Magical Realist Historical Fiction by Women Writers: Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* and Gioconda Belli’s *The Inhabited Woman*

by

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Abstract

Magical Realist Historical Fiction by Women Writers: Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirit* and Gioconda Belli’s *The Inhabited Woman*

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This study is based on two contemporary novels written by Latin American women writers: *The House of the Spirits* (1982) by Isabel Allende and *The Inhabited Women* (1988) by Gioconda Belli. The purpose of my study is to discuss the ways in which the female characters respond to the social and political imperatives that history imposes on them, as they also question traditional structures and move a step forward towards their personal liberation. As witnesses of a political and social revolution in their countries, Allende and Belli articulate women’s voices, intertwine their personal experience and write alternative fictional stories which is mixed with the official story producing thus a new historical novel in Latin America. They also show that women are empowered through subtle means such as their collective memory, love and spirituality. After introducing the concepts of the new historical novel in Latin America, and after reviewing ideas regarding concepts as magical realism and collective memory, I will discuss how magical realism as a mode of expression widely used by Latin American writers that bridges historical realities, spirituality, and collective memory to give Latin American women writers a distinctive voice in the 1980s. This distinctive voice in *The House of the Spirit* and *The Inhabited Woman* take advantage of the Boom male writer’s achievements and create their own spaces to portray the revolutionary times in the 1970s in which women made significant contributions independently and in their relationship with men.

**Key words:** the new Latin American historical novel, magical realism, collective memory, Latin American women writers in the 1980s
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Magical Realist Historical Fiction by Women Writers: Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirit* and Giaconda Belli’s *The Inhabited Woman*

*Sí eres una mujer fuerte protégete con palabras y árboles e invoca la memoria de mujeres antiguas*

If you are a strong woman get protected by words and trees and invoke the memories of women from the past.

Gioconda Belli

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of my study is to explore how the inclusion of women’s collective memory and magical realism contribute to the formation of the new historical novel in Latin America. The focus of my analysis is the inclusion of an idea of women’s collective memory, spirituality and magical realism in the quest for female identity during an important period of Latin American change. I will also argue what the women’s narrative perspectives add to the formation of the new historical novel and the formation of a new social reality in Latin America. My focus of study will be two novels by Latin American women writers: *The House of the Spirits* (1982) by Isabel Allende and *The Inhabited Women* (1988) by Gioconda Belli and the analysis of how Latin American history is told through the perspective of these women writers. In these two novels, the personal stories of the female characters in the Chilean novel - in particular, the women of Del Valle family - as well as Lavinia and Itzá in the Nicaraguan novel, are mixed with the social and political official history of two Latin American countries in the 1970s. They both include the experience of women and as María Teresa Medeiros-Lichem states, “women’s particular views in the so-called

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phallocentric order of language and culture from which women have been excluded” (x). In her book *Reading the Feminine Voice in Latin American Women’s Fiction from Teresa de la Parra to Elena Poniatowska and Luisa Valenzuela* (2002) Medeiros-Lichem examines “the eloquent voice” (1) that the many Latin American women writers from different decades and countries have developed in fictions that portray women moving from “the intimate sphere of home and family into the public space that includes the uncharted female experiences” (1). Women writers, as Marjorie Agosín states in her article “Whispers and Triumphs: Latin American Women Writers Today” is a “collective courage” (427) like in the well-known example of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo\(^2\) in Argentina. Like the Mothers, women writers in Latin America also broke the silence and became actively involved by writing about the political and social reality in their countries. Allende broke the silence and opposed oppression by being eloquent and denouncing injustices in her country when writing *The House of the Spirits*. Belli also breaks the silence and writes *The Inhabited Woman* in which the protagonist is actively involved in the revolution in Nicaragua, describing also injustices perpetrated by dictatorship. María del Mar López-Cabrales in her book *La pluma y la represión. Escritoras contemporáneas argentinas* she reflects on the reality of the Latin American women writers, specifically on the reality of women writers in Argentina during and after the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), stating that revolutionary ideas and movements in Latin America before the arrival of the dictatorships in the 1970s was inspired by the Cuban revolution in 1959. The excitement of these revolutionary movements of the 60s and 70s, López-Cabrales observes, was followed by the massacre of students and civilians in Tlatelolco in México in 1968, the assassination of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, and all the military governments that dismantled the revolutionary social changes envisioned by many Latin American societies.

\(^2\) The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo are the longest social movement standing until the present time. They still gather every Thursday to fight for human rights.
In this political and social historical context, the intellectuals and writers, López-Cabrales states, became subversive in Latin America because their voices denounced the terror, censorship and oppression being imposed by dictatorships (30). So, considering this context described by López-Cabrales, Latin America women discourse in literature in the 1980s is the result of not only a late second wave feminism in Europe and North America, but also the result of the social and political historical situation of women in this region: revolutionary times and the subsequent dictatorships. Many women writers emerged to express this violent reality, like Allende and Belli who were involved in the fight against oppression in their countries. So, in the particular case of women writers in Latin America, López-Cabrales explains, they have to struggle against censorship and oppression from dictatorships and they also have to come out of their position in the margins as “literatura menor” (30). Ileana Stofenmacher in her article “Escritura de mujeres en los ochenta. Roto el silencio…emerge el goce”³ studies the explosion of women writers in Latin America in the 1980s when the popular, life histories and women literature become increasingly notable. Stofenmacher explains that their writing aligns with progressive feminist discourses, gender theories, and for their violent political and social reality of the 1980s. Stonfenmacher also highlights the fact that in the case of Argentina, for example, due to the violent military dictatorship from 1976 until 1983, the literary productions at the end of the 70s and 80s, including writing by women, describe “sus propias experiencias” (2) (their own experiences) during those oppressive and violent years. Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli belong to this group of women who write about their own experiences amidst violence and oppression in Chile and Nicaragua as both of them become involved in the fight against oppression and had to leave their countries for political reasons escaping violence.

³ “Women’s Writings in the Eighties. The Silence is Broken…Joy Emerges”
Allende’s and Belli’s stories are autobiographical accounts of their personal experiences, and they also bring in memories of other women from the past in the form of ghosts and myths to formulate the female voice. The use of magical realism as a mode of writing that subverts and breaks the boundaries of the rational world, allows the two writers studied here to tell alternative stories. As Hélène Cixous says, when a woman writes “…she arrives, vibrant, over and again, we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another” (882). In the postmodern narratives of The House of the Spirits and The Inhabited Woman culture, history, memories and myths are mixed to express alternative visions of Latin American history. As excellent story tellers, Allende and Belli mix subjective and emotional dimensions with historical facts to bring history to the reader’s personal level. The novels The House of the Spirit and The Inhabited Woman represent Latin American new historical novels because Allende and Belli work out of Latin American traditional historical novel that centers on a realistic re-creation of a historical setting where women’s experiences were excluded. On the contrary, these novels create spaces through magical realism, which gives room for the expression of women’s alternative visions and their subtle powers gathered within their traditional spaces. In these novels, magical realism functions as a literary mode of expression that not only embellished the narrative, but also bridges the connection between history and the collective memory to give Latin American women a voice, empowerment and a distinct position in the general struggle for women’s liberation and struggle towards independence.

I will analyze magical realism as a category of historical fiction in Latin America as described by Helene Carol Weldt-Basson in her book Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction: the Impact of Feminism and Postcolonialism, considering that in the category of historical fiction, novels portray the past with a meticulous observation of historical events. I am interested
in the value of magical realism as a literary mode that crafts the connection between history and the collective memory of women which leads to the formation of the new historical novel in Latin America. Allende´s and Belli´s association with magical realism clearly helped them permeate a female discourse that reflects a more authentic women´s experience. As Wendy Faris (2004) explains, feminist thought attempts to liberate itself from patriarchal society, but it is also developed in connection with it (171). Julia Kristeva, Faris states, relates the female discourse with a “hidden and unconscious form of discourse that relates back to a connection to the maternal and the spiritual more than to a symbolic or (realistic) kind of speech which is aligned with the patriarchal society” (171). In the case of The House of the Spirits, Clara, as an agent of change, works towards changing the order of things in a patriarchal society within her traditional role as mother. Alba, the main protagonist, inspired by Clara, joins the social revolution, coming out to the public sphere to be a social agent of change. In The Inhabited Women, there is not an equal inclusion of a traditional domestic woman role because Belli´s main character is more warrior than a mother. However, in both novels magical realism and the inclusion of ghosts and female memories works together with the patriarchal rational discourse connecting their narratives to a more spiritual plane: Alba works with her grandfather by writing together their family story, and Lavinia does a men’s job as she participates in a men’s movement, not as their servant but as one who is equal to them.

I am also interested in the subtle ways in which the female characters in the novels respond to the social and political imperatives that history imposes on them, to study how they refuse patriarchal systems of domination, question traditional structures and move a step forward towards the liberation of women. Instead of analyzing the feminine experience in Latin America from a marginalized perspective, I intend to show that Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli present
women’s role in Latin America from the perspective of strong women who find empowerment through subtle things such as memories and spirituality. These subtle ways of challenging systems of domination, can open up the understanding of the role of women in Latin American as agents of social change who have gradually come out of their traditional space to work along with men to influence society.

Ana Ros (2012), when analyzing collective memory and cultural production in relationship to dictatorships in the Southern cone in the 1970s in her book *The Post-dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. Collective Memory and Cultural Production* asserts that there is a women’s predominance in the “active transmission and exemplary forms of memory”. Ros states that this predominance could “be further developed in future projects”, stating that women in the 1970s had to cope with “an often-insurmountable tension between a new role as activists and a traditional domestic role” (204), which can influence their perspective in the present. By analyzing Allende and Belli’s novels, this study is prolonging the research that Ros encourages. In the novels *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Woman*, Allende and Belli are active participants in the transmission of memory incorporating Latin American history and the evolution of the role of women in revolutionary times in the 1970s. They also articulate the female experience through the use of magical realism and collective memory, which has influenced the new historical novel in Latin America where storytelling became part of telling history.
Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks

1.1 The New Latin American Historical Fiction

Helene Carol Weldt-Basson’s book *Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction* (2013) studies the change in the definition, content and shape of historical fiction from the 1930s until the present day and “redefines” this genre in the Latin American context. Starting with Georg Lukács and Joseph Turner and their leading theoretical studies\(^4\), Weldt-Basson defines the evolution in the concept of the historical novel. She begins analyzing Georg Lukács’ book *The Historical Novel*, considered a key study of this genre, written in the 1930s. Lukács described the historical novel as a genre that represents past historical events based on historical facts that embody social tendencies (21-61). In 1979, almost forty years after Lukács’ study, Joseph Turner published an essay called: “The Kinds of Historical Fiction: An Essay in Definition and Methodology” which focuses on the inventive aspect in historical fiction. He distinguished three types of historical novels: the disguised historical novel, the invented historical novel and the documented historical novel. Turner defines the disguised historical novel as the one that creates parallels between its characters and historical figures, the invented historical novel as the one that refers back to a distant past before the author was born and the documented historical novel as the one that records history with real historical figures but gaps are filled with invented information (337-45). With respect to the different purposes of historical novels, he observes that writers may write in “original mode” to create the past, in “reflective mode” to recognize the connection between the present and past, and in “philosophical mode” to ponder on the value of history. The last two modes of writing historical fiction, the reflective and the philosophical modes, are pertinent to the characteristics of

\(^4\) In Weldt-Basson (3): George LuKács and Josesh Turner
the new Latin American historical novel as they not only represent past history, but they deconstruct history to reflect on past events by including different experiences of history based on the recognition of different social classes, race, and gender.

In his study of Latin American historical fictions, Weldt-Basson states that Seymor Menton concentrates in his book *Latin America’s New Historical Novel* (1993) on the moment of change in this genre, identifying *The Kingdom of this World* (1949) by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier as the first work in this genre in Latin America (Weldt-Basson 5). Menton describes several innovations and experimentation in the style of historical novels in Latin America starting in the 1940s and 1950s. Some of the characteristics of these novels that he identifies are the use of exaggerations, the distortion of history, metafiction as the reference to the writer and his/her process of writing, intertextuality, a combination of dialogism, parody, the carnavalesque, and heteroglossia as described by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevky’s Poetics* (1984). Outside the Latin American context, Weldt-Basson identifies that Naomi Jacobs (1990) is the first to consider novels that mix history and myth in the category of historical fiction. Jacobs recognizes three types of new historical fiction: fiction biography, fiction histories and recombinant fiction (Weldt-Basson 4). Weldt-Basson supports the notion that Latin American magical realist text are included, then, in this recombinant fiction category supported by Jacobs. Weldt-Basson states that since 1998, most other critics, like Celia Fernandez Pietro (1998) and Magdalena Perkowska (2008) give importance to the role of postmodernism in the historical novel and concentrate on the postmodern characteristics of the Latin American historical fiction. Weldt-Basson’s study

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emphasizes on the influence that feminism and postcolonialism have had on Latin American historical fictions, which has been overlooked by other critics.

My study will follow Weldt-Basson’s focus on the new historical novel in Latin American as a postmodern stance, influenced by feminism and postcolonialism. Weldt-Basson emphasizes the importance of The House of the Spirits in particular, as its publication in 1980s marks the “full peak” (12) of influence in Latin America of the second-wave feminism that started in the 1960s. Thus, the new historical fiction in Latin America literature influenced by postmodernism, proposes a representation of social and political conflicts using, among other tools, intertextuality and distortion of history through exaggeration from the perspective of the marginalized.

The traditional model of the historical novel represents a distant past that describes historical events based on rationalism that seeks to represent reality as it was (Weldt-Basson 2013, 2). On the other hand, postmodernism rejects elitism, favors the democratization of culture and recognizes distinctions of class, gender, sexual orientation and race. Seymor Menton, as mentioned earlier, supports the notion of the shift of Latin American historical fiction toward postmodernism as he describes the new historical novels as a recreation of history through exaggeration, metafiction (the reflection of the writers’ creative process), parody, the carnivalesque and exaggeration (Weldt-Basson 5). Celia Prieto in Historia y novela: poética de la novela histórica (1998) also focuses on the postmodern aspects of the Latin American historical novels, describing them as alternative histories from the perspectives of marginalized minorities, such as women, excluded from history (150). The House of the Spirits and the Inhabited Woman fit Menton and Prieto’s description of the postmodern historical novels in Latin America as they reconstruct historical events in Chile and in Nicaragua through the perspective of women as a minority that was silenced by the official historical record. The novels in my study portray history with magical
realism, the mode of writing commonly used in Latin America that mixes real events with elements of magic to offer new interpretations of history.

1.2 Behind their Novels: Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli

Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli are two contemporary Latin American writers who are part of an explosion of women writers in the 1980s who break the silence and give a voice to women’s experiences in Latin America. Emotions, relationships, memories, spirituality and history are all interwoven in their writing echoing the hidden voice of women in Latin America. *The House of the Spirits* (1982) and *The Inhabited Women* (1988) are Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli’s first novels which capture the attention of the world with their revolutionary women characters. Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* has sold more than fifty-five million copies and has been translated to more than thirty languages. Gioconda Belli’s *The Inhabited Woman* has also been a best-seller and has been translated into many languages. Allende and Belli gained their reputation by exploring the female experience in Latin America at the time of important political and social change and the fact that they were writing in the aftermath of the Latin American Boom in literature may have helped them gain the attention of international readers. These two writers have made significant contributions in their own right, as they incorporated women’s experiences in search of their new identity in revolutionary times in Latin American history.

The French Feminist movements may also have prepared the ground for their works. In her article “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976) Helene Cixous⁷, urged women to write and bring in their experiences. As the French writer and critic wrote, “Almost everything is yet to be written

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by women about femininity […] not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive, about trips, crossings, trudges, abrupt and gradual awakenings, discoveries of a zone at one time timorous […]’ (885). Latin America had earlier internationally known female writers such as the Mexican poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in the seventeenth century and the Nobel Prize laureate, Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean poet of the earlier part of the twentieth century; however, Allende and Belli are the first internationally known female novelists who participate equally with Latin American “Boom” male writers by writing about women’s “abrupt and gradual awakenings” in times of revolution and violence, searching for a new female identity and social change.

Isabel Allende

Isabel Allende born in 1942 is a Chilean writer whose stories transcend nations, cultures and languages. She was born in Peru on August 2nd, 1942. In 1945, Allende and her family moved back to Chile where they lived until 1953. Allende moved several times during her childhood and youth to different places in Latin America and to Lebanon. Finishing her secondary education in Chile, she fled in 1973 to Venezuela for political reasons after the military coup led by Augusto Pinochet. Salvador Allende, the president who was killed in the military coup lead by Augusto Pinochet, was her cousin. Married and with two children she lived in Caracas for thirteen years where she worked as a journalist. In exile when she received the news that her dear grandfather was dying, she started to write him a letter that would turn out to be her first novel, *The House of the Spirits* (1982). Later, in memory of her daughter Paula who passed away in 1992, caused by porphyria, a rare blood disorder that is rarely fatal. Allende started The Isabel Allende Foundation in 1996 to promote and preserve the rights for women and girls to be empowered and protected. The foundation’s mission is articulated as follows on its website (Allende): “I therefore support select nonprofits whose missions are to provide women and girls with reproductive self-
determination, healthcare, and education, as well as protection from violence, exploitation, and discrimination.” The foundation and her writing clearly show her determination to empower women in society and give them a voice to protect their rights and freedom.

Allende has written twenty books in which where she has vividly used her storytelling ability to enchant millions of readers. Among these twenty books some notable are: Of Love and Shadows, Eva Luna, Paula, Aphrodite, Inés of my Soul, Island Beneath the Sea and the most recent one Ripper. Her books have been adapted to cinema, theatre, opera and musical theatre. The House of the Spirits novel was made into a film in 1993, directed by Bille August was a German-Danish-Portuguese production. The film stars Jeremy Irons, Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, Winona Ryder and Antonio Banderas. Isabel Allende has been recognized with the following awards for her writing: Best Novel of the Year (Chile, 1983), Book of the Year (Chile, 1984 and 1987), Mulheres Best Foreign Novel Award (Portugal, 1987), Woman of the Year, GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, 2000), Best Biography for My Invented Country (USA, 2003), Momentum Award for Storytelling, Women’s Foundation of California (USA, 2009), and The Times (London) named The House of the Spirits on the Best 60 Books in the Past 60 Years (UK, 2009). These recognitions show that Allende’s storytelling has captivated people all over the world. It is interesting to note how many of these awards are specifically for women. This shows that she is often considered and rewarded for being a feminist writer.

Gioconda Belli

Gioconda Belli born in 1948 is a Nicaraguan poet, writer and political activist who has proven to be a strong advocate for the rights of women in Latin America. Her powerful poems and stories explore womanhood, like the novel I include in my study, The Inhabited Women. In her writings, Belli reflects her commitment to the empowerment of women and her desire to motivate
them in the struggle for women’s liberation. In the excerpt from her poem “Consejos para la Mujer Fuerte” (“Advice for the Strong Woman”, my translation) cited in the epigraph to this thesis, Belli incites women to be strong and to empower themselves by invoking the memory of strong woman from the past. This is how Itzá’s spirit inhabits and strengths Lavinia who becomes a member of the Nicaraguan armed revolution in the novel The Inhabited Woman.

Gioconda Belli has also been a feminist activist, committed to the struggle for equality. She finished her secondary education in Madrid, Spain, and studied journalism and advertising in Philadelphia. When she returned to Nicaragua she started working for a publishing house in La Prensa Literaria. Belli participated actively in the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) against the dictatorship of Anastasio Samosa Debayle (1925-1980) who was in office from 1974 until 1979. Forced into exile, as she joined the Sandinista National Liberation Party, she moved to Mexico in 1970. After the dictatorship of Somoza was overthrown, Belli returned to Managua in 1973 to take a position in the government. However, she later became a critical opponent of the FSLN leader, Daniel Ortega (re-elected president in 2007), and broke away from the FSLN accusing Ortega’s government of dictatorship.

Her novels intertwine elements of politics, myth and the search for women’s identity in a patriarchal world. Among her published poetic works are: Verse on the Grass (1972), Thunder and Rainbow (1982), Rebel Love (1985). Her published fiction novels are: The Inhabited Woman (1988), Sofía of the Signs (1990), Waslala (1996), The Country under my Skin (2000), The Scroll for Seduction (2005), Infinity in the Palm of her Hand (2008) and The Country of Women (2010). Since 1978 Belli was given several awards including the prestigious Casa de las Américas for her poetry book Line of Fire and My Intimate Multitude awarded the Premio Internacional de Poesía Generación del 27 in 2002. Her novels have also received recognition as she received the following
awards: Best Political Novel of the Year in Germany in 1989, Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in México and Premio Biblioteca Breve in Spain, both in 2008 for Infinity in the Palm of her Hand and Premio Hispanoamericano La Otra Orilla in 2010 for The Country of Women. On May 4th, 2014 she received the Premio al Mérito Literario Internacional Andrés Sabella 2014 in Chile. This marked the first time this award was given to a woman.

The presence of magical realism and collective memory in The House of the Spirits and The Inhabited Woman portray ordinary life of individual behind the turbulent official history of Chile and Nicaragua in the 1970s. Pierre Nora, who explores the opposition between history and the collective memory of the past, states that “Memory is life […] it is affective and magical” (8) while history is distant. The House of the Spirits and The Inhabited Woman are novels that include the magic, emotions and life experiences that Nora delineates in his study. By studying the use of magical realism and collective memory in these novels, I intend to prove that Allende and Belli as storytellers, bring the official history of their countries closer to the private life experience of people, focusing on women’s experiences with history.

1.3 Magical Realism

Magical realism is a mode of expression most commonly found in literature, which integrates local traditions with rational Western discourse. Magical realism connects social realities with the popular imagination or collective memory of local groups producing in this connection a specific type of reality that is mixed with magic. In magical realistic texts culture, history, memories, myth and fantasy are interwoven with daily common occurrences in order to give voice to the popular culture, the marginalized and to subvert the official Western discourse based on rationalism. It is usually associated with Latin American Boom writers, such as Gabriel
García Márquez (1926-2014), Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012) and Mario Vargas Llosa (1938- ) and others. The novels *The House of the Spirit* by Isabel Allende and *The Inhabited Woman* by Gioconda Belli use magical realism to present a particular social and political reality. These novels situated somewhere in Latin America create liminal spaces through magical realism to express alternative visions of history by adding alternative visions of women with subtle powers within their traditional spaces. Allende and Belli explore magical realism as a narrative ingenuity to expand a historical and social reality including the feminine voice, postcolonial voice and memory to tell history from the feminine perspective.

The term magical realism brings about two opposite, almost intransigent concepts. On the one hand, we have the term magical which involves the supernatural or illusions that seem to go beyond the natural laws. On the other hand, the term realism involves a fact or reality as it is, rejecting what is sentimental or idealist. In terms of literary studies, realism is a genre that simply depicts reality that emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century. In England and the United States most of the prizewinning novels continue to be realistic (Hart 1989), portraying what is rational. Magical realism in literary terms involves myth interwoven with reality. Magical realism can be described, thus, as a particular type of realism in that it portrays a social reality not a fantastic world. It is different from the nineteenth-century realistic perception of the world and literary creation because the popular voice in magical realism is usually presented in a magical manner in terms of ghosts, spirits, myths or fantasy, which are interwoven with daily reality.

Magical realism is “an attitude towards reality” (Parkinson Zamora and Faris 1995, 121), Luis Leal (1967) tells us, that is much debated, both from the point of view of its origins and in terms of its use. The foundations for magical realism can be traced to art criticism. Franz Roh a historian and art critic first used the term to describe the real and imagined and status of objects in
Post-expressionist paintings in 1920s\(^8\) in Europe that depict familiar objects in everyday life with a new way of seeing them (Gunther 36). Alejo Carpentier formulates the concept of “Lo real maravilloso” (1949) as an affinity between the real and the imaginary in Latin America. He gives importance to the cultural and geographic identity. “In Latin America”, Carpentier argues, “the fantastic is not to be discovered by subverting or transcending reality with abstract forms and manufactured combinations of images. Rather, the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America’s varied history, geography, demography and politics” (Parkinson Zamora and Faris, 1995, 121). Carpentier sees “lo real maravilloso” as part of the land, the people and the culture of Latin America. Angel Flores (1985) uses Jorge Luis Borges “as a point of departure of this new phase of Latin American literature, of magical realism” (Parkinson Zamora and Faris, 1995, 113). Flores remarks that Latin American fiction is no longer in search of its expression as magical realism is a genuinely Latin American expression, influenced by the fantastic extensively used by Borges in his writing. Luis Leal (1967) refutes Angel Flores’ notion that magical realism in Latin America comes from the influence of Borges by stating that magical realism is not based on a fantasy world; on the contrary, it comes from “an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, a reality thus perceived with special intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state […] Magical realism is not magic literature either. Its aim is to express emotions, not to evoke them. Magical realism, is more than anything else, an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms” (Leal 1967-in Parkinson Zamoras and Faris 1995, 121). Amaryll Chanady in Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved

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\(^8\) Roh listed several artists considered magical realism painters, like De Chirico, Grosz, Grossberg, Schotttz, Shrimpf and others, but several he had in his lists have been “relegated” to different categories like Surrealism and Futurism, like Pablo Picasso, Max Beckman, Andre Derain, Max Ernst, Carlo Carra, Gino Severini, and Joan Miró. For a complete list of artists refer to (Parkison Zamora and Faris 31 and 65)
Versus Unresolved Antinomy (1985) highlights that Leal calls magical realism an “attitude towards life” as it expresses mythical voices rooted in local cultures. She investigates how Western rationalism is subverted in the work of Latin American writers. Chanady supports the notion that Latin American writers use European surrealism as a source and inspiration for magical realism as a New World phenomenon to counter realism. However, Chanady recognizes that Carpentier supports the notion that “lo real maravilloso” is part of the Latin American culture as the indigenous beliefs and traditions and the colonial history gives Latin America a particular means of expression in this magical realistic mode of writing. Menton tries to prove that magical realism is an artistic tendency with specific chronological limits, having originated in German painting and expanded by the narratives of Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez in Latin America. Magical realism could have origins with Roh’s painting terminology, extended by Borges and García Márquez; however, magical realism is the result of the Latin American culture, full of particular beliefs and traditions that are mixed in everyday life.

The publication of the book Magical Realism: Theory, History and Community by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris (1995) makes a significant contribution to the study of magical realism because it presents a series of articles that analyzes the theory and history of magical realism as an international phenomenon that is present in many postcolonial works inside and outside of Latin America. Zamora and Faris identify some fundamental characteristics of magical realism. For them, it is an international commodity, a mode mastered by Latin American writers that transgresses boundaries by erasing differences between opposites like “mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and others, male and female” (6). Magical realism is concerned with reality and historical narratives, but at the same time it opposes rationalism by using imaginary scenes or events that encourage to criticize society and politics.
narrating history in a new way. Because of its innovative nature, magical realism texts are subversive as they allow a plurality of voices, resisting monologist powers. The polyvocality in magical realism has been particularly useful for women and postcolonial societies as this mode has allowed them to break their silence and speak up.

In addition to Parkinson Zamora and Faris’s definition of the term, this book contains other attempts to pin it down. Jon Thiem describes the interactions between the textual world and the worlds outside the world in conjunction with the character’s world and the reader’s. He uses texts by Julio Cortázar and Woody Allan as examples (235). Jeanne Delbaere-Garant investigates psychological, mythical and grotesque elements that unsettle literary realism in postcolonial writers Angela Carter, Jack Hodgins and Janet Frame. She argues that it is useful to search for the particular sources and motivations for the magic in a given text. Some writers use magical realism as a literary mode to focus on particular historical and political territories like D. M. Thomas in *The White House* (1981), Toni Morrison in *The Song of Solomon* (1977), and Isabel Allende in *The House of the Spirits*, where magical events echo external historical events in order to reconstruct history (249). This idea will be developed further in the body of my work. Stephen Slemon in his essay “Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse” shows that magic texts represent a positive and liberating engagement with codes of “imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation” (407) as magical realism gives a voice to communities silenced by colonization. He explains that critical studies on magical realism includes Latin America, the Caribbean, India, Nigeria and Canada as postcolonial countries. So magical realism can also portray the strength of communities more than the struggles of individual characters. Slemon concentrates on the study of two English Canadian magical texts to demonstrate that they account for the postcolonial history in which they are set: *The Invention of this World* (1977) by Jack Hodgins and *What the Crow Said*
(1978) by Robert Kroetsch. He sees in these texts a magical realism within the postcolonial perspective that seeks to recuperate the lost voices that imperialism pushed to the margins. Lois Parkinson Zamora in her essay “Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in U.S. and Latin American Fiction” argues that magical realism is truly postmodern in its rejection of the rationalism of Western modernity (497). Magical realist texts, Zamora explains, tend to universalize the individual self through the presence of ghosts that look for the connection with collective memory, tradition, communities, lost family members. She compares the use of ghosts in a number of U.S. and Latin American writers. To sum up this book, the foundations, the theory and the history of magical realism together with its social imperatives are presented in detail allowing for a better understanding of magical realism as a mode of writing. What is not present in this book is consistent definition across the range of essays. Perhaps this is impossible as magical realism contains such a variety of understandings and definitions.

Another critic engaged in the discussion of magical realism is Erik Camayd-Freixa. Contrary to the global perspective given by Zamora and Faris, he considers magical realism to be a historical style that derives from the presence of myth, legend and syncretism from the Americas. He believes that the magical realism is used in Latin America by writers who look for a new identity and emancipation. Helene Carol Weldt-Basson in her book Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction- the Impact of Postcolonialism and Feminism (2013) clearly positions magical realism as a type of historical novel that portrays the characters’ social and physical reality and the magical transformation that this reality undergoes in the popular culture. Weldt-Basson supports the notion that magical realist novels seek to illustrate, through myth and popular beliefs, Latin American history because history appears as an essential part of the message and perception of the text. Weldt-Basson says that postcolonial and feminist theory can be very useful in the study
of the historical fiction in Latin America as both are concerned with questions of representation, voice, marginalization and the relationship between politics and literature. Weldt-Basson also observes that the latest directions of historical fiction in Latin America have been influenced by postcolonialism and feminism.

The two novels I study are clear examples of historical fiction in Latin America that have been influence by postcolonialism and feminism. In *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Women*, the feminine and postcolonial voice is heard in particular moment of oppression in the history of Chile and Nicaragua through the use of magical realism as the bridge that connects the official history, popular roots, and the feminine experience.

Wendy Faris in *Ordinary Enchantments. Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (2004) positions magical realism as a multicultural mode of expression worldwide, especially in postcolonial cultures as magical realist texts allow the voices of marginal peoples and submerged traditions to be heard. Faris proposes that magical realism has an affinity with aspects of the women’s experience, considering a woman’s discourse that connects the maternal and the spiritual as opposed to the rational patriarchal thought. Faris argues that it may be possible that magical realism has a female spirit characterized by diffusion, polyvocality and a world of spirits, which she attempts to prove when she explains that magical realism is able to express some aspects of women’s experience expressed by French feminist theories about the discourse of women which reflects women’s experience of belonging to a particular sex (Irigaray 1977). Faris also argues that magical realism has eroded the importance of realism in literature. Contrary to the patrilineal form of realism that dominated fiction in the West for three centuries, especially by male writers, magical realism offers mechanism of expressions that give a voice to the previously unheard, like
women and the indigenous people. In the case of the novels in my study, the women present themselves as Latin American non-European women.

I have presented several definitions and explanations that give an account for this mode of writing and set a theoretical background for discussion of the novels. Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli associate themselves with magical realism in *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Woman* as the novels fuse social and political aspects of Latin America and the subjective women’s experiences. Magical realistic modes of seeing the world allow Allende and Belli to fuse the women worlds of spirituality and emotions to the official history of Latin America in each of their particular contexts.

In the study of Allende and Belli’s novels I will show that magical realism is a category of historical fiction, as described by Weldt-Basson, which depicts the official history of particular social, cultural or political spaces mixed with popular myth and beliefs, providing the language for the new direction of the postmodern historical fiction in Latin America. This fusion brings history closer to the experience of individuals and their memories, and it allows the reader to ponder upon the content of history in a reflexive and philosophical mode as stated by Jacobs, as opposed to the matter-of-fact content of the traditional historical novels. In the particular case of *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Woman*, magical realism is a valuable writing mode that crafts the connection between history and the intimate feminine experience of women whose voices are hard to find in Latin America literature before the explosion of women writers in the 1980s.

### 1.4 Collective Memory

Maurice Halbwachs, French philosopher and sociologist, is the father of the concept of collective memory. His book, *The Collective Memory*, published in 1950, advanced the thesis that, in addition to individual memory there is a collective memory, and this memory is dependent upon
the framework within which a group is situated in a particular society. Thus, an individual's understanding of the past is strongly linked to the group consciousness. In *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs analyzes collective memory and the influence that groups or communities have on individual memories. The importance of Halbwachs lies in the study of group dynamics which puts emphasis on the social contextualization of the individual memory; thus, introducing the concept of collective memory based on the dynamics of social groups which “borrow a great deal from one another but also […] their lives are intertwined” (112). The social framework of collective memory is essential to understanding Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory as he recognizes that the foundation of our memory is based on the different social groups we are part of. We are the result of the different groups we belong to during our lives and the memory they imprint on us at different times in our lives. Collective memory is the living memory of each group that we carry on in our lives, which is continuous and flexible as it changes through time as we age.

While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. While these remembrances are mutually supportive of each other and common to all, individual members still vary in the intensity with which they experience them. I would readily acknowledge that each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory, that this viewpoint changes as my position changes, that this position itself changes as my relationships to other milieus change…In accounting for that diversity, however, it is always necessary to revert to a combination of influences that are social in nature. (Halbwachs 48)

In this passage, Halbwachs is arguing that individuals retrieve memories from a group of people. Each individual has a particular viewpoint on the collective remembrance and this viewpoint changes as the individual’s relationships change over time caused by “influences that are social in nature”, that is to say, the intimate memory of an individual originates in social contexts. Halbwachs further explains that collective memory is flexible, as it allows particular memories to
arise at different generations and at different stages in the development of individual personal identities. When describing collective memory, Halbwachs contrasts history and collective memory as they both oppose each other in many respects. Historical memory, Halbwachs tells us, represents a lost past that lacks the social bond as it is distant, while the collective memory is a history that is alive and continues through time (80). Besides “written history” says Halbwachs, there is a “living history that perpetuates and renews itself through time” (64) called collective memory.

However, historical memory represents the fragmented lost past that is a recollection of a distant and unitary time. Collective memory, on the other hand, is multiple as it comes from different social groups and continuous as if nothing is lost. Halbwachs considers the collective memory of a group to be a collection of similarities inside a group that remain even though there are changes in relationships with other groups. He writes,

> History is a record of changes […] In reality, those who write history and pay primary attention to changes and differences […] history perceives only the sum (in the sense of the integral calculus) or final result. This viewpoint of history is due to its examining groups from outside […] In contrast, the collective memory is the group seen from within during a period not exceeding, and most often much shorter than, the average duration of a human life. …..The collective memory is a record of resemblances and, naturally, is convinced that the group remains the same because it focuses attention on the group, whereas what has changed are the group’s relations or contacts with other groups. (Halbwachs 87)

History, Halbwachs is telling us, is a “record of changes” as a result of only perceiving the final result of those changes and transformation in society from outside. Collective memory, on the contrary, is a record of similarities that a group experiences from within. Thus, Halbwachs holds the notion that history is distant as it represents the past from outside, while collective memory is an intimate voice of a group of individuals that have similarities that bring them close to each other, like the connection between generations in a family. Halbwachs analyzes the relationship of grandchildren and grandparents, for example, as a “living bond of generations,” stating that
perhaps their connection lies in their disregard for “contemporary events” (63). As parents are busy taking care of their present lives, grandparents help to take care of their grandchildren, imparting customs and traditions. Thus, the child, Halbwachs perceives, is exposed to “an even more distant past” (63), by grandparents whose stories link the past and present with not only facts but with attitudes and ways of being in the past. The memory of the grandparents represent the living experience of living history because he/she has experienced it. Therefore, the bond between generations in a family lies in the activation of collective memory, which represents a living history full of traditions, customs, ordinary events and stories. For the purpose of my novels, family stories are the most important means of transmitting collective memory.

Nevertheless, general history, Halbwachs asserts, “starts when traditions ends and social memory is fading or breaking up” (78) describing past events that are presented in books and studied at school elaborated by someone outside the social group that had those traditions. Halbwachs shows that history connects the gap between the present and the past, to restore the continuity. On the contrary, Halbwachs explains, “collective memory […] is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of leaving in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memories alive” (80). Collective memory never ceases to exist being always a living part of the consciousness of groups that keeps them together. Family ties represents an excellent example studied by Halbwachs to understand this continuity of memories among different generations as memories bring them close together by sharing similarities based on tradition and customs. Thus, the continuity of the collective consciousness is what helps to keep the bond of a group.

Every group--be it religious, political, or economic, family, friends, or acquaintances, even a transient gathering in a salon, auditorium, or street-immobilizes time in its own way and imposes on its members the illusion that, in a given duration of a constantly changing
world, certain zones have acquired a relative stability and balance in which nothing essential is altered. (Halbwachs 126)

The immobilization of past time creates a “relative stability and balance” in a group that bonds them together. The past is immobilized to bond a group creating collective memory that represents a social framework from which individuals “arrange and retrieve its remembrances” (126). The continuity of this past or collective memory lies in the fact that groups have the capacity to “reascend the course of time and pass continually over traces left behind” (126). History, on the other hand, is interested in the past of what no longer exists and its main purpose is to preserve the past. “Apparently history must wait until old groups have disappeared”, Halbwachs emphasis, “until their thoughts and memory have vanished” (106). History, thus, becomes distant from the real time of society or groups. The social framework of memory is what defines Halbwachs theory of collective memory that can be described as the bond between social groups and their memories establishing stability and particular frameworks where members of the group can retrieve remembrances to generate their collective memory. The continuity of collective memory is what bonds and unite groups.

Collective memory is being displaced into the margins, Pierre Nora argues that the modern trend is to preserve history with the official history and artifacts, forgetting the connection to a group. This leading historian endeavours to understand the functions of collective memory by recognizing that lieux of memoire, the sites of memories, such as archives, museums and other memorials that have been created because spontaneous collective memory has been marginalized. Modern memory is “above all, archival” (13) says Nora, and it relies on historical facts and traces of a past that is gone. The excessive historical analysis of the past or “acceleration of history” (7) marginalizes “the remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition” (7) giving
importance to data as an “unlimited repertoire of what might need to be recalled” (13). Nora (1989) captures the essence of memory and contrasts it to history in the following way:

Memory is life […] It remains in permanent evolution…History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon […] history is a representation of the past […] Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it…History…calls for analysis and criticism […] memory is by nature multiple and yet specific. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one. (8-9)

As Nora affirms, memory is alive formed by “living societies” (8), transmitting, the non-verbalized tradition. It is present in the rituals of groups, in the performance of everyday life that includes body language, silence and spirit; in Nora’s words “memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects” (9); on the contrary, history focuses strictly on the organization of the past by contemplating “temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things” (9). Thus, Nora supports the notion that collective memory represents life that is present in silent traditions and their repetition through different generations with skills that are passed down by tradition, interweaving the past and present to connect individuals in a particular group that bonds through collective memory. Nora gives importance to the continuity of memory passed down in the ritual of traditions stating that “each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual of repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning” (8). So, the performance of everyday acts and their repetition sustains “a timeless practice” within a group. This continuous practice of rituals creates collective memories from within the groups. Memoriologists, like Nora, envision individual memories as being the product of a social context, supporting Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory who elaborates extensively on the social frameworks of memory.
Susan Crane (1997) suggests that collective memory has not been displaced by historical memory, as French historian Pierre Nora and many modern theorists have argued today. She describes collective memory as a locale where the transmission of memory and identity has worked together with history. According to Crane, the difference between collective memory as “lived experiences” and historical memory as “the preservation of lived experiences” is that historical memory represents the “objectification” of the historical consciousness in collective memory. Crane explains that the debate about the practice of history and collective memory may have forgotten the historical consciousness that Funkenstein (1989) defines as an “organized form of” collective memory” (19). She gives a new meaning to Halbwachs’ social frameworks of collective memory by stating that Funkenstein’s study implies a possible combination of historical and collective memory:

For if historical memory is only one form of collective memory, it may well be that collective memory has not been lost …but, in fact, has persisted…unlike what has been proposed so far. In historical artifact, I will suggest relocating the collective back in the individual who articulates it--the individual who disappeared in the occlusion of personal historical consciousness by the culture of preservation. (Crane 1375)

Crane supports the notion that the location of collective memory is in individuals and not only in sites. The individual uses artifacts, reads or refers to texts when thinking historically. Crane argues that it is important to see collective memory in itself as a source of historical consciousness that comes from individuals and the representation of this collective memory by individuals has been expressed through national or collective histories for years. Thus, Crane proposes to see the individuals as member of groups who expresses personal memories which have historical importance. When defining collective memory, Crane also places emphasis on the individual who remembers. She recognizes that collective memories signify the representation of the past brought to the present with memories which are built and renewed constantly in the realities and lives of
individuals and social groups. Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam (1996) in their article “Collective Memory-What is it?” state that collective memory is an elaboration of an individual memory to suit a particular social environment, supporting the idea that collective and individual memory are the same and are located in “the same individual mind” (47). Thus, collective memory has its roots in the past and continues in the present by preserving lived experiences of individuals within a group. Collective memories preserve the past that helps to understand the present and shape identities. Contrary to historiography, which is only a recollection of a distant past that has been lost, collective memory is a continuous memory kept alive by individual members of a community that helps to give individuals a sense of identity and a sense of belonging.

The latest studies on collective memory have been linked to conflicts and trauma in the past. This is particularly relevant to Latin America of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s when repressive governments in many countries, like Chile and Nicaragua where the authors of the novels under study are from, terrorized individuals and communities and left them with a trauma which literature has attempted to address. Luisa Valenzuela, (1938- ) an Argentinean contemporary author of several novels that center on the time when a military dictatorship ruled Argentina (1976 -1983) creating a violent climate, states that the memory of those years should not escape our present so that violence does not happen again. For her, literature and other forms of writing are a way to keep memories alive in order to avoid the repetition of history (Valenzuela 2001, 116). Valenzuela gives memory a profound meaning in the healing of a society that has to come to terms with horrors of the past. She values writing as a vehicle for remembering and also for elaborating other visions of the events which are not regulated by these dictatorships. Maria del Carmen Sillato⁹ argues that the testimonio genre is used widely by Latin American writers and represents the need to recover

⁹ Maria del Carmen Sillato in Huellas.
the memory of a violent past so that history does not repeat itself. Like Sillato, who studies the recovery of memories of the violent dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern cone, Ana Ros also concentrates on the commemoration of this period in the history of Latin America. In her book *The Post-dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay-Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (2012), she analyzes active forms of transmission and remembering like movies, films and texts as vehicles to frame the collective memory about the violent past. By activating the collective memory of this past, Ros affirms the culture of fear imposed on the years of the dirty war in Latin America is confronted by contemporary society. In this study on active forms of transmissions of memory, she also highlights the predominance of women participation in the active transmission of the past and she incites to further develop this phenomenon (204).

In her book *Escrituras que trazan memorias, La Mujer Habitada de Gioconda Belli y La Travesía de Luisa Valenzuela* (2010) Bisherú Bernal Medel examines extensively the importance of memory in two novels, and does an in depth study of the relevance of memory as it has been an important topic since the 1990s in various part of the world, including Latin America. Bernal Medel accentuates the relationship between memory and the personal experience reflected in the writings of these novels. Bernal Medel sees *The Journey* by Argentinean writer Luisa Valenzuela and *The Inhabited Woman* by Gioconda Belli as depositaries of memory that is built from individual perspectives that search to build social awareness and the collective memories of those events. The critic recognizes the subversion present in these novels as their narrative aims at opposing the official truth imposed by the dictatorships and breaking the silence of the oppressed.

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10 *Writings that Traces Memory: The Inhabited Woman by Gioconda Belli and The Journey by Luisa Valenzuela.* (my translation)
The novels have, according to Bernal Medel, multiple memories from non-official positions that include the private and the public.

In her article “To Narrate Histories: the Fictionalization of Historical Topics by Mexican writers Elena Garro, Rosa Beltrán and Carmen Boullosa” (2007) Ute Seydel also emphasizes on collective memory in Latin American historical narratives. She analyzes historical narratives by women authors in the Latin American context, giving importance to memory as the origin of cultures as it transmits the essence of social cultural contexts to remember significant events. She addresses collective memory as a social collection that is essential to reaffirm the identity of a group through memory as there is a feeling of cohesion in this group. Claudia Feld in her article “Del estrado a la pantalla: las imágenes del juicio a los ex-comandantes en la Argentina, Siglo XX (Memorias de la represión)” studies the memories of the oppression during the Argentinean years of dictatorship from 1976-1983 and explains that memory, contrary to history, is activated by groups who are in charge of transmitting values from one generation to the next. She affirms that in the recent studies on collective memory, traumatic episodes in the past are a part of the present political struggles.

In the novels The House of the Spirits and The Inhabited Woman the women’s collective memory plays a role in the development of the narratives and helps the reader to understand history from a woman’s perspective. The memories of women from the past impel characters to search for their identities, feel stronger in times of difficulties, and stimulate social and individual change. Diana Taylor (2003) affirms that memory links the private spheres of individuals with their surroundings as it incorporates the past into the present to find their identity. Thus, the importance of women’s collective memories included in these novels is essential to the meaning of the stories as they include the private and public worlds and fill silences within history. Considering Susan
Crane’s explanation of collective memory as a continuous thought of the past that is extended into the present by individuals as their lived experiences, it can be argued that women’s collective memory in these novels as described by Crane, helps in the search for their identity, stimulates struggle for change, and provokes a social and individual change. Continuity involves evolving and being dynamic; thus, collective memory as a continuum that joins the present and the past stimulates struggle for change in the lives of women because it is dynamic. Pablo Ramírez describes collective memory as a process that is dynamic as it is affected by political and social events that occur in the present. The dynamic process of collective memories, Ramírez states, involves “framing and reframing memories” 11 (276) in the present.

Crane advocates the relocation of collective memory back to the individual who has lived through experiences and who was silenced by the official history. The women in the novels of my study: Alba, Lavinia and Itza’s voice that individualize history, and relocate collective memory back to the individual. The collective memory of women in these novels adds another layer of meaning to history. Thus, women’s collective memory in these novels constitutes the framework to narrate history from a women’s experience, giving importance to collective memory. Much is passed down from one woman to another without words in silence, through performance and gestures. Thus, the new historical novels *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Woman* written in the 1980s by Allende and Belli, clearly are depositaries of women’s collective memories in search of new identities. History is told from a women’s perspective, accentuating the importance of memory in social relations as a continuum. In *The House of the Spirits*, Clara learns much from her mother Nivea and passes on her female wisdom to her daughter Blanca and

11 Pablo Ramírez studies collective memories in the article “Collective Memory and the Bordelands in Guillermo Verdecchia’s Fronteras Americanas” in *Latin American Identities After 1980* by Gordana Yovanovich and Amy Huras, editors (2010)
especially to her granddaughter Alba. All four names are a variation of light and a movement away from darkness, towards a new dawn, as Alba signifies in Spanish. In *The Inhabited Woman*, Itzá is an indigenous woman from the past whose spirit guides Lavinia, giving her mythical strength to confront revolutionary times in the 1970s’ Nicaraguan history. Lavinia’s Aunt Inés and her memory also empower Lavinia to find her new identity in social and political instability.

My study attempts to prove that *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Woman* are historical novels that center on the stories and the experiences of individual women, as depositaries of tales and lived experiences interwoven with official historical events from Chile and Nicaragua. The collective memory gives agency to the women protagonists in these novels to reposition themselves during revolutionary times in their societies that search for a better tomorrow. Collective memory is, thus, revived and the subjective is merged with the objective account of reality. By activating the collective memory, Alba and Lavinia fight for their liberation from oppression. The collective memories of Alba in *The House of the Spirits* and Lavinia in *The Inhabited Woman* are reframed in search for their new female identities in the social and political revolutionary circumstances that they experience. The memories of women that belong to their past empower them to break away from tradition and search for a new identity. Magical realism, a literary mode chosen by both Allende and Belli in *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Woman*, gives space for the memories of the past that the women silently pass on to one to another. By using extraordinary occurrences, the appearance of ghosts, and the reincarnation of a person in a tree, Allende and Belli, as storytellers, fuse memories with a historical reality to challenge the limitations and partiality of the official history.
Chapter II: *The House of the Spirits*

2.1 The Plot

*The House of the Spirits* written by Isabel Allende has been widely analyzed and studied, it has been controversial at times for its resemblance to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Nobel Prize winning Gabriel García Márquez. Like the Colombian masterpiece, the Chilean novel offers us a window to look at the social and political reality of Latin America, more specifically of Chile’s history from the 1920s to the 1970s and from the private space of the home of Del Valle-Trueba families. Appealing to aspects of life traditionally associated with women, emotions, romanticism and the senses, Allende delineates the social and political reality of Chile in *The House of the Spirits*; adding women’s experience to history, she accuses the military dictatorship for the violence and terror imposed on Chile in the 1970s. The family saga in *The House of the Spirits* is interwoven with historical events and creates a space for memories that save Alba from dying when being in prison where she was tortured. By mixing the affective female experiences with historical facts, Allende associates herself with magical realism.

*The House of the Spirits,* published in 1982, is the first novel written by Isabel Allende. In exile in Venezuela after Pinochet’s coup in 1972, she started a letter to her dying grandfather in Chile which later would become *The House of the Spirits.* In the family saga, women are at the center of the story. The novel depicts their lives around Esteban Trueba from the 1920s until the time when the socialist President Salvador Allende was overthrown by Augusto Pinochet. The main narrator of the story is a woman who finds her grandmother’s diaries, *cuadernos de anotar la vida,* and based on them she writes her own story. But the reader learns only at the end of the novel that Alba is one of the narrators.
Allende describes her own country’s public history mainly from the perspective of women: the private space of intimate family life at home ruled by emotions and premonitions, as the very name suggests: *The House of the Spirits*. Previous studies have focused on different aspects of *The House of the Spirits*: the evolution of the role of women in Latin America, patriarchy, socio-political realms in Chile, magical realism, post-boom writers in Latin America, and women writers in Latin America. The focus of my analysis is not so much on the analysis of the female narrative voice but the inclusion of women’s collective memory, spirituality and magical realism in the quest for identity during an important period of Latin American change. I hope to explore what the women’s voice adds to social change and consequently the formation of the new historical novel in Latin America, which is now written by both men’s and women’s characters: Esteban Trueba and Alba.

2.2 Allende’s House in Gabriel García Márquez Macondo?

Before analyzing *The House of the Spirits* from the woman’s perspective, it is important to discuss its connection to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez to explain, if possible, its controversial resemblance. What is the relationship between *The House of the Spirits* to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a novel written by a man? Is Allende’s work parody or piracy? Or, is it one more Latin American novel with a common history, social and political situation? To answer these questions, I will present a brief overview of the existing literature that addresses these questions.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the life of the Buendía family in the city of Macondo, represent Colombia and the colonization period in America, another chapter in the history of Latin America, from a patriarchal point of view. *The House of the Spirits* represents the history of Chile in Latin America, depicting the evolution of women and in their role in society in a revolutionary
time when change was sought. There is no doubt that the two main similarities that stand out are the family saga and the use of magical realism. Both novels are family sagas that narrate the story of several generations. The del Valle and the Buendía families share relationships, sons and daughters, husband and wives, uncles and aunts who are affected by a social and political reality geographically located in two countries in Latin America: Colombia and Chile (although García Márquez and Allende do not explicitly reveal where their stories are situated). Both novels include written family memoirs with stories that influence the next generations; however, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* revolves around male protagonists who narrate and decipher the story, while *The House of the Spirits* gives importance to the female lineage that stands out in the novel for their role in the history of Chile and in the progress of women’s liberation. In Allende’s novel love and commitment to social causes triumph over male oppression, represented by the figure of Esteban Trueba. Magical realism, as a mode of expression, is used differently by García Márquez and Allende in these novels; while *One Hundred Years of Solitude* uses magic to reflect reality throughout the novel, *The House of the Spirits* uses magic to mainly portray Clara’s powerful spirituality and the collective memory of women. Alba describes her grandmother whose spiritual world continues after Clara’s death:

(It is a delight for me to read her notebooks from those years, which describe a magic world that no longer exists. Clara lived in a universe of her own invention, protected from life’s inclement weather, where the prosaic truth of material objects mingled with the tumultuous reality of dreams and the laws of physics and logic did not always apply.) (82)
In Clara’s world of magical realism, the prosaic world of material things is mixed with tumultuous truth of the violent reality of Chile in the 70s described in the novel.

Critical approaches to Isabel Allende’s novel clearly shows that *The House of the Spirits* is similar to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, (Riquelme Rojas and Aguirre Rehbein, 1991). Robert Antoni in his article “Parody or Piracy: The Relationship of *The House of the Spirits* to *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*” analyses in detail the relationship between these two works. Antoni states that *The House of the Spirit* could be considered a rewritten form of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* using magical realism and the language of García Márquez. Isabel Allende’s writing, follow García Márquez and other Latin American Boom writers, like Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortázar, who use magical realism as a realm to write about the social and political realities in Latin America and the search for personal identity in the 1960s. In his examination of magical realism as a point of departure for comparison of these two novels, Antoni studies examples of hyperboles, metaphors and the appearance of ghosts. Antoni also highlights other similarities like the use of third person narrators whose identities are disclosed at the end: Melquíades and Alba. The similarities between Melquíades and tío Marcos (adventurous travelers and readers of magical books) and Rosa the beautiful and Remedios the beauty, are other examples of possible intertextuality. However, *The House of the Spirits*, Antoni concludes, “discovers itself as a unique statement” (25). That is to say, although Gabriel García Márquez had a great impact on Latin American literature and he is a difficult author to ignore in the 1980s, Allende finds her unique story that centers around the relationship of women and their progression towards liberation meshed with the political and social reality of Chile from the 1920s to the 1970s.

The women portrayed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have traditional roles as mothers in the home (Salomon 1993), like Úrsula who is portrayed by García Márquez primarily as a
mother figure, a traditional Latin American woman. The female character of Úrsula along with Remedios, Rebeca, Amaranta, Santa Sofía de la Piedad, Remedios the Beauty, Fernanda Del Carpio, Renata Remedios and Amarata Úrsula are joined together by their marriage to the Buendías or in support roles of parenting the Buendías. They are confined to the world of domestic and motherly matters while men conquer the outside world\(^{12}\) (Salomon 1993). The women in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are strong figures in everyday life while their male partners are lost in their childish fantasies and endless wars. But, the women in *The House of the Spirits* are not only strong but search for liberation from a patriarchal society (unlike women in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* who maintain their traditional domestic roles in the male-dominated world of Macondo).

Rodrigo Canovas (1991) argues that there is no doubt about the resemblance of the two novels stating that *The House of the Spirits* is a re-writing of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; what is relevant, Canovas argues, is to determine the similarities and search for the cultural and social functions of *The House of the Spirits*. Its “*receta de telenovela* (soup opera recipe) Canovas explains, accepts the love between Blanca and Pedro Tercero who is a *peón* in his the Tres Marías belong to different classes, and it changes Esteban Trueba who at the end helps Pedro Tercero leave the country and supports his granddaughter Alba who is a political activist opposing his political views. This example represents the hope for change in society.

After analyzing in depth the role of magical realism in some novels by Isabel Allende, Patricia Harts (1987) argues that *The House of the Spirits* cannot be read without remembering

\(^{12}\) Salomon insists that the women in Macondo are portrayed as “male-defined, biological reproducers or sexually pleasing objects”. She further explains that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* accentuates a “climate of stereotypes and limited expectations” (194).
subtle references to García Marquéz. For example, Clara alludes directly to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in regards to the repetition of names when she refuses Esteban Trueba’s proposal to name their first son Esteban. Clara intervenes in the repetition of names and patriarchal customs, suggesting new names for her sons, and more importantly a new approach to reality which challenges her conservative husband:

-No es uno, son dos- replicó Clara-. Los mellizos se llamarán Jaime y Nicolás respectivamente-agregó. Eso fue demasiado para mí. Supongo que estallé por la presión, acumulada en los últimos meses. Me puse furioso, alegué que étos eran nombres de comerciantes extranjeros, que nadie se llamaba así en mi familia ni en la suya, que por lo menos uno debía llamarse Esteban como yo y como mi padre, pero Clara explicó que los nombres repetidos crean confusión en los cuadernos de anotar la vida y se mantuvo firme en su inflexión. (125)

(-It’s not one, it’s two,- Clara replied. - The twins will be called Jaime and Nicolás, respectively- She replied. That was too much for me…I got furious, arguing that those were names for foreign merchants, that no one in my family or hers had ever had such names, that at least one of them should be called Esteban, the same name like myself and my father, but Clara explained that repeating the same name just caused confusion in her notebooks that bore witness to life. Her decision was inflexible.) (115)

Clara obviously refers here to the repetition of names in the Buendía family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which does cause indeed confusion. Harts takes it even further, suggesting that the romanticism in the novel *Love in Times of Cholera* (1985) by García Márquez, where love between a man, Florentino Ariza, and a woman Fermina is at the center of the story, could have been influenced by the magical feminist centeredness of Isabel Allende. This novel can be considered a revolutionary change in García Márquez (Phychon, 1988), which supports Harts’ notion that Allende’s feminism might have influenced García Márquez. In this case, we witness a two way influence between Isabel Allende and García Márquez.

After analyzing Allende’s novel *The House of the Spirits*, Juan Manuel Marcos (1988) states that Isabel Allende distinguishes herself from García Márquez because she clearly depicts
the social conditions of Latin American women. Marcos supports the notion of the individuality of both Latin American writers as both are the product of different historical and social experience. Isabel Allende is fourteen years younger than García Márquez and wrote The House of the Spirits in exile for political reasons as many other post-Boom writers from South America did. For her, the social and political sources of inspiration are more immediate. Allende’s efforts to denounce the violence used by the dictatorships during the 70s and 80s in the southern cone countries of South America was a life and death necessity. Marcos acknowledges some similarities between the novels, but he considers them superficial like: the beauty of Rosa who is Clara’s sister and Remedios la bella in Macondo, los cuadernos de anotar la vida written by Clara and the mystical pergaminos written by Melquíades, Alba’s fascination with her Tío Marcos magical books and adventures as the Buendía family is enchanted by Melquíades belongings, the denunciation of political corruption in Latin America (a common trait in Latin American writings) and the longevity of Ursula and La Nana, which is shared by Esteban Trueba as well. We can understand these superficial similarities as described by Marcos as sources of inspiration for Isabel Allende that represent a parody of some elements that are present in One Hundred Years of Solitude that help her create her own women-centered story based on her experience as a Chilean national, with a lesser dose of magic which gives the novel a more realistic nature that put emphasis on the specific reality of Chile and its society.

Assuming that similarities between the novels are present and allowing the reader to decide in terms of piracy or the development of another story in Latin America centering on women and using magical realism mastered by Gabriel García Márquez, I strongly support the notion that Isabel Allende’s novel The House of the Spirits aligns with the postmodern view of women that demystifies the male-oriented culture of Latin America by fomenting “a feminist revolution in life
and in literature” (Solomon 1993, 196). Weldt- Basson states that “Allende’s use of magical realism obeys different objectives and imperatives than those of her predecessor and clearly signals the movement of the magical realist historical novel towards an important feminist perspective” (23). The masterpiece One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez portrays the old traditional concepts and reality of the role of women in Latin America solely in the domestic sphere in a family saga that centers on male protagonists. In analyzing The House of the Spirits, I will concentrate on this revolutionary women’s voice through the analysis of what this novel adds to the history of Latin America by using magical realism as a category of historical fiction (Weldt-Basson, 2013) that combines history, magical realism and collective memory.

Considering their similarities, it can be argued that Allende in The House of the Spirits and Gabriel García Márquez in One Hundred Years of Solitude use similar magical realism techniques and family lineage/collective memory to structure the novels. However, The House of the Spirits centers on the female’s perspective, locating the story in a different Latin American country, Chile. Although Latin America has had important earlier writers, such as the famous seventeenth century Mexican poet Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz, and Chilean Nobel-prize winner Gabriela Mistral, among others, Allende’s female voice opens up a chapter in Latin American prose fiction now written by women writers.

2.3 The Characters: their Ghosts, Magic and Memory Mixed with the Social and Political History of Chile.
In this section of my research, my analysis focuses on the interactions of the characters in *The House of the Spirits* to create the new historical novel in Latin America, where women and the marginalized are given a greater voice. The characters in the novel are from different social classes and represent a different segment of society and their interaction tells a national story of the 20th century in Chile, particularly in the 1970s. The novel shows the evolution of a society that looks for social justice and the equality of women as well as of farm workers or *peones* who are at the margins of society. Collective memory, magical realism and marginalized women and men’s voices are combined to give a close-up view of women’s and lower-class people’s role in history in Latin America. In her article “Memory and Retelling: the Role of Women in *La Casa de los Espíritus*, Susan Frick 13 states that *The House of the Spirits* “invites contemplation of the role of memory in understanding history” (27). As contemplated by Frick, memory has a role in the development of this novel as the Del Valle women and their collective memory is passed from one generation to the next another adding deeper layers of meaning to the understanding of the past. My analysis focuses on the inclusion of collective memory as a source of empowerment for women in their quest for liberation from oppression and the use of magical realism as a literary practice that helps to bring collective memory as another layer of history.

Historical fiction is a representation of a distant past with a connection to historical events as a way of reflection on them and preserving memories. Historical fiction in the postmodern era in Latin America started to add the voices of the marginalized capturing the spirit of oral culture. The style and content of historical fictions inspired experimentation in writing, including the view of knowledge, like history, as subjective. The study of collective memory in retelling the past as

13 In “Memory and Retelling: the Role of Women in *La Casa de los Espíritus*, Susan Frick analyzes the memories of the past stories that Alba brings into her present. The present studies differs from Frick’s in that women collective memory and magical realism help in the formation of the new historical novel in Latin America.
opposed to historiography, adds new layers of meaning to the new historical fictions in Latin America because the concept of collective memory allows the inclusion of the oral culture and verbal transmissions of communities that also has relevance as being part of the past. Halbwachs supports the notion that collective memory is multiple as it comes from different social groups and continuous as “nothing is lost in the continuum”, contrary to historical memory that represents the fragmented loss of a distant past. Historical memory, according to Halbwachs, represents a lost past that lacks the social bond as it is distant. The necessity of writing the history of a period arises when there is a need to preserve a distant and lost past. Besides “written history” says Halbwachs, there is a “living history that perpetuates and renews itself through time” (80) called collective memory.

In the novel *The House of the Spirits*, Allende wants to tell us a story based on the recent history of Chile. Her political and social motivations, her exile to Venezuela and the desire to preserve memories triggers the need to tell the family story in *The House of the Spirits* in 1982, her first novel. The story is told from the point of view of Alba and her grandfather Esteban Trueba. Alba and Esteban Trueba’s voices are integrated to create a new story which meshes male and female perspectives of historical events of the past. Their voices represent women and men in the making of the social and political reality of Chile from the beginning of the 1920s to the 1970s. Their two voices describe the notion of the dialogic perspective based on Mikhail Bakhtin's\textsuperscript{14} theory of dialogism (1929). Bakhtin considers language as a “social phenomenon” that includes multiple social voices. Dialogism according to Bakhtin opposes the monologic single vision of truth that disregards multiple voices, and accepts polyphonic vision with multiple voices (240).

\textsuperscript{14} Mikhail Bakhtin when describing dialogue in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1929) invented the concept of polyphonic novel defined as a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (240)
Alba’s voice representing the realm of women depicts the social advancement towards women’s liberation while Esteban Trueba’s voice reveals the oppressive patriarchal society that dictates the norms for women and lower-class people, representing the historical memory. Thus, Alba and Esteban Trueba’s voices reflect Bakhtin’s dialogic perspective that includes multiple social voices and perceives language as a social phenomenon. This dialogic perspective in Bakhtin’s theory helps to reveal new meanings in the new Latin American novels by analyzing the female voice. Alba and Esteban Trueba narrate *The House of the Spirits* in a double-voiced perspective considering the Bakhtian dialogism with a “plurality … of voices” (240). Alba and Esteban Trueba represent opposite worlds: the female space of collective memory narrative and the male voice retelling past events of Chile. In *The House of the Spirits* women's and men’s voices and their relationships are meshed together which determines the new historical novel in Latin America. So, together they create a new historical novel that is dialogistic.

The reader will learn that Alba is the main narrator of the story only at the end of the novel when she discloses that her grandfather, Esteban Trueba, gave her the idea that both of them should write the story and helps her in the process:

> Mi abuelo tuvo la idea de que escribiéramos esta historia. Así podrás llevar las raíces contigo si algún día tienes que irte de aquí, hijita-dijo. Desenterramos de los rincones secretos y olvidados los viejos álbumes y tengo aquí, sobre la mesa de mi abuela, un montón de retratos: la bella Rosa, mi madre […] mi abuelo cuando era joven […] Férula […] mis Tíos Jaime y Nicolás […] también la Nana y los bisabuelos Del Valle. (452)

(It was my grandfather who had the idea that we should write this story. That way you’ll be able to take your roots with you if you ever have to leave, my dear, he said…I began to write with the help of my grandfather, whose memory remained intact to the last second of his ninety years.) (430-31)

Both Alba and the patriarch, Esteban Trueba, who changes in the course of the novel moved by Alba’s compassion and memories of his Clara, write the family saga to keep memories alive.
Mi abuela escribió durante cincuenta años en sus cuadernos de anotar la vida [...] se salvaron de la pira infame donde perecieron tantos otros papeles de la familia. Los tengo aquí, a mis pies, atados con cintas de colores, separados por acontecimiento, no por orden cronológico, tal como los dejó antes de irse. (453-54)

(My grandmother wrote in her notebooks that bore witness to life for fifty years. Smuggled out by certain friendly spirits, they miraculously escaped the infamous pyre in which so many other family papers perished. I have them here at my feet, bound with colored ribbons, divided according to events and not in chronological order, just as she arranged them before she left them. Clara wrote them so they would help me now to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own.) (432-33)

While many family papers and memories are lost, Clara’s notebook where she primarily recorded aspects of life are saved and are the main source of inspiration for Alba’s and Esteban’s narrative and Allende’s novel. This is another dialogic voice incorporated into the text. Clara left all her wrote by events separating them by different color ribbons. This order by event is not preserved, giving Alba room for interpretation and inclusion of historical events she herself lives through and witnesses. Reality is interwoven with magic through the literary practice of magical realism, which allows Allende to mix reality and magic to create a realm where different worlds and different voices are tied together to represent the reality of Latin America.

“Magical” Clara as an Agent of Change

In The House of the Spirits Allende uses magic to portray Clara’s powerful spirituality and the collective memory of women. Nora defines memory as “affective and magical” (8) and Allende chooses Clara to be spiritual and magic who is an agent of change. Alba remembers her grandmother Clara whose spiritual world continues after her death:

Es una delicia, para mí, leer los cuadernos de esa época, donde se describe un mundo mágico que se acabó. Clara habitaba un universo inventado para ella, protegida de las inclemencias de la vida, donde se confundían la verdad prosaica de las cosas materiales con la verdad tumultuosa de los sueños, donde no siempre funcionaban las leyes de la física o la lógica. (94)
It is a delight for me to read her notebooks from those years, which describe a magic world that no longer exists. Clara lived in a universe of her own invention, protected from life’s inclement weather, where the prosaic truth of material objects mingled with the tumultuous reality of dreams and the law of physics and logic did not always apply. (82)

In Clara’s world magic dreams are mixed with the prosaic world of material things, as Alba says. When Alba refers to Clara’s “mundo mágico”, she describes the “living bond of generations” (67) that grandparents and grandchildren experience according to Halbwachs that helps in the formation of collective memory as an intimate voice that bonds individuals. In Alba’s narrative, in a similar way, the tumultuous history of the violence of Chile in the 1970s is mixed with her memory of her grandmother, her own subjective world. The magical Clara represents change in the story as she influences others with her spiritual world. Her spirituality is magnified by magical powers: she can predict events, communicate with spirits and move objects.

Clara’s world of magic unquestionably subverts the rational world of Esteban Trueba who is affected by this world of “feminine-magic” sensibility and irrationality. At the end of the story, he is softened by Clara’s influence. As she faces her oppressive husband, Esteban Trueba, Clara functions beyond reason as she is guided by tradition passed from one woman to another through gestures, body language, silence, and other performances. Like Nora’s definition of memory, Clara passes down “The warmth of the tradition” (7), “…the silence of the custom” (7), and memory is also in “gestures” (9). The importance of memory is accentuated here by Clara who ponders upon the value and scope of family memory that extends to different generations:

Blanca empezó a producir figuritas para el pesebre navideño […] sin saber que estaba haciendo con barro lo mismo que su tía Rosa, a quien no conoció, hacía con hilos de bordar en su gigantesco mantel, mientras Clara especulaba que si las locuras se repiten en la familia, debe ser que existe una memoria genética que impide, que se pierdan en el olvido. (187)

(Blanca began to create tiny figures for the family’s Christmas manger, […] without realizing that she was doing in clay what her Aunt Rosa, whom she never knew, had done.
with thread on her enormous tablecloth. Clara decided that if craziness can repeat itself in a family, then there must be a genetic memory that prevents it from being swallowed by oblivion.) (174)

As it is said, out of “memoria genética” Blanca embarks on an activity which is as imaginative and crazy as her Aunt Rosa’s passion for making an enormous embroidered tablecloth. Even though Blanca never met Rosa, Clara declares their passion as a connection interwoven by memories that are inscribed in the family genes, which supports the importance of collective memory passed on to different generations. Her decision to write the *cuaderno de anotar la vida* demonstrates her desire to keep memories alive by writing. Halbwachs’ (1950) elaborate work on the social framework of memory states that individual memory is activated in the social framework in which it is constructed (Crane 1376). Halbwachs gives importance to groups dynamics and their memory. In the case of Clara, it is clear that she ponders upon the power of family memory that is passed on to different generations, what Halbwachs defines as the collective memory within a specific group, in this case a family.

Nora (1996), explains collective memory and describes memory as something as important as history, and as something that stands wall on its own. He says that “that memory is no longer a servant of history….it is, on the contrary, on a par with history” (Gedi and Elam 1376). Nora associates memory with magic as he strongly supports the notion that collective memory is associated with experience that is present in the tradition, in the voiceless customs that are passed to other generations (Gedi and Elam, 1996). Clara’s magical influence on the lives of her children: Jaime, Nicholas and Blanca is preeminently associated, as Nora says, with experience that is passed on to other generations. Clara’s sons and daughter inherit the spirituality of their mother, as well as her unspoken customs and tradition. Her two sons resemble her affective and spiritual personality, and contrast their father Esteban Trueba’s strong and authoritarian personality. Jaime
devotes his life to taking care of others, Nicholas’ flamboyant personality and Blanca’s transgression of class division by becoming involved with Pedro Tercero means that Clara’s spiritual and soft ways affect the life of her descendants, more than the rational and oppressive ways of their father Esteban Trueba.

Clara is an agent of change not only in her family but also in society. She has a special relationship also with Pedro Segundo, the peón who helps Esteban Trueba in Tres Marías. Without words, they almost instinctively form a union of solidarity to defy Esteban Trueba who represents the establishment. Pedro Segundo becomes Clara’s support in the management of Tres Marías after an earthquake that causes great damage to the estancia. Clara and Pedro Segundo join their efforts to run Tres Marías as Esteban Trueba is seriously injured and they become very close. They both count on each other and enjoy their moments together, as they both fear Esteban Trueba:

Clara llegó a temerlo mucho más que cuando era el hombre sano y fuerte que se introducía en la paz de su vida con un olor a macho ansioso, su vozarrón de huracán, su guerra sin cuartel, su prepotencia de gran señor, imponiendo su voluntad y estrellando sus caprichos contra el delicado equilibrio que ella mantenía entre los espíritus del Más Allá y las almas necesitadas del Más Acá. Llegó a detestarlo. (178)

(Clara came to fear him far more than she had when he was a healthy, strong man who disrupted her peaceful life with his scent of the eager male, his hurricane voice, his relentless warfare, and his pompous airs, imposing his will and shattering his whims against the delicate balance she tried to keep between the Here-and-Now. She came to despise him.) (164)

Knowing that his boss uses his “vozarrón de huracán” with his wife, Pedro Segundo connects to Clara and form a solidarity relationship with his boss’s wife.

Secretamente le había jurado lealtad y, como un adolescente, a veces fantaseaba con la idea de dar la vida por ella. La apreciaba tanto como odiaba a Esteban Trueba. (179)
(He had secretly sworn her his loyalty and, like an adolescent, there were times when he fantasized about giving his life for her. He valued her as much as he detested Esteban Trueba.) (165-66)

Both Clara and Pedro Segundo despise Esteban Trueba who treats them harshly having them under his control. Thus, they unite in their struggle against his oppressive power. Clara, again, is an agent of change as she breaks class barriers by creating this relationship with Pedro Segundo especially when she is feeling tired and confused:

Clara estaba muy cansada. Se sentía sola y confundida y en los momentos de las decisiones, al único que podía recurrir en busca de ayuda, era Pedro Segundo García. Ese hombre leal y silencioso, estaba siempre presente, al alcance de su voz, dando algo de estabilidad al bamboleo borrascoso que había entrado en su vida. A menudo al final del día, Clara lo buscaba para ofrecerle una taza de té […] Tenían muchas cosas que hablar, muchos problemas que resolver, muchos acuerdos pendientes, pero ambos comprendían que esta media hora en silencio era un premio merecido. (178-79)

Clara was tired. She felt alone and confused, and when it came time to make decisions, the only person she could turn to was Pedro Segundo García. That loyal, silent man was always there, within reach of her voice, providing a certain stability in the midst of the catastrophe that had shaken her life. At the end of the afternoon, Clara would often look for him to give him a cup of tea. […] They had so much to say to each other, many problems to resolve, many agreements pending, but they both understood that that half hour spent in silent was a well-deserved reward. (165)

Thus, “en silencio” or beyond simple words, the novel fosters the desire for unity of classes: the upper class women and working class men or peones in Tres Marías both struggling for social equality. As those who are on the margin, women and working men become allies in their struggle for social change. Yet, they move “en silencio” and develop a feeling of trust.

The special relationship that Clara and Férula, Esteban Trueba’s sister, develop represents another alliance, similar to the one between Clara and Pedro Segundo. They also form solidarity against the oppressing Esteban Trueba. Clara not only protects Férula, but makes her happy:
Por primera vez desde que podía recordar, Férula se sentía feliz. Estaba más cerca de Clara de lo que nunca estuvo de nadie, ni siquiera su madre. (110)

(For the first time she could remember, Férula felt happy. She was closer to Clara than she had ever been to anyone, even her own mother.) (98)

The unfortunate woman born to care for her parents and to be given crumbs by her brother has a magical relationship with her sister-in-law. Clara senses Férula’s death and announces it: “Clara opened he eyes. She was still having difficulty breathing, and tears were running down her cheeks and neck, staining her blouse. “Férula ha muerto” (163) (“Férula is dead”), she announced.”(149).

Both Clara and Férula care for each other, and their emotional connection infuriates Esteban Trueba, who becomes jealous of their relationship:

Se convenció de que la culpa de todo la tenía Férula, que había sembrado en su mujer un germen maléfico que le impedía amarlo y que, en cambio, robaba con caricias prohibidas lo que le pertenecía como marido. (142)

(He was convinced that Férula was entirely to blame, that she had planted an evil seed in his wife to prevent her from loving him, and that she was stealing forbidden kisses that properly belonged to him.) (130)

Esteban Trueba even accuses Férula of witchcraft and Clara of having a lesbian affair with his sister. That is why, when Esteban Trueba finds Férula sleeping in the same bed as Clara, he loses his temper and prohibits Férula from seeing his family again. Clara and Férula’s caring relationship forms an alliance that defies Esteban Trueba’s power.

However, their characters are different. Férula accepts her position as a woman in a traditional society that dominates her voice and induces her to be silent and do as the norms of society stipulate. Her silence means acceptance as society forces her to take care of her mother and not to speak up for her dreams and rights:
Esteban miró a su hermana. Era todavía una bella mujer, de forma opulentas y rostro ovalado de madona romana, pero a través de su piel pálida con reflejos de durazno y sus ojos llenos de sombras, ya se adivinaba la fealdad de la resignación [...] Tenía un alma atormentada [...] Sin decirlo abiertamente, estaba presente entre las dos el hecho de que la hija habría sacrificado su vida por cuidar a su madre [...] Era de gestos bruscos y torpes, con el mismo mal carácter de su hermano, pero por su condición de mujer, a dominarlo y a morder el freno. (53)

(Esteban looked at his sister. She was still a beautiful woman, with rich curves and the oval face of a Roman Madonna, but already the ugliness of resignation could be glimpsed through her pale, peach-tones skin and her eyes full of shadows […] She was a tormented soul […] Without anything being said openly, the fact remained that the daughter had sacrificed her life to care for her mother […] She moved thickly and awkwardly and had the same sour character as her brother, but life and the fact that she was a woman had forced her to overcome it and to clamp down on the bit.) (42)

Clara, on the contrary, challenges the traditional role of women in society, and paves the way towards women’s liberation as she fights oppression by living in her spiritual world, defying Esteban Trueba with silence. Clara’s silence is a means of rebellion as she uses it as a way to stand up for herself when Esteban beats her. Clara does stay with her husband but she decides not to speak to him again, using silence as a form of oppression for Esteban Trueba.

Clara’s subversive nature and her desire to change society is stimulated by a woman from her childhood, La Nana was a servant in Del Valle family and had a nurturing connection with Clara since her childhood. Recognizing the importance of this spiritual woman, Clara decides to move her after her death to the Del Valle mausoleum so that she continue to be close to those she has served during her lifetime. Clara, again, breaks the class barrier, subverting the traditional aristocratic establishment by considering la Nana as her equal. Clara subverts the world of the establishment rupturing the unjust structure of society. She influences her daughter and sons not to see class barriers, by associating herself with Pedro Segundo and La Nana, and with her emotional alliance with Férula, as well as choosing a self-imposed silence she defies her husband and stands up to him. With her spirituality and love, she is an agent of change who exerts an
incredible influence over her family members; she even changes her husband with her softness and love. Clara also subverts the way history is told in Latin America by adding her spirituality to Alba’s collective memory through her notebooks.

Magical realism as a literary practice also subverts the way history is told by transgressing boundaries of literary realism to fuse the world of the “mind and body, spirit and matter…male and female” (Parkinson Zamora and Faris 1995) and in the particular case of my study, the use of magical realism as a literary practice fuses the official history with collective memory to create the new historical novel in Latin America in which history is told by both men and women. Thus, magical realism resembles Clara in the novel as both subvert tradition and the rationality by combining the mind (history) and the spirit (collective memory) by transgressing boundaries: the “cuadernos de anotar la vida” meshed with the violent history of Chile in the 1970s. Magical realism and Clara create the new historical novel in Latin America, where the individual “writes back” (Susan Crane) with her/his collective memory to add another layer of meaning to the official history.

**ALBA “writing back” with her Collective Memory in *The House of the Spirits***

In the novel *The House of the Spirits*, Alba plays an important part in the development of history which incorporates female collective memory; she also shows that women have the power to reinvent themselves. The identity of Alba who tells us her family story is built on the memories of other women in her family: her great- grandmother Nivea, her great aunt Rosa, her grandmother Clara, and her mother Blanca. The continued presence of these women in the house is described in terms of re-appearance of los fantasmas, the ghosts:

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15 Crane, Susan (1996). *Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory*
-Si las empleadas oyen ruidos, creerán que han vuelto los fantasmas-dijo Alba y le contó del glorioso pasado de espíritus visitantes y mesas voladoras de la gran casa de la esquina. […] Los enamorados probaron uno por uno los cuartos abandonados y terminaron improvisando un nido para sus amores furtivos en las profundidades del sótano. Hacía años que Alba no entraba allí y llegó a olvidar su existencia, pero en el momento en que abrió la puerta y respiró el inconfundible olor, volvió a sentir la mágica atracción de antes. (346-47)

(-If the servants hear noise, they’ll think the ghosts are back, Alba said. and she told him of the glorious past of visiting spirits and flying tables in the big house on the corner […] One by one the lovers tried out all the abandoned rooms, and finally chose an improvised nest in the depths of the basement. It had been years since Alba had been there, and she had almost forgotten that it existed, but the minute she opened the door and inhaled its unmistakable odor, she felt again the old magic attraction.) (329)

The memories of the past are not constantly present and they are triggered by the presence of objects in the home of her grandparents. Alba has a constant attraction for the collection of family objects that represent her past and family history which help her during the process of forming her identity in the present. As Halbwachs explains, collective memory is based on a social framework that exists in specific groups. The specific group in this case is the Del Valle and Trueba family that guides Alba in her search for identity and salvation. Crane states that memory is not a “historical artifact” and suggests that “relocating the collective back in the individual who articulates it- the individual who disappeared in the occlusion of personal historical consciousness by the culture of preservation” (1375).

Alba is the individual who articulates the collective memory of her family to find her own identity. Alba’s memories save her from the horror of torture when she is imprisoned in the 

*perrera*, the doghouse:

Trató de no respirar, de no moverse, y se puso a esperar la muerte con impaciencia. Así estuvo por mucho tiempo. Cuando casi había conseguido su propósito, apareció su abuela Clara, a quien había invocado tantas veces para que la ayudara a morir, con la ocurrencia de que la gracia no era morirse, puesto que eso llegaba de todos modos, sino sobrevivir, que era un milagro. La vio tal como la había visto siempre en su infancia, con su bata blanca de lino […] Clara trajo la idea salvadora de escribir con el pensamiento, sin lápiz ni papel,
She tried not to breathe or move, and began eagerly to await her death. She stayed like this for a long time. When she had nearly achieved her goal, her Grandmother Clara, whom she had invoked so many times to help her die, appeared with the novel idea that the point was not to die, since death came anyway, but to survive, which would be a miracle. With her white linen dress, [...] she looked exactly as she had when Alba was a child. Clara also brought the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse. She suggested that she write a testimony...so that the world would know about this horror. (413-14)

In this example of magical realism, a realm that embeds “lo real maravilloso” in the everyday, the collective memory is given a space in the world of spirits and ghosts in *The House of the Spirits*. The ghost of Alba´s grandmother, Clara, is a force from the past, her memory of her dear grandmother which gives her the strength to survive difficult moments, as other grandmothers and wise older women have been doing throughout history. The old woman comes back to the young woman with the advice to keep her mind occupied with stories and thus endure desperate times.

The family saga written by Alba is, thus, a fiction and reality at the same time further contextualized in Latin America. This geographical contextualization adds social and historical the reality of Chile from the 1920s to the 1970s. Alba begins with the reconstruction of her family which participates in the creation of her own identity and her own present:

It was my grandfather who had the idea that we should write this story. “Así podrás llevarte las raíces contigo si algún día tienes que irte de aquí, hijita-dijo. Desenterramos de los rincones secretos y olvidados los viejos álbumes y tengo aquí, sobre la mesa de mi abuela, un montón de retratos: la bella Rosa junto a un columpio desteñido, mi madre y Pedro Tercero García a los cuatro años […] mi abuelo cuando era joven […] mis Tíos Jaime y Nicolás….también la Nana y los bisabuelos Del Valle..(452)
Alba reinvents herself by mixing the memory of her great grandmother, grandmother and her mother as she also holds on to her grandfather and his rational strategies and solutions. The women’s collective memories included in *The House of the Spirits* fill silences within the official history by adding another meaning to the traditional historiography. *The House of the Spirits* includes the worlds of women and their sensitivity that can stimulate struggle for social and individual change, as they use love in their relationship to influence the rationalism of Esteban Trueba. The idea that women should write is repeated and transmitted through generations of the family in the novel as writing helps to preserve memories; thus, collective memory is kept alive by stories that the women pass on from one generation to another. So, in *The House of the Spirits* the present is framed by women’s collective memories. The collective memory of their foremothers not only functions as a social framework to guide the evolution of their role in society, it also functions as a source of empowerment. This empowerment leads women in the family to oppose the authoritarian Esteban Trueba who represents not only the official history but also the establishment and tradition that oppresses women and the *peones*. There is, however, a possibility for change in the end as Esteban Trueba loves Clara and Alba. Clara, on the other hand, is a bringer of change who brings her spirituality as a source of survival of the harsh social and political reality of the time.

Alba reinvents her distinct position in society as a woman who challenges the male dominated world by being part of the political and social revolution in her country. Alba chooses to have the baby she carries although she does not know if it is the daughter of her lover Miguel or the result of the rape while in prison by Esteban García. Keeping her baby means that Alba is
breaking the repetition of oppressive tradition by having her grandfather’s son’s child. The memory of her foremothers Nivea, Clara and Blanca’s evolution in their roles as women in society, or in Halbwachs’ terms collective memory, is what guides Alba in her search for identity in revolutionary times and salvation when violence strikes her. Nivea fights for women’s suffrage, Clara chooses spirituality, writing and silence as her ways to struggle for change initiated by her mother’s practical struggle for women’s votes and Blanca breaks class barriers by loving Pedro Tercero, a peón in the Estancia Tres Marías. Women in the novel struggle for their liberation in a process of discovery of their identity based on other women, opposing the patriarchal culture. The feminist Rita Felski (1989) describes self-discovery novels as narratives where there is a process of growth undertaken by the protagonists who negate frameworks imposed by the male culture. In light of self-discovery concept discussed by Felski, it is evident that in The House of the Spirits, the female collective memory represents the framework for the process of growth undertaken by the del Valle women. Their memory stimulates the struggle for change in their patriarchal societies as they reinvent themselves and dare to be different, drawing on each other’s advancement in society. Halbwachs (Bernal Medel 2011) reminds us that in all acts of memory there is an individual consciousness; however, it survives because of the groups that share them and he calls this collective memory. In Alba’s search for her individual consciousness coping with a harsh violent reality, we see that collective memory of her foremothers is incorporated in her life as a source of inspiration. Therefore, The House of the Spirits represents a self-discovery narrative (Felski 1989) in which Alba undertakes a growth process by imposing the memories of her family, especially women, who challenge patriarchal frameworks imposed by society. There is a clear process of evolution in the position of Alba’s foremothers as women in Latin American patriarchal society, portrayed in Alba’s story with the help of Clara’s cuaderno de anotar la vida. The
memories of Alba and Clara contribute to bring the memory of Nivea, Clara and Blanca who depict changes in women’s roles. The fact that her grandfather Esteban Trueba comes around to helping her in the writing process, means that both men and women are writing the new history of her country where women are included.

Alba is the one who bridges the gaps between her collective memory and history. In the search for her identity, she recognizes the world of her foremothers as an essential part of who she is. Her magical connection with them is through the ghosts of the magical world created by Clara. As the storyteller of this novel, Allende uses the female collective memory of the Del Valle-Trueba family as the social framework where memory evolves. Magical realism as a mode of writing chosen by Allende works as a space that is outside Esteban Trueba’s dominance. In the case of Alba, this magical space which possesses the memory of her grandmother Clara represents her own space outside the dominance of political violence.

**Esteban Trueba, the Other Voice in the Spiritual World of The House**

Esteban Trueba, who speaks in first-person, gives voice to male rationality in the novel. When he marries Clara-who represents the opposite, female spirituality- he is a hard-working traditional provider who is not open to change because his primary role is to maintain and control the status quo. In his attempt to hold on to tradition, Esteban Trueba oppresses Clara, their daughter Blanca, their two sons Jaime and Nicolás, the peones in the Estancia Tres Marías, which is not included by historians in the official history of Chile. However, Clara’s spirituality chips away at Esteban’s oppressive tradition and gradually changes Esteban into a more sensitive person at the end of the novel. The female sensibility in Blanca, his daughter, and Alba, his granddaughter also contribute to this change.

Esteban’s sons Jaime and Nicolás are very different from their father as well. They adhere to revolutionary ideas opposing the views and attitudes of their aristocratic and conservative father,
and align their way of life with the revolutionary spirit of the novel and the sensitive spiritual rebelliousness of their mother Clara. Jaime believes in the success of the initiated change because the marginalized in society have started to become aware of their conditions and they are also beginning to take their lives in their own hands:

Jaime estaba seguro que triunfarían finalmente los socialistas después de tantos años de lucha. Lo atribuía a que el pueblo había tomado conciencia de sus necesidades y de su propia fuerza […] Jaime tenía horror de cualquier forma de extremismo y sostenía que los guerrilleros sólo se justifican en las tiranías. (350)

(Jaime was convinced that after so many years of struggle the Socialists were finally going to win. This he attributed to the fact that the people had become conscious of their needs and their own strengths […] Jaime was horrified by any form of extremism and held that guerrilla warfare is only justified by tyranny.) (332-33)

Jaime’s way of dealing with the establishment and his own father was learned from his mother. He prefers silence rather than arguing with Esteban. Jaime also represents change in society as he breaks away from his father right wing political ideas and supports socialism. He is even a very close friend to the Candidate\(^{16}\) with whom he establishes a strong relationship and has long conversations about socialism. Jaime uses his mother last name, Del Valle, so that he is not associated with his father through his last name and breaking away from the social standing for certain last names. His devotion to his medical career to help for others is learned from his mother Clara. Together they had a red de protogenos, a network of the protected, maintained in silence as the narrator says “The only one that did not talk about what was going on was Jaime. To avoid arguing with his father, he had the habit of silence” (349). Clearly, Jaime supports the revolutionary

\(^{16}\) The Candidate represents Salvador Allende who was president of Chile from (1970-1973). He died on September 11\(^{th}\), 1973 when a military dictatorship overthrew him by force from office. This military coup was led by Augusto Pinochet.
spirits of society, which opposes Esteban’s support for tradition, but furthers his grandmother’s and mother’s dream of liberation.

Nicolás, Jaime’s twin brother, becomes a person different from his father as well, and similar to his dreamy mother and her uncle Tío Marcos. Apart from traveling to faraway places, Nicolás becomes a dreamer who loves to recite poems by el Poeta, a reference to Pablo Neruda the Chilean poet, and tries to invoice ghosts as his mother Clara did. He wonders around with eccentric ideas trying to find out what he wants in his life. Jaime and Nicolás choose paths in life which infuriate their father. But, they are presented as positive characters that are shaped by their mother’s spiritual world. Blanca is also different from her father Esteban and is influenced by her mother Clara. As she makes changes to the world by educating her sons in a non-conventional spirit, Clara supports Blanca’s sexual liberation which questions traditional norms. By having sexual relations before marriage and getting emotionally involved with Pedro Tercero who belongs to a lower-social class, Blanca transgresses moral and class traditions that Esteban pretends to maintain. He also had sexual relations outside of marriage with women who were not of his social class, but this was permitted and even expected within the patriarchal structure of the time, which upheld the concept of machismo marginalizing women.

Blanca, Jaime and Nicholas’s choices in life go against Esteban’s expectations, as he had the bad lack, according to him, of marrying a woman who gave birth to three children who refuse to continue the established tradition which he upholds:

…como él decía [Esteban Trueba], ya estaba harto de vivir entre puro locos y lo único que quería era un poco de normalidad, pero había tenido la mala suerte de casarse con una excéntrica y engendrar tres chiflados buenos para nada que le amargaban la existencia. (234)
(...as he put it (Esteban Trueba), he was up to here with living among a bunch of lunatics and all he wanted was a little normality, but he had had the misfortune of marrying an eccentric and siring three good-for-nothing crazies who were ruining his life.) (221).

Revolution is changing society in Chile and the Del Valle-Trueba family. Clara’s silence, Blanca’s sexual liberation and love for a peón, Jaime and Nicolás’s non-traditional lives are signs of rebellion against Esteban. His children have chosen to change and break away from tradition by becoming more sensitive towards social issues in the case of Jaime, and subversive against tradition in society in the case of Nicolás.

The family saga and the subjective collective memory are interwoven with the official history through Esteban, who has control over his family and his workers. The workers, and his children who need his economic support but question, like Clara, Esteban’s lack of respect for them. He even downgrades them as he ridicules their ability to govern themselves:

Ideas bolcheviques para soliviantarme a los inquilinos……..con estos pobres diablos hay que tener mano dura, es el único lenguaje que entienden. No se dan cuenta que esta pobre gente no tiene cultura ni educación, no pueden asumir responsabilidades…Si uno se ablanda, no lo respetan. ¿Cómo van a saber lo que les conviene? Sin mí estarían perdidos […] Son muy ignorantes […] No estamos en Europa. Aquí lo que se necesita es un gobierno fuerte, un patrón fuerte. Sería muy lindo que fuéramos todos iguales, pero no lo somos. Eso salta a la vista. (75)

(Bolshevik ideas designed to turn the tenants against me. What they don’t realize is that these poor people are completely ignorant and uneducated. They’re like children, they can’t handle responsibility. How could they know what’s best for them? Without me they’d be lost […] They are ignorant. […] This isn’t Europe. What you need here is a strong government, with a strong man. It would be lovely if we were all created equal, but the fact is we’re not.) (64)

Esteban believes that he needs to govern with a strong hand; any kind of softening, he believes, would lead to a loss of respect on their part. But, as the story shows, when his wife, daughter and especially his granddaughter make him gentler and thus a better man, Esteban changes his stoic
and tough personality. At the end, Esteban Trueba is the one who saves Alba by being the one whose connections liberate her from prison; he even suggests writing the family history. The fact that la casa de la esquina is completely renovated and cleaned after Alba returns home after the horror, represents the state of oblivion for Alba’s return and the renewal of family ties that flourishes from the memories of Alba and Esteban:

The memories and emotions change Esteban who confronts the horror of violence being inflicted on his own granddaughter, Alba and his powerlessness in this new political arena. His patriarchal role is shaken by this event so the world around Esteban falls apart. Alba and the dear memories of Clara change him by bringing him closer to his granddaughter. Esteban and Alba start writing together as Alba says “Empecé a escribir con la ayuda de mi abuelo, cuya memoria permaneció intacta hasta el ultimo instante de sus noventa años” (452) (“I began to write with the help of my grandfather, whose memory has remained intact down to the last second of his ninety years.”) (431). By writing this family story together, Alba and Esteban bridge the gaps between collective
memory of the female experience and history, and as a consequence of their connection they write a new history for Latin America.

2.4 Conclusion

Oral tradition is “the source of all of the world’s literary traditions” (166) José Manuel Pedrosa states, after analyzing a collection of examples of living oral literature (ballads, songs, proverbs, legends, stories, oral histories and epics in Spain, Latin America and central Africa from Homer to Gabriel García Márquez. Pedrosa recognizes the influence of oral tradition in contemporary works of fiction in the creation of symbols, and the use of metaphors that reflects life. Based on my analysis of *The House of the Spirits* which incorporates collective memory and magical realism into the story, Allende as a storyteller uses oral tradition techniques to tell us her story. Celia Britton in her book *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction* recognizes that the storyteller of the plantations in the Caribbean has an important role in the creole movement as “this figure connects the past and present” and the stories create a “unifying” sense of community (107). Walter Ong (1982) in his book *Orality and Literacy* which provides an insight into the relationship between orality and literacy describes oral cultures as being very close “to the living human life world” (48). The “oral narrator” uses his oral skills to adjust to new situations, audiences or “simply to be coquettish” (48). Allende reawakens the rich oral tradition in a cultural material and memories bringing history closer to individuals, like the oral narrator described by Ong. Allende writes a novel that breaks boundaries of gender spaces where women are at the center of the story. At the same time, her writing style associated with magical realism as a writing technique that subverts the western rationality, drawing audiences from all over the world. Allende is able to produce a new type of novel that shares characteristics of oral tradition which embodies knowledge, collective memory and values common to a group of individuals.
As the storyteller of this novel, Allende uses collective memory as a source of empowerment for women that helps them in their quest for liberation and identity within a social framework of memory\textsuperscript{17}, which in this case is the family. The Del Valle-Trueba family constitutes the social framework that develops the female collective memory. The spiritual world of Clara and magical realism as a mode of writing chosen by Allende work as spaces that are outside dominance and defy oppression. In the case of Clara, her spirituality is her escapism from Esteban’s dominance. In the case of Allende, the use of magical realism allows her to subvert the model of linear male historiography by focusing on female experiences, sensibilities and memories as important.

Allende mixes Chile and the Del Valle-Trueba family stories “into a collective biography of a people and a nation” (Agosín 431). By including the female experience, Allende is part of a growing trend in Latin America that opposes the male stereotype of women protagonists in literature as home-oriented mothers. Solomon\textsuperscript{18} (1993) describes the works of Isabel Allende and Elena Poniatowska\textsuperscript{19} as “a new literature altogether” (192) in Latin America that concentrates on the female experience.

\textsuperscript{17} Halbwachs supports the notion that collective memory lies in the social frameworks of different groups, like the family.
\textsuperscript{18} Solomon considers Isabel Allende’s writings as a new literature in Latin America that centers on the female experience and sensibilities, opposing the view of women as powerless, docile mothers or “degrading and objectified” (195) roles as prostitutes or mistresses that has dominated Latin America literature. Solomon does a study of the role of women portrayed in the masterpiece \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude} by Gabriel García Márquez.
\textsuperscript{19} Elena Poniatowska is a French-Mexican writer and journalist whose political and social writing focuses on the marginalized, like women and the poor. One of her most famous books is \textit{Hasta no verte, Jesús mio} (“Here is to you, Jesusa”) (1969) based on a true story of a washer-woman who was a fighter in the Mexican revolution.
Chapter 3: *The Inhabited Woman*

3.1 The Plot:

*The Inhabited Women* written by the Nicaraguan writer Gioconda Belli in 1988 is a novel with autobiographical content that mixes the political and social reality of Nicaragua in the 1970s. The main protagonist in the novel becomes a member of the revolutionary group called Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) that emerged to oppose the Somoza dictatorship. Gioconda Belli herself was actively involved in the Nicaraguan revolution of the 1970s and Lavinia, one of the two main protagonists in the novel, like the author, undergoes a process of personal change as she is confronted with a turbulent political and social reality that disturbs her identity. Lavinia is led by her boyfriend to be associated with the revolutionary movement, but she later decides on her own to be part of the *movimiento*, and to fight against the oppressing dictatorship of the *Gran General* who governs Faguas, the fictional country where the story takes place. Lavinia starts her independent life when she starts working as an architect and decides to live alone in a house she inherits from her Aunt Inés. By moving away from her parents and becoming an active member of the revolution, she breaks away from the traditional role of a woman. Itzá, the other protagonist in the novel who narrates the story in the first person, most of the time in a poetic language, is an indigenous woman who lived five hundred years earlier in the land that is now Faguas. Itzá was a Nahuatl woman warrior who died in the hands of the

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Conquistadores and then turned into an orange tree in Lavinia’s garden. Lavinia drinks orange juice from the oranges that grow from this tree, and Itzá magically starts to live inside Lavinia.

Sintió la nostalgia otra vez. Mientras sorbía despacio, distraída, el jugo de naranja, saboreando el sabor agrodulce, similar al de sus recuerdos, evocó a su abuelo.

(She felt nostalgic again. Daydreaming, she sipped the orange juice and savored its bittersweet taste, similar to that of her memories; she thought of her grandfather.”) (55)

From that moment on, their lives are joined together “creating a time-space continuum from the Conquista to the 1970s” (Walter 66). Lavinia and Itzá’s revolutionary experiences and their identities as women converge through the use of magical realism. When “saboreando” “savoring” the bitter orange juice, Lavinia’s nostalgic memories of the past become part of her journey to reinvent herself as a new woman. In the search for the reconstruction of their female identity, collective memory is incorporated in the narrative of the story: Itzá, a symbol of memory, is also linked to Aunt Inés and Lavinia’s grandfather who influenced Lavinia’s past more directly.

As in Allende's The House of the Spirits, Belli's The Inhabited Woman delineates “the role of memory in retelling history” (Frick 27) and its importance in the evolution of Lavinia’s identity. What brings the two novels together in my study is the fact that Allende and Belli both retell history from the experience of women by associating themselves with magical realism and the use of collective memory. The House of the Spirits and The Inhabited Woman both written in the 1980s when there was an explosion of women writers in Latin America, represent new distinctive narratives as they are centered on women’s experiences. Unlike One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez which centers on male protagonists and a male dominated society. Lavinia in The Inhabited Woman, like Alba in The House of the Spirits obtain are empowered by

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22 The 1980s is a decade that coincides with “the explosion of women writers in Latin America” and the late influence of the second wave of feminism of the 1960s in Latin America (Weldt-Basson 12)
their collective memory to reinvent their new female identity in social and political revolutionary times in Latin America. Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Identity* states that identity “is revealed to us as something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target of an effort, ‘an objective’; as something one still needs to build from scratch or to choose from alternative offers…” (15-6). Alba and Lavinia struggle to “reinvent” their new female identity in the middle of social and political turmoil in a changing society. Their objective is to rebuild their personal identity by choosing from “alternative offers” presented to them. Alba and Lavinia choose to be part of a political and social revolution in their respective countries in Latin America as they are inspired by memories of strong women in their lives. Alba’s and Lavinia’s struggle is individual and collective as they simultaneously struggle for liberation from a male-dominated society and oppressing dictatorships. Their involvement in the revolution shakes the status quo that has shaped their identity and leads them to reinvent themselves as new women. What is interesting to notice in the case of these two novels is the fact that revolutionary times in Chile and Nicaragua in the 1970s are presented as the historical backdrop that incites both Alba and Lavinia to launch their search for a new identity. Bauman delineates the power of those around us to influence our identity as he states that:

…identities float in the air, some of one’s own choice but others inflated and launched by those around, and one needs to be constantly on the alert to defend the first against the second; there is a heightened likelihood of misunderstanding, and the outcome of the negotiation forever hangs in the balance. (13)

The two women are led into the struggle for change by their boyfriends, who, for their part, are pushed into the revolution by popular struggle against oppression and exploitation. The involvement of both the boyfriends and the two women is thus a question of choice and of necessity. Benedetto Vecchi, in the introduction to Bauman’s *Identity* insists on the perceived
opposites and on “the ambivalence of identity” imposed by “social existence: oppression and liberation” (8). Alba and Lavinia experience an ambivalence of identity that emanates from oppression and their struggle to be liberated from it. The struggle of Alba, as studied in chapter two, is meshed with the memories of the women in her family who all struggle for their liberation and take small steps towards that change. Their struggle is a collective effort by women to reinvent a new female identity that will stand against oppression, provide a fairer representation of all and produce change in society. Lavinia’s struggle to reinvent herself, however, is less direct, as her empowerment comes from her memories of her dear Aunt Inés and the magical, spiritual strength of an indigenous woman who inhabits her body and who was herself a warrior in her own time, opposing her traditional role as a woman for her own people.

In *The House of the Spirits*, the source of female collective memory originates from women in the family, especially Clara whose *cuadernos de anotar la vida*, are read by Alba. In the case of *The Inhabited Women*, the empowerment comes from the presence of Itzá in Lavinia’s body, representing pre-Hispanic myth, and the memory of her Aunt Inés who was very close to her. The unconscious influence of Itzá who reveals herself in dreams or in Lavinia’s impulses, and the emotional recollection of her Aunt Inés constitute the framework for Lavinia’s collective memory. Having explored the inclusion of women’s collective memory and magical realism in Allende's *The House of the Spirits* in the previous chapter, in this novel I explore the inclusion of the mythical collective memory that is a recollection of the past based on pre-Hispanic indigenous culture. This mythical collective memory is represented by the indigenous warrior Itzá, as an unconscious drive in Lavinia’s search for identity. I also explore the inclusion of Lavinia's collective memory, framed in the relationship she has with her Aunt Inés who represents a source of inspiration for Lavinia in her search for identity. The relationship of the characters in this novel,
which are interwoven with myth, memory and historical moments in Nicaragua in the 1970s creates a new history with women’s experiences at its core.

3.2 The Characters: Myth and Memory Interwoven with the Social-political History of Nicaragua

In this section of my research, my analysis focuses on the interaction of characters in the novel *The Inhabited Woman* to create a new perspective on the history of Central and Latin America based on the inclusion of collective memory and magical realism. The experiences of the main characters, Lavinia and Itzá, are interwoven to create a new history which centers on the perspectives of women from different times: Nicaragua in the 1970s and colonization from 1492 on. The fact that Lavinia is inhabited by the spirit of Itzá creates a magical dimension to the story that accentuates their mythical connection. The story of Itzá tells the story of the colonization of the Americas in the hands of the Spanish *conquistadores* and the struggle of indigenous communities to resist their oppression. Itzá experiences a revolution in her identity by refusing to accept the rules imposed by a traditional society and she decides to be a warrior in the fight against the Spanish *conquistadores*. The story of Lavinia who experiences the social and political turmoil set in the fictitious country called Faguas, tells the national history of Nicaragua in the 1970s and the struggle of the Sandinista revolutionaries to liberate the country from the Somoza dictatorship that ruled for over forty years (1937-1979). Like Itzá, Lavinia also experiences a complete change in her identity and defies the rules imposed by society by joining a group of revolutionaries. In her personal quest, the influence of Itzá is unconscious as the indigenous woman reveals herself in dreams or in Lavinia’s impulses. Lavinia dreams about wars and dark skinned men and women, “Soñaba con guerras y hombres y mujeres morenos” (103) “She dreamed of wars, and dark men and women.” (113) in moments when she is about to take a revolutionary action. The memory of
her Aunt Inés is another source of empowerment that guides Lavinia’s awakening as a new woman who strives for liberation from tradition in society. Like Alba in *The House of the Spirits* who finds empowerment in her grandmother Clara and other women in her family, Lavinia finds the same empowerment in the memory of her Aunt Inés who leaves Lavinia the house where she can have, as Virginia Woolf would say “a room of her own,” and where she can start her new life as an independent person.

Itzá’s account in first person and Lavinia’s story are shaped by the historical moments they have to endure. As in the case of *The House of the Spirits* which is narrated by Alba and Esteban in a double-voiced perspective in Bakhtin’s terms, in the care of this novel the intermingling of the two voices replicates a similar structure. They are witnesses of different events in history. Thus, Itzá’s account in first person and Lavinia’s story voices also reflect Bakhtin’s dialogic perspective that includes multiple social voices. As in the case of *The House of the Spirits*, this dialogic perspective in Bakhtin’s theory helps to reveal the different voices in the narrative. In the case of Alba and Esteban in *The House of the Spirits*, they represent two opposite worlds: the female space of collective memory and the male voice. In the case of Itzá and Lavinia in *The Inhabited Woman*, they represent women at different point in the history of Nicaragua who are in search of their female identity and their liberation during tumultuous times. The dialogue of historical events which are five hundred years apart deconstructs Latin American history to produce the new historical novel where the women’s experience is included. The use of magical realism creates a realm where magical events activate this trans-historic dialogue. Itzá, a Náhuatl warrior from the past, starts to inhabit Lavinia’s body magically after Lavinia drinks the orange juice from the tree's fruit-- the very tree where Itzá lives after her reincarnation. After this, their lives are interwoven in the narrative of Itzá whose account compares her experience in the time of the conquest of the
Americas when she was a warrior against the Spanish settlers and Lavinia, a young architect who decides to live by herself, opposing her parents and society, is confronted with tumultuous times like Itzá.

- **Itzá as a Symbol of Collective Memory**

  In his 1999 article “Pan-American (Re) Visions: Magical Realism and Amerindian Cultures in Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer*, Gioconda Belli’s *La Mujer Habitada*, Linda Hogan’s *Power*, and Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El Hablador*” Roland Walters analyzes magical realism as a literary mode that represents a cultural-political practice that articulates the history of colonization and decolonization in the Americas. Walters recognizes that the authors in his corpus, including *The Inhabited Woman* by Belli, use magical realism as a way to “re-create” cultural practices based on indigenous belief systems typical of the Americas where the world view is supported by myths and legends. In the particular case of *The Inhabited Woman*, in addition to working as a magical presence of a mythical woman from the past, as Lavinia’s source of spiritual empowerment, Itzá also represents the memory of the past that is reconstructed to create a meaningful present. Itzá’s spiritual linkage empowers Lavinia to become a new woman who strives for liberation from tradition in society. Itzá observes Lavinia and her struggle to find her position in a society that is changing in the middle of social and political revolution. Itzá is aware that her past and her struggle to be part of the war against oppression during the conquest of the Americas has become part of Lavinia’s own dreams. Itzá writes about her influence in the following way:

  Se debate con las contradicciones. Uno y otro día la he sentido bambolearse sin poder evadirse, sin poder huir, asomándose como quien contempla un precipicio. No sé si deba insistir. No sé si puedo. No me son claras aún las relaciones. Sé que ciertas imágenes de mi pasado han entrado a sus sueños, que puedo espantar su miedo oponiendo mi resistencia. Sé que habito su sangre como la del árbol, pero siento que no me está dado cambiar su
sustancia, ni usurparle la vida. Ella ha de vivir su vida; yo sólo soy el eco de una sangre que también le pertenece. (103)

(Shes wrestling with her contradictions. Day after day I have felt her waver without managing to escape, unable to flee, like someone looking out over a cliff. I don’t know if I should insist. I don’t know if I can. The relationship is not clear to me yet. I know that certain images from my past have entered her dreams, that I can frighten away her fear by setting my own resistance against it. I know that I inhabit her blood like that of a tree, but I feel it has not been granted to me to change her substance, not take over her life. She must live her own life; I am only the echo of a blood that also belongs to her.) (113)

Itzá helps Lavinia unconsciously to cope with fear with her spiritual influence, but she does not have the power to change her even though they have become one now that Itzá inhabits her body. Belli, affirms in an interview that she sees life as a continuum and asserts that she is el “producto de muchas otras mujeres y muchas otras historias” (the product of other histories and other women) (Zerdeto 2014) in her life, and she is also the product of openness to what is passed down by conversations and readings. All this inhabits her, Belli says, as a part of her genealogy. The fact that in the novel The Inhabited Woman, Itzá as a mythical persona that is part of Lavinia represents life precisely as a continuum, as described by Belli in the interview. Both women are connected through magic to symbolize the influence of women in each other’s lives.

Halbwachs’ asserts that one important aspect of history is the fact that it “restores” the continuity between the past and the present. On the contrary, collective memory is a continuous thought in that it only keeps from the past what is still present in a group (Halbwachs 80). Thus, by including Itzá in The Inhabited Woman, Belli recreates history with indigenous belief systems molding a time-space continuum in the history of Nicaragua from the time of the Conquest. By having the Náhualt warrior Itzá from the past inhabit the body of Lavinia, Belli does not only restore the continuity of the past and present, she also creates a time-space continuum that shows the power of collective memory in the lives of individuals, in this particular case of Lavinia.
Halbwachs also recognizes the importance of past time and individual groups when creating their collective memory:

Every group—be it religious, political or economic, family, friends, or acquaintances—immobilizes time in its own way and imposes on its members the illusion that, in a given duration of a constantly changing world, certain zones have acquired a relative stability and balance. Of course, how far we may so return into the past depends on the group. Consequently, individual thought, depending on the degree of its participation in a given collective thought, attains ever more distant remembrances. (126)

Halbwachs accentuates the importance of the individuality of each group when remembering the past that “immobilizes times” to unite the group by their collective memory and also identifies that each group’s memories go different distances into the past. In the case of the novel *The Inhabited Woman*, Belli goes back in time five hundred years with the help of magical realism to accentuate the value of the memory of women in the past as a form of empowerment for other generations. Itzá, as a magical connection with Lavinia, symbolizes collective memory.

Speaking from the point of view of post colonialism, Deepika Bahri, a postcolonial critic discusses the similar “questions of representations, voice and marginalization” (203) that are found in feminist and postcolonial theories as both have appeared partly due to the fact that there was no representation of the perspectives of women, racial minorities and marginalized cultures. In *The Inhabited Woman* Belli retrieves the memory of an indigenous women from the past is important as a source of empowerment for Lavinia, but it is also important because it is a representation of the perspectives of marginalized cultures or communities that Bahri refers to in postcolonial studies. By giving Itzá a voice in the story, Belli breaks the silence of marginalized indigenous women in the history of the Conquest. Belli also accentuates the devastation effect produced by the conquest of the Americas when the indigenous people of the Americas were torn apart in the name of civilization. As Itzá says:
Los españoles decían que debían “civilizarnos”, hacernos abandonar la “barbarie”. Pero ellos, con barbarie nos dominaron, nos despoblaron. En pocos años hicieron más sacrificios humanos de los que jamás hiciéramos nosotros en la historia de nuestras festividades. Este país era el más poblado. Y, sin embargo, en los veinte y cinco años que viví, se fue quedando sin hombres los mandaron en grandes barcos a construir una lejana ciudad que llamaban Lima, los mataron […] les cortaron la cabeza, los fusilaron […] ¿Y de todo eso qué de bueno quedó?, me preguntó. […] Nuestra herencia de tambores batientes ha de continuar latiendo en la sangre de estas generaciones. Es lo único de nosotros, Yaricé, que permaneció: la resistencia. (97-98)

(The Spaniards said they had to make us “civilized”, make us give up our “barbarism”. Yet they defeated us, they decimated us barbarously. In Just a few years they made more human sacrifices than we had ever made in all the history of our festivals. This country was the most populated. And yet …it lost so many men. They sent them in great ships to build a distant city they called Lima. They killed them…cut off their heads, shot them…And what good remains of all this? I wonder. […] Our legacy of beating drums is still pulsing in the blood of these generations. It’s the only thing left of us, Yaricé: resistance.) (106-07)

This is an open criticism of the brutality of the conquest of the Americas by the Spaniards. By giving a voice to Itzá, Belli is able to rewrite history from the periphery giving a voice to the marginalized. Itzá recognizes the importance of the legacy passed down to generations which keeps them fighting against oppression. Collective memory or legacy, in Itzá’s words, keeps them together “beating their drums” to resist domination.

The literacy practice of magical realism allows Belli in *The Inhabited Woman*, as in the case of Allende in *The House of the Spirits*, to unite different perspectives of the history of Central and South America and create a new history by adding the experiences of women. Itzá and Lavinia represent the female experience in search of their liberation from tradition at different revolutionary times in the history of Central America. Their lives are interwoven by magic as the spirit of Itzá inhabits Lavinia. While the novel *The House of the Spirits* portrays different segments of society during a fifty-year period in the history of Chile, *The Inhabited Woman* tells a trans-historical story that creates a time continuum of five hundred years by including Itzá who represents the colonial past of the Americas and Lavinia who represents the revolutionary times in
Nicaragua in the 1970s. The inclusion of Itzá as a character of the conquest of the Americas, represents a philosophical stand that questions the purpose of violence in wars across time. For example, Lavinia questions the use of violence in struggles for change when Sebastian, a member of the Sandinista guerrilla movement, is brought to her home by Felipe after being injured in a confrontation. Being confronted with this degree of violence, Lavinia debates whether or not to participate in the revolution. She thinks that:

Pero era terrible, de todas formas tener que recurrir a balas y armas, unos contra otros. Tangos siglos no lograban cambiar las maneras brutal en que se enfrentaban los seres humanos. […] En Faguas […] con sólo ver el periódico de hoy, por ejemplo, uno podía tomar partido entre la fuerza bruta y el idealismo. Optar, aunque fuera a nivel de abstracción, por los muertos. Pero no podía apartar las dudas. (83)

(But it was still terrible to have to resort to bullets and weapons, one group against another. All centuries had not managed to change the brutal way human beings battled each other. In Faguas […] just seeing today’s newspaper, for example, one had to take a stand between brute force and idealism. One had to choose the cause of those who had been killed, even if only on the abstract level. …But she could not get rid of her doubts.) (90)

The same violence that Lavinia faces is experienced by Itzá five hundred years before when her people had to fight against the Spanish conquistadores. As the mystical persona, Itzá makes the connection between their worlds separated by time.

La veo mirándome. La siento pensando. Allí está en medio de la noche como una luciérnaga perdida […] Dentro de la casa, los hombres discuten. Oigo los murmullos de sus voces, como tantas veces escuché desde la oscuridad, los consejos que Yaricé hacía con sus guerreros. Aquellos en los que a mí no me era permitido participar aun cuando me llevaran al combate. (84)

I see her looking at me. I feel her thinking….Inside the house, the men are talking. I hear the low murmur of their voices, like the many times I listened from the darkness to the councils between Yarincé and his warriors. Those councils where I was not allowed to participate even though they took me into battle. (90)
Time has passed and violence and oppression are still present in Nicaragua, as Lavinia asserts in her reflection about war and violence across time. Women are not part of the decision making, even though they are asked to participate in wars.

Collective memory, magical realism and the inclusion of women’s experience in these narratives are joined to accentuate the role of women in history in Latin America at different times, including the private and the public perspectives of history. The intimate relationship between public events and private experience does not escape the eye of women writers, Belli highlights this in her interview with Zardetto (2014). The private experience adds another layer of meaning to the official history, as it is the case in her novel *The Inhabited Woman* which centers on women and their role in the history of Nicaragua.

Lavinia’s spiritual connection with Itzá also accentuates the connection of women through memories in general. Magical realism as a mode of writing allows Belli to create this mythical indigenous woman warrior from the past that symbolizes the importance of the memory of other women as means of empowerment. This is also accentuated by Allende in *The House of the Spirits* by using Clara's ghost to give prominence to the importance of collective memory as a source of empowerment for women. Halbwachs identifies the social frameworks of collective memory, and recognizes that there are different types of collective memories as individuals belong to different groups. In the case of these two novels, the female lineage represents the social framework for the activation of Alba and Lavinia’s collective memory. The women of the past represent empowerment for Alba and Lavinia. Itzá, as a magical connection with Lavinia, symbolizes collective memory thereby allowing history and collective memory to be interwoven to recreate the past that helps us understand the present and hope for a better future. The novels accentuate the importance of memory in the shape of society and individuals. Lavinia and Alba, immersed in
the reality of the social and political situations in their societies, look for change in their lives and their search is guided by their collective memories of their families.

**Lavinia and her Lonely Journey Inhabited by Memories**

Although Lavinia is connected to the revolution through her revolutionary boyfriend, her search is lonely and she searches for independence as well:

...se preguntó qué era lo que realmente amaba de esta ‘tranquilidad’; ¿sería que realmente la amaba o era la noción de independencia, de mujer sola con trabajo y cuarto propio, eran opciones incompletas, rebeliones a media, formas sin contenido? (96)

(...she wondered what she really loved about this “tranquility”. Did she really love it or was the notion of independence, of the woman who lives alone and has her own job, a room of her own, an incomplete option, a half-hearted rebellion, form without content? (105).

Her journey is a slow process of self-discovery which allows her to separate herself from a patriarchal culture and redefine her identity, as she rejects aspects of her life that have been imposed on her. In her book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics. Feminist Literature and Social Change* Rita Felski defines self-discovery narrative as a new type of writing in which the feminist protagonist repositions herself by allowing her repetitive impulses to refuse patriarchal values (130). In the case of *The Inhabited Woman*, this postmodern novel tells the story of Lavinia’s resistance to traditional values and her repositioning as she searched for her identity. The inclusion of magical realism as a subversive narrative discourse used by Belli also reflects a postmodern stance to change the rational narrative discourse to be able to accentuate the voice of the marginalized from history, like women. Thus, Lavinia’s story is a self-discovery narrative, as defined by Felski, as it is founded on a personal internal journey that searches for identity amidst oppression and silence, as consequence. Revolutionary times constitute the social and political background that incite Lavinia to struggle for change beyond the personal. The memories of her Aunt Inés pave the way so that her journey is supported by what Halbwachs calls collective
memory. Her journey is a slow process of intimate change, of searching for her identity as a woman with doubts and achievements:

Este espacio era una isla, una Cueva, un encierro benevolente de estatua ciega en un jardín romano: el dominio de la soledad, su más brillante conquista. Aquí podrá permaneces mientras el mundo se desataba en lluvia… (97)

(This space was an island, a cave, the benevolent imprisonment of a blind statue in a Roman garden: conquering solitude was her most outstanding achievement. She could stay in here while the world unleashed the rain…) (105)

Lavinia lives on her own creating a private space having an independent life, which is not the norm in Faguas where women are supposed to marry and have a family. In solitude, she explores her inner self and discovers that she has personal expectations that are not aligned with the traditional role of women in the aristocratic society of Faguas. Along the way, Lavinia has doubts and fears about her decision to break away from tradition. These doubts and fears are coped with by way of memories of people from her past and people from her present. Itzá, Inés and her grandfather, representing memories and Flor, Sebastián and Lucrecia representing the present, they all help Lavinia to redefine her female identity challenged by the social and political revolution in Faguas when she learns about the movimiento revolutionario. Halbwachs stresses the collective memory of individuals and its formation in the social frameworks which are established by different groups. He insists on the continuity of collective memory that is always present. In the case of Lavinia, memories of the past and her present are interwoven to empower her to search for her true identity. The continuity is established when she recovers her past to apply it to her present turbulent experience as a member of the revolutionary movement that opposes the oppressing dictatorship in Faguas. In her present, Lavinia is supported by members of the movimiento, somewhat by Felipe—her lover, and the compañero Sebastián and she is especially inspired and encouraged by her compañera Flor. Like Itzá, Flor is also a warrior who possesses positive spirituality. Itzá senses
Lavinia’s doubts and fears: “…puedo comprender su temor, teñirlo de fuerza” (79) “… I can understand her fear and imbue it with strength” (85), and she tries to give her strength.

As they show female solidarity in The Inhabited Woman novel, women play an important part in the development of the new history in Central America. In The House of the Spirits, as Alba searches for a new identity in political and social revolutionary times, she is also supported by her fellow female prisoners and kept alive by the memory of her foremothers who had had an important impact on her. In the case of Lavinia in the novel The Inhabited Woman, in addition to Itzá, the memory of her Aunt Inés incites Lavinia in her quest for change. The orange tree which is the metamorphosis or incarnation of Itzá grows in the garden Lavinia inherited from Tía Inés. Her aunt encouraged her in a number of ways:

Ella quería ser arquitecta y tenía derecho, le dijo. […] Tenía derecho a soñar con ser algo; a ser independiente. Y le allanó el camino antes de morir. Le heredó la casa del naranjo y todo cuanto contenía “para cuando quisiera estar sola”. (16)

(Lavinia wanted to be an architect, and she had the right to be one, Inés told her […] she had the right to dream of being something, of being independent. And Aunt Inés paved the way for her before she died. She willed Lavinia the house with the orange tree and everything in it, “for when she wanted to be alone”.) (10-11)

The house with the orange tree that Inés willed Lavinia represents the first step towards her liberation. Amy Kaminsky in her article “Entrada a la historia: La Mujer Habitada”23 (1994) highlights Belli’s intention to associate her work with Virginia Woolf (1882- 1941)´s novel A Room of One’s Own (1929) where Wolf recommends a rented room for the independence of women so that they can develop their own ideas. Kaminsky says that Belli provides Lavinia with toda una casa (a full house) (24), which stimulates her journey and gives her the chance to be alone. In this house, Kaminsky stresses, Lavinia has her first contact with the movimiento, the

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23 (“The Entrance to History: The Inhabited Woman”, my translation)
revolutionary group in Faguas. This *tía woolfiana* (24), paves the way for Lavinia’s liberation from the patriarchal order of society and the search for her identity. Aunt Inés not only provides her with the house, but also insists that Lavinia carry on with her career as an architect.

La tía Inés no hubiera querido verla partir nunca, pero abrumada por los derechos paternos del hermano, se conformó con aleccionarla para que no se dejara convencer de estudiar para secretaria bilingüe u optometrista. Ella quería ser arquitecta y tenía el derecho, le dijo. (16)

(Aunt Inés would have preferred not to see her go at all, but outranked by her brother’s paternal rights, she had to be content with teaching her niece enough so she wouldn’t let herself be talked into studying to be a bilingual secretary or an optometrist. Lavinia wanted to be an architect, and she had the right to be one, Inés told her.) (10)

Inés strongly supports Lavinia’s dreams to become an architect convincing her to pursue her career. The house represents the space that allows Lavinia to initiate her independent life. Besides representing liberation, this house was part of Lavinia’s childhood as she spent a lot of time with Aunt Inés while Lavinia’s parents were busy with their social life in Faguas:

La tía Inés era quien de niña la había criado. En esa casa, solía pasar largas temporadas porque sus padres andaban muy ocupados con la juventud, la vida social y el éxito. Sólo cuando se percataron que ya estaba crecida […] pusieron en plena vigencia la patria potestad para mandarla a Europa, como se estilaba en ese tiempo entre la gente de linaje. (16)

(Aunt Inés was the one who had raised her. She used to spend long periods of time in this house because her parents were preoccupied with their youth, social life and success. Only when they realized she had grown up […] did they exercise their full parental rights and send her to Europe to study, as was the custom at that time among people of breeding.) (10)

Both Lavinia and Inés developed a long lasting, affectionate relationship that marks Lavinia’s journey into adulthood while in search for identity as a woman. As Lavinia recalls,

Menos mal que existió la tía Inés, pensó, limpiándose las lágrimas que empezaban a borrarle los contornos de los muebles. Porque a su tía Inés, sí le gustaba abrazarl,
acurrucarla, llevarle dulces. Le gustaba meterla en su cama y contarle cuentos mientras le acariciaba el pelo. Tenía, como Lavinia, una inmensa sed de cariño. (190)

(Fortunately, she had Aunt Inés, she thought wiping away the tears that began to well up and blur the outline of the furniture […] Because her Aunt Inés, did like to hug her, cuddle her, give her sweets. She liked to bring her up into her bed and tell her stories while she stroked her hair. Like Lavinia, she had an enormous hunger for affection.) (216-17)

Affectionately connected, Lavinia and Inés enjoyed each other’s company in the warmth of this house where Lavinia was able to find the affection that was lacking from her parents who did not have time for her. She even feels that her parents as strangers.

In time of fear, when Lavinia receives the training needed to become part of the movimiento revolucionario, she remembers Inés dearly.

Su tía Inés se hubiera sentido orgullosa de ella. Creía en la necesidad de darle trascendencia al paso por el mundo; “dejar huellas”. (337)

(Her Aunt Inés would have been proud of her. She believed in the need to give transcendence to one’s passage through the world, to “leave a mark”. (388).

Following her Aunt Inés’s advice, Lavinia not only undergoes an individual search for change, she also commits herself to a collective social change to diminish oppression in society and “dejar huella” in the world as her Aunt Inés used to say. Thus, Lavinia decides to undergo a strenuous military camp to fight against the oppressive power of the dictatorship of the “Gran General”. Her hardship is described as follows:

[Lavinia] Tenía frío. Al poco tiempo le castañeteaban los dientes y los escalofríos le recorrían el cuerpo. Pensó en Flor para darse ánimos, en Lucrecia, en Sebastián. Recurría de vez en cuando al recuerdo del general Vela para que la rabia y la repulsión la sostuvieren. Finalmente pensó en su tía Inés […]. (244)

(She [Lavinia] was cold. Soon her teeth were chattering, and she felt chills through her whole body. She thought of Flor, Lucrecia and Sebastián to keep her courage up. Once in a while she thought of General Vela so that rage and revulsion would keep her going. Finally, she thought of her Aunt Inés […]. ) (281)
Long hours of training plus staying posted to quad the surroundings during the night, just in case they were discovered in their illegal training camps, brings Lavinia’s fears to the limit. However, the thought of people who were close to her, and especially the memory of her Aunt Inés, gives her the strength to continue. In the novel The House of the Spirits, Alba also remembers her grandmother Clara when she is seeking the spiritual empowerment to resist torture. While in prison, the ghost of Clara appears to Alba inciting her to fight for her life and to start writing her story.

Although the situations for both protagonists differs greatly as Alba is victim of torture and violence while Lavinia is only confronted with fear of attack while in training, we can conclude that in both cases the memory of the women who have been close to Lavinia and Alba play an important role as both evoke it when their lives are shaken. As stated by Halbwachs, collective memory is present in the social traditions passed down from one generation to another as a “continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping its presence in the present” (80). Lavinia and Alba retain from the memories of Inés and Clara their conscious efforts to pass down their experiences so that Lavinia and Alba can find empowerment to fashion their identity, more specifically there is identity in revolutionary times. As Bernal Mendel says “lo personal es politico” (85) (the personal is political, my translation). Lavinia’s search for her new identity as a woman is influenced by the social and political revolution that affects her society. This is also true of Alba who is influenced by revolution. I also believe the memory of Inés and Clara as revolutionary women, with a Virginia Woolf style independent and intellectual impart their desire for a transformation in the role of women in society, creating the continuum described
by Halbwachs. They create a foundation for Lavinia and Alba so that they can continue to explore their own space in an oppressive society that silences women’s voice. Inés and Clara both belong to a transitional, pre-feminist time in which society needed to change to recognize women as fully contributing adults. Allende and Belli write the new history of Nicaragua and Chile in the 1970s where women are at the center of the story, reinventing their identity meshed with the political situation. In *The House of the Spirits* and *The Inhabited Women*, their protagonists, Lavinia and Alba, commence their internal revolution interwoven with the social and political turbulence in their societies. This internal revolution is also interwoven with their collective memories which function as sources of empowerment.

Lavinia learns to cope with fear, helped by the memory of Inés who told her “Hay que aprender a ser buena compañía para uno mismo” (27) (“You have to learn to be good company for yourself.”) (22). Itzá functions like a mirror that reflects on what she experiments while part of Lavinia, comments on the manner that Lavinia copes with fear by stating:

> No deja de enternecerme su miedo, ahora que logro distinguir el pasado y el presente en las blancas dunas de su cerebro. Al principio era difícil saber distinguir. Un suceso, para ser asimilado por ella, se mueve en medio de referencias pasadas. (79)

(I can’t help feeling tenderness about her fear, now that I can distinguish the past and the present in the while dunes of her brain. At first it was difficult to tell them apart. An event, to be assimilated by her, must make its way through past references.) (84).

Itzá recognizes the importance of the past memories on Lavinia’s present life. Lavinia in her process of personal growth counts on people from the past, which proves the importance of Halbwachs’ and Nora’s theory of collective memory which emphasis its continuous presence that affects individuals as they have been imprinted with the warmth of traditions and unspoken skills passed down through social frameworks.
Analyzing the psychological, emotional and social growth of Lavinia in the novel *The Inhabited Woman*, Bisherú Bernal Mendel (2011) describes the slow awakening process undertaken by Lavinia as she breaks several rules in the patriarchal society, like living by herself and refusing motherhood. In order to get involved with the *movimiento*, Bisherú Mendel asserts, Lavinia looks for help from women. But, Lavinia’s memories of her grandfather also influence her., she remembers him dearly:

Y su abuelo, fervoroso admirador de las rebeliones indígenas, iconoclasta, abogado de causas perdidas, instaurador pionero de jornadas de ocho horas y dispensarios para los trabajadores, casi en los oscuros tiempos de la esclavitud, la estaría mirando, pensando que, al fin se había puesto las alas y volaba. (337)

(And her grandfather who was a fervent admirer of the indigenous rebellions, iconoclast, supporter of lost causes, pioneer installer of eight-hour hours workdays and infirmaries for the workers back then almost in the dark ages of slavery, must be watching her, thinking that finally she had donned wings and was flying.) (388).

She follows in his footsteps and fights for a collective cause to bring about equality in society. Lavinia feels sure that her grandfather is watching her. While being nostalgic and “hundiendo los ojos en su memoria” (54) (“plunging her eyes into her memories”) (55), Lavinia thinks of her grandfather as

Recordó […] la cantidad de trabajadores que lo acompañaron hasta que desapareció tras la lápida, porque el abuelo, seguidor de ideas liberales y socialistas, opositor furibundo al régimen dinástico de los grandes generales, había establecido antes que el Código de Trabajo, la jornada de ocho horas, los beneficios sociales y la seguridad laboral. Y también había descubierto las antiguas ruinas de Tenoztla. (55)

(Lavinia recalled […] the number of workers who stayed until he disappeared beneath tombstone because her grandfather, holder of liberal socialist ideas, rapid opponent of the dynastic regime of the great generals, had established the eight hour workday, social security, and job safety before the existence of a labor code. And he had discovered the ancient ruins of Tenoztla.) (56)
Memories brings her a nostalgic feeling for her grandfather, and Lavinia goes on to follow her grandfather who had been a political figure fighting for social equality in society. Lavinia inherits the sensibility for social justice from her grandfather who was part of social change in Faguas. Now, it was Lavinia’s turn to continue his legacy and struggle for social equality amidst the oppressive power of a dictatorship that takes away from the people what her grandfather fought for. Memory, in Lavinia’s case, functions as a reason to struggle and move forward towards liberation from political and social oppression. She learned about social justice and equality from her grandfather and she wants to continue with his dream.

The notion of collective memory is useful to understand the influence of Aunt Inés and Lavinia’s grandfather as tradition passed down to different generations is described extensively by Halbwachs and Nora. Itzá recognizes that time has passed between her life and Lavinia’s. However, she notices that certain relationships and emotions, which are immutable remain the same.

Muchos asuntos me son incomprensibles, debido al tiempo que ha recorrido el mundo. Pero hay gran cantidad de relaciones inmutables; lo primario sigue siendo semejante. Comprendo sin temor a equivocarme, la paz y el desasosiego, el amor y la inquietud, el anhelo y la incertidumbre; la vitalidad y la pesadumbre; la fe y la desconfianza; la pasión y el instinto. (78)

(Many events are incomprehensible to me because of the time that the world has traveled through. But there are a great time of immutable relationships, the primary ones are essentially similar […] I understand peace and restlessness; love and uneasiness; longing and uncertainty, vitality and sorrow; faith and mistrust; passion and instinct.) (84)

In the case of The House of the Spirits, Alba is also empowered by her grandmother’s spirituality, taught by performance and the “warmth of tradition” (Nora 9) and her other foremothers who pave her way to become a more independent woman. In case of The Inhabited Woman, Itzá recognizes
the importance of relationships and emotions that are central to Lavinia’s empowerment and struggle for her personal change.

3.3 Conclusion

Belli writes *The Inhabited Woman* with her own autobiographical content based on her experience as a member of the *Movimiento Sandinista* in Nicaragua and there are also many references to the official history of Nicaragua in her work. Revolutionary times in Faguas and the memories of her Aunt Inés and grandfather shape Lavinia’s search for independence and her new self. As a storyteller, like Allende, Belli connects the past and the present to create a sense of community and collective memory. Belli connects the worlds of Lavinia and Itzá distanced by hundreds of years and the memories of Lavinia’s aunt and grandfather to emphasize the importance of the past and ancestors in shaping the present. In other words, Belli represents the importance of the concept of collective memory described by Halbwachs who emphasizes the essential aspect of the continuity of memory and its social frameworks. Collective memory is, thus, essential in Lavinia’s search for her own identity. It is this collective memory of the past helps Lavinia overcome doubts and fears that interfere with her objective which is to become free from dominance and redefine her identity as a liberated woman. The spiritual world of Itzá as a mythical collective memory that gives her strength, functions as a subversive way to confront historiography by mystifying the connection between women. In addition, Belli uses magical realism to create a realm in which Lavinia is stimulated unconsciously by Itzá’s spiritual strength to transcend a time-space continuum with the indigenous people of Nicaragua who fought against the *conquistadores*. Through Itzá, they are given a voice to tell their story and it is through Itzá, Lavinia is empowered to fight against the present injustices in Nicaragua.
As in the novel *The House of the Spirits* in which Allende reawakens the oral tradition rich in culture, traditions and memories bringing history closer to the life of individuals, in the novel *The Inhabited Woman* Belli is also “coquettish” (48), in Ong’s terms, and subversive by writing a novel that breaks the boundaries of gendered space allowing the female experience to be at the center of the story. Magical realism allows Belli to create a woman’s space that is mythical with the presence of Itzá as a symbol for collective memory.

**Chapter 4: Overall Conclusions**

“Write! Writing is for you […] let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man.”

Helene Cixous

In the novels *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende and *The Inhabited Woman* by Gioconda Belli, magical realism and collective memory contribute to the formation of the new historical novel in Latin America. The Latin American “Boom” in literature of the 1960s and 1970s was made up predominantly of male writers, but building on their achievements and fame, women writers also made a significant contribution and expressed their voice in the 1980s. There is no doubt that Isabel Allende and Gioconda Belli became internationally acclaimed writers (Allende being the bestseller for years) because they dared to take on Cixous’s challenge and write that women are equal participants in the struggle for social change and in the making of history. As Medeiros-Lichem says, Latin American women writers offer an “eloquent voice” (1) and take women out of their homes into the public space. In both novels, women respond to the social and political imperatives that history imposes on them, and they attempt to resist systems of domination.

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24 In “The Laugh of the Medusa” (876-77)
by questioning traditional structures and moving a step forward towards their personal liberation, and towards a broader sense of social liberation and justice.

The novels of this study refer to specific historical moments in Chile and Nicaragua in the 1970s and 1980s which they integrate with Latin American spiritual heritage as well as with women’s collective memory to produce their own particular narrative. In *The House of the Spirits* the women’s collective memory plays a significant role in the saga of the Del Valle-Trueba family, a social unit which undergoes positive transformation regardless of its suffering and loss. As the family is affected by a general Latin American attempt to address social injustice and class and gender inequality, Allende finds that collective memory is a source of empowerment for women in the novel who are forced to either confront their male family members or act in solidarity with them. Clara’s spiritual world and magical realism, as a mode of writing chosen by Allende, work as spaces that are outside male rational dominance; instead of being places of refuge, they are places of different attitude and spaces of subversion of the established order. Clara, for example, uses her spirituality and silence to build her own space which protects her from Esteban Trueba’s dominance as well as gives her space to educate her children and assist her servants with greater understanding.

By focusing on female experiences, sensibilities and memories, as she narrates historical events, Allende creates magical realism which helps he to subvert the model of linear historiography. She is able to include the official history of Chile in her novel not as a backdrop but as an integral part of Alba’s subjective story, giving a new perspective to the violent history of Chile during Pinochet’s dictatorship in the 1970s. In her novel she includes mentions of major
historical figures such as Salvador Allende, Augusto Pinochet and Pablo Neruda. President Allende’s last address to his Chilean people appears with only minor alterations:

Siempre estaré con ustedes […] Otros hombres superarán este momento y mucho más temprano que tarde se abrirán las grandes alamedas por donde pasará el hombre libre, para construir una sociedad mejor. ¡Viva el pueblo! ¡Vivan los trabajadores! Estas serán mis últimas palabras. Tengo la certeza que mi sacrificio no será en vano.

(I will always be with you […] Other men will prevail, and soon the great avenues will be open again, where free men will walk, to build a better society. Long live the people! Long live the workers! These are my last words. I know my sacrifice will not have been in vain.)

As Weldt-Bason points out, Clara’s son Jaime, “appears to have a historical counterpart” (Weldt-Bason 24). As a doctor Jaime accompanies the President on the day of the military coup, just as in real life Dr. Enrique Paris Roa, Allende’s doctor, was the last one who saw Allende alive (24). A conservative women’s march against the government of Allende called “March of the empty pots” that started a protest against the shortages in stores is similarly “chronicled” in the novel as: “las mujeres […] desfilaban por las calles apporeando sus cacerolas en protesta del desabastecimiento” (380) [“the women […] paraded in the streets pounding their empty pans in protests against the shortages in the stores” (362)]. Later these marches brought women to the street “became an inverted symbol of protest” against President Pinochet’s dictatorship, which continued “female mobilization in Chile” (Weldt-Basson 24). Isabel Allende refers to actual historical events but she transforms the official history into a life story where a family full of memories and experiences is the framework for the development of the narrative influenced by the social and political turmoil. As Agosín says, Allende mixes Chilean and the Del Valle-Trueba family stories “into a collective biography of a people and a nation” (1986, 431). She interlaces

25 President Allende’s actual last speech can be found in Weldt-Basson (2013) on pages 25-26.
collective memory with historical discourse to produce the new history of Latin America that portrays history from a subjective experience of people, in this case Del Valle-Trueba family.

Gioconda Belli similarly writes *The Inhabited Woman* with her own autobiographical perspective, as she uses her experience as a member of the *Movimiento Sandinista* in Nicaragua, and as she also makes many references to the official history of Nicaragua in her work. As Stephen Henighan in his book *Sandino’s Nation-Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramírez, Writing Nicaragua (1940-2012)* states, in spite the fact that the novel *The Inhabited Woman* is fiction, there are many references to events taking place in Nicaragua in the 1970s (334). Eduardo Contreras who was a Sandinista guerrilla member and Gioconda Belli’s lover in real life “shares biographical traits with” (334) Felipe, Lavinia’s lover in the novel. As the novel ends with the revolutionaries’ “raid on” the Gran General’s party at his mansion which has been designed by Lavinia, Henighan links this ending with the 1974 Sandinista raid on “Somoza’s Christmas party” (334). In addition to linking history and fiction like Allende, Belli also links the past with the present as she also highlights the importance of collective memory described by Maurice Halbwachs. *The Inhabited Woman* is a novel of self-discovery that describes the journey taken by Lavinia to find her own identity, and collective memory has an important role in her search. Revolutionary times in Faguas are connected with the memories of her Aunt Inés and grandfather who shape Lavinia’s search for independence and her new female identity. The spiritual world of Itzá as a mythical collective memory gives her strength, and functions as a subversive way to confront the official historiography by mystifying the connection between women. Belli uses magical realism to create a realm in which Lavinia is stimulated by Itzá’s spiritual strength to transcend a time-space continuum with the indigenous people of Nicaragua who fought against the conquistadores.
Through Itzá, the indigenous people are given a voice to tell their story. Through Itzá, Lavinia is empowered to fight against the present injustices in Faguas.

Although *The House of the Spirits* is a family saga while *The Inhabited Woman* is a novela de autodescubrimiento, and the two novels center on history of two different countries, they share many aspects which have been highlighted in my study. Collective memory, in both novels, is a source of empowerment for women in the general struggle for woman’s liberation and social change. Maria Herminia Di Liscia in her article “Género y Memorias” supports the notion that remembering is influenced by gender. She explains that memories are “espacios de luchas políticas” in which each generation recognizes the works of memories as empowerment for women based on the “genealogía femeninas y feministas”. In the novels of this study, the protagonists are empowered by the women of their past. When Alba and Lavinia search for their identity in revolutionary times, the women of their past, Clara, Inés and Itzá, help them pave the way for their revolutionary spirit encouraging them to search for change in their lives. By using extraordinary occurrences now acceptable because of magical realism, the appearance of ghosts, the reincarnation of a person in a tree, Allende and Belli fuse memories with a historical reality to challenge the limitations and partiality of the official history. They add a subjective dimension to history that helps in the formation of the new Latin American historical novel, which include women working along with men as equals as men also have a positive influence on the protagonists’ lives. Alba becomes close to her grandfather Esteban Trueba at the end of the novel when he saves her from the horror of prison and gets the idea that they both write their family

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26 “Gender and Memories”, my translation
27 (“spaces for political struggles”, my translation)
28 (“female genealogy and feminists”, my translation)
history. Lavinia’s grandfather also influence her when she decides to join the *movimiento* as he was a social activists as well.

In *The Inhabited Woman* the idea that woman’s struggle for equality and liberation has not been won yet is made clear by Belli. In the novel, Itzá, Lavinia and Flor mention the irony of being women in the *movimiento revolucionario*, and in the case of Itzá, the fight against the *conquistadores*, and still having to play traditional roles, as they fight along with men in the struggle for liberation. Itzá ponders on her participation in the fight against the *conquistadores* and sees that the *guerreros* discriminate against her when the male warriors excluded her from participation in important decisions making moments because she was a woman:

> Después de la batalla de Maribios la de los Desollados, como le llamaron los invasores, hubo momentos en que sentí mi sexo como una maldición. Se pasaron días discutiendo cómo debían proceder, mientras yo tenía que vagar por los alrededores, encargada de cazarles y cocinarles la comida. […] Yo era fuerte y mis intuiciones, más de una vez, nos salvaron de una emboscada. […] Tenía cuerpo capaz de dar vida en nueve lunas y soportar el dolor de parto. Yo podía combatir, ser tan diestra como cualquiera con el arco y la flecha y además, podía cocinar […] Yo era fuerte y mis intuiciones, más de una vez, nos salvaron de una emboscada. […] Tenía cuerpo capaz de dar vida en nueve lunas y soportar el dolor de parto. Yo podía combatir, ser tan diestra como cualquiera con el arco y la flecha y además, podía cocinar […] Pero ellos no parecían apreciar estas cosas. Me dejaban de lado cuando había que pensar en el futuro o tomar decisiones de vida o muerte. (84-5)

(After the battle at Maribios-the battle of the Flayed Ones, as the invaders called lit-there were moments when I felt my sex was a curse. They spent days discussing how to proceed, while I, charge with hunting and cooking their meals […] I was strong and more than once my intuition saved us from ambush. […] I had a body capable of bearing life in nine moons and withstanding the pain of birth. I could fight, was as skilled as any with my bow and arrow, and also I could cook […] But they did not seem to appreciate these things. They left me out when they had to think about the future or make life-and death decisions.) (90-91)

As she indicates, her intuition or non-rational woman’s response can be as valuable as men’s rational deliberation, as it had been in instances when she saved everyone from ambush. She is someone who can do things men do, as she skilled in the use of arms, she can stand pain better than men, and she can cook and do things men do not do. “But they did not seem to appreciate these things.”
Lavinia also questions Flor’s fervent belief in social change when it is obvious that men are not changing their machista (male chauvinist) attitude. She is not satisfied with her revolutionary female friend’s answer that the problem is “mucho más complejo” and seeks a way of approaching men in a revolutionary fashion:

¿Cómo creer tan fervientemente en la posibilidad de cambiar la sociedad y negarse a creer en el cambio de los hombres? “Es mucho más complejo” opinaba Flor, pero a ella [Lavinia] no le satisfacían esas teorías. No negaba la complejidad del problema […] ¿Cómo se provocaba el cambio? ¿Cómo actuaba la mujer frente al hombre…? (253-54)

(How could she believe so fervently in the possibility of changing society and not believe in changing men? “It’s more complex,” Flor would say, but those theories did not satisfy Lavinia. She did not deny the problem was complex […] How could the change be brought about? How should women behave with men…?) (291)

The problem of participation in the revolutionary movement, as Flor and Lavinia point out, is complex, and although a solution has not been found yet, it is important that women have become conscious of the need for change, and that they understand that they have a role to play in the general struggle for social, political and cultural change.

In both novels, magical realism and collective memory help to develop the stories of women who struggle for change in their lives and in society, as they rebel against oppression and instigate social change. As Cixous (1976) has said women have become agents of social change as

Woman unthinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield. In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. As a militant, she is an integral part of all liberations […] she will bring about a mutation in human relations, in thought, in all praxis: hers is not simply a class struggle, which she carries forward into a much vaster movement. (Cixous 882)

The women protagonists in these novels are agents of social change as they reinvent themselves based on memories and their present, and as they also struggle for social change against
oppression. In the case of Clara in *The House of the Spirits*, she is clearly an agent of change who “brings about a mutation in human relations” by being aware of the marginal position of the poor. When she forms a union of solidarity with Pedro Segundo, the *peón* of the Tres Marías, she defies Esteban Trueba who represents the establishment. As a female “militant”, she is “an integral part of all liberations” (Cixous 882) as she brings about change in human relations by breaking the class barriers and teaching the poor women in the *Tres María* to read and write. She defies at times Esteban Trueba with silence to oppose his domination. Clara gradually changes Esteban Trueba as she puts emphasis on love; she changes the hard disciplinarian who becomes close to his granddaughter Alba. Clara gradually also passes on the unspoken tradition that is passed down from one generation of women to another; she transmits her spirituality and commitment to help others to her granddaughter Alba who consequently joins the revolution to fight for her country’s liberation from dictatorship. Alba works along with men to change society as she becomes a social activist, hides guns in *la casa de la esquina* and helps political dissidents into exile and freedom to support the revolution along with Miguel, her lover. Alba also becomes close to her grandfather and they both write their family story together.

In the case of *The Inhabited Woman*, Lavinia also as a female “militant” becomes part of a social revolution to bring about change in a society that is oppressed by a dictatorship. Lavinia is an independent woman who decides to take men’s role by becoming a member of the *movimiento revolucionario*. She works with Felipe, her lover for the *movimiento*, yet her decision to become a member of the revolution is personal, not allowing Felipe to interfere. After joining the *movimiento*, Lavinia concludes that she did not become part of the revolution because of Felipe; on the contrary, it was her own decision to join the revolutionary group to change her country: “No lo había hecho por Felipe, se repitió, viendo los robles de su barrio doblarse bajo la lluvia […] Este
también era su país. También lo soñaba diferente [...] Faguas merecía mejor suerte” (134). (“She hadn’t done it because of Felipe, she told herself again, watching the oak trees in her neighborhood bend beneath the rain [...] This was her country, too. She, too, dreamed it could be different [...] Faguas deserved a better fate.”) (151). Her awakening process is an internal revolution that changes Lavinia as she decides to leave alone and participate in the revolution along with men as equals. Her friendship with Flor, a compañera from the movimiento, and her relationship with Lucrecia, the woman that helps her in her house, demonstrates that Lavinia, like Clara, breaks class barriers and brings about change in society, even though she belongs to Faguas upper class. Lavinia searches not only for her new female identity, but for a larger social change and for that reason she becomes a part of the militant social revolution.

The explosion of women writers in the 1980s was Latin American women’s attempt to add their voice to literature and history, Allende and Belli, like their women protagonists, not so much oppose the world dominated by male experiences as they write from the perspective of women with the intention of social and political integration and change. The House of the Spirits and The Inhabited Woman incorporate women’s collective memory in a significant way. Enlightened by magical realism of the Boom writers, the two female writers add the women’s voice to the new history of Latin America. Allende’s and Belli’s women act from the perspective of a female generic advantage as women find empowerment through subtle things such as love, memories and spirituality during Latin American revolutionary times and when hostile dictatorships forced women to come out of their home to participate actively in the political and social world. In their stories Allende and Belli include collective memory, and use magical realism to mix turbulent revolutionary times with personal experiences of the present and the past, creating a new type of historical novel that not only represents women’s experiences but also activates a
social consciousness of a turbulent and traumatic time in Latin America during oppressing dictorships.

The study of these two different novels written in the mode of magical realism which incorporates collective memory and contributes to the formation of the new Latin American historical novel opens a space for further discussion on Latin American women writers’ contribution. It would also be interesting to study historical novels by Latin American women writers in “the post-democratization” (Perkowska 104) period in the 1990s and later to analyze if their contributions continue the trend of the 1980s. Have Latin American women writers given a new direction to the historical novel? Are collective memory or magical realism an integral part of Latin American or a national history? In my opinion, observations made about the British women writers in the last decade of the twentieth century in The Women’s Historical Novel (British Women Writers, 1900-2000) by Diana Wallace can also be applied to Latin American women writers. Weldt-Basson observes that “it is curious that there have been no similar studies made to date on historical fiction by Latin American women writers” (9). My study is a step in that direction: it validates the importance of historical novels as alternative versions of the official history. The novels reflect a reality closer to the experience of the reader and invite the reader to reflect on revolutionary episodes and women’s place in them.
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