

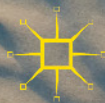


LITERATURES of
the AMERICAS

**THE NATIONAL BODY IN
MEXICAN LITERATURE**

Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control

REBECCA JANZEN



LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS

About the Series

This series seeks to bring forth contemporary critical interventions within a hemispheric perspective, with an emphasis on perspectives from Latin America. Books in the series highlight work that explores concerns in literature in different cultural contexts across historical and geographical boundaries and also include work on the specific Latina/o realities in the United States. Designed to explore key questions confronting contemporary issues of literary and cultural import, *Literatures of the Americas* is rooted in traditional approaches to literary criticism but seeks to include cutting-edge scholarship using theories from postcolonial, critical race, and ecofeminist approaches.

Series Editor

Norma E. Cantú currently serves as Professor of US Latin@ Studies at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, USA. She has published widely in the areas of folklore, literary studies, women's studies, and border studies. Her numerous publications include the award-winning novel, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* that chronicles her coming-of-age in Laredo, Texas. The (co)edited volumes: *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*; *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*; *Paths to Discovery: Autobiographies of Chicanas with Careers in Mathematics, Science, and Engineering*; *Moctezuma's Table: Rolando Briseño's Chicano Tablescapes*; and *Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson's Art of Dissidence and Dreams*. She is cofounder of CantoMundo, a space for Latin@ poets and a member of the Macondo Writers Workshop; her poetry has appeared in *Vandal*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Feminist Studies Journal* among many other venues.

Books in the Series:

Radical Chicana Poetics

Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez

Rethinking Chicano/a Literature through Food: Postnational Appetites

Edited by Nieves Pascual Soler and Meredith E. Abarca

Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico: Deep Undercurrents

Paulo Moreira

Mexican Public Intellectuals

Edited by Debra A. Castillo and Stuart A. Day

TransLatin Joyce: Global Transmissions in Ibero-American Literature

Edited by Brian L. Price, César A. Salgado, and John Pedro Schwartz

The UnMaking of Latina/o Citizenship: Culture, Politics, and Aesthetics

Edited by Ellie D. Hernández and Eliza Rodriguez y Gibson

*Music and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature from Our America:
Noteworthy Protagonists*

Marco Katz Montiel

*New Trends in Contemporary Latin American Narrative: Post-National
Literatures and the Canon*

Edited by Timothy R. Robbins and José Eduardo González

Roberto Bolaño, a Less Distant Star: Critical Essays

Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo

*The National Body in Mexican Literature: Collective Challenges to
Biopolitical Control*

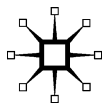
Rebecca Janzen

The National Body in Mexican Literature

Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control

Rebecca Janzen

palgrave
macmillan



THE NATIONAL BODY IN MEXICAN LITERATURE

Copyright © Rebecca Janzen, 2015.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-54627-2

All rights reserved.

A portion of chapter 4 has been previously published as "Marginalization, the Body and Bare Life in *El Evangelio de Lucas Gavilán*" in *Confluencia* 31.1 (2015) and is used with permission.

First published in 2015 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-57661-6 ISBN 978-1-137-54301-1 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137543011

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Janzen, Rebecca, 1985—

The national body in Mexican literature : collective challenges to biopolitical control / Rebecca Janzen.

pages cm.—(Literatures of the Americas)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "This book explores how the body literary fiction from 1940 to 1980, by Jos? Revueltas, Juan Rulfo, Rosario Castellanos and Vicente Leñero, reflects the control of the Mexican State. It envisions characters who are sick, disabled or miraculously healed as a collective that challenges this control"—Provided by publisher.

1. Mexican fiction—20th century—History and criticism. 2. Revueltas, Jos?, 1914–1976—Criticism and interpretation. 3. Rulfo, Juan—Criticism and interpretation. 4. Castellanos, Rosario—Criticism and interpretation. 5. People with disabilities in literature. 6. Politics and literature—Mexico. 7. Literature and society—Mexico. 8. Mexico—In literature. I. Title.

PQ7203.J36 2015

863'.6409972—dc23

2015009959

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: September 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Bill Janzen and
Marlene Toews Janzen.*

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	
The National Body in Mexican Literature	1
Chapter 1	
Blindness in José Revueltas's Narrative at the Beginning of the Mexican Miracle (1940–1946)	15
Chapter 2	
Pedro Páramo's Bad Blood: Bare Life and Exclusion from the Mexican Miracle in Juan Rulfo's Narrative (1946–1958)	53
Chapter 3	
The Mexican State, <i>Indigenismo</i> , and <i>Mestizaje</i> : Rosario Castellanos's <i>Oficio de Tinieblas</i> and <i>Balún Canán</i> (1957–1962)	87
Chapter 4	
A Mexican Savior Can't Work Miracles: Reflections on Post-1968 Mexico	125
Conclusion	
Crowds on Mexico City's Subway: The Ultimate Challenge	159
<i>Notes</i>	173
<i>Bibliography</i>	179
<i>Index</i>	193

Acknowledgments

I was sitting at a conference in May 2014 in Irvine, California, and Cristina Rivera Garza said that today most dedications to books are so long that one day they will be longer than the manuscript. In that spirit, I acknowledge the academic and personal support of a number of communities.

My family is endlessly encouraging. Some might even call them strange. My dad, Bill Janzen, offered the best editing, that even money could not buy. My mom, Marlene Toews Janzen, and Ghenette Houston and Brian Ladd have offered me food and their homes, and in the case of my parents, their financial support as well. Anyone who has ever eaten ham on boxing day at my parents' house also counts as family, of course. To Phil Janzen, my brother, I promise I'm not leaving anything in the tank with this book. Clara Toews and Ed and Bev Toews expressed interest well before this was worth reading. Many others in my large extended family want to read this book and maybe even buy it. Thanks.

This book was once my dissertation. Susan Antebi, Berenice Villagómez, Néstor E. Rodríguez, and Sanda Munjic were instrumental to that process. This is much better than the versions that you—especially Susan—read while I was at the University of Toronto. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the University of Toronto, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (México) for their financial support in the early stages of the project.

Thanks to all of GCF for teaching me how to be an adult and how to cook delicious food. This group meant that I always had a place to call home in the basement of Wycliffe College. Sara

DeMoor, Marcia Boniferno, Jess Brown, and others have been crucial touchstones. My Grebel friends—Katherine, Charissa, Sarah, and Leah—for our reunions since we graduated. Adleen Crapo has kept me well fed for years. Paula Karger is also a loyal friend, and I smile when I think about our adventures in cooking. Pamela Fuentes, thank you for making me fall in love with your city, the only city, Mexico City. La rockola, las amigas, la Buenos Aires. Paul Imison, thanks for welcoming me there and to the Casa de los Amigos.

Once I moved to Bluffton, Ohio, to begin working at Bluffton University, I experienced the kindness and generosity of an entire village. I have come to realize that some of my colleagues might, in fact, be angels in human form. The English and Language Department, Cindy, Jeff, Susan, Kate, Lamar, and Paul helped me create spaces in rural Ohio. The opportunities for interdisciplinary procrastination in Centennial Hall are legion. My friends from Wednesdays at Luke's (Esther, Judy, Ray and Elizabeth, Bess, Brad and Sarah, Walt) are models of generous lives. Jackie Wyse Rhodes, Karen Bontrager, and the thrift store in Ottawa are special. So are my students.

I am also fortunate to collaborate with many colleagues at other institutions. Andrew Ascherl edited a section of the manuscript, and his work goes far beyond what I was able to pay. Sara Potter introduced me to the Fourth of July in the Midwest, and she and Ilana Dann Luna encourage me in all things. Pedro Ángel Palou, José Ramón Ruisánchez, Brian Price, Christina Soto, Cheyla Samuelson, Ariel Wind, Iván Aguirre Darancou, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, and others have offered guidance and car trips that doubled as comedy shows. Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, you are a great mentor and a kind friend. The books you and Abby sent me enriched this book and my life. Thank you. Thanks to others who joined me for the LASA taco tour in Chicago in 2014. As we learned there and in the panel de yak studies, the best way to live is by sharing a meal with friends.

Introduction

The National Body in Mexican Literature

I began writing this book while recovering from a concussion incurred at my workplace, a small, private, religiously affiliated university in rural Ohio. One part of this experience overshadows all the others—the experience of seeking ongoing medical care after the initial injury. The injury was covered by Workers’ Compensation (or Workers’ Comp), rather than my employer-sponsored health insurance, as it was incurred at work, and my interactions with Workers’ Comp led me to believe that they cared more about whether I was faking a head injury than about whether I should return to work. The Christian community that supported the university prayed for me and brought me food. Underneath their concern and prayers was, I imagine, their preoccupation that I remain in Ohio rather than return home and that I get back to work, as I taught most of their Spanish course offerings that year.

In this recovery period, four powerful players emerged: religion, medicine, Workers’ Comp—a form of health insurance and labor protection—and education. To envision these players interacting with one another, we can think about the foundational theories of power developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who established that power circulates. In accordance with what Foucault has observed, I could submit to power, or exercise my own. I could accept religiously motivated kindness, which I happily did, attend medical appointments with wait times that equaled those of public health care in other countries, and return to work. I could also exercise limited power in my interactions with the medical system by asking my doctor questions, ensuring that Workers’ Comp paid

my bills after I received several alarming final notices, and reading the paperwork I was asked to sign.

Another way to think of these players interacting with one another is by imagining them as distinct arms of the state. The Marxist thinker Louis Althusser describes the late twentieth-century capitalist state as one that brings people into being through its apparatuses, which include the police, the army, and the court system, as well as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), such as churches, schools, and unions. In his view, state apparatuses and ISAs encourage individuals to submit to state ideology. In 2000 and 2003, the Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek elaborated on these ideas of state and ideology as they apply to the twenty-first century by conceiving of an all-encompassing ideology. In my experience, the state or ideology aims to bring healthy bodies into being in relation to it, so that they will become productive citizens, and, in the rural Midwest, this ideology establishes that these productive citizens will be religious. Each of the four powerful players, then, also functions as an ideological state apparatus, which brought me, an individual, into being, in relation to the state or reasserted the state's power over me. This embodied experience of injury and recovery thus illustrates a complex network of power, affiliated with a broadly defined state ideology.

My lived experience was also a profound moment of integration into the small town and university where I live and work. This community could have rejected a new faculty member who had previously lived only in urban areas, but it did not. In fact, I cannot speak more highly of any group of people. I could have been considered a version of what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben conceives of as the twentieth-century state's tendency to conflate *homo sacer* and bare life. This means that the state disregards people so that they live so far at the margins that they cannot be sacrificed in religious rituals; Agamben's bare life encompasses those who live or die at the whim of those who exert power. In my experience, even though the town and the university interacted with me around my physical injury, I was able to perceive connections between the community and me, which might otherwise have taken longer to be established. Using the feminist philosopher Gail Weiss's vocabulary, this experience shed light on our intercorporeality, that is, the fact that each individual's body is defined by

and, in turn, defines, the bodies and bodily experiences of others. Indeed, my experience of a concussion suggests that the university is profoundly invested in creating a community that includes the physical well-being of all of its members. It, perhaps, lives out what Žižek has identified as that which is worth fighting for in Christianity—this tendency to incorporate the remainder, which Agamben calls bare life, into community. Žižek, perhaps inadvertently calling to mind the university's Anabaptist values, observes that this community, led by the Holy Spirit, can then transform its members and its surroundings. Following Žižek's line of thinking, the lived experience of a concussion has allowed me to enter into the community in a profound way: students who experience concussions and post-concussion syndrome, for instance, discuss their experiences with me and I have gained a small window into one of rural Ohio's driving passions, football. This embodied experience of power and intercorporeality has also made me aware of the troubling narratives associated with disability, sin, healing, and a cosmic plan. It is possible, although never explicitly stated, that some people in my vicinity would think that these events were all part of God's plan for my life. Some might also think that being incorporated into the university community as a result of these experiences lends credence to the Hallmark-style optimism encapsulated in the saying that everything happens for a reason.

The way I have explained my injury in relation to broader social structures mirrors the way I analyze Mexican literature. The disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa, in the Mexican state of Guerrero, on September 26, 2014, connects my experience and the historical approach I take to analyzing this literature. These students are 43 of what some have estimated to be as many as 26,000 disappeared people in Mexico since the 2000 reinvigoration of the War on Drugs. This violence did not begin with the first declaration of the War on Drugs in 1971, or with one of the most significant events in Mexican history, the Mexican Revolution that officially ended when the 1917 constitution came into being. By examining the years between the revolution and 2000, we see a horrifying precedent for the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa. During these years, the Modern Mexican state works with a series of power players, which I have described as state apparatuses and ISAs, using terminology from Agamben, Althusser,

and Žižek. These apparatuses in Mexico during the twentieth century, much like the religion, medicine, Workers' Comp, and education that affected my life after experiencing a concussion in the twenty-first, strongly affect the bodies of the Mexican population. They bring these bodies into being as utterly disposable bare life.

The Body in the Mexico

Mexican narrative fiction from this period, particularly during the so-called Miracle of economic development and modernization (1940–1968), provides compelling examples of other state actions affecting the bodies of Mexican people. Literary fiction represents these actions, and portrays the effects of state actions by describing many people at the margins. Their illnesses, disabilities, or other unusual lived experiences suggest that they do not fit in to the Mexican state's vision of its national body. Reading this fiction affords us the opportunity to examine some of the troubling narratives about disability, sin, and transformation in a new light. I suggest that these marginal bodies reflect the effects of various branches of the state, and allow us to imagine an alternative non-hegemonic collective body that might challenge this state.

José Vasconcelos's utopian essay *La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana* [*The Cosmic Race: Mission of the Iberoamerican Race*] constructs the hegemonic collective Mexican body, which defines the country as mestizo [mixed race].¹ Vasconcelos, who, as critic Pedro Ángel Palou wryly remarks, “era un loco que se creía José Vasconcelos” [“was a crazy man who believed he was his persona, José Vasconcelos”] (14). And, Vasconcelos's idea of the national collective became hegemonic because he formed part of a prestigious group of intellectuals, the *Ateneo de la juventud* [Atheneum of Youth] and was briefly its president (1911–1912). As literary critic Horacio Legrás has observed, “Todos sus nombres importantes [del Ateneo] se acercaron a la política trazando a veces la trayectoria de mayor distancia con las instituciones tradicionales de la política.” [“All of the important names (of the Ateneo) became part of the political realm, tracing at some points a trajectory of great distance with traditional political institutions”] (51).² Vasconcelos's participation in the political realm was as the Minister of Education (1921–1924), where he promoted his vision of the

cosmic race. Vasconcelos's work, the subject of innumerable critical interventions, outlines an esoteric and mystical vision of a better corporeal future for Mexico. The cosmic race would allow Mexico to fulfill its revolutionary potential and be a light for the rest of Ibero-america. It becomes the master signifier of the Mexican state (Palou 14). Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado's "El mestizaje en el corazón de la utopía: *La raza cósmica* entre Aztlán y América Latina" ["Racial Mixture at the Heart of Utopia: *The Cosmic Race* between Aztlán and Latin America"] adds that Vasconcelos's essay inherits the nineteenth-century French thinker Henri Bergson's idea of *élan vital* [vitality]. This vitality advocated for a creative form of evolution, against Darwinism's naturalistic focus (Sánchez Prado, "El mestizaje" 394). Vasconcelos's creative vision imagines modifying the population's material bodies:

es preciso ir creando, como si dijéramos, el tejido celular que de servir de carne y sostén a la nueva aparición biológica. Y a fin de crear ese tejido proteico, maleable, profundo, etéreo y esencial, será menester que la raza iberoamericana se penetre de su misión y la abrace como un misticismo. (Vasconcelos 60)

[It is necessary to keep on creating, so to speak, the cellular tissue that will serve as the flesh and support of this new biological formation. In order to create that Protean, malleable, profound, ethereal, and essential tissue, it will be necessary for the Ibero-American race to permeate itself with its mission and embrace it as a mysticism.] (Jaén 21)

The end result of this mystical process, that is, the new biological formation, will mean that marginalized people's bodies will no longer procreate. According to literary and cultural critic Nancy Leys Stepan, Vasconcelos's *mestizaje* [racial mixture] was a fantasy of national unity and mythologized deep divisions of race, culture, and politics in Mexico (151). That is, the lower social classes with fewest economic resources and whose members were generally indigenous, would be eliminated. In Vasconcelos's words:

Los muy feos no procrearán, no desearán procrear; ¿qué importa entonces que todas las razas se mezclen si la fealdad no encontrará cuna? La pobreza, la educación defectuosa, la escasez de tipos

bellos, la miseria que vuelve a la gente fea, todas estas calamidades desaparecerán del estado social futuro. (Vasconcelos 70)

[The very ugly will not procreate, they will have no desire to procreate. What does it matter, then, that all the races mix with each other if ugliness will find no cradle? Poverty, defective education, the scarcity of beautiful types, the misery that makes people ugly, all these calamities will disappear from the future social stage.] (Jaén 30)

Unlike other eugenicists, Vasconcelos does not want to kill these groups to eliminate them. For him, some members of society could exist and others would be creatively bred out of existence. We focus here on those who should have been bred out of existence and suggest that their persistence in literature alludes to an imagined alternative collective that counters what Palou establishes as the Mexican state's master signifier.

As the state and ISAs exercise power to modify the Mexico population's bodies to create the hegemonic collective, the cosmic race, many less powerful people were left out. In literary works, less powerful characters appear sick or disabled, especially as they participate in public education, as they try to access health care or are rejected from unions. The literary characters' unusual lived experiences imply, in my view, that these characters' bodies, like my lived experience of a concussion, allude to a complex network of power. These characters, whose bodies involuntarily submit to more powerful characters affiliated this power, which includes the state and ISAs, are excluded from the cosmic race and are not, as Vasconcelos had hoped, simply refusing to procreate.

We conceive of these represented characters in figurative relationships and alternative collectives that go against the grain, because novels and short stories often describe their bodies in similar ways. This reminds us of my opening anecdote and how experiencing a concussion allowed me to connect with students with whom I would otherwise have had little in common. This critical work connects a character who does not understand her myopic doctor in José Revueltas's short story, "El hijo tonto" ["The Stupid Son"], which reflects urbanizing Mexico City in the 1940s, to a group of characters who kill a public school teacher who appears blind in Revueltas's short story "Dios en la tierra"

[“God on Earth”], set during the 1926–1929 Cristero War, which pitted the Catholic Church against the Mexican state. Both stories portray characters through blindness: this is the first step to a collective. Upon closer examination, these characters’ experiences clearly reflect the influences of powerful players—in this case, health care, education, and the Catholic Church. We imagine these characters, who are excluded from modernization, in an alternative blind collective that is not part of the cosmic race.

The National Body in Mexican Literature thus examines the sustained metaphor of disability, illness, and other examples of unusual bodies in Mexican narrative from a period of profound social change and relates these bodies to a vision of the national body in specific historical moments in the development of the Mexican state. For this reason, I dialogue with recent works that relate other sustained metaphors in Mexican fiction to their historical context. In particular, I engage with Brian L. Price’s *Cult of Defeat in Mexico’s Historical Fiction: Failure, Trauma and Loss*, which contends that the specter of failure haunts Mexico’s historical fiction and Mexico nationalism (2). He explains that “writers resort to failure . . . to revise history, to explain failed utopian ideals, to undermine opposing political ideologies, to promote platforms of social change . . . Failure narratives often meditate between lofty narratives and unsatisfied goals” (Price 4). I particularly engage with Price’s arguments when we read the faintest of illusions to alternative collectives in Juan Rulfo’s narrative fiction, or, in the case of José Revueltas’s short stories, allusions to the failure of his political ideals that promoted social change. My emphasis on the potential within literary allusions to failed or failing alternative collective bodies, moreover, speaks to Price’s final observation that failure has promoted resilience among Mexican intellectuals (168). That is, the bodies I read point to the desire to continue imagining a better future in Mexico.

The sustained corporeal imagery in the literary works I examine also suggests a debt to feminism and disability studies, particularly their innovative application to Latin American literary studies. Emily Hind’s *Femmenism and the Mexican Woman Intellectual from Sor Juana to Poniatowska: Boob Lit* employs a needed dose of humor in literary criticism and calls for a new theoretical paradigm that places women and women writers in more than just the spaces

left over by masculinist and rational discourse (7–8). It surveys the lives and work of Mexican women intellectuals, and, significantly, explains Mexican gender relations and the vocabulary of *coger*, *chingar*, and *chingada* for an English language audience. Her explanation of the vocabulary of *chingar* [to fuck], *el chingón* [the fucker], and *la chingada* [the fucked-over, raped or screwed], is helpful (Hind 61); these words, and the patterns of gender relations to which they allude are omnipresent in Mexican literature. *The National Body in Mexican Literature*'s understanding of alternative collectives, however, does not engage with Hind's significant contribution to feminist identity politics.

Disability studies is similarly based on identity; however, unlike debates regarding race, gender, or sexuality, this approach to literature and culture observes that most people will eventually experience a disability and, hence, that disability studies is more encompassing than other approaches. Given my focus on the sustained presence of unusual bodies in fiction, and my opening anecdote, I engage with Susan Antebi's groundbreaking inquiry into Spanish American literary representations of disability, *Carnal Inscriptions: Spanish American Narratives of Corporeal Difference and Disability*. I situate these representations of unusual bodies in the Mexican context, and thus accept Antebi's invitation to consider multiple meanings of figures with unusual bodies in literary fiction at crucial points in Latin American history (3). I also place them in an alternative non-hegemonic collective body, where characters interact with one another. This dialogues with her observations regarding intercorporeality in Latin American literature, about the interactions between humans and machines, and through intertextual connections between characters with similar disabilities (197). Rather than developing a Latin American understanding of disability and disability studies, however, I assert that sick or disabled figures in Mexican literary fiction reflect the Mexican state's interest in controlling its population.

This emphasis on state control of the population means that I am also in conversation with Gareth Williams's *The Mexican Exception: Sovereignty, Police and Democracy*, which examines what he calls the Mexican state of exception in relation to ideas of sovereignty, democracy, and the police. Williams applies Foucault

and Jacques Rancière's theories of politics to the Mexican context, and conceives of the police as those entities that regulate ways of doing, being, and saying (12). I, however, differ from the way Williams juxtaposes various historical periods in a thematic rather than chronological manner with rich analytical effect. For this reason, we also dialogue with other studies of biopolitics in Latin America, such as Mabel Moraña and Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado's recent edited collection, *Heridas abiertas: biopolítica y representación en América Latina* [*Open Wounds: Biopolitics and Representation in Latin America*]. Oswaldo Zavala's essay in this collection, "Las razones de estado del narco: soberanía y biopolítica en la narrativa mexicana contemporánea" ["The Reason of the Narco State: Sovereignty and Biopolitics in Contemporary Mexican Narrative"], which deals with literary representations of violence and violated bodies from 2000 to 2012 in Mexico, proves useful. Zavala posits that Williams's:

análisis supone una ilusión de continuidad en el Estado mexicano que ignora las eventualidades históricas del poder soberano, su uso contemporáneo del monopolio de la violencia legítima y los efectos precisos de su dimensión biopolítica que han alterado la relación misma entre Estado y sociedad civil desde la caída del PRI.

[analysis supposes a continuity in the Mexican State that ignores the historical eventualities of sovereign power, its contemporary monopoly of legitimate violence and the precise effects of its biopolitical dimension that have altered the relationship between the State and civil society since the fall of the PRI.] (185)

We add that the way Williams ignores the changes of sovereign power is equally problematic in his analysis of power in the pre-2000 period.

In light of these contributions' debt to Foucault, and appreciating the caution critics have exercised when applying Foucauldian theories to Mexican literature (Antebi 72), we approach representations of the body in contemporary Mexican narrative through a Foucauldian framework. This framework posits that police action is crucial to the workings of the state and to erasing the borders between the state's domain and everyday life. In other words,

ordinary people's lived experiences reflect the state. According to Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France*, "to say that a sovereign has a right of life and death means that he can, basically, either have people put to death or let them live, or in any case that life and death are not natural or immediate phenomena" (240). They are under the state's purview. Foucault adds that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European governments employed their sovereign power over life and death through public health and medical programs that focused on people with disabilities (244). In the twentieth century, the Mexican state began public health and hygiene programs with similar goals; literary representations reflect these tendencies.

Althusser's landmark essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)" explains how he understands the state to interact with its population. Althusser argues that in the twentieth century, the state has been the primary holder of power, and that it "interpellates" individuals as its subjects. Interpellate, a term meaning to bring into being, refers, in our case, to how the state brings people into being by subjecting them to the ruling ideology and by controlling them through prisons, police, and the army. Althusser then enumerates Ideological State Apparatuses, such as the church and the school, which work in the private sphere to continue the state's repressive work (143). This means that individuals are subjected to or controlled by the state, and can only exist in relation to it. As we saw in the initial example, the body is a site where different powerful players, or the state and ISAs, manifest themselves.

We adopt Agamben's terminology of bare life, meaning a life stripped of all rights in relation to a sovereign's power, to further understand how the body functions as a site of power and submission in literature (53). In Agamben's view, the sovereign affects the lives of others through what Foucault has called biopower. This biopower, for Agamben, focuses on the bodies of marginalized people, which in the traditional philosophical understanding were bare life, *zoe*, that could be transformed into good life. In the contemporary world, according to Agamben, bare life takes on qualities of *homo sacer*, a term that refers to a person who can be killed but not sacrificed (82). *Homo sacer* can never lead the

good life. According to the scholar of religion Clayton Crockett, in Agamben's reading:

human life becomes equalized under the process of modern secularization, [and] the notion of the "sacredness of life" goes hand in hand with the development of sovereign secular power over life and death. As life itself or bare life becomes seen as sacred, it is easier and easier to accumulate sovereign biopower to dispose of or kill it. (4)

In Mexico, the ostensibly secular state accumulates power over its population to dispose of it as *homo sacer* rather than to transform their bodies into citizens who could live the so-called good life. Eventually, most Mexican people become, as Agamben predicts, *homines sacri*, the plural of *homo sacer* (115).

Our reading conceives of these *homines sacri* in relationship to one another, as a body that surpasses the contours of the individual body. This alternative body, a non-hegemonic collective, counters the rhetoric of the cosmic race and gestures toward transformation. To conceive of this gesture and to elaborate on the potential within its multiple failures, we turn to Weiss's vocabulary of intercorporeality, which she establishes in her *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*. In this philosophical work, she establishes that the body exists in an intercorporeal model, that is, that discrete bodies are always mediated by other bodies. In Weiss's view, the individual becomes a subject based on the exchange between that individual's body and the bodies and body images of others (3).³ Her phenomenological perspective sustains that humans develop the contours of their individual bodies through these interactions. I take Weiss's ideas in a different direction than Antebi, who establishes intercorporeal relationships in Mexican literature as an oscillating movement, an *écart*, between Mexican Gabriela Brimmer's *testimonio* of her lived experience of cerebral palsy—written and on screen—as well as Brimmer's life and other similar testimonies of disability (196). Characters' bodies in literary fiction, are, in my view, in a reversible *écart* with one another. Repetitive descriptions of characters with other unusual lived experiences that suggest that these characters are marginalized and exist as bare life, demonstrate their submission to state biopower. In a similar way,

sustained corporeal imagery also suggests that characters outline the contours of one another's bodies in an intercorporeal entity. I conceive of them together in an intercorporeal entity that arises through intratextual connections and so they become interchangeable with one another in the critic's imagination. As an alternative collective that implicitly—although not overtly—challenges the cosmic race.

Collectives of characters in literary texts, who do not directly challenge representatives or representations of the state or ISA, often participate in some kind of collective religious experience. These experiences, both endorsed by the Catholic Church and popular religiosity related to Catholicism, which sometimes take the characters away from the state's influence, suggest that there is some potential for challenge within religious ritual. At the same time, since these religious collectives are no more successful than the intercorporeal entities I read in literature, collectives that arise through religious expression, remind of what Žižek calls the failure at the heart of Christianity. Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* and *The Fragile Absolute—or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* maintain that the ideal Christian community is based on divine failure and, I maintain, contrast with communities formed by the state, such as unions or public schools. For Žižek, as Christ dies on the cross, God becomes the gap between God and man and vacates the position of the divine father (*Puppet* 90). In response to this reality and to this divine failure, Žižek proposes that what Christians would call the Holy Spirit forms a community (*Puppet* 171). *The Fragile Absolute* elaborates on this community. It observes that Paul's letter to the Galatians maintains that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, because Christ reconciles differences (Gal. 3:28). This Pauline letter elevates figures such as women and slaves who might otherwise exist as marginalized bare life by incorporating them into Christian community. The way Žižek reads this community is crucial to our understanding of alternative collectives in twentieth-century Mexican narrative fiction. Although the Catholic Church often functions as an arm of the state, there is potential for its membership to behave differently, particularly were it to incorporate characters who would otherwise only exist as bare life. *The National Body in Mexican Literature* approaches