers who also came to Canada.

In Chile, apart from looking after her family, she worked to make some extra money to help.

I did many things, imagine we had seven children, six of whom were already in school. Our aim was to have our children attend university. Nothing interested us more than to give them a good education. When they were in public school they needed uniforms, books, and other things. Therefore, I did things to sell like bread, ‘empanadas’ and sewing”.

She saw herself very much as part of the working class. Her husband was an active member of the Communist Party. Although Gabriela was not a party member she did collaborate in activities of women who had been organized by her husband’s political party. "I participated with a group of women ‘The Women’s Union of Chile’, who were committed to giving more education to other women. There I learned about infant feeding, about gestation, aesthetics and making clothes. So I took these courses and then went to the various mother centers to talk and to make models of skirts, teaching mothers how to copy them. All that was long before the Unidad Popular came to power."
Everything changed in her life when the military coup took place. Her husband was taken in and then let go, but subject to having to present himself at the police station every Saturday. In other words, he was being watched. They decided to leave the country in March 1974, as the police could detain him again at any moment. He went first, followed by Gabriela and the children, meeting again high up in the Andes Mountains, as prearranged, to cross the border into Argentina. Upon arrival in Mendoza they asked for political asylum. “The United Nations recognized us as refugees and gave us the status, but without any financial help or protection. As a result, we suffered much hunger, passing days without anything to eat.” With her husband not given permission to work in Argentina, they ended up with a charitable organization that gave them one meal a day. Their situation improved somewhat when Gabriela was given work there as a helper in the kitchen and was allowed to make and sell 'empanadas' (meat pies). This made it possible for them to save money so that her husband could travel to Buenos Aires, where the Canadian Embassy was located, and apply for entry into Canada. They were successful in their effort, arriving in February of 1975 in a small city in Western Ontario, where they remained until their moved to Toronto in 1983.

The small city lacked the kind of organizations that welcome newcomers to Canada, as found in large cities like Toronto. But church people helped them out.

One of them wrote an article in the local newspaper presenting us as the largest Chilean family that had arrived in that city, with accompanying photo and address. Soon people from across the city started to come to the house, leaving sometimes bags with clothes for children, bed spreads, and sweets.

But neighbors also helped in other ways, by inviting the children to come and roller skate in the park. As Gabriela said: “I don’t know when I began to fall in love with this country. Well, if you now look back to these simple actions of help, they show the humanity of people.”

She worked in a hotel as a maid for several years until retiring, although she still does some part time work. Her husband also retired from his work in a factory. Together, they have time now to enjoy their grandchildren. They can communicate with them in English, which Gabriela couldn’t do for a long time with her own children. She did take a course in English upon arrival in Canada, but didn’t learn much then. Consequently, she
has often felt ashamed to try to talk in that language. Only when she realized that even her youngest daughter could speak English, and she was the only one left in the family who couldn’t, did she make a serious attempt and began to practice with the youngest one. With her smaller grandchildren she has no other option, since they only communicate in English.

While in Canada she began to write poetry and children’s stories in Spanish, having them published in Chile in 1993 in book form. One of her poems ‘Mi romance a los cuarenta’ (My romance at forty) was published in an encyclopedia in the USA.

My idea to write this book was for my grandchildren, so that they would know why we arrived here. We did not come here freely, or as tourists, to travel around. We arrived at a dramatic moment of our lives, and here we settled, here we are.

Gabriela has no intention to return to Chile, although she has been back several times on visits. She thinks that she has resolved her relationship with Chile. “I believe I accomplished an important goal in my last trip. I went to sign an act of peace between Chile and Canada, which gives me spiritual tranquility.” She explained her position as follows:

My country is Chile because there I was born, raised, married, had my children, had dreams, loved and suffered. I had many experiences there. And my mother died there. I always say that one’s mother and country go together. It doesn’t matter where you go, where you are, these two go together”

But Gabriela goes on to say: “I always thought I would like to be buried in Chile. Today, however, I want to stay here when I die. My children are going to stay here, here they are going to live. I am for them their historical roots.” The economic situation which is much more difficult in Chile is another reason given by Gabriela as to why she does not want to return. “I am accustomed to having economic security, because I can meet all my needs. Why should I put myself in a situation that would not give me any advantages except for more headaches?”

She thinks of continuing her writing and publishing, and values the close communication she has with her children and grandchildren. On the other hand, she feels
frustrated at times having to adapt herself constantly to living in a culture that is so different to the one where she was raised.

I miss the Sunday lunches with the whole family, not being able to chat with my neighbors and friends, not hearing the news, the simple things. One of the important parts of daily life is to share with your neighbors and friends the experience of getting older. I am living these changes, but my children do not see them.

**Mireya**

She was born in 1938, in Talca, as the youngest of a huge family of twenty children. Her father, who had married twice, died when Mireya was six; and at fourteen her mother (second wife of her father) died.

After that I lived with my brother and two sisters who were with me the youngest in the family, and from then on began to look more and more after myself. My family was not rich. To the contrary, they were poor. Therefore, things were not easy for me...my older brothers thought they had the right to control my life, but they contributed nothing. I supported myself. It was a very tough ‘macho’ world, because all were men. I was not able to finish my secondary education at a regular school, that I did later in the evening in Santiago.

Mireya married at seventeen and separated a year later deciding not to remain in Talca but leave for Santiago. “It was partly to leave the family and have more opportunities for work, for development, but especially not to be near my brothers... I decided to go even though knowing nothing about Santiago.” The political orientation of her family of origin was another reason for leaving, as they were all Christian Democrats in their political option, heavily conservative and strongly influenced by the Catholic Church. For them this meant that one could not be a Marxist, as this would go against the principles of the Catholic religion.

She arrived in the capital city, rented a room paid for by savings she had brought along, and began to work in a children’s clothing store. There she learned much, and eventually became a supervisor. Soon she got to know various people in Santiago and joined the Communist Youth organization. She also made some close friends. She lived
in with the family of one of them. "It was very important to me that they adopted me because it seemed that I was in search for a family."

It was through her political involvement that she got to know her second husband, father of her four children. She continued to work until the third child was born. Having domestic help allowed her to take up her studies again, finishing her Lyceum through night school, even taking some courses at the university level as a preschool teacher. Working as an engineer, her husband was well off economically during the sixties, and decided to set up a business to be directed by Mireya. "My husband had this idea that by investing the money into some place would help us to prosper. I managed it but I was little present because I always had other things to do."

She was very much engaged in political work from 1958 on until 1973, involving herself with different sectors. She worked with campesinos in the South of Chile, Temuco, Valdivia and Talca-Linares; with mothers in Santiago through the various mother's centers; with miners in the Coronel and Lota mines. Mireya feels that with such a strong dedication to her political activities, she neglected her children and house. "I tried to be with them on Saturdays and Sundays, but often including on Saturdays I had to go somewhere in the country, taking along my children, but it was not that simple."

Her husband had to seek asylum immediately following the coup d'etat, because of his high visibility at the time in his role with the Socialist Party. He was able to successfully enter the Honduran embassy, and from there moved to Honduras. Lacking any security in that country he applied to Canada, where he arrived in January 1974. Mireya, in the meantime, stayed behind, thinking at first that the political situation would change quickly. But she was living in danger and did not have any place to hide. "My friends were in hiding and those who were not felt very nervous to have you in their house with the four children." Her main concern was her eldest daughter, then fifteen years old, who was working politically, underground. "I was unable to convince her to get out, having to call on my authority as mother. This was difficult, because she was young and thought that she could change the world the same as us a decade earlier."

She decided to leave. Leaving with all the documents in order, though, was very hard. But, it was having to leave her country that weighed her down most.
The whole family and all our friends stayed behind, and what I felt most was for the people who remained working from within. I felt much guilt because the rest were willing to continue there and I was leaving like a coward. That sensation stayed with me for a long time.

She arrived in Toronto with the four children as an immigrant in March 1974, two months after her husband. She took the ESL course, but it cost her much effort to learn English, particularly because she carried a strong aversion against "the language of imperialism, which had for me a connotation like Coca-Cola. But this barrier does not exist for me anymore today." After attending the ESL course, she studied at the University, received her Bachelor of Arts and then began her studies in Social Work. She did not finish this program. The problem was that she had to work always to support herself and her children because she separated from her husband after being in Canada two years.

She has worked mostly as a front line worker in various community centers, working with immigrants or on cases involving family violence. But what interested her most was to form a Latin American women's movement in Canada. She participated in the organization of the 1995 conference of Hispanic women, attended by no less than 500 women, lasting for three days. A stable group of fifteen women has continued to meet since the event on a voluntary basis, and has obtained funds to undertake two investigations.

Mireya entered into a relationship with a new partner. Her children in the meantime are all married now, living on their own, with the eldest daughter having returned to Chile in 1977. It has been hard for Mireya to think of staying in Canada.

I didn't have one night that I did not dream about going back. They cut me off brutally while being in the middle of a project that was very important to me, it was drastic and hit me very hard. I think I have had the opportunity to live better. But never did I buy a house here, for instance. That for me would have meant denying myself the act of returning...it would have meant assimilating myself, denying everything, and that I could not do. I did not wish to cut off my roots....Nevertheless, we have decided now to buy a house.

Her daughter returned at 18, during the time when the dictatorship was still in full control. Seeing her going back was difficult for Mireya. She herself visited Chile in 1984
for the first time after arriving in Canada in 1974. The violence of the dictatorship, the extreme poverty and the silence of the people had a strong impact on her. “Before the end of the first month I was ready to come back.”

She visits Chile every two years.

Chile attracts me for being Chile, everything that involves one’s roots, my liking for things, the tastes, the scents, the people who are still there, like my daughter and my brother. They continue to be important to me. Chile is something that keeps you pinned down. Chile has left me with much pain, because I had to leave it for all the suffering, having no choice. No one can tell me that Chile doesn’t matter to me. It matters very much what is happening there. We are constantly watching the news being very much up to date on what is happening.

Comparing Chile with Canada, she stated that the politics in Chile affects her more than Canadian politics. Furthermore, she said that she understands immediately what is Chilean and the way of being Chilean, while she does not know what is the way of being Canadian. To illustrate that, she refers to the characters from books written by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood and those written by the Chilean writer Marcela Serrano. Mireya sees Canada as a quiet place, secure, where she has goods friends and her own children. “It is all complicated since I have already lived a whole life here, more than twenty years. My children got married and in turn had their own children, in Canada. Thus, I can not act as if Canada doesn’t exist for me. I believe that one has to live in the two worlds.”

Accounts and Accounting

After reading the narratives of these women many times, it became clear to me that all talked much more about their past experiences than what happens to them today. Specifically, what receives priority in their accounts are experiences related to their childhood and being a young adult in Chile, the political project of Unidad Popular, crossing borders as political refugees, the first years in Canada and, for some of them, the eventual return to Chile. Every storyteller made sense of these moments in a very personal way. I attempt to capture this dimension of the women’s accounts by focusing on the life histories of two women. I have selected Ana and Emma because their stories
are particularly rich in detail, portraying well for the reader how each make sense of how home and belonging become constituted through political involvement as well as family regulations. Each story, discussed in chapters 5 and 6, emphasizes very different aspects of their lives. While Ana addresses the impact of Unidad Popular on her life, Emma focuses largely on family issues affecting her sense of home. Ana’s account provides a gendered perspective on a Chilean woman’s involvement in the public domain where political parties, social class and work are interwoven. Emma, in contrast, provides us with an opportunity to see the gendered organization of the so-called private sphere. Her relationship with her mother and her patriarchal father, as she tells us, very much affected her decision whether to live in one country or another.

Chapter 7 I focus on women’s experience related to Canada by drawing from the stories of all ten women. On its own, each of their accounts of what constitutes their current relationship with both Canada and Chile lacks the richness for a more in-depth analysis that was possible in relation to Ana’s and Emma’s past history. However, considering the combined narratives of all of the ten women allowed me to touch on many aspects of that experience. Drawing on their many stories made it possible to focus on similarities but also differences among them regarding their present location. It helped me to better understand what it is like for them to be in Canada today and how the category of nation is constituted for them in their present location.
CHAPTER 5

ANA: BEING PART OF A NATION
¡OH PATRIA SIN HARAPOS!

I interviewed Ana at the end of 1998. Her life history, as she shared it with me, focussed principally on the socio-political developments in Chile and on related activities of herself and those of her husband that ultimately, with the onset of the military repression, left them with no other alternative but to leave the country. Together with her two children, born in 1971 and 1972, and her husband she sought asylum in Canada in March of 1974. In 1979 they decided to return to Chile, with Ana preceding her husband. The many difficulties they encountered there were unexpected and too much to bear for them. And so they resolved to go back to Canada in 1982, this time to settle here for good.

Ana’s history includes an assessment of her political commitment in the early 1970’s and how it affected her life, viewed from the perspective of her current situation. As she told me, she was eventually able to create a space for herself in Canada. However, in spite of it, this new country could never replace the attachment she had once felt for Chile. Her new reality required her to construct different images of nation and belongingness, in relation to Canada as well as Chile. What interests me about Ana’s narrative is the centrality of nation. Therefore, I will analyze how she lived out her sense of belonging to a national collectivity and what allowed her to settle permanently in Canada and not in Chile.

To Be Poor and the Chilean Middle Class of the 1960’s

A dominant factor in Ana’s childhood and adolescence was her family’s relative lack of economic resources. It was not only a question of having to live with its limitations per se, and the constraints this reality placed on her aspirations, but also the fact of being constantly reminded of her place in society. This was partly due to the
nature of her mother’s work, which exposed Ana from early on in her life to people who lived very privileged lives and accentuated the differences in social class. It was also the strong influence of her mother’s ethical code.

While she described her father as a very cultured man, basically self-taught and employed as an administrator in the public sector, he was also an alcoholic who failed in his role as family provider. It was up to her mother to support them. Her mother earned just enough to meet the family’s basic needs by running a fashionable clothing store that catered to a select group of women from the upper class.

My mother was a hard worker and quite strict, being very Catholic. She raised us very much guided by an ethical code typical of the middle class, a class that feels that one must follow all the rules, even though the upper and lower classes, and for different reasons, frequently do not.

Thus, ‘the picture’ Ana developed about Chile, through her mother’s work connections and by the way she was raised, was of a society that was very Catholic and at the same time divided by clearly delineated social classes. The ethical code she referred to include principles such as the value of private property, the unity of the family and social order. The same code rejected the notions of divorce, abortion and sexual freedom. Catholicism in Chile, and all over Latin America, was introduced during colonial times by secular leaders as a powerful ideology that aimed at maintaining the status quo in class, race and gender relations. This Catholic substratum is very much part of ‘the’ contemporary Latin-American identity, although its form has become highly variable. Thus there are hierarchical, reactionary, anti-secular proposals from the Right, which Ana makes reference to, as well as Liberation Theologies whose proposals are anti-establishment and solidaristic with the poor. The latter acquired some influence across Latin-America during the papacy of John XXIII (Brunner, 1995; Gutierrez, 1992).

Lower class people in Chile rarely followed the norms of the established, more conservative-oriented Church, since they didn’t possess the means to live a stable marriage or be able to connect with the importance of the idea of private property, finding themselves usually to be without it. As for members of the upper class, they could easily feign to uphold the very norms their class promulgated in public, without necessarily living up to them in their private lives.
Traditionally, the family has been seen as the basic social unit of society that mediates between individuals and the nation state, and therefore as the appropriate place where individuals are to be socialized into the norms of that society. The contradiction between this general view and how it played out in reality in Chile has been amply described and analyzed by various authors. For instance, Helsper (1991) points out, based on her analysis of The House of the Spirits, how Isabel Allende (1986) deconstructs the traditional notion of family. She shows how the patriarchal and powerful family in Chile was far from united, accepting and loving. The façade of respectability presented in public hid a brutal reality of rape, battery, adultery and domination. Only the middle classes – very Catholic in Chile and concerned about their social status – were bound to live according to the moral and social norms, that among others called for being respectful of the existing social order and of private property.

The Chilean upper class, politically represented by the Right, has been quite adroit in promoting among all social classes the belief in the family ideal, setting itself up as the guardian of the family. For example, during the campaign preceding the elections that brought Salvador Allende to power in 1970, rumors circulated that a Socialist government would usurp patria potestad, i.e. parental authority, taking children from their parents to be sent off for ideological indoctrination. In other words, the Right skillfully deflected the political platform of the Left that aimed to address the class issue of economic exploitation in this campaign. They tried to convince voters of all classes, which included victims of that exploitation, how much the election of a Socialist president would be against their interests as parents and the Chilean ideal of the family.

Returning again our attention to Ana, we can read her text as a critique of her middle class background. She had to follow all the rules of the dominant ideology, with

---

24 Ana’s middle class is reflected as well in the kind of job that her mother and she as adult had in Chile. The limited employment available to women in the 1960s and early 1970s certainly placed them in such a class. As reported by Michelle Mattelart (1976), women’s employment was distributed as follows: Almost 40% of the working women in the 1970 Census were employed as maids, cleaning women, or ironing ladies in individuals homes. About twenty percent of the Chilean women who had paying jobs were factory workers. The remainder were distributed among those who practiced a profession or a technical specialty (16%) and those who were employed in the public service administration or private enterprise (25%), as secretaries and saleswomen (p. 294).
her mother serving as one of the most important agents for communicating that ideology to her children, along with the school and the Church. Ana’s mother respected very much the norms imposed by the ruling class upon the rest of the population, norms of good behavior and proper appearance. The daily contact with customers from that class, for whom she designed clothes and whom she admired, evidently influenced the way she educated her children and also induced in her a desire to live a similar type of life.

**A Place Called Home for a Girl with Aspirations**

The fact that my mother moved in that circle affected us to the point of us beginning to adopt the same values of that class. But, those values did not correspond to our socio-economic situation. For instance, regarding our clothing, we always were very well dressed. We projected an image of sobriety that was part of the behavior typical of the Chilean upper class, wearing clothes made of the finest material and designed according to the latest fashion. The frustrating part of all this, particularly for my sister and myself being women and less so for my brother, was the problem of our family not having any economic means to speak of... My sister never invited any boyfriends to the house, because of the ‘barrio’. We used to live in San Pablo, a barrio that was quite low in status. Fortunately, my mother’s work did not influence us in our political views.

The location of the house was a real issue for Ana and her sister since it established their status in society. The spatial order of Santiago has always been clearly delineated by social class. The economically well off tend to concentrate in the east of the city, near the mountain range of the Andes. The economic status of its urban population gradually decreases as it moves down to the center and from there to the west where most of the lower middle class homes tend to be located. It is in the south, north and west of the city where the great majority of Santiago’s population lives, those who together constitute the various groups of the poor. San Pablo, where Ana’s family lived in the 1960’s, was a barrio inhabited by people at the lower end of the middle class. In her description of Santiago of the 1990’s, Veronica Schild (1999) captures very well what has always been the distinguishing criterion of that city’s spatial order between the two extreme social groupings. She writes: “This vast peripheral Santiago is a spatially distinct area ... whose inhabitants live in a kind of apartheid, coming rarely in touch with well off
Chileans, and then mostly in work settings.” The middle class, even in the spatial code, is located in between, always hoping to get closer towards the east.

In her narrative Ana points out how the location of their home affected the female members of the family differently from the men. It did not seem to be a problem for her brother. However, it was all-important for the social image of women to reside in a ‘good barrio’. As a matter of fact, in the Chile of the 1960’s women’s behavior and chances for better futures were more strongly affected by norms pertaining to physical appearance and one’s physical environment than men’s were. Norms about fashion and being well dressed governed much of the lives of middle class women. The presentation of such a social image was typically a middle class phenomenon. In order to make a ‘good’ marriage a young woman had to produce herself as respectable. Thus, women could find a way up in society through a conventional marriage where appearance and being a good proper woman matters. As for housing, the woman was assessed in terms of her close links to the house, while men were regarded as belonging to the world of work and the public sphere. Men used to visit women at their house. In contrast, a woman would be frowned upon if she visited a man in his house. There was a popular saying in Chile that expressed well this relationship between a house and the kind of moral conduct expected from women. A woman could not visit a man in his house because “it is not enough being good (i.e. to be careful in not entering into sexual relations with a man), one has to give the appearance of being so”. Therefore, even today a house and how Chileans relate to it and to each other are tied to a world of gendered appearances.

This domestic space had a moral, as well as an emotional, resonance for Ana and her sister. Furthermore, the location of the house in Santiago’s urban space defined their status. Like many adolescent and young women of their class with limited material resources, Ana and her sister experienced what was a kind of drama. They were living in a house and barrio that denied them the possibility of receiving people they wanted to get to know, the kind of people they needed in order to meet their social aspirations.

This history of Ana’s childhood and adolescence, viewed superficially, appears quite commonplace, the kind of history that one comes across in soap operas. In reality, it

---

25 In Spanish: “No basta con ser bueno sino que hay que parecerlo.”
is more like a kind of Jane Austin story. Frustrated desires and aspirations that may appear very common reveal on the one hand the degree of marginality and exclusion of women of the lower middle class. On the other hand, they reveal the significance of the symbolism of domestic space in social and personal narratives, and how it regulated social situations that were most constraining and also subordinating for women like Ana.

Because of the family's meager income, none of the children were able to pursue university studies. Ana, instead, opted for a technical career, becoming a bilingual secretary in Spanish and English, that would take only a short period of training. She put it as follows:

When I finished secondary school I had the crazy idea of studying law, but had little choice in the matter. The thing was whether I would continue to be a financial burden for the family, or help out in covering some of the costs.

It is to be noted here that while Ana did not have the chance to go to university she did not have to work to assist in the upkeep of her parents. She did not have many privileges, but neither did she suffer total exclusion from society like the majority of the poor did in Chile. The excluded classes could always seek solace in the hope for a better life after death as professed by Catholicism, the dominant religion in Chile at the time. It taught people to resign themselves to their lot in life, and above all show respect to their superiors, masters and the ruling class. Ana, little by little, began to rebel against such values. "They said that one had to have faith to be a catholic, but I did not have that faith." She declared herself to be an atheist at the age of fifteen, and two years later she joined the growing movement of the Left.

It was during this period of training to become secretary, in 1964, that she came in contact with that part of the student movement that had opted for a Marxist analysis of society, defined in terms of the class struggle. Subsequently, Ana began to participate in student protests. In one of these manifestations she met the man who eventually would become her husband, and who for several years already had been a militant member of one of the most influential parties of the Left.

I was a rebel, but without having a clear political position. When he met me I wasn't a person whom you could say was from the Left. He was four years older than I was; he came into my life as an activist on the take. It
didn't take him much to convince me of the correctness of the Leftist position, being myself only 17 years old. From that moment on we lived together and married in 1969.

From this point on she no longer considered the deep frustrations she had felt about the circumstances of her family’s social class situation in ‘personal’ terms. Those tensions that formed so much part of her earlier life now could be explained through Marxist analysis. She became conscious of the fact that the relations between social classes are not ordained by nature. The political manuals distributed to people at that time explained that power relations existing between social classes were based on the economic infrastructure. Or more specifically, the way the system of production of material goods functions is that the class that ‘owns the means of production’ holds a hegemonic power in society imposing its own interests on other classes that have to ‘sell their labor’. The hegemonic class controlled not only the economic system but also reproduced its power through ideological work. Institutions such as the school system, the church and the media were reproducing such ideology.

The disadvantages of one class with regard to another that had prevailed in Chile for centuries, could no longer be understood in terms proposed by the dominant ideology. It is of special interest here to point out the tremendous change Ana was undergoing in the perception she held about her country during this period. She passed from being part of a country in which she felt excluded in many respects, to one in which the personal history of many like her became central. Chile, and her political project, gave Ana an

26 The Chilean sociologist Marta Harnecker (who was a disciple of Althusser) wrote Los Conceptos Elementales del Materialismo Histórico which explained in a very simple way the Marxist analysis influenced by Althusser’s understanding of the production and function of the ideology. In this sense we thought not only that the dominant ideology was reproduced in different ways according to class location but also that we could uncover somehow the ‘truth’ once we had dismantled that ideology. To do that it was necessary to change the material conditions of the production of knowledge and at the same time to carry out a particular struggle at the ideological level.

27 Intellectuals such as Ariel Dorfman(1971) and Armand Mattelart (1971) were very influential with their work in mapping out the ideological impact of the media. They published a weekly magazine for children that told traditional stories - such as Blanca Nieves y los Siete Enanitos, and Caperucita Roja, and others - in a new way, bringing attention to the ideological work inherent in such stories.
opportunity to feel completely at ‘home’, in her own country. She felt that it had become possible to obtain justice for all those who had been oppressed in Chile.

Interestingly, Ana presents in the same quotation a view on the relationship between men and women in which men are understood to be the active ones and women as passive. As she said, “When he met me…” as if she was not active in that initial meeting. It suggests also that she was like a *tabula rasa*, or unshaped material on which he wrote her first ideas or sculpted the figure she is today. In this paragraph she seems to discount the likelihood that her commitment to social change was related to her own experience.

**The Self and the Nation**

A review of the literature that deals with nation shows that it can be viewed in many ways. For Anderson, a national collectivity is imagined as something like a horizontal and homogeneous community. In that way people can think of a nation as a sort of kinship system, as one big family. This feeling can be so strong that many would even be prepared to give their life for their country. Bhabha (1994) questions this popular idea of a nation being like a big family, the spatial expression of a unitary people. He suggests that the nation as a spatial expression becomes something quite different when perceived from a subordinate position, rather than from a hegemonic one. The tension resulting from these opposing ideas of nation is evident in Ana’s narrative. Her position, rooted in a subordinate class and gender, has always been there, though she rarely articulates it in those terms. She is much more explicit when she talks about Chile (as shown in her narrative cited below), as something more than her place of birth, as a ‘big family’ for whom she used to hold the deepest feelings. Canada, in contrast, her country of adoption, represents a new form of relationship.

Before moving on with our analysis of Ana’s story I should mention that the terms nation, national identity and nationalism are often used interchangeably (Anderson, 1991a; Smith, 1991). However, for purposes of my analysis, there are some significant differences in their definitions and meaning. For instance, Radcliffe and Weston (1996)
distinguish nationalism, as a coherent ideology, from the civic and territorial aspect of nation[^28] and the lived imaginaries of subjects that constitute national identities.

Referring to her participation in the social movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's Ana talks about it as follows:

I don't remember much of my married life in those first years... I do remember the birth of my children, and especially the marches I joined in, in spite of my advanced state of pregnancy. It may seem absurd, but what we were living at that time made us feel part of something that was more important than giving birth to a child. Such was the mystique of that moment of history for me... And my children know that.

Her participation in that momentous stage of Chile's history and her deep feelings about it meant something that was almost like a religious experience. Participating in that political project was to transcend beyond earthly concerns, to involve oneself in history on a larger scale with visions of eternity. Her strong commitment to this political project that concerned the nation of Chile as a whole sharply contradicted the norm established for women at that time. After all it was expected that home and children were the priority for women, not matters related to the State. Yet, the whole country was affected by what was happening at the grass roots levels. For Ana its importance somehow overshadowed that of childbirth. Her feeling as mother, including that of giving birth to her children, was marked by the vertigo of that period.

She didn't remember much of her married life, but she emphasized that she did remember the birth of her children and especially the marches she joined in. Stating it this way served above all as a reference to indicate the force and determination behind her involvement with the grass-roots movement. Ana turns to the biological function of giving birth to children, unique to women, to express the centrality of this political experience for her. Although all women do not universally experience giving birth, it does form part of the condition of women that excludes men. Therefore, when talking about her experience from the perspective of her particular gender's condition, one begins to understand what meaning Ana attaches to her political participation. Sara

[^28]: Nation for Giddens (1991) is seen as the unification of administration and power over a specific territory. In this case he emphasizes the infrastructure of the nation rather that its meaning for citizens.
Ruddick (1994) indicates that female identity goes beyond motherhood, "To be sexed approximately 'female' is to encounter, and therefore to know, the world in approximately 'female' ways. One, but only one, of these encounters with the world occurs for many females, but certainly not for all, in birthgiving" (p. 41). Even Ana's children know that they ranked below her commitment to the revolution. "Such was the mystique of that moment of history for me...And my children know that." She does not complete her sentence, because, as she said before, "it may seem absurd" that her children were secondary to that great social movement of which she felt an integral part.

Ana goes on with her narrative:

In retrospect, because in that period I did not think it, but felt it, we were all involved in a thing that took hold of us and lifted us up...And it must have gripped you and the others the same way. Because one can not explain this in another way. Looking back on it I realize what a spectacular moment it was. My daughter dies of envy for not having been able to feel it because she knows it is something unique in life that few experience. Maybe we were fortunate, but also unfortunate. I believe that even now I consider it a privilege, imagine that, in spite of the terror we were subjected to afterwards and having had to leave Chile, the pain is there as well. I keep telling my daughter that it had to have been something very special because it affected us so much, because it was so painful.

I have to remind the reader again that I am not only the narrator and interpreter in this thesis. I read Ana's text as if they were my own words. By representing this particular testimony of hers, I invest in remembering in specific ways my own sentiments about the events of that stage in Chilean history. I agree with her assessment of that period, in which I also was deeply involved. I, too, felt fortunate to have lived that incredible phase that Chile went through between 1970 and 1973. At the same time, it was devastating. After the euphoria of that period we had to face a brutal military coup and repression with all its terrible consequences for the country, especially for those who had been actively involved in this experience.

**The Chilean Road to Socialism**

With the rise of Unidad Popular this country called Chile achieved nothing less than a government model of social justice. It responded not only to the aspirations of so
many Chileans, but was also something shared by many all over the world. It was the result of a long historical process of struggle and alliances struck among various political parties of the Left. As put so well by Bengoa (1999) when speaking of this social project, “We Chileans were capable of presenting to the world a dream, ‘the Chilean way to socialism’.” Chile as a national collectivity found itself torn in 1970 between the parameters of basically two sharply opposing political visions of society. The play of democracy decided that those forces that stood for greater social justice for all Chileans should have the right to assume leadership of the country and put their platform into practice. To the world at large Chile appeared as a unique experiment in Latin America, for its style of bringing about profound social change, through a process of consultation and decision-making that formed part of the liberal democratic tradition.

Thus, a new image of Chile enters into the national and international conscience. Salvador Allende, who as an individual represented the political position of only one sector of the population by the fact of being elected president, the position of maximum authority of the country, comes to symbolize the nation. The terminology used at the time was imbued with the conviction that we were fighting to defend the ‘national’ interest. To take an example, Allende’s government nationalized copper, until then left to be exploited by American corporations, in an attempt to gain economic independence for the country. As the saying went, “Copper is the bread of Chile.” In this context copper became a symbol of national sovereignty. Allende himself underlined the symbolic significance of his position representing the nation as president of the republic when at the point of dying, during a merciless bombardment of the palace on the day of the military coup, he wrapped himself in the national flag.

**Ana’s Political Journey**

Through what processes, activities and notions do we women identify ourselves with this nation state which proposed a new social formula for the people? Was there perhaps a particular female way of relating oneself to nation through different metaphors? Through what cultural practices and ways does Ana narrate nation? Ana’s identification with the movement of Unidad Popular was, as we have seen, absolute. This was expressed by her strong desire to be at the service of its cause. “When the Unidad Popular
came to power one had to do something, it was like saying 'here I am to work, count on me'.” She decided though to involve herself with a party different from her husband’s.

My husband’s party always intimidated me; it wasn’t a question of just joining and being active in it. They invited me, but I thought it was too much for me. Just the same I always let myself be guided by that party’s political platform.

Ana saw herself as insufficiently prepared for a political party that she believed stood at the vanguard of the social and political struggle. This did not seem to dissuade that party’s leadership though to invite her to join. We have to be careful not to generalize on the basis of the perception held by Ana about her ability to accept political responsibility, and think that this is true for all Chilean women. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that women in general, with few notable exceptions, did not assume any leadership positions in political parties (Kay, 1987; Kirkwood, 1986).

In the same text, Ana shows the urgency of the situation, the necessity to share in the political work to be done, “one had to act”. She understood, like other activist women and myself at that time, that the proposal of Chilean socialism involved a struggle between classes about economic exploitation and public policy. The struggle was a difficult one, having to face powerful forces that consisted principally of the Chilean ‘bourgeoisie’ (the privileged class) and at the international level the economic and political interests of American imperialism.

Among Chileans there developed different ways in which to identify with their country that often stood in sharp contrast one to the other. Interestingly though, those who were in favor of change felt they were defending their country as much as those who favored the status quo. The question here was not a country that was at war with another, sending out its soldiers to defend ‘la patria’. Reference to ‘patria’ in our struggle had little to do with an external enemy or with territory. The idea of ‘patria’, in the political context of that time took on meanings based on visions that were mutually exclusive.

This situation shows how power relations are at the heart of the conceptualization of nation. Nobody could remain neutral. The Chilean people were dragged into defining their own position, whether they liked it or not, in one or the other direction (Garces, 1972; Zemelman & Leon, 1972). Ana captures well the underlying strain:
We lived a dream, thinking that it was possible for the most dispossessed in society to have a place; and in fact for three years people of that class did have a place for the first time in Chile's history. And that is what caused the opposition to be so upset.

The dominant economic class of the country saw itself confronted for the first time by subordinate groups of the middle and working classes that no longer were at the mercy of their former masters, but who now could advance their interests from a position of power. They had gained control of the country's government by legitimate means. Though they did not have a majority of seats in the Legislature, they were able to manage the state from their executive position of power in government via the Presidency.29

For those who identified themselves with the movement of national liberation 'home' extended to include the whole country, all the people. This was so because they saw included in the negotiations of government those demands that traditionally had been excluded as a result of the prevailing relations of dominance between the social classes. 'La patria', i.e. the country Chile, thus became the central reference point of belonging, giving meaning to what was or was not to be done. I asked Ana how her political party related to women as compared to men.

At that time I never did feel inferior, nor did they treat me differently because of my being a woman. I did feel it much later when we came here, looking at that experience in retrospect. But at that time, no. The tasks that were carried out were almost purely physical, everybody had to do them; it was up to me to even help out in loading trucks. Juan had the responsibility of supervising a whole sector of the city, seeing to it that the wheat would be turned into flour, then into bread and subsequently that it would be distributed to the people. Besides that, during the strike of the truckers, he had to make sure that the trucks were loaded and sent out for food distribution.

Although Ana did not see this as an unequal relationship then, she recognized later that it was. They did not assign her, nor did she assume larger responsibilities as carried by her husband, who was asked to supervise the provision of food for a whole

29 Allende had won 37% of the total vote cast. The conservative Alessandri came a close second with 35%, and Tomic a Christian Democrat who represented the center position, received 28% of the vote. Unidad Popular's lack of an overall majority meant that it did
district. In this regard she was quite eloquent when she explained that she did not feel up to it, that is, to be in the same party as her husband. She had internalized the role of helper, to be an assistant in the political and social realm. The subject of political change as she phrased it was a neutral subject in terms of gender, “the tasks we carried out were almost purely physical, everybody had to do them.” But as she points out in the following text, the condition of gender was very much present and evident in the smallest details.

Although it may be a mere detail I always felt proud for having had the opportunity to meet Allende face to face. I remember it was a large event organized by the union, which was attended by Allende. He approached me at one point and said, 'compañera (comrade), can you bring me a cup of coffee'? Why do I tell you this, I took off and hurried to get it to him...These are like moments, like little treasures I remember.

Ana was in awe of this political leader. Allende represented a new path to social justice and honesty. Yet, when she met him her relationship with him was not through this new political path but through a domestic task she was asked to perform traditional to women. She was asked to bring him a cup of coffee. The political parties of the Left saw the female subject linked to and relegated to the domestic area, that is the private sphere, while the environment of ideas and institutional life, that is the public sphere, belonged properly to the male subject.

Sexual Division of Political Work

In her interviews with exiled women from Chile living in England during the late 1980's, Kay (1987) found that these women always described their proper role in politics in auxiliary terms. Apparently this view does not seem to have changed over time and place for women in exile, as we will see from the following example related to an experience in Toronto that came to my attention. In October of 1998 Chileans there organized a panel to analyze Pinochet's detention in London. The people selected for this panel included three Chilean men and two Canadian women. I asked one of my interviewees, Tania, who assisted in the organization of that event, why she or any other Chilean woman had not been chosen to sit on the panel. She claimed that she didn't like not control the legislative arm of government; however, the President had substantial power, which was by no means unprecedented (Biehl del Rio & Fernandez, 1972).
to talk in public, and that those Chileans whom I mentioned to her as possible candidates, women who appeared quite comfortable in public, according to her were either narcissistic and interested only in their own prestige. I myself had become acutely aware that Chilean women, even after all these years in Canada, continue to hold auxiliary, almost invisible, roles particularly in political activities related to their country of origin. Those who aspire towards more visible roles have to still overcome the barrier of what is considered among Chileans the norm for a ‘good woman’: to be silent and to walk behind the man, figuratively speaking. It appears from Tania’s comment that in the Chilean diaspora Canadian women are permitted to share the platform with Chilean men, but Chilean women are not.

Several dynamic factors have been at play that may explain the continuing silence of Chilean women. In their majority, women have not visualized themselves particularly as objects of discrimination, even when they were not included in what was considered to be the fundamental struggle going on in society, that is the class struggle. Women were principally related to in connection to their biological function of having children. Therefore, she was expected to occupy herself with their upbringing and the upkeep of the home. Such a domestic role relegated her to the private sphere, seen as clearly separate from the public one. As far as political parties were concerned, they belonged to the public sphere. Not surprisingly, their policy platforms said nothing about improvements that ought to be made in the condition of women as women.30

Nonetheless, both Left and Right needed the support of women for their respective political platforms. In trying to mobilize them they turned to symbolic images in speeches that connected with womanhood and traditional roles. They spoke of ‘the Chilean woman’, ‘la Madre de Chile’ (the motherland), ‘the protector of the great family that is the nation’, ‘the defender of our children’, and ‘women rise up and fight for what is yours’.31 These images reflect well the role that was conferred upon women as the guardians of the home, or that of the ‘great family’ that is the nation. Pettman (1996b)

30 Nevertheless, Unidad Popular tried to address gender issues through a greater informality of dress and behavior. For example they called women compañeras. However, those who argued for the need to broaden the struggle to include issues such as sexuality, the family and personal life were a few lonely voices.
notes that in complex interactions between nation and state, the state is often seen as gendered male and nation as gendered female. Thus, women referred to in the above images are construed as the symbolic form of the nation. Viewed from this perspective women’s participation would be of benefit to the state, with men as the major beneficiaries rather than women.

The absence in the political agenda of interests relevant to women per se was a problem that had serious consequences, especially for Unidad Popular. The critical analysis of this fact, made by Julieta Kirkwood, and to which I will refer liberally in the following paragraphs, is quite to the point on this issue. The political project of Unidad Popular theorized the social conflict prevalent at the time as a conflict between economic classes, pure and simple. This constituted the central idea of politics as practiced. Feminine history in that period appeared not to be differentiated from this central issue in society. Women’s condition of oppression and that of native peoples and others needing to be liberated, were submerged into and seen as an integral part of the larger issue of class oppression. Kirkwood writes:

The democratization of the system and the broader social and political participation at that time, brought about as a result of the people’s movement, as a whole, did not address – neither politically, nor theoretically – certain categories of more specific problems. These were supposed to be resolved automatically once the basic class struggle was solved. That was the essence of the feminine problem (Kirkwood, 1986)

In the sectors that stood for social transformation, Kirkwood identified two ideologies, one superimposed on the other, each of which corresponded to two very different levels. On the one hand, there was the progressive, revolutionary ideology that pertained to the public realm, completely outside the context of the concrete day-to-day relations and behaviors of people. And, on the other hand, was the traditional conservative ideology that provided a coherent model that was hierarchical, disciplinary and constrictive, and implied roles for women that were seen as naturally linked to the family, regardless of social class.

---

The Personal is Political

The separation between public and private was so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the population that even the Left did not touch this traditional ideology of the family. In other words, this ideology cut across all social classes. Even when the Left regarded itself as the champion of the proletarian family, viewed as a basic revolutionary unit, it ignored the complex authoritarian structures functioning within that basic social unit. The fact was that authoritarianism within the family was just not seen as a public issue. After all, it was not only the family that was authoritarian, so were the educational system and the socialization of children, the factory, and even the political parties functioned in authoritarian ways. To change authoritarianism, so deeply embedded in the social structure of the country, would have required an analysis of its fundamental roots, which Kirkwood argued, were to be found in the family.

Consequently, the private sphere of the family would have to be made a political and a public issue. But Unidad Popular did not include it in its political platform. So, when the Pinochet regime imposed an authoritarian rule after the military coup, it followed basically in the Chilean tradition of a system that had never been challenged, not even by the Left. Women could have contributed greatly, not only to class liberation but also to a more extended form of democracy, because of their personal experience having been in a subordinate position within the existing authoritarian social structure of the family. But the ‘personal’ was not seen as also political. Issues such as abortion, domestic violence, sexual and reproductive freedom were not considered to be legitimate public issues, and therefore were not included in the political agenda. Consequently, the majority of women in Chile could not identify easily with the proposals of the Left. As Kirkwood explained:

They (Unidad Popular) proposed the socialization of the means of production in circumstances that found more than 80% of Chilean women as inactive, simply because they did not form part of what was considered as the ‘productive work force’. Their proposals suggested subverting the relationship of power between master-subject, but implicitly still leaving women to remain dependent partners of ‘liberated men’. It advanced the idea that the threshold of liberty was to be the man, for women freedom stopped at the doorsteps of the house (1986, p.51).
By ignoring female oppression and those factors that directly affected women, they took a reactive stance, as happened so often in history. I am thinking here of 'the march of the empty pots' that started in 1972 in protest against the government of Allende, and in support of a military coup. Contemporary statistics dramatically show the political divide that existed along gender lines. The political sector that stood for radical social change had the support of 45% of the country's total male population, compared to the conservative sector that was multi-class and gained the support of 70% of all Chilean women. These women, even though they were the primary victims of a social system submerged in authoritarianism, expressed a rejection of radical social change (Kirkwood, 1986, p.188).

In this context we should ask what Chile, as a nation, really meant for Ana and other women of the 1960's and early 1970's? It is quite clear from the above analysis that Chile's history was narrated from a male perspective. For the Left the struggle was about liberation from the exploitation of labor and class domination, in which women's liberation played no part. The Right stood for upholding traditions in which the defense of the family, with its patriarchal structure and authoritarian form, was a central feature. The political dream of Unidad Popular, as noted, was shared by a relatively small percentage of women who, like their male compañeros, searched for a liberating path for the country but who were not allowed, and therefore unable, to add anything that went beyond the general proposals formulated by men.

Evidently, the military also regarded the role women had played in the political sphere of the Left as secondary, since they detained mostly men following the coup. Targeting principally organizations such as political parties and labor unions, it was the men who were rounded up, becoming the major victims of military repression. So it was with Ana's husband who was taken prisoner, while Ana was not.

Incorporation of women into the politics of the Right did not mean that it had a feminist proposal, which might have drawn more activist women into their ranks. In this case, and at this particular juncture, mobilization of women served the interests of the Right to come to the defense of the moral values of the country, the family and private property. Once the Right had won that struggle and felt those values had been properly
restored, women were expected to return to their private space, the home, and focus on their domestic responsibilities.

Did this mean that women stopped functioning in the political sphere? Far from it. Patricia Chuchryk (1994, p. 70) points out that it was precisely because of women’s traditional condition of public invisibility and the prevailing norms about the responsibility of a mother and wife towards her family and husband that allowed women to become political actors, at a time when it was extremely dangerous to do so. Their growing political involvement during those repressive years was legitimated by their traditional roles as wives and mothers. And so, in 1974, they formed the Chilean Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared, and the Association of Relatives of the Politically Executed with the majority of its members being women. The same women kept running into one another in hospitals, outside prisons and in government offices, all seeking information on the whereabouts of their loved ones. They eventually formed organizations with the help and support of the Catholic Church to coordinate their search. I should add here that those women who were the founders of those organizations had not necessarily been politically active before.

Women who moved into exile faced other realities. To examine those, let us return to Ana and consider what her relationship with Chile consisted of, once the military took control with brutal measures. Juan, Ana’s husband, was taken prisoner by the police who turned him over eventually, like thousands of others, to the military for detention. "They pushed a machinegun into his mouth many times, telling him they would kill him if he didn’t talk. They were surprised that he and the others would not talk, nobody said anything." Juan was held for two months, being subjected to this and other types of torture. He then was let go. "This experience taught us that if they could take you prisoner once, just like that, it could happen again." Ana, who had worked as secretary in one of the government offices, lost her job. Fearing that Juan might be taken in again, they decided to leave the country.

I did not want to leave. I said that our obligation was to stand firm in Chile. I considered it shameful for us to leave under the circumstances. We were fortunate enough to be able to present our case and convince the embassy people, while others were not for lack of preparation and skill. It just did not seem honorable to me to go through with it. It also felt like
abandoning ship. Juan, on the other hand, felt worried about what might happen if he was to be taken prisoner again. He said the security of the family and that of his own were at stake. Ultimately, I told myself, I had to concern myself about my husband’s security. After all this was my obligation as a wife. I tell you this, and I have never told anyone else, but if Juan had not put it in those terms...for me his security was not my first concern at that moment. Looking back on those events I think it made no sense, but at that time I felt like that.... The most curious thing is that I wasn’t even upset in having to leave my relatives. I was much more upset about the idea of having to leave the country, and the fact that I could not be one with the others in putting up with the ‘shit’ the country was in. I felt my duty was to stay. Now, in retrospect, I tell you, I know I made the right decision in leaving.

Again in this narrative we see Ana rebelling against the norms pertaining to women, in her role as wife and mother. She desired to remain closely linked to her country, that ‘imagined’ Chilean community, and all those people who were subjected to that brute military force. She would have liked to be with the other women who stayed behind in Chile to continue fighting on the side of the persecuted. To convince her otherwise Juan had to resort to images of the traditional family and the expected behavior of a wife. She had really no choice in the matter, she was obliged by tradition to follow her husband. This argument appeared more persuasive to her than her concern about his security.

Agger (1994), in her study of exiled women in Denmark, showed how common was the feeling of these women who wanted to stay in their country in spite of it all. One just could not leave one’s country without betraying the struggle. The issue here is that of an unacceptable abuse of power, an abuse of power by the newly established government in pressuring people into exile. If, under such circumstances, one said good-by to one’s country, it would feel like accepting the new reality and resigning to dictatorial rule.

On the other hand, this abuse of power by the new rulers had unforeseeable consequences for the security of those citizens who opposed it, and particularly those who had been activists in the cause of Unidad Popular, like Ana’s husband. This, combined with her duty as a wife, made her decide to leave the country. I asked Ana what this specifically meant for her, to accept the duty of a wife. Her answer was that if they had stayed behind and Juan had been picked up again, she would not have been able
to live with the guilt, knowing very well that she would have been blamed. As his wife she had to consider all possible scenarios, she had to take into account what might have happened to him and also to the rest of the family. Thus, Ana took the decision to leave, because by remaining 'she' would have ultimately been at fault for any suffering that might have been inflicted upon him as a result of the military's violent measures. To avoid placing her husband in such a potentially dangerous situation, Ana reluctantly gave in to what she and others regarded as a cruel game played by the dictatorship. The objective of that game she understood was to terrorize and thereby silence any opponents, so that the new rulers would be able to govern uncontested without proper debate as normally found in democracies.

In the same text she informs us that now, having reassessed the thoughts she held at that time from the perspective of the present, she thinks she made the right decision. The relevant question to be pursued here is what significance can be attached to this reassessment of those events seen from the present? What has Chile become for her today? And what meaning does this new country Canada have for her, after all these years?

**A ‘Body’ Between Divided Geographies**

Canada is the country that took them in. That first period, following upon arrival, Ana lived as if they would be staying for only a short while, believing that they would return to Chile within one, or at the most two years. Like other Chileans recently arrived, she threw herself into the political work from her condition of exile against the Pinochet regime. This activity played a central role in her life and that of most Chileans in Canada during the 1970’s. Besides this she became the moral and economic pillar of the family. Of course, she had the advantage of knowing English, which allowed her to quickly locate and obtain a good job. She worked extra time with the Toronto Chilean Association, a political organization, in solidarity with Chile.

Juan did not become much involved in politics over here. I was the one who was most active, which was something quite different from our situation in Chile. The problem was that Juan is very susceptible, and there were many active in political work who were feeling self-important and were very disagreeable. But I was much stronger...
Ana points to something that is very interesting and requires further analysis. In these new living conditions her role in political work reversed her previous relation with her husband. It raises the question whether migration from one country to another may invalidate patterns of behavior and relationships that were the norm in the ‘old country’? I will address this question and analyze the various adjustments made in behavior when crossing borders in chapter 7, where I draw on narratives from all nine women interviewed. I will continue here with Ana’s history, not so much in relation to her stay in Canada, but more in relation to the fulfillment of her dream and that of all exiled people: to return to the country she lost.

Ana arrived in Canada like a zombie, without any knowledge about Canada, no attempt to settle in this country, residing here as in transit, awaiting her return to Chile. She experienced this place, where she lived from one day to the next, as somebody else’s country and not her own, while her own country so distant now was becoming more inaccessible with each passing day. Ana remembered Chile as a place of important political projects that were rudely interrupted, of shared horrors, and of family longings, loved ones who also form part of how the nation is imagined, remembered and lived. After living this way for five years in Canada they decided to return to Chile.

We had been telling ourselves from the beginning that we came ‘to ride out the storm’, so to speak. Like many others we naively thought that the dictatorship would not last long. And as time began to pass by we came to realize that one could not wait until the dictatorship would fall in order to return because that could take an eternity. We were very much imbued with the mystique and desire to work in that political thing...

Exile is a situation of tortuous waiting. One waits (hopes) for the political situation to change so that one can go back. Ana and her husband lived with the belief that the political work they did from the outside, in Canada, to bring down the military regime would not have as great an impact as the work done from inside the country. They thought that by returning they would be in a better position to hasten Pinochet’s fall. In this context, it is important to remember that they had not been formally and explicitly expelled from their country, but rather that their departure from Chile was a form of ‘self-exile’ to avoid a real danger faced by Juan. There had been a choice for them, albeit a very restricted one, as we saw earlier. Thus, their self-imposed exile left open the
possibility to enter the country again, since their name did not appear on the list of the expelled. They took the decision to return in 1979.

In contrast to their previous departure from Chile for Canada, their return to Chile this time was planned. Ana left first with the children and moved in with her parents. Juan, on the other hand, stayed behind for another year, gathering some more money to bring along with him. As in Canada before, Ana quickly obtained a job again, well paid, as a bilingual secretary with an American mining company in Santiago. She survived those first months very well being able to support her aging parents economically as well. However, life under the military dictatorship was not made easy for people like her who had been supporters of the previous government of Allende. The military had foreseen cases like hers, and while they did not impede her return they did everything to frustrate her reintegration into the country. So, while her husband’s name might not have appeared on the list of the expelled, he did appear on another list, that is the ‘list of undesirables’, which was consulted by private companies and government offices to contract new workers and employees. As Ana was the wife of an ‘undesirable’ person, she became suspect and soon lost her employment with the American mining company. After that it was moving from one job to another, being let go, as soon it became known that her husband was on the list. As for Juan, he was allowed to enter the country, but nowhere was he accepted for employment in spite of his training and expertise in computation for which there was a great demand, especially at that time.

Consequently, the money to live on became scarce. Slowly they found themselves falling into debt, as they also tried to help out relatives who were without work. Where the years prior to their exile consisted of participating in a struggle for political survival, trying to turn a collective dream into reality, the two years and a half in Chile this time were reduced to a fierce struggle of economic survival of the family. In Ana’s words:

I tell you the truth, the only thing that concerned me during the dictatorship was how to take care of my children and have work. Only by doing that I was making a mockery of the military government.

With that thought Ana seems to underline her reason for being back in Chile. By the mere fact of living in Chile she was contravening the strategy of the military dictatorship, which consisted in getting rid of all opponents by whatever means at their
disposal. But the repression was so severe that Ana and Juan were unable to engage in political work as they had hoped for while still in Canada.

Generally, the people in Chile didn’t talk. When we were at the point of returning to Canada again I knew just a few people who used to be on the Left and we had formed a little group of three or four...you know that ideology even though you don’t want to permeates everything, including your relations. The dis-information in Chile was total. I knew more about Chile in Canada than I knew while living in my own country. At the end we were in a very bad situation economically, my whole family was in a precarious situation. Juan told me that he didn’t feel like a citizen anymore in Chile, as he was not accepted anymore to work even though he was in his own country of birth. This was the moment that Juan decided to come back here again, or really we decided it together as I said let’s go.... When I got up into the airplane, after having a good cry because I was leaving my family, I felt like a big load being lifted from my shoulders. In Canada I could work and on top of that help out my family from here. I was able to organize a life for myself that I never could do in Chile, and our economic security that was so important especially for Juan.

Ana left Chile with her family for the second time. The terror they had experienced in 1973 was replaced this time by being denied their basic rights as citizens, being marginalized, exiled in their own country. They were neither allowed to contribute to the political life of the country or to the economy. Trying to immerse oneself again in Chile’s life was made impossible. Consequently, in deciding to leave for Canada this time, they knew what they were losing and what they were gaining.

Luckily for them, they both could take up the same jobs they had before leaving. For the children it was more difficult, suffering once more the consequences of a sudden interruption in their lives. They were not very keen to leave after having become accustomed in having a big family in Chile. While being away for two and a half years, they had to adapt themselves again to the school system here. But little by little they made new friends.

Once settled back in Canada Ana found new possibilities for getting involved politically in the Chilean diaspora. She became the coordinator of the women’s program of the Chilean Association in Toronto, and together with other women set up a scholarship for Chilean children whose parents had been tortured. Furthermore, she initiated changes in gender relations within the organization of Chileans.
The men asked us to prepare the ‘empanadas’ (popular Chilean cheese or meat pies) for the dances (peñas), and we said no. We told them that they could search themselves for men or women who might serve or would like to do this work, since we wanted to have a different role in the organization.

After the military dictatorship came to an end and democracy was restored in Chile with the installation of the Aylwin Government - still a very restricted form of democratic government, I should add - the Chilean organization in Toronto began to fall into decline. This seemed natural, considering that the raison d’être of its existence had been to work from Canada to add to the fall of the dictatorship.

Unlike Chile, Canada offered her space to survive, to continue her political struggle in relation to her country, and to extend this struggle to other spheres that had been of deep concern to her. Gender relations and the unequal relations that exist between the two sexes became a preoccupation for her, as did the diverse forms of tyranny suffered by different groups in society. This led her to extend her solidarity to those groups in their struggle for liberation. In addition to political space, she was able to find a certain economic security in Canada, something that was also denied to her in the Chile of the dictatorship.

It is in Canada that Ana has found ‘Chile’, namely in those who left and who like her are living a form of ‘post exile’. Among them she found those with whom she has developed friendships. As a geographical place Chile no longer serves as her ‘patrïa’. Chile has become for her more like an old friendship that she cultivates at long distance, a place where some loved ones are still living. Her daily life, preoccupations and aspirations are now connected with Canada. She feels loyalty with Canadians who helped her out during her arrival and others who have joined in solidarity with her. Her situation in Canada is reflected well in the following part of her narrative, where she talks about her friendships with Canadians and Latin-Americans.

My friends in Canada are those from the beginning. I know them from the first days of arriving here. But my friendships with Canadians are distinct from those I have with Latin-Americans. I meet and relax with Chileans, in Spanish. With Canadians I also have great friendships, but we lunch together on workdays, they are very good friends. Chileans for me are like family, with them I can talk in Spanish and relax. But I can not forget the
gestures of generosity that my boss and other Canadian colleagues have extended to me...

In conclusion, what we hear Ana tell us quite eloquently in the following and final part of her history is that she does not feel as a citizen of a country called Chile, located in South America. More specifically, she no longer can act out her dream for Chile as if it were still her country, a country that at one time absorbed her whole being and for which she risked herself but which she finds difficult to understand and able to relate to. When referring to Chile, it is 'their country' now, not ours. And when talking about its inhabitants, it is 'they' and not we. I will let Ana have the last word.

The Chileans have decided what road to take and we are not the ones to tell them what it is to be. Here (in Canada), we are now part of the mainstream. Our political involvement does not place us in any kind of danger with respect to Canadian society. I don't understand those who say that while living comfortably here that the Chilean people over there will have to continue fighting and take on the military. We have already left, and so it is up to them to decide what has to be done there, they have to handle the situation. You would have had to live seventeen years under the dictatorship to be able to place yourself in their shoes, to know up to what point the human being is able to internalize the fear and all that. I am sure that much could have been done if people would have had no fear. If I had had to defend my work with tooth and nails, like so many Chileans have had to do there, might I not also have acted as if I was blind to the political situation in order to survive?
CHAPTER 6
MY HUMAN COUNTRY
MI PAIS HUMANO

In chapter five I offered an analysis of what constituted for a Chilean woman her involvement in the political project of Unidad Popular. I was particularly interested in examining how women make sense of their participation in the public sector. In the present chapter I focus on stories related to the private world where family, household and close friends play a central role. Emma’s life history forms a major part of this analysis, though I do draw also on some stories of the other women. Important questions for this chapter are: how does family intertwine with the exiled woman’s sense of belongingness and home, and how do these notions- for someone who has been ‘on the move’ throughout her adult life - relate to the idea of her country, her sense of place?

I have chosen Emma as a main reference for the analysis because, in contrast to most of the other women interviewed, she has neither had a husband or any children of her own. Although she has had affective relationships with several men, she made all her moves and decisions as an independent woman. In this sense, she does not fit the generalized image of a refugee woman, a woman who follows her husband - the ‘real’ refugee - as wife and mother of ‘his’ children. The situation of being not only single but also childless bisects Emma’s life history, giving it a peculiar connotation. Since in Latin America being a mother is a fundamental category that defines womanhood (Montecinos, 1996), Emma’s story takes on a special significance in dealing with the question of how she constructs her identity and her sense of belonging in the absence of children and a married partner.

A second reason for considering her history for a more in-depth analysis has been the key role her family of origin played in her return to Chile. Emma lived that experience intensely for five years, after which she decided to reestablish herself in Canada. Looking at how Emma and other interviewees fashion their memories of family and home I try to map out how family and national identity intersect, and how loss and belongingness get constituted after all these years.
It would serve little purpose to transcribe the entire narration that Emma shared with me. Instead, I will search for the episodes where ideas of family, home and belongingness and their meaning appear more explicit. Emma’s history has many layers. Nothing she said appears self-evident, as her words are open to various possible interpretations. Furthermore, as I tried to listen to her the story she told evoked my own experience, being a counterpart of Emma’s history. Like her, I also left Chile as an exile after the Pinochet-led coup. However, I lived - and interpret - that experience in my own way. After all, even though the historical and national contexts of Chile have been the same for each of us, our biographies and personal histories are not. This leads us to different interpretations of the same phenomena. It is in our common history, but also in our differences that I search for deeper understanding of what is home - one’s place or locality - and belonging.

**Perspectives on Family**

Family has a central place in Emma’s account, it marked not only her childhood and teenage years, but also her existence as an adult, which surprised me at first as she has been a single woman and very much independent of her original family since very early in her life. Family, identity and belonging, and the everyday interactions they entail are part of everybody’s life interwoven in complex ways. Before turning to her story I will first highlight some perspectives on family.

Traditionally, family has been viewed as the basic unit of society. In conventional conceptions of the family, it is assumed that it is a natural fact, based on the biology of sexuality and reproduction, and that our kinship structure is a natural extension of that family. Furthermore, it is assumed that our pattern of gender division of labor is a phenomenon that is given by our anatomical and biological make-up, as noted by Elizabeth Jelin (1991 p. 9)

A number of researchers have questioned the naturalness of such a unit (Andersen, 1991; Bruce, 1989; Eichler, 1983; Jelin, 1991; Vargas, 1989). Specifically, Jelin points out that women have come to contest the naturalized view of a sexually based division of work that expects them to carry out most of the domestic work. She, and
others, has shown how such a division is connected with relations of subordination and domination between the genders.

More recent empirically-based and cross-cultural studies show that there are many ways in which the family can be construed in the context of people's day-to-day life. In an interesting study on the Latin American family Eunice Durham (1991) found a variety of family arrangements, not dissimilar to those found in North America and Europe. The author describes 'family' groups that she came across, including other relatives (members of either one of the spouses' family of origin), members of different types such as godchildren (not blood-related, but for whose religious upbringing an adult has assumed responsibility), protégés, friends, and even domestic servants (p54).

Many social units, regarded as families, are even smaller than a nuclear family such as those formed by two spouses without children; brother(s) and sister(s) living together; a single mother and children; or the less common case of a single father and his children. A more complex type of family having emerged in recent years is made up of two people united in a second or third marriage (or common law union), together with children originating from one or both spouses' earlier marriage(s). The newest form of family, legally recognized as such in Canada, is that of a homosexual or lesbian couple who may constitute a family with some legal rights comparable to heterosexual couples.

Emma herself did not enter into a conjugal heterosexual relationship or form a nuclear family, although she appears to be heterosexual as she makes particular reference to two long-lasting relationships with men. When she talks about her family of origin, she uses the term 'family' in its most commonly understood meaning of a nuclear family consisting of father, mother, herself as the eldest, and four brothers. In addition, she makes a few references to her extended family, including aunts and uncles. Later, though, as we will see further on in the analysis, she moves to a broader conception. Instead of blood relations she proposes something more in line of a support group or network of people with strong ties where one meets friendship, finds security, shares warm feelings, is being accepted, and loved in the broader sense of the word. Her life history provides important insights on how her experience with her family and with close friends impacts in different ways on how one's place becomes constituted. During her childhood the
place where she found safety and love, and where she was being cared for, was her nuclear family of origin. That I will turn to next.

**Emma's Story**

Emma was born in Chile in 1945 and continued to live there throughout her childhood and as a young adult. In 1973 she became exiled, staying in one of the embassies in Santiago, from where she passed to Panama and from there to Canada, arriving in 1974. She returned to live again in Chile in 1993 remaining for 5 years, after which she made up her mind to go back to Canada in 1998 to stay.

I met Emma a few weeks upon her return to Toronto and followed up with several three hour-long interviews, held usually in my home. After each session we gathered around the table with other invited Chilean women friends for a meal and good conversation. The failure in Emma’s attempt to reinsert herself in Chilean society, and the new challenge she faced to reintegrate in Canada touched me deeply. Her story is framed by her recent experience in Chile and her family becomes the central focus in her telling of that story.

Reading the first part of Emma’s narrative she appears to have a clear and separate picture of the two countries. Chile is the place of her childhood and young adulthood, and Canada the country that offered her sanctuary. However, her story about the last ten years presents both spaces as interconnected, showing changes in identification with each country. Furthermore, in her telling she goes back and forth from one place to another as she points out feelings, problems, aspirations and desires. I’ll try to keep the order she gave to her story as I think this order is also part of her story. She already knew that my research was about exile and nation. When I asked her in our first interview about some personal data, she immediately responded with the following account,

I was born in a working class home with a father who was a sailor in the marine, and who considered himself then and even now during retirement as part of the military. For me the reality of social class divisions in Chilean society was something I was quite aware of already at the age of fourteen. I told him then that he was of the working class but with uniform. The place I was born in was called Santa Barbara, a small fishing village in the Province of Valdivia with a primary school that had up to
four grades. We were the most well off family in the village. We were the family with shoes. One day I hid them in the rose bushes because I wanted to be like the other children.

What strikes me about the opening of her story was the emphasis she placed on class and how clearly she identified her working class origin. After all, Emma is today part of the middle class, being a university-educated person and professional, as are her brothers in Chile. She remembers the place of her childhood as a miniscule unimportant place, a 'small fishing village', a village far removed from the centers of political and economic power, and where the majority of children didn't even have shoes. While she sees herself as having been an integral part of this place, she also sees herself as a member of a relatively privileged family, "we were the most well-off family in the village." As such she had a clear identity that gave her a certain advantage over the other children. On the other hand, forming part of a village of fishers, she also suffered the general limitations that went with living in rural communities, removed from urban centers. She notes that they had just a primary school and only up to and including the fourth grade.

Linked to her description of her family's class position appears her father, a low ranking military figure. His class location casts her as well. While she tends to give a lot of weight to her working class origins, at the same time she makes her father appear as an important figure. But, already at the age of fourteen she looked at the military uniform beyond the myth of respect and privilege the army wanted to inculcate in people. She implied that it did not prevent him and his family from suffering poverty and lack of opportunities, "I told him then that he was of the working class but with uniform." With such a beginning to her story, Emma sets the stage of her place during childhood where her identity was determined in great part by a father 'with uniform', living in a very deprived poor village.

Emma also points out the aspirations her family had about education for all the children, and the effort made to get beyond the fourth level of schooling provided by her village.

For my fifth grade of schooling they sent me off to a neighboring town, where at the age of ten I lived in a boarding house. Only on weekends did
I go back home which took me half an hour by train. At eleven years of age I entered a boarding school, a lyceum for girls.

By reading in between these lines we can almost sense the pain in remembering the separation from her family and the loneliness of having to live at the young age of ten in a place like a ‘boarding house’. And, ‘Only on the weekend did I go back home’. Schools in Chile during the 1950’s were still quite rare in rural regions, outside the bigger cities. The solution that Emma’s family found was unusual for children of her class, living in non-urban settings. Better-situated families with sufficient means could afford sending their daughters to private colleges in important cities, where they were usually taken in as boarders as well. Or, another arrangement was to provide daughters with a basic education at home by contracting teachers privately. Large landowning families in Chile would often put up a house in one of the large cities where mother and children would live during the school year. This particular life style has been described in great detail in Chilean novels, such as for example in the *House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende (1986) and in *El Paraíso* by María Elena Castedo (1991).

Thus, it was rare indeed for working class children living in those villages to pass on to high school, and even less rare to advance to university. Although education in Chile was regarded as the only way to progress socially and economically, a large percentage of children from the lower classes were unable to overcome the barriers that prevented them from such a pursuit. It was not only a problem of distance but also a question of low vacancy rates. Public secondary schools carried long waiting lists resulting in people having to wait for years before being able to obtain a space for their child. And it was not until the 1960s, when universal education was passed into law (Schiefelbein and Farrell, (1980)\textsuperscript{32}, that schools became more accessible for the population at large.

\textsuperscript{32} Schiefelbein and Farrell, based on an eight-year longitudinal study in Chile, wrote that universal education to the entire population became implemented in the 1960s with elementary schools, consisting of eight years, becoming mandatory. Their study indicated that female enrollment and completion of elementary schooling reached 82.9 percent versus 83.1 percent male. These results showed the significant developments that Chile had made particularly in relation to girls, compared to other developing countries.
In spite of the obstacles faced by rural and lower class families in gaining access to schools beyond the primary level in the period preceding the 1960's, Emma was able to pursue her secondary and university studies. When she talks about the struggle that finally got her into a public lyceum in the city, all the credit goes to her mother and to the people of the village in their display of solidarity with her family.

I entered a boarding school, a lyceum for girls, where my mother made a nuisance of herself by sitting down for days in the school's office until they agreed to accept me, on the condition that she could meet the specific requirements spelled out on a list regarding the things that I had to bring along. These included: a cot that had to be of a particular type, a chromium-plated 'Cic'\textsuperscript{33}, dozens of socks, various uniforms for different occasions, coverlets of a certain kind, and so on. As you can see a boarding school at the time was for people who had the means to cover all these additional expenses. My mother went to the store run by Palestinians, told them about her predicament regarding the demands of the school, and asked for credit, which they gave to her. In turn, she called on all the women of the village to help out in sewing quickly all the aprons, nightshirts and other clothes needed for me to go to this lyceum because everything had to be submitted within a few days. And we did it, it was a tremendous effort. She had much will power. School authorities put up a barrier so that she would stop bothering them, but she overcame the obstacle. At that school I studied all the humanities. It was a lyceum with much prestige.

When talking about her childhood Emma remembers two important Chilean institutions beside the family, the army and the school system. Experience with both taught her much about the marginal position of her family in that country. In the above quotation Chile, as a nation-state, is portrayed through the institutional practice of its school system. The discrimination towards working class people obliged Emma's mother to mobilize all her resources in order to give her child the opportunity to study, "School authorities put up a barrier so that she would stop bothering them, but she overcame the obstacle". It is her mother who assumes the responsibility of Emma's education. She is the one who fought for Emma, persevering in her efforts to get her admitted into a recognized lyceum. First she obtained an opening for her at the school; and then with

\textsuperscript{33} Cic was a Chilean company that manufactured these cots for schools all across the country.
almost no money at her disposal, she was still capable of gathering together the pieces of furniture, clothes and other materials required of a student at a boarding school. As if to emphasize the importance of this incidence in her life Emma says, “And we did it”. It is interesting to note here that she does not say ‘and my mother did it’. In this plural ‘we’ she includes herself and the village people who helped out. She projects the idea of a collective effort in the attempt to get her into the lyceum. In contrast to the exclusionary practice of the school system Emma remembers the strong solidarity shown by the women of Santa Barbara, which seems to be part of a system of mutual aid traditional to smaller rural communities, “(My mother) called on all the women of the village to help out.” Thus, home appears in Emma’s recollection not only as being constituted by her family but also by this village of hers where women had formed strong bonds to overcome exclusion and marginalization from hegemonic discourse, “We did it, it was a tremendous effort.”

**Mother’s World and Gender Inequalities**

The gender relations she observed within her own family and in the village also influenced Emma’s association with the place of her childhood. Later, as a young student, she suffered as well the consequences of gender inequality found in Chile. She recalls a number of moments where she had to face the repression inherent in a patriarchal system. I present here two of them, one linked to her father and the other, presented further on, which is related to a faculty member at the university where she took up studies in Political Sciences.

My father does not play an important role in my life. As part of the marine he spent most of his time away from home. And when he arrived at the house he presented himself like a ‘señor’ whom expected to be served. Besides, he usually came accompanied by many of his friends. It meant that we had to kill chickens and wait on them as well. It never occurred to him to say something like ‘since I am here I will take you all to the beach.’ He was more like a visitor whom you had to pay special attention to. My mother on the other hand was a special woman. She was in reality a mother and father to us, very compassionate with everyone, very much a leader among the people. My mother was the only one in the village who knew how to give injections. At times she got up at three in the morning to
attend to a sick person taking me along. I served as her protection. We were very close.

The distribution of gender roles in Emma’s family was quite typical of Chilean families, with her mother assuming the role of child rearing, practically alone, and her father working outside. Emma’s mother also generated some income as a nurse giving injections to patients. It was already quite common in low-income households in Chile that women worked outside to make some money. Half of my interviewees recalled their mothers being involved in activities such as preparing meals and sewing clothes for others. Emma remembers her mother not only as a person who had a lot to offer, but also as a woman who was much appreciated in her community, “very compassionate with everyone, very much a leader among the people.” Emma’s account shows how important a place her mother has in her feelings of belonging to a place compared to her father who was mostly absent.

Her relationship during that earlier period of her life with home and her surroundings is constructed through her mother. And her mother appears in both settings as subordinated and threatened because of her gender. At home her father was “a ‘señor’ who expected to be served. Besides, he usually brought along many of his friends. It meant we had to kill chickens, and wait on them as well.” Emma also learned very soon that the streets of the village she grew up in turned into dangerous places at night, for women especially. There was no protection at all for them, no place where one felt safe, where one could move about freely. Her mother’s work as a nurse demanded of her at times to leave the house at night to give injections to patients in cases of emergencies. But as a woman she could not risk to go out into the street alone. So, she would wake up Emma, still a young child then, and take her along as a protection for herself. What Emma might mean, but does not say explicitly, is that her mother would have exposed herself to possible sexual aggression if she had gone out onto the street alone at night, being mistaken by men for a ‘woman of the street’, a prostitute. Thus her young child served as a useful protection, since Emma’s presence at her side would project the image of a mother with child and reduce the possibility of harassment. To go out into the street normally required the company of a man. In situations where no trusting man was around, women had to resort to other means, as did Emma’s mother. Emma refers to a
narrative still important in Chile nowadays, that a decent woman is not to walk alone in the street late at night.

In summary, Emma’s account of her childhood presents a country where gender and class hierarchies are clearly established. Institutions such as the school and the army appear in their reproduction of the system as well as people’s beliefs regarding women’s role and men’s privileges. The sense of belonging to a place is mediated by her family, particularly her mother who turns Emma’s home into a place where she found protection and feels connected with her village as a community of solidarity and mutual aid. Home also appears to be the place of male dominance, a place where men are to be served. The village streets in turn become a place of danger for women who venture out at night. The social norms regarding a woman’s place made it impossible for her to feel in control at home and safe in the street, particularly when it was dark.

Chilean literature about that period portrays women’s condition in similar ways. The prevailing gender system subjected women of all social classes. For instance, Monica Echeverría (1996) in a biographical history of her own ancestral family documents the sexual violence that was played out within conjugal relationships, generation after generation, which in some cases resulted in the death of the woman. At the same time, she writes in detail about how the men in question were able to escape punishment for their conduct, time after time, by relying on the legal resources and right contacts available to members of the upper class.

In the interviews held with the Chilean women we touched on the subject of sexual violence only in a tangential way, which makes me wonder whether all of us, including myself, hesitate to talk about this reality more openly. Nevertheless, Emma does talk about her experience of being sexually harassed by a professor in her first year of university studies.

What I remember more than anything else of this time, and which impacted me deeply, was the sexual harassment from a professor. I believe that this guy pursued me because he saw me as an innocent and girlish woman. Nothing concretely happened but I didn’t know how to handle the situation, just the same it drained me. I lacked experience and knowledge of somebody older whom I could turn to for advice. To obtain our final mark for this course this guy required of us to take an oral exam. He left
me to the end, even though I should have been examined earlier following the names alphabetically. When few of us remained at the end of day he told us he would proceed with the orals in his office. You should know that this guy was a regional chief of the CORVI and a member of a well-known family. And so what happens? He takes the four of us to his office at 5.00 p.m. and left me to the last. At this point it was 6.00 p.m. He told me he had to eat and would return in two hours to hear my oral. I almost died of fright. My friends wanted to help me out, but they were as ignorant about these matters as I was. Among the four of us we decided that they would return later also and hide in the hallway not wanting to leave me abandoned. At 8.00 I entered his office where he had a bottle of liquor and two glasses standing on his desk. I sat down as instructed and as he walked behind me he said “talk to me about Cesar Lombroso”...a criminologist who held the view that the criminal is born a criminal and that he is recognizable among other things by the shape of his ears. At that point he rubbed my ears from behind. When I started to scream he stopped, and at that point my friends burst into the office. The guy then said “well I am giving all four of you a mark of ‘4’.” We were very upset and scared to death. After that I didn’t know what to do. Denouncing him at the student center was out of the question and so was talking about it to my parents who were going to tell me that surely I must have been seducing him by wiggling my behind in front of him. A few days after, as I was walking on O’Higgins Street, a car pulled up beside me. It was the same professor who told me that if I wanted to do well in the other exams I would have to study with him. After that I quit university. I just didn’t know how to resolve the problem. I didn’t know anyone I could trust, which included my parents. To them my leaving my studies would be seen as nothing more than an excuse for being lazy.

Being a student who came from a poor family lacking wealth and prestige Emma became a perfect target for any sexual desires her professor may have harbored for her. Apart from the power he held over her in his role as professor, in the unlikely event he would have been found guilty he could easily have dodged any type of sanction. After all, he was a lawyer and member of the Court of Justice, and part of a prestigious family with considerable power.

That event in her life, which occurred long before her experience with political repression, introduced her into the world of fear. It made her aware of the force and power of authority, understood as the person who is socially authorized to speak, the ‘legitimate’ spokesperson to be listened to seriously. The only way Emma could have defended herself against the sexual harassment of this professor at that time was to leave
in silence, as she did. Again, as she put it to me, “After that I didn’t know what to do. Denouncing him at the student center was out of the question, and so was talking about it to my parents who were going to tell me that I surely must have been seducing him by wiggling my behind in front of him.” She was aware that she was not going to find any support around her to bring her professor to justice. Here I refer to the commonly held belief that if a man sexually approached a woman, and even attacked her, he did it because she had provoked him. With that, men may be justified in any of their sexual advances, even though unwanted.

I Wanted Something More Than My Mother

Under those circumstances she felt unable to take up her life’s project in that place. Nor could this city serve as her home like her fishing village had been. She decided to try her luck in Chile’s capital. Perhaps in the big city she might find a space that would be just right for her? The rationale given is that she wanted a different life to that of her mother, “My mother stayed on raising children, and being a house wife, I wanted something more. However, I didn’t know yet what that should be.” Rejecting the role of housewife and child rearing she expected perhaps a better life less marked by her gender.

When the next school year arrived I didn’t know what to do so I took my things and traveled to Santiago in search for a job. My mother quietly gave me a bit of money, 50 pesos. My father did nothing for me. In Santiago I went to the house of one of my father’s aunts who supposedly lived close to the Central Station. So I left the station on foot and traipsed through all those streets alone with my suitcase at 9.00 p.m. and men following me calling out ‘hey you little one come with me’. I was scared. Finally I arrived at the house.

Again it was her mother who stood by her, while her father remained indifferent to her needs. As Emma put it, “My mother quietly gave me some money, 50 pesos. My father did nothing for me”. Once again Emma touches upon sexual harassment, fear and the impunity of men who were pursuing her after dark. Listening to her story one may conclude that Chile as a place didn’t offer much security and dignity to women such as Emma. She was only able to count on her mother, and later in Santiago on her paternal
aunt. I will analyze further on in detail the role of women in Emma’s life. Let us see next if the political project of Unidad Popular helps Emma to solve her conflictual and unsatisfactory relationship with Chile.

The Political Project: Putting the Dream for a Better World into Reality

The reality of being part of a subordinate class and gender made Emma realize how unjust and violent a society Chile really was. She aspired for a better world. Soon upon her arrival in Santiago she began to take up the cause of the Socialist party that opposed oppression and exploitation of the poor. This political party later would become part of an alliance with other parties of the Left - Unidad Popular - to form a Socialist Government led by Allende. Not surprisingly, she came to strongly identify with its political platform whose goal was to counterbalance the excessive power held by the upper classes and gain control of government through democratic means, bring about greater social justice and a better distribution of land, goods and services. The years from 1968 to 1973 became a heady and exciting period for her. She was taken on as an employee at one of Santiago’s universities, while studying at the same time for a Business Administration degree. As she said, “My plan was to become an administrator of a socialist enterprise. We had to create a nation of administrators who had a social consciousness.” When Unidad Popular formed the government Emma’s life took a sharp turn, as she perceived the possibility of her dreams becoming a reality.

She now came to identify herself with what she described as ‘the whole nation’. The activities she became involved in were not only meeting her personal interest, they were part of a collective project. She cherished the hope for fundamental social changes.

My expectations were that there might be more social justice. My part consisted in efforts to bring about university reform. We had some successes in this regard at my university, and these had to be extended to others across the country, i.e. to create new schools for the people that would become affiliated to the university, technical institutes where people would have access to some type of technical training....Or schools that would bring culture to the people so that they might have theatre and song in their own communities. This government worked for that.
Emma became deeply involved in this project that took her all over the country, sharing her dreams and ideas with others. Although the Unidad Popular program focussed primarily on improving the living conditions of the working classes of Chile - excluding in its analysis the relations of domination and subordination that existed between the two sexes -, Emma in her own way started to assert herself as a woman. She became more confident in the use of public space. As she told me, “I felt on top of the world. I felt powerful and without fear.”

Many of the other women I interviewed point out similar feelings regarding that time. In one way or another they also joined in this national dream. For Emma (as well as for my other interviewees) home became all of Chile, her country. For her, this sense of home did not refer to the country’s scenery and cities, but to a project, a dream, and a hope that she identified with and which gave her renewed energy. It was the development of an idea that she was going to put into reality. Home for her at this instance was connected with desire, as expressed so well by W. Scott Olsen (1999, p12).

Desire according to Psychology, is born at the moment an infant discovers it is not its mother, at the moment when loneliness is first perceived, at the moment when we are first filled with wanting to foreclose a distance between ourselves and another. This distance between self and other, between object and subject, between you and me, has been called a ‘potential space’. We cannot fill this space, ever. Yet, we spend our lives and talents pouring what we can into it...and those moments, when the space becomes smaller is the location of home.

Home, for Emma, is the witnessed development of an idea, or the realization of a hope.

Exile

Following the coup d’état on September 11, 1973, Chile changed from a liberal democracy into a dictatorship. Political persecution was unleashed almost immediately. For Emma, the country was transformed overnight into a place that threatened to take her life, a sinister place in which friends and brothers were tortured and died. The notion that emerges from her story is that the repressive measures – involving death, kidnapping, torture, exile, deportation, house searches, threats and total or partial loss of individual
and collective rights to free speech — consisted of a situation that, at least to some extent, she was familiar with. She had already known fear during the darkness of night in the streets of Chile where her body and that of her mother were at risk of being violated. She was forced to submit herself to the abusive behavior of a man who had power over her, a professor who “told me that if I wanted to do well in the other exams I would have to study with him.” And the silence that followed the abuse, the inability of being able to denounce the abuse because of lack of money, power and knowledge of how to deal with this situation. She saw her project of pursuing university studies frustrated, taking a much longer time for their realization. In other words, Emma lived repression and exile within her own country many times before, although qualitatively different.

The military dictatorship exercised its repression in relation to the public sphere, regardless of gender, relying on more notorious and cruel techniques. What Emma experienced before, during Chile’s democratic phase, was a phenomenon that was less visible, aimed at disciplining women’s bodies through fear, abuse and exploitation of social class and submit them to the opposite gender. The short reign of Unidad Popular served to reveal some of these technologies of power and to expose a system that functioned essentially at our subconscious level. But this political project, as we established in chapter five, did not result in any attempts at stripping the mechanisms of oppression of women.

Emma felt she had to seek refuge. She found it in Canada where she discovered what it was like to be in the position of a stateless person.

They passed me a pink paper that said ‘nationality, stateless’. I felt so pleased then to be stateless. I preferred to be stateless, it was more important for me not to have a state than to belong to a state like Chile. I felt completely impotent with respect to Chile, a sensation of great injustice, a sensation of being subdued. I felt content, therefore, when I saw the word state-less, or stateless. They assigned me a provisionary status, called Ministerial Permit, which was not a refugee status, since such a status did not exist yet at that time.

In today’s world, the nationality of a person is often considered an important attribute that forms part of our identity. The country or region of the world from where we originate opens or closes opportunities for us in other countries of the world. To be
stateless is not something that one looks for, since it results in the loss of all official protection from one's country of origin. Officially, you are seen as a person who belongs to no place. The feeling expressed by Emma, therefore, was complex. She embraced her lack of official national identity and the prohibition from living in Chile with open arms. She now identified that country with the rule of a fascist state, where the collective project in which she actively participated in was no longer possible. Nevertheless, she maintained the hope that the political situation might change so that she could return. From this perspective, Chile continued to live as an idea in her mind, the place where her loved ones lived, the past and the future, and her dreams.

She found herself without country, with a Ministerial Permit allowing her to reside in Canada. This permit, though, did initiate a process of forming part of a country, at least at the official level. Later, the permit changed to immigrant status and a few years after she received Canadian citizenship. The organization of her life in Canada was a process that took much effort, training to obtain the title of 'travel agent', setting up her own agency and developing a network of friends with whom she felt well.

In those first years Chile appeared to her as the place where she would like to live again, once the country had returned to normal. After all, she was here in Canada merely 'in transit'. In the following text Emma talks about her enduring loyalty, for several years, to that geographical place called Chile in which it once had been possible to aspire for radical social change.

For two years I did not unpack my luggage. I thought that we would return soon again to Chile. My understanding was that we would have to return in a matter of hours. I didn’t buy things. I had one suitcase for departure for as many as six or seven years. Even though I had a relationship going with a Greek, who was in exile from his country ruled by generals, that would not stop me from going back to Chile.

The feeling of being 'in transit', waiting to return, is graphically expressed in the phrase "I did not unpack my luggage." I felt the same way for many years. And when asked at what point I stopped feeling that way I found it difficult to answer, as I now feel somehow to be 'in permanent transit'. I know that if I decide for some reason or another
to go back I do not expect to live in the same way I once longed for. After all, Chile has changed in ways I do not appreciate, and I have changed as well in the interim.

Some of the other Chilean women interviewed express quite eloquently their sense of belonging to the ‘patria’ and their mixed feelings today. Mireya put it in this way,

I didn’t have one night that I did not dream about going back. They cut me off brutally while being in the middle of a project that was very important to me, it was drastic and hit me very hard. I think I have had the opportunity to live better. But never did I buy a house here, for instance. That for me would have meant denying myself the act of returning...it would have meant assimilating myself, denying everything, and that I could not do. I did not wish to cut off my roots... Nevertheless, we have decided now (1997) to buy a house.

After the massive losses experienced by every one of these women they entered a tunnel – to use a metaphor cited by Agger (1994 p.146) – and didn’t know where this tunnel would lead them. Inside, it can be dark and painful. We are dealing here with a threshold state in which the individual is ready to undergo a radical change in her life precisely because she finds herself in a space that is ‘no-one’s land’. As Agger points out, in the case of exiled or marginal groups this ambiguous condition is permanent since there is no solution as long as one belongs to diverse social groups whose norms are contradictory. In our case, we lived with our cultural background on the margin of Canadian culture. At the same time we tried to fashion our lives in this country. The following account by Emma portrays her internal changes and the feeling of being in ‘no-one’s land’.

At one point I had lost interest in returning to Chile. It was not because of this Greek, but because I was beginning to lose connections with Chile. Friends I had no more there, only my family. I even dreamt for a while of going to live in a village in Greece. I like the style of life the Greeks have.

For Emma, Chile appeared very distant after living in exile in Canada all those years, which felt like an eternity. Her family (parents and brothers) seemed to be her only remaining link. They were not a strong enough reason, though, for her to return. It is also
apparent that she had not developed any deep attachment to Canada, as this place could easily be replaced with another, such as Greece, having no projects that tied her down to this country. Does this part of her narrative imply that she was still struggling internally, searching for a place that could replace the loss of what was once her place of belonging when she lived in Chile? Or is she telling us perhaps that she was entering a stage in which she entertained the idea of a type of life without putting down roots in any particular place? She certainly leaves us with the impression that she felt dislocated, unsettled. Neither her memory of the past, nor her hope for the future provided her with a place where she could belong. She expressed this loss when she said, “I even dreamt for a while of going to live in a village in Greece. I liked the style Greeks have.” Is it possible that this Greek village evoked in her feelings of home, like she had experienced during her childhood in her fishing village in the South of Chile?

The idea of traveling – this time by her own choice – to a place so different from the history and culture of any Latin American country, seemed to imply that Emma felt caught between the two alternatives, her country of birth and her country of exile. Deciding to go to Greece might present her with the possibility of putting an end to this ambivalent situation. Perhaps she felt that a move to Greece with this man might consolidate her affective relationship with him and at the same time gain her a new family. The fact that she was considering the idea, implies that she was living in a state of uncertainty, faced with a groping and agonizing search for the right place to attach herself to, or for a meaningful project to commit herself to that would give a new purpose to her life.

Once the political situation in Chile changed and the government gave her permission to enter, she decided to travel twice, in 1989 and again in 1993. However, she did not feel integrated. The country stopped being a place of belonging for her.

I felt lost, the people spoke in symbols, in ways that I did not understand. I also felt of being from another planet. Their primary interests were quite materialistic, living in an economic upswing, being the beginning of the so-called “Boom” years. It was not that I had made up my mind in saying no to what was Chilean. No, I had no concrete opinion.
After seventeen years of dictatorship, and radical economic reforms, Chile is just not the same anymore. Her visits to Chile made her conscious of this fact finding it difficult to understand this new country, so different from what she knew it to be when she left in 1973. Interesting is how she phrased her reaction, “It was not that I had made up my mind in saying no to what was Chilean. No, I had no concrete opinion.” Because of the changes she had observed during those visits, she had become less sure about her future relationship with Chile, just as she felt in relation to Canada (as reviewed above). What seemed to be difficult to accept for her was the prospect of forming part of a community that had bought wholly into the materialistic life style and value system. Her awareness of the enormous gap that existed between the country she once identified with and its new face placed her in a situation of not knowing whether to accept or reject the challenge of making a future there. What her narrative points out is that it is not so much a question for her what social structure she can live with but where and how she might be able to build a project that would be meaningful for her. I will address this question next following her account about her decision to return to Chile.

Return to Chile: The Paradox of Home

When her mother died and Emma went to attend the funeral, she decided to return and live in Chile. She explained it to me as follows:

My mother died on the 17 of April 1993. My mama and papa used to live alone in an enormous house and it dawned on me that my father must be terribly lonely all by himself. My brothers stayed one week after the funeral, and I remained with papa one month during which period I traveled around with him trying to console him. For ten years I had lived with a man, from whom I separated some two years ago. I told myself that I was alone now, my papa is alone, why therefore not live together? Thus, I presented the idea to him, which he thought was wonderful... So, I left Canada to live again in Chile... because my business investments, nothing interested me. Of only interest at that point was my father, to do something to preserve the family. I left with two suitcases and 3000 dollars in my pocket.

Approximately 40,000 Chileans have returned from exile, of these 60% between 1990 and 1992; and 75% returned with their families. The regions from which they returned were Europe, 47%; Latin America, 41%; North America, 9% (of these 7% from Canada). (Chile-Government, 1990-1992).
How might we interpret Emma’s sudden decision to return and live in a country that she had no longer any longing for? In her account, Emma constructs two quite different selves. One is the independent successful businesswoman living in Canada, very much on her own, “I had lived with a man, from whom I separated some two years ago. I told myself that I was alone now, my papa is alone, why therefore not live together?” She also points out that she was free from having any strong attachment with any person in Canada. At the same time, she casts herself in the traditional role for women as she assumes the responsibility of looking after the family’s interest once her mother is gone. Apparently, the attachment to her family of birth is based on deep-seated values and emotive layers that mobilize her into action, “I left Canada to live again in Chile ... my business investments, nothing interested me. Of only interest at that point was my father, to do something to preserve the family.” The travel agency, her circle of friends and independence that had taken her so much effort to build in Canada were put aside as she seemed to set a higher priority on preserving the unity of the family.

We learn from her story that she had been socialized into this conventional role for women since early childhood, at home, helping her mother in her different tasks.

As I was the eldest of the children she used to confide and rely most on me. Together we made decisions on what to do with my brothers, and the money. Consequently, I began to feel very responsible for her and the family. This experience I believe marked me for life. Perhaps because of this situation, of having carried responsibility for the family together with my mother and now that she is not alive anymore, I felt it was my task to keep the family together somehow. It was one of the reasons why I returned to Chile in 1992 and stayed for 5 years.

She remembers the close relationship she had with her mother and talks about how that relationship influenced her identity as a dutiful daughter, “Together we made decisions on what to do with my brothers, and the money. Consequently, I began to feel very responsible for her and the family.” Several authors have written about this link between mothers and daughters and how it shapes the way these daughters, as adults, are
connected to a place and the role they have within the family. Emma expresses this as follows, “As I was the eldest among the children she used to talk most with me. Together we made the decisions.... Consequently, I felt responsible for her and the house.” This strong identification with her mother continued after her mother’s death as she said, “perhaps because of this situation... it is my task to keep the family together.” She gave this as one of the reasons for her return to Chile. Emma does not mention in this account anything about the grief she felt at the time, or her experience of loss of her mother. Yet her mother’s death is what made her decide to return to Chile, “she is not present anymore.” The loss of the mother can be a strong reason to return in order to maintain the connection with a world that we share with our mothers. Martha McMahon (1998) in *Between Exile and Home* talks about her experience of separation from her mother. She points out how talking on the phone with her mother about her family, relatives or one’s close neighbors, she felt connected with this distant world.

People and local places were tied to each other in her tracings so that time, space and social relationships were all kept together through her stories, stories embedded in that order, the moral order that ‘mothers’ seem to carry as part of their social role. (...) I see my loss as being not only of a mother to whom I was deeply attached but also of bonds that held an older world together for me. (p. 194)

The relationship with ‘home’ has been problematic for most of us women, being subjected to all the limitations that come with distance. And Emma was far away when her mother died. Under such circumstances, she most likely must have been wondering whether she can forgive herself for not having been with her mother at such a crucial time? Yet, what choice did she really have? In the *Experience of Mother Loss*, Mary Valentich (1998) sheds light on the significance of such a moment when she writes: “I was not with her when she died. And we had never talked about what was happening to

---

her, what our lives together had been, what we had learned from each other, how I could go on without her, or what she hoped for me” (p.215). Obviously, Emma faced a sudden break in her longstanding relationship of affection with the death of her mother.

In summary, from reading Emma’s account it appears that her return to Chile had little to do with any feelings of attachments she may have still harbored for her country. It was the fear of seeing her family disintegrate following the death of her mother, and regarding herself as the one responsible for taking her mother’s place that made her decide to go back. In this sense, I read in her narrative the enactment of the life of a conventional woman.

The decision to return carried a heavy cost, though. After all, in Canada she had set up and developed a successful travel agency. Abandoning her business so suddenly meant a considerable loss of money. Political conditions had improved in Chile with the reinstatement of democratic rule, albeit still quite restrictive, making it less onerous to live there again. But she did not call attention to this change as having anything to do with her return. As a matter of fact, her feelings about Chile shifted at different moments of her life story as did her feelings about home and family. She certainly didn’t like her country on two previous travels in 1989 and 1992 as mentioned earlier. Moreover, the presence of her family, before her mother’s death, did not provide a sufficient reason to go back to Chile either. However, now, that her mother was gone she was determined to settle there again, take care of her elderly father and hold the family together.

The dutiful daughter appears again when she says, “My brothers stayed one week after the funeral and I remained with papa one month.” The social norms about what is a woman’s duty are deeply embedded in Emma that it appears quite natural for her to leave everything behind in Canada, after having crossed frontiers and changed country and lived in this place for 19 years. This norm, which expects a woman to deny herself and be disposed to any sacrifice for the good of the children (see Beatriz Schmuckler, 1988), applies especially to the mother, or wife. We also see this operating in the case of Emma, even though she is not a mother or a wife, but a daughter and sister.

Emma’s narrative causes us to notice the intricacies involved in a decision taken by a refugee woman to return home after so many years living in exile. At first, it may appear that she acted solely on the basis of feeling duty-bound, as a ‘good daughter’, to
return. But it was more complex than that. Her mother’s death suddenly presented a situation in which she could take up a project once more that would give meaning to her life. The project could bring the formerly disparate parts of her life together again, including her past homeland, her family, and her expertise in tourism. McSpadden and Moussa (1996), quoting Barrett, assert that everyone - especially refugees - need a meaningful social place. And that social place can only be achieved when a person is able to contribute to his or her network in society, as well as receive social psychological and/or economic support (p.216).

Carmen is another interviewee who attempted to return to Chile with her husband, around the same period as Emma, despite the high professional and economic status both had achieved in Canada. She points to other reasons though for her decision,

I needed to communicate in Spanish. By the time Friday arrived I felt exhausted in my dealings with the gringos, who moreover are so cold in their human relationship ... I also missed all my extended family and my friends there. Furthermore, you feel you have to be consistent, if one left Chile for a particular reason and that reason doesn’t exist anymore, what are we doing here then? My return to Chile was emotional more than anything, the need for friendships, family, the social life.

Family, affection and ability to communicate with people that shared the same culture, are Carmen’s reasons for returning. But she adds an important other point related to her political project, namely the possibility of counteracting through her return Pinochet’s strategy of eliminating or banning into exile all those who opposed him. McSpadden and Moussa (1996), comparing the reasons of Ethiopean and Eritrean women and men for wishing to return, conclude that a major consideration for men was to be able to attain a social status in their own male-dominated world, based on their education and employment aspirations. In contrast, women were more cautious in their responses as they were aware of serious gender constraints back home (p.234-236). Gender didn’t stop Emma and Carmen from returning to Chile, as hinted at by the study of McSpadden and Moussa. In Emma’s case particularly, it was precisely because of her gender-related role - wishing to be a ‘good daughter’ -, combined with other reasons as noted above, that had her decide to go back.
Emma stated, “I told myself that I was alone now, my papa is alone, why therefore not live together?” As an independent woman who had organized and lived her life by herself for many years, Emma might well have believed that she could establish a more equal relationship with her father, one of mutual help. The return to Chile gave her the chance to re-position her father from the absent father of her childhood to the father of the present, a companion, and a friend in the adult stage of her life.

At the beginning, upon arrival, everything went well. It was like a honeymoon. Coming together again, having company, to do things together. But then that male control began to reassert itself again, mixed with his military ways.

My father is 81 years and is mentally alert. Just the same I began to resent this attitude of his and started to talk about it with him. I thought that he ordered me around because he felt it was his home. Therefore, I suggested that we should buy a house for the two of us. He remained non-committal for a while until he finally accepted. His house sold well, and with that money we bought one close to the Hot Springs in Talca, on a plot of 10 hectares, because I had a project in mind. My plan was to build some cabins to attract tourists and take advantage of money made available by the German government to those Chileans who returned to their country and wanted to start a business. My idea involved setting up recreational cottages near the Hot Springs. And I knew all about tourism. It seemed to be a good project that was given high priority since the capacity of tourism in Chile had diminished sharply. It certainly was a high priority for those official funders whom I approached. What was needed was to back up the project with 25% personal investment. I did my calculations and asked my father to endorse me with the house. He told me no. This was the first blow I received. I had accompanied him so that he could see what the project was all about. I had always included him in the planning of it, as something that was to be for the two. The funders would lend you the money according to the progress made in your work. In other words, they gave you the control over the money and at the lowest interest possible. One could expect no better terms. Yet he said no. I then approached my brother who considered it a good idea but not with any outsider’s loans, he wanted me to use his money. Being his money it would not be my project anymore. If they were not prepared to endorse me what could I do?

In this text, she adds new layers to the complexity of returning home from exile.

As a mature, independent, single woman, well-educated and owner of a travel agency in Canada Emma enters in conflict with the way that masculinity and femininity is played
out by her family in Chile in their relations with her. She expresses the dynamics of that relationship with her father in a very clear way, "that male control began to be reasserted again, mixed with his military ways...he ordered me around." Furthermore, finding herself in a new situation in Chile she needed temporarily the support of her father or brother in financially backing her up in the tourist related project that she had conceived so that she eventually could become economically independent. The help usually offered to people who return to Chile didn’t work in her situation. As for her family, while they seemed to like her project plan, they were not prepared to endorse her. Instead, they allowed her to direct the building of the paternal house with her father's money, and to have the cottage for tourists financed by one of the brothers. Hereby, both father and brother maintained effective control over any decision pertaining to the project. Even with these unfavorable conditions for her, Emma agreed to proceed and apparently was successful in getting the two houses built. In the interim, she found her relationship with her father deteriorating. As she explained,

I had to constantly deal with my father's opposition. He was always telling me that I didn’t know anything. Every little thing turned into a struggle for control with him. And he continued fighting while I was busy, draining me completely. I had told myself at the beginning that I was an intelligent person and had to find a way to make a living with my father, but I did not find it.

Terrible things were said between my father and I. At one point he kicked me. Then I decided to leave. ... I was good for nothing according to him. He told me literally that I was a failure because I had no husband or children, and that I had no title. I responded by telling him that it was my business to have a husband and son, or not, and regarding the title you have to see what I got in Canada.

He tried to belittle what I had become ... However, I had become an independent person already in Chile, a long time ago, but he was not

36 Following the democratic elections in December of 1990, the new Aylwin Government created the National Office for Returning Exiles (ONR) to assist Chileans who had come back from exile in their resettlement. One important program, carried out in coordination with other government and non-government organizations, was to extend loans to create small businesses or provide subsidies to employers as an incentive to hire 'retornados' for a limited time so that they might gain 'Chilean experience'.
around then. When he came to visit me in Canada, together with my mother, it was he who was in a state of dependency, because I paid everything for them, translated for them, invited them to go to Cuba. We had a fantastic time, without problems. We were like companions. But in Chile I became for him his subordinate, he no longer treated me as his partner.

Returning ‘home’ from exile means crossing borders again, arriving in the old place, but with the expectation to be framed by others like the person I have become. Emma found out quickly that, in Chile, her father viewed her as he used to see his daughter. Interestingly, he didn’t frame her in that way when he came to visit her in Canada. There, Emma’s individuality had been formed through separateness and independence from others. That experience evidently influenced her current conception of her role within the family, and how that role should be performed. She believes in partnership, solidarity and mutual aid. In contrast to this idea was her father’s traditional view of the woman that resulted in great tension for her.

When Emma moved to Chile she had to start all over again. But in contrast to Canada, the support system there is organized and operates very differently. While Canada, still considered a welfare state, attempts to meet the basic needs of newcomers and unemployed people, Chile under the Pinochet regime radically transformed into a neo-liberal economy, leaving people like Emma essentially to fend for themselves. In spite of the good intentions of the new democratically elected government in helping ‘Retornados’ to reintegrate in Chilean society, it could not compensate for the social consequences brought about as a result of the extreme neo-liberal policies.

The bedrock for survival in Chile is the family, which traditionally has functioned as the principal support system. In other words, the conditions under which newcomers or unemployed people find themselves in the two countries are very different. Comparatively speaking, the Canadian State takes a more humanistic and compassionate approach in receiving those immigrants she recruits for the labour market, or any other newcomer to the country. The Chilean State, on the other hand, has been principally reduced under Pinochet to a subsidiary function of the private sector, offering little in terms of social security or public services. Once Emma crossed national borders, moving
back from Canada to Chile, those conditions inevitably impacted on her relationship with her family, creating a difficult dynamic.

Emma’s project to set up a tourist business in Chile came to an abrupt end. With it her hope to achieve a certain economic independence to which she had become accustomed in Canada also disappeared. But more important to her was that her expectations, in regard to having a space in her family that she could call home, were not realized. The solidarity she needed and the partnership she expected were not extended to her. In addition, Emma did not recognize herself in the role her father attributed to her. “He tried to belittle what I had become.” He tried to reduce Emma to the little, dependent and obedient girl he knew.

Quite conflicting ideas of family were at stake. Her father, very likely had his own desires and set of images associated with the return of his daughter and what their life together would be like. She would be welcome to his home only if she behaved like a daughter should in the tradition of Chilean society, taking care of him as her elderly father and doing the domestic work that pertained to women. These expectations were in complete opposition to what Emma expected from her relationship with her father and family. Apparently, he was not really interested in seeing her succeed in the tourist business project. Being strongly ‘machista’ in his vision he depreciated and devalued anything his daughter stood for and had achieved that did not conform to the role assigned to her as a woman by tradition, “He told me literally that I was a failure because I had no husband or children.”

As D. Kay (1987) showed in her study of Chilean exiles in England, the sexual division of labour – by which the man fulfils the role of breadwinner while the woman is the homemaker – is deeply rooted in Chilean working class families. Any woman who tries to break out of this pattern is not only not accepted, but is also confronted because she is perceived thereby as attacking the very nucleus of the kind of machismo widely practiced in Latin America. I would add, that she is seen as attacking the very idea of family that machismo supports. Many Chilean women interviewed in Kay’s research indicated how generalized an attitude this machismo towards women is in Chile. Men, according to them, think that the woman is only good for domestic tasks such as washing, ironing, preparing the meal, housecleaning, and raising children. Those are supposed to
be women’s exclusive tasks. In contrast, the man has the authority and is the provider who has the power to give orders in the home (Kay 1987, p. 149).

It is obvious that this conception of ‘machismo’ establishes a relationship of power between the woman and the man, in which the woman is subordinate. Although many families in Chile still seem to hold on to this belief system regarding the division of labor by gender, even with the radical changes that have taken place in the Chilean economy, Emma definitely does not share in this belief. Consequently, when joining her family in Chile she found herself marginalised, at least by her family, for not abiding by central social gender narratives that have prevailed in Chilean society.

At the level of family and friends, Carmen in contrast to Emma encountered much more satisfaction, receiving much support and company. It was at another level that she and her husband experienced so much frustration. Having achieved great competency as professionals in their respective fields they tried to contribute to Chile’s development by transferring the knowledge and skills acquired in Canada. Based on this experience, Carmen concludes, “the general feeling was that there was no place for those who returned to Chile, no one was interested in your story”. Besides, as she told me, salaries for medical personnel working in hospitals are very low. And to start all over again, after having been away for 20 years, in setting up a private practice was uphill work and too much of a challenge for them. “Soon we realized that the money we earned wasn’t enough to visit our children in Canada, forcing us to take out a portion of our Canadian Registered Retirement Savings Plan in order to finance our travel.”

The stories of Emma and Carmen intimate that establishing a meaningful social place in Chile was near to impossible for both, and that a combination of factors caused them to make up their mind and go back to Canada. Among them are frustrations related to their inability of gaining control over their economic situation, disappointment regarding their expectations whether with family or colleagues at work, and generally the sharp and sometimes irreconcilable differences in views they have with many Chileans. Both uttered strong criticism about the very country they dreamt about when living in exile. Carmen, for example, talks about the difficulty of constantly having to deal with the envy directed at them for the life their colleagues believed she and her husband lived in exile, the so-called ‘exilio dorado’ (the golden exile). What is more, those same
colleagues and others viewed their return to Chile as unwelcome competition for jobs and funding. Emma adds to this her experience of feeling let down in her own country by Chileans who apparently looked upon her – in her capacity as a ‘retornado’ – like someone who doesn’t belong there.

When you indicate that you like the meal sour-sweet they look at you as if you are not from there. Nobody asks you how you managed with the new language and how you adapted to their ‘relish’. I felt rejected, and henceforth tried to hide that I had been away living in exile in Canada.

In the book by Celedón and Opazo (1987), where the authors report on their interviews with eight ‘ordinary’ women who talk about their exile and return, we find experiences similar to the ones reported in this research by Emma, Carmen and the others. One of the interviewed women, Cecilia said, “the subject of exile is prohibited in my family... They don’t want to hear those stories” (p.18). Another woman, Alejandra, noted that the men back home assumed that, “if you are among the returnees, you must be a liberated woman, a feminist. They think after any invitation, you must go to bed with them” (p.109). Fabiola observed, “solidarity has disappeared...even within the family” (p.167).

When I asked Emma what Chile represents for her now, she said,

For me, today, Chile is merely a geographical accident, a place that forms part of the Americas, where I don’t find the sea or its beaches any more beautiful than elsewhere. I feel I don’t know their language anymore, nor do I understand them just as they don’t understand me.

**Coming Back: Reframing Family and Belongingness**

After five years in Chile, trying hard to make it, Emma gave up and left. This was the second time. First she left because of the failure of Unidad Popular’s political project to which she was deeply committed, and which came to a cruel end with the military coup and the assassination of Allende. The second leave-taking was gender-related, because of her conflictual relationship with her father and to some degree also with her brothers.
When she was still in Chile, living that conflictual situation with her father, it was Canada that began to emerge for her as the place where her ‘real home’ was. She phrased it as follows,

I began to realize that there is solidarity in Canada and respect for the woman. Sure, over there in Chile I had my blood-related family, but here in Canada I have my big family which I have formed with those to whom I do not need to explain anything for us to understand each other. They are able to understand you intuitively. Everything is clear... The majority of my friendships here are with Chilean women but I also have a great Polish woman friend who even came to look me up in Chile when I was there. We talk in English. We communicate in the language of friendship, and at some point we may just sit there and communicate in silence. My human country consists of Marta, Juana, Soledad, Teresa, and I can name you many more. It is one big family whose members I selected and treasure, a family I created and to which I feel much closer.

Beyond intimating that family for Emma is something different from the traditional conception of family – a nuclear unit, or extended with blood-related relatives – she also outlines what are for her desirable familial relations. She seems to emphasize the importance of choosing freely those people one would like to have solid and long-lasting relationships with, people who hold similar values and have the same destiny. As she put it, “My human country... It is one big family”. This human community of hers is mediating her attachment to Canada. I should add here that her network of friends has a peculiar configuration, with everyone originating from another country, and most coming from Chile. Somehow, Emma has a diasporic identification with this group as they all share the experience of exile and/or immigration to Canada. Some form a community based on a shared past (at least those women coming from Chile), as well as an understanding of evolving together through time in a place that doesn’t exactly fit the traditional idea of ‘homeland’. In the new place called home it is possible to organize one’s life and to be different from the mainstream.

In conclusion, Emma’s story challenges the commonly held view of home as something that is rooted in a particular place. Her story rather suggests that such a place is in constant flux and ‘processual’, subjected to changes in one’s circumstances. It
consists partly of memories, it is partly the result of self-construction, and some of it forms part of the major discourse.

One's place of belonging does not necessarily have to be understood as a particular locality defined in fixed terms. It can manifest itself in many other ways that are associated with a person's needs and desires, such as being in control of one's own life, being accepted the way you are, and being part of and able to implement a meaningful project. Canada may offer certain important conditions that facilitate the creation of such human communities for 'diasporic people'. I will reflect on the experience of these exiled women, in Canada, in the next chapter.
The problem Estela de Ramírez had when she arrived in Canada was that she had nothing to hold on to (...). It wasn't as if she had been told, Look, Estela, tomorrow you are going to Buenos Aires. If she had been told Buenos Aires, Estela would've thought of Evita Perón, the River Plate, a good barbecue, the line "It was raining, was raining," the way Leonardo Favio sang it in that deep, masculine voice (...). The point is that she would've thought of something. Even if she had been told, Look Estela, tomorrow you're going to England, she would've thought of Queen Elizabeth in pale blue low-cut dress, drinking tea with her little finger poised (...). But when Estela de Ramírez was told that tomorrow she was going to Canada, nothing came to her mind. And when her daughters asked her, Mom, Mom, what's Canada like? All Estela de Ramírez told them was, 'It's a very big country at the other end of the world' 37.

How and by what processes do refugee women give meaning to Canada and to their selves, having 'landed' in this country? In an attempt to examine this question I will draw on the stories of all the ten women interviewed, as well as my own. This contrasts to the two previous chapters where the focus of analysis was on the past histories of two individuals, Ana and Emma.

I would like to emphasize that this is not an analysis of the adaptation process of refugees as newcomers to Canada, with a particular focus on Chileans. There are a number of useful studies that have already shed light on this (Disman, 1981; Fornazzari, 1995; Freire, 1990; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). The work of Ester Krimer (1986), about the adaptation of Latin Americans to Canada, also comes to mind here. 38

37 Taken from the story titled Black Hole by Carmen Rodriguez (1997, p.19-20), writer and Chilean refugee residing in Vancouver following the military coup in 1973.
38 Krimer, based on a study of 48 Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America who had been in Canada between three months and 14 years, described and interpreted the following stages or phases of integration: First the touristic stage, followed by the encounter stage, that is the encounter with the unknown world. The next stage, named the beginning, is when the reality hits you, moving back and forth between illusions held about the new place and the reality. The mourning stage comes after that, in which one has to deal with the inevitable let-down following the realization that many of the notions.
What interests me in this chapter are the images, ideas and concepts conveyed by Chilean refugee women regarding Canada. How they compose their relationship with this country. How home and national belongingness appear in their narratives. What is at stake for them now, after so many years living in Canada as exiles and post-exiles? Furthermore, I ask how I as the researcher, but also as one of ‘them’, share their experiences and images of Canada. How do I situate myself? What are the differences in continuities and discontinuities among us?

In Chapters 5 and 6, I have analyzed different aspects of the life of the women subjects in Chile, not only before they went into exile but also upon return, wanting to find out how some of them have reconnected with their native country. That analysis has looked at the social system in which these women grew up, and their experiences with it. Furthermore, I examined how they perceived Chile now, at the time they were being interviewed. What has Chile become for them?

Next, I analyze some of the experiences they recalled that reflect on a number of important narratives regarding crossing national borders, providing a gender perspective on their encounter with different countries when seeking asylum, and particularly their memories regarding their settlement in Canada. Throughout this analysis I scrutinize their stories as constructed by ‘hybrid subjects’. However, it is not until the second part of this chapter that the reflections on their ‘diasporic’ or ‘borderline’ location takes central stage. To do this I look at the processes they are living now.

Exodus

At the beginning of the 1970s Canada was largely an unknown country for most Chileans, having no presence in their consciousness. Many became aware of Canada, for the first time, in the context of their search of a place for asylum. This was true for all my interviewees. There was no Canadian Embassy in Chile at the time, only a Consular Office that was linked to the Canadian Embassy in Buenos Aires. As a matter of fact, held about the place were just illusions and just that. The next stage, accommodation, involves correcting the formerly held illusions and a corresponding change in attitude.
there was little else that would have made us think about Canada. For example, there existed no established community of Canadians in Chile, as was the case with those originating from various European countries. Nor was there any known Canadian presence at the commercial level, or in any of the cultural exchanges that Chile had with other countries. Canada was in 1974 the only country of all the Americas that was not a member of the Organization of American States. As for the Chilean school curriculum Canada did not appear either, except for describing its geographical characteristics. And even these must have seemed vague and exotic in their otherness. This was in sharp contrast to interest shown in countries that form part of Latin America, Europe, and the United States. Finally, Canada’s literature and achievements of any type were unknown to most Chileans.

This almost total lack of knowledge about Canada by Chileans compares to many other refugees and immigrants to Canada who originated from Europe after the Second World War, and who learned about Canada because of its direct involvement in the two world wars fought on that continent. This knowledge of Canada, though, I should add was probably still minimal and superficial (Iacovetta, 1992). It is possible also that refugees from those Third World countries which form part of the British Commonwealth, and of which Canada also is a member, were likely to be more aware of Canada than those coming from Chile. Thus, for Chileans who had to leave their country in the early 1970’s, Canada was not an obvious country to apply to for asylum and to seek shelter against persecution.

The Chilean exodus\(^\text{39}\) was first and foremost to other countries in Latin America, with a relatively small proportion travelling directly from Chile to a European or North American destination. This tendency is also reflected in the case of refugee women interviewed for this study. Six of them were living as exiles in one of the Latin American countries when making first contact with Canada. Although the various writings on the

\(^{39}\) Chile’s population, based on estimates calculated by the National Institute of Statistics, in 1970 was 9.5 million; in 1975, 10.35 m; in 1985, 12.1 m; in 2000, 15.27 m - quoted in *Mujeres Latinoamericanas en Cifras* (Valdés & Gomariz, 1992).
Chilean exodus differ regarding the numbers involved, all agree that among the Latin American countries Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico were the ones that received the largest number. Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Peru and Cuba, among others, received a smaller but still substantial number of Chilean refugees. However, most of these countries offered no real protection to them, with the exception, perhaps, of Cuba. Consequently, they passed through several countries before ending up in one that provided genuine personal security, in the political and material sense. Many Latin American countries of the 1970's, besides Chile, were plagued with political

40 The Catholic Institute of Migration reported in 1977, four years after the military coup, that an average of 10,000 Chileans were still abandoning the country each month (Chile-América, Rome, Nos. 31-32, May-June, 1977, p.108). The same Institute estimated that by the end of the 1980's no less than 1,600,000 out of a total population of approximately 11 million had left the country. Whereas most who left in the 1970's might be considered refugees in the stricter sense (as defined by the UN), either as those forcibly expelled or those leaving as self-exiles for fear of their lives, many others who left during the 1980's formed part of what is referred to as 'voluntary migration'. This latter movement was believed to be the result of the social and economic changes introduced by the military government. Thus, many of these so-called voluntary migrants joined the earlier flow of expelled and persecuted Chileans out of the country because of a mixture of fear, poverty and feelings of despair about Chile's future. Figures provided by Pinochet's own Ministry of Foreign Relations claimed that there were no more than 10,000 exiles all together, but these were believed to include only those who were explicitly forbidden to re-enter the country. This would exclude the hundreds of thousands who left for reasons of continuing persecution. For instance, the Chilean Commission of Human Rights, a non-governmental-organization, estimated the number of refugees to be approximately 200,000 (Arrate, 1988, p.115-122).

41 A staggering 600,000 Chileans were reported to be in Argentina alone in 1977, four years after the coup. Not all of these, though, can be counted as recent exiles since earlier figures indicate that some 300,000 Chileans had already taken up residence in that country in 1970. Other sources claim that of the more than one million Chileans who were said to reside outside of their country by 1979, 600,000 were in Argentina, 150,000 were found to be in Venezuela, 100,000 in Brazil and the rest ended up in 50 other countries scattered across the globe (Chile-América, Rome, Nos. 50-51, Jan.-Febr., 1979 p.8).

42 Cuba, one of the Latin American countries that took in one of the greatest number of Chilean refugees and self-exiles—in proportion to its population compared to Venezuela, Brazil and other countries—may be considered an exception to the usual official attitudes and the absence of real protection offered to Chilean exiles elsewhere in Latin America. Besides being given the opportunity to know the reality of the first Socialist revolution in the Americas, many of them contributed over the years in various forms to the social and political processes taking place in Cuba (Arrate, 1988, p.13).
instability and military violence. Furthermore, not being immigration countries like the U.S. and Canada, and suffering low levels of economic development, these countries were just not prepared to receive so many refugees all at once. As a matter of fact, the situation Chilean exiles faced in other Latin American countries receiving them was not much different from that experienced by the majority of refugees in the Third World (Hoetz, 1995; Kok, 1989; Shaw, 1991). It is neighboring countries that usually take in the bulk of refugees, but they lack the material conditions, social and political stability and the necessary institutional framework and experience to process large numbers of refugees. Thus, many Chilean refugees, even though they found themselves in a relatively familiar cultural environment, endured hunger, fear, insecurity, little opportunity for work and no means to obtain a residence permit.

Six of the women I interviewed had lived in such situations: Gabriela and Soledad in Argentina, Carmen in Honduras, Emma in Panama and Mexico, Tania in Venezuela, and Isabel in Panama. They commented in some detail on how impossible the situation had become for them, making it difficult to continue living as refugees in those countries. In short, while these neighboring countries provided them with the opportunity to seek temporary shelter from persecution, there was no place for them where they could settle down. Gabriela talked about that experience.

In Argentina there was no institution that extended any help to us, we had to make our own arrangements. Remember that the situation in Argentina during that period was hard. There, they also attacked Chileans. Fortunately, nothing happened to us in spite of this aggressive stance of the military toward us. The United Nations committee granted us the status of refugee, but that did not ensure us any economic assistance or protection. We suffered much hunger, going without food for days. In the winter months we sent out the smaller children in to the country after breakfast in search of herbs and other things they could find to prepare soup or a meal.

Chilean identity affected us in different ways once crossing national borders, depending on what country we were in. In the case of Argentina, as Gabriela pointed out,

43 Shaw is the editor of issue no.223 of the New Internationalist, whose focus is on the dispossessed of the earth. It includes articles on the cost to the impoverished neighboring countries for their hospitality to refugees; on the fortress mentality found in Europe towards asylum-seekers, and also provides a short history on borders.
Chilean refugees were generally received quite badly. The very presence of large numbers of Chileans, perceived in their national identity and not as refugees, awoke nationalistic sentiments among many locals who had long memories about past wars and ongoing rivalries with Chile. This was especially true for Argentina and Peru. We were not received well either by officials of those countries in Latin America which, like Chile, were governed by rightist-oriented and repressive regimes at that time (Roniger, 1997). To them we were suspect, as we represented a leftist ideology. In this sense we were being perceived as a dangerous challenge to the existing political and economic order. The Chilean military, in turn, had closed a secret agreement of exchange with other dictatorial regimes in Latin America to have so-called ‘dangerous’ exiles persecuted in the international arena. Specifically, the agreement called for their interrogation, extradition or outright killing in their place of exile.45

Thus, as noted, Chilean exiles were viewed and treated at many levels as ‘persona non grata’. On the other hand, in those same countries there was a part of the population that stood by Chilean exiles in solidarity with their struggle, and helped out by extending material and moral support. Soledad who arrived in Argentina with her tortured husband and who was let go thanks to UN intervention, tells it as follows,

In Argentina we had no work, no house, and so we lived for a while in a shelter provided by the UN. As this arrangement ended, I don’t know why, a group of doctors and us wives rented a house until we had no more money. Then, an Argentinese family came forward by offering their (large) shed to us to live in. We remained in that country for eight months.

From the perspective of those of us who left Chile, our identity as members of the Chilean community who were ‘dwelling-in-displacement’, meant several things. First, we had been taught from early on in life that we belonged - at least ‘formally’ - to a country

44 Furthermore, the local population would perceive the presence of a large number of Chileans, highly qualified, as an unwelcome competition.

45 One of the most notorious cases is that of General Prats, the former head of the Armed Forces, who was killed (1975) in Buenos Aires together with his wife by a direct bomb attack on his life. His opposition to the use of any military force in overthrowing the democratically elected Government of Allende was well known. And his opinion had a considerable influence among members of the military. When General Prats stepped down voluntarily as chief of staff to avoid divisions within the military, General Pinochet replaced him. Prats auto-exiled in Argentina following the coup.
that bestows legal citizenship on its inhabitants and represented their interests anywhere in the world. But we soon found out that this function of the state didn’t mean anything in our condition as expatriates. A second part of this identity was related to a common national history we shared. In this particular instance of the massive Chilean exodus, there was the shared and collective feeling among us of belonging to a community of solidarity that had been fighting for a political ideal of national and international importance. We shared a dream, a struggle, ‘The Chilean Road to Socialism’. And thirdly, we didn’t have a name for our new location as we felt ‘suspended’ from our citizenship, finding ourselves in foreign lands trying to escape from repression back home. Gabriela touched upon this as she said,

I was not conscious of the word ‘refugee’ when we were in Argentina. That came to me slowly when I was in this country (Canada). Here, I knew I was a refugee. The solidarity of the people I met was tremendous. It is amazing to see how people of another country, with a different language, can be so perceptive to pain and suffering of other human beings.

The move into exile was a period of turmoil, uncertainty, anguish and feeling unprotected. But it was also a period of great intensity, comradeship and solidarity shown by some local people.

In women’s life stories, the sadness and confusion appears marked by their gender location as many of them were the wives of persecuted and often tortured husbands. They weren’t looked upon as heroes like their husbands, nor was much attention paid to their suffering experienced within the intimacy of the couple’s life. Returning home from the ordeal with torture, husbands were unable to attend to their wives and what they were going through. Soledad talks about this in some detail showing what she had to put up with.

We were both in distress. Jaime had just come out of his sessions of torture. It is difficult to live with a man who is emotionally destroyed. He was completely paranoid and terribly jealous of me. Right after his detention we prepared to fly to Argentina, which was the first moment I saw him again. As we were packing he ordered me to throw out the birth control pills saying, “don’t even think of taking them because they could be drugs in order to keep us here (in Chile).” Upon arrival in Buenos Aires we immediately visited a pharmacy where they tell us that they could not sell birth control pills without prescription. Imagine the difficulty in
finding a medical doctor on your second day in the country under our circumstances. Of course I became pregnant. We had three little children, without a place to live and no work. And then Jaime tells me that it is all my fault, since I don’t take the necessary precautions. On top of that he wasn’t sure if I was his wife. Later on I learned that one of the torture techniques consisted of telling him that while he was being held I was sleeping with one of them. I don’t know how long it took for Jaime to realize that I was absolutely faithful to him.

At that moment in Argentina I apologized for living. The fact that I had not been taken a prisoner does not mean that he and others can ignore the many things I was going through. Being left alone to struggle with the children in such an inhospitable environment where everybody turns their back to you, in itself is a form of torture.

Thus, while being identified as Chilean was downright dangerous in some countries, women often suffered much as well in the intimacy of their relationship with a tortured husband, feeling diminished and overpowered by a man weakened psychologically and physically.

A number of writers have recollected the process of Chilean exile and its dilemmas. Most of them are male authors with the majority of publications not taking into account gender differences. Nevertheless, there are some good exceptions. The collection by Celedón and Opazo (1987), for instance, presents the stories of eight women about their exile experience in different countries, and their return to Chile. These stories point out the lack of support found in many Latin American countries, which didn’t help women in their relationship with their husband and children. It often resulted in a couple splitting up and having to struggle alone to survive. In a more autobiographic way, Isabel Allende (1994) presents her own struggle as an exile with the intention to counterbalance the tendency she came across in Venezuela that disadvantaged her as a woman and as a writer. Other important contributions have been made by Vasquez and Araujo (1988) in their research, and the fictional writing by Vasquez (1991). Worth mentioning also are Silva (1989) and Vera (1992).

In this general context of adverse conditions prevailing in Latin America for Chilean refugees, Canada, as that invisible and far off country, began to appear increasingly as a more desirable place to be. This was not only true for those still within
Chile who were being persecuted but also for those who had left earlier, having found shelter in neighboring countries. In Canada, so it seemed from news received, one could count on state protection, live in conditions of greater security and be able to survive economically. Yet, all the women interviewed mentioned their complete ignorance about Canada when they faced the likelihood of going there. Julia, who as high school teacher of history and geography in Chile was presumably the most informed about Canada, described her knowledge and feelings.

I had a more or less clear idea about the climate and language spoken. What concerned me was Canada’s remoteness... But about its human and urban state of affairs I had absolutely no knowledge. I didn’t have any idea, for instance, how cosmopolitan Toronto was.

Most of my interviewees showed their preoccupation with the ‘remoteness’ of Canada, something that I shared as well. It is important to note in this context that at the beginning of the 1970’s Chile itself was still quite an isolated country, with few people, including those from the middle class, who had traveled abroad. The cost involved was just too forbidding for most of. This contrasts sharply with today’s situation.

The women in this study felt that Canada’s geographical distance would make personal contact with loved-ones left behind almost impossible. They also expressed their concern about Canada’s cultural remoteness, being English- and French-speaking, considering it quite different from the Hispanic and Latin culture they were a part of. Mireya put it as follows:

I told him (my husband) ‘why don’t you go to Venezuela or Mexico, a Latin country, at least we would be much closer; but Canada, what has Canada to do with us?’ But OK, we couldn’t really choose at that moment.

In this text Mireya seems to project a feeling of closeness and familiarity with Latin American countries in contrast to her feelings about Canada. In this regard she speaks for all the other women interviewed. It appears that this imagined community (i.e. Latin America) inspires certain attachments similar to those that Chileans have for their own country. In other words, the same mechanisms that Anderson claimed were operating in the image construction of a nation – in this case Chile – appear to function in
the formation of a regional identity, which in this case would be a Latin American identity.

We as Mestizos tend to see our belongingness to this region of the world as a community whose members share a number of common characteristics. First, there is the language of Spanish. Even in communication with Portuguese speaking Brazilians we have little difficulty in making ourselves understood with each other. There are many other languages spoken in the region, such as the various native tongues found among the aboriginal peoples, but Spanish (and Portuguese in Brazil) is still the dominant regional language. Secondly, we belong to a territorial community of nations with a shared history of people colonized by Spain and Portugal, and wars of independence. This common history does not negate the existence of significant differences among each of our nations in their relationship not only with the Spanish (or Portuguese) but also with local indigenous people, and with non-Latin American countries. For instance, there were the diverse interests of the European industrial powers in the riches of each country, and the selective settlement of large numbers of immigrants from different European countries during the 19th and early 20th centuries targeting certain countries in Latin America. Thirdly, we also tend to share a similar Christian culture. And finally, there is our joint struggle against American imperialism in the region throughout the 20th century.

As Latin Americans we may think of ourselves as being part of this imagined community of nations with a common identity. However, as alluded to earlier, nation states in Latin America have and continue to confront each other over borders and access to resources. This has led to bloody wars in the past, such as Chile's wars of 1820 and 1891 with Peru and Bolivia. Furthermore, these nations have been in fierce competition with one another over export markets, to the U.S. especially, a competition that has been managed shrewdly by the US to further its political and economic interests in the region (Galeano, 1973; García Marquez, 1989; Subercaseaux, 1998).46 In these confrontations,

---

46 Valdez, Minister of External Affairs in the Government of Eduardo Frei, writes about a meeting he had in 1968 with Henry Kissinger who served as head of the U.S. Security Council during the Presidency of Richard Nixon. He had traveled to Washington as designated representative of the Latin American region, following a joint meeting of all States of the Americas (excepting the U.S.), to present the region's common concerns and propose resolutions for improved relations with the United States. Kissinger's response to
leaders of several nations involved have mobilized their population by appealing to nationalistic sentiments that override any political or regional identity they may share.

Solidarity movements that intensified all over Latin America during the 1960’s and 70’s – among industrial workers, campesinos, shantytown dwellers, and indigenous peoples - cut across national differences and served as an antidote to the forces of nationalism (Ballón, 1986; Jaquette, 1994). These movements again provided a common identity among those who shared a similar social trait, living condition or ideology. This was true also for Chilean refugees, who were recipients of acts of solidarity from those Latin Americans who espoused a leftist ideology and shared in the socialist dream. In this sense, Chileans in exile experienced fluid and complex responses to their situation. Whereas government policies and state officials of many Latin American countries placed them frequently in an extremely difficult situation, they got some support from ordinary people and political activists.

In conclusion, the sentiment of being part of a community such as Latin America - sharing a common past, culture, language and religion - is contingent on the situation one finds oneself in. And at times, this sentiment can be contested for good reason. On the other hand, when confronted with the reality of living in a society that is quite dissimilar the sense of shared identity among ‘Latinos’ begins to override their differences.

the presentation of Latin America’s common front, as recorded, was as follows: “I have listened to your discourse and it surprises me that Latin America is represented here by only one voice … You have said false things… I have studied much of history and I like to tell you that history does not pass through Latin America, and the U.S. is interested in history. History follows a line that passes through Moscow, Washington, Bonn and Tokyo. That is the line of history. What happens South of that line has no importance whatsoever and therefore Latin America has no importance” (Subercaseaux, 1998, p.123-124).
A Married Woman Crossing Canadian Borders

This remote and unknown country, Canada, became a concrete reality for Chilean refugees during their first encounter with immigration officials. Carmen, a medical doctor in Chile who obtained shelter in Honduras, elaborated on this first meeting with Canadian officials in Tegucigalpa.

We were part of a group of at least 140 Chilean exiles in the city of Tegucigalpa... We were conscious of the fact that the Canadian government, having come under pressure by the Churches, such as the United Church, and human rights groups, sent immigration officials to Honduras to interview this group of Chileans who had no possibilities for work nor for going to any other country. And thus a group of those officials from Canada arrived setting themselves up in the best hotel of Tegucigalpa. There we had to go to be interviewed and be told whether we were accepted or not. They interviewed us as well. In reality they interviewed the head of the family. It meant that they interviewed my husband, and they told him at the end that we were to go to Montreal. And so we were left with the impression of moving to Canada and settling in Montreal. They sent us five travel fares for the family, 70 dollars for pocket money to live on, and a visa in the form of a Ministerial Permit to enter the country. Soon after we began to make travel arrangements and were surprised we could not enter the United States, not even in transit, we were not extended a visa for such a purpose... When we finally arrived in Canada, landing at the Toronto airport we were told to stay in Toronto. In Honduras they told us we would go to Montreal and here they said no, that we had to stay here. And without understanding anything about all of this we got off in Toronto and were taken to a rundown hotel in downtown, across Union Station.

In this narrative, Carmen makes a comment in passing that is of key interest to this research, which requires closer examination. She stated that 'they interviewed us', and quickly corrected herself by remarking that in reality it was the head of the family, that is her husband, who was being interviewed, excluding her from that meeting. This tension between these two statements reveals an ideological struggle going on in society and within her. It is interesting that Carmen should call attention to this issue now, more than 25 years after it happened. She seemed to imply that Canadian officials indicated that her husband was assumed to be 'the real refugee', even though they had no prior knowledge about her own political involvement in Chile that might have required
protection from persecution. Furthermore, they assumed that her husband was the head of the family and therefore the proper representative of the family. In other words, both statuses - being a refugee and head of family - were linked with the male gender, without posing any questions to verify their assumptions. The officials evidently did not see her as an equal partner in this marriage. Carmen’s brief observation about her husband being interviewed and not her suggests that she felt this to be rather odd. After all, she was not only a wife and mother, but also a successful medical doctor and a politically active citizen in Chile.

What is at the heart of the problem here is the traditional conception of gender roles, which is deeply embedded in the Canadian immigration system. The Immigration Act defines family in terms of ‘close relatives’ that include husband, wife and children under the age of nineteen. This is what is commonly understood as the nuclear family. Dorothy Smith (1987), Ng (1997) and Eichler (1983) have shown how the concept of ‘nuclear family’, as a dominant ideological construction, conveys a temporal and universal picture of the adult male as the breadwinner. The female adult may also earn an income but her primary responsibility is to care for her husband, children and household. The distribution of work within the nuclear family by gender is grounded in the ideology of separate spheres which, according to historian Ruth Pierson (1995), is a carry over from the Victorian era and still operative in certain Canadian circles. This Victorian ideology held that the sexes were predisposed by biology to operate optimally in distinct domains: men in the public realm of business, industry and politics, and women in the private domain of home and charity. Pierson adds that at various times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries women rebelled against their confinement to domesticity. Nevertheless, this doctrine of separate spheres survived throughout the twentieth century under different forms and discourses. For example, after de Second World War, child psychology in Canada was at the forefront of professional discourses that rationalized the continuing sexual division of labour between women and men. The role of father in this discourse was to be the provider, and the mother’s role was to stay at home, changing

47 Some of these issues, and others related to ‘family’ have been touched upon and approached from a different perspective in Emma’s story (see chapter 6).
diapers and supervising the emotional and mental development of the child (Pierson, 1995, p.3).

Carmen's brief comment implies that her impression of Canada regarding the status and treatment of women was no different to that of Chile. This impression was shared by all of the women and myself as well, based on our experience of those first encounters with Canada. Of course, such treatment by Canadian officials was very constraining, especially for those of us who had actively participated with our husbands in a class struggle or who had followed professional careers, activities which were very much part of the public domain. But most of us seemed to regard this as natural at that time and a continuation of what was expected of women in Chile. There wasn't the widespread consciousness yet among women about issues related to gender discrimination and exploitation. Neither did we have the intellectual tools to analyze our experiences from a gender perspective. Our analysis of society and human relations that guided our struggles in Chile tended to focus on issues related to the domination and exploitation of the laboring classes. But now, twenty years after its occurrence, her exclusion from that interview remains a vivid memory for Carmen.

Canada appeared to Carmen and many of the interviewees in a very different light once they moved beyond their dealings with officialdom and began to become aware of the activist movement for social justice spearheaded by the Churches, trade unions, the many grassroots organizations and community development groups dealing with poverty issues, and the women's movement. Carmen showed this in her narrative by her reference to the role of the Churches and other civil society groups in getting more Chilean refugees to enter the country. In retrospect, I share this part of her story. In subsequent years we have both been able to reflect on the different images of Canada projected by the state and the various sectors of civil society.

As for the women's movement in Canada, we soon began to realize that there were ongoing debates and a growing rebellion among women - professional women as well as recently married and university educated women - against their subordinate role within the family and the workplace. There was much resistance within the larger society to this new perspective on the family and women that highlighted the forces of discrimination operating within the family and other institutions based on gender identity.
Judy Syfers’ now famous document ‘why I want a wife’, first issued in New York in 1971, also came to our attention, as it was being distributed all over Canada by activists of the Canadian women’s movement throughout the 1970’s. That document became partially instrumental in mobilizing and channeling women’s collective anger against the unfair division of labour within the nuclear family based on gender.

As women coming from Latin America, we felt largely left out from this debate, as no allowance was made for cultural, class and racial differences existing among women. As we saw it, the North American women’s movement in those days predicated for the rights of the universal woman who in fact was being portrayed as white, heterosexual, able-bodied and of the middle and upper class. While recognizing the significance of this movement we found it difficult to identify with it because of the exclusion of our own reality from the debate. We came from a world that was embroiled in a violent class struggle, consuming people’s energy in many Third World countries. Furthermore, we Latin Americans had our struggle against Yankee imperialism. Consequently, it should not be surprising that most Chilean women in exile hardly concerned themselves with the question of gender oppression (Kay, 1987; Kirkwood, 1986; Mattelart, 1976). And as the feminist analysis popular in those days in Canada did not take the concrete experience of non-Caucasian women into account, we as Latinas and refugee women from Chile remained largely uninvolved in this particular struggle.

In summary, the experience of how we were perceived and treated as married women, in our first contacts with officials of this country and during our first years in Canada, did not seem surprising to us or unusual. It did not differ much from what we had been used to in Chile. The Canadian officials who interviewed us appeared to us to reflect the dominant view prevalent then about the ‘proper role’ of women in relation to her husband, family and the public domain. In any case, in retrospect, it was unjust to be ignored whether we as women were educated and had work experience, or not. Finally, we considered ourselves excluded from a woman’s movement which failed to address the concerns of women such as us, who apart from having problems in communicating in a

48 This document is reprinted in Pierson and Griffin (1993), document section. It was first reproduced in Canada in 1972, shortly after our arrival in this country, by Toronto Women’s Place in their ‘Consciousness-Raising Kit’.
foreign language, came from an entirely different cultural, economic, social and political environment.

Who is the Refugee?

In the first interview with Canadian immigration personnel it was apparently taken as self-evident that Carmen’s husband, Fernando, was the one whose life was in danger because of persecution, and not Carmen. Therefore, he was taken to be the ‘real’ refugee needing protection. Such assumptions were commonly made, and often proved to be incorrect. This approach to refugee determination repeated itself with all other married women that I interviewed. In some instances the man in question may be the person in real immediate danger, but even in these cases his wife, as our experience has shown, also becomes the target of persecution because of her association with her husband.

Canada’s gender bias towards refugee claimants was, and still is, rooted in the definition accepted by the United Nations in its 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Under this definition a refugee is a person seeking sanctuary from persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. It appeared that Canada had little difficulty in verifying claims for refugee status by Chileans, as the scale of the repressive actions taken in Chile was quite evident. What is questionable though in Canada’s processing of Chilean claims is that immigration officials had been guided by the prevailing ideology on the family’s division of labour by gender. Within this ideological context, Chilean men could make a much more credible and easily understood case for the need for protection against persecution than could women. Women, as wives and as single heads of households, were at a distinct disadvantage. Apart from the difficulties encountered at the time in making their own case for needing protection, they had the additional burden of having to overcome prejudices about women.

Canada showed some willingness in 1993 to broaden its approach to refugee determination by considering problems of persecution specific to women. It issued new
guidelines in that year on gender persecution\textsuperscript{49} that allowed women to apply at Canadian borders for refugee status, and make an equally credible case than men for needing protection. This was a great step forward (Bernier, 1997; Macklin, 1996; Oosterveld, 1996). However, even if these guidelines had been in place at the time when Carmen and her husband applied for entry into Canada they were not likely to have changed the treatment Carmen received. These guidelines would not have addressed her concern about fear of persecution by association with her husband. Nor would they have addressed Ana’s case of having been politically involved as a person, separate from her husband, exercising her democratic rights as a citizen.

At first glance, as in each case of married women I interviewed, it was Carmen’s husband who the military was after. But the situation did not seem to be much better for her. She lost her position as a medical doctor in one of Santiago’s hospitals. While her husband gained asylum in Honduras’ Embassy in Santiago and eventually moved to Tegucigalpa, Carmen stayed behind to deal with her pregnancy and need for hospital services to give birth to her third child. During her hospital stay she felt hospital staff ignored her, receiving shoddy service. At the same time, she was told in no uncertain terms that she could not expect to be employed any longer as a doctor in any of Chile’s hospitals. In addition, she received various anonymous threats. Soon after the delivery she joined her husband in Honduras. As reported also in Ana’s story, women often have a great commitment to social change and as a result suffer as much as their husbands, but in a different way.

These variations in women’s situations, it seemed to us, were not acknowledged or understood by immigration officials. In effect, we as women were treated as voiceless

\textsuperscript{49} The definition of who is a refugee has been very much challenged, particularly by different groups of women in Canada. Their major concern was that gender was not one of the five enumerated grounds under which a claim for asylum could be made. When issuing the new guidelines in 1993 the Canadian Government took those concerns into account, but still did not add gender as another ‘ground’ or reason for persecution. Nevertheless, when dealing with refugee claims from women Canadian officials could now turn to the new guideline which spelled out the relationship between gender persecution and one of the five grounds. This has made it easier for non-married women to apply for refugee status.
persons who were supposed to have come along for the ride as wives, or who stood faithfully and compassionately by our husbands in their suffering from persecution.

**Continuities and Discontinuities**

Carmen did not have to apply a gender analysis to her situation to realise that, although she came from a macho-oriented society, she had some relative advantages in Chile prior to the onset of military rule. She lost these rights as a refugee woman in Canada. She was certainly not excluded in Chilean society on the basis of class. While she was married, she also belonged to a prestigious profession, being an active medical practitioner. Furthermore, she was accustomed to speak out and be heard in the public domain. In her daily life situation the private and the public were intermingled. This does not mean that she as a woman was equal to the man in the eyes of the public. Her awareness of societal reality may explain why she seemed to accept, implicitly, the role assigned to her husband as the head and spokesperson for the family in their dealings with the Canadian State. After all, the Canadian norm of viewing the man as head of the family was in line with norms prevailing in Chile, thus providing a degree of continuity in husband-wife relations.

Carmen perceived herself and her husband in the private domain of the family as members of a team. She apparently supported her husband willingly by looking after the children and working in various menial jobs, such as office cleaning, while he studied to qualify as a medical practitioner in Canada. She also willingly followed him to Halifax where he was offered a medical post, and back again to Toronto where he prepared for, and eventually entered, one of medicine’s specialization. This was a far cry from the life she had lived in Chile. It wasn’t until 7 years after arriving in Canada, and after her husband was well established professionally, that she was finally able to take up the threads of her own life. Finally, her turn had arrived to prepare for qualifying examinations to practice medicine in Canada, and to continue her successful career that had been so rudely interrupted by the military coup and her forced departure from Chile (Carmen’s story is summarized in Chapter 4).

Canadian norms at the official levels were no less discriminating in relation to the use of surnames for married women. This took me very much by surprise. I felt I was
being personally violated when it occurred to me that they had replaced my own family surname with that of my husband's on all documents.\textsuperscript{50} When I mentioned to the officials concerned that I went by my maiden name and wished to maintain my own family's identity their usual response was that here in Canada I had to take on the surname of my husband.\textsuperscript{51} With that I was left with the feeling that by coming here I had lost my status as an individual which I had been able to exercise in Chile, even in marriage. In Chile, too, there existed the tradition of women assuming the name of their husband at the point of marriage. But professional women especially, when marrying, often chose to keep their own name, which was the name they held at graduation. This was the case, for instance, of my mother (a lawyer) and myself (a professor), even though her and my children received as their first surname that of our respective husbands. There was also the desire among a growing number of women of my generation to be 'masters' of their own person. These women were proud of being themselves without losing any respect for the marriage relationship. Finally, there are the many women across Latin America who add their husband's name to their own maiden name, thus merging one's own identity as an individual woman with that of the newly adopted status as wife. I tried to regain my sense of individuality, at the informal level, by having people call me by my maiden name. And slowly, through 12 years of effort I was able to have my surname changed to my maiden name on one official document after the other, relying much on the cooperation of the one attending to my request. The one place I was unable to achieve this change was in the schools of my children.\textsuperscript{52}

The crossing of borders frames identities in different ways. In Chile we had a family and personal history that served as our basis of identity. But once having to leave that familiar and supportive social space in search for a new protective and secure environment as exiles, we became labelled people - 'refugees'. To be labelled as such, or

\textsuperscript{50} I entered Canada in 1974 moving directly to Montreal with my husband and two children of one and three years old, remaining in the Province of Quebec for nine years.

\textsuperscript{51} Pierson (1995) points out that under Canada's common law, the basis for this country's legal system, a woman is not compelled to change her name when marrying. In spite of this, women generally take their husband's surname.
as 'immigrants', conveys stereotypes that can be most disempowering. The above analysis of Carmen's encounter with immigration officials and my own struggle with the use of my surname provide two examples of this disempowering experience.

Ng (1993) sheds further light on this issue of stereotyping in her writings. Taking the case of immigrant women, she explains that once accepted by the authorities to enter the country as an 'immigrant woman' that person carries a legal status, i.e. 'landed immigrant'. That status does still not provide the benefits of full citizenship but does allow the person to enter the employment market and receive state services, such as healthcare. The official definition of 'immigrant woman' is deceptive though. In spite of its legal status and accompanying rights, in common everyday parlance only certain groups of newcomers are referred to as 'immigrant women'. They are thought of as the women who don't speak English, or who speak English but with a heavy accent other than those of British or American people. They are the non-white women from the Third World. They are the women who have jobs as assembly line workers or cleaning ladies. As Ng points out, this common use of the term 'immigrant woman' implies class and racial prejudice (p.281). Although some years of building up educational resources and credentials helped most of the Chilean women refugees I interviewed to move into a more central place in Canadian society, the social image of immigrant women portrayed by Ng still appears in their recollection of that period, more than twenty years afterwards. I turn now to another part of Carmen's narrative to see how she makes sense of the Canadian State and its officials.

We were conscious of the fact that the Canadian government, having come under pressure by the Churches such as the United Church and the human rights groups, sent immigration officials to Tegucigalpa.

What Carmen seems to imply here is that Canada was a country that was difficult to access, being reluctant to open its doors to us. It was thanks to the lobbying efforts undertaken by the more progressive and humanistic groups within Canada's civil society

52 Tradition is actually more of a barrier than the law itself to those women wishing to revert back to the use of their maiden name, as Pierson shows in the case of Andrea Knight (1995, p.76).
that we were allowed in (Simalchik, 1993). Their solidarity with us helped to overcome the obvious barriers that existed in our case. This image of official Canada as an 'aloof country' vis-à-vis Chilean refugees has been amply examined and developed by two Chilean refugees, Tomic and Trumper (1993). They state "We believe that the reluctance of the Canadian government to accept Chileans was linked to both our political leanings and the fact that we are Hispanic, not 'white' Europeans" (p.168).

At that time, in the early 1970's, refugee policy was part of immigration policy. Political asylum was not extended automatically when claiming refugee status at Canada's borders. Chileans as a group were the first Latin American people to seek refuge in Canada and they were one of the first among non-whites - after South Asians and the Uganda exodus - to be let in on compassionate grounds. But each individual exile still had to apply for immigration, qualifying according to the points system by which immigrants normally are being assessed. Although the application of the point system was relaxed, immigration officials were still left with considerable discretion to decide who could and could not enter Canada. For instance, there were no specific guidelines to establish which refugee was more capable of adjusting to life in Canada than the next (Dirks, 1977)

Let us turn to Carmen's account where she talks about the desperate situation they found themselves in.

They sent immigration officials to Honduras to interview this group of Chileans who had no possibility for work nor for going to any other country. And thus arrived a group of those officials from Canada, setting them up in the best hotel in Tegucigalpa. There we had to go to be interviewed and being told whether or not we were accepted.

---

53 Simalchik writes that in January 29, 1974 the Canadian Council of Churches sent a telegram to Prime Minister Trudeau. The telegram stated, "Church sources in Panama inform us of crisis in situation of more than 50 Chileans and non-Chileans awaiting Canadian security clearance. They are under pressure from Panama government to leave and subject to various forms of harassment...Why has Canada kept them waiting more than two months with still no word re outcome their applications... We are informing World Council of Churches and urge you take prompt action."

54 When it came to Chileans, Immigration and Security Personnel saw red. After the overthrow of Allende's democratically Socialist government, Canada was among the first to recognize Augusto Pinochet's military regime in order to protect Canadian investments in that country (Tomic & Trumper, 1993; Troper, 1995).
In this part of her story Carmen alludes to the intimidating situation of this first encounter. On the one hand there are these Canadian officials projecting an image of being part of a rich and powerful country. And on the other side the image of refugees forced into conditions of poverty and helplessness, with each begging for entry into Canada and feeling in competition with the next one. Razack (1998, p.91) underscores this view of the situation when she writes that when refugees from the Third World come knocking on our doors, there is a plethora of images and texts establishing First World superiority. Carmen laid out quite clearly those images in her narrative, conveying the sense of humiliation that she and others felt at that moment. Her text also carries a veiled criticism about the form of ‘help’ given by Canada to people in desperate situations when she comments on how Canadian officials set themselves up in the best hotels to interview refugees. Whether intended or not, the image projected was that of power and hegemony. Canada’s compassionate stance was turned into something that appeared more like a charitable act. Is this part of the image of the nation in an international context that Canadian officials seek to create: Nice, helpful, liberal and tolerant?

Reflecting further on my interpretation of Carmen’s narrative, I believe that it is important to mention that the images projected here, when she says “those officials setting themselves up in the best hotels,” presupposes a view that I share and believe to be correct. I understand, as one of ‘them’, what all this means in the eyes of a refugee and as one coming from the Third World. This type of phrase, which Whetherell and Potter (1992) call an ‘interpretative repertoire,’ is a phrase that allows the speaker/listener to ‘place’ a person or a group. Therefore, no further explanation is warranted, no more needs to be said about this. What is important to establish is the direction that Carmen’s narrative takes, and what effects the text tries to produce and in what context.

In conclusion, the substratum of this part of her story is a political and social critique of how immigration officials work with refugees, at least in those days and with Chilean refugees. She conveys painful memories of being subjected to humiliation and denial of an autonomous sense of self, at the hands of those people from the North. These officials clearly marked their superiority by placing themselves in the best hotel of the city and by applying a male centered approach to their treatment of the refugees.
Reading Through Differences Among Us: A Methodological Observation

The stories I gathered for this study deal with women refugees' perceptions about their experiences that span a period of more than 25 years. Consequently, the past comes to us now as viewed through today's lenses. My own interpretation of these stories comes from a reflection I myself have been engaged in all these years on my own experience. In addition, I should stress the point that neither Carmen's story nor the other nine stories presented here serve as exemplars or prototypes of 'the Chilean woman refugee', even though the analysis of their narratives can reveal certain tendencies, possible situations that we have in common. There are many facets of our lives that make every story unique. Similarly, the circumstances of our arrival in Canada and how the interviews were carried out were not the same for every one of us. For example, some women passed the officials interview together with their husband, as in my case. Some received the English course for newcomers, while many others did not. I look at next our different perceptions regarding our everyday life in English our second language. Below I will examine the different perceptions regarding our everyday experiences with English as our second language.

English - Exclusions and Inclusions

Why including language as part of the analysis on how we as refugee women construct Canada, and ourselves, when it was not subsumed under any one of the four main themes that made up the research design? It certainly has been my experience that one's life in Canada is very much being structured by the level of knowledge of either one of the two official languages. As I listened to the stories of my interviewees who, like me, were deficient in the use of Canada's dominant languages, and asked for more detail on their problems with the new language, it became quite evident that this also greatly affected their communication with people and their chances in Canadian society. The more we perfected our mastery of the dominant language, the more opportunities seemed to open up.

As I began my interview, I asked each woman to tell me about her life in Chile before coming to Canada, why and how she came to Canada, what happened since her
arrival in Canada, what was particularly difficult for her and what was a positive experience, and how she saw the future. These questions were deliberately left broad in scope, without any clear boundaries, so that each would feel free to tell her story the way she wanted. However, as the interview proceeded, and the issue related to language was mentioned in passing, I would intervene by asking them to elaborate. All of the women raised this issue, but few would spontaneously elaborate unless asked beyond mentioning the struggle they had to get into the course of English for newcomers.

The fact that I had to specifically ask more than half of my interviewees to reflect on this issue would suggest that they might not have considered this as a relevant dimension to be included in their account of their life story. Obviously, communicating in English today, after having been in Canada since the early 70's, is not as much of a challenge for us anymore. The other explanation may be that the interviewees were just not conscious of it having been a problem at the time of the interview, since we conducted the session in our native tongue, Spanish. Or may be language was taken for granted as something difficult, but widely shared that 'everyone' gets through.

Evidently, one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome, particularly for us women, was to gain approval to get into anyone of the official courses offered free by the government to newcomers. Knowledge of English was generally viewed as essential to access the labour market and better one's chances in the new country (Boyd, 1989; Boyd, 1990). Besides, it was seen as a necessary tool for cultural understanding of the new society and for engaging in social communication. Yet, only one of the ten women interviewed had proficiency in the English language. All the others felt very constrained by their limited facility. Take for instance the case of Julia. She had to find work to complement her husband's income. Whereas he worked as an engineer in Chile he had to start at the bottom, laboring as a factory hand earning a minimal wage. So, Julia did find something that got her some money but which she considered only as a temporary measure. She aspired to eventually become a professional in Canada as she used to be in Chile. Therefore she needed to learn good English, and made efforts to enter a course. Her account of that experience is quite eloquent and revealing.

Without the language we had two choices, to work on a conveyor belt in a factory, or do cleaning work. I opted for the latter, sweating it out for
about one and a half-year. In the meantime, I went around to see if I could get into an English course. They asked me why I wanted to know English when my husband spoke the language and my children were learning it at school; but why did I need it if I was at home? This was in 1976. I told them that I had been a teacher in Chile. The response was that there was no demand for teachers at that time in Canada. One of the Manpower officials told me to return later to see if they could give me a short course in secretarial work so that I would not have to continue with my cleaning job. This turned into a ritual with me returning every six months. But what really made me angry was when one day I met one of those types who told me ‘We Canadians don’t have any obligation to educate you, we already have done enough for you people; with that you should be more than satisfied’. I was beyond myself and began to curse him in Spanish. I told him that ‘your little course for secretarial work is not going to educate me more, that I probably had more formal education than he and that he was an idiot....’ They did not accept me for an English course.

In this narrative, Julia presents an ugly side of Canada that many of us also had to face at one time or another. The Manpower official made it perfectly clear what separated her from him when stating “We Canadians”. She, like other women refugees, was made to feel as the outsider who was to earn her own keep. He seemed to imply that Canada’s humanitarian gesture to refugee women did not extend beyond providing us with a safe place where we would be protected from further persecution. She ought to be grateful!!

This was not the position taken vis-à-vis refugee men who, being regarded as heads of their family, were eligible for English training. This policy at least acknowledged some Canadian concern about the critical importance of this language in making a living, even if it was a very basic course assisting newcomers to just get by. Or, could it be that this Canadian concern for men learning English had something to do with them being regarded more attractive as employees than women? Of course, teaching men English would make them more productive in the labour force, and thereby further Canada’s economic interests. Whatever the real reason for this policy, Julia as a married woman did not qualify. One can just imagine her reaction when realizing that this meant she was slated to remain a dutiful housewife, or work in some manual job that required little English but would ‘help’ in adding to her household’s income.

There is more to her narrative, though. She spoke as if she felt deeply humiliated when referring to the official’s comment that she should not expect anything more than a
safe place. After all, who was she to ask for more? It was not just what he said but the way he said it, as she recalls, 'We Canadians don't have any obligation to educate you, we already have done enough for you people, with that you should be more than satisfied'. This interchange not only produces Julia as refugee woman, but the identity of Canadian as well.

Her narrative makes it clear that he is not only talking about himself and her, since he uses the plural forms, "we Canadians" and "you people". The official implies when stating "we Canadians", that Canada comprises a homogeneous entity, a political community in the Weberian sense (1968), which imagines a community of people with some kind of kinship ties and common descent. In this sense, newcomers are positioned as outsiders. By the same token a class distinction was implied, where Julia and other refugee women were not to expect more than being a housewife or office cleaner, while social roles and jobs with a higher status would be reserved for Canadians, such as this official. Ng's work (1989) and that of others such as Bannerji (1997) and Das Gupta (1994) suggest that gender and racialized immigration practice contributes to class distinctions in social relations by establishing differential access to the labour market. In this regard, access to English or French are crucial resources that immigration authorities can extend or withhold.

These are the images that Julia formed of Canada as a result of her first encounters with Canadian officials. They were not dissimilar to the ones formed by Carmen based on her experience in meeting Canadian immigration officials in Honduras. Not being eligible for the course in English offered by the government, Julia decided to enrol herself in one offered by the library in her local neighborhood, with senior citizens working, as volunteers, doing the teaching for two hours, twice per week. The rest of the time Julia studied English on her own. Three years later she entered the university. This is quite an accomplishment considering the obstacles she had to overcome.

---

55 Weber points out that in the formation of an ethnic group it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community unless drastic differences exist among the community's members in costume, physical type, or above all in language (1968 p.389), quoted in Ng (1989, p.14).
Most of the women I interviewed were not eligible to take the formal course in English designed for newcomers since they were not regarded as heads of their family and therefore not considered to be in need. The notion that only men would seek employment and therefore should receive such a course, was so ingrained in the official culture that even Emma, as a single woman, was denied the course as well.

They told me upon arrival that they were not going to allow me the course since I was single, and the course was only for heads of families. So I went to work, which was at the Toronto airport, working at night on a conveyor preparing food trays used in air travel. When 5.00 o'clock arrived the next morning I was dead tired. One day I decided to try again to get into the English course. It took a great deal out of me, as I had to argue all the time with them. I told them that I was head of my own household. It cost me more than a month of arguing until they finally let me in. My whole world began to change as I started this course.

Emma’s story shows how much effort it required of her, as a woman, to obtain approval to get into the language course for newcomers, and to break through deep-seated official beliefs about the woman’s role. These beliefs made absolutely no sense in her case as a single person. Married women in such a normative environment could at least expect to be supported by their husbands, being officially designated as the principal breadwinners, even though this expectation was often not borne out by their experience. But in Emma’s case, her status as a single person placed her in circumstances where she had to function as her own breadwinner, and obtain gainful employment in order to survive. To succeed she needed access to a basic language course as much as a man. Why then did she have to call on all her persuasive powers to convince officials of that need?

Considering existing norms and the rigid application of official rules pertaining to eligibility requirements for attending the course in English for newcomers at that time, it is not surprising to find that women comprised two-thirds of the immigrant population unable to speak English or French, as reported by Health and Welfare Canada (1988) and Pendakur & Ledoux (1991), based on 1981-1986 census data. And refugee women, as quoted by Rockhill and Tomic (1992, p.18), were even less likely to speak any one of these two dominant languages than any other immigrant class.

Emma’s and Julia’s stories also show how such norms pertaining to the role of married women and their inadequate knowledge of English resulted in being channelled...
into certain types of jobs - such as cleaning and assisting in childcare - even though their post secondary education from Chile had prepared them for much more challenging occupations. Furthermore, they felt insufficiently informed about their rights to contest their below-minimum wage levels and the practice of being paid ‘under the counter’. In her study of foreign women, Boyd (1989) confirmed this tendency in job channeling and segregation, with most of these women ending up in the lower end of the labour market, involving cleaning, manufacturing processing and assembly type jobs. The more recent the arrival, the more likely women find themselves channeled into these job categories. However, once having learned the language the whole world changes, as Emma exclaimed. This may be so if you are white, as in Emma’s case, with some degree of educational background and ‘cultural capital’ from country of origin.

**English with an Accent**

A person may have achieved a working knowledge of the language, by having attended one of the officially sponsored courses, but still feel uncomfortable in the new language because of speaking with a heavy accent. Many are unable to surmount the obstacles to job improvement. This raises the question of what level of command of English or French is demanded by members of the dominant society. It also raises the question of how this requirement is used since it is not always clear whether it is really about language, or whether it is used as an instrument to discriminate. Rockhill and Tomic’s study (1992) leaves no doubt on this issue as they show how a limited command of the official language is often used as a rationale to justify the segregated space occupied by immigrant groups in the employment market. These authors point out that it is the accent ‘per se’ when speaking English as a second language that frequently leads to a devaluation of the person, regardless of the quality and level of the English spoken. This social devaluation in turn may be internalized, stopping many of us as newcomers from asserting ourselves, feeling excluded, alone and far from being at ‘home’. Eva Hoffman (1989) an immigrant from Poland, expresses this well in her autobiography *Lost in Translation*:

In my situation especially, I know that language will be a crucial instrument that I can overcome the stigma of my marginality, the weight
of presumption against me, only if the reassuringly right sounds come out of my mouth (p.123)

It is not unusual to find refugees (men or women) with post secondary degrees from their native countries trying to make up any perceived deficiencies in training to qualify for practice in Canada\textsuperscript{56} The language proficiency test required for university entry was eventually passed by six of my ten interviewees. Let us turn to Julia’s narrative to find out what language struggles she endured in her university studies.

I got a Master’s degree, but it was agony to get there. It was a real challenge to keep going and make presentations in class. For years I felt tormented, my stomach would start to turn every time I entered the institute and climbed the staircase. And I was agonizing over the papers I had to write for my courses. I felt so inadequate with the language, which was the frustrating part of it. I feel that my capacity in articulating well my ideas is one of the few strengths I have, but it is the management of the language that holds me back. This capacity is all I have to show to the world and there, ‘paff’, it was gone. Writing is still a torture for me, although not so much now. I had to submit an article today for a community newspaper and it left me in a state of anxiety. Somebody who writes well in English always will tell me to change this or that.

What Julia conveys is how difficult it is to live, work and study in a new language that one only manages in part. Even when gaining mastery of it over time one never seems to feel completely confident. She goes as far as qualifying the very activity of having had to immerse herself in English during her university studies as extremely painful, using such words as agony, torment, torture, frustration, anxiety, and a turning stomach. This sensation that carries physical overtones, she feels even today when involved in professional tasks, although with lesser intensity. Whereas Julia prides herself on her great ability to express her ideas and sentiments in Spanish, she often feels incapacitated in Canada whenever it is required of her to communicate in English. The

\textsuperscript{56} Research carried out in 1994 by the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQUAM) on Chileans in Quebec and advanced studies, found that 163 Chileans finished either a Master’s or Doctoral thesis. They touched on no less than 38 different subject areas covering literature, the social and physical sciences, medicine and the broader field of health, engineering, and many other fields. A further analysis on the completed theses, by gender, found that men still far outnumbered women at the Master’s level (70M versus
difficulties Julia described about her university studies in Canada sound very familiar to me. I have gone through this experience twice, first with French doing my Master's level studies at a Quebec university, and now with English. Every moment I turned to writing this thesis was a painful experience, feeling impeded by a language that could just not express the bits of narrative analysis I had in mind.

The high value attached by Julia and other educated Chileans to their ability to express themselves well in part explains their sense of segregation and frustration in Canada. Talking in English with an accent has been addressed in detail by Hoffman, (1989), Oboler (1995) and Rockhill (1992). As they point out, this preoccupation with speaking correctly, is partially related to being listened to for the ideas being presented. And ideas, after all, are not inferior because they are expressed with an accent. But to keep people's attention and have them listen to those ideas calls for eloquence in English that few of us possess, it being our second, third or fourth language. This is the obstacle and basis for the continuing frustration felt by Julia, myself and apparently many other educated newcomers, who have to express ourselves in a language that is not our own.

**Speech as a Class Signifier**

Another driving force in this aspiration among us Chileans to master the language and speak correctly has its roots in our native land. Chile, whose dominant language is Spanish, did not present any difficulty for those of us women from the middle class with post secondary education and with no other pretensions besides performing well as professionals. Nevertheless, even when Spanish is the dominant spoken language it is the social class a person belongs to that most often determines the skill level in the management of the language. People with low levels of education and limited economic

---

39F), the Doctoral level (38M to 7F), and in Medicine (7M to 2F). See study compiled by UQUAM professor Jose Del Pozo (1994).

57 Pierre Bourdieu (1991) points out that the value attached to linguistic/cultural practices is part of the processes that produce and reproduce a logic that is economic, in the broader sense of the term. These practices are aimed at the augmentation of some kind of 'capital' (e.g. cultural or symbolic capital) or the maximization of some kind of 'profit' (e.g. honor or prestige). Part of the competence of the speaker is to know how, and to be able, to produce expressions which are highly valued in a particular context. Differences
means who in Chile are referred to as 'los rotos' are easily identifiable by their 'bad' speech. They use words in their improper meaning, changing the spelling of some words and pronouncing them in ways that do not respect the forms acceptable to people belonging to other sectors of Chile's society. 'El roto' (singular) is a person scorned and looked down upon by the middle and upper classes. And while 'los rotos' (plural) may embody and symbolize Chilean nationhood, nobody would like to be labelled as a 'roto'.

Thus, when entering the English speaking world as Chilean women from the educated middle class, we bring along this culturally shaped and class-based idea that speaking the language 'badly' automatically marks that person negatively. In Chile, 'el roto chileno' is not aware of her bad use of the dominant language and therefore does not suffer from this condition. In contrast, Julia becomes very conscious of her limitation in speaking correct English in Canada. The pain she expressed of not being able to express herself well may remind her of all those images she learned in Chile to devalue such a person, and confirmed now in Canada, but this time in her own person.

in accent, grammar and vocabulary are indices of the social positions occupied by the speaker, and reflections of linguistic capital (and other capital) possessed.

58 For an extensive analysis of what 'el roto chileno' symbolizes, and the role it has played in the Chilean identity, see Eduardo Carrasco (1989). It has its precise beginnings in the period following the war against the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation in the 1830's. Chile being the victor in the battle of Yungay designated the 20th of January as the day of 'el roto chileno'. As such it takes on a positive image, symbolizing the brave soldier who thanks to perseverance and willpower, achieved victory and becomes transformed into a heroic being. However, this character over time evolves into being identified by his bad speech and his taste for certain dishes that are typically part of the Chilean working class. With respect to bad speech, what eventually becomes an issue is the manner in which words are pronounced; a manner which the person who speaks it is not conscious of but which prompts the person who does not engage in such speech and listens to it a sense of superiority, mocking that speech. While this mockery may not be expressed verbally, it is evident in that person’s attitude towards 'el roto'.

59 Beyond the differences in the speech of Chileans according to class there are other factors at play that result in distinct speech patterns, such as the speaker’s origin of region and the accented Spanish of people whose ancestors were Mapuche, Aymara or from other native tribes.
I Never Worry About My Accent

Isabel provides a view and interpretation of our condition in Canada, in the use of English as a second language, which is completely different from that of Julia and myself. I was astonished to learn from Isabel that she did not accord any importance to the problems newcomers usually encounter in learning to communicate in one of the official languages. Let me state the question I posed to her and follow with her text that explains her experiences with the language and her feelings about them. My question was ‘Did you not experience any problems or cultural shock that most non-English speaking newcomers seem to have at the beginning when not able to speak the language, or later when not speaking it well or with a heavy accent?’ Isabel answered as follows:

Look, I knew that I was coming to a country where people speak another language. I was prepared that we were going to be speechless for a period. And so that happened. We had been for sometime, for a year, speaking very little and making many mistakes. We have many stories, some of which are funny and others not so. But I was prepared for this. I knew that we were treated as second class. If we were not able to speak the language of the country when entering, obviously you are not going to get anywhere. I knew that I would be able to learn English. If they had sent me to China, perhaps...but not with English. I knew I had to learn it. As for Raul he learned it on the go. He left the course speaking very little English feeling much anger against English as the language of imperialism... He began to work with people who spoke Portuguese or Italian. So he learned to speak Italian perfectly. And with a lot of gestures he was able to get by and earn his living. But I saw that it took Raul 3 to 4 years to realize that he had to speak English, and that it was a problem he had to overcome. Once he decided to overcome it, he learned very quickly. He speaks with a heavier accent than I do, but with much confidence. Raul never feels less (than others), he never worries about whether or not people understand him because of his accent or anything. Nor did I ever worry about my accent. I knew I was never going to get rid of my accent being already 30 years of age. Thus I knew that my English was going to be good but with an accent. I neither have had any fear talking in English, even when I was speaking it like a 'Tarzan' I was quite happy.

My question, as formulated, conveyed quite clearly my position. The majority of newcomers I have come in contact with underwent a cultural shock in which the lack of knowledge of the language played a key role. It was not only an issue of feeling hampered in communication with our new environment but also our experience with
Canada's response, from institutions and individuals alike, that was not very helpful and which even aggravated the situation for some of us. In addition to this, my question to Isabel implied that problems arise also when you possess a working knowledge of the language but do not speak it fluently, or when you are fluent but speak it with an accent.

I expected Isabel's answer to identify some of the problems she had faced as a result of the change in language once having crossed the borders. Instead, she gives us to understand that she considered the process of evolution she went through with the use of English as normal, that one has to expect it to be that way. Furthermore, she claimed that she never suffered from speaking 'broken English' in public. This is quite a different view on the impact that the use of a language may have on somebody who crosses borders. It merits some further analysis. I want to examine particularly the various meanings that are implied in the statements of her narrative so that other stories may appear to us.

Her first reaction to my question was that she did not suffer from her language adjustments because she anticipated she would have problems. Moreover, she did not convey any negative feelings about being regarded as second class citizen, 'I knew that we were going to be treated as second class. If we were not able to speak the language of the country, obviously you are not going to get anywhere'. She seemed to suggest that it is normal not only to be seen as different, but also to be an inferior citizen if one is unable to speak the country's dominant language.

Secondly, Isabel makes the point that knowledge of the country's language is central to getting somewhere, which appears to mean to her being able to defend one's rights and making a place for oneself in this country. If this is what she means I would share that view with her. Where I would differ with her is about how we are to get 'there'. Her position is made clear in the next point.

Thirdly, Isabel sees the lack of language as a problem that each individual has to overcome, it is an individual problem. Isabel reinforces this idea when she talks about her husband '...it took Raul 3 to 4 years to realize that he had to speak English and that it was a problem he had to overcome. Once he decided to overcome it, he learned very quickly'. What Isabel seems to imply here is that the major struggle in life is within and for oneself, and that personal attitudes and individual effort determine success or failure.
Her views, reflecting an individualistic ideology, would be most welcome to those sectors of the right in Canada, which do not favor any policies or public investments into social programs that would facilitate the process in language and other adjustments for newcomers. For Isabel, when referring to her husband she expresses her belief that the factors involved in becoming skilled in the English language begin and end with the individual, seemingly ignoring or considering irrelevant any factors of a contextual nature.

Yet, contextual factors evidently do play a large role in marginalizing certain groups of people in society in ways that would require extraordinary efforts from individuals to overcome. This was made clear earlier in reference to immigrant women who face normative and structural impediments that tend to channel them into low status roles and occupations. Isabel also implicitly acknowledges this in other comments that we encounter in her narrative. For example, she talks about the wanderings of newcomers through various language groups to earn a living and survive. In her account about Raul she states, 'He began to work with people who spoke Italian and Portuguese. So he learned to speak Italian.' In other words, he worked in a place where workers were not required to understand or speak English in order to produce. This portrays the picture of a man who is being marginalised from the opportunities of mainstream society, and his lack of skill in the dominant language is part of that problem.

But there is another story here about a man who is very capable in spite of not knowing any English. She may have intended to paint a romantic portrait of her husband as a survivor who 'made it' despite the odds. After all, he worked, he learned Italian perfectly, and was able to get by and earn his living. This second story, somehow, is in tension with the first, which makes the point that one does not need to manage English to 'get by' in Canada. The stories also return to what it means to 'get by' and whether migrants can expect any more than just 'getting by'. I will return to these different meanings further on. But first I like to address another point that Isabel makes.

In a passing reference to Raul's association of English with American imperialism, Isabel claims that this caused him to rebel against learning and using it. This claim is understandable in view of US interventions in the Latin American region throughout the 20th century. More immediately in relation to Chile, it is now an
established and well-documented fact that the US Central Intelligence Agency played a central role in bringing about the military coup against the democratically elected Socialist Government of Allende. And many of us, like Raul, hold the Americans indirectly accountable for the kind of repressive actions that followed, which unleashed one of the largest, if not largest, exodus of people from their country - as refugees - in Latin American history. This explains also why Raul, as well as myself, looked upon English as the language of imperialism, a language we felt uncomfortable with and even rejected for communication if we could get by, particularly in the early days after arriving in Canada. This was easier for me to do, ending up in Montreal where I lived and learned to speak French. I, together with other Chilean refugees settling in the Province of Quebec, viewed French as a non-imperialist language\(^60\) and found it easier to throw myself into trying to master that language. And as many of my compatriots, I also found it easy to identify at that time with the Quebec separatist movement. Thus, as a construct English represented for many of us a cultural symbol that signified American dominance. And so, when Isabel made a passing reference to Raul's resistance to English and American imperialism, she did not have to elaborate. I understood her instinctively. The expression ‘English the language of imperialism’ functioned as an interpretative phrase in the sense Wetherell and Potter point out (1992).

Dwelling on this issue should not be interpreted by the reader to mean that all difficulties experienced by Chilean refugees with the English language could be attributed to their association of this language with American imperialism. Such an explanation would be an over-simplification of a complex phenomenon that conceals many other factors operating in our environment so as to result in acquiring poor language skills in English. Some of these may include inadequately designed language courses tailored to the needs of specific groups of newcomers (such as women needing childcare while attending the course), or the devaluation experienced when speaking the language with a heavy accent, or the discrimination suffered by newcomers who are members of certain ethnic or racial groups that are constructed as inferior, and other factors (Rockhill and Tomic, 1992, p.41-42).

\(^{60}\) French too is a language of colonization and imperialism, though not in the same
The subject of social discrimination and racism that other refugee women (Paulina and Mireya) have touched upon in their personal histories never surfaced in Isabel’s narrative. At least no direct reference was made to it. She mentioned that her husband speaks English now, albeit with a heavier accent than herself, but with great confidence. ‘Raul never feels less (than others)’. She adds that she neither had concerned herself about the accent ‘even when I was speaking like a Tarzan.\(^1\) I was quite happy.’ These statements differ from Julia’s experiences and feelings about the issue. When subjecting Isabel’s narrative to a closer examination other meanings can be read into her story. The fact that she mentions that ‘Raul never feels less’ may also imply that she understands perfectly well that he could easily be discriminated against because of his poor English. There may be other reasons for which he could be discriminated. She implies this but does not specify or elaborate when adding ‘or anything’.

Manifest xenophobic attitudes and behaviors of mainstream Canadians towards newcomers from Third World countries such as Isabel and her husband have been reported to be quite prevalent in Canada. One such report, titled *After The Door Has Been Opened* (1988) writes “Many Canadians place ethno-cultural groups on a scale of acceptability. Anglo-Saxons, French, and Northern Europeans occupy the top of the scale and Asians and Caribbeans at the bottom. Members at the bottom of the scale, i.e. Canada’s visible minorities, experience rejection everyday on the job, in housing, in education, in the media and on the street.” Even though Latin Americans are not specifically mentioned in this quote, as a non-white people they are generally regarded in Canada as one of the visible minorities.\(^2\) Consequently, they also find themselves at the lower end of the scale of acceptability, having to face all the social barriers this implies.

---

\(^1\) Speaking as a Tarzan is a common expression among Spanish-speaking people to point out that the person does not speak English well. The symbolism involved refers to Tarzan’s cries in the jungle, which are unintelligible to outsiders but not to those who are his friends.

\(^2\) The Federal Employment Act of 1986 defined as visible minorities most Latin American people (other than the aboriginal people) who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color. In the Ontario Employment Act people from Chile, Argentina and Paraguay are not identified as visible minorities, however many of them have been confronted with the Canadian racialized practice of devaluing any education obtained
In this context, people from Latin America who represent socially organized links between phenotype/bodies and images/practices are less acceptable in Canada. Who speaks English with an accent, will likely have more difficulty in being listened to seriously, in being respected for their qualities, and in obtaining the necessary supports to develop the new language and gain promotions on the job, than those Canadians classified as higher up the scale of acceptability. Thus, Latin American newcomers share their visibility in a predominantly white society with other visible minorities in Canada. But in addition to this, they have to confront English as a second or third language, something that is not experienced to the same extent by those visible minorities originating from English speaking countries such as India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Jamaica.\(^63\) This means that Latin Americans in general readily turn to other Spanish-speaking people for social communication and support, as illustrated by Emma in her narrative (see chapter 4), with all the possible risks involved in developing a ghetto mentality and adding to social segregation.

In her narrative, Isabel makes no direct reference to this social reality of Spanish-speaking people being relegated to the lower end of the scale of acceptability, and the impact this may have on their identities. As a matter of fact, she seems to stress her own uniqueness as a Latin American in her personal biography. Nevertheless she does, implicitly, refer to the social context which engendered the discourse in the first place. In one part of her biography she informs me that she was trained in Chile to become a lawyer and is doing legal work in Canada. What she may have suggested here is that in order to succeed in one's career one should set oneself apart from the others and not admit to the existence of social barriers. Telling the story in the way she does, stressing her positive attitudes and feelings, can be viewed as her means to stabilise a personal situation in what would otherwise be a disturbing environment of everyday living for her. It enables her to forget in order to survive and move forward. Or said differently, it could be seen as her way to give meaning to social events that she can live with.

\(^{63}\) Many from these English-speaking countries are considered as deficient because of their accented or dialeced English.
Differences Among Us

In this analysis I start from the premise that stories don’t have fixed meanings. What is of prime interest to me as the researcher is to look for and examine the intentions behind the words being communicated. It is clear from the above analysis that Isabel and Julia make sense of their experience with language in different ways. While Julia suggests that she felt handicapped in having to communicate in a language foreign to her, Isabel claims that she has not suffered at all. Having some information about the social location of each of the two storytellers helps to understand why their experience with language is narrated differently.

Both Julia and Isabel have in common that they arrived in Canada about the same time as women refugees, and have achieved in the interim a relative mastery of the English language. They differ in the course their careers have taken. For instance, Isabel is a lawyer who believes success in life is entirely up to the individual. In contrast Julia, a teacher by training, believes that things change through community awareness and mobilization. Each in their particular way, though, is aware that speaking English marks them both negatively in Canada. They are both newcomers originating from a non-English speaking and Third World country, members of a visible minority in Canada for whom mastering the new language is an endless struggle upward into the mainstream regardless of how this struggle is being presented in their respective narrative.

Even for these middle class women the process of devaluation, and accompanying subordination, linked to speaking ‘incorrect’ English apparently continues many years after having obtained full citizenship and having established oneself in one’s career. Carmen’s case is illustrative of this point. After passing her qualifying examinations as a physician here in Canada she moved into one of medicine’s specialization studying for a further five years. Stressed the point that English was the medium of learning. She mentioned that when she finished a few years ago and began to treat patients, which was about 10 years after arriving in Canada, one of them subjected her to a devaluating behavior related to her accent that affected her deeply.

Devaluation is closely linked to the process of subordination, which is apparent in the channeling of those subjected to it into low-paying and alienating jobs. Crowley
(1989) and Bourdieu (1991), have identified and studied this phenomenon in the context of movements for linguistics standardization in emerging European nations, during the 19th century. They have shown how speech of the ruling classes became the norm used as a measure in moving certain groups to the center of the nation and others to the margin. Similarly, in the construction of English-speaking Canada people who speak English with an accent - and specially those of visible minorities (which does not necessarily include all Chileans) – are placed in a subordinate position.

In the case of my interviewees and myself, our middle class locations give us, to some extent, a certain self confidence and ways of resisting processes of devaluation that we all have experienced since arriving in Canada. Nevertheless, even after so many years living in this country, and having developed considerable expertise in our professions or occupations, we still do not ‘feel’ as full members. Tomic and Trumper (1993, p.179), two other Chilean refugees, express well what we all collectively seem to wonder about.

Do we ever really overcome devaluation? Are we not disempowered, for example on every occasion that we speak? Are we seen as substandard because of the way we speak? Do we have to prove everyday, over and over, that we have something to contribute? Will we ever overcome the power of the dominant discourse or do accent and language (and, of course color) retain their ability to disempower?

Canada, founded during its colonial period by the two European imperial nations of England and France, has inherited notions and traditions about cultural and racial differences that are still very prevalent in some influential social and political circles in Canada. Canada continues to be viewed as a white settlers’ colony. This may explain how the tendency of hierarchical structuring in social position of Canada’s people – by ethnic, racial and class identity – is closely linked to the mastery of either English or French as the two official languages.
Us and the Others

The sense of belonging or the sense of home is the result of multiple variables. The previous analysis of stories about meetings with officials from Immigration and Manpower and the difficulties with the English language, reveal that for these refugee women the existing system of immigration and refugee management constituted a barrier in their attempt to build a meaningful place in Canada. Certain aspects in the encounter with the social system may appear similar for men and women. However, when considering my analysis of the life stories shared with me it becomes clear that the opportunities offered these women - to develop life paths that are meaningful for them - have been much more limited. Positioned as wives, mothers, or simply as women marginalizes them in their dealings with state officials.

But it was not only in their communications with government officials that they were made to feel that way. Their exposure to the dominant discourses prevalent in Canadian society – reproduced in people’s behaviors, in their passing comments, and the kind of places they were sent to – left Chilean women feeling devaluated. For example, Julia, Soledad, Carmen and Ana dwelt on the conditions of the hotel they were sent to, the treatment their children received in daycare centers and schools, and the building in Scarborough where they lived. When they first arrived in Canada all of these encounters made them feel very unwelcome in this new country. A vivid description of the hotel to which most Chileans were sent in the early 1970s, including my interviewees, has been given by Tomic and Trumper (1993, p.167).

At the Toronto International Airport we passed a number of formalities and, to confirm our fears (after all, we were middle-class Chileans used to private bathrooms and large homes), we were taken to an old, ramshackle downtown hotel, the Walker House. This experience gave us an inkling of the class position the Canadian government – and Canadian society-expected us to occupy.

These two Chilean refugees refer to the class position we as Chileans were expected to occupy in Canada. For most of us who lived in Chile as members of the middle class, this notion clashed with the way we used to define ourselves.
This collective experience when crossing borders from one country into another was like a rude awakening, being forced into a social position that radically changed our identity. Our struggle as women refugees since our first day in Canada has been to challenge this social understanding of who we are. It became a matter of survival for us since attempts to devalue us not only had serious consequences for our future in Canada but also affected our immediate daily life situations in negative ways. Mireya points this out quite dramatically in her narrative.

Canadian society continues to situate me even now into the position of immigrant, a person who is disadvantaged for lack of opportunities in many areas. The fact of being viewed as an immigrant and a woman weighs down on me as a double burden that I feel every day. Skin color also enters in this discrimination I feel. For instance, as a community worker I found that doors do not open equally for those who practice in this field.

Mireya, like many Chileans who entered Canada, has white skin, clear brown eyes and physical characteristics that differ markedly from those usually identified with people of color. As a whole Latin Americans represent a mixture of many racial and ethnic groups, ranging from the indigenous native groups to African, European and Asian. Some of them are a ‘blend’ as a result of intermarriage between one or several of these racial and ethnic groups. I said to her, “But you could be from the Mediterranean region in Europe judging by your appearance. Considering this, how then thus one explain your situation and that also of other Latinos with similar phenotypical characteristics?” Mireya responded as follows,

When you open your mouth and talk with a heavy accent it doesn’t matter where you come from, you automatically are not considered a Canadian and they place you in one of their categories. If you are not very white you are placed in another category again. And thus, things begin to add up and you are being denied opportunities. When they know you are a Latin American we enter into the debate of what is a Latin American. Latin Americans are supposed to be aggressive, lazy, complaining all the time and being critical. I think that by just ignoring all these things that are happening to you is almost better because you can live a more quiet and less complicated life.

In this account, Mireya appears to mingle accent and skin color into one racial category. The ‘they’ or ‘others’ in her story refers to the ones who are white and speak
correct English. They presumably are the true Canadians. In this sense we are relegated to the 'audible' minorities, appearing in Canadian society as 'not quite white', even when many of us are white. Language and our struggle with it have evidently played a key role in constructing our belonging to and exclusion from, a community in Canada. It can bind some and exclude others. Mireya, with her accent, understands that she can never be considered a true Canadian. On the one hand, her Spanish language and her regional origin as a Latino binds her to an imagined community—in Anderson's sense (1991)—here in Canada. Being regarded by mainstream Canada as a member of a minority she is ascribed an inferior status that is exclusionary. This observation and analysis has been confirmed by various studies about Canadian and American society (Moraga & Castillo, 1988; Oboler, 1992; Rockhill & Tomic, 1992; Rockhill & Tomic, 1994). The country emerging from Mireya's story is that of two Canadas: one that is white, speaking English without accent, and dominant; and the other that is made up of various minorities, non-white, speaking English imperfectly with many different accents, and placed in subordinate positions. Not surprisingly, Mireya feels trapped by this stereotyping of Latin Americans. Linking this story to the analysis of West-East imagery by Said (1979) in Orientalism, Canada like all white nations appears to rely on the marked bodies of immigrants and refugees to define itself. I asked her how she deals with these stereotypes?

From the moment I learned the rules of the game it did not bother me anymore. I just play along now within this scheme. Where I can fight against it I will fight, from the way an advertisement is worded to the spelling out of requirements for a job. For example, I will ask 'Why does this work call for a Master's degree?' The phrase 'Minorities are welcome' are just words. It isn't easy. It is very complicated. I have worked in social agencies that are terribly racist. Racism pervades the whole system. There are many agencies where the whites dominate. They will contract somebody who is different from them only to show they are not racist, and then proudly say to you 'We have a Chilean or native person working with us'. But those who rule are the whites. Now, there are many things to fight about, but you have to consider how and where so that you don't exhaust yourself. This is an issue for education too. One has

---

64 When Chilean refugees lived in Chile most were not conscious of their Latin American identity. It is only when they arrived in Canada that they were attributed this identity and came to internalize it.
to make sure that people know about their rights and where they should take a stand.

In this narrative Mireya seems to say that there are possibilities for changing the rules, but to succeed in this one must have a good understanding of how power works. She expressed this very succinctly, when she said, “From the moment I learned the rules of the game it did not bother me anymore.” Furthermore, it is clear to her what the struggle is about, as she proposes to change the dominant discourse into one that is more inclusive. She phrased it as follows, “Where I can fight against it I will fight, from the way an advertisement is worded to the spelling out of the requirements for a job.” She emerges here as an advocate and organizer of the marginalised people, “You have to make sure that people know their rights and where to take a stand.” In fact, she is an active member of a Latin American women’s organization whose aim is to create a safe place for women who are being abused by their partners, and also promote better conditions for Latin American women in Canadian society. As she explained it, “We women need to have a reference point of our own.”

Being ‘Latin American’ is one of the labels that Mireya uses to identify herself with. But in contrast to her reference to the label of ‘Canadians,’ she definitely does not view Latin Americans as part of a homogeneous community. The following section of her narrative makes clear how diverse she considers Latinos in Canada to be, and how difficult it is to organize them.

We have great rivalries among us. Central Americans sympathize very little with South Americans, and vice-versa. There is both a problem of racism and class here. Because generally speaking South Americans feel, or some feel, that they are superior with respect to Central Americans. For instance, we think we know more about politics and a whole lot of other things. Many problems need to be overcome in order for us to have an effective organization of Latin American women in Canada, problems such as differences among us in class, race, regional affiliation, group identity and also our relations with lesbian women. Among Latin American women there are many lesbians. And then we have all those Caribbean people who don’t speak Spanish asking us ‘And where do we fit in?’ Brazilians also enter here in questioning us. The challenge for us is how to arrive at a proper name for our organization that is fully representative and does not leave people out…. In addition to these problems of naming our organization we have the issue of the underlying philosophy and principles so that all Latin American women feel
welcom. One day this group of intellectuals appears, which is not bad in itself, but who start demanding that our organization be based on feminist principles and be called a Feminist Latin American Women's Organization. As you can see we all support feminism. But we question the wisdom of calling our organization the way they want as we believe it would scare away those women who are less educated and sophisticated.

The basic view coming through from Mireya’s story is that Canada is a place where hegemonic discourses place her and other Latin American women in positions of disadvantage, and turns what is a very heterogeneous group into a homogeneous mass. She believes that the problem of discrimination against visible minorities can be addressed by taking action as an organized group of Latin American women. She seems to take solace in the awareness that she is not alone in this struggle. At the same time she expresses feelings of frustrations in trying to create an inclusive organization that makes all women from Latin America welcome. So Mireya’s frustration reveals how seductive this label ‘Latin American’ is as she uses it to create a social-political movement and then finds out the messiness involved in determining who and who are not ‘real’ Latinas.

Whereas Mireya made her place in Canada by working as a committed and active member of a Latin American women’s organization, Julia began to stake out her place by linking up with other people living in her immediate ‘barrio’ (neighborhood) whose children attended the same school as her own children. There she took the initiative in setting up an organization of Spanish-speaking parents, which eventually spread out to embrace the entire city of Toronto.

We organized (among the Spanish-speaking people of the barrio) a whole community around the school. And since I knew four more words in English than the rest of them they appointed me as the spokes person of our community in that little school of my children, and as the one to establish contact with other schools that had Latin children. From that moment on I began to work as a volunteer in the school system. Together with five to eight persons from different parts of the city we were able to set up a city-wide association of Spanish-speaking parents. It was heavy work and complicated because of all the requirements we had to meet in order to become incorporated, to agree on a constitution, write bylaws ...and we were all so new to this task not knowing how the system worked here in Canada....My own work has always been related to issues of marginality, to concern myself for instance with the vulnerability of the old. It has been important to me to strengthen local communities because when people join together they also loose their prejudices....But
unfortunately many of the projects I was working on terminated. There have been many budget cuts. And especially in the area of the social sciences and education, the cuts have been enormous.

What appear to have been the key driving forces for Julia were first her identity as a mother, which led her to become involved in the school of her children; and secondly, her identification with Spanish-speaking people with whom she began to work and organise during the time when the children were at school. Evidently, instead of presenting herself as a Chilean refugee, she takes hold of her present situation in Canada and constructs herself as a Latin and active citizen in Canada, working on behalf of the marginalised.

The place where she and the others used to meet was in the office of one of the non-governmental-organizations (NGO’s) that extended their service to ‘ethnic’ groups. As a matter of fact, all of my interviewees who were actively involved in community work linked themselves up with NGO’s that served ethnic communities. Julia, from the beginning, saw herself as working in community development, a field with which she strongly identified. In the interim she has been instrumental in getting several NGO’s off the ground. Many are still functioning. She assessed the value of her contributions in terms of helping people who, for one reason or another, are marginal to the system.

In summary, these various stories on identity and making a place in Canada express different struggles facing women refugees. They arrived to a place where other people made this country’s history and where hegemonic narratives made us live with racism, discrimination and exclusion. We started out, somehow, by changing our perceptions of ourselves. The different strategies for survival, making a life for themselves and resisting oppression also changed their sense of identity. In one way or another, each of the ten women interviewed became actively involved in this new place. The social commitment shown in these activities somehow reminds one of their activism
prior to leaving Chile. Interestingly, in Canada their activism has often a clear gender component.

Where is Here?

When we were told that we would come to Canada, many of us had ‘nothing to hold on to’ as Carmen Rodriguez stated in her story quoted at the beginning of this chapter. For us, Canada was nothing more than a large space limited by borders. In our imagination when still living in Chile, Canada was no different from the United States as many interviewees pointed out. And once in Canada our reference point for understanding this world became the US. Julia and Mireya expressed this as follows:

Julia – I was very angry with the Americans, and it took me a lot to make out what the difference was between Canada and the US. I felt like arriving in ‘Gringoland’ (the land of Americans), and they were the bad guys.

Mireya – We were raised with the idea that English was the language of imperialism. It has for us a connotation similar to Coca-Cola. That, therefore, influenced why we didn’t like it.

Place is a space to which a certain meaning is ascribed, wrote Carter, Donald and Squires (1993). Julia, evidently, imagined Canada as a mere extension of the US. Any identification of Canada with the US still provokes a negative reaction, not only for Julia but also among other refugees from Chile. After all, we came from a place with a strong nationalist movement that defined itself by its opposition to American intervention in the economic and political affairs of our country. It can be said that Chile’s identity as a nation, for those who supported Allende’s ‘Road to Socialism,’ was marked by its opposition to the ‘American way,’ its capitalism, its affluent culture and geopolitical...

---

65 Patricia Vera (1992), based on her study about Chilean women exiled in Holland, claims that their experiences lived prior to their exile was a determining factor in the form their lives has taken in their host country (p. 234).
66 Their involvements have been noted in chapter 4. Soledad became very much committed with the shelter movement; Tania and Mireya with different groups of Latin American women; Julia with a parents association; Ana with the women’s section of a Chilean political organization; and Paulina was involved in activities with a church.
position in the world. In Mireya’s case she rejected English because of what it represented for her, namely American domination.

All the material things we imagined to be American we found here in Canada, such as blue jeans, Coca-Cola, the level of automation of daily life in the form of automatic machines for coffee or snacks, and the general affluence.\textsuperscript{67} All these things not often found at that time in Chile, we associated with the US. Consequently, as expressed in the narrative of all my interviewees, their feelings about Canada in those first months were very mixed. Of course, we felt good about finding ourselves in a safe place where we were not subjected to the repressive measures and persecution that had been unleashed upon us following Pinochet’s coup. On the other hand, entering a place filled with things that symbolized for us the American way of life awoke negative feelings. Considering that we also held the US largely accountable for us having become refugees, the representation of American symbols all around us left many feeling ambiguous, to say the least, about being here.

The borders between English Canada and the US also frequently appeared as blurred in the women’s narratives. They mentioned a number of the more obvious features that both English Canada and the US have in common. For instance, they talked about the proximity in geographical space of the two countries and the length of their joint border, the English language and the hegemony of the anglophone people who originated from the British Isles (and the Northern European countries). Less obvious in the women’s stories was their understanding (including mine) of Canada’s identity, which appeared very complex to us.\textsuperscript{68} We quickly became aware that Canada has been

\textsuperscript{67} The 1976 French Canadian movie ‘Il n’y a pas d’oubli’, directed by Fajardo, Gonzalez and Mallet (1976) (who arrived from Chile after the military coup) shows all the striking reactions of Chilean refugees to this American way of life.

\textsuperscript{68} Most Chilean refugees who came to Canada arrived during the decade of the 1970s. As for the ten women refugees who became the subject of this thesis they entered Canada in 1974 and 1975. An intense debate about Canada’s own identity involving all Canadians had been going on for many years prior to their arrival. On October 8, 1971 then Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, raised Multiculturalism to the level of official policy of the government. This policy brought about a major shift in Canada, at least at the level of the official discourse, of a nation that had been involved in trying to replicate the mono-culturalism of the English society into a nation defined by its ‘cultural diversity’. With this definition Canada clearly rejected the American notion of nation as a
very much shaped by two distinct people, the French and the English. The French-speaking part where I first settled presented itself with a very clear identity. As Randy Williams Widdis (1993, p.57) pointed out, French Canada has a distinctive language, religion, art, literature and other features that project an identity with clear cultural boundaries. On the other hand, Ontario forming part of the anglophone region of Canada - the place where my interviewees settled and where I moved to after residing for many years in Quebec, appeared to lack that clear identity. Widdis (1997) claims that anglophone Canada has always struggled to find its cultural niche within the North American continent. The fact of being 'non-French' and 'non-American' have been the principal characteristics of its identity. But, identifying anglophone Canada in terms of what it is not, generally speaking did not help us refugee women very much as we were having enough problems in assuming new identities for ourselves. On the other hand, it can be argued that unexpected forms of identification may arise as a result of this country’s negative identity combined with our diasporic condition.

Weaving an Identity Without Nation

Paulina, one of my interviewees, attributes the absence of a clear Canadian to a policy that has supported the maintenance of ethnic group identities.

Canada is a nation that is divided. That is the way I see it. The Canadian system and I don't know if they mean well or not, somehow wants us to maintain our culture. Canada has not become a real nation yet, as no marriage has taken place between the different cultures. Because of that I don't know if it was a good idea to have us hold on to our culture. I believe deep down that the real reason was to maintain racism. And what happens to our children? They will come to the conclusion that they live in no-man's-land. And when people ask you, 'Where are you from?' how could we answer? What do you mean where I am from, I am from Toronto, from Chile, I am a Latin, I descended from the Spanish, the native Indians and the Germans. What do you mean where I am from? I

'melting pot', setting itself on a path that was to evolve into a different kind of national identity. With this new policy of Multiculturalism, Trudeau also reaffirmed his commitment to a just, equal and plural society where each citizen could make a personal choice to live and be fulfilled by the culture of preference while respecting the rights of others, and work in one of the two official languages (Fleras & Elliot, 1992, p.73). Thus, the idea of 'diversity' becomes a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society recognized and supported then by the new federal law of Multiculturalism in 1971.
am from the human race. This type of question has always disturbed me. When I arrived here I became suddenly aware that I was a Latino. Oh my God, a Latin woman! It was a shock.

For Paulina there is no Canadian identity, “Canada has not become a real nation yet.” She makes it also clear that for her Canada’s approach to multiculturalism has not contributed to resolve this crisis in identity. Quite to the contrary, she claims it has made things worse for those who maintain their ethnic identities, as it makes them easy targets of devaluation: “I believe deep down that the real reason was to maintain racism.” Further on she points out that the labels attached to people because of their different ethnic background convey meanings that are often not acceptable to them. She said, “Oh my God, (I am) a Latin woman! It was a shock”. Then she expresses her concern about the possible consequences of this kind of multiculturalism for the children, as they are constantly reminded that they are not from here, “They will come to the conclusion that they live in no-man’s land.”

What Paulina suggests is that one’s identity can not be defined in terms of a place called a nation, certainly not in Canada. This is not only because of finding herself in a ‘transitory’ condition of exile, but also because she does not feel Canada provides her (and others in similar position) with a common frame of reference. As she put it, “Canada has not become a real nation yet, as no marriage has taken place between the different cultures.” The problems emanating from the lack of a strong national identity have been plaguing Canada, apparently, throughout its history. There is, of course, the English-French duality that forms the basis of Canada’s existence and a conflictual relationship with native people who are not recognized by the constitution as funding nation. But even among Canadians who share the English language, there are the ethnic, religious and regional differences which create identities and boundaries that are in competition with Canada’s national identity as well (Erickson, 1997; Frye, 1991; Widdis, 1997). All these characteristics make the relationship of these women refugees with Canada quite complex. At some level, there is an understanding of Canada as a nation or imagined community, sovereign and limited. There is also a realization that these same women are ‘outsiders’. On the other hand there is an opinion expressed that we don’t need a national identity. We may ask, why a national identity and for what?
Following Paulina's argument, Latin Americans in the US presumably would not suffer from this confusion in identity because of the American 'melting pot' approach to immigration. This approach supposedly makes everyone equal as citizens and provides each with a common frame of reference. However, this is not confirmed by several studies coming out of that country. Latin Americans there have pointed out that because of the existence of racial hierarchies in the US they will always be considered second class citizens, even when English is not an issue (Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga & Castillo, 1988; Oboler, 1995; Rosaldo & Flores, 1997; Vila, 1997).

On further reflection, what appears to be the real issue for refugee women from Latin America in Canada is not multiculturalism but racism. This is implicitly acknowledged by Paulina when she states, "I believe deep down that the real reason was to maintain racism." Hamilton (1996, p.131) shows how social relations of racism have pervaded throughout Canada's history, creating and shifting categories of 'otherness'. A number of studies have pointed out the inferior position often assigned to each new group of non-English-speaking immigrants entering Canada. Even in the early decades of the century, when Ukrainians, Italians, Mennonites came to Canada in great numbers, they were perceived as non-white and dangerous foreigners. Jews, trying to escape Nazi Germany, were turned away (Abele & Stasiulis, 1989; Abella, 1982; Iacovetta, 1992; Iacovetta, 1995).

Paulina seems to find it difficult to live with the 'visibility' attached to minority people in Canada. Not being part of the norm, she is usually faced with situations where people ask her to explain her origins. And as she pointed out, the specific place where one comes from, Chile, has little meaning. No country or place is homogeneous in ethnicity. Paulina named her multiple identities or places of identification in her narrative, "I am from Toronto, from Chile, I am a Latin, I descended from the Spanish, the native Indians and the Germans."

Paulina seems to look for a way to escape or free herself from constructed stereotypes, framed and projected by the dominant ideology: "I suddenly became aware I was a Latina. Oh my God, a Latin woman! It was a shock." Her story differs from Mireya, as she is not willing to specify any particular identity or affirm her many identities all at once. Mireya, in contrast, does affirm herself specifically as a Latina in
Canada. By affirming her identity as such, she believes that when Latin American women are organized and functioning under this label it will help to improve conditions of minority groups like them in Canada. At the same time, like Paulina, she is conscious of the fact that Latin Americans are not a homogeneous group. Paulina touches on the issue of the hybrid character of people that is not being taken into account in categories such as race, ethnicity and nationality (Lorde, 1988; Morrison, 1992; Oboler, 1992; West, 1990).

One of the interesting findings emerging from the women’s narratives is that Canada (conceived as a nation) in its national identity does not constitute a fundamental part of their identity, as Chile once did. These stories clearly represent discourses of a minority group in Canadian society. Not forming part of past generations in Canada that share a historical baggage evolved in what Anderson calls ‘homogeneous empty time’, they do not see themselves legitimated. The discourses of these minority women tend to challenge those in power, whose primary interest lies in forging a sociological whole out of Canada, and whose discourse consists of constructing Canada as an equal and diverse society and as peacekeepers of the world. For instance, Mireya stated, “There are many agencies where the white dominate. They will contract somebody who is different from them only to show they are not racist ... But those who rule are white.” Or Carmen, when she speaks of her experience in Honduras with Canadian officials, implies that Canada wouldn’t have helped Chilean refugees if it had not been pressured to do so. She stated “We were conscious of the fact that the Canadian government having come under pressure by the Churches and human rights groups ... sent Immigration officials to Honduras to interview this group of Chileans.” These are what Bhabha (1994, p.155) calls supplementary discourses: “This discourse comes after the original, or in addition to it.” The power of such supplementary discourses opens up possibilities for negotiation between discourses of tradition and past history on the one hand and on the other hand the present where refugees are participants. These women’s discourses that challenge the dominant ones express a desire to change their uncertain path in this country into signs of history. It is in the supplementary discourses acted out in their daily life struggles that these women become involved somehow in changing the hegemonic discourse of Canada as a nation.
The Making of a Place

While refugee women from Chile may not associate easily with the notion of Canada as a nation, there are socially constructed spatial locations that do become places of attachments for them. These include their household, the various geographical and functional communities they become involved in, and their work places. In their public activities most have found their place in working with so-called minority groups, as noted specifically in the stories of Julia and Mireya. This is also the case with Carmen, Tania, Soledad and Isabel. All of them touched on numerous issues, including family violence, abuse of women, refugees as victims of torture, racial discrimination, and accommodation for immigrants. The organizational settings through which they served minorities have ranged from self-help groups to legal clinics, immigrant aid agencies, Spanish-speaking parents’ associations, and Latin American women’s organizations. Most of these work places are women-only places or immigrant-refugee sites. Still, as Julia pointed out in her narrative, many center and services throughout the country have been forced to close, and those that remain open come to demand even longer hours from their workers in return for even lower wages.

The four other interviewees narrated their struggles with identity and making a place for themselves in the context of a different work setting. Emma and Paulina entered the business world, setting up successful small enterprises. Both of them told me that they quit their job as employees of large firms following their desire to be more in control of their own work life. Ana became a senior administrator. And Gabriela, mother of seven children, started out as a cleaning lady working in hotels, and eventually ended up writing poetry for which she received a prestigious award from the United States.

Refugees in Borderlands

The prolonged period of exile resulted in the development of a routine that created some sense of order and stability out of a situation of rupture and chaos. In the process, what was new and strange was transformed into something more familiar and
foreseeable, but not necessarily acceptable. Women make sense of this country in very different ways. Certainly, working in Canada appears to be for most of them a source of satisfaction. Paulina, for instance, states that she acquired tremendous knowledge in working with computers, “it made me an expert”. Carmen returning from Chile, after failing to resettle there, told me that in Chile,

I was doing things there for which I was not being recognized... We came to visit Canada to attend a medical conference in May 1998 and decided to explore the possibilities of working here again. We were very surprised to find the doors being opened widely and being told that we were more than welcome to come back... I would never go to Chile again to work there, except perhaps as a self-employed. But I do love to live in Chile to walk on the beaches of Maitencillo and to walk in the hills of La Reina. After all, it is your history, your language and the friends who live there.

The women also mention gender relations in Canada as being more favorable than in Chile today. Julia gives that as one of the reasons for not wanting to go back to Chile, “I realized that I would face insurmountable obstacles as a separated woman there.” ⁷⁰ Tania puts it as follows, “Here I feel to be in a free country where I can live the life I want...” Emma adds, “I see Canada as a place where I feel at peace... where I know what is going to happen.”

Each of these stories tell us how women encountered and, at times, overcame the restrictions of expected roles, stereotypes and labels attached to them. Their stories also show, implicitly, how much richer Canada has become, having benefited so much from the diverse contributions of these refugee women. Paulina, a successful businesswoman, gives us an evaluation of her relationship with Canada.

I owe much to Canada but I also have given a lot, everything I could. I have come across good things and terrible things. I have come to know the

⁶⁹ Tanya Basok (1985) presents detailed information about the Chilean community organization in Toronto. She does not focus on women particularly, but she does report on the nature of the activities that women have participated in.
⁷⁰ Schugurensky (1991) in his interview with Latin American women in Canada reported that some Chilean women make reference to gender relations in Canada and Chile. One of his subjects, Llanca states, “As a single woman they treat me here as an autonomous and human being. In my country, women are appendices of men... There I would be the spinster who failed in getting a husband.”
meaning of racism, a term that didn’t exist in my vocabulary when I still lived in Chile...

Although Tania has not thought of returning to Chile, she has kept alive her interest in combating military rulers and repression in Chile and Latin America, and other parts of the world. She was one of the principal movers in October of 1998 to get the Chilean community in Toronto out into the streets to show publicly their support for Pinochet’s detention in England. She talks about her commitment to human rights in the following narrative.

This occurrence (the detention of Pinochet) has given me an incredible happiness, but also much pain because one has to relive again those things that happened to us. We have a duty, though, to the dead, to our families. They did not die in vain. We continue here and today we can do something, at least making sure that justice is done. That would be a great lesson for the world. And we are asking of the Canadian government that it speak out in support of what is happening in Europe, because there are people in Chile from the ultra-right and the military that are making threats. If Canada lends its support it would be one more country applying pressure...

Tania enters a new territory here when she speaks about the link she likes to see developing between Canada and Chile, and the role Chileans like her can play from within Canada. In a sense she has already become transformed into a person situated in

---

71 That Paulina comes to know the meaning of racism in Canada does not mean that Chileans are not racist. It means that she had not been exposed to it before.

72 In October 1998, Pinochet was taken into detention while recovering from back surgery in a private London hospital. The British authorities were following up on a request from Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzón who asked his European Union counterparts to extradite the former dictator to Spain. There he was to be tried on charges of extreme cruelty against Spanish citizens in Chile involving murder, torture, terrorism and genocide during his military regime. Pinochet’s supporters from the right were outraged by the action claiming that he should never have been arrested since they believed that being a senator for life he had diplomatic immunity and enjoyed the protection of government amnesty (an amnesty imposed by Pinochet himself while he was still in control of the powerful National Security Council). The counter argument was that he was in England on private business, not on a diplomatic mission. Clearly, his detention caused great excitement particularly among proponents of human rights everywhere, with some speaking enthusiastically of the dawning of a new age in which there was no hiding place in the world for those who had committed the most heinous offences against humanity (Gee, 1998; Hurd, 1998).
that zone referred to in the literature as ‘borderlands’ (Anzaldúa, 1987; Heitlinger, 1999; Pettman, 1996a; Rosaldo & Flores, 1997; Schild, 1999) joining the two countries in her person. She lives the here and now as part of what is going on in this country, but at the same time she continues to have a loyalty to Chile that represents her past. Paraphrasing Rodriguez (1990), “We are the zone of struggle between memory and achievement.” Borderland experiences emphasize borders or zones of difference and divergence, as well as bridges or places of similarity and convergence (Martinez, 1994; Widdis, 1997).

Reflecting further on Tania’s narrative, and those of the other women, it appears that the symbolism expressed by borderlands is a good metaphor of who we are today. We, in our personal histories, constitute the overlapping territories of these two countries. Better than conventions or treaties, we – the refugees who have settled in Canada and those who have returned – embody the link, understanding and collaboration between Canada and Chile. We have turned these two distant lands into adjacent countries. From this perspective it is not a coincidence that some of those refugees who have returned from Canada to Chile have founded the Chile-Canada Association. In turn, refugees who have remained here have set up many similar organizations in Canada, such as the Toronto-Chile Association. Being situated in the borderland zone we are peripheral to the center of both countries. But at the same time we are subject to the influences emanating from both. This is not peculiar to women only, but this experience I argue in this research is gendered (as found and articulated so well in the words of Gabriela below). Dwelling in the periphery we share a common experience with other borderland people, with whom most of my interviewees work, trying to build a force for change locally and internationally.

I leave the last word on this to Gabriela.

My land is Chile because I was born there, raised, married, gave birth to my children, had many dreams, loved and suffered. I ‘lived’ Chile in every way. My mother died there, I always have said that one’s mother and the land go together. It doesn’t matter where you may go, that is your land. My children are going to stay here. And especially my grandchildren, they are most important in my life. I am like the roots of their history. Because of that I am thinking today that if I were coming to die I would like to stay here. I am referring to my physical being nourishing this land. And my grandchildren will be able to visit my grave, or at least they could say ‘My grandmother is dead but she is here with us’.
In summary, Chileans are being produced as 'classed' and 'racialized' Canadians through more than images and ideologies. This is very evident in the material withholding of key resources like language for some, and for others through the gendered repertoire that located them as 'wives', dependents, homemakers, or in another words secondary income earners at best. However, all of the women interviewed fought back in their way as discussed in this chapter. Getting ahead in Canada for these women, therefore, seemed very much to depend on negotiating these major hurdles. Thus, being ahead becomes part of what shapes a sense of 'belonging' that has no roots in the country of origin.
Inclusions and Exclusions within a Nation

This research has attempted to examine the impact that nation as narrative has had on the lives of a certain group of exiled women and how this has played out in their day-to-day life. Their life histories tell us in many different ways how they made sense of this notion of nation. At one time they could afford to be content in being contained by its disciplinary boundaries, paraphrasing Burton (1997). But after having passed through the experience of being exiled from the national body they question in many ways the apparent naturalness of the nation. Rather than fixed identities rooted in territorial space, this study has found in women's narratives multiple processes of identification with various spaces. They related once with a nation assuming some isomorphism of space, historical memory, culture and societal organization. In exile a new form of relationship with space appears as their identities become displaced and dis-centered. Women’s memories of Chile, particularly the times of their involvement in the political project of the late 1960s up to 1973, shows a strong identification with that nation in what is understood as a community that is territorially marked. Chile was very much present in the narratives of Ana and Emma, analyzed in some detail in this study. It isn’t, though, until they reach young adulthood, when the opportunity arises to reform the nation through a new political project, that these women began to identify themselves - as active participants – with the history of the country as a whole.

Because their racial background as well as their access to post secondary education cast half of the women I interviewed as part of the middle class, they narrate this early stage in their lives from a certain position of privilege. The project referred to generally as the ‘Chilean Road to Socialism’ offered them an opportunity to act upon their frustrations emanating from the inequalities and injustices in society together with
other social classes that had been subjected even more so to different forms of
everalization and inferiorization by the hegemonic class.

The notion of territoriality of a nation as conveyed in their narratives, was produced and reproduced in the mass mobilizations across the country to appropriate national space. It was also evident in the land being subjected to agrarian reform, and the mines owned by the American consortia that were being expropriated. Furthermore, efforts were made to turn industry over to those who worked in them. In the cultural arena, the project emphasized what was considered ‘authentically Chilean’ – in music and dance, national poetry, typical Chilean cuisine, publishing, and so on. Of course, when one is immersed in such a political project of national scale it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the notions of nation, territory and state. Thus, when listening to the women talking about that period, the loss of the homeland conveys these three meanings.

Although these women showed a deep commitment to this national political project and a strong identification with Chile viewed as homogeneous and sovereign what becomes clear is that they also lived different forms of exclusion as women. The problem is that the image projected of a homogeneous community, through which they lived their national experience, made these exclusions invisible to them while residing in Chile. They became more evident later while living in exile in Canada, after their dreams had been shattered. I would like to mention some of these exclusions that stand out from the analysis related to Chile, because it will help in understanding their silence in this narrative on national community and the political project that so totally absorbed them and me.

The exclusion of women, as women, in Chile was manifest in the very definition of the national political project I have discussed. That project searched for equality between the social classes and never proposed to integrate the interests of women in its policy platform. For all intents and purposes, it continued to view and relate to women principally in their biological and familial functions, as bearers of children and mothers, relegated to the private world of the home. In this assigned role they experienced on a daily basis the oppression inherent in the authoritarianism and macho behavior that were embedded in the structure of the family. Regardless of this injustice, women were neither
heard nor listened to seriously in any of the political parties, not of the Right nor of the Left.

Women were assigned auxiliary functions, without any authority attached to them. The traditional concept and practices of family relations and the socialization processes engaged in within the political parties and institutions involved in nation building, were retained. The places where daily life unfolded were left untouched, because the nation carried objectives that were considered transcendent and of greater importance, such as economic development, political transformation and protection of the citizen. It was also the view that ‘other’ inequalities would adjust themselves once economic exploitation had been eliminated.

Interestingly, the continuing authoritarian relationship prevalent within the family and male dominance in the political arena assured and normalized the transition to another nation building project, after the military coup. But this time, it went hand in hand with state violence that was unleashed on the nation’s own citizens through torture, disappearances, assassinations and terror practices inculcating fear among the population.

In spite of all the good intentions of the national political project of the Allende years, the idea of nation – as a homogeneous people, evolving from the distant past toward the future, and which is imagined as something eternal – affected women negatively in particular. Because it was in the pursuit of transcendent interests of the nation that their concerns remained invisible. The homogeneous community of this project only recognized the existence of social classes. But the struggle of workers is one that acquired a particularly male connotation, in which the concerns of women did not play any part. That means that this so-called imagined community was in reality not homogeneous. It comprised many diverse identities. However, it acted to benefit only some of them.

In sum, these women experienced nation understood as the spatial expression of a homogeneous collectivity. They lived with the ideology of a national project in which the notion of nation was projected as the most authentic unit. Therefore, any interests particular to women would have to be subsumed to the nation. And for Chile at the time of Unidad Popular the national interest consisted of addressing the inequalities between social classes. However, as these women remember it now when talking about their day-
to-day lives at that time - about their childhood, adolescence and their involvement in the political project - nation does not appear as an expression of a unitary people at all. Even though they did not occupy the most marginalized position in the country, they did experience serious related gender limitations.

These forms of exclusion were not obvious to most women at the time, and even less so for those of us who strongly identified with the political project of nation building. We were spurred on by the ideal of creating a new type of human community that would be different from the ferocious capitalistic system represented, as we saw it, by the United States and the anti-democratic totalitarianism represented by the Soviet Union. But years later, in the sessions with me, some of the women pointed out how their involvement in the movement fitted the norm into which we women had been socialized.

**The Changing Borders of a Nation: Political Struggle and the Sovereignty Issue**

The apparent naturalness of nation appears in these women’s stories as having a logic of operation that is quite different to what they expected. The political action they and I were involved in was based on a belief that the nation-state, Chile, was an entity by itself, autonomous and clearly separate from other nations, with well-defined borders. But those borders did not function the way we conceived them, at least in the case of Chile. Instead, we saw its territory being penetrated and shaped in its farthest corners by supra-national forces. The whole world witnessed the events of 1973 and saw how a democratically elected government of a nation that was supposed to be autonomous was undermined and detained in its political project, a project that attempted to take on the forces of capitalism within its own borders. There was a demonstrable American intervention in the affairs of this so-called autonomous and separate nation, through an alliance formed with a Chilean sector of the population that represented supra-national interests. Release of secret documents at a later date and investigative reports exposed the American covert and subversive actions that aimed to destabilize Allende’s government. The unity and sovereignty of our national community, imagined and loved - lived “through a project that took us in, and elevated us” (using Ana’s phrase) - received a rude awakening since it did not function as a unified entity to stand up to those external forces.
The women’s stories position them today in a situation that contests the assumption that the world is made up of sovereign, spatially discontinuous units. In this sense they coincide with positions supported by Malkki (1992), Gupta & Ferguson (1992) and Miyoshi (1993), and quoted in chapter 2. Although they appear as disconnected, naturalized spaces distributed on a global map and part of a neutral grid, they are very much interconnected and ordered hierarchically. Only people and nations in hegemonic positions can afford this naturalized representation of nation.

Ana tells us in her interview, “I don’t know why the loss of this dream leaves me with so much pain.” I ask myself, if part of her pain was connected to the discovery that the space she thought to be sovereign was not, and that this comforting notion of sharing with ‘others like one’ a protected place was just an illusion that vanished at the instance of blatant American interventionism. Some of the women interviewed conclude, based on this and other similar experiences, that the idea of ‘patria’ or nation has no meaning at all. As Emma phrased it, “it’s all the same to me.” Even though one can read many different meanings in this assertion (see chapter 6) there is one that needs to be mentioned here. She meant to say that the space associated with nation did not serve to bring about internal changes in an autonomous and self-determining way. Moreover, the community imagined as ‘horizontal comradeship’, with its members dwelling in the same territory, turned out to be very divided in interests. Some of those interests extended beyond the national territory and threatened the life of a large portion of the population.

Unfortunately, we had to learn in the most painful way, with the loss of so many lives, that this invention called nation has little meaning when hegemonic interests operating at the international level come into play. At the moment of this crucial political struggle the physical borders that delineated the country geographically did not function as a barrier to deter foreign intervention. That intervention consisted of financing the mobilization of the Chilean military and police, and in assisting certain sectors of the population in activities that aimed to undermine the government. As we became more aware of the workings of the global system, we saw how space is constantly re-inscribed and re-territorialized in accordance with the prevailing dominant political and global economic forces.
Living with this new and awakened consciousness, it seemed appropriate to ask the women, what eventually took the place of the dream they lost following the military coup? I will look at this question after considering how this meta-narrative called ‘nation’ works for these refugee women.

**National Borders as Experienced by Refugee Women**

Nation and borders appear in the narratives as discursively constructed, imagined and symbolized in multiple ways. On the other hand, they become materially present in the actions of state institutions, particularly those of the military with their patrols closely guarding the border. Consequently, people escaping persecution searching for a safe place have a very different experience about the functioning of national borders. Those inventions, erected like symbols of the nation-state, go into action to make the flight of refugees extremely difficult. When taking charge of the government, Pinochet passed a spade of decrees that sought to punish and discipline the population. Consequently, the military and police, under his stewardship, introduced one of the worst reigns of terror in modern history that extended also to those who tried to leave.

Many foreign embassies, in turn, symbolizing the presence of other nations on Chilean territory, closed their doors to many who tried to escape. The physical borders, as outlined on the maps of the world, were closely watched. In the case of Chile they were difficult to cross at any time because of the Andeans and the Atacama Desert. The passport, representing one’s identity and the country one belongs to in the exterior, was almost impossible to obtain by those who were identified as enemies of the new state. And even if one carried such a document, it was still hard to find a country willing to put its official stamp in it, giving us permission to enter the country. The existence of such rituals and institutions would make us believe that the nation, as an independent and sovereign entity, does function in this case. They keep people who wish to leave within the borders, and keep them outside the borders of those countries where they seek shelter and are not wanted. Therefore, our experience as refugees wanting to leave the country showed us the existence of some very ‘real’ boundaries and effects established in the
name of the nation, which contradicted our earlier experience with American intervention in our national territory during Allende's government.

Gender too enters into the narratives about experience of crossing national borders. The women remembered that journey for having the major responsibility for children or for covering up for their husbands, and sometimes for having to adopt a different identity to be able to pass national barriers. Gabriela, for example, crossed the High Andes that divide Chile and Argentina on foot with her seven children. It was somewhere in the midst of this mountain range that she joined up with her husband, who had left earlier fleeing from persecution. As for Carmen, she linked up with a network of women to assist her in getting her persecuted husband into one of the embassies. Later, she fled with her three children to join him in Honduras. As for Emma, she disguised herself as a domestic servant in order to pass the police barriers and climb a steel fence to enter the safety of one of the embassy compounds in Santiago.

Each life history, as narrated, demonstrates how national borders, which needed to be crossed to escape the terror and enter another country, became such enormous obstacles with physical and human barriers 'firmly' put in place. The country Chile thought of internationally and by convention as sovereign, with clear national borders, engaged in a brutal internal repression. In this case, there was no supra-national force prepared to intervene directly and put a stop to it. Nor was there any nation-state, because of those conventions, which could come to the rescue of the persecuted and people living in terror within Chile. As a matter of fact, the very notion of 'sovereign' nation-state gave other countries, which considered taking in refugees, the power to set up barriers of their own by watching and selecting carefully the entry of 'desirable' refugees.

Experience has taught us that extra-territorial organizations - such as Churches, the Red Cross, the United Nations Commission for Refugees and Human Rights, Amnesty International and some of the international labour unions - provide 'some' protection for the persecuted, directly through service delivery and indirectly through their lobbying efforts with governments.

And so, those of us who were lucky enough to escape from the regime of terror and torture joined the mobile world of refugees who, together with other groups such as the ethnic/racial minorities and migrant workers, were channeled into other national
arenas. These countries with their laws and main discourses of nation, living the myth of ethnic territorial coherence, scrutinize and weed out the undesirable ethnics in the name of the rights of the dominant citizenry. As the histories of Gabriela and Soledad in Argentina and Carmen in Honduras show, even when they were given permission to enter those countries they were relegated to a third class status, denied the right to work and thereby try to survive. Although we were dealing here with Latin American countries – sharing a similar culture, language and history of being colonized by European powers and American imperialism – the ideology of refugees transformed us into ‘ethnic noises’. Other narratives linked to the dominant interests of nation-states play a part in the assessment of ‘desirable’ refugees. These are part of a system of social categorization in which gender and class come into play.

The women’s histories that deal with the processing of refugees in the receiving country show how the woman’s fate is most often caught up with the possibilities open to the man. It was therefore not surprising to find women frequently working to obtain shelter for their husbands. As analyzed in some detail in this research, it is quite obvious that the concept of refugee currently defined and in force, considers more adequately the precarious situation of the man than that of the woman. This is evident also from the stories shared with me, in which the women describe how the search for refuge takes on a more dramatic form in the case of the man being persecuted, while the great majority of the women experience persecution in ways that are more subtle and indirect. The man appears as the clear target of persecution, being subjected to direct punishment. But we should not lose sight of the fact that to a large extent the woman’s experience is mediated through her husband’s fate. The stories of Carmen and Gabriela are quite eloquent in this respect. Carmen, finding herself with a husband paralyzed by being named in the media as ‘terrorist’, began to actively search out an embassy willing to open its doors to him. She succeeded, thanks to a network of women, which included the wives of several foreign ambassadors. In this way she was able to quickly identify which of the embassies could offer entry with minimal risk involved. Gabriela in Argentina prepared and sold

---

73 In the context of the ‘Cold War’ at that time being a refugee, identified with a Marxist ideology, made us undesirable to many Latin American governments linked through institutional agreements on state security.
empanadas' to save money that she needed in order to help her husband in his application to the Canadian Embassy in Buenos Aires for entry into Canada. It is not only gender but also class location that it is clearly played out in these events. The access to a network of women with some influence suggests how privilege relative to social class worked to Carmen's benefit.

In the case of single women, such as Tania (as widow) and Emma (unmarried), the selection process was much more clearly dictated by gender considerations. They did not fit the 'unspoken' rule regarding refugees in receiving countries. This rule gave priority to single men and to families comprised of a heterosexual couple with children and a male 'head of household'. Emma, on the other hand, was not able to find an embassy that would let her in. Being desperate she literally had to scale the fence of one of them to force her entry, with all the dangers that this involved. The fact that she was single continued to disadvantage her, particularly during the early period of settlement in Canada, as she could not count on the privileges extended to heads of families, understood to be men.

The Nature of Our Continuing Relationship with Chile

Being immersed once in the meta-narrative of national identity as applied to the territorial divisions of global space, as well as to its inhabitants, the women I interviewed defined themselves as Chilean. More than 20 years later they describe themselves, at most, as Chilean-Canadian. Obviously, at some level they cannot escape the social classification of people by national identity. The meta-narrative of nation with their borders has been successful in imposing such space as the main organizing principle. However, this form of identification does not explain how loyalties, feelings of belonging and home are played out in the life stories of the women.

This study has shown that the processes involved in crossing borders, in combination with length of exile, produce complex forms of identification not found among those who form part of more recent waves of refugees. Malkki's study (1989) of Hutu refugees suggests that there exists an association between physical location in exile and the extent of their identification with their home land. Those who live in refugee
camps showed strong aspirations to recuperate the lost land, while others living scattered across the urban region became more ‘broad persons’ not expecting to return to Burundi. In the case of the Chilean women studied here, most of them, residing in a modern city, continued to long for many years for the ‘lost patria’ assisting from abroad in the struggle against the dictatorship. However, today after more than twenty years their stories tell that they don’t see themselves anymore as a nation-in-exile aspiring to the eventual recuperation of the ‘homeland.’ In other words, the Chilean women in my study present a collective identity that is distinct from the two groups of Hutu refugees studied by Malkki. I should add here that the degree of active involvement in the political project at hand might be a factor. As for these Hutus, being part of the civilian population, they were caught in the conflict.

There appears to be a form of identification with Chile that is disassociated from its ‘territorial space’, and expressed more in relation to their continuing fondness for its ‘soil’. To fully understand this form of loyalty that distinguishes between soil and territory, I like to quote Appadurai (1996), who defines ‘soil’ as a matter of “spatialized and originary discourse of belonging,” while he views ‘territory’ as being concerned with “integrity, surveyability, policing and subsistence” (p.46). With regard to feelings connected with Chile I found them to be grounded in shared memories of earlier events in the country’s history. In that sense, the destiny of Chile’s people was part of us who resided in exile. It established a Chilean Diaspora that served as a fertile ground, first for the mobilization of forces opposed to the military, and later in 1998 for the mobilization in support for the continuing detention of Pinochet in London, England where the former dictator was held at the request of Spain on charges of crimes against humanity.

This points to an important distinction in feelings among exiled Chilean people. On the one hand, there is the sense of belonging to a national community of people and, on the other hand, feelings that distance themselves from Chile’s territory, understood as a place of national sovereignty. The loyalty to Chile, expressed in the interviews was in the form of their identification with the struggle against the dictatorship carried on from within and without the country.

Other feelings that seem to last through time relate to one’s belongingness to place of origin, the place where one has been formed as a person in feelings, perceptions
and desires, and where are learned the first lessons of life. All those memories about the place of origin make many exiled people wish to return. In fact, many did return. Four of the ten women I interviewed were part of this return movement. Ana and Tania did so in the 1980’s when the military regime was still in power, and Carmen and Emma in the 1990’s, when democracy had been reinstated, albeit in a restricted form with a Center-Left government that was given little room to maneuver.

Listening to the stories of these four women, it soon became clear that their nostalgia was about a particular landscape and scenery, remembered through crucial events in their distant past, which gave them a sense of belonging to that place. At the same time, it was a longing for being part of the human community linked to their birthplace, with which they believed to share blood relations and a common culture. These feelings appear in many of their statements. Pablo Neruda (1991), 1971 Nobel price winner for literature, expressed well this longing for what is Chilean in all its concreteness and peculiarity. One of his verses articulates this:

My country: I want to change shadows
My country: I want to change roses.
I want to envelop your slender waist,
Sit on your stones blackened by the sea,
Stop the wheat and see it from within.
I'm going to pick the nitrate's slender flower,
I'm going to spin the bell's glacial stamen,
And beholding your illustrious and solitary foam,
I'll weave a tideland bouquet to extol your beauty.

74 These feelings are likely to be stronger for refugees, being forced out of their country, than immigrants who leave voluntarily.
75 Original version in Spanish from Canto General de Chile (1972):
Patria mia: quiero mudar de sombra.
Patria mia: quiero cambiar de rosa
Quiero poner mi brazo en tu cintura exigua
Y sentarme en tus piedras por el mar calcinadas,
A detener el trigo y mirarlo por dentro.
Voy a escoger la flora delgada del nitrato,
Voy a hilar la estambre glacial de la campana,
Y mirando tu ilustre y solitaria espuma
Un ramo litoral tejere a tu belleza. Pablo Neruda, Himno y Regreso (1939)
The English version of this poem, included in the text, is named Hymn and Homecoming (1939) in Canto General of Chile (Neruda, 1991, p.215).
Although each of the four women initially intended to re-settle in their country of birth, in the final analysis none of them was able to do so. As they arrived in Chile they faced a set of factors and circumstances that they had not anticipated. I have analyzed these in considerable depth in the stories of Emma and Ana. To enumerate the reasons why they did not follow through with their original intentions to stay carries the risk of oversimplifying these stories. However, for purposes of the record, I think it is still important to list them here.

For the two women who returned when the military still governed the country, they strongly resented being watched all the time. They also found it impossible to locate work, mostly because of a deep recession that was gripping the country brought on by the introduction of severe neo-liberal measures. The machismo the four women encountered provided them with little opportunity to gain control over their own destiny, which they had become used to in Canada. Particularly in the case of the two single women, the prevailing prejudices about women alone construct them as ‘libertinas’ and easy targets for male desire. For those not so young they are cast as ‘good for nothing’, affecting their self-esteem and their work opportunities. In spite of a return to democracy in the late 1980’s, there was the ubiquitous military presence. It affected not only the country’s political life but also the day-to-day social conduct. And, finally, it was most disconcerting for these four women to find that they just could not understand ‘the Chileans’ and communicate with them as before. Those ‘Chileans’ seemed to them to live in a different space.

What needs to be stressed here is the effect on the Chilean people of all the things that took place in that national territory during the 17 years of dictatorship, together with the impact of neo-liberal economic reforms – reforms that were forced upon the population, replacing the welfare state. This produced a profound change in the Chilean personality and human relations. Those of us who had not been part of that transformation during all those years, those of us who had been evolving in other places - even though we held on to our ‘fondness for our soil’ – did not share with the ‘Chileans’ the experience of having lived with such a territorial culture and suffer the type of discipline imposed on them by such a political and economic regime. This, therefore,
made a permanent return to Chile for many of us an impossibility. Moulian (1997, p.18) synthesizes well how many of us saw the Chile of today on our visits there:

The Chile of today stems from the fertility of a *menage a trois*, the materialization of an incessant copula between the military, neo-liberal intellectuals and business managers (...). That block of power brought about a capitalist revolution, it constructed this society of unregulated markets, of indifference to politics, of competitive individuals who feel fulfilled or who feel well compensated because of the pleasure of being able to consume - or better even in showing off consuming -, of salaried people who are disciplined and socialized into evasive behavior (my translation).

The Chile of today, as found by the returning women, constitutes a formidable obstacle in trying to recuperate the lost 'patria'. Many felt, to some extent, like strangers in what they believed to be their own country. Paradoxically, while seeking in Chile the land these women had lost - their familial affects and political dreams - they have come to the conclusion that it is Canada that still offers 'some' of that 'human face' they hoped to find in Chile. On the other hand, as I address further on in more detail, for those of us who continued to live outside Chile in post-exile, we can still not be fully part of the Canadian nation. The elusiveness and sometimes hostility from certain sectors of this imagined community, Canada, do not allow us to inhabit this land as our own.

This research, through its analysis of the women's stories, exposed the fallacy of being able to seek one's-lost-land in a particular place defined as a nation-state. Nation as a spatial expression of a unitary people, or as a sovereign, spatially discontinuous unit, in fact, becomes something quite different when viewed from a subordinate position (see Bhabha, 1994). Only hegemonic countries and dominant groups in society can benefit from such a conception. Thus, space perceived as such has very little to offer these women. Their insertion into a national space can at the most - in Bhabha's words - present 'a supplementary discourse', or a discourse of minority people that often antagonizes those in power.

And so, living in post-exile we join that vast conglomerate of people who imagine home and their belongingness without necessarily being associated with any concrete place. Identities in such instances are constructed more than ever in what Said (1979) calls 'imaginative geographies', in which the difference between 'us' and 'them', and
‘our place’ and ‘their place’, is articulated in discursive form through actions and narratives.

**Our National Identity in Relation to Chile and Canada**

As I have shown above, there does not exist complete identification of the women I interviewed, including myself, with the Chile represented as a nation-state. The same is true for our identity in relation to Canada, which contradicts how our passports identify us, as Canadian citizens. While living in Canada for more than twenty years, we do not fit within the type of culture and people represented in the dominant narrative of this nation. Our cultural identification, and how we are defined ethnically, has little to do with the territory we inhabit and the material things we are immersed in.

Bhabha (1990) states that, while the boundaries between nations reinforce territorial segmentation, they also reinforce the notion of pure and similar identities within the same bounded territory. This type of meta-narrative has as a result that those identities that differ or are seen as impure, do not really belong to that national space. Although, this is quite evident when hearing the women talk about Canada, it needs further explanation when referring to our identity in relation to Chile.

With respect to this point, what our life histories underscore is our clear consciousness that because we are not there anymore, it is up to the ‘Chileans’ in Chile to decide what path to take, how to construct the day-to-day affairs of that country. After all, paraphrasing Ana, they are the first to suffer the consequences and not us who are outside. That ‘not being there anymore’ involves a material exclusion, an exclusion that operates in the everyday practices engaged in within the home, the barrio, at work, in the public as well as private spheres. It is an exclusion that affects the very construction of our identity. In this sense, this research concludes that in these life histories national identities and nation appear as something more than mere narratives. They are embedded not only in the imaginative, but also in the material space (see also Bhabha, 1990)

Here in Canada, in contrast, we find ourselves in a territorial space in which we live our daily life. But here, by being pigeonholed into an ethnic minority, we become excluded from the Canadian identity. Diverse labels such as ‘refugee woman’,
'immigrant', 'Hispanic', 'Latina', 'Chilean' - all used prominently in the dominant narratives - reflect forms of exclusion. They classify and channel us into certain roles and niches. Furthermore, the practice of speaking English 'less-than-perfect' with an accent and often incorrectly, and the tendency of viewing Latin Americans idiosyncratically as 'not-quite-white', have also engendered discriminatory behaviors on the part of the 'Canadians' toward us.

She or he who is not a 'Canadian' as understood by the dominant discourse, can not expect to 'embody' Canada. The words spoken by these post-exile women, living in Canada for all these years, must be added to the large number of other 'voices' that have been collected in auto-biographies and in research on women, who have been labelled as ethnic minorities in Canada. Officially, 'Canadians' are defined as constituting a heterogeneous world of many races, ethnic peoples, social classes, ideologies and religious beliefs. On the other hand, in Canadian everyday life we find ourselves being pointed at as 'the other', the group that is not included in what is imagined as Canadian.

The same process that defines the 'Canadian core community', quoting Bannerji (1997, p.25), also defines 'the other', which is us. Consequently, the dynamics operative in the Canadian arena do not foster an environment that facilitates the development of a sense of belonging to this country. Possessing a feeling of belongingness to a place does not only come from lived and remembered experiences, or from participating in a national political project, or being involved in a meaningful job. One must also feel to be an integral part of the Canadian community, as imagined by the dominant discourse.76

The various exclusions analyzed in the context of Canada, as well as those examined in relation to Chile, reveal the tremendous difficulty for people placed in the position of these women to see their identity being linked directly to either one of these nations. The life histories examined here confirm what a growing number of scholars have been saying lately, namely that a direct relationship between identity and place is becoming increasingly unsustainable. This is so, in part, because of the divisions created within a nation on the basis of social class, race, ethnicity, ideological positions and

76 Lacking the feeling of forming an integral part of Canada is not peculiar to this group of exiled women. It also applies to the poor, the homeless, the street-kids, the natives and others who do not quite fit into the dominant discourse.
gender, which challenge those who like to represent the national community as one of 'horizontal comradeship' (B. Anderson 1991).

This view is also unsustainable because of the actual conditions of the world, a world of numerous diasporas and global connectedness (Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1990; Hall, 1990). This begs the question what imaginary geographies appear in the stories of these women that offer them a new identity?

**The Diaspora, Supra- and Sub-National Collectivities**

Home, like community and nation, is an imagined construct. It is most often imagined as a nurturing place, where we find rest, refuge and satisfaction. In the life histories of the women interviewed, these notions of home appear inscribed and re-inscribed in different times and forms. They identify a range of spatialized communities to which they claim to belong. Referring again to Malkki’s (1989) study, these women are to some extent similar to the Hutu refugees dispersed in towns. Rather than as a collective waiting to return to the ‘promised land’, they tend to adopt multiple identities in the place they inhabit. However, I don’t interpret this way of reconstructing one’s identity as a form of assimilation, nor as seeing oneself merely as a ‘broad person’.

‘Familial’ friendship is mentioned in several of the women’s stories as having a special significance. For instance, Julia states, “Most of my friends here in Canada are Chileans and Latinos. This is my group of reference, they are my close friends who together make up my family in exile”. Emma explains her sense of belonging to such a group as follows, “I do not need to explain anything in order for us to understand each other.” While these women have created a space called ‘home’ in Canada, it is based, to a large extent, on affinities that relate to their place of origin and a shared history and culture. Latin Americans, and not just Chileans, form part of this intimate group. Listening to their accounts of close friendships, it seems that persons of other ethnic backgrounds, or those who are white, Caucasian and English-speaking, are rarely included. Ana told me that her friendships with ‘Canadians’ were developed mainly in the workplace. The reason she gave was that it cost a lot of effort to speak in English
about things that touched her more personally. The Chilean writer Marjorie Agosin (1994, p.145) expressed similar feelings, in her case in relation to Americans

Even after living here for so long, I still don’t know exactly what to do and what to say. I don’t know what is expected of me. I don’t know the limits of intimacy. I have felt betrayed by American friends. I think that perhaps we don’t share the same understanding of the demands and limits of the relationship.

Canada became a safe haven for us. We deeply appreciate having found here the protection we needed, and the opportunities that allowed us to survive and develop ourselves. It has been more problematic to find ourselves classified as part of the ethnic minorities, as part of that group that is ‘not-quite-white’, and therefore inferior. As a result, ‘home’ for us is not Canada but a smaller circle of people found in the community of Chileans and Latinos living in Canada or other groups with common interests. Home extends itself to Chile for many of the women interviewed, but in a qualified sense. They see it as a place they think they still know intimately, this even though it has changed profoundly. They principally relate to Chile as a place where they still have friends or loved ones, and a soil they wish to have physical contact with. Not surprisingly, many of my interviewees have spent their vacations in Chile, or plan to be there for several months of each year when they retire. But in their present circumstances they don’t think or wish to replicate the past experience of national essentialism.

Women belong to other communities as well. Somehow they have recreated a sort of Chilean community throughout many Chilean organizations, including housing cooperatives, cultural and sport clubs, and a school for Latin children to learn Spanish. I should remind the reader that this study did not examine in any depth the role of these women in such organizations. A study with such a focus could add valuable information on how the feminine gender is produced and reproduced in the diaspora. What has been shown in the analysis of their stories is that they maintain social contact and friendship with people who are linked to the larger extended Chilean community. But the selection and development of friendship follows other patterns as well.

Eight of the ten women have taken an active part in the building of community organizations (see chapter 7). At this level women find a meaningful way to be involved with different communities in Canada. The important point to be made here, in regard to
the identification of these women with local spaces, is that they seem to achieve in them a feeling of nurturing, of protection and self-confidence that they do not find in the wider Canadian community, understood here as the dominant group. Secondly, they maintain a certain identity as Chilenans through their ethnic community. And thirdly, they have translated, somehow, the commitment they used to have to social causes in Chile into building different communities in Toronto.

But local spaces are not the only places where these women have tried to reconstitute their 'former' political identity. That type of identity, for most, has been achieved in their participation in supra- or extra-local activities, such as the activities of the Chilean political parties working with the exiled community in various parts of the world or through the movement for human rights related to Chile and other countries. Others have also been very much involved in the activities of feminist organizations. While some engaged in activities in support of progressive political candidates at the Provincial and Federal level in Canada, this has been more the exception rather than the rule. One of the women in the Chilean community in Toronto became an elected school trustee and another ran as a councilor in the municipal election.

Of all the activities related to the public political domain, the ones that have had special significance, for the women in this study, are the activities related to the movement in defense of human rights in Chile. They did not talk about human rights 'per se' but about the deaths, torture, detentions and disappearances of their loved ones or relatives. The pain that resulted from the loss of loved-ones, their feelings of frustrations with the lack of justice, and their constant preoccupation with the fate of family members and friends who stayed behind, all of these feelings moved them to work together with the men in lending their support to the Chilean political parties in exile. Their objective was to put a stop to military violence. These political organizations, I should add, coordinated their work with those active in the interior of Chile and with other international bodies that focussed on human rights transgressions.

What is important to note is how the work of the women who were actively involved in this human rights movement differed from male participation. The women acted very much with the dominant social narrative that defines their gender as mothers, protectors of children and responsible for the family’s welfare, caring for the wounded
and burying the dead. Consequently, they played a leading role in the movement of the 'Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared' which emerged in Chile, Argentina and other Latin American countries with dictatorships. Some of the women interviewed became living witnesses of what happened to their loved-ones, making themselves available to local schools, churches and neighborhood groups talking about their experience. They took into their home people from Chile who came to seek Canadian solidarity in support of specific human rights causes within Chile. They assisted in fund-raising activities to support resistance activities in Chile, and other such supportive activities. However, it was men who continued to be the recognized voices of and for the Chilean community in exile.

The influence of Chileans abroad in relation to the struggle going on inside the country to obtain justice for the victims of violence has been very tangential. It was the women within the country who started what has been viewed as an innovative movement to address the inhumane measures taken by the military regime. The case of the disappeared is perhaps the most dramatic illustration of violence perpetrated in the name of Chile's interests as a nation-state, which left those affected seemingly impotent in the face of these actions. Referring to her own husband, who was one of the 'disappeared' Tania uttered, "I will never know for certain if he is dead. I live every day with the sensation that he may some day walk through that door, although I know deep down that this is impossible after so many years." It is the ambiguity involved in the identity status of the disappeared person that makes relatives suffer, having to live with this uncertainty indefinitely. This identity, in the context of national space, as Laclau and Zac (1994, p.34) suggest, is like a space in suspension by which the disappeared person is at once part of the nation and excluded from it. This is an extreme form of exclusion, as the individual is eliminated in a material/substantial way. The act of making a person disappear is an attempt is to remove all traces of responsibility of those who have committed the crime.

On the other hand, it was exactly the status of the 'disappeared' - of continuing to be a citizen in the mind of the organizers as long as his or her whereabouts were not known - that led a growing number of women (as wives, mothers, and grandmothers) to demand information from the state and establish the fate of their loved-ones. It became
the rallying point for a new movement in Chile, led by women emulating the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* formed in 1977 in Buenos Aires during that country's military regime. It evolved in an entirely new way of building a social movement led mainly by women. As the military rulers in Chile, Argentina and other Latin American countries redefined the margins of what henceforth would be considered legitimate political action, these women projected a political profile based on their culturally acknowledged family roles as mothers and wives, concerned about the welfare of their husbands, sons, daughters and fathers.

The involvement of women in exile in such a movement produced their identities in different ways than women inside the country. Nation as a category of identity worked differently in these cases. Women in Chile have successfully challenged the military regime. By taking to the streets and by using their identity as mothers they could effectively challenge the violence of the military. The production of an essentialized identity of 'mother' echoed the military ideology, endorsing the discourse of self-sacrificing motherhood, fighting for the well-being of their children and family.\(^77\) Women's mobilization within the country reproduced a national discourse of *Madres de la Patria, Madre Sagrada*, and the mother as a sacrificing Mary (the mother of Jesus).\(^78\) It was assumed that when they solved the problem of the tension of 'disappearance' they would leave the streets and return home. What they claimed was the illegitimacy of military force practiced in Chilean society.

On the other hand, women such as Tania, living outside Chile for more than 20 years, could not challenge the military regime with her body; she could not take to the streets, as the women did in Chile. Tania denounced what happened to her husband in a distant foreign place, by talking about it to community groups in Canada and sometimes to the press. In this case, the concerns she expressed to her audience here were not only

\(^{77}\) Even the names given to groups that emerged during this period reflected this ideology, such as *Mujeres por la Vida* (Women for Life), or *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina.

\(^{78}\) See M. del Carmen Feijoo (1985) "*Las Mujeres en la Transición a la Democracia.*" She argues that the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* reinforced gender division of labor, and made female altruism more significant than demands for human rights. See also Rohini Hensman, (1996)
much the illegitimacy of the military or military violence, but also the illegitimacy of violent force in our society, including issues such as violence of men against wives or child poverty. Therefore, since her identity as a woman is not produced any longer from within the dynamics established between the Chilean nation and motherhood, her story becomes connected to other stories in the world that point to the many forms of violence in society.

Even though it were primarily the women within Chile who initiated the movement of the *Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared* it should be emphasized that the activities undertaken by Chilean women in exile (as those reported on above by the women interviewed) were equally important, especially those aimed at building an international movement. The case of Pinochet’s detention in London, England showed the effectiveness of this effort, converging with other forces at work at the international level, such as Amnesty International. Not only did this combined action put pressure on the regime in Chile. Coinciding with it were efforts aimed at developing awareness among Canadians about what was going on in Chile. Similar efforts were carried out by Chilean exiles in the more than 40 countries across the globe that had taken them in after the Pinochet coup. Tania again expressed best the depth of commitment to such a movement. She spoke about how fundamental it was for her to be part of these actions. Through them she feels the pain she has lived with all these years as a wife of one of the many disappeared, has meaning. She added, “the early loss of my compañero, father of my son, may not have been in vain after all.”

The influence of feminism is to be noted here. While the women do not refer directly to feminist thought in their life histories, they do show in various ways their convergence with feminist struggles. For instance, they indicate the importance of sharing equally with their partner in tasks and responsibilities, and the high value they place on their independence and being master of their own lives, gained while living in Canada (see for example, Isabel, chapter 4; and Emma, chapter 6). Their awareness of the constraints involved in being women appear in more subtle ways when making sense of the immigration process (see Carmen, chapter 7) or when referring to decision-making processes (see Ana, chapter 5). This research, throughout its analysis of the narratives, has illustrated the complexity and, sometimes, contradictory processes in which women
position themselves when having to deal with nation, family, and crossing borders. Their perception on gender issues appears fluid and changing, at times influenced by and at other moments struggling against hegemonic ideologies. This ambiguous state is illustrated well in Carmen’s story about immigration officers, “They interviewed us as well. In reality they interviewed the head of the family. It meant they interviewed my husband.”

The very complexity and ambiguity of living in ‘no-one’s land’, also opens up new possibilities for these women living in post-exile. What appears central in establishing their belongingness and home, is not their association with a particular territory, be it Canada or any other country, but their involvement and commitment to a personal project or social cause. In this sense, nation may serve as one, and only one, of the points of departure in the formation and transformation of our identity. To women who have crossed borders, their identity is constituted on the basis of geographies that are imagined as distant and simultaneously overlapping spaces, and not linked directly to a particular nation-state, be it Chile or Canada. The narrated stories tell us that the identities of each woman, and of the group as a whole, are ‘unfixed’ and multiple in the sense that they can be defined in diverse ways, according to their relations with ‘diverse others’.

In conclusion, whatever forms identities have taken in the narratives of these women, as well as in my retelling of them, they hint at something that above all has moral significance.\(^79\)

\(^79\) Interesting to note here, although not taken up in this thesis, is the idea of Charles Taylor (1989) for whom the ‘self’ and the ‘moral’ intermingle. He puts this in the following words: “My identity is defined by the commitment and identification, which provides the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good and valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose(p.27).”\(^\text{g}\)
AFTERTHOUGHT: WORKING IN TWO LANGUAGES

The writing of this thesis in English has been a particularly daunting task for me. It was not until 1990 that I moved from the Spanish-speaking world (Peru) into the English one (Ontario) with practically no working knowledge of this new language. When entering Canada as a refugee from Chile, in 1974, I moved first into the French speaking environment of Quebec where I learned to speak French well after seven years living in that province.

Once I moved to Ontario I often traveled back and forth to Chile and Quebec, speaking in a language other than English. And with the struggles I have had in trying to learn English at a more advanced stage in my life, and with the inadequate language training classes received in English I have tended to resort to either Spanish or French whenever the opportunity arose. These circumstances have not helped much in writing my thesis. As a matter of fact, the use of English has turned out to be the major hurdle for me in doing this research. Like Julia, one of the women I interviewed who struggled so much as well with this language, it has been a most painful experience and discouraging to the point of giving up on this research on several occasions.

When dealing with the data I have worked in my mother tongue, the language that gave me my own sense of identity. This was possible in part, because for my research subjects Spanish was also their native born language and they preferred it that way. It certainly facilitated matters for me, in terms of being able to hear and to know what they were saying. But it was more than that. My understanding of the women’s narratives also passed through a common medium of communication and common culture, which includes my understanding of the cultural repertoires they used during the interviews to make sense of their stories.

Apart from having had to deal with the various layers of interpretation of the women’s lived experiences, communicated in Spanish, I had to be content with the additional layer of interpretation involved in the translation from Spanish into English. The very writing of a thesis in English, with all the requirements that form part of a
scholarly setting and aim for high standards, becomes a condition sine qua non. In English I have to face the problem of not ‘owning’ the language as I ‘own’ Spanish and to some extent also French. This has frequently meant a lack of control and dependency on others in correcting my ‘never adequate’ translations followed by editing into a ‘correct’ English version.

Words that in themselves are problematic in any language, as Pierre Bourdieu pointed out so well, when translated in another language and edited by someone else again becomes even more problematic. I had to ensure that the words as spoken and shared with me in Spanish by the women through their narratives, my retelling and interpretation of them in Spanish, followed by my translation in English and editing by another person, would not be altered in the meaning I thought they conveyed. I hope I have met this challenge.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


