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Visions of Mary: Patria as the New Mestiza Madonna

in Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies*

Mila Argueta

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Visions of Mary: Patria as the New Mestiza Madonna in Alvarez’s In the Time of the Butterflies

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Alvarez’s In the Time of the Butterflies is a fictional depiction of three sisters who are lauded for their role in ending the supremacist, womanizing, and terror-inspiring reign of Trujillo. While, one character, Patria, seems to represent the traditional, and at times cloistered, life of a Dominican wife and mother (reflecting the Malinche and sufrida archetypes), the text also shows her transformation into one of the most vital figureheads of the revolution. I find that when she joins the revolution, she comes as a transformed Marian-figure. Unlike Ibez Gomez Vega and other feminist scholars who have categorized Patria as one torn between two ways and who chooses to replace the old ways with new ways, I argue that Patria finds a way to live pluralistically, as she inhabits the role of a revolutionized and evolved Madonna whom Gloria Anzaldua would refer to as a “new mestiza.” This term changes its Aztec root “mestiza,” meaning torn between ways into, a new mestiza who “copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, [who] operates in a pluralistic mode–nothing is thrust out…nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (100-101). In doing so, she reconstructs a Marian identity by returning to the Marian and Indigenous Goddess figures whose sexuality and equality with God have been buried by centuries of patriarchal and colonial fathers. This thesis demonstrates that Patria does not have to face the rigidity of certain feminist and secular standards. As a new mestiza, Patria can live beyond the rigidity of borders, and create something new, something that is truly Patria, out of womanhood.

Keywords: Mestiza, Marian Figure, Patria Mirabal
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I believe that in writing a paper about powerful and religious mothers, I should first thank those whose lives demonstrated that motherhood and equality were not yet friendly terms. My Guatemalan and European family matriarchal lines have had an abundance of strength and resilience without always receiving the acknowledgment, admiration, and equality in those roles of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and women. They teach me that we must draw out the strength of those matrilineal roots, those goddess powers, and unbury them from the centuries of machismo and patriarchal rot. Part of finding Patria was discovering that mothers, in whatever form, especially BIPOC mothers, should be respected for their cultural love of family and religion. Too often scholarship has seemed to tear their identities apart, forcing them to decide between a binary of constructed choices. I hope this thesis honors women like Patria and my mothers who shouldn’t have to make that choice, but who, with their creative powers, can determine, refashion, refurbish, and recreate religious motherhood.

In addition to these more general thanks, I would like to thank those who participated individually in the construction of this thesis. While I wrote this thesis at BYU, I could not have framed this intersectional understanding without a professor at BYU-Idaho, Quinn Grover, who introduced me to a scholar named Gloria Anzaldúa. He shared Anzaldúa’s scholarship on borders not as part of his curriculum, but to respond to my quest for identity and to help me pave the way to personalize my scholarship.

That guidance would have withered away at BYU had I not been encouraged by my chair, Mike Taylor, to pursue Latinx studies regardless of the constraints and difficulties I might face in a limited Latinx curriculum, limited multicultural experience, and limited Latinx leadership at BYU. Mike Taylor is the reason so many students have been able to come to terms
with past and present injustices as they learn to understand and have pride in their multicultural heritage. So many students admire him and have been blessed by his mentorship. I knew that I would need his encouragement and patience as I formed my committee. In creating my committee, I knew I wanted women on the committee. Too many committees on female-centered studies have lacked the voice of female scholars, and I did not want to perpetuate that mistake. But in addition to presence and voice, I am grateful for Jarica Watts’s example as an exemplary female scholar and mother who taught me so much about matricentric feminism and the power of mothers through the pages of the mother of Modernism: Virginia Woolf. It was her class and her questions that made me so excited to find out what Patria was teaching me. It would have been impossible to confidently write this thesis without her guidance and questions. And I must thank my other guide, David-James Gonzales, who was the first professor I talked to at BYU who could truly relate to and understand my experience as a multiracial student and scholar at BYU. His classes were filled with students of color who shared so much wisdom with me through his insightful and encouraging facilitation. I have not ever been a part of such a welcoming and insightful space throughout my time in academia. It made me see the power of diversifying our student population and faculty. He gave me the literature and tools to understand Patria from a historical, religious, and cultural standpoint.

Finally, I would like to thank my God and my religious upbringing. It was in Professor Gonzales’s class that I read *Brown Church* and realized the absolute necessity of religion and religious activism in academia. I know my Heavenly Father and my exemplar Christ are with me as I understand the power of mothers and women within the literature. I know they created me with the same strength power and devotion that Patria demonstrates in *In the Time of the*
Butterflies. It was the Holy Ghost sent by them that enabled me to persist and understand what I needed to write and research in order to pursue and establish truth within this thesis.
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Introduction

The Mirabal sisters are a larger-than-life trio, lauded by Dominicans around the world for their pivotal role in the Dominican underground revolution which deposed the dictator, President Trujillo, and ended his chokehold over the country from 1930 to 1961. This huge undertaking is present in Julia Alvarez’s 1994 novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, a historical fiction narrative that presents these revolutionary sisters as more than just legends; they become exemplary political leaders, mothers, daughters, and lovers. Of all the sisters, scholars usually laud Minerva—the second youngest—as the leader and true revolutionary among the three. Even Alvarez’s Trujillo is quoted to claim that “Minerva Mirabal was the brain of the whole operation” (Alvarez 232). Her sister, Patria, on the other hand, only seems to represent the traditional life of a wife and mother in a mid-twentieth century Dominican Republic, a woman who remains hesitant to prioritize anything above her domestic duties. She describes herself entrenched in the role of domesticity by stating, “At sixteen I married Pedrito Gonzalez…And I, Patria Mercedes? Like every woman of her house, I disappeared into what I loved, coming up now and then for air” (Alvarez 148). And initially, she finds it inappropriate for a woman to involve herself with politics, for “It’s a dirty business, you’re right. That’s why we women shouldn’t get involved” (Alvarez 51). She was completely willing to fall in line with the roles and limitations that had been given to her as a Dominican Catholic woman. This state of being is where Ibis Gomez Vega begins her analysis in her article, “Radicalizing Good Catholic Girls: Shattering the ‘Old World’ Order in Julia Álvarez’s ‘In the Time of the Butterflies.’” She describes the sisters’ pre-revolution as “traditional upperclass Dominicans who are also good Catholics, devout, the kind of women who do not question the status quo and ask their father's permission to attend the university. Throughout the novel, Alvarez documents, methodically, the sisters' dedication to their religion, their families, and the traditional, albeit patriarchal,
Dominican way of life” (94). Yet, Alvarez also shows Patria’s transformation into one of the most vital figureheads of the revolution. Unlike Minerva, Patria is late in coming to the revolution, but when she enters, she comes as a transformed Mary figure, a revolutionary mother whose sexuality, politics, and submissive attitude come to evolve and expand beyond the whore/virgin, Catholic/communist, and suffrida/feminist dichotomies. Although it is her plan to remain within the confines of domesticity, Patria comes to mirror Mary’s Latin American revolution from cloistered sufrida and Malinche to a glorious mestiza mother as she is immaculately conceived, receives a calling to demanding responsibilities, and cries out the Magnificat. These Marian processes reveal and emphasize the virgin and Patria’s ultimate role as powerful mothers who maintain a strong connection to home and family, virtue and religion, while also revolutionizing sexuality, class distinctions, machismo culture, and religious participation within political struggles.

Patria resembles Mary in visage, character, and motherhood. In the earliest-known descriptions of the Madonna, Epiphanius the Monk described Mary’s physical features as, “A light complexion, light brown hair and eyes, black eyebrows, a straight nose, a long face and long hands and fingers” (Gambero 42). Additionally, in traditional artistic representations of Mary physical features, some show her with “erect nipples that echo the upward tilt of the Virgin’s glance” (Leith 7). Likewise, Patria, a wealthy Dominican, describes her reflection in the mirror as a “young lady with high firm breasts and a sweet oval face” and with “dark, humid eyes full of yearning” (Alvarez 45). Not only does Alvarez describe Patria similarly to the physical representations of the young Mary, but she is also referred to as a holy child, recalling the details of the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Conception is the doctrinal belief that Mary was conceived not in sin, but in a purity free of even original sin (Leith
4). Patria similarly is described as a child who was “already the way we were here to become” and “no one had to tell [her] to believe in God or to love anything that lives” (Alvarez 44,45). As a child with an “immortal soul” she was “sweet” and “always her religion was so important” (Alvarez 45, 6). She is like the biblical Mary in Luke chapter 1: an obedient “handmaid,” “favored of the Lord,” and “blessed… among women” (1.28,38).

Finally, Alvarez’s Patria is truest to Mary’s central role as a mother. In her short introduction to the Virgin Mary, Mary Joan Winn Leith describes that Mary’s role as a mother is her signature role (6). This is why Patria’s most prevalent descriptions tend to revolve around her maternal characteristics. Minerva says of her, “Always the mother, that one” (Alvarez 97). All of her home region, San Jose Conuco and Ojo de Agua perceive her as “a model Catholic wife and mother” (Alvarez 54-55). This Mary-Patria connection is most significant in Mary’s motherly ties to a sacrificial and redemptive son and Patria’s almost parallel relationship with her son Nelson. He “nails” her to “hard facts” (Alvarez 150). Hard facts that she, like Mary, “had to let him go, but it broke her heart because, though he was God, He was still her boy” (Alvarez 154). A boy, like Jesus, saved from Herod, saved from SIM who “were dragging young men off the streets, and farms, and from offices, like Herod the boy babies in all of Judea,” but only saved like Jesus, to join the revolution as a “firstborn” a “little ram,” which like in Abraham and Isaac’s sacrifice, was sacrificed for the salvation of others (Alvarez 153, 220). Again, although Alvarez makes no explicit connection between Patria and the embodiment of the Madonna, Patria’s characteristics closely parallel Mary’s to demonstrate that the reader should see more than just a physical and familial connection. Patria does not just resemble Mary, she becomes like Mary in her role as revolutionary mother with controversial sexual and domestic roles which
will leave an immense impact on Dominican and international societies’ understanding of the virgin’s role and the role of the women she overshadows.

The question, then, is why Mary? When so much has been said about feminism, sexual freedom, and liberation theology *In the Time of the Butterflies*, why add a symbolic Mary to the conversation? For example, Holly Blackford has already associated Patria with the expansion of female roles in the church through Patria’s use of feminist theology. Daren Broome has discussed the sisters’ sexual liberation and self-determination. Bridget Kevane has shown that Patria is the novel’s way to introduce Matthew’s liberation theology and the ability for religion to fuel rather than smother a revolution. But while Mary operates in similar ways to the present scholarship—she is nuanced and revolutionary in her sexual, religious, classless, and liberatory identity—it is her capacity to hold these traits and their dualities at once that makes her truly transcendent. This transcendence of contradictions, this blending of plurality into a new creature, is true for Patria as well.

Patria holds a more complicated and telling role than what has already been discussed in that she is capable of maintaining plural and seemingly contradictory identities. For example, while Ibez Gomez Vega outlines a fresh view of how the sisters transcend gender and cultural roles through revolutionary Catholic language, Gomez Vega maintains rather than complicates the binaries in motherhood and revolution, romance and rebellion, or the “tyrannical” Dominican man and the “new” Dominican Woman, arguing that one cannot exist if the other remains: “Replacing the old world order with a better world is precisely what the Mirabal sisters are attempting to do in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*” (97). According to Gomez, the old world must be replaced; it cannot inhabit the same space as the new. For this reason, Gomez
finds that religiosity is only attributed to the language of the new revolution because it is the only language and paradigm that the sisters are fluent in. It is a means rather than an end.

In response to Gomez and other feminist scholars who have categorized Patria as torn between two ways and as one who would replace the old ways with new ways, I argue that as Patria is transformed into a new Mary, she finds a way to live pluralistically, as she inhabits the role of the “new mestiza.” This duality and ability for opposing positions to inhabit the same place hearken to Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera the New Mestiza*. In some ways, Gomez’s findings parallel Anzaldua’s belief in a cultural collision that occurs in the body of one who is born of two contrasting identities. Anzaldua finds that this creates un choque, that “The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of references causes un choque, a cultural collision” (100). Anzaldua claims that in this collision, the self has a choice of which bank they will stand on, and whether the self will expel the oppressor-identity or not, but, she says, there is another choice as well. This new possibility is what Anzaldua calls the new mestiza. This term changes its Aztec root “mestiza,” meaning torn between ways into, a new mixture, which Anzaldua explains is a new mestiza who “copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity…she operates in a pluralistic mode–nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (100-101). Through immaculate conception, the Marian call, and the Magnificat, Patria not only inhabits the role of Madonna in the novel, but she creates a new identity, a Mary like unto the “transcultural” phenomenon that exists in Latin America today (Leith). Like Mary, Patria a new mestiza, finds a way to keep all opposing identities together. And in so doing, Patria is free to choose her own path, a path that suits her desires more perfectly. She does not cater to the church’s strict
patriarchal role that could pressure some women in a corner, creating a forced isolation into domesticity and toxic purity, but she also does not cater to some feminists who would look disdainfully at motherhood and family life. She is able then to be a Dominican woman who holds on to important foundations of culture, church and family, but who is also able fully access her sexual and political strengths and capacities.

It is in the tension between Mary as a submissive historical figure and Patria’s evolution as a Marian representative, that we see a deeper and more powerful argument that cultural and traditional foundations can be combined with the progress of modernity. This evolution happens as Patria, like the Virgin, is immaculately conceived and receives a calling which she follows with a moment of Magnificat. Through this process, Alvarez shows Patria to be a new Marian mestiza who becomes new not by doing away with the old but by following Christ’s promise in Matthew chapter 5, “I am not come to destroy but to fulfill” (5.17). Instead, like the transformative Christ of Corinthians chapter 5, Patria becomes “a new creature” where “all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5.17).

This evolution into a Marian mestiza is especially dramatized as Patria goes on a retreat to the motherhouse. In order, to protect herself from the explosions sounding around them as Trujillo’s forces attack the rebels in the hills, Patria recalls, “I scrambled to a little niche where a statue of the Virgencita was standing, and begging her pardon, I knocked her and her pedestal over” (Alvarez 161). Recognize that Patria is almost dethroning, the colonial image of Mary. These movements mirror in reverse the actions Spaniard conquistadors took as they entered and desecrated Indigenous sacred spaces. Spanish conquistadors would destroy what they saw as pagan temples and replace stone gods with statues of Mary. In other words, they would attempt to “Christianize pagan customs and temples” (Gebara et al. 132). By doing so they imposed an
ostensibly more civilized and purer Madonna to counteract and denigrate “her sexually liberated indigenous predecessors who were associated with dangerous spirituality” (Gil 11). Andres Gonzales Guerrero Jr. states that in these moves “the dominant theology left out those oppressed. Instead, it addressed the needs of the oppressor and colonizer” (102-103). Alvarez, however, complicates this when Patria completes her move into the niche after toppling the statue. She continues her recollection by chronicling: “Then I crawled in and held my folding chair in front of me, closing the opening, and praying all the while that the Lord not test me with the loss of my child” (Alvarez 161). Patria is not destroying the Madonna and leaving the space empty, instead, she is placing herself within the sacred space. Rather than the colonized Madonna, whose church has remained submissive to the regime up to this point, the people receive Patria, she who maintains her religiosity and commitment to Catholicism while also leaving that scene as the mother of rebel martyrs, the mother of the communist revolution.

The novel here produces what Chicanas have been attempting for years. Chicanas have been returning to “repressed mother goddesses in order to recuperate the symbolic social power embedded in feminine archetypal figures (Alcala 2). In her article, “Virgins, Martyrs and Whores: Mexican Cultural Icons of Womanhood in Chicana Literature,” Rita Alcala responds to the attempts made by Chicana scholars and authors by asking “Why bother with these symbols at all, why not reject them entirely?” (Alcala 5). Alcala’s article responds by finding that, “The answer to that question is that we cannot escape the archetypal patterns that shape our way of perceiving and telling about the world, and these symbols, or archetypes, will surface in one shape, by one name, or another. Since they are all constructed symbols, we can deconstruct and reconstruct them creatively” (Alcala 5). And Mary, like many women, has much to be
deconstructed. In many ways, Patria embodies both the destruction and creative reconstruction of the Euro-western traditional Mary.

Some scholars would describe the more negative cultural construct of Catholic domesticity as Marianism. Marianism follows Mary as an eager submitter to God’s will. But in the absence of God, a woman eagerly submits to her husband and patriarchal culture. This system requires Latin women to see their role as sacred, self-sacrificing, and impeccably pure. Women in this system “live in the shadows” and become “another side to the coin machismo” or “the mortar of holding antiquated cultural structures firmly in place” (Gil and Vazquez 6). They live in a system of antiquated ten commandments that forbid them from forgetting their place, deserting their traditions, remaining single or independent, prioritizing themselves, wishing for a role other than a housewife, using sex for pleasure, being less than happy if a husband is unfaithful or abusive or unwise with his money, asking for help, airing out their dirty laundry, changing things that make them unhappy (Gil 5). This system leads to syncretic versions of Mary to hold colonized women to higher and impossible standards. Mary becomes a version of sexual and selfless perfection that is very hard for any mortal woman to maintain. And when this standard isn’t reached, when a woman is sexually active or independent, they are seen as Malinches, or as a woman who is considered a traitor to culture and her people (Alcalá 8). In a sense, these women must become Marian-like martyrs and see submission and shame as a virtue (Gil 43). And this affects women throughout the generations. As Norma Alarcon puts it, “the forced disappearance of the Mother/Goddess leads to the daughter's own abjection. The daughter is doomed to repeat the cycle until the ancient powers of the goddess are restored” (80). This is what Alvarez is facing as she writes of the toppling of the Madonna and establishes a new evolution in Patria.
This evolution must take the “traditional interpretations—be they historical or religious, anthropological or sociological, literary or scientific…[and] re-image these symbols into models of feminine strength and independence” (Alcala 102). Mary should no longer be seen as a player in colonialism, serving as the flag for Cortez, but be recast as Maurice Hamington suggests that we “not only [mitigate] Marian alienation but [return] Mary to a spiritual source of strength and empowerment” and that Mary should be a “reflection of women’s experience and… should speak to a “greater plurality of women” (171). I would argue that attention to a woman’s true complex experience and greater plurality is why Patria’s evolution into a modern mestiza Mary figure is so monumental. She decolonizes a powerful symbol and empowers all women. Alvarez explicitly lays out this attempt as she claims, “Obviously, these sisters, who fought one tyrant, have served as models for women fighting against injustices of all kinds” (Broome 15). A tyrant Patria saw as the devil himself. Patria says of Trujillo, “Maybe the evil one had become flesh like Jesus!” (Alvarez 224). So, Patria, as a new Mary, works not only against the devil himself, Trujillo, but against all he stands for: machismo, rape and abuse, womanizing, and colonialism. And Patria does so as one who both a mother and one who has “the ability to challenge traditional roles as mother and wife” (Broome 16). Her re-imagination happens through several evolutions that allow Patria to inhabit and champion a newly constructed and mestiza Marian figure full of complexity and nuance.

This evolution hearkens to Bridget Kevanes' argument that Patria experiences a revolution as she becomes a follower of Matthew’s New Testament liberation theology. While Patria’s revolution encompasses more than the vital role of the church in insurgences, aspects of Kevane’s argument are good foundational perspectives for Patria’s own “revolution.” First, Kevane names Patria’s evolution as a “spiritual revolution” rather than a “spiritual
transformation” (77). Her first explanation of this distinction follows what Patria’s Marian revolution will entail. Kevane explains, “First Alvarez describes Patria Mirabal’s religious crisis as one in which God performs many spiritual revolutions on her” (77). God was going to change or dethrone Patria’s less Christlike qualities in order that she would be prepared to dethrone Trujillo. Likewise, Patria revolts against the totality of conservative and traditional opinions of Mary and becomes a Mary who can bring salvation to her land, to her gender, and to her role as a mother by adopting a new progressive identity while still embracing the best of the old. This revolution happens in a multiple-step process. Like Kevane, I believe that Patria experiences a sequence of revolutionary experiences. Specifically, Kevane ties Patria’s journey to three Matthew liberational scriptures: the pearl of great price, building a house on a rock, and a bearable cross (Kevane 82). But, again, unlike Kevane, I do not use biblical references to “equate the religious to the political” (Kevane 82). Rather, I believe Patria’s role is much more expansive. So, while I tie her transfiguration to the three Marian experiences formerly presented—Immaculate Conception, the calling, and the Magnificat, I find that these events show that Patria’s role is more than just representative of the church, Patria grows to maintain and promote a plurality of gender expectations, the value of motherhood, and the embrace of all classes or ethnicities through new politics.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION: THE BIRTH OF A POLITICAL AND “SEXY” MAMA

Alvarez’s Patria, like the traditional Mary, was conceived as a pure soul ready to return to heaven, but the Patria which becomes a Marian mestiza is conceived in very different circumstances and with contrasting results. Mention of the Immaculate Conception and Patria’s tie to this type of birth is throughout the novel, but while it is copious it is also subtle. Although subtle, it is telling that the novel’s beginning surrounds a decision of whether or not the future
Mariposas will attend a Catholic school named “Inmaculada Concepción.” Here, then, the book begins with the immaculate birth of three revolutionaries whose political, religious, and academic birth is produced by women alone, specifically “holy” women (nuns). While it is a description of Minerva’s experience at Inmaculada Concepcion, Steve Criniti’s article discussing the sisters’ impact on North American memory, relates, “she was not only freed from her father’s patriarchal household, but she also experiences a kind of intellectual freedom that results from having seen governmental oppression firsthand” (Criniti 52). Where this state of being has more of an immediate impact on Minerva who later will influence and convert the whole family, it cannot be ignored by Patria, and causes her eyes to be open and places her in the center of the political scene, a scene Kevane writes as a “hotbed of political activity” and “a site of religious and social contestation for Patria and Minerva” (81). This is where her first calling comes before she retreats back to the imagined separation between domesticity and politics. She retreats to this domesticity until she realizes that tradition and home are not free of Trujillo and all he represents. His eyes, ears, and hands touched everything.

In addition to birthing women prepared for politics and activism, this type of conception deviates from the image of the impossibly pure virgen by having Patria experience strong sexual pulls and a refusal of the virgin life of a nun covenanted to God that would produce purity and submissiveness. But even as Inmaculada Concepcion produces a sexual “deviant” in Patria, this deviant leaves because she is called to be a wife and mother—a Marian figure who chooses to become a domestic housewife with a high sex drive. She describes this duality herself, as she tells the history of domesticity: “At sixteen I married Pedrito Gonzalez…And I, Patria Mercedes? Like every woman of her house, I disappeared into what I loved, coming up now and then for air” (Alvarez 148). She then consistently shares the intense sexual exploits within their
marriage: “Every night I gave him my milk…and afterwards I let him do things I never would have before…Then I was the one on horseback, riding him hard and fast” (Alvarez 95). Perhaps this is not a deviancy, but rather a reversal to an image of Mary before she was colonized and reimagined by the patriarchal church fathers. For “Medieval gynaecology also taught that to conceive a child, the woman must experience an orgasm” (Leith 107). As Leith explains, “medieval authors did not shy away from imagining Mary’s ecstasy at the Annunciation” (108). This was in opposition to Thomas Aquinas who insisted that “Mary’s menstrual blood was unsullied by any of the sin-laden lust that normally fuelled orgasmic conception” (Leith 107-108). But here again, is Patria experiencing ecstasy as she has sex with her husband, she “lusts” after him, as he “lusts” after her. This is demonstrated in her claim that she rode him like a horse (95).

Likewise, Mary’s sexuality was not just demonstrated to birth babies, but it included pleasure and power as well. Early church pilgrims believed that Mary’s breasts “betokened Mary’s power of intercession: because Jesus drew life from Mary’s breasts, he could not deny her requests” and so “pilgrims flocked from all over Europe” to Marian shrines like the “great English Marian pilgrimage shrine of Walishingham, whose high altar was crowned by a vial of Mary’s milk” (Leith 10-11). Similarly, Patria gives strength to her husband in the loss of their child and in the sustaining of their “patria” or homeland. And similarly, Patria is able to call those who are blessed by her resources and leadership, especially her hesitant husband, to join the revolution just as Moses led the people through the Red Sea (Alvarez 165). Patria then represents a reconstruction of Mary before her powers were diminished by traditions that “replaced the comparatively free-wheeling and assertive Mary of medieval-Renaissance” with a
“more dignified Virgin” whose “standards of dignity and decorum effectively erased Mary’s relation to physical motherhood” (Leith 127).

But Patria helps us remember the women of the bible, Mary, Tamar, Sarah, or Elizabeth, who “despite engaging in seemingly irregular sexual activity, [are] revealed to have acted according to God’s divine plan.” Their actions show “the ‘scandal’ of the Gospel, that with Christ, established conventions” like Dominican or international machismo and patriarchal and colonized cultures, which would maintain a “political and social status quo—are set aside; God’s plan surpasses human assumptions” (Leith 25). Hence, Patria as a portrayal of these new reconstructions that would surpass human constructs of the past, joins the pattern of recreating old and modern Marian figures produced and promoted by various Latina authors. Carmen M. del Rio traces this revision of the Virgin and, in a brief example of Sandra Cisneros’s “Lupe,” demonstrates how such revisions create a Virgen Guadalupe who “like her Aztec twin the goddess Tlazolteotl, [can] sustain the ‘duality of maternity and sexuality. In other words, she is a sexy mama” (19). Patria is a domestic mother who has sex to have children, who has sex to grieve, who has sex to demonstrate passion, and who sees her body as sexual but not corrupt. Purity is no longer tied then to sexual abstinence.

THE CALLING: A MADONNA OF THE PEOPLE

Such tension also follows Patria within the second phase of Marian’s transfiguration: the call and Magnificat. While there is a call mentioned in Patria's decision to become a nun or not, the call to be a mother of the nation is a more significant extension of that initial guidance. It demonstrates Patria’s eventual understanding that she cannot retreat to isolated domesticity and that her role as a mother is intricately intertwined with her role as a political figure and actor. So, Patria’s call and Magnificat are intertwined within Patria’s retreat to the motherhouse. This call
and Magnificat mirror what is referred to as the “call narrative” where “God a) calls upon an unlikely person (in Mary’s case, a girl) to perform a heroic task, b) the person objects, c) god overrules the objection, and d) the chosen individual consents” (Leith 26). Patria is less likely to become a revolutionary mother like Mary because she was hesitant about the idea of women getting involved in such a “dirty business” and because she had begun to lose her faith and would then be less likely to answer the call (Alvarez 51, 54-55). But on a retreat to a Marian motherhouse, she is called to be heroic and consents to take part in the revolution. The retreat itself was “an exploration of the meaning of Mary in [their] lives,” and Patria hoped it would “have an answer for [her] now about what was required during these troubled times” (Alvarez 158). Patria would learn soon enough of her call to be like Mary, a mother of all, and to join the revolution in defense of her national family.

Scholars have already noted this movement to becoming the mother of a revolution, and Alvarez makes this revolution quite obvious in the description of carnage, rubble, and dead rebel martyrs. Alvarez writes that after the explosions at the motherhouse, Patria came down the mountain as “a changed woman,” she was now the mother who mourned not just the loss of her biological son, but the loss of her “murdered son,” the rebel, and is transfigured into the mother of “brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, one and all, [her] human family” (Alvarez 162). Darren Broome also provides insightful commentary, by clarifying, “Patria trades the traditional role as mother for that of the symbolic mother of all children persecuted and victimized by the state” (13). Here again, however, it is important to explain that Patria is not replacing her role as mother with a symbolic role, she is maintaining both by expanding the first. For this reason, Patria is still primarily devoted to the children of her womb. It is for Nelson that she offers up her life, not for the general population. But while Patria is not choosing between her own progeny
and the state, Patria is choosing to be among her children. Rather than reigning down from above, Patria, like the great Guadalupe before her, is one of the people, she is in the pews with them, in the fields, in the plans. This unifying and grassroots revolutionary theology is described several times over. While Patria came to the earth literally and spiritually wealthy, her calling brings her down to earth. Patria recalls that when she was born, “So you could say I was born, but I wasn’t really here. One of those spirit babies, alela, as the country people say. My mind, my heart, my soul in the clouds. It took some doing and undoing to bring me down to earth” (Alvarez 44). This idea came by way of a call. She recognizes “At last, my spirit was descending into flesh, and there was more, not less, of me to praise God. It tingled in my feet, warmed my hands and legs, flared in my gut. ‘Yes,’ I confessed at last, ‘I have heard’ (Alvarez 49). This was a Marian figure whose calling embraced her mortal body and its physicality.

A Marian figure whose place was with those in “the packed pews, hundreds of weary, upturned faces” because, she felt, “it was as if I’d been facing the wrong way all my life. My faith stirred. It kicked and somersaulted in my belly, coming alive (Alvarez 58-59). It is this calling that causes Alcala to contradict Hamington who argued that “the Virgin Mary is not a source of inspiration for earthly justice. . .Curiously, neither the feminist theologians that Hamington discusses nor Hamington himself recognize the potential of the Virgen de Guadalupe to cast a feminist revisioning of Mariology and signal the movement towards a ‘liberation Mariology’ (Alcala 117). Modern visions of Mary signal a return to the people, an idea that Mary will join their ranks and liberate them. Patria likewise, with her communist ideals, is no different, it is the poor and forgotten that she now rallies for. And again, this does not defy historical precedent, but rather it unearths the earliest populist versions of Mary. In the 7th century, Mary was seen as an “invincible virgin warrior who drove attackers from the walls of Constantinople. .
and was hailed in the Greek Orthodox Akathistos hymn as ‘our leader in battle and defender’ (Leith 12). Today, Mary is held to different esteem. In the article “Handmaid or Feminist?” Sister Elizabeth Johnson, a professor of theology decries that later dogmas described Mary, “as above the earth, remote and passive,” and as a martyr with “no sex or sass” (Ostling). This disempowering of Mary could be associated with early artworks that depicted Mary as “the epitome of ethereal purity…poised above—rather than of—the earth” (Leith 128). But it is repeated several times, that Patria’s callings ground her to the people rather than some ethereal and pure version of herself that would be above the earth and its struggles. Darren Broome also finds a significant tie between Patria’s calling and earthly revolutions. He instructs, “For Alvarez, it is important to add a character like Patria because her religious influence helps to reinforce a sense of community that extends across race and class lines” (14). This sense of community is what transforms her into a mother as she walks down the mountain of clouds and fire like Moses descending from his call, from the burning bush. After receiving this new maternal calling, she cries out a version of the Magnificat that both resembles and departs from the Magnificat in the first chapter of Luke. While Patria praises God as a revolutionary and all-loving being, she is not immediately submissive to Him as a “handmaid” until she ensures that his “will” is just (1.38).

MAGNIFICAT: MOTHER AND COEQUAL REVOLUTIONARY WITH GOD

After her call as the mother of the revolution or Dominican salvation, Patria cries, “I am not going to sit back and watch my babies die, Lord, even if that’s what you in Your great wisdom decide” (Alvarez 162). While Mary’s Magnificat is submissive and, by definition, full of praise, Patria denigrates her praise even as she gives it. She honors the greatness of his wisdom but will not work or have it be according to his will. Patria, a hesitant wife and woman, could have
followed a marianismo archetype or a sufrida like the “Virgin Mary herself who willfully and enthusiastically bends to the will of God. . .sacrifice, self-sacrifice, and chastity” Patria instead puts off willingness until God and his church join the picture (Gil 2). In other words, Patria puts off the “Church’s patriarchal principles that, as a perfect woman, Mary would have submitted to her husband’s authority” (Leith 130). Here she questions her “eternal bridegroom” while acknowledging his power and ability to save his people by joining with Patria.

Instead of detailing a submissive Mary who is willing to suffer all things with patience and passivity, the novel focuses Patria’s ignited revolutionary spirit as she echoes the same testimony Mary gives of God in Luke chapter 1 by exclaiming “he hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud; and he hath put down the mighty from their seats” (1.51-52). This new Marian figure who refuses the sufrida or Malinche archetypes (refuses to be set aside as a servant alone or a traitor to her people) echoes the Mary of old who “gave birth to the salvation of all mankind,” rather than the Mary that was made subordinate to her son’s redemptory powers (Fulton 324). It is said that prior to the Second Vatican Council, “popes had proclaimed Mary the Co-Redeemer with Jesus,” and that it was only after this council that Mary was seen as “subordinate to her son.” Instead, the council “issued no decree on Mary at all. Rather she was incorporated into the Church, a move that placed the Virgin among the community of believers of Christ rather than in anything resembling a coequal position” (Ostling). But, again, here Patria is seen as a leader and instiller of liberation theology. She is coequal like the Mary of old before oppressive deconstruction. In depictions of the 16th century, for example, Franciscan Lawrence of Brindisi instructs, “God has set Mary over the work of His hands. She is the Goddess of Heaven, the Queen of the universe, the true Spouse of the omnipotent God, the true Mother of the Almighty Christ. She stands at the right hand of God as
heaven’s exalted Queen” (qtd Leith 63). And this sentiment is echoed by early church fathers who outlined the foundations of early Christianity. These fathers saw Mary as a religious leader who performed “liturgical actions,” and demonstrated that “women in leadership roles [were] a matter of course and not of controversy” (Leith 48). Here, Patria’s insistence that God must come to the aid of Dominican rebels echoes this idea of co-leadership and shows that women can enter into counsel with God and be leaders in the church.

Patria as this religious leader determines that God is a god of revolution and an activist for those who are least among us. This is the type of liberation theology for which Patria has already been lauded or the theological revolution within the novel, and this is the same spirit Patria will witness in the revolution until the church joins the cause. It is no coincidence then, that when Mary of the Bible praises God as a revolutionary and activist, she is echoing “Miriam at the Exodus, who sang God’s triumph over the Pharaoh” (Leith 22). For, Trujillo was an actual modern Pharaoh and the Dominicans needed a Moses. So, eventually, God joins the revolutionaries in full force, and like Patria, the church grows tired of traditionality in its decision to remain neutral. Following Patria’s decision to knock down the statue of the traditional Mary within the retreat’s motherhouse, the church also commits to turning from the “Mother Church in whose skirts they once hid” (Alvarez 163). But neither player abandons the church as atheists, they just ensure and exemplify the reformation of Mary and the church she represents. Kevane is very much in line with this thinking as he describes Mary as a follower and instiller of liberation theology. And Kevane furthers this idea that Patria does not live with dichotomies, but with pluralities. First, Kevane argues that Patria who is still returning to her faith, seeks political revolution without a religious ideology, and uses the political struggle to replace her efforts in her religious struggle and affirmation (85).
Soon, however, Patria discovers that “the political requires the religious” (86). Patria demonstrates this as she combines spiritual revelation with political activism, and as she sees the church fathers combine doctrine with calls to revolutionary action. They create a “Church militant” and turn to the theology of liberation as they follow the Lord who had said, “I come with the sword as well as the plow to set at liberty them that are bruised” (163). Significantly, by the middle of the novel, these Marian-led Catholics would begin to, “spread the word of God among our brainwashed campesinos who had hunted down their liberators. After all, Fidel would never have won over in Cuba if the campesinos there hadn’t fed him, hidden him, lied for him, joined him” (Alvarez 164). In the direst of circumstances, the church and Patria not only turn to the God of war and retribution but also to communist ideologies, for they seemed to serve the lowest best. And not only does a Marian church become dual in its allegiance to Christianity and communism, but Patria’s calling and demonstration of a transfigured Marian dogma also demonstrate a duality in motherhood and what it entails.

After the traditional, submissive, and obedient Mary is toppled and her house destroyed, Patria not only becomes the mother of the revolution but by necessity also turns her home into a new “motherhouse” (Alvarez 166). Kevane includes this as one of Patria’s second spiritual revolutions. Kevane summarizes, “She will finally understand that building a house on rock refers to foundation of faith, to a community…the rock being a spiritual community of social justice, the new church” (86). Patria is building a literal home where community efforts and faith join together in a union requisite for one practicing liberation theology. But I expand this by adding motherhood to this understanding. This “motherhouse” is a physical representation of the possibilities of motherhood. It is important to recall that Patria’s domestic motherhood is found within the very materials of this house, for she emphasizes, “Patria Mercedes was in those
timbers, in the nimble workings of transoms, she was in those wide boards on the floor and that creaky door opening on its old hinges” (Alvarez 148). The most essential things she does, the maternal duties she fulfills are inherently connected with the very building within which those acts occur. This is echoed as Patria delineates the transfiguration of the house and its dual uses. She recounts how the coffee table which had once been the location of a sibling tussle, was now the place where plans of attack were drawn out, how the hall where the children walked was the same where she would consider the threat of the SIM on her family because of their involvement (Alvarez 168). Here, the mother-house becomes dual, it is both submissive and domestic and revolutionary and nationally involved. Like this house, Patria finds a way to stay a mother while also committing herself to the rebellion. And this is where Kevane’s argument is limited, for Kevane argues, “She has willingly renounced the self and her family in order to follow her faith, a faith in which the creation of a spiritual community represents the essence of political behavior (87). This idea that Patria must renounce her family in order to pursue her religious calling is limited, because the text seems to demonstrate that rather than splitting herself in half, she expands her motherhood.

She does not have to renounce family, faith, or politics, she does not have to be a cloistered virgin mother or a political maid. And neither did the mother Mary before her. If the image of Mary had not been colonized or adjusted by the patriarchy evident within Catholicism and Christianity, Mary’s “active leadership” could have been preserved. But instead, Athanasius would denounce the apocryphal texts describing a more involved Mary in favor of “his own characterization of Mary essentially as a cloistered virgin” (Leith 49). In fact, this is how Kevane has rewritten Patria’s motherhood. And perhaps this is inherent in the early liberation theology texts that describe Mary, “as a peasant madre soltera (Spanish ‘mother on her own’) whose son
was executed by an unjust state, was the sister of the poor, sharing their struggles and modelling fierce faith in the face of injustice” (Leith 143). For here, one could read this as Mary, deprived of motherhood, becomes only a figurative member of the familial community—substituting one role for the other. But the texts continue by stating that feminists celebrate “Mary in her fortitude and her active choice, in bearing Jesus, to participate in God’s plan for human liberation. Mary thus becomes a model” (Leith 143). Mary is an exemplary liberationist in her bearing of Christ as in her post-motherly roles. It is not Mary who forsakes family or her role, but Christ who dies young and unfairly. Likewise, then it only seems natural for her position as a mestiza Marian figure for Patria to see the rebellion and her civic duties as the perfect extension of the role she has already perfected. Motherhood here is peaceful and violent, it is revolutionary. This is not a new Mary, just a reversal of the Latin sufrida Mary. Instead of a cloistered, and self-sacrificing Mary, this is the Mary of antiquity, who as a Marian mestiza, a Mother of God and all peoples, was depicted “brandishing a sword over the cowering Devil…a fearless guardian of her devotees and implacable punisher of her foes” (Leith 103). Patria takes down the colonized Marian statue in the motherhouse and recalls the Indigenous maternal goddesses of strength, life, and power.

Conclusion

Patria’s revolution through these Marian events causes her not to reject the Marian myth and persona, but to transfigure it into a mestiza, a new mix evolved from the previously colonized and patriarchally transformed whore and sufrida, Mary. This colonial and patriarchal desecration of Mary led to “the forced disappearance of the Mother/Goddess [and] to the daughter's own abjection. The daughter is doomed to repeat the cycle until the ancient powers of the goddess are restored” (Alcala 2). As a more complex and evolved Madonna, Patria is simultaneously sexually driven and virtuous. She joins in a classless cause as a wealthy citizen. She is
communist and Catholic. And she is a mother and a liberator from the patriarchy. In some ways, Patria’s embodied duality follows what scholars and writers have found already. They have first questioned, “why bother with these symbols at all, why not reject them entirely” and have found, “we cannot escape the archetypal patterns that…will surface in one shape, by one name, or another. Since they are all constructed symbols, we can deconstruct and reconstruct them creatively” (Alcala 5). But it also expands, sometimes directly counters so much of what scholars have seen in Patria and how they have limited her to an unfair and limited dichotomy. Criniti, for example, states that “the fact that Patria’s entire involvement with the revolution is couched in religious terms seems somewhat overdrawn” (58). But as we have seen, Patria’s connection to one of the most iconic and revolutionary figures of all time does not limit her, it broadens and expands her identity and allows her example to react against many levels of colonialism and patriarchy, for the devil she struggles against is much bigger than Trujillo. So instead, Patria does not do away with the old, she just reconstructs it, and in her reconstruction, she gives future generations the possibility of forging a new path, a path of complexity and plurality, where opposites coexist and create a new creature. Patria’s revolution into a communist, feminist, theologian mother, sister, leader, and friend as a Madonna figure is essential to a reading of the text that humanizes women and shows the world their power and ability to overturn dictators, class systems, or the status quo. Patria as a new mestiza intimates a future where all women (mother, catholic, communist, etc.) can lead and participate in the struggle. Patria as a new mestiza invites us to see power and possibility where some like Antonio Tate Mejía would see, “una dulce mujer dedicada por completo a su hogar, pero con gran espíritu cívico profundamente religiosa y humana. Con un humanismo capaz de llegar al sacrificio por el bien
de los demas” or a suffrida archetype who gives herself completely to everyone else and who isn’t “politica” or capable of self-determination and greater broader visions (Criniti 59).

In fact, it is self-determination that Anzaldua finds so effective for the troubled mestiza, the mestiza that faces a “clash of cultures.” She states, “We are halfway there—We have such love of the mother the good mother. The first step is to unlearn the puta/virgen dichotomy and to see Coatlalopeuh-Coatlucue in the mother Guadalupe” (Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza 106). Latin cultures already have so much love for mother figures and for the Virgin Mary, now the next step is to see Mary as a complex figure rather than a divided one. Patria shows how Mary is more than the dichotomy instilled by colonialism. She reveals a mestiza Mary who is no longer limited to choices between home and family and civic leadership, no longer divided between class, and no longer divided between impossible purity and sexual deviancy. But Anzaldua also acknowledges that reconstruction beyond this dichotomizing of women by patriarchal and colonial forces is not always simple and straightforward. She acknowledges, “Pero es dificil differentiating between lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto” so women must put “history through a sieve, [winnow] out lies, [look] at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of” and “[botar] lo que no vale, los desimientos, los desencuentos, el embrutecimiento. Aguarda el juicio, hondo y enraizado, de la gente antigua” (Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza 104).

Like Patria, Anzaldua’s mestiza must see injustice in the figurative and literal dictatorship of identity and politics, she must see that Trujillo is the smaller version of cultural and historical forces. And she must reengage with broader visions and possibilities for women that engage with her ancient ancestors, with the predecessor of the colonized Mary figures of history. For, Anzaldua concludes that a mestiza must “[reinterpret history and, using new
symbols, she shapes new myths” (*Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 104). Patria as a Marian mestiza figure must shape a new myth. She must reshape a Mary who “had been an essential tool for the taming/training and conversion of the ‘pagans’” (Pure 92). She must work against the interpretation of Mary “Placed on an unattainable pedestal, [who] facilitates the condemnation of impure women” (Hamington 17). A Mary who was as “interpreted by the Catholic church—perhaps the longest-standing, most effective oppressor of women in Mexico…a powerfully disempowering symbol” (Alcala 113).

Patria overcomes this misuse of a powerful symbol by choosing what Anzaldua terms as ambiguity. As Anzaldua emphasizes, “Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking” (*Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 101). Patria’s patron saint and symbolic foundation has been rationalized away by Western thinkers, and it has limited her populist identity, it has torn her in two: Malinche and sufrida facing virgen and revolutionary. It has made her impossible to emulate, influential and monumental, but limited in her activism. So, Patria’s revolutions must be “characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes (*Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 101).

By the end of the novel, Patria’s reconstruction of a powerful symbol has made great strides in the reversal of these colonial and patriarchal distortions. By the end of the novel, she is truly a revolutionary, powerful, “sexy mama” goddess. Patria, herself, acknowledges this power as she sits before Trujillo, the devil himself. She observes, “It wouldn’t have been exaggerating
to say that Patria Mercedes had been struck dumb in the devil’s den… That’s when it struck me. The devil might seem powerful, but finally I had a power stronger than his” (Alvarez 216). The power that helps her overcome her silence, act, and see Trujillo’s smallness comes from her role as a mother. She states, “So I used it. Loading up my heart with prayer, I aimed it at the lost soul before me. Soften his devil’s heart, oh Lord. And then, I said the difficult thing, For he, too, is one of your children” (Alvarez 216). She sees Trujillo as another child misbehaving, whose power and antics are lower than God’s, and the stature she has been given as a holy mother the coequal of God who can request from him the submission and disintegration of this mere mortal boy. This is a power she also demonstrates in Trujillo’s minion’s, Pena’s, office. She recalls, “Maybe because I was watching him so closely a funny thing started to happen. The devil I was so used to seeing disappeared, and for a moment, like his tilting prism, I saw an overgrown fat boy…I was no longer his victim…Now that I had shined it on him, this poor blind moth couldn’t resist my light (Alvarez 217). The height of motherhood rather than its diminishment is light that allows Patria the ability of discernment and the ability to put into perspective the limits of these men’s power. So, by the end, Patria returns to the ancient depictions of this mother figure, to the image where “Mary brandishes a sword over a cowering Devil” and is able to become “a fearless guardian of her devotees and an implacable punisher of her foes” (Leith 103). Her new courage and unbreakable fearlessness push her to become an immortal saint and revolutionary whose identity becomes mythological amongst the Dominican people, and whose efforts should be acknowledged worldwide. Through Patria, Mary is once again reconstructed into the Goddess of old “as a heavenly being who wields supernatural power on her own authority” (Leith 57). And this reconstruction only grows stronger and more effective in death.
Like any other martyrdom, Patria’s death cements her movement in history and draws the public to laud her example to mythological proportions. Judy and Judith Rivera-vvan Schagen argue this about the sisters as they explain, “In their death, they become even more powerful when the people accept their deaths as the call for freedom” (158). It is Patria’s death that makes what she lived and fought for more urgent. Trenton Hickman adds that Patria’s death increased the magnitude and scope of her cause by stating, “As in Greek tragedy, the outcome is known from the beginning, but with the difference that where the law of Greek destiny implied the fall of the hero, here the glorification of God requires the saint’s triumph” (100-101). In reality, Patria’s cause was aired internationally as the entire country of the Dominican Republic mourned her death. And so, like a saint, her cause was memorialized and actualized with her death. But like any other saint, her cause will die out without followers. Hickman makes this clear as he continues, “I would also argue that the textual monument created by hagiographic commemoration finally desires its real-life reiteration” (100). While Hickman specifies that this reiteration is created through monuments, I would argue that Alvarez means for Patria to give birth to further revolutions.

Alvarez does this by mirroring the birth of Christ by La Virgen with the birth of revolution by Patria. The birth of future revolution is commemorated first by a miscarriage of the old traditional and colonized methods. Despite feeling safe in her isolated domesticity and the faith she inherited as a child, Patria begins to feel a deadness growing inside her. She realizes, “I’d started noting the deadness in Padre Ignacio’s voice, the tedium, between the gospel and communion…My faith was shifting, and I was afraid…And suddenly…I could feel the waters breaking and the pearl of great price slipping out, and I realized I was giving birth to something dead I had been carrying inside me” (Alvarez 52-53). Patria describes this deadness as the false
religion she had believed in before. The religion that would desert its people and passively let its patrons suffer. She explains, “Snug in my heart, fondling my pearl, I had ignored their cries of desolation. How could our loving, all-powerful Father allow us to suffer so? I looked up, challenging him. And the two faces [Trujillo and Jesus] had merged” (Alvarez 52-53). Patria determines that a religion that is truly godlike would also be a religion that fights for its people and that honors God as a God of revolution and activism as demonstrated by the Magnificat. It is especially telling then that Patria feels her womb awaken during her first Marian vision. Patria remembers that in the mother-daughter retreat to Higuey she had “turned around and saw the packed pews, hundreds of weary, upturned faces, and it was as if I’d been facing the wrong way all my life. My faith stirred. It kicked and somersaulted in my belly, coming alive” (Alvarez 58-59).

Instead of floating above the common people in her inaccessible purity and virtuosity, Mary showed Patria a vision of a grassroots and communist revolution, one in which there was no hierarchy and God fought for all of his children. Here we can recall Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth’s when John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth’s womb in recognition of a savior who would bring salvation to the poor and the lowly. Patria’s conception is followed by a figurative birth. After deciding to join the rebels and uniting with the rest of the family in these efforts, Pedrito enters Patria and “Raul Ernesto began his long campaign into flesh the first day of this hopeful new year” (Alvarez 150). Like John the Baptist and Christ, two liberation-inspiring leaders, Raul Ernesto is named by the divine rather than by his parents. Patria describes, “I looked down at my belly as if Our Lord might write out the name on my cotton housedress. And suddenly it was as if His tongue spoke in my mouth. On my own I would never have thought of naming my son after revolutionaries. ‘Ernesto’ I said, ‘I am going to name him Raul Ernesto’”
(Alvarez 151). And like Christ, Raul has a significant lineage: two Cuban and communist rebels. This lineage intimates the power and purpose of Patria’s progeny. This is the way one must read Patria: she is the mother of present and future revolution which would take down literal dictatorships and colonial and patriarchal obstruction to self-determining women. As we read Patria in this way, we encourage the deconstruction of the humble, submissive, white, and pure Mary (Leith 2). And we begin to accept the Mary that has shown herself to her people in so many forms, in so many roles. We encourage “what for many people today has effectively become a new religion: the thriving modern Goddess Movement” (Leith 58). One in which the mestiza can mold herself into something new with the best of the old, the powers of indigenous antiquity.
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