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Embroidering Mexico: Feminine Spaces, Dechados and the National Space

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EMBROIDERING MEXICO: FEMININE SPACES, DECHADOS AND THE NATIONAL SPACE

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Mexican *dechados* consisted of pieces of cloth were women and girls would practice and record needlework. It was a practice rooted in western tradition where they were known as samplers. Given that *dechados* were objects that were made within feminine spaces they illuminate how gender is constructed through space, and how those gendered spaces generate different ways of knowing.

As the majority of Mexican *dechados* correspond to the nineteenth century, a period of national construction, this study questions the role that the domestic space played in the establishment of the Mexican nation. It proposes that although displaced and subservient to the national space, women contributed to this effort and that *dechados* functioned as a personal space from which to craft the nation and a sense of identity. Ultimately, it highlights the racial dimension of the practice and considers the connection it maintains with the textiles of indigenous communities in Mexico.

DEDICATION

The completion of my master's studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. My husband Daniel who withstood my most challenging times and understood the sacrifice of time spent together. My sisters, Carolina and Elisa who always make me feel like what I do is important. My furry daughters Lulu and Julieta for administering the most soothing cuddles when needed. And my parents Rafael and Laura for instilling in me a need to craft my own reality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Samplers consisted of pieces of cloth were women and girls would practice and record needlework. Their form varied throughout time and place reflecting their function, one largely linked to women's education. They were initially practiced in Europe and were later brought to America constituting a practice that spanned for over three hundred years beginning in the seventeenth century.[1] In Mexico, samplers are known as *dechados*, the term given in Spain. As a subject that tends to be on the periphery of art history, this study situates itself within the efforts to bring women's voices and experiences to the forefront of academic but also social debates.

Today, even if we wanted, it would be virtually impossible to ignore the environmental crisis that we are facing. It is evident that we need to change our ways and that awareness and action is increasing every day fortunately. This exploration into Mexican *dechados* initiated as an effort to contribute to this. The fashion industry is among the industries that contribute the most to climate change, ranking among the most detrimental.[2] If we Google the term fashion, most of the images that come up will feature women. Whether models, designers, makers, garment factory workers, women constitute a significant portion of this industry. In 2013, the collapse of Rana Plaza, a garment factory in Dhaka Bangladesh opened the eyes of the world to the invisible

[1] Clare Woodthorpe Brown and Jennifer Mary Wearden, *Samplers at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A, 2002), 7.
[2]Morgan McFall-Johnsen, "The fashion industry emits more carbon than international flights and maritime shipping combined. Here are the biggest ways it impacts the planets." Business Insider, last modified October 21, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/fast-fashion-environmental-impact-pollution-emissions-waste-water-2019-10

side of the fast fashion paradigm.[3] The model of fast fashion operates by producing high volume, low quality garments in countries where the cost of labor allows for higher profits, but also where laws and regulations do not require much investment or care, seriously endangering both people and their environment. On the other side of this model, a cycle of never-ending consumption is prompted. The images of the Rana Plaza collapse made the world ask, who made my clothes? As visual metaphors of the unsustainable nature of social structures they urge us to examine the intersection between textiles, politics, gender and race, a space inhabited by Mexican *dechados*.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Visibilizing the people that make our clothes questions the relationships that people hold with each other and the logic behind them. According to cultural theorist Stuart Hall, identities are not natural, they are rather "always 'too much' or 'too little' –an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality". Nevertheless, he also says that identities are needed for political purposes and entail a violent hierarchy assigning people to subject positions. In this way, identities are constituted in relation to one another and are experienced within and from a position in a system of values.

Understanding Mexican *dechados* as objects that reflect the spaces in which they were made, this study questions how they embody intersectional experiences and thus speak to marginality but also how they constitute a response from within those spaces and therefore a

[3] Yim Yardley, "Report on deadly factory collapse in Bangladesh finds widespread blame", last modified in May 22, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/23/world/asia/report-on-bangladesh-building-collapse-finds-widespread-blame.html

distinct way of relating, being and creating the world. In other words, what can *dechados* tell us about the relationship between the domestic space and the Mexican national space? By looking at the *dechado* of Isabel Tlachi, I suggest that *dechados* provided women with a personal space from where to craft a sense of identity, not only for themselves but for others.

Throughout this work, I utilize terms in Spanish which responds to my own experience as a bilingual person. Since languages not only describe but also prescribe the world, I consider it important to use the term *dechados* instead of samplers to refer to the objects in this study. Utilizing this term emphasizes that the practice of *dechados* in Mexico derives from Spain and therefore that these objects embody a universe that draws from this culture´s religious, social, stylistic, etc., aspects.

Review of Literature

The study of samplers is fascinating and continues to expand. Considering Rozsika Parker´s classical work *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the femenine*, the topic has had significant consideration in the UK.[4] In addition to this publication, other articles contribute to highlight how through embroidery work women expressed interests and concerns which demonstrated an inquisitive character, challenging the notion of femininity[5]. Moreover, relevant to the study of samplers, British scholarship contributes extensively to textiles, craft and

[4] Rozsika Parker, *The subversive stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine* (London: Women´s Press, 1984).
[5] Mary M. Brooks, "Performing curiosity: reviewing women´s domestic embroidery in seventeenth-century England," *Routledge* 32, no. 1 (2016) :1-29.

material culture studies, bringing new methodologies to art history which further emphasizes the importance of sampler study.[6]

In terms of sampler collections, the Victoria and Albert museum holds one that is certainly critical for samplers' research due to its international profile and the publication available. Aiding comparison between time and place, this publication is an excellent source for exploring design throughout the world as it focuses on form.[7]

Turning to Mexican *dechados*, we find pieces in sampler collections of museums in the United States among which the Cooper Hewitt, the MFA Boston and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco stand out. In Mexico, there are a couple of collections available, most of them in México City. Throughout this study, I had the opportunity to visit the collections of the *Museo Nacional de Historia*, the Franz Mayer, the *Colegio de las Vizcaínas* and the *Museo de Historia Mexicana*, this last one located in Monterrey, México. Each collection has its distinctive characteristics.

The collection of the *Museo de Historia Mexicana* offers pieces that are in great condition, for the most part finished by the maker and a good number of them include names, dates, places or a phrase. Although smaller, the collection of the Franz Mayer museum has very unique thought-provoking pieces. The collection in the *Colegio de las Vizcainas* emphasizes *dechados* as school exercises exhibiting materials that facilitate embroidery practice. Lastly, the collection of the *Museo Nacional de Historia* amounts to over 150 pieces, providing a variety of them; from pieces that record only embroidery exercises, to others that are not finished, to some that belonged to prominent women such as Doña Josefa Ortíz de Domínguez. Other collections

[6] Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 2 (2011) : 232.
[7] Clare Woodthorpe Brown and Jennifer Mary Wearden, *Samplers at the Victoria and Albert Museum*.

are found in the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* (MNA) in Mexico City, and in the *Museo Textil de Oaxaca* (MTO), in Oaxaca City.

Focusing on indigenous *dechados*, a crucial source for this study was the catalogue for the exhibit curated by the MTO *In octacatl, in machiyotl: Dechados de Virtud y Entereza*.[8] Another publication equally informative specially in regards to its treatment of the history of women's education in relation to *dechados* and embroidery was the catalogue of the collection of the Museo Nacional de Historia.[9]

Prior to coming across with the exhibit *Dechados de Virtudes, Mujeres que Cosen Historias* curated by Mayela Flores Enríquez and inaugurated in 2015, I was unaware of the existence of *dechados*. Her work contributes to the most current and active scholarship in the case of Mexico, including publications presenting a unique case study, the panorama of the field, and also and an article examining the nature of women's work within the context of nineteenth-century Mexico.[10] Furthermore, her compilation of *dechados* from various museums in an online catalogue, as well as her Instagram account bordados_y_dechados_mx have facilitated the access to information, which considering the topic's relative unpopularity is greatly appreciated.

The approaches in the study of samplers vary form contextualizing through the revision of documentary sources such as journals to bringing up the history and origin of the techniques and stitches. In the case of Mexican *dechados*, the work has been focused on providing education and awareness of these pieces. Being a study that seeks above all else to facilitate the visualization of a different future, my work contributes to understanding *dechados* as personal

[8] Alejandro de Ávila Blomberg, *In octacatl, in machiyotl: Dechados de Virtud y Entereza* (Oaxaca City: Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú & Museo Textil de Oaxaca, 2015).
[9] María Hernández Ramírez. *Colección de dechados del Museo Nacional de Historia* (México, 1995).
[10] Mayela Flores Enríquez. "Panorama de los estudios sobre dechados en México" *Ameryka Łaciñska*, no. 5 (2015): 127-148.

spaces that reflect the architecture of thought allowing it to be redefined by the needs of contemporary spaces.

Thesis Chapters

The first chapter introduces sampler-making as a European practice and seeks to delineate how they reflect the construction of gender and roles and how the structuring of space generates them and they generate space. It then considers the introduction of *labores mujeriles* in New Spain as well as women's education to review the periods before the nineteenth century. Chapter II sets up the panorama of nineteenth century Mexico which for women meant that society understood their role as mothers subservient to the nation. It places an emphasis on the domestic sphere as a space that operated through a different logic but also under racial scripts aspects expressed and reflected by *dechados*. Then, it presents the case of Isabel Tlachi's *dechado*, a piece made in Cholula Puebla, in the year of 1860, which lends itself to examining how *labores mujeriles* contributed to transform the space of indigenous communities. Finally, the last chapter, makes evident how national discourses disregarded the labor of continuity that women sourced to the construction of the Mexican national space. Moreover, it focuses on the link between *dechados* and the textiles of indigenous communities in Mexico, suggesting parallels between Isabel's *dechado* and textiles from the community of Hueyapan, Puebla, which highlights indigenous women's contribution to a sense of Mexican identity.

CHAPTER II

EMBROIDERING GENDER & RACE

Feminine Spaces

Samplers are fascinating pieces that allow us to enter the spaces where they were made. Although they have been explored in different latitudes, the little information that accompanies them makes their study an enigmatic question since it is difficult to attribute them to an author or to a place. However, their study is very rewarding and promising. Undoubtedly, a characteristic that captivates the interest is their intimate quality. Samplers consisted of embroidery and needlework exercised that girls and women performed in the private sphere and as part of an education that was geared towards their gender.

Embroidery samplers were practiced in Europe before they arrived to America. The word 'sampler' comes from the French word '*essamplaire'* meaning example.[11] Although samplers exhibit particular characteristics across Europe and therefore possibly slight differences in development, the English case serves to understand how sampler making established as a female practice. The first records of samplers date back to the sixteenth century. Initially, samplers worked as a "kind of notebook which was always at hand", consisting of narrow strips of fabric with embroidered bands recording stitches and border designs used for costume making.[12]

[11] Lanto Synge, *Art of Embroidery: History of Style and Technique* (Woodbridge England: Antique Collector´s Club, 2001), 82.
[12] Synge, Art of *Embroidery*, 82.

During this time, adults were the main producers of embroidery samplers and often times they were professional embroiderers.[13]

In the seventeenth century this changed and teenage girls and children began to be engaged in the practice of samplers as a way to prevent idleness and to ease the passage of time when they were tasked with becoming acquainted with pious texts. In this way, this century brought a "moral aspect that shows a change in attitude to sampler making from purely practical exercises to objects in themselves".[14] In the eighteenth century, women did occasionally produced samplers yet mainly for the purpose of setting the example for children. In this period the shape of the samplers— became squarer including a panel in the composition—where lettering and motifs were stitched—surrounded by bands that were wider than in the past. By this time embroidery samplers were considered achievements and were often framed.[15]

Embroidery samplers were a major component of women´s education. In the western context, the education of women has largely been determined by men ever since the time of the Greeks.[16] Aristoteles believed that the word was exclusively human, yet that it lacked authority when it was uttered by women, causing their lives to be characterized by not having access to it. Since through the word justice and order is expressed, the word provided the foundation for the city, the polis.[17] In this way, women´s education has responded to an idea of order that has designed and organized society into sexualized spaces.

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[13] Woodthorpe Brown and Wearden, *Samplers at the Victoria*, 7.
[14] *Synge, Art of Embroidery*, 126.
[15] Woodthorpe Brown and Wearden, *Samplers at the Victoria*, 9.
[16] Josefina Muriel, "La educación femenina en la cultura occidental" in *La Sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas. Tomo I. Fundaciones del Siglo XVI* (Mexico: UNAM; Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2007): 10.
[17] Zaida Muxi, *Más allá del umbral, mujeres, casas y ciudades* (dpr-barcelona, 2018), 20.

Fig 1: The Milkmaid by Johannes Vermeer, c.1660, oil on canvas, Rijksm Museum

In her book *Beyond the threshold: women, houses and cities*, Zaida Muxi points out that it is during the first modernity when the indestructible and naturalized relationship between women and reproductive labor started to develop and that we can identify the beginning of the myth of domesticity in the masterpieces of seventeenth century Dutch painting. These paintings (fig. 1) depicting female figures occupied with their chores within interior spaces denote how the limits between the interior-exterior, private-public, women-men consolidated into space confirming the construction and division of gender roles.[18] The transformation of samplers into objects in themselves happening in the seventeenth century is therefore reflective of the establishment of female spaces. Given that these spaces demand a role, these spaces also

[18] Muxi, Mujeres, Casas y Ciudades, 22.

generate a way of knowing, relating and existing in the world. As objects that reflect the domestic space, embroidery samplers make us consider how women's experiences were informed and their participation mediated by a textile dimension.

Embroidering in America

In Mesoamerica the predominant embellishing technique was brocade, a technique where supplemental threads are added during the weaving process. In their book *Bordados y Bordadores*, Virginia Vermella Aspe and Guillermo Tovar de Teresa recount that the introduction of 'western' embroidery in America occurred ever since Hernán Cortés reached the pre-hispanic world.[19] In this way, the practice of embroidery and needlework acquires a colonizing dimension. Inheriting the western pattern, in New Spain embroidery and needlework was practiced and articulated through gendered spaces and contexts. Men embroidered as part of the embroidery guild which was established in 1546, while women embroidered as part of their *labores mujeriles*.

As friars saw the need to address the difference in ideas and principles about human dignity in indigenous culture, they considered the establishment of *Colegios*—schools where they were interned away from their families—for indigenous boys and girls. Friars taught boys while *maestras* taught girls. Catalina de Bustamante known as the first *maestra* of America undertook the task of educating the girls in a *Colegio* in Texcoco. Her role was to teach indigenous girls "*un nuevo modo de vivir distinto del suyo en sus bases culturales, en el cual se*

[19] Virginia, Armella de Aspe and Guillermo Tovar de Teresa. Bordados y bordadores (Mexico City; Grupo Gutsa, 1992), 52.

comprendían, desde su medio de expresión, la lengua castellana, la modificación de su manera de vestir, la realización de nuevas labores femeninas y hasta la forma de practicar las virtudes humanas y cristianas". [20] In New Spain, the *labores mujeriles* were practiced not only in sexualized spaces, but also in racialized ones, something that must be taken into account when looking at Mexican *dechados*.

Mexican Dechados

Most of Mexican *dechados* correspond to the nineteenth century, with a few pieces made in the eighteenth. The *dechados de virtudes* were part of women's education in New Spain and therefore often made within the spaces and institutions dedicated to it. This included *escuelas, Amigas*, *colegios* and covents. Other institutions that sought to provide women with the education and skills for leading more virtuous lives were *recogimientos* which welcomed women in precarious situations. In general, the education that girl and maidens—they were considered maidens at the age of 12— received erased the limits between these different spaces given that they all subscribed to the mission of promoting models of piety and Christian virtues aspiring to provide the "*barniz monjil sinonimo de refinamiento y superioridad*".[21] In the eighteenth-century, the ideal was the nun.

[20] Josefina Muriel, ¨La evangelización de las mujeres indígenas obra básica de la aculturación¨ in *La Sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas. Tomo I. Fundaciones del Siglo XVI* (Mexico: UNAM; Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2007), 63.
[21] Pilar Gonzalbo. *Vivir en la Nueva España. Orden y desorden de la vida cotidiana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México-Centro de Estudios Históricos, 2009): 145. Translation: … Christian virtues aspiring to provide the ¨profile of a nun which was synonymous with refinement and superiority.

The education that women received was not systematized but rather was achieved through a lifestyle that consisted of "*rezos, devociones, penitencias y sumisión a las autoridades eclesiasticas*", nevertheless, there were differences between what women learned according to their social and racial status.[22] For example, the education given to the elite emphasized a proper deportment and how to manage a household.[23] On the other hand, institutions like the *Colegio de Indias de Nuestra Señora Guadalupe* were geared towards teaching the girls the skills related to their parent's trades.[24] Entering a cloister was a way to protect girls and maidens while they married or it even ended up serving as an asylum.[25] In this way, their family situation largely determined women´s experiences within and outside these spaces. In a society where single women abounded, these institutions functioned to establish urbanization norms, thus constituting cities with dynamics that justified the differences between the rich and the poor with different paths toward religious virtue entailing "*las mortificaciones con ásperos cilicios y la prodigalidad en reparto de limosnas respectively*".[26]

Unlike the first *Colegios* for indigenous girls that were established by the Spanish, in the eighteenth century it was the indigenous communities who sought to open these spaces uplifting the models of New Spain´s society. In 1787, the caciques funded the publishing of a book that celebrated the life of a devout indigenous woman who aided the Carmelites in their mission.[27] Contemporary to the text book, we have an exquisite *dechado* that upon closer analysis opens up

[22] Gonzalbo, *Vivir en la Nueva España*, 141. Translation: "prayers, devotions, penances and submission to ecclesiastical authorities".
[23] Gonzalbo, *Vivir en la Nueva España*, 141.
[24] Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, "Escuelas, colegios y conventos para niñas y mujeres indígenas en el siglo XVIII" in *Obedecer, servir y resistir*, ed. María Adelina Arredondo (Mexico City: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003).: 51.
[25] Gonzalbo, *Vivir en la Nueva España*, 148.
[26] Gonzalbo, *Vivir en la Nueva España*, 155. Translation: "the mortifications with rough sackcloths and the lavishness in the distribution of alms".
[27] Tanck de Estrada, Escuelas, colegios y conventos para niñas, 49.

the world of the time. Attributed to the year of 1785, the *dechado* belongs to the collection of the LACMA (fig. 2). The catalogue entry identifies linen as the base fabric, the use of silk and metallic threads and of metallic sequins. The techniques include embroidery, drawn work and needlelace work. Measuring 103.82 x 51.44 cm, this *dechado* is rich in both technical and iconographic detail.

Fig 2: Mexican *Dechado*, Unknown, Mexico, c. 1785, linen base and silk threads, 103.82 x 51.44 cm, LAMCA Museum

This piece is not only unique due to the fact that it belongs to the eighteenth century but also its composition is similar to that of Luis Mena's pintura de castas y la virgen de Guadalupe (fig. 3), inviting us to consider the discourse that was generated referring to New Spain as a bountiful land where "*el paraíso perdido en Europa había sido recuperado en México gracias a la Virgen de Guadalupe*".[28] The similarity between the *dechado* and Mena´s painting can be suggested based upon the fact that both are divided into three sections and that they have a virgin presiding over a space where elements of a fertile land prevail.

Fig 3: Pintura de Castas y la Virgen de Guadalupe by Luis de Mena, c.1750, Museo de América

[28] Antonio Rubial Garcia, "El paraíso encontrado. La representación retorico-religiosa de la naturaleza en Nueva España". *Boletín de monumentos históricos*, 18 (2010): 33.

In the second section of the *dechado*, I suggest that when we come across a set of figures surrounded by flower garlands we see what Antonio Rubial identifies as an iconographic innovation that developed in New Spain.[29] This innovation consisted in the representation of the celestial space as an *hortus conclusus*—closed garden—instead of a city as it was in European models of representation. Inside the 'garden' of the piece we see flowers, butterflies and Christian symbols such as the lamb of god and the pelican which resonates with the fact that the *hortus conclusus* was in turn associated with the *hortus misticum* and the *locus amoenus*. The first one referring to the "*relacion entre el paraíso incontaminado por el pecado y el claustro*" and the second to a "*jardin que le ofrecia su espacio a la mujer y al amor*", resulting in a an *hortus conclusus* that connected the conventual cloister with the love of Christ.[30] In the New Spanish representations of this garden, the virtues that characterized the love encounters between the nuns and Christ were symbolized with flowers and accompanied by abundant vegetation.[31] Understood within this context, the second section leads us to consider the cloister as a space aimed at promoting virtues.

Considering how women's education stressed the same religious values across different types of institutions, it is difficult to determine whether this *dechado* was made within a convent, an Amiga, a *Colegio* etc. However, the existence of another *dechado* (fig. 4) with similar figures and composition, in addition to the fact that the embroidery work exhibits a high degree of difficulty may suggest that this *dechado* could have been the work of a *maestra*, serving as an example to her pupils. The two human figures—one adult and one child—in the *dechado*

[29] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*, 14.
[30] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*, 16. Translation: ¨relationship between the paradise uncontaminated by sin and the cloister¨… ¨garden that offered its space to women and to love¨.
[31] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*, 20.

exchanging or offering flowers to each other further supports this idea. On the other hand, the details in the garments of the figures may suggest that the maker belonged to a well-established level in society.

Fig 4: Mexican *Dechado*, Unknown, Mexico. C.1785, linen base and silk threads, 99.7 × 59.06 cm, LAMCA Museum

Looking at the human figures we turn our attention to the first section of the *dechado*. As mentioned before, in this section we see a Virgin presiding over the piece which after reviewing the iconographic elements that surround her suggests that we encounter an immaculate theme. In this way, this piece starts unfolding itself, given that in New Spain—as in other places—the *hortus conclusus* developed a close connection with the values and symbols associated with the

Immaculate Conception.[32] Moreover, it could be considered that the floral motifs that make the composition of the first section delightful due to its colors may hold symbolic meaning given that the iconography of the Immaculate Conception was also associated with vegetal emblems ever since the fifteenth-century.

Another key element supporting this reading is the snake that we see in the left side of the second section. Upon first sight, the snake stands out from the composition given that it contrasts with the other elements in this section and also due to its placement in the piece which makes it appear as almost bordering or leaving the space. The snake is part of the iconography of the Immaculate Conception (fig. 5) as well as of the representations alluding to sin. Given that in New Spain the theme paradise/redemption as frequently illustrated it is possible to suggest that the presence and placement of the snake tell us that the virtues contained in the *hortus conclusus* of our piece, and that are embodied in the Immaculate Conception free the space from sin.[33] The inscription underneath the Virgin "*vendita y loada sea Maria*" tells us that the maker celebrates the Immaculate Conception and by placing herself near her, she makes us consider her virtuosity.[34] The last section of the piece including drawn work, and needle lacework demonstrates a technical virtuosity that leads us to consider the fact that no loose threads were left on the reverse side of the embroidery as a statement of purity and perfection.[35]

[32] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*, 32.

[33] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*.
[34] Translation: ¨blessed and praised be Mary¨.
[35] Curator at the MNH Maria Hernández explained and showed me the back of pieces during my visit to the collection.

Fig 5: Inmaculada Concepción by Echave Ibía Balthasar, c.1604-1650, Museo Nacional de Arte

Although women referred to the same models, their experiences in relation to them were different. Mena's painting illustrates this by featuring a world where we see the Virgin of Guadalupe engaging in different ways with her 'protégés'. Intentional or not, the unique combination of the *castas* and devotional genres of the painting conveys the hierarchical values of New Spanish society. If we think about the Virgin of Guadalupe functioning as a model in this painting, the first row of *casta* paintings is closer to the Virgin than the second one, suggesting different level of access to her. Furthermore, the individuals not only stand at different distances from the Virgin but also inhabit separate spaces within 'her' world. Moreover, we see differences in their dress and in the case of the *cuadro* of the far right of the second row, activities. The way

in which the figures exist in these spaces recalls the fact that the curriculums of the institutions dedicated to women´s education were tailored according to the population that they served.

In her iconographic study, Karina Ruiz Cuevas recounts the details of the consideration of the allegory of the Immaculate Conception as a source of life that developed in New Spain.[36] After looking at this piece in detail and in relation to Luis Mena's painting—which is a mode of representation that associates the virgin with abundance—it is fair to suggest that this piece gathers the characteristic of said allegory and that the natural richness of New Spain was conducive to the metaphors that associated it with a paradise. However, it was its situation as a space to evangelize that transformed the militant character that the Immaculate had in Spain into the protective nature and image hat developed in New Spain, "*recalca(ndo) su papel como instrumento de propaganda religiosa estrechamente vinculado a la expresión de la piedad popular*".[37] The iconography of the Immaculate Conception as an allusion to a fertile land was in turn conducive to the Virgin of Guadalupe, although her association with 'paradise' was established more through rhetoric rather than through visual representation where she was referred to as the mother that buried heresy with her flowers and turned New Spain into an Eden.[38]

Seeing both Mena's painting and our *dechado* and considering that both works can be understood as an imaginary of a found paradise given that they express a Marian devotion that is elevated through its association with natural abundance, we can understand what Rubial refers to

[36] Karina Ruiz Cuevas. "La Virgen como "Fuente de Vida". La Inmaculada Concepción como alegoría en la Nueva España. En CAMPOS Y FERNANDEZ DE SEVILLA. La Inmaculada Concepción en España, religiosidad, historia y arte: actas del simposio. ¼-IX. Madrid: Ediciones Escoriales, Real Centro Universitario Escorial María, 2005, pp. 1177-1200.
[37] Ruiz Cuevas, *La Virgen como "Fuente de Vida"*, 1181. Translation: "emphasizing its role as an instrument of religious propaganda closely linked to the expression of popular piety".
[38] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*, 32.

when he says that the idea of New Spain as a fertile land provided a "*rico campo simbolico*" that constituted, "*uno de los temas centrales de la conciencia de identidad novohispana*" and thus becomes recurrently articulated in different types of objects and images.[39] Resonating back in Spain, the Virgin of Guadalupe makes us question about the role that indigenous women played in this.[40] To this point, Lynne Anderson makes an intriguing suggestion about the *dechado.* She suggests that the way in which the flowers held by the human figures are represented—including the root—is similar to the way in which plants are represented in Mesoamerican codices.[41] Whether this connection is feasible or not, there is not denying that Mexican *dechados* exhibit a unique character. As objects that were part of women´s education and that accompanied New Spain in its transition to becoming a nation, *dechados* can provide us an interesting outlook on the question of Mexican identity.

[39] Rubial Garcia, *El paraíso encontrado*, 5. Translation: "rich symbolic field", that constituted, "one of the central themes of the consciousness of identity of New Spain".
[40] Bernarda Urrejola Davanzo, "Notas sobre la Inmaculada Concepción en sermones novohispanos", Magallánica: Revista de Historia Moderna 3, no. 5 (Julio-Dic 2016): 115.
[41] Lynne Anderson, "Schoolgirl Embroideries: Integrating Indigenous Motifs, Materials and Text" in The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global: Proceedings of the Textile Society of America 16th Biennial Symposium. Presented at Vancouver, BC, Canada: September 19-23, 2018.

CHAPTER III

THE MARGINAL SPACES OF THE MEXICAN NATION

The Domestic Space and the Nation

As mentioned before, a great number of Mexican *dechados* correspond to the nineteenth century, a period of transition and national construction. By this century, the ideas of the age of Enlightenment generated a shift in the ideals guiding women's lives. While during the eighteenth century the nun constituted the ideal for women, during the nineteenth century, being a mother became the most important and noble role for women. In fact, according to the national ideology of the time, the value that women held in society was determined and derived through their function as mothers of citizens, and not as citizens themselves.[42] In this way, in nineteenth century Mexico, women were in service of the enlightened society.[43]

Given that women's lives were thought in this way, men became increasingly preoccupied with women's education. Although there was some debate in regards to whether women should receive schooling, this interest resulted in a specific set of values, knowledges, practices and abilities that characterized women´s profiles.[44] Jose Maria Heredia (1803-1839), a

[42] Mary Louise Pratt, "Las Mujeres y el imaginario nacional en el siglo XIX," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 19, no. 38 (1993): 60.
[43] Mayela Flores Enríquez, "Artes Mujeriles¨y estereotipos de género en el México del siglo XIX: Presencias en la prensa femenina" Mujeres en servicio de la sociedad ilustrada. *H-ART. Revista de historia, teoría y critica de arte* no.7 (2020): 20.
[44] Flores, *Artes Mujeriles*, 20.

Cuban born poet who later naturalized as a Mexican citizen published a poem titled "*Plan de Estudios*" a work where he refers to women encouraging them not to concern and worry themselves with matters outside of their scope.[45] This provides an example supporting Mary Louise Pratt suggestion that it would be a mistake to see the exclusion of women from the category of citizenship as something that happened naturally or spontaneously but rather it must be seen as a result of specific and active strategies that subordinated women within the establishment of the new nation.[46]

About the domestic space, Muxi writes that it is not a space that women chose or enjoy but rather it is a place of obligation, of fulfillment of their gender role. She also notes that it must be distinguished from the private space as it does not provide an opportunity for personal cultivation.[47] After looking at nineteenth century publications directed at a sector of women in society, Mayela Flores, gathers how girl's education was thought around the aim of "*el cultivo de la aplicación, docilidad, humilidad, sensibilidad, aseo y amor al orden, urbanidad, laboriosidad, además del destierro de la pereza, la mentira, la envidia, los chismes, el parloteo, los escándalos y el miedo privilegiando siempre a religión y la vida en familia*".[48] Weaving and embroidery practices were frequently encouraged in these publications and prescribed as the material expression of these traits and in turn associated with the idea of caring for the home.[49] For this reason, Flores suggests that these practices constituted a 'technology of gender', and that they

[45] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 54.
[46] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 54.
[47] Muxi, Mujeres, Casas y Ciudades, 37.
[48] Flores, *Artes Mujeriles*, 20. Translation: .."the cultivation of *aplicación*, docility, humility, sensibility, cleanliness and appreciation of order, civility, industriousness, as well as the disapproval of laziness, lies, envy, gossip, chatter, scandals and fear while always prioritizing religion and family life".
[49] Flores, *Artes Mujeriles*, 23.

ultimately coerced the body.[50] Adding to this, Pratt points out that the displacement of women from the national fraternity causes an instability in the national space that is only controlled through the coercion of the body.[51] In this way, although the division of society into the public and private spheres already designated men and women to different spaces, the nineteenth century period emphasized the cultivation of the domestic space, which by being subjected to the nation building effort, it displaced women from the national space, marginalizing the very same logic, knowledges and practices crafting the domestic experience.

Thinking and Constructing from the Domestic

In reference to women, Shakespeare once commented that women often became speechless when abstracted into their embroidery exercises.[52] Far from this, today's reality makes us understand this as a condition of the time rather than a natural condition of women. However, taking Donna Haraway's words when she says that the fact that something is a construction does not make it any less real, we wonder what could have generated this distinction.[53] I suggest that in order to address this question, it is fundamental to consider the historical division of the senses.

In her book exploring the epistemologies involved in the activity of cooking, Meredith Abarca recounts how the senses were split from the beginning of Western philosophy into

[50] Flores, *Artes Mujeriles*, 19, 27.
[51] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 55.
[52] Synge, *Art of Embroidery*, 82.
[53] Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium.Female_Meets_Oncomouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 129.

'higher' and 'lower'.[54] The senses of sight and hearing were thought as the 'higher', while the senses of touch, taste and smell the 'lower'. The higher senses experienced the world at a distance which was thought to provide 'objectivity' something that took precedence in scientific culture and empirical knowledge. Eventually, Hegel would classify them as the 'intelligible'—higher—and the 'sensible'—lower.[55] Given that Hegel is also associated with the birth of modern art history this raises questions about the foundation of aesthetic values and experiences.[56] To this matter, Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez explain that in the eighteenth century, aesThetics—as they use the term— became a Eurocentered theory that regulated sensibility and the experience of the beautiful and the sublime.[57] The hierarchization and division of the senses is thus part of this regulation. According to Abarca, "*the division of the senses . . . relates to the philosophical split between thought and practice, the eternal and the temporal, the universal and the particular, the mind and the body, that which is masculine and that which is feminine*".[58] In this way, the production of gender and gendered spaces entailed a specific way of engaging and sensing the world. Occurring in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the marginalization of the senses is therefore connected to the marginalization of the domestic space.

Understood within this framework, it becomes more apparent how *dechados* no longer seem like an expression of femininity, but rather a process of construction. As objects reflecting the domestic space, what can they tell us about the role it played in the nation building effort?

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[54] Meredith Abarca, *Voices in the Kitchen* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006): 57.
[55] Abarca, Voices in the Kitchen, 56-57.
[56] Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A critical introduction to its methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006):21.
[57] Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings," *Social Text Online* (July 2013).
[58] Abarca, Voices in the Kitchen, 59.

First, it is useful to review the term ‘nation’. While a ‘state’ refers to an independent country, a nation occurs when a collectivity perceives a sense of unity and community based on a common denominator being language, culture etc.,[59] In other words, the nation is an imaginary community. The *dechado* of Manuela Garay, (Fig. 6) suddenly acquires an interesting dimension when we consider that an imaginary community can only exist like that, imagined.[60]

Fig: 6 Mexican *Dechado*, Manuela Garay, Mexico. First half of XIX century, linen base and silk threads, 65 x 60 cm, Fran Mayer Museum Photograph by author.

[59] Agustín Basaro B. “¿Qué es el estado-nación?” El Nacionalismo, vlex información jurídica inteligente, vlex.com.mx/vid/es-nacion-581960958.
[60] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 52.

The first feature capturing the attention are two areas that are created by color and technique. Although this piece does not include a date, the use of drawn work suggests that it might correspond to the first third of the nineteenth century as it was more common during this time. The second feature and the most significant for this analysis is the fact that it includes both the double-headed eagle representative of the Hapsburg reign and the Mexican national symbol. In addition, these two symbols are placed in each of the two areas of the piece. While there is an overall use of flower and animal motifs that grant it a decorative character, on the side with the double-headed eagle, we see also see religious symbols like the lamb of God and the Virgin of Guadalupe near it placing emphasis on the center of the area. The size of this area is also greater than the area with the national symbol. It is as if Manuela Garay materializes a paradigm shift by showing us a smaller, still colorless area emerging into the plane. The inscription 'SIRVO A MI DUEÑA MANUELA GARAY' invites us to think about the relationship of this piece with her maker.[61] Besides serving her as an exercise, as technical and design reference and probably as a source of personal satisfaction, this *dechado* could be thought to function as a personal space where to imagine, conceptualize and craft the 'nation'.

Due to its condition as an imagined community, the nation is constantly being challenged by the heterogeneities within its territory, something that is heightened in the case of nation-states founded through a process of decolonization or in other words 'independence'.[62] Established in 1767 in Mexico City, the Colegio de las Vizcaínas, an institution dedicated to the instruction of girls, was envisioned by its founders as way to preserve their Basque heritage.[63]

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[61] Translation: "I SERVE MY OWNER MANUELA GARAY"
[62] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 51.
[63] Maria Cristina Torales Pacheco, "Cuatro escritores, la décima musa y la identidad vascongada de todos ellos: origen del Colegio de las Vizacínas," in *Vizcaínas 250 años de vida en un colegio a prueba del tiempo*, ed. Ana Rita Valero de García Lascurain (Madrid: Ediciones El Visto, 2017).

The members of the Basque community arrived to America from the very first decades of the sixteenth century and constituted a minority in relation to other European groups such as the *castellaños*, *extremeños* y *andaluces.* They saw themselves as the original Iberic settlers, and defended their language fiercely. The Colegio de las Vizcaínas was the culmination of an effort to distinguish themselves and sustain a historical conscience.[64] This provides an example of a heterogeneity within the territory, and makes us think about the role that women played in addressing this.

Fig. 7: Mexican *Dechado*, Maria de Jesús Martínez, Mexico. First half of XIX century, linen base and silk threads, 74 x 37 cm, Fran Mayer Museum

[64] Torales Pacheco, Cuatro escritores, 21.

A characteristic that distinguishes Mexican *dechados* is that a good number of them include the national symbol. This is the case with the *dechado* of Maria de Jesus Martínez (Fig. 7) a piece that unfolded the questions framing this work.[65] The piece reads ´ESTE DECHADO LO HIZO MARIA DE JESUS MARTINEZ EN EL COMBENTO DE LA NUEBA ENSEÑANZA EN SAN JUAN DE DIOS LO CONCLUYO HANTES DE CUMPLYR LOS SEIS AÑOS'[66]. The *Combento de la Nueva Enseñanza*—officially, *Convento de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*—was established in 1753. Prior to this, it was the *Colegio de inditas de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* which served indigenous girls and was ran by *maestras* until Antionio Modesto Martínez de Herdoñana proposed for it to follow the model of the *Convento de Nuestra Señora del Pilar* an institution contemporaneous and similar in vision to the *Colegio de las Vizcaínas* but instead ran by nuns.[67] Founded by Maria Ignacia de Azlor, the *convento-colegio* became known as *La Enseñanza Antigua*, while the one for indigenous girls *La Nueva Enseñanza*. In this way, we know that Maria de Jesús Martínez was an indigenous girl who embroidered a national symbol before turning six years old. Suddenly the often expression referring to the existence of multiple Mexicos makes sense and illuminates the complexity of the national project. What relationship is Maria de Jesus Martinez crafting with the national space?

[65] Mayela Flores Enríquez, "Dechado Mexicano." *Miradas* no. 1 (2014).
[66] Translation: THIS DECHADO WAS MADE BY MARIA DE JESUS MARTINEZ IN THE CONVENT OF LA NUEVA ENSEÑANZA IN SAN JUAN DE DIOS CONCLUDED IT BEFORE TURNING SIX YEARS OLD
[67] Maria Concepción Amerlinck de Corsi, "Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (La Enseñanza Nueva)" in *Conventos de Monjas. Fundaciones en el México Virreinal* ed. Maria Concepcion Amerlink de Corsi and Manuel Ramos Medina (México: Grupo CONDUMEX, 1995): 143.

Isabel Tlachi´s Dechado

The *dechados* of Manuela Garay and Maria de Jesús Martínez demonstrate that the domestic space played a role in the construction of the nation despite being marginalized within the national space. Speaking of marginalities, Pratt notes that another aspect of societies built upon colonial foundations is that they include groups that the new order does not actually seek to decolonize.[68] Although, referring to class in terms of women constituting a class of society, a quote that Flores recovers from Lizardi's novel la Quijotita saying that "*cada miembro del estado debe estar en aptitud de desempeñar aquellos cargos a que ordinariamente se destinan a los de su clase*", foreshadows how there were different experiences in relationship to the nation-state justified by national discourses.[69] In order to explore this further, I look at the *dechado* of Isabel Tlachi.

[68] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 52. Translation: "Each member of the state must be able to carry out those roles to which those of his class are assigned".
[69] Flores, Artes Mujeriles, 25.

Fig. 8: Mexican *Dechado*, Isabel Tlachi, Mexico. 1860, base unknown, cotton thread, Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

Isabel's *dechado* (Fig. 8) is among the pieces of the wide collection from the *Museo Nacional de Historia* in Mexico City.[70] The only image available is in black and white, something that resonates with the fact that access and information about these pieces is not as readily available. The catalogue entry indicates that the piece measures 75 x 59 cm. It also indicates that it was embroidered with cotton thread using the techniques of *bordado al pasado* and cross-stitch. The material of the base fabric is not specified.

[70] I would like to thank Maria Hernández curator at the Museo Nacional de Historia for receiving me and teaching me about the pieces in their collection.

Although it is not clear, it seems as if the border of the piece is hemmed with a *randa.* At the bottom we have a line going across the piece creating a band. Inside this band we have two types of motifs that meet in the middle. The one in the left seems unfinished. The rest of this piece does not have a 'structured' composition, with most of the designs being free flowing figures or motifs.

In terms of the types of figures and motifs, we see a significant presence of flowers. These flowers are primarily in the shape of a fan and of a circle. We also see figures of stags and birds. Despite most of the designs being flowing around, there are three figures that do seem to be grounded on the bottom band—a flower vase that is a bit off to the left of the center, a figure similar to the flowers in the vase stemming from the bottom right corner of the piece, and a stag to the left of the flower vase. It is possible that these figures were the first ones that the author embroidered.

Above these figures we see a rhomboid like figure composed of flower motifs a bit off to the right of the center. To the right of this figure we a see another stag, yet this time with a larger scale than of the one at the bottom. Both stags have flowers coming out of their mouths. The birds in the *dechado* are positioned standing on top of the flowers from the figures in the bottom bringing them close to the figures above. Among the rest of the figures we see another flower vase in a smaller scale and more flower motifs arranged in a way that it seems as if they were meant to create more circular figures. At the top of the piece, we see motifs going across the border with an upside-down orientation and therefore grounded on the top part of the piece. The piece reads "ACABADO EN CHOLULA EL AÑO DE 1860 DE MANO DE ISABEL TLACHI".[71] Not all *dechados* indicate where they were made, making this piece interesting.

[71] Translation: "FINISHED IN CHOLULA IN THE YEAR OF 1860 BY THE HAND OF ISABEL TLACHI".

Furthermore, the last name Tlachi invites us to think that we are dealing with indigenous authorship.

Considering that Cholula was among the first places were the Spanish established *Colegios* for indigenous girls, Isabel's *dechado* provides an excellent opportunity to delve deeper into the way in which *labores mujeriles* transformed the territory of indigenous communities. While for the nation to exist, imagination is key, for a territory it is different. According to Veronica del Rocio Sánchez, the territory is ¨a boundary established by a determined group, a signified partiality of space, an appropriation; in such a way that it is lived, practiced, marked, and recognized; with its inscription in culture, is therefore a structuring axis of identities¨.[72] Furthermore, the body-space relationship that is generated through trajectories, practices and experiences establishes a mental map of the territory that supports the symbolic construction of the world.[73]

Being a material experience, textile practices structure thought and space. Like mentioned in the first chapter, prior to the Spanish arrival, the primary embellishing technique was brocading. Drawing from Claire Pajaczkowska´s analysis of textile techniques and their epistemologies, weaving stands as a ¨material example of two axes of symbolic order¨.[74] Similar to the construction of meaning in language where one category—syntagmatic—defines the groups or type of function of a unit of language, and the other, —paradigmatic—defines the order in which those units are placed to create a structure, "the two matrixes in weave is what

[72] Veronica del Rocio Sánchez "Significación del espacio y tiempo la memoria apropiada en el territorio: los diez barrios de la ciudad de San Pedro Cholula, Puebla" *Cuicuilco* 21 no. 61 (2014): 213 Quote Translated.
[73] Del Rocio Sánchez, Significación del espacio, 236.
[74] Claire Pajaczkowska, "Making Known: The Textiles Toolbox—Psychoanalysis of Nine Types of Textile Thinking," in *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, ed. Janis Jefferies, Diana Wood Conroy and Hazel Clark (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), 87.

allows the linearity of the thread to become the planar surface of the cloth".[75] Echoing this, pre-hispanic woven structures were never cut in the garment construction process due to the believe that it would cut the story that weave embodied.[76]

Although, archeological study often looks at monumental architecture to derive a sense of the pre-hispanic societies that built them, Cecelia Klein suggests that referring to textiles would probably provide a wider appreciation as they were experienced more on a daily basis by a greater number of people.[77] In her article, *Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos* she supports this by exploring how textile metaphors (fig. 9) aided in structuring the concepts of the Mayan universe. On the other hand, the materiality of crafting, meaning the actual technologies used, the social systems required to produced them, etc., provides the maker a sense of identity, as their body and self is shaped by this culturally charged practice.[78] For example, in Mayan culture girls were thought to developed the proper deportment as their bodies were shaped by the use of the backstrap loom.[79]

[75] Pajaczkowska, *Making Known*, 87.
[76] Carla Fernández, *The Barefoot Designer: A Handbook* (Mexico DF: National Council on Culture and the Arts, 2013), 50.
[77] Cecilia F. Klein, "Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 5 (1982): 29.
[78] Julia A. Hendon, "Textile Production as Craft in Mesoamerica," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 6, no.3 (2004): 356.
[79] Julia A. Hendon, "Textile Production as Craft in Mesoamerica," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 6, no.3 (2004): 357.

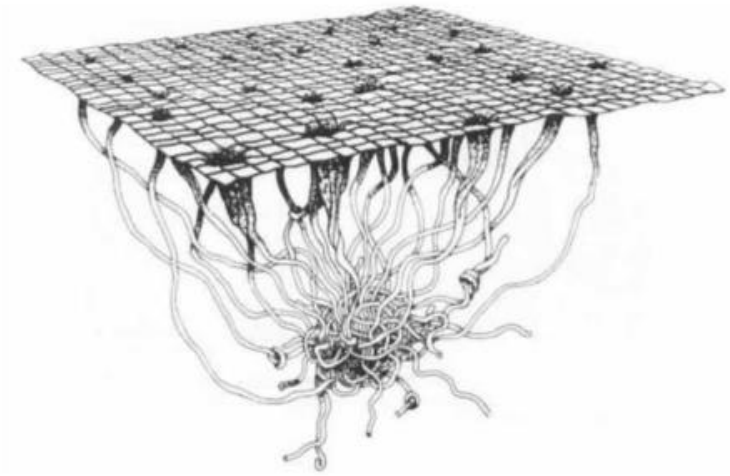

Fig. 9: The woven earth and the tangled underworld of the Mesoamerican cosmos: a model, Drawing by henry F. Klein. From Cecilia Klein´s article Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos

Made in 1581, the *relación geográfica* of Cholula (Fig. 10) depicts the area six decades after the Spanish arrival. As part of a corpus of maps produced by *tlacuilos*—indigenous scribe and questionnaires answered by Spanish authorities that responded to the crown's desire to 'see' its conquered lands, the *relación geografica* of Cholula illustrates how both the people and the space changed as the nature of their '*relación*' changed.[80]

[80] Translation: "Relationship"

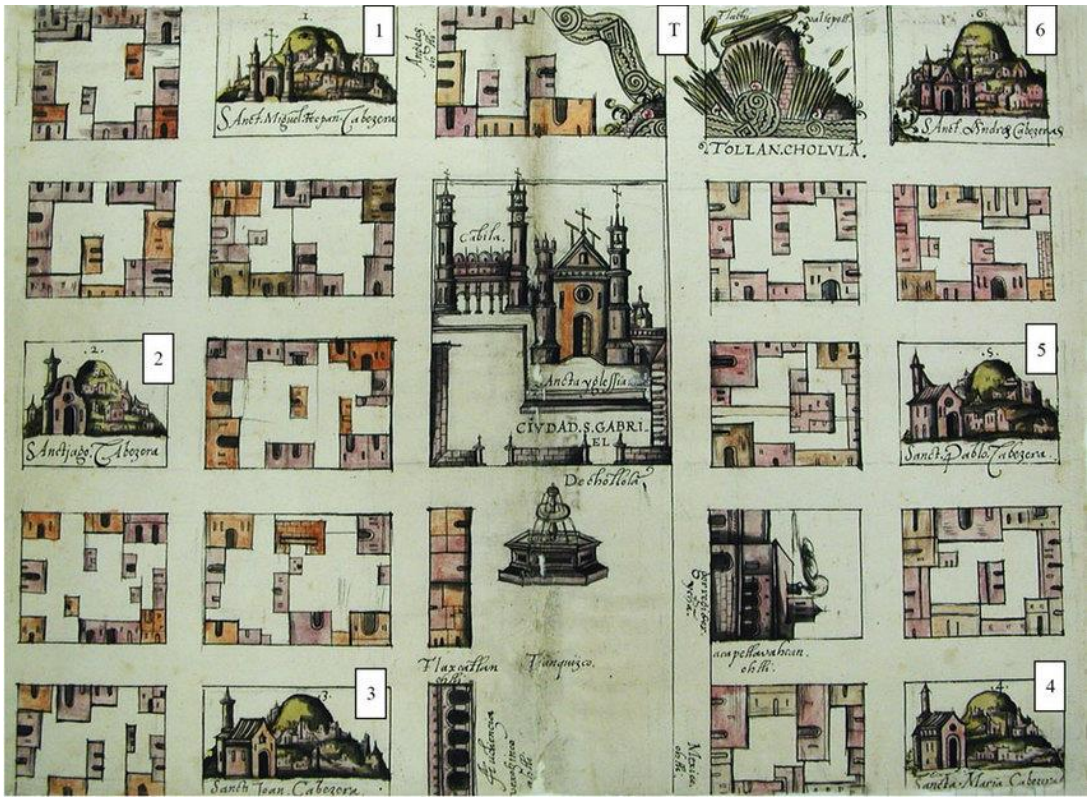

Fig. 10: Map of Relación Geográfica de Cholula, 1581. Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

Compared to a map included in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca (Fig. 11)—that exemplifies what Barbara Mundy terms social settlement map—where we see a self-contained circular space activated by human figures, the *relación geográfica* of Cholula is rather crossed by a grid.[81] Looking at the combination of the church and the grid in other *relaciones geográficas,* Dana Liebsohn argues that they rather become one symbol expressing the consciousness of a certain logic ruling the space.[82]

[81] Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 119.
[82] Dana Liebson, "Colony and Cartography: Shifting Signs on Indigenous Maps of New Spain" in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America* ed. Claire Farago (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1995).

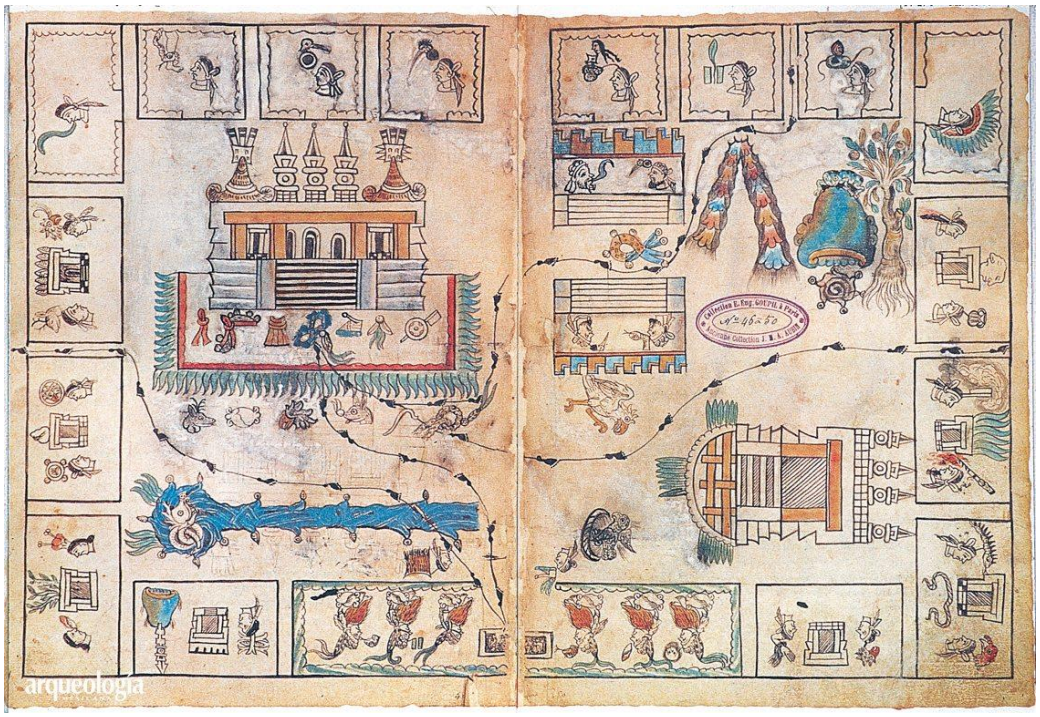

Fig. 11: Map, Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, folios. 26v y 27r.

After finding different types of spindle whorls indicating the practice of spinning cotton, ixtle and feathers anthropologists Sharisse D. and Geoffrey G. McCafferty support the notion of Cholula being a center for textile production.[83] Cholula was also a spiritual and pilgrimage center.[84] Therefore, textile practices probably went beyond being a commercial activity. If we consider that "*el espacio se conforma a partir de los roles, y éstos a su vez se ven conformados por el espacio*" the introduction of *labores mujeriles* constituted a practice that transformed the indigenous space.[85]Just as the artist of the *relación geográfica* of Cholula learned to see and conceive of space through a western perspective, *labores mujeriles* taught indigenous girls how

[83] Sharisse D. McCafferty and Geoffrey G. McCafferty, "Textile production in Post-classic Cholula, Mexico" *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11, no. 1 (2000).
[84] Alejandra Gamez Espinosa, "La ciudad dual de Cholula. Fronteras e identidades étnicas en conflicto" *Tefros* 15, no.2 (2017): 95-96, 102.
[85] Muxi, Mujeres, Casas y Ciudades, 23.

to inhabit it and reproduce it. In fact, after being educated by *maestras*, indigenous women found it hard to be accepted by the men in their communities as they held different customs.[86]

Although the prehispanic past is well, in the past, the collective memory of Cholula retains a strong sense of it. However, a conference given a few years ago by Manuel Tlatoa a well-respected and knowledgeable community member where he revisits Cholula´s massacre—happened in 1519—indicates that this sense is understood through their history as a conquered territory.[87] When referring to ethnicization, Alejandra Gamez Espinosa defines it as a process through which the links that a cultural community holds with its territory attenuate dissasociating the group either physically or symbolically from it, a process of deterritorialization. Since textile practices were linked physically and symbolically to the territory, the *dechado* of Isabel Tlachi attests to this process of deterritorialization.

The Indigenous in the Nation

The *dechado* of Isabel Tlachi was made in 1860, a year in which the war of Reform was waging in Mexico. Divided into the *liberales* and *conservadores*, political leaders differed in opinion about how and who should govern the country to ensure its order and well-being. As the aftermath of the independence movement, the mid-century years were characterized by political and economic instability, and by social and racial conflicts.[88] One notion that was held among

[86] Josefina Muriel, "Los colegios de la niñas indígenas en el siglo XVI" in *La Sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas. Tomo I. Fundaciones del Siglo XVI* (Mexico: UNAM; Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2007): 101.
[87] ¨Conferencia "La Matanza de Cholula", Youtube, last modified October, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zekHqKQD368
[88] Jaime Rodríguez, "La crisis de México en Siglo XIX," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporanea de México* Mexico: UNAM; Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 10 (1986): 85-107.

the Mexican elite class and therefore shared by the two opposing political forces was that the indigenous population were in need of being saved from themselves as they were thought to be 'savages' and 'uncivilized', as Romana Falcón tells us "*cuando Mexico alcanzó su indepencia sus gobernantes no se propusieron construir un país ajeno al modelo occidental*".[89] This brings us back to the explanation that Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez provide about how the hegemony of the western perspective established a century prior and makes us consider how it functioned to hide, dismiss and marginalize alternative ways of knowing and making during the next century.

Similar to the idea of the universes contained in textile practices, Xicotencátl points out that upon receiving a Christian name, people lost the universe that their original nahua names kept.[90] For her, indigenous last names provide a path down a history. In this way, what history can Tlachi tell us?

Since the city of Cholula preserved the base of the calpulli system, studying the origin of a last name means exploring the territory of the pre-hispanic ancestors. Although there are studies and information regarding nahua anthroponyms, it is less compared to toponyms. According to Xicotencátl the availability of information about toponyms derives from the creation of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografia* in 1833 and responded to the undertaking of the political division of the nation. [91] This is indicative of the nature of the national project, one that is not understanding the territory through its people and therefore perpetuates the deterritorialization of the communities from which these last names emerge.

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[89] Romana Falcón, *Las rasgaduras de la descolonización: españoles y mexicanos a mediados del siglo XIX* (El Colegio de México, 1996), 29 https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv3dnqtp.5

[90] Irma Xóchitl Cuahutémoc Xicoténcatl. *Nahuatocaitl. Apellidos Nahuas de Puebla* (Puebla México: Editorial Puente, 2018), 90.

[91] Xicoténcatl, Nahuatocaitl, 28.

The history of the city of Puebla is an example of this. Despite being founded with the intention to undermine the political power and therefore owing its origins to Cholula, Puebla's history is marked as beginning in 1531.[92] As the work of Hernández Flores and Martínez Corona points out, the area of Cholula endured the expansion of colonial Puebla resulting in a curtailing of its growth and the loss of thirty percent of the Cholulteca territory thus far.[93] If we take Xicotencátl's words and see last names functioning as maps, Tlachi is therefore mapping us a marginal space.[94]

[92] Xicoténcatl, Nahuatocaitl, 32.
[93] Hernández Flores and Martínez Corona, Disputas del territorio, 281.
[94] Xicoténcatl, Nahuatocaitl, 9.

CHAPTER IV

EMBROIDERING THE NATIONAL SPACE

Marginal Threads

Although not recent, it can be considered that the creation of the Mexican state occurred not too long ago. Nevertheless, sufficient time has passed to allow for questioning it. Despite that the nation-building effort of nineteenth century Mexico called for the participation of women, the greatest influences constituted the voices of writers such as Jose Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi and Jose Maria Heredia. The poem written by Heredia titled *El teocalli de Cholula* is an example of how the discourses surrounding the nation were founded upon an idea of a vast and empty land waiting for the author to inscribe history into it.[95] In this way, the *dechado* of Isabel Tlachi can be seen as both an expression of a marginal place within the national space and a resistance to this erasure.

In the previous chapter it was established that the surname of Tlachi maps a marginality. The asymmetric relationship that Cholula maintained with the colonial city of Puebla, contributed to contrasting realities. Made in 1851 in Puebla, the *dechado* of Maria de la Luz Eligia Álvarez (Fig. 11) broadens the panorama of the Mexican space and the understanding of Isabel's *dechado*. Seen next to each other, both *dechados* are similar in the way that they

[95] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 57.

include a band at the bottom of the piece. The shape of the flowers, the use of birds and the general style of the shapes within this band resemble each other. On the other hand, there is a difference in the fact that Maria's *dechado* alludes to a bourgeois space considering the carriage and the sense of leisure that the figures provide while Isabel´s is rather emphasizing motifs and design experimentation.

Fig. 12: Mexican *Dechado*, Maria de la Luz Eligia Álvarez, Mexico. 1851.

In order to delineate Cholula as a dual city—as two cultural groups have cohabited the space—Gámez Espinosa refers to the existence of borders. About this she explains how "the border separates, but at the same time unites; there cannot be a border if there is no one on the other side. For this reason, the border is fundamentally a cultural limit that defines an established identity, marks distinction of a group that recognizes itself and differentiates itself from others; therefore, the border delimits differentiated identities".[96] Given that it is impossible to determine

[96] Gámez Espinosa, La ciudad dual, 97. Translated quote.

from one example if all or even a compelling number of *dechados* made in Cholula had a similar style, the point of the comparison is not to attribute any specific stylistic characteristic to this area but rather to inquire whether it can map out a border between a space that is closer to an indigenous population and a center of Spanish influence.

A couple of *dechados* from the collection of the Cooper Hewitt (Fig. 12 & 13) may add to this comparison. Both made within the *Colegio de Puebla* a couple of years apart from Isabel's *dechado*, they epitomize the latest trends for women's education. In the case of Spanish *dechados*, foreign influences changed the geometric style to a figurative one which serves to understand these pieces as productions that were possibly closer and therefore nurtured by international currents.[97] These two pieces have the same format yet, differ in color selection and the type of flowers, highlighting the personality behind the model. In relation to Isabel's *dechado*, there is a difference in the embroidery technique used—which in turn influences style. Isabel's utilizes cross-stitch and the school *dechados* utilize primarily satin stitch.

Fig. 13: Mexican *Dechado*, Dolores Obando, Academia de Puebla, 1853, silk on linen, Cooper Hewitt Museum

[97] L. Segura Lacomba. Bordados Populares Españoles (Madrid, 1949).

Fig. 14: Mexican *Dechado*, Refugio Gavino, Academia de Puebla, 1852, silk on linen, Cooper Hewitt Museum

Given that these two pieces as well as Maria's can be linked to an urban context and therefore stand as expressions that correspond to a center of power, the question turns to whether Isabel's *dechado* is capturing the shapes of a marginal space. An aspect to note in Isabel's *dechado* is the use of cotton thread. Although, the base fabric is not specified, it is likely that it is cotton as well, usually a characteristic of indigenous *dechados*. Another aspect is that no human figures are included. In regard to the composition, with an exception of the bottom band, the space in Isabel's *dechado* is not sectioned. The border is embroidered which frames the space, enclosing it. Based on the image, the piece seems to be unfinished as some figures are incomplete but also because there are marks of figures that were not even started. The marks are positioned where if embroidered, the piece would have still retained sufficient negative space to keep its harmonious quality.

Colonial Threads

Mexican *dechados* provide an opportunity to explore the concept of Mexican identity given that they were mainly produced during the nineteenth century. However, another aspect and assumption—my assumption—that originated this exploration was that they seemed to incorporate both 'indigenous and European styles'. A look into Segura Lacomba's book on *Bordado Popular Español*, clarifies that the style of Isabel's *dechado* has a strong Spanish influence. According to an inventory she makes of the motifs found in the *bordado popular español*, we can identify *ramos* and *palmas* in Isabel's *dechado*.[98] It is interesting to note that *palmas* appear especially in the embroidery from the area of Cáceres, which is suggested to have a link with America.[99] On the other hand, *ramos* are described to have vases and to be angled as well. In this way, it can be suggested that Isabel's *dechado* has two ramos, the figure that rests on the bottom band of the piece and the figure stemming from its right corner. In *bordado popular español*, angled *ramos* (fig. 14) are usually used to decorate the corners of domestic textiles appearing in pairs. This is mirrored in Spanish *dechados magistrales* (fig. 15) yet changes in *borradores* (fig. 16) and *marcadores* where there is often only one *ramo*.[100] This is the case in Isabel's *dechado*, nevertheless the scale of the *ramo* is greater than the ones we see in Spanish *dechados*.

[98] Segura Lacomba, Bordado popular, 54, 56.
[99] Segura Lacomba, Bordado popular, 68.
[100] Segura Lacomba, Bordado popular. *Dechados magistrales* refer to pieces with an artistic emphasis, *dechados borradores* to pieces mainly to record and practice and *marcadores* to pieces including alphabets.

Fig. 15: Bed cover, Unknown, Spain, Photograph by Segura Lacomba.

Fig. 16: Spanish Dechado, Francisca Ryoja, 1785, Photograph by Segura Lacomba.

Fig. 17: Spanish *Dechado*, Unknown, Photograph by Segura Lacomba

The similarities in style are not limited to Spanish pieces. This German piece (fig. 17) from the Victoria and Albert museum is not too distant from Isabel's piece. This is due to the fact that Spanish embroidery work is influenced by Mozarabic style which reached various areas of Europe through the exchanged that occurred through the publication of pattern books. In addition to including a *ramo* similar to the one in Isabel´s *dechado,* this booklet of embroidery

(fig.18) from the Metropolitan Museum collection exalts the function of *dechados* as sources of reference, and above all as spaces to experiment and innovate.

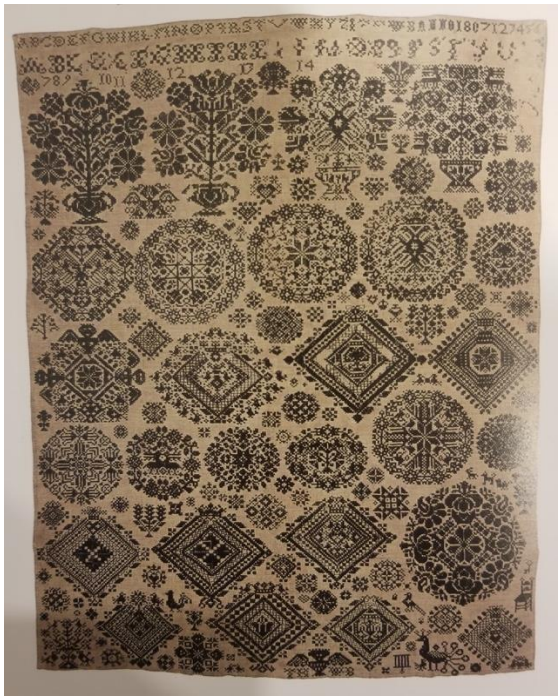

Fig. 18: German Sampler, Unknown, 1807, linen embroidered in cotton, 49.5 x 40, Victoria and Albert Museum

Fig. 19: Embroidery Booklet, Probably Portuguese, 1807, Metropolitan Museum of Art

After this analysis, it is clear that Isabel's *dechado* is an expression of a global exchange which challenges the assumption that Mexican *dechados* exhibit 'indigenous' styles. I suggest that this assumption is generated as a result of a resemblance with the textiles of indigenous communities in Mexico. Considering that "distinctive community styles were not a feature of pre-hispanic culture" and that instead appeared "during the colonial period as early as 1759" this points to an imaginary constructing the notion of 'indigenous' as something unchanging and completely autochthonous.[101]As well, this points to a limited appreciation and comprehension of the significance and history embedded in both *dechados* and the textiles and dress practices of indigenous communities.

Decolonial Threads

As mentioned in the introduction, Stuart Hall understands identity to be something unnatural but necessary for political purposes. This resonates with Elizabeth Brumfiel's suggestion that those distinctive community styles that developed during the colonial period may have done so as a way to claim access to community lands as competition increased.[102] Furthermore, Hall's explanation of how he uses the term of identity ¨to refer to the point of suture—a suture being a surgical union that is made with threads, staples, or other materials to close a wound or to join tissues or organs—calls upon the idea of utilizing stitches as a strategy to secure the body to a territory, to claim it politically through culture.[103]

[101] Elizabeth Brumfiel, "Cloth, gender, continuity and change: Fabricating unity in anthropology"*American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (2006): 868.
[102] Brumfiel, Cloth, gender, 868.
[103] Hall, Who needs, 5.

An important collection of *dechados* is found in the Museo Textil de Oaxaca. In 2015, the museum inaugurated an exhibit that linked *dechados* with textiles of indigenous communities. The curators of the exhibit identified four styles or characteristics in *dechados* that were mirrored in textile pieces. They identified pieces that preserve the selvedges of the fabric and also utilize the *hilván* stitch. Another style is the use of three stitches, cross-stitch, *lomillo* and *hilván*. A third is a type of work that resembles a brocading technique but instead consists of embroidered bands. And finally, they identified pieces that exhibited a compositional freedom in terms of scale and arrangement, embroidering in cross-stitch and *lomillo* free flowing figures disregarding proportions.[104]

In addition to drawing connections between *dechados* and textiles, the curators propose that there was a Nahuatl term that functioned as an equivalent to the term *dechados.* Used in phrases by the elderly, 'machiyōtl' approaches the meaning of *dechado* by implying "a design: art, sensibility, sophistication".[105] The difference between *dechado* and *machiyōtl* is that the former is more closely related to '*ejemplar*', '*dictado*', whereas the latter translates more accurately to '*seña de conocimiento*'.[106] Despite the similarity, these terms arise from different epistemological contexts and therefore denote different textile universes. This in turn suggests that the *dechados* from indigenous communities embody fractures while at the same time a labor of continuity, as they provided a source of new possibilities.

Dechados were a fundamental source of design for new styles of garments—like *huipiles, quesquemeles, blusas*—and textiles that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century.[107]

[104] De Ávila Blomberg, *In octacatl*, 27.
[105] De Ávila Blomberg, *In octacatl*, 10.
[106] De Ávila Blomberg, *In octacatl*, 11.
[107] De Ávila Blomberg, *In octacatl*.

For this reason, the similarity between Isabel's *dechado* and a *blusa* from Hueyapan Puebla (fig. 19) stands out.

Fig. 20: *Blusa,* Hueyapan Puebla, c. 1980, Photograph by Unhuipil_aldia

As we already know, the practice of *dechados* in nineteenth century Mexico was inserted in an agenda that sought to place women within the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, by producing and wearing garments such as Hueyapan's *blusa* women not only made themselves present in the public sphere but also modified it benefitting their communities by providing them with a strategy for identification. During a conversation with Xóchitl Xicotencátl, she mentioned that she knows someone from the area of Puebla whose family preserves something may meet the characteristics of a *dechado*. However, when referring to it, she emphasized it as something that was kept for the knowledge of future generations. Considering this, it is possible to think of Isabel's *dechado* as not only a statement of her virtues, but also as an aid to craft and reproduce the territory of their communities?

An online search of Hueyapan Puebla will yield images of its streets and architecture, but also—and in great number—of its textiles. Furthermore, the search will bring up a work by

Carlos Mérida, titled ‘Hueyapan, Puebla’ (fig. 20), this painting belonging to the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago places a woman and a child against a blank background. Holding hands, the two figures transform the space of the canvas into a reference of a place, stitching and crafting the territory of their communities. Since a place is denoted through culture, this painting illustrates how indigenous women create cultural ties that generate a sense of identity that transcends national borders.

Fig. 21: Hueyapan of the State of Puebla, Carlos Merida, 1941, gouache and graphite, Art Institute of Chicago

In her article examining the concept of citizenship in the nineteenth century, Azucena Rodríguez Ousset points out in Lizardi’s novel Periquillo y Sarmiento how an old indigenous woman assists the main character by giving him *atole* and hot tortillas.[108] This reveals a

[108] Azucena Rodriguez Ousset, “Imágenes de la ciudadania en la literature Mexicana del siglo XIX: Rupturas y continuidades¨ in *Educación y Ciudadanía. Miradas Múltiples*, ed. Inés Castro (Mexico: UNAM 2006): 60.

perspective that understands indigenous women as procuring the comfort and grounding the citizen subject. They infuse the national space with meaning, produce a cultural landscape, frame a beautiful vision, yet their voices, and experiences remain at the margins. Perhaps the Mexican term *malinchista* is an example of how this erasure continues at the core of national production. Zaida Muxi asks, why is it so difficult to find the names of women commemorating streets or public spaces, being a practice that helps to create historical consciousness?[109] We know now—her work tells us—that it is because the public domain has historically restricted access to women and thus history functions to erase them. Finding the name of an indigenous woman stitched on a *dechado* implies a double challenge to historical consciousness, implies coming across with the trace of an intersectional experience.

Despite being at the margins of citizenship, the women of nineteenth century Mexico had an active role in providing the new nation with continuity, a civic role that is not recognized by the discourses and imaginaries constructing the national space.[110] Instead of conceiving of an empty land, the works of authors such as Avellaneda—Heredia's student—saw it as full of history, of memories inscribed in the body.[111] The study of nineteenth century Mexican *dechados* bring us closer to these types of histories and logics and therefore open up new possibilities for future ways of producing the nation. Isabel's *dechado* like many others made by indigenous women open up the door to a new Mexican foundational imaginary, one that sees Malinche not

[109] Muxi, Mujeres, Casas y Ciudades, 20.
[110] Pratt, Las mujeres y el imaginario, 57.
[111] Pratt, Las Mujeres y el imaginario, 57.

in relation to either Cortés or Moctezuma, but by virtue of her own decisions and creativity to continue—despite of her circumstances—giving birth to a new place called Mexico.[112]

[112] Deena J. González "Malinche Triangulated, Historically Speaking" in *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*, ed. Rolando Romero and Amanda Nolacea Harris (Houston: Arte Público Press 2005): 10.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Mexican *dechados* draw attention as pieces that are easily appreciated. Nevertheless, probably misunderstood. Although, I inferred from my background in gender studies their significance, my initial acquaintance with *dechados* proved difficult beyond the surface. Without much knowledge of the techniques they display, it is difficult to imagine how they reflect the lives and experiences of their makers. Mexican *dechados* constitute political spaces because they embody women's response to their placement in society and history.

Samplers and *dechados* correspond to femenine spaces. These spaces were built and ruled by men. These spaces have marginalized women by restricting their access to speech, to producing ideas, in a world that operates mainly in that dimension. These spaces generate roles, which imply and generate ways of knowing and acting. This is how women have developed an alternative perspective and reality of that they have not postulated within the canons that dictate our way of thinking, discerning feeling, perceiving and being. On the other hand, as these western technologies of gender are transferred to other cultural contexts, their spatial implications disconnect bodies from their cultural universe.

To examine these pieces is to face a complex world, to enter a textile dimension. It is to think of space from the inside out. Questions regarding Mexican identity continue to be latent today. Emerging designers encounter complex debates when they are asked to think of

themselves as Mexican designers.[113] The so-called Latin American countries and their corresponding material production are in the best position to question hegemonic terms, the structures they generate and their consequences. For example, considering the term 'fashion' itself could help us understand how it functions to condition bodies and also the environment. Mexican *dechados* open feminine spaces, a necessary movement to build new spaces based on new social dynamics, allowing not only a better future, but the mere possibility of one.

[113] Gustavo Prado, *Mextilo. Memoria de la Moda Mexicana* (Mexico City: Trendo.mx, 2017), 30, https://www.trendo.mx/mextilo.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Regina Perez Kamel was born in Mexico City. At the age of three, she moved to Villahermosa, Tabasco located in the south of Mexico, and eleven years later moved again to the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas. She completed her Bachelor's in Fine Arts (BFA) with a double major in Studio Art and Philosophy and minor in French Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2016. In August 2021 she received her Master´s in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus in Art History (MAIS) at the same institution. Her other two areas of study were Anthropology and Mexican American Studies. After her master's degree she seeks to continue down the path of textile design and research through the lenses of gender, culture and sustainability. Her email is regina.perezj08@gmail.com