

ABSTRACT

Human Rights and Social Injustice in *Nadie me
vera llorar's* Mexico of 1880-1930

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Through her acclaimed novel, *Nadie me vera llorar*, Cristina Rivera Garza, prolific Mexican author, and feminist literary icon, explores the conflicted history of vanilla as it is intimately intertwined with the history of Mexico and its people. This thesis offers a deep dive into the history of vanilla, from a prized and sacred crop of the indigenous Totonac people to the vessel of brutal oppression of said people by the European colonizers of the country. Using the New Historicism theory as a critical lens, the author of this thesis attempts to fill the gap of the widely misunderstood and often overlooked struggle for human rights throughout the history of Mexico, as illustrated by instances in the novel. The thesis will carefully explore the contextual history and human rights movement of the Porfirian era and how these are juxtaposed with Rivera Garza's own view and beliefs regarding the movement – to shed light on the stories of the forgotten.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the people of Mexico, those who have been hidden in society, whose story has not yet been told. To the indigenous people of Mexico who have been directly affected by American policies and treaties. To the women in Mexico, who fight for rights in the still-oppressive democracy. You have rights and I will advocate for them.

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Work of Cristina Rivera Garza

The Works and Accolades of Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza

Cristina Rivera Garza, renowned Mexican author, professor, and translator is best known for her award-winning works of fiction. She has published six novels, three non-fiction books, one book of translations, and eight collections of short stories and poetry¹. Her literary novels, *Nadie me verá llorar* and *La muerte me da* (Guadalajara International, 2021) earned her two prestigious Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz awards.

Many of the extensive works of this prolific author have focused on the social history of mental illness in twentieth-century Mexico while her shorter publications explored the casualties of the Mexican Drug War of the 21st century as well as the historic and ongoing oppression of women in Mexico (Poole, 5). Her works are considered essential feminist literature within the modern Mexican canon, a feat which Rivera Garza prides herself in, insisting that in today's world, feminism is the only worthy and honorable choice (Velazquez).

Recently named a MacArthur Foundation Genius, Rivera Garza continues to write while serving as director of the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program, where she has received grants from the Mexican and American governments to continue her work in prevailing border issues.

¹ <https://www.uh.edu/class/spanish/faculty/rivera-garza-c/>

Preeminent Mexican Author, Carlos Fuentes, on Cristina Rivera Garza

Carlos Fuentes is one of Mexico's most prolific and celebrated writers, having published over fifty works of literature, articles, and collaborations which collectively garnered fifty-five literary awards and have been translated into dozens of languages². Prior to his passing in 2012, he praised Rivera Garza's *Nadie me verá llorar* as an extraordinary novel of its time, exhorting its careful prose, remarkable beauty, and bold narration, asserting that no one had portrayed Mexico the way Rivera Garza managed to and praising her ability to make tragedy poignantly evident while exposing the psychotic teardown that the Mexican government imposed on its people during the revolution³.

Scholars Stephen Silverstein, Jessica Lynam, and Silvia M. Gianni on Rivera Garza

In 2013, Stephen Silverstein wrote about what was then her doctoral dissertation which Rivera Garza later transformed into *Nadie me verá llorar*. He attested to the ways in which the author "salvages this generation of the downtrodden" and "calls into question the past victories of the rulers by including fragments of history's debris" (Silverstein, 2013, pg. 543, 545).

While trying to unveil the sociocultural norms on gender and sexuality in Mexican's society, Silvia M. Gianni explored Rivera Garza's attempt to represent the social constructs imposed on women's femininity and governments' deconstruction of their sexuality in *Nadie me verá llorar*. Gianni proposes that this narrative helps the reader understand the complex role of women in Mexican society and the social norms

² https://cvc.cervantes.es/el_rinconete/anteriores/marzo_16/01032016_01.htm

³ <https://www.hoydallas.com/hoy-dfw/metroplex/3528-entrevista-cristina-rivera-garza-escritora-mexicana-elogiada-por-carlos-fuentes.html>

that are repeatedly destabilized by the oppressive regime. She asserts that Rivera Garza's narrative gives sexuality a new dimension, as she implements distinctly full language and rhetoric to rid the lineality of space and time to question, invert, and expose the relationship between sex and identity in a newfound space where representation and reconfiguration are averse to the national reality of the women in *Nadie me verá llorar*.

Similarly, Jessica Lynam, an associate professor of Spanish at Tidewater College, recognizes the ways in which Rivera Garza attempts to rewrite the woman and her future in *Nadie me verá llorar*. Since it is written during the booming positivism of Porfirian Mexico, Rivera Garza imagines the future of both, country and woman, as a blank page, a yet-undefined being that must disentangle what has been previously written about her and leave her unique mark while refusing to accept a destiny of failure in modern Mexico. Lynam claims that Rivera Garza aims to juxtapose the relationship between *Nadie me verá llorar*'s Matilda and Marcos – the main character and her uncle – with that of nationalist propositions of the Porfiriato to Mexico which tried to superimpose science and education to erase the discourse of the cultural narrative of indigenous families. Nevertheless, both find that there is no blank page in which to author these stories, that heritage is within identity, and it cannot be reinvented. Lynam highlights the places in which Rivera Garza gives her protagonist freedom to recreate herself without hiding the oppressive world that surrounds her. Lynam attests to the diversity of works in the work itself, displaying the intertextual strategies in it, as it is composed of literary works from the end of the century as well as medical records, historical investigations, and fiction. (Lynam, 509)

A Focal Lens on the Mexican Human Rights Narrative Illustrated in Rivera Garza's novel Nadie me vera llorar

Exploring the breadth of her works while focusing on her 1999 novel, *Nadie me vera llorar*, this thesis will expound on how Cristina Rivera Garza portrays the dynamics of human rights and social injustice of Mexico in the decades between 1880 and 1930. Though much has been written about Cristina Rivera Garza's *Nadie me vera llorar* and its brilliant portrayal of society as well as women's role in it, not much has been written on the human rights movement of the era – both at the time Rivera Garza drafted her novel and the time that the records and historical investigations which informed her work come from. Through all eight chapters of the novel, Rivera Garza interweaves the struggles of the Mexican-Porfirian society and – as she admits in an interview— poses her own notion of the human rights movement in the turn of the century as a lens through which she writes the novel (Rivera Garza, *Escribir en comunidad*). As Rivera Garza seeks social justice and uncovers the injustices against the forgotten in society, through this thesis, I intend to unveil the cries for progress in the recognition of human rights in both her writings and in Mexican society at large during the time in which she writes.

An Introduction to the New Historicism Theory and its Application to Rivera Garza's Nadie me vera llorar

Using New Historicism as a critical lens, which asserts that “the relationship between history and literature is reciprocal” and that “literature itself has historical agency” (Bertens, 2013), this thesis attempts to expose and critique Porfirian Mexico, its violations of human rights, the showcasing of perfectly legal practices which almost condone manslaughter, and other forms of abuse pertaining to this period in this review. By contextualizing the human rights movement, abiding by human law, and investigating

international treaties of the time, the thesis author will attempt to fill the gap of the widely misunderstood human rights movement in Mexico by focusing on particular instances in the novel and carefully exploring the contextual history and human rights movement of the era and how these are juxtaposed with Rivera Garza's own view and beliefs regarding the movement – in order to shed light on the stories of the forgotten.

To accurately juxtapose this novel to Rivera Garza's view, this thesis endeavors to analyze the time and place in which she was living in, both her critical formative years as a writer and those in which she drafts the novel, *Nadie me verá llorar*. These, I argue, influence the choices that she makes as a writer, and, when seen parallel to the stories that she writes, give us a clear picture of both the story she is telling and the bias she perhaps unknowingly writes with. Rivera Garza's novel is set between the 1890s and 1920s, and she writes in the 1980s and 1990s, publishing the novel in 1999. Thus, this thesis will draw parallels from the late twentieth century to showcase Rivera Garza's choices as a writer.

CHAPTER TWO

A Deep Dive into Human Rights

Chapter Summary

In chapter two, we will gloss over the multiple definitions and interpretations of Human Rights. Throughout Cristina Rivera Garza's book *Nadie, me vera llorar*, there are countless portrayals of breaches of power, abuse in the workplace, and abuse to women's rights. Even though each perspective on human rights is briefly explained at the beginning of each chapter, it is necessary to give each perspective, definition, and interpretation that we talk about a space to coexist. In this way, we will be able to expand on these notions rather than limiting their scope.

Many international organizations and national documents have attempted to define the concept of human rights in the civil, political, economic, and social spectrum. This chapter will not attempt to redefine this concept, nor will it approach the topic with a single, comprehensive multi-level interpretation. Rather, it will briefly explain the various definitions and environments that surround each particular instance and subsequent breaking of human rights that are mentioned in the later chapters. These explanations are twofold, on one hand, they will clarify and expand on one specific definition of human rights, so that we can understand its full scope and the extent to which it was present in the Mexico of *Nadie me vera llorar*. On the other hand, they will serve as introductions to the following chapters, which will claim that specific instances

in Cristina Rivera Garza's book were clear portrayals of the abuse of human power by the state and local government as well as other popular entities.

Recognizing the Inherency of Human Rights

In chapter three, we delve into the breaches of power that conquerors of Mexico are responsible for when they overuse and underpay the indigenous people of Papantla for their labor, land, and crops. This chapter is set around Cristina Rivera Garza's chapter three, *El esposo de la vainilla*, where she tells the story of Matilda's parents, which is set in the pre-Porfirian era.

Currently the first human rights movement in Mexico was a century away and any political content protecting human rights was a few decades and government structures away. Because of this, I abstain from analyzing the breaches of power or lack of government protection as a human rights infringement as one would when these laws are in effect. Instead, this section resorts to explaining those human rights which derive from natural law, a law that is inherent to human beings and not dependent on policies, regulations, or treaties.

Human rights, explained as those that come from one's nature of being human, derived from Natural Law, are inherent rights. In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas offers his own version of Natural law and follows with his own definition of human rights, which he calls natural rights. Natural rights, as seen in Question 94 of the *Summa* differ slightly from the contemporary conception of human rights and are a consequence of natural law. Natural Law, according to Aquinas "is consequent to human nature... is something pertaining to reason." He also asserts that all humans are called to "shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live" and "whatever

can be ruled by reason.” In some ways, natural rights are those which are not only inherent to humans, but also rights which grant them the liberty of acting virtuously as opposed to those based on obligations to the community around them. It is important to highlight the key differences between this kind of natural right and the contemporary understanding of human rights to accurately develop the notion that natural rights were broken in pre-Porfirian times.

Aquinas understands natural rights to be those which are both inherent to humans and grant them liberties instead of obligations. This means that they protect a human’s right to obey and disobey any human-made law, but binds them to higher moral standards, those evident in the Bible and many other church teachings. With this, he demonstrates the many ways in which these rights are not self-evident, as contemporary understandings of human rights will agree, but that they are derived from the higher natural or divine law. The foundations of this concept do not lay on the church teachings themselves or whether humans are an active part of the church, it is simply a claim on the inherent rights that come with being a human created by God.

In many ways, this is the same foundation with which contemporary historians have defined human rights. Many provide those human rights are not those which are inalienable and cannot be attained. They, however, add that we need to preserve and uphold the human rights of others to ensure our own. Even though this differs from Aquina’s concept of liberty versus obligation, we can still see the common foundation. Human rights apply to all, no one is above or below them, they cannot be taken away and they are protected by higher laws as well as self-regulatory laws.

So, sustaining the common foundation of inalienable and inherent rights, chapter three of this thesis calls into question the treatment of the people of Papantla. *El esposo de la vainilla* is set at a time in which the indigenous people of Papantla Mexico, being the only growers of vanilla, become a target. At the time, vanilla was a coveted crop, and given its particularities when it came to insemination and harvest, it was only grown and harvested from small indigenous villages in Mexico. Chapter two exposes and develops instances of human rights infringements that come from the notion that human rights are inherent. At the time, there were no laws protecting property or harvest, and no tribunal to which the indigenous people of Papantla could contend fair treatment, wages or pay. It is also evident that none of these things take away from the injustices and human rights infringements that they were suffering. Thus, it became clear that human rights, as derived from natural law, were a proper way of defining and developing this narrative, that the people of Papantla were suffering and tremendous breaches of power and injustice, even though the concept of human rights did not exist.

The Protection of Inherent Human Rights

Even though human rights— which proceed from natural rights, which proceed from natural law— are inherent, it is difficult for society to self-regulate these. As we see in chapter three with the case of vanilla, when there are not any laws to avoid the infringement of human rights or to punish it, entire sectors of society suffer. Chapter four exposes and develops the problems that arise when laws and social norms have fostered and enabled the governmental structures to infringe the human rights of minorities. In this way, human rights need government structures to both define and uphold them.

In chapter three, we develop the idea that *natural rights* are derived from natural or divine law. The authority by which these rights are given is far beyond the authority of any national or international commission. In chapter four, we delve into what the poor management of a government structure yields. Here, the main characters in *Nadie me vera llorar* get their hands on medical records which Rivera Garza shares with the reader. These are real records from La Castañeda, an insane asylum in Mexico City the size of a tiny town, which was home to the insane of Mexico City in the early twentieth century. Even though it closed its doors in 1968, medical records remained in the public domain for decades. It was then that author Cristina Rivera Garza found them and incorporated them into her thesis, which later evolved into the book I have centered this thesis on. After reviewing the multiple records, stories behind them and studying the laws and regulations that Mexico during the Porfiriato had in place, there was one evident pattern. Women, especially those who were in favor of women-in-the-workplace at a time of economic boom and social mobility, were deemed unstable by their spouses. Even though every record of every woman in that book tells a different story, the underlying effects of the Porfiriato and its poor management of human rights in its government structure remain the same, especially when it comes to the social norms and political rights of women. Therefore, only one record was carefully reviewed in Chapter four, given that the input from laws and abuses of power remained the same for many. For this reason, there needs to be a second explanation of human rights, one that explains the ways in which the presence of human rights in and around policy is the only way in which they will function and be kept safe in society.

The Declaration of Independence, written in 1776 proudly boasts:

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights... That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it” (US 1776)

Even though the American Declaration of Independence has no legal precedence in the scope of this thesis, that is, the Mexico of Porfirio Diaz, it is important to understand the weight that this ideology carries. ‘*These Truths*’ refer to the preceding notion that the Laws of Nature provide men and women with individual rights. Furthermore, the securing of human rights is left to the governments that have been instituted by and among men. In the same way, the repeated infringement of these rights gives the people a right to alter or abolish said government or government’s structure.

Nadie me verá llorar: Portraying a Failure to Preserve Human Rights During the Porfiriato

Chapter four exposes and expands on Lucrecia’s record, who writes her own entry about the ways in which the many mishaps in her life land her at the asylum. Upon closer inspection, we realize that the diseases which caused major complications and multiple other setbacks in her life could have been avoided with a more comprehensive rule of law that extended to the protection of indigenous communities. We begin to understand that Lucrecia was driven to alcoholism given the many stressors placed on her life, primarily the abuse she must endure with her husband, a man who quickly found another woman while Lucrecia wanders in and out of asylums. In the end, Lucrecia only remains in the asylum because she loses authority over herself. Her husband continues to check her into mental facilities after he denies her the right to work during the economic boom, which

makes her dependent on him and gives him her power of attorney. The underlying issues behind Lucrecia are far too wide to fit in a single chapter of a thesis, but the effort to portray that these issues come about from the misuse and breach of power remains. Lucrecia's medical record represents countless matters that the government under Porfirio Diaz failed to recognize, left behind or outright caused, and they all come back to Human rights and the need for governments to sustain them and policy to value and uphold them.

Human Rights and the Concept of Justice

Finally, there is an aspect of human rights that is intricately linked to the concept of justice, and here, one would say that the two go hand in hand. In *Inventing Human Rights*, historian Lynn Hunt approaches the concept of human rights as such that can only become significant when they are followed by political action (Hunt, 130). Concurrently, it is understood that human rights require a form of active participation from constituents, meaning that if these rights are protected by the laws of such a society, people in that society must act in a way that ensures its upkeep of these rights. In a thesis that is so focused on a particular government's time and its structure, it is important to convey the notion that even though it was Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship which caused all these breaches of power, it is the constituents who must ensure the upkeep of their own rights. Though this is represented in the fall of the Porfiriato, a time in which the people of Mexico revolted against their government not to set forth a new one but to bring down the current one, it is important to highlight this aspect of human rights.

As represented in this thesis, neither Matilda's parents and their indigenous community, nor Lucrecia and the rest of the patients of La Castañeda could have actively

pursued action against their government to fight for their own rights. However, it is still the constituents who enabled these actions, in chapter two, it is the corrupt government structures and the conquerors who take advantage of the poor indigenous people of Papantla; and in chapter three, the wealthy men who supported the dictatorship and benefited from the cheap labor and enclosurement of those who opposed the government.

CHAPTER THREE

The Harvest of Vanilla and Its Implications on Human Rights within and without Rivera Garza's *Nadie me verá llorar*

Chapter Summary

As previously stated, though much attention has been paid to the portrayal of women, the role of prostitution, and general economic disparity within Mexican society in Rivera Garza's work, more thought must be given to the portrayal of human rights violations in her book *Nadie me verá llorar*, what they say about the era in which the book is set, and the implications on modern Mexican society. Therefore, this chapter will first provide an overview of the rules of natural law which will serve as a framework to understand human rights in a state of nature so they may then be compared to human rights in the secular political world and contextualize and analyze instances of human rights violations in Rivera Garza's *Nadie me vera llorar* through the new historicist perspective. This chapter will more closely explore and analyze instances pertaining to the book's portrayal of the violation of human rights of vulnerable populations, namely indigenous peoples, which civil laws and Mexican government authorities have historically committed against them. Finally, because Rivera Garza portrays the harsh realities of the ripple effects that the emerging vanilla trade had on Mexican families in the 1920s, mirroring the pressing phenomenon of outsourcing harvest that NAFTA created in the 1990s—the time in which she writes this book—this chapter will offer a brief analysis of this phenomenon and its lasting impact and continuing implications in

modern Mexican society and international world trade using the New Historicist framework.

The History of Vanilla and the People of Papantla as told by Rivera Garza

In the second chapter of her book, Rivera Garza carefully runs through the extensive history of Vanilla as Joaquín visits the National Library in Mexico. As the characters in her book walk-through the library, they read aloud dozens of recollections and testimonies from indigenous people that have been recorded in various books. One of them being the Totonac¹ legend, dating back to 400 AD and which was passed down through generations. The legend provides a folk account of how vanilla, a staple in kitchens the world over, came to be.

The legend is recounted below.

En tiempos del Rey Teniztle Tercero de la dinastía Totonaca, una de sus esposas dio a luz a una niña a quien pusieron por nombre Tzacopontziza (Lucero del Alba), que por su singular hermosura fue consagrada al culto de la Diosa Tonacayohua cuidadora de la siembra del pan y los alimentos. Pero un Príncipe llamado Zkatan-Oxga (Joven Venado) se prendó de ella, a pesar de que sabía que tal sacrilegio estaba penado con la muerte. Un día que Lucero del Alba salió del templo la raptó huyendo con ella a la montaña. En su camino, un monstruo los envolvió en oleadas de fuego obligándolos a retroceder a donde los sacerdotes les esperaban airados, y antes de que Zkatan-Oxga pudiera hablar, fue degollado, corriendo la misma suerte la princesa siendo después arrojados sus corazones en el ara de la Diosa. Allí la hierba al secarse, de su sangre empezó a brotar un arbusto cubriéndose de espeso follaje dando nacimiento a una orquídea trepadora con asombrosa rapidez y exuberancia, perfumando el ambiente con su aroma. ¹

English translation:

In the times of King Teniztle, the Third of the Totonaca dynasty, one of his wives gave birth to a girl who was named Tzacopontziza (Morning Star), who because of her unique beauty was consecrated to the cult of the Goddess Tonacayohua, guardian of the sowing of bread and food. But a Prince named Zkatan-Oxga (Young Deer) fell in love with her, even though

¹ Garcia Ramos, in bibliography, translates this legend to Spanish

he knew that such sacrilege was punishable by death. One day when Tzacopontziza left the temple, he abducted her and fled with her to the mountain. On their way, a monster enveloped them in waves of fire forcing them to retreat to where the priests awaited them angry, and before Zkatan-Oxga could speak, he was beheaded, the princess suffered the same fate, and their hearts were thrown unto the altar of the Goddess. There, the grass dried up and from the blood began to sprout a bush covered with thick foliage, giving birth to a climbing orchid with amazing speed and exuberance, perfuming the environment with its aroma". (My translation)

Though there are many accounts of how the vanilla vine spread out throughout different countries, as detailed above, Mexican tradition insists that it came from the bleeding hearts of Totonac star-crossed lovers Tzacopontziza and Zkatan-Oxga. This is important because the story that Cristina Rivera Garza is trying to tell when she weaves the second chapter, "El esposo de la vainilla," into her book is not only that of a woman with a past, but that of her entire people. It is a story that conveys the simplicity and primitivity of vanilla's primary harvesters and later exposes the instances of exploitation they faced through this work. This exploitation begins when invaders take vanilla from Papantla to Europe and continues as they are forced to produce it under harsh conditions.

Back in chapter two of the book, in the library, Joaquín also shares tidbits of history and creates for the reader a small timeline for herself, one that starts with the arrival of the Totonacs into Papantla, Mexico in the year 800 and ends in an open conversation about her family, the people of Papantla.

Los totonacas arrivaron a la zona del Tajín alrededor del año 800 de nuestra era, tiempo después y por razones que permanecen en el misterio, el área fue abandonada hacia el siglo XII. El territorio del Totonacapan iba desde las riberas del río Cazonces hasta las del río La Antigua e incluía, sobre un costado de la sierra Madre, a Huachinango, Zacatlán, Tetela, Zacapoaxtla, Tlaxianguitepec, Tezuitlán, Papantla y Misantla... La guerra de independencia estalló pronto en el norte del antiguo Totonacapan y se extendió hasta la entrada de la década de los veinte. Mientras que el dominio militar de la zona no fue estable, se produjeron tomas y retomas de los principales puertos y plazas. En 1812 hubo un asalto insurgente frustrado contra Tuxpan. Al año siguiente los realistas tomaron

Tihuatlán, Tepetzintla y Papantla... Las autoridades y el pueblo de Papantla desconocen absolutamente al gobierno de Estados Unidos del Norte, reconociendo más que nunca a México cuya suerte compartirán por siempre y ofrecen perecer en su defensa sacrificando sus fortunas, sus familias, y cuanto les es más sagrado como víctimas de su patriotismo, y sobre sus cadáveres pasarán los enemigos de su nacionalidad e independencia a ocupar las ruinas y escombros que dejarán...(Rivera Garza, 63-65)

Through Matilda, we begin to see the ways in which Rivera Garza slowly uncovers the never-ending stories of racial inequality and human rights violations that run alongside the harvest of vanilla, especially the stories of the people who have been marginalized and othered in Mexican society since the era of colonialism.

Through these stories, Rivera Garza conveys a sentiment of dread and offers an appalling portrayal of exploitation as she illustrates the life and history of the Mexican people of Papantla as these people did not yet know about the United States but would soon have to sacrifice their fortunes and families to help their country keep independence (Rivera Garza, 65). While Rivera Garza foreshadows a kind of doom for these people, she also introduces the concept of an international relationship. One which we will see will come to affect them in ways no one expected. For this chapter, we will center on the issues that involve vanilla and interacting with Matilda's family and her recollection, perception and knowledge of such.

The City of Papantla and Vanilla, Inexplicably Intertwined

Before defining and dissecting the human rights aspect of the harvest and trade of vanilla, it is important to highlight the historical geography of Papantla, the city that gave birth to the vanilla orchid, and that from which Matilda Burgos hails. Coming from an orchid endemic to Mexico, vanilla has been cultivated and harvested in its native land for more than twelve hundred years, and though the records of this pre-Columbian Mayan

orchid are incomplete, it is certain that its origins stem from Papantla, México (Lubinsky, 2).

In *Nadie me vera llorar*'s chapter two, Rivera Garza unveils the story of protagonist Matilda Burgos, revealing that the train which brought her to Mexico City came from the desolate land of Papantla, while she tells the story of her people who were taken advantage of in "*La guerra de independencia*" and continues to express the dangers that Matilda fled from. Though Rivera Garza physically removes Matilda from Papantla into Mexico City, the story of Matilda and her family's origins are key in the Rivera Garza's reconstruction of Papantla, the trade of vanilla, and the human rights abuses that occur in this context.

Throughout chapter two, "*El esposo de la vainilla*," vanilla is personified as a wife that needs support and care, and who behaves like any other woman who is helpless without a husband (Rivera Garza, 63). The author invites us to look past the anti-feminist rhetoric this chapter seems to portray and prompts us to delve into the type of modern-day slavery perpetuated by the harvest and trade of vanilla, a kind of slavery that is portrayed in this chapter of her work of fiction, but which has also played out in the history of Mexico. Through this the reader may explore the political issues and civil laws of the time that fostered a societal climate which allowed this kind of slavery to thrive, as well as the effects it had on individuals, families, and on society at large.

Back to the book, in chapter two, Matilda goes on to explain the relationship between her own father and the vanilla orchid. Her explanation paints a unique and delicate relationship, which is later used to contrast how the vanilla trade industry trapped and destroyed her people.

She explains that:

La vainilla... para que se produzca hay que polinizarla con un pedazo afilado de bambú. Las manos de las indias, como las de mi abuela María de la Luz, son las mejores para esa tarea. Hay que hacer tres limpiezas anuales. Tres años después... se colectan las vainas todavía verdes... Pero una vez separada de los árboles, la vainilla también se vuelve amarga, ¿sabía eso? Entonces la flor ya no está en manos de indios, sino bajo la mirada de los beneficiadores y los políticos... La vainilla requiere exactitud, perfección. Mi padre era el mejor. Mi padre sabía que, una vez seca, había que dejar posar la vainilla por lo menos dos meses, y que, si ya no había humedad, entonces estaba lista para orearse otros noventa días... Mi padre, antes de aficionarse al aguardiente chuchiqui y perder hasta la dignidad, cuidaba a la vainilla como se debe cuidar a una mujer. El esposo de la vainilla, eso era mi padre. Santiago Burgos (Rivera Garza, 63).

English translation:

Vanilla... To produce it, she must be pollinated with a sharp piece of bamboo. The hands of Indian women, like those of my grandmother Maria de la Luz, are the best for this task. Three years later... the pods, still green, are collected... But once separated from the trees, the vanilla also becomes bitter, did you know that? Then the flower is no longer in the hands of the Indians, but under the eyes of the millers and the politicians... Vanilla requires accuracy, perfection. My father was the best. My father knew that, once dried, the vanilla had to be left to sit for at least two months, and that, if there was no more humidity, then it was ready to be dried for another ninety days... My father, before he became fond of chuchiqui liquor and lost even his dignity, took care of the vanilla as one should take care of a woman. The husband of vanilla, that was my father, Santiago Burgos (My translation).

Though communal forms of land ownership virtually disappeared in the middle of the twentieth century, the land of Papantla was still communally owned at this time (Kouri, 9). When Matilda Burgos recounts the memory of her abuela's well-trained hands and how they were the only hands adept enough to pollinate the mystic vanilla vine, Rivera Garza comments on the indigenous people of Papantla, who altogether owned and arduously worked this land. '*Una vez separada de los árboles*' se vuelve propiedad '*de los beneficiarios y los políticos*' (Rivera Garza, 62). Though the art of this harvest

requires perfect skill, it is one that all but belongs to the indigenous of Papantla after — as Rivera Garza explains— everything is being taken from them.

At this time in Mexico, as soon as vanilla is harvested with arduous work and meticulous precision, shareholders and other politicians take ownership of it and profit from it. We can interpret this as an evident act of human rights violation, given that the present government structure is passively allowing the lower class to be taken advantage of, as it is also actively pursuing profit at the expense of its people, exploiting their labor while keeping them in what is essentially poverty (Bruman). We will delve into the human rights framework as we define the harvest, trade, and attitudes towards vanilla, but not before exploring the wider sentiments that this injustice provoked on the people.

Post-Independence Injustice in Mexico Against the Indigenous People of Papantla

As the Mexican revolution came and went and the government attempted to build a constitutional republic, many laws involving changes to the national land ownership framework and regulations were created and put into effect. Though they were well intentioned in the context of the new republic, they adversely affected indigenous communities through forced displacement.

Though members of this community understood the new legislative system, they were not able to make changes that suited their way of life. In addition, the wide majority of these indigenous communities were faced with unjust treatment by government officials enforcing the laws of the new republic.

The Evolution of the Vanilla Harvest and Trade According to Records of the Time

By reading the newspapers of the few years preceding the time that Rivera Garza writes about, we can contextualize what happens in the book. This is because local newspapers of this time captured the general sentiment towards the unjust treatment that people received during the time, and which ignited their desire for organized labor unions as well as an urgent yearning to be left alone by the government of the new republic.

In the newspaper *La opinión*, columnist V. Huerta writes about his people's experience with the Federal Government and expresses his preoccupation for the proletariat. To convey the need for the local government to intervene in the labor laws, he writes: ‘

La guerra, la injusticia, la opresión tienen las por grandes crímenes y quieren que los gobiernos sean de paz, de justicia y libertad... que la vida sea codiciada por dichosa y que no haya más contiendas que las del trabajo y de las ideas’’
(Hemeroteca Digital).

English translation:

War, injustice, oppression have great crimes and want governments to be of peace, justice, and freedom... that life be coveted for its happiness and that there be no other conflicts than those of work and ideas' (My translation).

The same newspaper mentions the vanilla trade industry as one that keeps changing, and whose future is uncertain. In newspapers of its time, we see the mention of the term ‘vanilla’ increase exponentially. From an average of three times a year in the first decade of the 1900’s to an average of nine times per year in the 1910s, with its peak in 1913 with over sixty mentions in a single national newspaper, most pertaining to its newfound trade and the growing conflict that the people of Papantla are facing (HNDM, Veracruz 1990-1930). There are a few reasons why this issue is affecting the entire community, as opposed to just the farmers or those who harvest and trade vanilla.

In this matter, the judicial framework is a helpful one to consult, there we can see the laws of the time, specifically those pertaining to property management and ownership. Though historically this land belonged to the indigenous people of Papantla, the fruit of their work was one they were losing their ability to own. We have talked about communal ownership and its eventual shift, and we will further develop the ways in which the government intervention for all tradeable goods caused vanilla's international trade to be taken out of the hands of the farmers. Both the communal land ownership ordinance and international trade being controlled by the government clearly explain why the issues that pertained to land, harvest and value of the crops disproportionately affected the indigenous farmers like Matilda's father and his community (Kouri). By the end of this decade, vanilla began to sell at a market price that the people of Papantla could not control nor pay, and because they were the farmers but not the sellers, they were left with little profit and eventual losses, of both revenue and land. They were also unable to continue the many Totonac traditions involving vanilla, this hiatus caused a tremendous strain on the unity of Papantla's indigenous. Undermining the indigenous people and leaving an entire community without land, traditions or money is a violation of intrinsic human rights which is often overlooked or minimized when discussing the repercussions of the vanilla trade. We are unable to exact or accurately impose the current definition of human rights which was developed long after the turn of the twentieth century. For a more accurate framework for human rights at the time, we may use the parameters for human rights defined by Natural Law.

A Working Human Rights Framework Based on Natural Law

To define Natural Law, I will be using St. Thomas Aquina's Summa Theologica, and briefly cite a key part of his work, and refer to the concept of Natural Law throughout the rest of the chapter as it is further defined. The concept of Natural Law as he defines it here will be referred to in the rest of the chapter both when cited and as it takes on the framework of human rights. Even though the book that Aquinas writes is primarily theological, it serves as a conventional way to address human morality as it pertains to the natural human world and not ecclesiastical, thus it is a fitting reference. Aquinas explains natural law in quite simple terms, he writes the following about men:

There is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law; for instance, to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination" (Summa, Article 3 Objection 2).

Here it is clear that natural law as Aquinas defines it, is not subject to interpretation, and no one is exempt from it, it applies to all humans living in society. It is a call, if you will, to *do good*. Man must live in society and strive to shun ignorance, and most importantly, avoid offending those among which he lives with. It is not optional, and no one is excluded from it. In establishing that one must avoid offending their neighbor, Natural Law sets forth a new sense of equality. Without the mention of social status or race, it concentrates on the overarching sense of humanity and creates a path for mutual respect, regardless of anything other than the basis of sharing a common society. It is here that it becomes the fundamental premise of human rights. Aquinas talks about a human inclination to do good and abstain from harming others, and therefore, humans who live in society with other humans have the *right*, if you will, to be protected against

unusual harm from other people who live in the same society. This becomes their human right, as it comes from the unattainable but intrinsic characteristic of them being human. So, it follows that harming those among whom one must live is violating their human rights. Though Natural Law only establishes that there is a human calling to avoid harming those who share their society with you, it gives the right to be, by extension of natural law, kept safe from harm inflicted to you by those in society. Here we see that Rivera Garza showcases the ways in which society rationalizes the abuse of these people. It is then that mutual respect as a call to others becomes an individual right since common society and humanity, and therefore human rights.

Applying this Framework to Nadie me vera llorar

Herein, we can examine Rivera Garza's portrayal of the trade of vanilla as one that goes against this notion of Natural Law, and violates human rights. Furthermore, Rivera Garza shows her audience that the perpetrators of these abuses justify themselves by way of progress, claiming that the inferior people are in need of correction. We will explore the series of events portrayed in the second chapter of *Nadie me vera llorar* where the invaders – those who reap the benefits of the vanilla harvest and trade without doing the work or paying fairly— violate the rights of the people of Papantla and harm them in a grave manner by exploiting them for labor and belittling their work.

Paul decía que era una planta planifolia y que ni siquiera la de Madagascar se comparaba con la calidad y la fragancia de las flores negras de Papantla... Son blancos ellos, mestizos, europeos. Ellos pagan poco a los que vienen cargando la cosecha desde allende los montes o se la roban de noche. Ellos conocen la violencia. (Rivera Garza, 67)

Much like in the rest of the book, we can see here how the people of Papantla have only heard about the uniqueness and value of the Vanilla vine from their close American

friends. For them, it is a mere vine that their people have harvested for centuries. The profit they receive is not reflective of its value and therefore they do not understand their work or underpayment. Paul, who Matilda mentions is an American engineer who she met during her time as a prostitute, later asked her to quit said job to be with him. Following steady but temporary income and safety, Matilda chooses to leave her job, it is during her time with Paul that she learns more about the atrocities that she grew up around but did not fully comprehend. Though much can be said from the transactional nature of that relationship, which we will explore later, we can extract the exploitative nature of those selling the harvested vanilla by understanding that this issue is one that no one in Papantla understood as it was happening. The people of Papantla were left without profit, *los europeos les pagaban poco o se robaban la cosecha*, they would take advantage of them, and this is something that Matilda only understands as she recalls what Paul told her. Paul tells Matilda that the quality of the vine was greater than that of the commercial Madagascar vine, and that it is worth much more than it too. As Matilda states, *los beneficiadores* underpay or simply steal from the harvesters who have worked arduous hours to make vanilla profitable' and 'they know violence,' she highlights the human rights violations committed against the people of Papantla. The year-long work put into harvesting vanilla was customarily stolen from her people, who were not even aware of its value because they never saw profit!

A Deeper Dive into its Colonial Past

In many ways, exploring vanilla's history means uncovering and confronting the conflicted nature of the crop. Since its inception in the hearts of Totonac lovers, vanilla has been a vessel of prosperity but carrier of conflict. We have explored a few instances

of human rights violations that appear in the book, both as Cristina Rivera Garza introduces the history the vanilla vine's pollination and history, as well some of the times in which Matilda recounts the stories of her people and the ways that they were taken advantage of by both the government and different conquerors.

However, there is a greater issue that we need to dissect, and though we will keep coming back to the *Nadie me vera llorar* chapter, we should explore the wider context in which the trade was happening. We will also explore the moments in history that our writer, Cristina Rivera Garza was living in. For that we will go back to the first attempts of trade, that is, the trade history of vanilla and traverse this path until we get to the book, then fast forward to the 1990's, when the book was written. The letters that Hernan Cortes writes to Emperor Charles V contain descriptions of Montezuma's gardens reaping of vanilla (Cortez, 78,102). At the time, the pollination happened naturally as Melipone bees skillfully lifted the outermost layer of the flower and penetrated the vine to successfully pollinate (La Vega, 2). We know that during this time, vanilla was a key component of the original hot chocolate recipe, and that it made an excellent energy drink. Many stories corroborate that Cristopher Columbus tried this recipe and wanted to bring it back for King Ferdinand of Spain and Queen Isabella the author to try (de Orellana).

Though he attempted to bring the vine to establish a profitable trade route, he was never able to do so. History books tell us that this was because no one was able to pollinate the vanilla flower, and no vanilla beans could ever come of it. There are as many as seven attempts recorded, all of which failed. Somewhere between then and the 1820s, people learned to pollinate vanilla. Two popular accounts have been recorded, in

France, it is an African American slave, Edmond Albius, who is credited for this discovery during his time as a French slave (Cornell). In Mexico, no paper record shows what tradition has been telling us for decades, that it was the hands of an indigenous woman who first pollinated this vine with a cane stick – as told in chapter two of *Nadie me vera llorar*— in Papantla Mexico. This version of history is backed by La Vega’s recent research trip to Mexico, where she quotes a recent sighting of such act: “Don David lifted the anther from the stigma, pressed the pollen against the stigma with the small wooden stick, and voila, the fertilization happened in front of our eyes” and insists that this has been passed down for generations going back more than two hundred years.

Decades of living with and caring for the wildlife around vanilla production have led the people of Papantla to discover, understand and promote this practice. Though it seems unlikely that the indigenous people would keep the knowledge of vanilla pollination to themselves when they could profit off the trade, it is important to consider that vanilla was used in many religious indigenous ceremonies and therefore considered a sacred vine in the community for hundreds of years. Thus, there is reason to believe that sharing this communal secret was equivalent to sharing religious beliefs with outsiders. We know from trade history that when a cheaper and easier-to-produce vanilla-like product came to market, the vanilla trade fell so drastically it almost disappeared, it was only because of the indigenous people of Papantla that the species itself was kept alive, given that it was a core part of their religious ceremonies. This is further evidence for the hypothesis that its hand pollination is older than what history books will tell you, but it was a secret not shared with the world because of its sacred nature.

Cristina Rivera Garza writes about the indigenous people of Papantla and their ability to hand-pollinate the vanilla vine and make it produce vanilla pods as a practice that had been passed down for many generations. She insists that the harvest is extensive and must be incredibly precise. The curing process then takes some months, as distinct parts of the vine must be heated, covered, wrapped, and extracted. This labor-intensive process makes it clear that for Matilda's people, it is not only a labor of love or a religious duty, but the biggest component of their life. The process takes so long that it must have slowly become that which their lives are centered on. For instance, vanilla harvesters have exactly twenty-four hours to pollinate the flower between its opening and dying phases. This means the entire community must set aside their daily commitments to help others hand-pollinate the flower. We know that though it is an arduous task, it brings not only fulfillment, but profit.

Until, as previously mentioned, '*los europeos*' arrived in Papantla. Even though Cortez and his people attempted to bring vanilla back to their hometown to profit from it, without the Melipone bee this quest failed. It was not until the popularization of vanilla and its newfound hand-pollination in the twentieth century that the people of Papantla became vessels of what is one of the most abusive trades to involve indigenous people to occur in Mexico. In Matilda's recollection, share stories that her father would tell her, those in which he was living through the exchange of power between Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada and Porfirio Díaz. During this period, Mexico's economic development meant that most businesses were owned by foreign nationals and these changes were benefiting the country's upper classes, instead of the poor majority. This situation increasingly hurt Matilda's people and vanilla is only a fraction of the ways in which the fundamental inequalities of Mexico's political and economic system push the lower class to revolution.

The Role of Synthetic Vanilla

It was in the early 1900s that synthetic vanilla was discovered, drastically changing the scene for the natural vanilla bean. A lab created flavor, vanillin became widely available and rapidly rose in popularity given its similar taste and cheap

manufacture. During its early years, the synthetic vanilla mixture of vanillin and coumarin remained the cheaper variety of vanilla, making vanilla appear as a luxury once again (Berenstein, 2). However, factories soon realized that vanilla production could not keep up with the demand, given that “at least three times more vanilla [is] consumed in the United States as all other flavors together” (Chace, 7). This, paired with the cost cut that came with using synthetic vanilla made it such that all major producers that had been previously importing vanilla beans from Mexico and Madagascar halted their imports and switched to synthetic flavors. As we know, the vanilla curing process is a long one, and this drastic change in trade volume left the people of Papantla with a harvest that they could no longer sell. The income security that came with growing a vine that was incredibly popular dissipated in a matter of months. Though Cristina Rivera Garza does not move her characters into this part of history, it is still worth noting that this further develops the idea that the indigenous people of Papantla were being exploited. Vanilla was not being traded at face value and the harvesters were not being paid a fair wage, the buyers were trying to make the most profit out of this trade and thus left the people of Papantla vulnerable. Furthermore, as soon as a cheaper and popular version of this plant came to market, the indigenous were left behind. Enduring economic loss was directly correlated to the lack of protection that the providers of vanilla were given, since the arduous work was not paid in advance and it wasn’t until a cured vanilla bean was produced that they could expect a return on their investment. Still, we know that even though vanilla was at risk of extinction considering its synthetic replacement, the people of Papantla kept growing it, even without buyers. We can credit them with the

preservation of vanilla, but not without insisting that these issues further highlight the exploitation that they were enduring.

Implications of the Evolution of the Vanilla Industry on Mexican Society

Finally, given that Cristina Rivera Garza's *Nadie me vera llorar* was written decades after the events that Matilda recalls and those she lives in, it is in the best interest of any *new historicist* to understand the events that our writer was living through. It was in 1994 that the US and Mexico (and Canada) had drafted the North American Free Trade Agreement and in 1999 that Cristina Rivera Garza wrote this book, as the earliest effects of the treaty were on the rise. To shorten the narrative that I am trying to uncover, I will briefly summarize two antagonizing views that NAFTA created in the Mexican and American farmers and the ways in which these are strikingly like the portrayal of Rivera Garza's vanilla trade.

In the Economic Research Service, Steven Zahniser and William Coyle write about the corn trade during the NAFTA era, referencing many of the pre-treaty restrictions and the industry's yearning for trade. This sentiment was based on a shortage of demand for the yellow corn that was being produced in the U.S. and a shortage of the same in Mexico. Even though there were concerns for the implications that might come with this trade, namely, that Mexican farmers may want to migrate to the U.S. to find work in the booming corn market, it is widely accepted as a mutually beneficial trade by both economists and government bodies. The article states that:

‘white corn, which is used to produce tortillas and other traditional Mexican foods, has steadily decreased in export volume since 2000, due to Mexican Government support for the marketing of domestically produced white corn. Interestingly, the Mexican corn sector still includes many small-scale producers,

whose efforts to market traditional varieties of corn and other commodities are supplemented by government farm payments

This suggests that there is governmental support for this production. Although it may seem like this is true, the general sentiment across most Mexican citizens is quite different from the truth, particularly for those to which this trade pertains. Earlier, we established how vanilla production and trade went through “changes [that] were benefiting the country’s upper classes, instead of the poor majority”. This is also what our author is experiencing, as these titles make headlines in popular Mexican news sources. “El TLCAN nos destruyó, dice hija de agricultor mexicano”, assures the popular Mexican journal ‘Expansión’. TLCAN, el Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte, known as NAFTA is the center of this argument. The article begins by acknowledging NAFTA has positively impacted the manufacturing industry in Mexico but insists that it has negatively affected many cities in Mexico, especially the poorer agriculturally centered ones. The daughter of a Mexican corn farmer explains that the men in her hometown were left without work as the cheap, US government-subsidized corn began being exported into Mexico. She also insists that the people who profited the most from this trade were American farmers, who totaled thousands of millions of dollars in export during the peak years.

As this narrative unfolds, we can find many similarities with the stories that Cristina Rivera Garza tells her readers. With NAFTA, the American side of the story is proud to have found a cheaper and more efficient way of doing a trade, thus leaving the poor Mexican farmer trying to find a market for his goods and finally leaving town to find a way to sustain his family. Similarly, we find that with the vanilla trade, there are a few iterations of this story. First, the indigenous people of Papantla attempt to safeguard

the vanilla pollination secret, and it is later the French who discover and profit from it. Then, vanilla becomes a coveted luxury, and the people of Papantla suffer through the exploitation that comes with being the poor and defenseless lower class. Furthermore, the instance in which vanillin is created and vanilla left aside in some ways mimics this corn model. One in which the historic framework is uncovered by finding the otherwise hidden repeating stories.

Cristina Rivera Garza's *Nadie me vera llorar* offers a unique and extensive portrayal of the vanilla harvest, trade, and commerce and the human rights implications this industry has on Mexican society past and present. The human rights crises that this crop was a vessel to are well defined and highlighting them is important, because as we can see with the new historicist perspective, it is not only that history is sometimes written using the framework in which authors are living through, but that history, when not well studied, repeats itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

Social Injustice in ‘The Forgotten Society’

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we will examine one of the medical records in Cristina Rivera Garza’s third chapter of her book. Given that this record showcases many of the relationships and instances of neglect that appear throughout the rest of the book, Lucrecia’s record is chosen to demonstrate the various social injustices and instances of abuse that many people who were marginalized by Mexican society at the time faced. Remaining fully aware that this one record cannot represent the lives of all the marginalized people or the injustices that they faced, it does aid in unpacking the countless breaches of power and abuse that Porfirian Mexico created and allowed. It is important to show that although this is just one record, the environment that surrounds this patient extends in scope to society at large which contextualizes it. Afterall, it was this oppressive regime and exploitative society that eventually landed Lucrecia in the asylum, La Castaneda. Like many others, is a product of society that has othered her.

“Social justice may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth” (United Nations, 17). The concept of social justice within Mexican society before and throughout the Porfirian era is one that Cristina Rivera Garza urges the readers of *Nadie me verá llorar* to think about and explore throughout the book. In the afore-referenced third chapter, *Todo es lenguaje*, it is evident that the author is trying to give those whom society has shut out, a voice. In doing so,

Rivera Garza gives the reader a new perspective, she sheds light on a side of history that has not yet been told. In this thesis chapter, I will focus on Rivera Garza's chapter three and the stories it tells, as it presents medical records that the Rivera Garza gathered from an asylum. Her portrayal changes the ways in which we see the barriers that society has placed on the lower classes, Rivera Garza gives a voice and portrays the story of those otherwise marginalized in society, making the instances of social injustice evident.

Social Justice, Feminist Theory, and the Porfiriato in Nadie me vera llorar

Even though this chapter seeks to highlight and explain the events and circumstances that promoted social injustice in all lower-class citizens, who we have nicknamed 'the forgotten society,' describing the feminist theory is key. Rivera Garza seeks to deliver a comprehensive narrative of the La Castaneda patients, and not surprisingly, many of them are women who have suffered and lived in the shadows of the economic boom that came with the Porfiriato. According to Carole R. McCann, the feminist theory is one that provides the intellectual tools to examine the injustices that women confront. The feminist theory asks questions pertaining to gender differences and subordination as women to explain that oppressive circumstances are a direct result of structures in gender differences along with limitations, rights and authorities set by society and public policy rather than individual misfortune (McCann, 22). Feminist theory also centers the voices of other populations, in addition to women, who are marginalized by society.

This promotes further understanding of the multiple perspectives that this chapter seeks to bring out. When the medical records of Cristina Rivera Garza's doctoral thesis are transferred to this book, they call attention to the many injustices that society has

placed in them, in this case, because they belong to an oppressed gender. Given that a “central principle of feminist theory is that theory should be accountable to politics (McCann)” it should make sense that this chapter calls into question the Porfirio Diaz’s regime and insist that the current circumstances of these patients, the forgotten society, are a product of the dictatorship.

In his article, Stephen Silverstien calls the patients whose records are displayed “discarded material”, portraying their existence as such that is “endangering the very foundations of society” (Silverstein, 542). The remnants of the urbanization, development and industrialization that came with modernization could not go unconsumed. The growth that came with modernization would not have been possible without the refuse of society in the Porfirian era and subsequent Revolutionary Mexico. It is these people, who society has hidden away in the dark corners of history that Rivera Garza gives a name, background, and story to. In the multiple stories that are shared in chapter 3, it becomes clear that the current state of these patients, who are considered dangers to society, are only a product of society and the circumstances into which they were forced. It is here that we see the social injustice that they face repeatedly. Without undermining the nature of these medical records—the mentally ill of Porfirian Mexico—this chapter attempts to highlight the injustices that they have endured, acknowledging that there is far more to their lives than what society at that time accepted and further the notion that they can be both products and producers of society. By parsing these records and giving historical context and an appropriate societal framework, this chapter will explore the ways in which society failed to give them an opportunity and how they were given an unfair and indifferent distribution of the fruits of the economic growth that came

with modernization. Thus, establishing that society failed and was therefore unjust to the marginalized of society.

For this analysis, it is important to keep in mind the broader timeline of the Porfiriato and how it affected women. During the first stage of the Porfiriato, in the coup that brought Diaz into power, women were thought to have low social value. The societal expectations placed on them were such that they shall stay home, tend to their husbands, and have children. These women were considered submissive and proper, whereas the ‘deviated ones’ - according to popular literature of the time- were the prostitutes, adulterers, single mother and the mentally ill. Conversely, the second stage of the Porfiriato- when Diaz re-elected himself after a four-year hiatus- lasted twenty-seven years, between 1884 and 1911. It was characterized by the foreign investments that Diaz welcomed into Mexico, such as a country-wide telegraph, a dam, many cross county train tracks and public education reforms including a national university (Grijalva et al, 27). All these destabilized rural and urban economies, having a negative impact on rural communities as seen in chapter three of this thesis. However, the installation of factories and manufacturing plants led to a shortage of labor, to which many women had the opportunity of fulfilling vacancies. Even though there was now a place in society for the working, salaried woman, this opportunity came too soon after the virtuous woman of the earlier decades that was known for her submission to her husband and quiet homemaking skills.

To say that the suffering women of the asylum in Cristina Rivera Garza’s book, *Nadie me verá llorar* are a product of the Porfiriato is to explain that the constant and brisk shift in societal expectation, their lack of rights—as women’s right to vote was over

forty years away from the end of the dictatorship- and the usual treatment that women received, all contributed to their eventual admission to a mental facility. Rivera Garza tells the stories of these women through the medical records she acquired from the Mexico City asylum, La Castañeda. These women were on the receiving end of the indifference and unfair distribution of the economic growth that came with the Porfiriato and were therefore victims of a broader socially unjust movement. According to historical studies of the National Anthropological Institute of Mexico, women of this period were trapped between two opposing demands, the first of which came with being raised in a widely illiterate country that also expected them to abide by the rules and provision of their husbands and secondly, a world that, in the face of a booming economy, provided diverse labor opportunities which offered them livable wages. Unfortunately, the rapid economic growth and booming opportunities conflicted with the traditional values and societal disapproval of the working woman. Therefore, traditional values maintained and encouraged the submissive housewife image as that of a virtuous role for women. The many circumstances that bring these women to the asylum develop in Rivera Garza's third chapter, as she sets out to give each one of them a voice in their own narrative.

A Case Study in Nadie me verá llorar, Lucrecia

Lucrecia is an asylee who is arguably a product of the dictatorship. Her fragile mental state is due to the political and social phenomena that she has endured because of the Porfiriato. Lucrecia was born just two years before the coup that brought Diaz to power, and her life as a wife started in 1891, seven years after President Diaz's second term. At this time, the damage that the economic boom— which was later characterized

for benefiting its export and foreign interest sector at the expense of indigenous, agrarian, and labor groups— began to structuralize and become an inescapable reality. Lucrecia was living in a marriage where her partner insisted that her role was to give him children and raise them at home, despite having enough of a formal education to later write her own medical record—as her doctor notes at the end of this record ‘los datos anteriores fueron transcritos por la misma enferma’ (Rivera Garza, 92). Lucrecia describes the misery and suffering that the first ten years of her marriage brought her, the social expectations that she had to live up to and the self-deprecating image that she sustains after decades of being mistreated by her husband.

El señor mi esposo se casó a los veinte años. En diez años que viví con él tuve ocho hijos de los que viven cuatro. Dos se ahorcaron con el cordón y dos nacieron muertos por haber tenido albuminuria. También tuve cuatro abortos por causa de la vida tan difícil que llevaba con el señor mi esposo... En 1899 me vino un ataque de dipsomanía y el doctor Liceaga me convenció ingresara a la Quina de Tlalpan. Entonces se me produjo este ataque por el cambio de vida moral y físicamente, pues el señor mi esposo trajo a una mujer y desde esa época no vivo íntimamente con él y se me reflejaba el vacío del alma en mi parte física... [el alcohol] me quita el gran dominio que debo tener dada mi difícil situación y mi manera exagerada de sentir y de ser, y me viene el desborde de las pasiones y la excitación completa (My translation).

English translation:

My husband married when he was twenty years old. In the ten years I lived with him I had eight children, four of whom are living. Two were born with the umbilical cord wrapped around them and two were stillborn because they had albuminuria. I also had four miscarriages because of the difficult life I had with my husband... In 1899 I had an attack of dipsomania and Dr. Liceaga convinced me to enter the Quina de Tlalpan. Then I had this attack because of the change in my moral and physical life, since my husband brought a woman and since that time I have not lived intimately with him and the emptiness of my soul was reflected in my physical part... [alcohol] takes away from me the great control that I should have given my demanding situation and my exaggerated way of feeling and being, and I have the overflow of passions and complete excitement (Rivera Garza, 91).

Lucrecia writes her own medical entry, and after summarizing her parents' lives, she writes about the hardships that she had to endure as a wife, married at seventeen years young. Here, we learn that she had albuminuria – a kidney disease— that affected her health for the better part of her life. More than a kidney disease, albuminuria, I believe, makes a statement about the conditions that Lucrecia had to endure, many of which she could not control. A recent study from the University of Guadalajara states that “The population and human right defenders affirm that the cause is found in the thermal water that is delivered to the communities from deep wells of the zone” (Macias et al). This zone, lake Chapala, is one of the most polluted areas in Mexico, and it is also a place with high prevalence of end-stage renal failure, albuminuria. A different study by the same university develops data that remains largely inconclusive. This study states that though the water in the area has high related exposure to environmental contaminants, its levels still “fell outside of the Mexican normative regulations.” These, however, seem to still pose a high danger to the population of said region, as it states, “the prevalence of albuminuria among the children participating in the study was 45.7%” (Lozano-Kasten et al). After reading many of these studies, it seems far from coincidental that Rivera Garza would include these specific medical records in her book. It is as though the author is making a statement to further the notion that Lucrecia, like many others, was a victim of her social climate, that of a rural community. These studies, though they come later in time, expose the nature of Lucrecia's record, one which I believe Rivera Garza was aware of.

In *Nadie me verá llorar*, we learn that Lucrecia, as well as other patients, had albuminuria, which today we know to be prevalent in children living in rural agricultural

and mining communities in Mexico (Lozano-Kasten). We also learn that along with the four babies that Lucrecia carried to term and the four stillbirths, she had four miscarriages. It is important to highlight that her doctors have attributed two of these stillbirths to the disease she was infected with as an infant. Even though studies on Albuminuria began to evolve in the later decades of the twentieth century, these suggest that Albuminuria had been prevalent in children in the early 20th century, with not much data gathered beforehand. Not only is it possible that Albuminuria was present in Lucrecia's time given her background and record, but it is highly likely that Rivera Garza, living in the 20th century was seeing this disease affect the rural communities of her homeland and, when she found these records in La Castañeda, and saw the similarities, drew them in so that her audience could come to their own conclusion.

According to a study conducted by the University of Guadalajara, in the rural agricultural community of Mexico, this disease comes from high “exposure to environmental contaminants” possibly found in “agrochemicals” and exacerbated by “child malnutrition.” Suggesting that contaminants which came from both harvest pesticides and leaks in mining and industrial plants could have unknowingly furthered the spread of this disease. Furthermore, research at the University of Guadalajara insists that other factors involving extreme poverty and gender inequity put the population at a greater risk of developing this disease.

When we look at Lucrecia's life together with her familial background and the time and economic and political environment in which she lived in, these medical records seem to suggest that the Albuminuria itself is a consequence of her unprotected exposure to the harmful conditions as a child and teenager. Studies on the export-led growth of the

Porfirian period establish that there were many silver, oil, copper, and lead mines as well as numerous industrial manufacturing plants that were located around the outskirts of the city (Catão, 69). If her doctors are correct in the assessment that these two miscarriages were brought about by the illness that she endured as a child, and her contracting the illness comes from the greater development of the Porfirian era which brought dangerous chemicals by the way of modernization to her community, it is accurate to say that she is the victim of social injustice.

The fruits of the economic growth that were brought about with the Porfirian industrial boom that surrounds Lucrecia creates a very harsh reality. The industries that create jobs and opportunities for others are the same whose waste poisons her with illness-causing chemicals. Moreover, the patriarchy and broader social climate continues to affect her everyday life. As Lucrecia develops her story through this medical record, she writes that, in her assessment, her four miscarriages were a direct result of the hardships that she endured while married to her husband. She elaborates on that claim by telling the story of how her husband left her. In 1899 she developed dipsomania, a strong need to drink alcohol, and was admitted to La Canoa, a hospital for mentally ill women (Villa Guerrero). Though there are many reasons why Lucrecia may have developed alcoholism, it is important to highlight the normative ways in which she talks about her husband's response. Lucrecia did not work, her husband was her sole provider, she was a housewife and mother of four, but as she was admitted to La Canoa, he brought another woman to their home. Lucrecia insists that the sadness and grief that the new woman brought to their home caused her severe drinking problems for which she was in and out of the treatment center. Slowly she realized that drinking alcohol only exacerbated the

problems, as being away from home was the primary cause of her husband's infidelity.

Lucrecia realizes that she must live a sober life and learns to follow the rules required of her to leave the facility.

After recounting the many stories that brought her to La Castañeda, Lucrecia insists that she understands all the mishaps, misfortunes, and injustices that she has endured. She explains that it was all of the aforementioned hardships and not her own will to behave inappropriately that have brought her here. Lucrecia also shows a willingness to change. On the other hand, when the male doctor in charge writes his own assessment of his patient, Lucrecia, he emphasizes a very distinct perspective. The following excerpt of her medical record shows some of the many ways in which women were deemed insane for wanting basic needs and having intuitive ideas. Her doctor writes:

No hay día que no tenga nuevas ideas, planes nuevos que llevar a cabo, ya sea para salir del manicomio o para seguir determinada conducta con su esposo, al que hace responsable de cuanto le sucede. Cada día hay un nuevo achaque de salud, ya sea un dolor que dura minutos y recorre casi toda una pierna o un brazo... una sensación de angustia y malestar porque no ve a sus hijos o porque piensa que no saldrá de este hospital... la situación angustiosa en que se encuentra, otras veces, en fin, se dedica con verdadero ahínco al trabajo manual, pero en nada hay continuidad, en nada hay método (Rivera Garza, 92).

This medical record is a powerful primary source, much to the merit of Rivera Garza. It is critical to emphasize the assessment that, like in Rebecca Garonzik's article, the people who were entrapped in the asylum were those who the modern nation-state did not consider full citizens. Lucrecia is kept in treatment, not because of her mental outbursts— of which there are none— but because she is no longer wanted in society. She has become the refuse of society, a product of unjust circumstances and the gender-based limitations she faced. It is important to further the notion that this forced seclusion

was yet another instance of the social injustice that these lower-class citizens were living in. The asylums, shelters, and other places where men were allowed to leave and entrap women are the places where we can find the stories of the forgotten society. The records of those who society left aside, and history has since othered and left behind.

This is only one of the countless records – both in and out of Rivera Garza’s book— of Mexican asylum patients who were broken, left, and forgotten society. The people that history chose to forget and those who Rivera Garza gives a voice to. These particular people were products of an unjust system, asylees who are trapped and misunderstood patients that cannot seem to escape their reality, circumstances, or the asylum. Much has been said about the pictures of the insane in Porfirian Mexico and the portrayal of their mental state both in a medical and artistic perspective. However, much more needs to be understood about the labor laws, women’s rights, social injustices, social environment, and other serious issues that indisputably caused their admission to said mental institution. Although not much of that assessment is suitable for the small scope of this chapter or thesis, it is an important matter that should be considered for further development.

Conclusion

Matilda, a patient of La Castañeda, an insane asylum in Mexico City that existed during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, tells the story of her life through the chapters of Cristina Rivera Garza’s novel *Nadie me vera llorar*. In this chapter, we highlight the life of Lucrecia, who, like Matilda, has an indigenous background and ties to affluent men who condemn her to a life in the asylum. Moreover, in comparing the two while exploring the life of Lucrecia, the human rights infringements that come from the

Porfirian Regime and their oppression that these women face, it is evident that the political structure of the time only fostered this inequality. Like the lives of these two women, many others lived through this dictatorship being oppressed, silenced, and shut out. Cristina Rivera Garza allows the medical records she includes in her book to speak to this matter. The women in *La Castañeda* are a product of the dictatorship, who subsequently chose to forget them after being admitted.

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