

THE CATHOLIC PUZZLE: FAITH IN THE BORDERLAND NARRATIVES OF
CARMEN BOULLOSA AND ROLANDO HINOJOSA.

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic experience in the Texas-US borderlands represents a void within the humanities. The attitudes that surround the topic of religion in socio-historical and literary studies have limited the scope of works. Two of the most problematic biases are the pro and anti-Catholic discourses that have been intertwined with national political agendas in both countries. They have created important obstacles that complicate the study and understanding of the identities that have arisen since the conquest. In the border, a significant percent of Mexican families maintain strong links to Catholic practices and beliefs despite living under the pressures of Americanization and secularization that are deeply rooted in the anti-clerical discourse. On the other hand, pro-Catholic approaches often lose sight of the realities found in the margins of society, as they can be over-reactionary to perceived attacks.

Taking this counterpoint in consideration, this dissertation studies the multiple faces of Catholicism portrayed in the contemporary narratives of *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* 2013 of Carmen Boullosa and in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* 1977, *Claros Varones de Belken* 1986 and *Becky and her Friends* 1990, all three novels of Rolando Hinojosa's *Klail City Death Trip Series*. This analysis is situated within pro and anti-Catholic discourses, as well as with the critical works on cultural change of anthropologists such as Fernando Ortiz, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Clifford Geertz, Elizabeth Fernea, and Dan Rose. Some of the historians considered with regards to the subject of Mexican-American culture and religious change are Albert

Camarillo, Robert Wright O.M.I, Carlos E. Castañeda, Timothy Matovina, and Robert Treviño. The works of these critics, in conjunction with the study of the borderland titles, allow for the possibility of re-tracing the Mexican-American Catholic experience in the Rio Grande Valley starting from the years that immediately followed the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Ultimately, this dissertation allows for a better understanding of the religion shared by many generations of Mexican Americans and proves that Boullosa and Hinojosa's works are crucial in understanding the processes responsible for the generational shifts and reactions that many historiographers have noted in the study of the borderlands.

DEDICATION

To Katy Giles Weir and Kit Elizabeth Weir.

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Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Professor Alessandra Luiselli [advisor] and Professors Richard Curry, Brian Imhoff of the Department of Hispanic Studies and Professor Norbert Dannhaeuser of the Department of Anthropology.

All work for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

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NOMENCLATURE

KCDT	Klail City Death Trip
KCDTS	Klail City Death Trip Series
O.M.I	Oblates of Mary Immaculate
NHN	New Historical Novel

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of the Mexican Catholic experience in the Mexico-US borderlands represents a void in need of attention within the social studies. Approaches followed in socio-historical and literary studies related to this religion have limited the scope of works and continue to test the secular-religious interactions that make up the daily life of the frontier. Two of these biases are related to the Mexican and American anti-Catholic/anticlerical discourses that have been historically intertwined with national political agendas in both countries. They can be observed in state-led policies, which have been represented in literature, and detected in the hypercriticism aimed at organized religions found within academic circles.¹ All have created important obstacles that hinder the ability to understand identities that have arisen in the border where, despite the pressures of Americanization and secularization, a significant percent of Mexican families maintain links to the Catholic practices.² An example of this complex reality took place in the middle of the twentieth century when the US government called for a

¹ One current example of the hypercriticism in the academia can be seen in comments such as Jaime Labastida's definition of the missionary's catechesis in Colonial Mexico. He writes: "Los iluminados que llegan al Nuevo Mundo en el que ven una tierra de esperanza y promisión en la que deben salvar almas de paganos: quieren catequizar, o sea, destruir al Otro, al diferente, al infiel, al idólatra poseído por el demonio: salvar almas significa para ellos, al propio tiempo, despreciar *este* mundo para poner sus ojos en *el otro* mundo." By taking such a critical position in his definition of colonial evangelization, he leaves little room for the discourse of the missionaries and effectively limits the scope of colonial research. See, *Historia de la literatura mexicana. Vol. 3*, 462.

² This trend can be inferred from Paul Perl, Jennifer Z. Greely, and Mark M. Gray's report "What Proportion of Adult Hispanics Are Catholic? A Review of Survey Data and Methodology." Though the study suggests that a shift in religious affiliation may take place in the second and third generation, the percentages of the shifts showed that the link to Catholicism remains strong in many families. The report showed that 47% percent of the second and third generations as being identified as Catholics in their nation-wide surveys. See, 430-431.

general abandonment of the Mexican identity. The US discourse of Americanization sought to eliminate some Mexican religious traditions by the process of assimilation as it was argued that such practice hindered the adjustment to the American way of life, which is Protestant in nature.³ This call for the abandonment of the Mexican Catholic heritage had an earlier counterpart in the project of secularization of the Mexican State when the government sought to eliminate the influence of the Church by limiting the practice of Catholicism and even persecuting Spanish and French clergy.⁴ Nonetheless, the Catholic Church has maintained a presence in the borderlands in spite of these pressures and many traditions are still alive. The number of observances that thrive in major cities of Texas such as San Antonio and Houston, where new Latin-American immigration tends to concentrate, are current examples of this pattern.⁵ In both places, devotions have diffused over time from Mexico and other countries, and have become integral parts of the Mexican-American communities.

Despite social, political, and cultural forces that work against Latino/Latina identity and Catholicism, such as the aforementioned Americanization, immigration often brings renewal of the Church militancy and practices. This seem to counter act such pressures by introducing new forms of worship and veneration that may be adopted

³ An example of this attitude towards the assimilation of Mexicans can be found in Albert Camarillo's *Chicanos in a Changing Society* (1979). The Chicano historian explains that Protestant missionary efforts and charitable institutions were the preferred agents of change of assimilationist. See, 225-229.

⁴ George J. Sanchez explains in *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* that this practice included the persecution of both French and Spanish clergymen during the revolution and persisted throughout the 20s. He additionally gives a description of the multiples attitudes surrounding Mexican Catholicism and the internal and external pressures Mexican Americans faced during this generation. See, 151-170.

⁵ In his book *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present* Timothy Matovina traces the origin of the Guadalupe devotion from its origin in the frontier in 1731 to our days in San Antonio. See, 24-45 and 65-94.

over time and may even spread to Anglo or English-speaking communities.⁶

Nonetheless, both historiographical research and creative works argue that a struggle has been present in the collective mind of Mexican-Americans where the many faces of their Catholic practices are in a process of decline.⁷ These discourses of religious struggle are best seen represented by anticlerical positions contained in Chicano narratives such as José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) or Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless me Ultima* (1972). In addition, new biases seem to become more prevalent in the popular media, where they often take stands against the official political discourses held by the Catholic Church.⁸ The generalized depictions of religions contained in such works are incomplete at best and suggest a need in the social sciences to strive for a greater scrutiny in these matters.⁹ The failure to account for the spirit of renewal of traditions and the many facets of Catholicism brought by new immigrants show the presence of discourses that deserve diligent attention in order to fill the gaps presently found in the study of religion and literature. For instance, the resilience of Catholicism against the constant criticism of intellectuals like James Carroll, a writer, historian, and former priest, or Pulitzer Prize

⁶ Timothy Matovina gives an example of this diffusion by attesting the range of the devotions to Our Lady of Guadalupe which he has followed across the United States and which is practiced not only by the Hispanic community but by the Anglo as well. These practices are seen from California to D.C, and Indiana to Texas. See, *Guadalupe and her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present*, xi.

⁷ A discussion of this concern is found in Matovina's *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (2012) with examples from surveys that suggest a decline of members in the Catholic Youth. See, 219-244.

⁸ For a list of official Church Stands on current issues refer to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website. < <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/index.cfm>>

⁹ Philip Jenkins provides a detailed description of the discourses directed at the Catholic Church. On his first chapter, he dissects the different attitudes surrounding the positions of the church on issues such as same-sex unions, abortions, and female priesthood, while arguing the prevalence Bigotry from the more orthodox-liberal sections of US society. See, 1-22.

winner Anna Quidlen, is proof of the urgency of studying the official discourse of the Roman Church.¹⁰ This is especially important due to the presence of a discourse that affirms the existence of a new wave of evangelization represented by the work of the first Latin-American Pope. Church Scholars like Bishop Robert Barron, Rector of the Mundelein Seminary and Founder of the Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, argue that Catholicism survives and thrives despite the turmoil caused by the scandals at the end of the twentieth century and thus show a counterbalance to the previously mentioned pessimistic secular discourse.¹¹

These radically different positions of the Catholic experience, both past and present, bring into question not only the status of the faith and its necessities, but also the validity of recent historical depictions of the Church. By following these two discourses, some researchers have often failed to establish a criticism that takes into account the limits of concepts and assumptions held at the specific critical tradition which scholars hold when they carry out their research.¹² This is problematic because it means that previous scholarly work done on the depictions of Catholicism or any other religion in

¹⁰ Philip Jenkins explains that both authors are especially critical about the celibacy and go to the extent of linking the corruption of the clerical elite to the practice. See, 153.

¹¹ Fr. Robert Barron's ministry "Word on Fire" is a non-profit organization dedicated to the purpose of evangelizing through modern media. This ministry published the *Catholicism* series, written and narrated by Fr. Barron himself, which have aired in the US on PBS and EWTN. Fr. Barron is also a columnist, writer and works with NBC News in NY as a contributor and analyst. For a detail description of the organization and a biography of Fr. Barron See: <<http://www.wordonfire.org/about/word-on-fire/>> and <<http://www.wordonfire.org/about/fr-robert-barron/>>.

¹² One example can be found in Mario T. Garcia's *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity*, a foundational text in Chicano Studies, in which he dedicates a chapter to Carlos E. Castañeda's historiographical work on Mexican Americans and Catholicism. Though, this chapter is meant to be a summary and commentary of the Texas Historian placed in the section "Mexican American Intellectuals," Garcia fails to place Castañeda's work within a specific critical theory tradition or discourses which he uses to re-trace history. See, 231-251.

literature, historiography, or theoretical studies need to be revisited in order to understand religious experiences. Moreover, in order not to compromise the depth of criticism, future scholars should acknowledge the multiple views and approaches surrounding their subject matters in order to make contributions that go beyond restating old discourses.

Taking this counterpoint into consideration, the purpose of this dissertation is to analyze modern representations of the complex and multiple faces of Borderland Catholicism as portrayed in the novel *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013) by Carmen Boullosa and in three narratives of Rolando Hinojosa: *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990), which are included in the *Klail City Death Trip Series*.¹³ These borderland titles are all set in the Rio Grande Valley and, due to the chronological setting of their plots, allow for the possibility of re-tracing the Mexican-American Catholic experience in Texas starting from the years that immediately followed the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. The analysis is to be situated within discourses of pro and anti-clericalism in addition to the critical works of anthropologist and historians, such as Fernando Ortiz and Albert Camarillo, on cultural change and assimilation. This will be done to address issues like the challenges that similar discourses possess in the creation of borderline identities and the possibility of envisioning a more unified form of Catholicism in the future. The ultimate objective is to avoid the dangers of hypercritical approaches to the

¹³ Though the series contain 15 volumes, I chose to concentrate my dissertation on three of these volumes: *Becky and her Friends* (1990), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986) and *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) because these narratives contain attitudes, interactions, and stories related to the Catholic Experience in Belken that can link them.

study of faiths, religions and spirituality while remapping a historiography of Catholicism in the region as portrayed by the mentioned authors. In other words, the intention is to create a vision of the Mexican religious heritage that will allow for a better understanding of the continuity between the generations of Mexican American Catholics represented in Boullosa and Hinojosa's work. Moreover, this analysis seeks a better understanding of the processes behind the generational shifts and subsequent reactions that many historiographers have noted in the study of the borderlands.

1.1 Historical and Critical Theory Frames

The history of Mexican American Catholicism and its devotions can be traced to the conquest and to the dual approach employed to convert the peoples of the Americas. This was a process in which assimilation came from the use of force with different degrees of alienation and brutality imparted by the military forces of Cortez on the one hand, and by the use of reason as shown by Franciscan friars such as Toribio de Benavente, Jerónimo de Mendieta, and Bernardino de Sahagún. These priests had an extensive contact with the indigenous people and shared a vision of creating a Mexican Church that the natives could accept, one that would ultimately include the creation of a native liturgy. They would use rhetoric and reason in their attempts to fully incorporate the natives without using violence while adapting some of their cultural elements. Unfortunately, the ideal project of the Franciscans was never completed and instead a

much more dogmatic Catholic Church took its place in New Spain (Weir 3-8).¹⁴ Nonetheless, these first efforts left a mark in the Mexican version of the Church which can be seen in some of the devotions to Our Lady of Guadalupe as they show pre-Hispanic influence and in current processes still taking place in the indigenous cultures where the missionaries once worked. Moreover, as Jeanette Rodriguez explains in her book *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, this mestiza incarnation of Mary became the foundation for Mexican Catholicism and is, to this date, the link for two different traditions – the Spanish and Indigenous (45). Spaniard Conquistadors and their descendants were able to connect her to old peninsular traditions, and for Native Mexicans she came to be symbol of the New Indian Catholicism that the first Franciscans envisioned. By 1556, Guadalupan devotion had been promoted by the second archbishop of New Spain, Alonso de Montúfar, despite resistance linked to the dangers of syncretism which Fray Francisco de Bustamante raised (Matovina, *Guadalupe and her Faithful*, 3). It is under this model of evangelization that Catholic Christianity came into the United States, and specifically Texas.

Between 1565 and 1821 Catholicism arrived first in the form of missions, which aimed at the evangelization of the Natives, and secondly, in the form of chaplains which would be assigned to garrisons. Parishes would eventually be established for Hispanic civilians in the larger towns, as was the case in San Antonio in 1731 (Wright, “Catholicism,” 283). Catholic devotions diffused with these missions following these

¹⁴ See, Francisco Morales, OFM. “The Native Encounter” 137-159. See also, Don Paul Abbot *Rhetoric in the New World* 48-52.

patterns of colonization and with time they reshaped the collective identity of the local inhabitants. Today, some of these devotions are still celebrated in San Antonio. This is despite, as Matovina explains, “the intermingling of ‘secular’ artistic expressions and religious devotion, and the use of images in prayer and worship” (*Guadalupe and Her Faithful*, 43-44). This mix of secular and religious traditions, in addition to contemporary inflow of non-Mexican Latino influences in the worship traditions that take place in San Antonio today, sets the stage for the discussion of the counterpoint that is to be explored in this dissertation as it reflects the constant reconfiguration of the Catholic Church.

The historiographical setting described up to this point contextualizes the faiths represented in the narratives of Boullosa and Hinojosa as it shows the heterogeneous origin of Mexican Catholicism during historical turning points for the Church. Boullosa’s book is set during the years that immediately follow the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), in which the official lines for the borderlines were drawn. The faith of the generation depicted on her work is the product of the evangelization work performed by the Franciscan missionaries from the College of Santa Cruz de Querétaro (founded in 1683) and the College of Guadalupe de Zacatecas (founded in 1703-1707). Both institutions were commissioned to minister to the Indians of Texas during the late XVII and early XVIII century, and followed the example of their XVI century brothers by attempting to bring a new lifestyle to the native inhabitants. As with the Franciscan project of evangelization, their task was not fully completed before a radical reconfiguration of the Church took place. In the case of Hinojosa, his books recreate the

experiences of the people of the Rio Grande Valley as they face a generational shift often represented, at the social level, with the Chicano Movement and with the Second Vatican Council of 1962 in terms of the faith. Taking into account that many of the families of the Rio Grande Valley can trace their heritage back to the same original missions, it will also be important to consider the effects multiple discourses may have on the religious experience portrayed by the Chicano writer.

Though the discussions in here have concentrated up to now on the historiographical setting under which Catholicism will be analyzed, it is important to briefly list some of the critical theories that will be employed throughout the chapters. These will serve as lenses through which the discourses interacting in the novels will be decoded. They will also provide the tools to understand the generational shifts in the Borderland, and the codes used in their critical literary representations. Keeping this in mind, the first concepts to be employed are the ideas of Seymour Menton and Fernando Ainsa about the New Latin-American Historical Novel (NHN). Their ideas and descriptions of this new literary genre will be applied specifically in the chapter dedicated to the work of Carmen Boullosa.¹⁵ Firstly, with the intention of establishing *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013) as a new example of the NHN tradition. Secondly, with the purpose of explaining the historical and ethnographic discourse contained within the novel thereby postulating Boullosa's novel as an example of an ethnographic novel. The second critical lenses are found in the ideas of Michael de

¹⁵ Seymour Menton and Fernando Ainsa gives a series of characteristics for the New Historical Novel that include the subordination of mimesis, distortion of history, fictionalization of historical characters, metafiction, intertextuality, and the presence of Bajtinian concepts. See, Menton *La Nueva Novela Histórica de la America Latina 1979-1992*, 42-44. See also, Ainsa 18-31

Certeau about reality in the writing of history and the discourses contained within it. These will allow for an ongoing discussion on the views of religion throughout the different narratives and literary criticism that will be addressed throughout the present dissertation.¹⁶ Another theoretical frame that will be a keystone for this study is a criticism of the ideas of transculturation and assimilation found in the fields of cultural anthropology and historiography. Some of the authors which will be addressed on this discussion are Fernando Ortiz, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, George M. Foster, and Albert Camarillo.

1.2 Summary of Contents and Chapter Organization

This dissertation will be divided into three chapters and an interview annexed. The first chapter, “Towards a New Historiography of Borderland Catholicism,” aims at discussing the necessity of re-writing the historiography of Borderland religion while looking at current literature that portray faith and spirituality from the perspective of the various discourses that surround the subject. The objective of this project will be achieved by critically synthesizing the work of historiographers such as Fr. Robert Wright O.M.I and Timothy Matovina, in the form of a summary of the history of the Church in Texas. This critical synthesis will also analyze Fr. Pierre Parisot’s *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary* (1899) as a firsthand account of the religious life and the state of Catholicism, as it will provide a historical context to understand Carmen Boullosa’s

¹⁶ We will take into account several ideas included in the essay “Making History: Problems of Method and Problems of Meaning,” *The Writing of History*. (19-55). These include de Certeau’s four positions on the study of religion, his take on reality within the scientific process of history, the role of the historian and the principle that history is not immune to the ideas of the historian.

novel.¹⁷ Modern portrayals of Catholicism under the banner of the New Evangelization movement that the Vatican endorses will also be taken into account in this study.¹⁸ This approximation to historiography is an important step in the process of acknowledgement of the interactions of various discourses in the process of writing. As Michael De Certeau explains, history is not immune to the ideas of the historian and needs to be contextualized along with the discourses with which it's written in order to contest or corroborate historical details. He additionally confirms in his essay "History: Science and Fiction" from *Heterologies* (1986) that the work of the historian is to invert the polarized effects that act in the field of history while readers must recognize the deep relationship between discourse and power and historiography. In other words, historians must recognize that discourses are part of science while they are in conflict with each other (205). Thus, for the purpose of the present study, the scholar is both the reader and the writer of history, because he seeks to question history in order to detect any fictions that the dominant discourses have sold as reality.

In order to accomplish this task, this first chapter will discuss the ongoing debates related to the effects of the colonial missions in current Texas Catholic practices while explaining the discourses with which they interact. The work of Historian Carlos E. Castañeda will also be introduced as it provides a source of reference to the work of

¹⁷ These two scholars have shared the project of re-mapping the history of Catholicism in the face of an Anglo-centered narrative.

¹⁸ Though it is possible to mention much of the post Second Vatican Council publications in regards to this new wave, the positive portrayal of this religion is best represented by Fr. Robert Barron 2013 documentary *Catholicism: The New Evangelization*. Here he visits both in theological and philosophical terms the tenants of the faith, in addition to answer common questions and misconceptions of Church teaching over devotions and practices. This documentary consists of 11 episodes and it gives a more approachable image of the church in a global context.

Boullosa in the next chapters. Castañeda's historiography of Texan Catholicism sought to re-construct colonial mission life by using journals and letters written by the actors of this first colonization. The study of his work in the context of the discussion of the first chapter will create the unique opportunity to understand the readings of both Wright and Matovina. It will also allow us to dig into the different forms of Catholicism that resound with George Foster's work *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage*.¹⁹ The chapter will end with a discussion of new waves of evangelization, as already mentioned earlier in the proposal, in addition to a brief reflection on the importance of writing literature that explores Catholicism in all its complexity while avoiding the discursive limits that de Certeau describes.

Chapter two, "Border Catholicism in Carmen Boullosa's *Texas: The Faith in the Rio Grande Valley*" will establish this novel's place within the tradition of the New Latin-American Historical Novel through a comparison of details found in Fr. Parisot's depiction of the Catholic experience introduced in the first chapter with Boullosa's novel. This analysis will also dwell specially in the depiction of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, his revolt, and the rise of a religious leader called "El Iluminado," that provide the setting for the novel. Through this comparison, the chapter will seek to discuss the usefulness of the genre of the New Latin-American Historical Novel in the writing of history and in contesting dominant discourses and will seek to establish a link between the historiographical criticism and literature as it will explain how *Texas* can be studied

¹⁹ It is important to call into attention as well the ideas of conquest culture and cultural crystallization contained in *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage* as they provide further information for theoretical framework of the process of transculturation. See, Foster 10-20 and 227-234

as an anthropological device as it can be compared with Castañeda's lifework *Our Catholic Heritage*. In order to reach this goal, it's necessary to first place *Texas* within the genre by comparing it with the description Seymour Menton gives on his book *La Nueva Novela Histórica de la America Latina 1979-1992* as well as with Fernando Ainsas's work "La reescritura de la historia en la nueva narrativa latinoamericana." After this point, their criticism of the dominant historiographical discourses will become the focus of the chapter as it will set the stage to their comparison to Castañeda's history of Texan Catholicism as well as with the historical foundation of this dissertation set out in the first chapter. Though Castañeda's seven volumes give an overarching view of Texas history that far surpasses the time in which Boullosa's narrative is set, the comparison of these works will reveal two faces of criticism aimed at the official discourse of Americanization which the US adopted during the turn of the century with regards to the borderlands.²⁰

This second chapter will also study the depiction of the Mexican religion contained in the book and argues that Boullosa's critical perspective of Catholicism

²⁰ This discourse or project can be broadly defined as the activities that were designed to prepare foreign-born residents of the United States for full participation in citizenship. Though the process of assimilation can be traced to the influx of European newcomers from the earlier years of the US these began to be deliberate, and sometimes forceful, after WWI. American reactions to European hostilities produced an intense awareness of the aliens and "foreigners" in their midst and created the conditions for an Assimilation achieved by the deliberate, and sometimes forceful, means of earlier nativist movements. Due to this perspective, the Americanization movement and its discourse gained strength and primarily became an educational program that propagated through schools, businesses, voluntary associations (such as the YMCA), libraries, and citizens' bureaus. Teaching foreigners became a favorite form of patriotic service for organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, particularly after the United States entered into the war. The movement also took hold in nascent industries that desired an immigrant workforce capable of adjusting to mass-production work standards. See, Encyclopædia Britannica. <<http://school.eb.com/levels/high/article/6140>>.

needs to be further contextualized. Following the tradition of the New Latin-American Historical Novel, the reader of this genre must ground the study of this new historical depiction by contrasting it to the official discourse. In other words, in doing a revision of the Catholic Texas History the traditional historiography that looks at the period portrayed in *Texas* will be juxtaposed with the views portrayed by Boulosa. This approach allows for the creation of a new perspective on the period that immediately follows the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. A time period that is in need of further research in order to fill the gaps in the historical record in discussions related to the influence of Catholicism and the priesthood in regards to the experience Mexican-American people.²¹ In the case of the study of religion, it is also important to look at the work Church historians have completed. Without such a context, the historical record is left with a sole discourse, causing scholars to underestimate the complexity of religious experiences in the borderlands.

In order to bridge the described gap of information, religious practices as portrayed by Boulosa will be considered with philosophical and theological explanations set by the current church discourse contained within the work of the documentary *Catholicism* (2011) along with any conclusions from the previous chapter on the historical work of Castañeda. Though the two views represented by the documentary and *Our Catholic Heritage* are separated by the ecumenical church council in the 60s known as the Second Vatican Council, they provide depth in the religious

²¹ Though Castañeda shows a continuity of the heritage in his seven volume work and Fr. Robert Wright confirms it with his own research, other historians such as Roberto R. Treviño hold that the Catholic clergy lost touch with the realities of Mexican-American life as the missions became secular parishes. See, *Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* 75-90.

discussion. According to the discourse of the Church, Catholicism as a faith is not only a homogenous way of life summed by principles held by the clergy, but a heterogeneous body with multiple practices that are unified by a common theology. By comparing the pro-clerical perspective of both works with the criticism of Boullosa, which coincides (although lightly) with more anti-clerical discourses of Latin-America, a better picture of the spread of Catholicism in this particular time will take shape.²² This perspective of Catholic practice will carry us to the description of the early XX century set by the work of Rolando Hinojosa which will be the subject matter of the final two chapters of this study.

Chapter three, “A New Kind of Ethnography: Faith Journeys in Hinojosa’s *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990),” studies the representation of Mexican-American Catholicism in three of Hinojosa’s narratives with the purpose of contextualizing these works with the pressures that are in effect in the valley due to immigration from Mexico and the North, and the discourse of Americanization. This analysis will be framed by a discussion of the mechanisms that act in the process of transculturation of the Rio Grande Valley as well as with the proposal of *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) as an ethnographic novel. The chapter begins with a description of the concept of transculturation as established by Fernando Ortiz in his *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (1978) and with a

²² The Church in Latin-America has been subject to criticism and debate within itself. This fact is evident in stories, depictions and attitudes that surround positions of the clergy that may or may not be in line with official Church teaching. This was the case with the support of factions during the Mexican independence movement or the revolutionary war. As a result of this trend, it is common to see critical depictions of the clergy in Latin-American literature even if it is at a nominal level.

brief discussion on the need for redefining the descriptive term into a dynamic process.²³

This redefinition is crucial to the chapter as it provides the tools to understand the effects the pressures of immigration and Americanization have in the Mexican-American experience in Texas.²⁴ These set the stage for the religious transformation of Jehú Malacara, one of Rolando Hinojosa's fictional characters, when he undergoes a coming of age experience that will see him reject the faith of his parents for that of a Protestant pastor. The study of this personal journey shows us a chronological vision of the transformation of the Borderland in terms of the religion.

After this initial discussion, the chapter turns to the study of depictions of the Catholic faith with the intention of proposing the genre represented by this work as a new kind of ethnography. This will be done by recalling a proposed set of guidelines or

²³ The definition of the concept of transculturation and its mechanism begins with Fernando Ortiz and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's work on acculturation. Both understood the process as a dynamic reaction that took place after contact but followed two different approaches in their explanations. Ortiz abandoned the use of the word acculturation due to the implications that the word itself brought into the discussion. Instead he chose the neologism transculturation as the best word to define what he called a "counterpoint" in his book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1978). Aguirre Beltrán at the same time elaborated on the old notion by describing different instances and reactions that could take place from the contact. He saw the necessity understanding the context in which the definition was created and presented a description in his *El proceso de aculturación y el cambio socio-cultural en México* (1970) that sought to fill any gaps that prevented the understanding of the process. However, both accounts neglect to fully dwell on the mechanisms that carry out the changes they describe. For a definition and description of transculturation under this light refer to "Recontextualization as a Mechanism for Acculturation: Protestant and Native Interactions in Chan Kom and Amatlán." *HISPANET* 4 (2011) 1-30. See also Ortiz, 93-97 and Aguirre Beltrán, 30-51.

²⁴ It is worth mentioning that though both Americanization and the flow of immigration are very much related to the experience of new immigrant in the US. The process of colonization of this country and the historical flux of immigration are different to those of the Hispanic populations of the Texas Borderlands which are represented in Hinojosa's *Klail Death Trip Series*. This is because the history of the Rio Grande Valley can be traced back to the years before the independence of Mexico in a time in which, as Hinojosa tells us in his essay "The Sense of Place," the river was not a jurisdictional barrier and would not come to be one in more than 100 years. Previous to the independence of Texas, this region had an identity of its own which was based on the Spanish origin of the founders of Nuevo Santander. In other words, the Rio Grande Valley and its culture precede the transformative pressures of the American Anglo culture and the American Dream. See, "The Sense of Place" in *The Rolando Hinojosa Reader: Essays Historical and Critical*, 19.

conditions that must be met in order for a narrative to be considered a valid representation of an ethnographic investigation defined in the second chapter. Such interpretation will be supported by analyzing the reactions portrayed by Hinojosa as a consequence of the transgression of the Sacrament of Marriage by Becky, one of his main characters. This analysis is framed by the discussion of the process of transculturation and its mechanism as seen in the literary incarnation of the Rio Grande Valley in Belken County. The chapter will end with a synthetic definition of the Catholic experience of the Rio Grande Valley and a return to the postulates of Michael De Certeau about the writing of history in between discourses, seeking to establish the genre which *Becky and her Friends* represents as a model for future scholars in exploring modern culture.

2. TOWARDS A NEW HISTORIOGRAPHY OF BORDERLAND CATHOLICISM IN TEXAS

“Most contemporary attacks on Catholicism or the Catholic Church draw heavily on history, or at least on a kind of mythic history that has become deeply embedded in popular thought (178)”

– Phillip Jenkins
The Last Accepted Prejudice

When talking about Catholicism in any particular country, the first features that come to mind are the majestic buildings and the role of the Catholic hierarchy. The institutional church, the buildings in which people meet to worship and the prelates will often take a center stage in detriment of the beliefs or devotions of Catholics. Though some of these beliefs clash at times with the prescriptions of orthodoxy, they are more than often at the heart of the militancy if not of the theology of Catholicism.²⁵ This institutional view of the Roman Catholic Church is prevalent not only in the public discourse, but also in Historiography, as centrist approaches to the spread of the cultural artifact of religion prevail in the field in general. Catholicism in Texas has not been exempt from this rule, as historians tend to favor the study of the spread of the institution over the scrutiny of

²⁵ Though an enumeration of Catholic beliefs or devotions falls outside the scope of this dissertation, a good example of this clash with orthodoxy can be seen in the making of home altars. These forms of piety are intrinsically linked to catholic theology, as they have been used as tools to exemplify Catholic truths. However, when taken to extreme it can be equated with idolatry. In other words, the devotion to a saint or a figure can become act of adoration of an idol if the effigies become the center of their faith instead of helping the faithful in their worship of a member of the trinity.

the diffusion of core beliefs or of the practice of devotions. By doing so, they equate the arrival of the institution with the diffusion of the faith. Though this institutionally centered approach has a value and provides crucial insights into the Catholic experience, it fails to answer many questions about individual struggles that can be found within the spread of the religion. Moreover, it leaves room for multiple interpretations of the nature of the ministry and, as a result, decisions taken by the higher echelons of the clergy are often interpreted negatively.

Under this scope, the present chapter will revisit some depictions of the Catholic Church found in historical records with the intention of creating a socio-historical foundation for the critical analysis of the narratives of Carmen Boullosa and Rolando Hinojosa in later chapters. This endeavor will synthesize the work of historiographers like Fr. Robert Wright O.M.I and Timothy Matovina, with the objective of presenting a summary of the history of the Church in Texas.²⁶ The described revision will distance itself from the institutional centered approach to privilege instead the cultural processes concurrently at work in the Texas-Mexico border.²⁷ Consequently, a new historiography will be created and anchored in Fr. Pierre Parisot's *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary* (1899), reconsidered here as a firsthand source of information for the cultural spread of the religion in the Rio Grande Valley. The analysis will also take into account modern portrayals of Catholicism that fall under the banner of the New Evangelization

²⁶ These two scholars have shared the project of re-mapping the history of Catholicism in the face of an Anglo-centered narrative. See Matovina's "Remapping American Catholicism" and Wright "Mexican-Descent Catholics and the US Church, 1880–1910: Moving Beyond Chicano Assumptions"

²⁷ This approach does not seek to describe particular beliefs but rather argues that a shift of focus is needed in order to write a historical account of Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley.

movement that the Vatican endorses.²⁸ In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to establish a clear distinction of the concepts of Catholicism and the Roman Catholic Church before proceeding to discuss borderland religion. This clarification will prevent falling into some of the limitations found within institutional-centered approaches to the study of religion. It will also allow the creation of a definition of Borderland Catholicism that will be a common thread in the studies of the narratives of Carmen Boullosa and Rolando Hinojosa in the rest of the dissertation.

2.1 The Church and Catholicism

The distinction between Catholic faith and the Institution of the Roman Church is often blurred as both terms are regularly used interchangeably by public and academic sources. The Pope and the religious hierarchy are seen as the guardians of the faith, embodying all the good and evil of the religion. This is especially true when Catholic beliefs are subject to prejudices or attacks that are anti-Catholic or anti-Clerical in nature, as will be pointed out later. This viewpoint however does not account for the body of believers or for their struggle in following the precepts of millenary faith. It must be considered that the Priesthood after all comprises a small fraction of the total number of Catholics and, at different points throughout the long history of this faith, has failed to uphold the values that are supposed to represent the faith. One only needs to explore a few of the different Church Councils to see how distant priests can be in

²⁸ Bishop Robert Barron's 2013 documentary *Catholicism: The New Evangelization* (2011) is an example of this movement. This documentary consists of 11 episodes and it gives a more approachable image of the church in a global context.

matters of theology or in their approaches in solving their differences.²⁹ Priests have been historically censored and even laicized for failing to meet the standards of Christian behavior.³⁰ Nonetheless, the definitions of Catholicism, the Church, and the composition and role of hierarchy must be clarified, albeit briefly, in order to prevent confusion or the continuation of institutional approaches when studying religion in the Texas-Mexico Border.³¹

The definition of Catholicism along with that of the Roman Catholic Church is often considered one and the same. This is because there's a link between the authority of the Catholic orthodoxy and the core beliefs of the religion. Nonetheless, this blurred connection does not account for interpretations that the faith itself makes of these terms. There is a distinction that the Roman Catholic Church makes about the word “church” which is defined as an all-encompassing and universal self which transcends the concept that public discourse tends to see. This “self” is defined by ideals that were present at the very moment of its creation, an origin that precedes the birth of Jesus Christ. Through this claim, the faith argues that it has a link to the Jewish heritage contained within the scriptures and the Mosaic tradition as it can be seen in the Catholic Church’s Catechism where it is stated that:

²⁹ One example of such differences is the discussion that took place during the Council of Nicea of 356. See, Bokenkotter *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 41

³⁰ Every Priest is subject to cannon law and not following the norms of behavior and civil laws could result in censorship or laicization, in the gravest cases. See, canon code of canon law 290-293 and code of canon law 1333 < http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PZ.HTM> For a thorough explanation of canon law in New Spain See, Martinez de Condes.

<http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/QUCE/article/viewFile/QUCE8787120041A/1770>

³¹ These explanations will be informed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) which is a compendium of the beliefs and theology of the Faith. Though these beliefs can often be at odds with the tenants of individuals who claim to be Catholic, they nonetheless provide the base point from which it is possible to examine the outward representations of the religion.

The word ‘church’ (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-ka-lein*, to ‘call out of’) means a convocation or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for really just purpose. *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the chosen people before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself ‘Church,’ the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is ‘calling to together’ his people from all the ends of the earth. The aquiline Greek term *Kyriake*, from which the English word *Church* and the German *Kirche* are derived, means ‘what belongs to the Lord.’ (751)

Such a long-standing and all-encompassing definition of the Church transcends the institutional seed in Rome and precedes its creation. In other words, the Church is a group that does not necessarily include the presence or lack of clergy.

Keeping the origin of the word in mind, the Catholic Church goes beyond the foundational explanation for its self-identification by stating that:

In the Christian usage, the word ‘Church’ designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. ‘The Church’ is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so

herself becomes Christ's body. (CCC 752)

The above statement implies that the body of the church includes both the hierarchical composition of the religious clergy and the lay membership.³² This holistic definition of the body of believers is further emphasized with the word “catholic,” an adjective through which the faith claims to be universal in its theology and in its scope since “[it] has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race” (CCC 830). The result of this missionary call in the Rio Grande Valley is ultimately what the present work explores, as shown in the summary of the history of borderland Catholicism and also in later chapters. Before continuing, it is imperative however to explain other concepts based on the core theology of the Catholic faith; in example, it is crucial to establish a definition of Catholicism.³³

Catholicism can be defined broadly as the belief in the core teachings of the Catholic Church as well as the worship traditions that respond to these precepts. These beliefs include the worshipping of one God from whom humanity has received the revelation of truth and salvation. The Catholic faith considers itself to be the fulfillment of the Jewish religion and distances itself from its origin by believing that God, being born of a virgin, took a human form in order to fulfill the Law given by Moses.³⁴ Such fulfillment is the theological basis that sets Catholicism apart from all other religions in

³² The composition of the Church Hierarchy is explained by setting a distinction between laity and clergy. This is followed by an explanation of the different roles in the church starting with the Pope, Bishops, Priests, their co-workers, their deacons, lay people, and consecrated life. See, CCC 937-945.

³³ It is important to mention that the Roman Catholic Church is the Latin branch of the Catholic faith. It is called Roman because of the liturgical tradition with which its members practice their worship and the primacy of the Chair of Saint Peter, the first Pope. See, CCC 834.

³⁴ This belief is called the Incarnation which is which is considered to be the fact that The Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. See, CCC 461.

both its teachings and practices.³⁵ However, it remains too broad a definition to be useful as a baseline for understanding the Catholic experience and its literary representation. Consequently, the present analysis limits its scope by considering the Catholic faith in the Texas-Mexico border as the set of beliefs introduced by believers of the Roman faith. These tenets include the already mentioned belief that God incarnated in Jesus for the purpose of making a sacrifice that would reconcile humanity to Himself.³⁶ Being more precise, humanity is reconciled through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven; an extraordinary event through which sin, the product of which is death, is defeated. Within this sacrifice, Jesus also instituted the clergy that is called to continue the ministries he carried out. Their work includes the administration of sacraments, a very important aspect to take into account within the definition of Catholicism. These rites are often regarded, along with the devotions to Mary and the saints, essential to understanding both the definition and the experience of Catholic life. As reflected both in historical records and in literary representations, all outwards signs of the faith are important within the beliefs of salvation that Catholics hold on to as one of the most relevant aspects of their faith.

The two most important signs to consider for a clear definition of Catholicism are the sacrament of the Eucharist and the devotions to Mary, the mother of God, as they are central to the Catholic faith. Communion is important because it represents the basis of

³⁵ The birth of Jesus by a virgin is considered to fulfill the divine promise given through Isaiah in the Old Testament. See, CCC 497.

³⁶ According to the Catholic Church, this belief can be traced to the first century. For information about this belief and the challenges it faced at the beginning of Church History See, CCC 464-469. See also, Bokenkotter *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* 7-28

the celebration of the Mass, the central form of worship for the faithful, placed at the core of Catholic Theology.³⁷ Catholics believe that when the priest consecrates the host, he takes on the person of Christ himself who offers up his body as a sacrifice for the past, present, and future of creation thereby reconciling it with the creator.³⁸ The final outward sign that is worth considering as a feature of the Catholic faith is the devotion to Mary. The devotion to the mother of God is often used as an explanation for the conversion of the Mexican nation during colonial times. Guadalupe is regarded as the spiritual Mother of Mexico, and her devotions have diffused throughout the years to English-speaking communities. Moreover, her patronage accounts for a key difference between multiple religious traditions interacting at the Texas-Mexico border, as Protestants will almost always distance themselves from these forms of piety. This key difference will be revisited during the final chapter when Protestantism will be discussed in the work of Rolando Hinojosa. At this time however, it is convenient to express a few ideas about the difficulties of studying religion.

2.2 The Problem of Writing a History of Borderland Catholicism in Texas

The study of a belief in faith is a difficult task to undertake within the historiographical record. This is due to the dynamic nature of religions and the ambiguity of terms employed by different social sciences in their approaches to the study of religion. It is

³⁷ Bishop Robert Barron explains this teaching in “Bread of Heaven: The Mystery of the Church’s Sacrament and Worship,” the 7th episode of *Catholicism: The New Evangelization* (2011) and argues that the belief is so important that without it, everything falls apart.

³⁸ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that a priest acts *in persona Christi Capitis* (in the person of Christ), a key concept to understand the importance of the priesthood within the religion. See, CCC 1548.

not enough to catalog rituals or the use of artifacts, such as the already mentioned example of home altars or prayers, in order to understand religious experiences or analyze them. After all, what scope can a social scientist use to measure the degree of authenticity found behind a devotion to a saint or a prayer to God? Or, what framework may social scientists draw to test the degree of conversion of new believers? Though it is possible to crunch numbers of attendees to services or to study initiation records that will eventually produce a statistical result worth considering, the truth is that when dwelling on the metaphysical artifacts of culture, personal testimony may be the least problematic lens that could be used to study religion. Such a philological tool gives researchers the opportunity to explore faith as interpreted by individuals who professes it. Despite the usefulness or validity of the source, the depth and impact of such study is problematic for the social sciences and remains a subject of continuous debate.³⁹ Anders Hultgård explains,

There are many dangers and dilemmas involved in the study of religions. When dealing with religions outside his or her own cultural sphere, the scholar runs the risk of missing important aspects. This leads to the question of whether it is possible to get a real understanding of a religion without being a believer or practitioner of it. Should we, then, leave the study of Christianity to Christians, Hinduism to Hindus, and Judaism to

³⁹ Cameron David Warner recently published a review on the current state of field of anthropology of religion. He traces the evolution of the field by briefly looking at the consideration given to the definition of “superstitions” in order to turn to current debates that took place at the conference “Researching Religion: Methodological Debates in Anthropology and the Study of Religion.” In his thorough review, he shows the diversity of contemporary approaches in the study of religion as well as a shared concern for epistemology. See, *Numen* 131-144.

Jews? A similar dilemma faces the scholar who attempts to create an image of a religion belonging entirely to the past. We are confronted with a worldview that is largely irrecoverable, and what we reconstruct may risk being biased and is anyway incomplete. Moreover, our own modern world-view and values cannot be kept out completely, but the awareness of this fact may prevent the historian of religions from making too serious misinterpretations and anachronisms. (“Studying Religion” 47)

Emic and Etic approaches in the study and understanding of culture still linger on, and methodological limits placed by the social and political contexts of the studies may create unsurpassable obstacles for the social sciences.⁴⁰ Accordingly, there is a need for a theoretical point of reference that will account for the deep layers of meaning existing within the cultural artifact of religion.⁴¹ Even when personal accounts are available, researchers must dig beyond the prescriptions embodied by specific institutions in order to account for discourses within the religious experiences. Such task may be difficult to achieve, as historical records are filled with institutional-based historiographies permeated by the attitudes generated by the beliefs of the time in which the study is published. To give an example of a contemporary polarizing issue, a belief on a traditional marriage institution by subjects in an hypothetical study may become a

⁴⁰ The emic perspective is that of the insider or participant’s point of view. The etic perspective is the outside researcher’s point of view. See, Salzman *Understanding Culture* 51.

⁴¹ Though religions as a collection of beliefs and practices do not necessarily fall within the definition of material culture, I interpret it to be a symbolic cultural artifact. This is because it is an object of significance that both embodies and collects cultural meaning. As a result, it fits the broad definition of artifact provided by Barbara A Babcock. See, Richard Bauman *Folklore, Cultural Performance, and Popular Entertainments*, 204-206.

controversial topic to address by a US historian in the future, depending on his interpretation of the belief. This could occur because current secular ideals on morality argue that to defend a traditional understanding of the union is both a misinformed and intolerant rhetorical practice and therefore should not be allowed in the public discourse. Meanwhile, a religious group with a more apologetic approach to the subject may argue that it is their basic right to disagree in order to profess a belief in what some call a natural order of society. Such clashing points of view, or other similar problematics, could compromise a scholar's work if he or she does not take into account the discursive debates of the time. This particular dilemma is evident in the study of religious beliefs of Mexican Catholics in the Texas border where scholars must balance ever-changing social, religious, and economic biases entangled with their studies. In order to account for the described problem, it is advisable to draw upon Michael de Certeau's ideas about the discursive creation of history.

The French philosopher and historian argues that the study of History is not immune to ideologies and arrives to the conclusion that: "It [history] combines what can be thought, the 'thinkable' and the origin, in conformity with the way in which society can understand its own working ("The Writing of History" 21). In other words, History becomes a collective memory that wants to be reinterpreted. It balances between the known (which is that that which the historian studies, understands, or wishes to rescue from a past society) and the discourse. The second dimension of the historical work is comprised by the problematics of the historian, the processes, and the modes of interpretation through which History acquires its meaning (35). Consequently, the work

of the historian is to contextualize reality within the discourses and to correct any polarizing effect that occurs within the field of history. A historian must become a reader who is able to “recognize today that the conflict between discourse and power hangs over historiography itself and at the same time remains an integral part of it” (“History: Science and Fiction” 215). In keeping with his ideas, the history of the religious beliefs of Catholics in the Texas-Mexico border studied here will need to uncover what lays behind the stories which dominant discourses attempt to institute as realities. This will be achieved by considering the multiple discourses or interests at work in the study of the subject of Roman Catholicism.

2.3 Anti-Catholic Discourses vs. The New Evangelization

Catholicism may be one of the most polarizing religions today. Whether because of its historical track record, or due to the influence of Catholic morality in current political spheres, there is always something to say about the Roman Catholic Church. Year after year, critics and supporters of the religion have engaged in long standing discursive ‘tugs-of-wars’ which appear to be contingent in each other’s ability to reconfigure themselves in the public arena. Such discussions are studied by Philip Jenkins in his *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (2003) where he traces the long history of anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States (23-24). Though not a defender of the Catholic Church himself, he proposes that popular and academic spheres have recently become heavily stacked in favor of anti-Catholic biases despite the attention and

treatment other prejudices receive in the US (22).⁴² This thesis is explored throughout his book by drawing comparisons to both anti-Semitic prejudices and the manner in which Islam is treated in Modern American Circles. The book does not explicitly condemn the treatment of Catholicism, but it reaches the conclusion that modern academic and popular sources have failed to be consistent in their treatment towards this Christian tradition. Consequently, Jenkins calls into question the seriousness of current scholarly work as he points out the need for a balance in the debate. Such need takes into account the anti-Catholic mythology, which “has retained general guidelines from the 16th century onward” (177). He also cautions about the historical anti-Catholic imagery recalled in multiple audio-visual representations and attacks on the Church.⁴³ The scholar’s reproach leads to re-evaluate more contemporary criticisms on the Catholic faith and its institutions as it creates the space to explore sentiments or reactions that emerge before the many faces of anti-Catholicism. One of these new reformulations has come to be known as the “New Evangelization” which has become the banner for pro-Catholic discourses.⁴⁴

⁴² Philip Jenkins explains that a link exists between historical Anti-Clerical sentiments and his notion on Anti-Catholicism. Though *anti*-clericalism has been relatively unknown as a concept in the United States, it has indeed appeared in US periodicals in the context of the history or contemporary politics of Latin-America. Anti-clerical imagery includes a set of images and insults where priest, monks, and friars, are idle, greedy, lascivious, gluttons, and hypocritical. Consequently, the members of the clergy are viewed not only wicked but also the enemies of public welfare and of social progress. Such arguments are commonly associated with secularist or socialists points of views, but often these opinions can be heard from people who would happily describe themselves as Catholics unhappy with what they perceives as abuses of the Clergy. In other words, Catholics themselves can express anti-clerical and anti-Catholic attitudes despite belonging to the Church. See, 10-13, 21, 89, 133, 155-56, 161, 209, and 213.

⁴³ These include the sale of indulgences, and the compound of the greed, despotism, and megalomania with the before mention idleness and lustfulness. See, Jenkins 10-13, 21, 89, 1155-56, 161.

⁴⁴ The idea of a pro-Catholic discourse falls within this scope and can be defined broadly as both the expression and promotion of everything that is Catholic. That is, the discursive antonym of the sentiment

The “New Evangelization” is a ministry program that can be traced to the work of Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and is a re-articulation of the mission and identity of the Church which took place in the 80s and 90s.⁴⁵ The renewal of the Catholic Church was based on the work of Pope Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the Second Vatican Council, which called for a new period of evangelization that could cope with the discussions taking place within the whole of the Church.⁴⁶ These discussions included the meaning and practice of ecumenism, liberation theology, *inculturation*, the reformation of liturgical practices, religious education, and religious freedom, which were reaching a climax by 1992.⁴⁷ This year would mark the 500 anniversary of the

which Philip Jenkins’ exposes in his book as anti-Catholic. This is a view that can be held by both believers and unbelievers alike and as a result it is not contingent on church membership. See, Jenkins 20, 24-29, 41-42 80, 81-83, 88-89, 170-172, and 181.

⁴⁵ *Redemptoris Missio* is an encyclical written by Pope John Paul II in December 7, 1990 during the 25th anniversary of the conciliar decree of *Ad Gentes* (to the nations) of the Second Vatican Council. This encyclical is devoted to the urgency of missionary activity due to the tendency of the weaning of such endeavors. John Paul II considered that such a trend was not in line with the directives of the Council nor with the statements that followed. As a result, the pope called for a new wave of evangelization that could renew the vitality of the church. Other objectives of this encyclical included: “to respond to the many requests for a document of this kind; to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*, and to confirm in their commitment those exemplary brothers and sisters dedicated to missionary activity and all those who assist them; to foster missionary vocations; to encourage theologians to explore and expound systematically the various aspects of missionary activity; to give a fresh impulse to missionary activity by fostering the commitment of the particular churches - especially those of recent origin - to send forth and receive missionaries; and to assure non-Christians and particularly the authorities of countries to which missionary activity is being directed that all of this has but one purpose: to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.” See, *Redemptoris Missio* 1-2. For full text see, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html>

⁴⁶ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - On Evangelization in the Modern World 1975 is an apostolic exhortation given by Pope Paul VI in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, in December 8, 1975. This document would influence the Catholic Church and, according to a reflection given by Cardinal Lucas Moreiras Neves, O.P., would prove to be a harbinger of new times, of a new evangelization. For a summary of the exhortation see, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*: Paul VI’s Pastoral Testament to The Church” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17 January 2001, page 10. For full text see, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html>

⁴⁷ According to Dennis M. Doyle, *inculturation* is the term that Catholic leaders and theologians have used in recent decades to denote a process of engagement between the Christian Gospel and a particular culture. The term is intended conceptually both to safeguard the integrity of the gospel and to encourage sensitivity

evangelization of the Americas, presenting an optimal opportunity to re-launch the charism of the Catholic Church for the new millennium. The reconfiguration of goals implied a revision of the historical legacy of the colony and a renewal of the first evangelization effort that had begun with the work of Spanish Missioners during the XVI and XVII centuries. Though the work and zeal of the original missioners had left a mark in the identities of the continent, Catholics would continually ignore the true evangelical call of their faith by committing atrocities in war or peace times.⁴⁸ Such shortcomings lead the association of Church activities with ethnocide and genocide, and as a result, these needed to be addressed.⁴⁹ Moreover, the advent of competing religions along with those of a secular world had created the need for a new vision that would allow the Church to compete against them (Bennett-Carpenter and McCallion 9). In facing these pressures the Vatican, and subsequently the different conferences of Bishops throughout the world adopted pastoral plans to answer the challenge of Pope John Paul II of evangelizing the modern world. In the case of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, their current program is organized in a three year plan that focuses on three main goals:

to various cultural contexts. See, “The Concept of Inculturation in Roman Catholicism: a theological Consideration,” 1.

⁴⁸ It is important to state this topic could be a subject of discussion in any conversation on the History of Catholicism as the struggle to follow the precepts of any faith are linked to the process of acceptance or conversion. However, tracing a history of atrocities such as those incurred at times of war, fall outside of the scope of this dissertation. As for the case of the evangelization in Mexico, it is possible to argue that two approaches arose in the evangelization efforts since the use of reason and rhetoric strategies coexisted with violent approaches during the quest. See, Weir (2011) 4.

⁴⁹ According to Barbara Perry, *ethnocide* refers to the subtle efforts to deculturate Native Americans, sometimes through physical violence but more often through the social violence of “resocializing” or “civilizing” the natives. See, “From Ethnocide to Ethnoviolence: Layers of Native American Victimization,” 234.

- 1) Faith: Inviting Catholics to a deeper relationship with Christ, and a deeper understanding of and relationship with his Church, and knowledge of the faith.
- 2) Worship: Inspiring confidence in the gospel and the teachings of the faith expressed in a vibrant community and sacramental life, most intensively in the Eucharist and Penance, but also through Marriage and greater appreciation of the family as the domestic church.
- 3) Witness: Strengthening of our understanding of the Christian vocation lived through a public witness to Jesus Christ and to the life and dignity of the human person where believers, living out their vocation to be witnesses, affirm the freedom of religion and work to transform society through living and sharing their faith in Jesus Christ and giving recognition to the life and dignity of the human person. (USCCB 2015)

This ecumenical approach has been exemplified by the work of Bishop Robert Barron whose “Word on Fire” has become the leading paradigm of the New Evangelization movement in the United States.^{50 51} His work not only serves as a source of outreach

⁵⁰ Bishop Robert Barron’s ministry “Word on Fire” is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to the purpose of evangelizing through modern media. This ministry published the *Catholicism* series, written and narrated by Barron himself, which have aired in the US on PBS and EWTN. Bishop Barron is also a columnist, writer and works with NBC News in NY as a contributor and analyst. For a detail description of the organization and a biography of Bishop Barron See, <<http://www.wordonfire.org/about/word-on-fire/>> and <<http://www.wordonfire.org/about/bishop-robert-barron/>>.

and education for Catholics, but as a source for exchange and discussion of ideas in the modern world and modern culture.⁵² Here both pro-Catholic and Anti-Catholic arguments are often considered in an attempt to create the balance Phillip Jenkins seeks in his abovementioned book. Though the ability of ministry to achieve may be debatable, it suggests a possible framework from which to approach the discursive debate and reconcile the past. Following Michael de Certeau's ideas with regards to the study of history, the revision of the past that follows in the rest of the chapter will assume that multiple interacting narratives are at work along with competing discourses. Moreover, it will seek to disentangle the experiences of Catholics from the institutional-centered depictions of Catholicism by re-considering various historical works on the subject of the origins of Texas Catholicism.

2.4 Mexican Catholicism and Its Diffusion to the US

The history of Catholicism in the Texas Rio Grande Valley begins with the diffusion of Christianity into Mexico.⁵³ The conquest saw a dual approach to convert the peoples of the Americas. This involved a process in which assimilation came from the use of force with different degrees of alienation and brutality, imparted by the military forces of Cortez, or the use of reason, as shown by Franciscan friars such as Toribio de

⁵¹ For more information and resources on "The New Evangelization" see, Lejeune, <http://www.aggiecatholicblog.org/2015/07/what-is-the-new-evangelization/>

⁵² A good example of such discussion is seen on Fr. Barron's two-part commentary on the YouTube Heresies uploaded on December 18, 2008. See, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8YTre3xqXg>> and <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP2InFa16D0>>

⁵³ Diffusion can be defined as the borrowing of elements between cultures and is regarded as one of the processes of cultural contact as explained by Franz Boas in his "The Diffusion of Cultural Traits." See, 177-186.

Benavente, Jerónimo de Mendieta, and Bernardino de Sahagún. These missionaries had extensive contact with the natives and shared a vision of creating a Mexican Church that the natives could accept, a goal that would ultimately include the creation of native liturgy. They would use rhetoric and reason in attempting to fully incorporate the natives without using violence while adapting some of their cultural elements. This approach came to a halt however and possibly gave rise to syncretic practices that we see today in modern Mexico such as the use of paper figurines in altars.⁵⁴ The ideal project of the Franciscans was never completed and instead a much more dogmatic Catholic Church took its place in New Spain (Weir 2011 3-8).⁵⁵ Nonetheless, these original efforts left a mark on the Mexican version of the Church and can be seen, for example, nowadays in some of the devotions to Our Lady of Guadalupe where the process of acculturation is still at work. As many anthropologists may attest, some of the current devotions to the Virgin in Mexico show pre-Hispanic influence and still take place in the indigenous cultures where the missionaries once worked.⁵⁶ Despite the difficulties that surrounded the missionary work and the intrinsic problems of the dual approach to the spread of the religion, the cultural artifact had taken root in the local cultures and would spread along with the devotions to the Virgin. The Mother of God would become the foundation for Mexican Catholicism as it would provide a link between Spanish and Indigenous

⁵⁴ For an example of the paper figurine practice See, Alan R Sandstrom's *Corn is our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village*, 317.

⁵⁵ Also See, Francisco Morales, OFM. "The Native Encounter," *The Americas* 65.2 (2008): 137-159 and Don Paul Abbot, Don Paul, *Rhetoric in the New World: Rhetorical Theory and Practice in Colonial Spanish America*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 48-52.

⁵⁶ Two good examples are seen in; Redfield and Villa Roja's *Chan Kom* (1934) 124-125; 148-159 and Sandstrom's *Corn is Our Blood* (1980) 242-279; 291-300.

traditions. As Jeanette Rodriguez explains in her book *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, through this mestizo incarnation of Mary, the Spaniard Conquistadors and their descendants were able to connect her to the old peninsular traditions (45). As for native Mexicans, she represented the symbol of the New Indian Catholicism the original Franciscans missionaries envisioned; that is, a faith that would echo the life of the early church and would spread through the sacrifice of the apostles.⁵⁷ This model of evangelization laid the foundation for the religious beliefs that would come into the United States, and specifically to Texas. Moreover, it would eventually inform the strategies and expectations with which Franciscan missionary efforts would spread to the northernmost provinces of New Spain that would become the Texas-Mexico Borderland.

The Roman Catholic Church arrived to the US with the colonial foundations between 1565 and 1821 in the areas of Florida, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California. In these outposts, faith was administered in the form of Missions, which aimed at the evangelization of the Natives, and secondly, in the form of chaplains that would be assigned to the garrisons. Parishes would eventually be established for the Hispanic civilians in the larger towns as it was the case in San Antonio when in 1731 the diocese began its ministry (Wright, "Catholicism," 283). However, the spread and diffusion of the religion followed patterns that differed from its institutions because every early European incursion would create the opportunity of this cultural transmission. Whether it was part of an exploratory mission or a colonization effort,

⁵⁷ By 1556, Guadalupan devotion had been promoted by the second archbishop of New Spain, Alonso de Montúfar despite resistance linked to the dangers of syncretism that Fray Francisco de Bustamante raised. See, Matovina *Guadalupe and her Faithful* 3.

every moment spent in the new world would bring an opportunity for the European faithful to practice their religion and cause it to spread in a case of contact.⁵⁸ This reality is also expressed in Father Parisot's *Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary* (1899), where he briefly describes the history of the spread of the religion. In this book, he traces the spread of the religion and its institution to the Americas by accounting for the first Scandinavian explorations in North America before turning to his summary of the efforts in Mexico (91-92).⁵⁹ Another example of the non-institutionalized diffusion of Catholicism can be associated with the experiences of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, of whom Carlos E. Castañeda writes in his first volume of *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas*.⁶⁰ Though the account of his travels gives a small glimpse of the reality of the many native peoples of the US, Cabeza de Vaca's actions portray a first meeting in which the indigenous have an encounter with the Catholic faith. Such an exchange would not be an uncommon sight in the Texas frontier. Every first encounter between Europeans and Native Americans, whether positive or negative in nature, would provide an opportunity for the introduction of Roman Catholicism. Then, the institutional framework of the faith would follow with the missionary task of the clergy. Taking the heterogeneous diffusion pattern into account, the religious reality of this time period will

⁵⁸ One example of this kind of contact is that of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who is accredited with building a reputation as a shaman by healing different indigenous peoples in North America by praying to the Lord, Jesus Christ, and by making the sign of the cross. See, Castañeda Vol. 1 72.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to mention that this assertion of Fr. Pierre Parisot OMI confirms the ideas of knowledge by the Catholic Church of the actual size of the earth as reported by Philip Jenkins. See, *The New Anti-Catholicism* 33.

⁶⁰ Here Carlos E. Castañeda describes the extent of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's experiences which begun with the defunct expedition of Pánfilo de Narvaez of 1527. Cabeza de Vaca, along with three other survivors, managed to survive a 9 year journey to Mexico. His experiences include a depiction of how he built a reputation as shaman by healing different indigenous peoples by praying to the Lord, Jesus Christ, and making the sign of the cross. See, Castañeda Vol. 1 54-80.

be considered along with the long-term effects it had in the spiritual experience in the border.

2.5 The First Texas Missions: 1680s – 1848

The 1680s may be the most significant years for Catholicism in Texas as they marked the beginning of systematic expeditionary efforts to settle the Texas frontier. The expulsion of the Spanish missionaries due to the Pueblo Revolt in New Mexico of 1680, along with the expeditions of the French crown to the mouth of the Mississippi river, created the perfect setting for the exportation of the mission system and the foundation of the Church. At the political level, the Spanish crown needed to control the spread of the influence of France by securing its foothold in the Texas province and to do so would mean importing their social, economic, and military structures (Castañeda “Vol. 1” 301). The mission, presidio, and garrison system soon followed and, though their effectiveness would fluctuate, eventually it would create centers of permanent Catholic practice out of which San Antonio is the most important.⁶¹ ⁶² Turning briefly to the example of the spread of the devotion of Mary, Timothy Matovina explains that by 1731

⁶¹ As Robert E. Wright, O.M.I. explains, the missions were established for the conversions of the natives and their hispanization. The Indian mission villages of Ysleta and Socorro, which were established in the El Paso district in 1682, exemplify this trend. Along with the villages, military garrisons would be erected for their protection and Hispanics would later settle within or nearby. As a consequence of this progression, the missionaries would also provide pastoral care for Hispanics in the military garrisons and civilian communities that would eventually spread. In East Texas this would be the case as the Franciscans actually ministered primarily to the Hispanic military and civilians, since the local natives were notably unresponsive to settling in the mission compounds. This was the case as well by 1779 in the lower Rio Grande Towns where Franciscan missionaries were their pastors. See, Wright (2005) “The Hispanic Church in Texas under Spain and Mexico” 19.

⁶² Carlos E. Castañeda’s *Our Catholic Heritage Vols 2-4* are also devoted to this time period and may be considered the authority on the subject. However, Wright gives a brief summary of the transformations of the Mission System during the XVIII century. See, *ibid*, 18-20.

the presidio and the five missions dedicated to propagating Christianity among local indigenous groups, located in present day San Antonio, would turn to Guadalupe in times of drought, flood, and epidemic. They began to celebrate her feast the 12th of December by extending it into the Christmas season and by 1737 her patroness had been extended into the Town and her Feast-day celebration was the center of the annual ritual calendar (*Guadalupe and Her Faithful* 43-44). In less than sixty years, one of the most important Mexican Catholic devotions had diffused to Texas and taken root in both the indigenous and Spanish communities. Nonetheless, the viability of the settlements and the social climate within the different indigenous communities began to question the effectiveness of the colonization and evangelization efforts in Texas.⁶³ Often, tension would arise between the military and religious actors as their goals and strategies would often clash.⁶⁴ Due to these clashes, the missions and settlements were continuously visited and assessed by both church and government officials and, by the 1770s, it was clear that the current evangelization and the mission system were unsustainable.⁶⁵ Even

⁶³ It is worth to mention as well that the political climate between Spain and France had changed and as a result the necessity of maintaining a military presence in the eastern most provinces lost its appeal.

⁶⁴ Castañeda mentions many times how the Franciscans missionaries would complain time and again about the brutality of the military personnel in their treatment of the natives but would often claim that the effectiveness in their evangelization goals would need a stronger military presence. See, *Our Catholic Heritage* Vol. 3 30.

⁶⁵ Missions were supposed to progress and become a diocesan parish over time as it had happened in other more populated areas of Mexico. Under the “Laws of the Indies,” this change had to take place within ten years but it had been postponed for over fifty in most missions in Texas. The reasons behind this delay included: “the nomadic character of the natives, their cruder civilization, their more barbarous nature, in the presence of European rivals of Spain amongst them, such as the French and English traders.” As a result, the secularization would be slowed down by maintaining the mission in a primitive stage through the continued renewal of the membership of the neophytes or Mission Indians. For a detailed description of the beginning of the secularization process of missions in Texas See, Castañeda Vol. 5 35-66.

though the frontier establishments in East Texas were abandoned with the cession of Louisiana, the climate remained turbulent in the Texas frontier.

New policies were to be followed with regards to aggressive indigenous people such as The Lipan-Apaches and the political climate would change once again with English speaking people in the Americas following the American Revolution (Castañeda “Vol. 5” 10-11).⁶⁶ This climate became even more complicated with the political turmoil in Mexico during the independence movements and lead to the eventual reconfiguration of the missions and parishes in the North. This was first seen in the form of the secularization of the missions which had begun earlier in the 1780s but had been carried out by 1794 in San Antonio. As a result, the role of Franciscan missionaries would begin to dwindle in importance (35-64). This would be followed by wartime tensions between the Church and the Mexican State. As Castañeda explains, “during the struggle for independence the hierarchy in Mexico, with few exceptions, generally favored the cause of the Spanish Monarchy. Many prelates had, consequently, been forced to abandon their dioceses, and others had died” (“Vol. 6” 308). This position of the priests meant that many vacancies had been created through the newly established country that needed to be filled. Before this would happen however, the Vatican needed to agree on questions related to the *Real Patronato* through which the Spanish Crown had gained the authority to lead the Catholic evangelization of the New World (Parkes 105). This lag of action and decisions left the diocesan clergy without leadership and the missionaries in Texas

⁶⁶ This interaction with the new country eventually would lead to the formal colonization of the territory as the newly formed United States of America began encroaching the Texas frontier and would become even more crucial once the Louisiana Purchase was completed in 1806. For a discussion of the initial relations between the United States in Spanish officials in Texas see, Castañeda Vol. 6 232-284.

destitute. The Spanish Crown directly financed the missions and in many cases their state would not allow them to produce enough resources to sustain themselves (Castañeda “Vol. 6” 307-308). The precariousness of the missions and the lack of leadership would only be exacerbated by the position of priests such as Refugio de la Garza, pastor of San Fernando, or José Darío Zambarano, his assistant, as they neglected their spiritual duties in favor of politics (307). The result would be devastating in some aspects of the faith as these pastoral duties included the administration of the sacraments, caring of the sick, preaching and saying mass. All of the faith pillars were neglected by these pastors and resulted in a religious crisis that would lead to changes in personnel, searches for more priests, and the appointment in 1824 of “Juan Nepomuceno de la Peña as *Vicario Foraneo de la Provincia de Texas* (Rural Dean)” (311). This would be the first step towards the creation of apostolic vicariates and diocesan rearrangements that would carry the faith past the Texas Revolution 1835-1836 and into the present. Moreover, it would ultimately lead to a renewal of the evangelization lead by Bishop Jean-Marie Odin of the Diocese of Galveston and the introduction of a new religious order, The Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The historical summary traced here will concentrate on their work in the Texas-Mexico border and their effect in creating or fostering Catholicism in the border.

2.6 The Cavalry of Christ: Borderland Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley

In order to understand the missionary work carried out by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Texas as well as their effects, it is necessary to consider the social and

religious context that had been created before their arrival. For over two hundred years Europeans of diverse backgrounds and faiths had arrived both intentionally and unintentionally to the Texas frontier. These newcomers would have an effect in the spiritual experience of the inhabitants, which included the existing population of indigenous peoples who had been (ad) ministered to directly or indirectly in the mission system. As it has been stated in this chapter, they were in continuous contact with other Europeans and their exchanges would only become more entangled as the European populations would grow, become more diversified, and mix with local population.⁶⁷ Frontier society originated from this smorgasbord of cultures that were involved in the continuous search for expansion of opportunities and resources. These exchanges would only become more complex in the 1800s when the English-speaking populations would move into Texas from the United States. Both the Spanish and, later, the Mexican governments would encourage this kind of immigration in order to populate the area by inviting Catholics or converts to settle in the northernmost province of New Spain. This decision would ultimately become an organizational nightmare for the religious leaders. The pastoral goals had to reflect the problematic realities of the region that translated in a lack of clear-cut approaches to reach out to individuals that would fall under the care of the religious. This care also would be problematized by the lack of a religious institutional apparatus in the vast majority of the Texan Territory. The immigration of groups would not necessarily coincide with the transmission of the religious apparatus

⁶⁷ From the very beginning of the colonization of Texas, Europeans used indigenous peoples as guides and translators. This is obvious in the expeditions in search for French survivors of the La Salle expeditions where they employed guides See, Castañeda Vol. 1 316.

that could be found in the Texan frontier as priests would not always follow the same immigration pattern to the south as they did in the north-eastern communities.⁶⁸

To counteract the changing demographic reality, Galveston would become a Diocese in 1847 only years after being erected as a prefecture apostolic in 1839, but it would still need the aid of missionaries to fulfill its duties towards the number of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It is under this setting that Jean-Marie Odin, Bishop of Galveston, sought the help of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who began their work in 1848. Though their first attempt at establishing a mission in Texas was short-lived, their presence and actions resulted in the permanent creation of future parishes. The Oblates were able to adapt to the social and religious circumstances of the area by following the banner of serving the poor. This zeal for ministry would come to be regarded as heroic demonstrations of the faith and eventually became the first portrayal of borderland Catholicism in the historical record. The first account was created by Father Pierre Parisot's *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missioner* (1899). Though this historical representation of Catholicism has been visited by most historiographers of Catholic History, it is worth reconsidering it under the scope of a Pro-Catholic discourse. This is because such an analysis will give insights into the socio-cultural atmosphere of the time in question and the way in which pastoral goals were carried out to match them.

⁶⁸ This would especially become the case for Mexican Immigrants. See, Treviño *Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* 16-17.

2.7 Memoirs of a Texas Missioner

Fr. Pierre Parisot's *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missioner* (1899) can be read as a personal testimony or reflection over many of events that took place during his pastoral life.⁶⁹ Fr. Parisot arrived to Texas in 1852 with six other missioners to re-establish the Oblate presence in the state under the guidance of Bishop Jean-Marie Odin and their superior Fr. Jean-Maurice Verdet (Doyon 34). They established their headquarters in the town of Brownsville and from there ministered to the southern part of Texas along the Rio Grande River. In this area, they would begin to carry out circuit visits of the different ranches to minister to the Catholic populations that included scattered Spanish-speaking communities. The state of the faith in these communities was initially regarded with pessimism and would continue to be a cause for concern during the different pastoral visits of the next decades (26). The reality of these populations meant that a missionary network needed to be created in order to reach them and, with time, to bring them into a full religious communion. It is worthy of mentioning that this concern reflected negatively in the way in which he regarded the evangelization work and pastoral care of Mexican priests in his jurisdiction. Such concerns were further exacerbated by some of the practices locally grown priest had followed in their

⁶⁹ Pierre Fourier Parisot was born on May 20, 1827, in Ambacourt, diocese of Saint-Dié, France. His parents were Rémi Parisot and Marie Charotte. After his studies in the minor seminaries of Saint-Dié and Châtel-sur-Moselle and one year of philosophy in the major seminary of Saint-Dié, he began his novitiate in Notre-Dame de l'Osier on February 25, 1850 and made his vows there on February 26, 1851. In his reports, Father Jacques Santoni, novice master, always notes "very good." In presenting him to the general council for vows he elaborates: "solid virtue, good character, somewhat fat, military; good judgment." He did one year of theology in the major seminary in Marseilles, was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop de Mazenod on February 15, 1852. For more information on Fr. Parisot see, Yvon Beaudoin, O.M.I. dictionary entry in <http://www.omiworld.org/en/dictionary/historical-dictionary_vol-2_p/1881/parisot-pierre/>.

congregations; these included the request of payment for performing sacraments, a practice not allowed under canon law and as a result was not in accordance to the teachings of the Church (Castañeda Vol. 6 311).⁷⁰ Though the practices of these priests were localized, they created a lasting impression within the newly erected Diocese and would be reflected in their depictions over time. The decisions taken would ultimately come to be regarded in historiography as anti-Mexican in nature but are in need to be re-assessed as these do not take into account the pastoral reality which Parisot's memoirs point out.⁷¹

As their mission grew, they established a second headquarters in the town of Roma (1854) and a half way stopover at La Lomita Ranch (1861). Their mission work was arduous and included labor at both sides of the border. According to Doyon, the founder of the order, Bishop Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod had the vision of an Oblate presence in Mexico. This call quickly became problematic because the number of missionaries assigned to Texas could not cope with the necessities of their ministries (Doyon 86-99).⁷² Moreover, the social and political climate would shift along either border, making their work complicated. Fr. Parisot would comment on this characteristic of the border by saying:

Peace reigns on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. But there is trouble on

⁷⁰ Canon law 1380 prohibits the sale of ecclesiastical favors or simony. See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P54.HTM.

⁷¹ Fr. Robert Wright makes a similar criticism in his revision of Chicano assumptions. See, Wright (2010) "Mexican Descent Catholics" 97.

⁷² It is worth to mention that the actual size of the religious order at the time made it difficult to meet all the issues which the Galveston Diocese faced during the first years of the Oblate Presence in Texas. One such example was the withdrawal of Oblates from the College of Galveston. See, Doyon, 55-57. See also, Porter, Charles R. 9-51

the Mexican side. Matamoros is besieged: half of its population crosses the river, and Brownsville becomes the refuge of the frightened Mexicans as on other occasions, Matamoros had been the place of refuge for the citizens of Brownsville. During those troubled times, the life of the missionary on both sides of the river was one of great labor and exceeding danger. (109-110)

Texas and Mexico would experience turmoil of different natures over time such as anti-clerical revolutionary movements that would eventually lead to the expulsion of French religious presence with the fall of Maximilian in Mexico (Doyon 114). Parisot shares an example on this matter, when he reflects on the political instability and anti-Clerical/anti-French sentiment by giving a full account on the imprisonment of the four Oblate priest and the results of his visit to Matamoros in 1866.

Fr. Parisot had crossed the river to Matamoros as soon as the news of Fathers Rigomer Olivier and Etienne Vignolles' imprisonment reached Brownsville. He wanted to investigate the reasons why the new authorities had carried out such actions.⁷³ Upon his arrival he found that Father José María Clos and Father Jean Marie Jaffrès would share the same fate by the orders of General Garza. Parisot would inquire further about the reasons for the arrest in the jail only to find that he could not communicate the prisoners by the same command which had been given originally by General Carvajal, the Governor of the State of Tamaulipas. This information was procured from a meeting with General Garza himself who suggested the need as well of a meeting with the

⁷³ Doyon visits this episode as well in his *Cavalry of Christ*. See, 114-116

Governor (Parisot 68-69).⁷⁴ In this meeting Fr. Parisot also received permission to visit his imprisoned brothers which he accounts by narrating the following:

I first visited Father Olivier, who was shut up in a room with a guard at the door. I found the Father in a deplorable condition. He was sad, worried, and beset with anxiety at seeing his church on the point of falling into the hands of an intruder, Rev. Zertuche, whom the General had brought from Tampico and appointed Parish Priest of Matamoros by order of General Carvajal. Father Olivier had been ordered to give up his church and parish; to make an inventory of the sacred vessels and other articles, and to deliver the keys of the church to the intruder. Strict order had been given to deprive the prisoners of food and drink, until he should submit to the demands of his captors. (70-71)

Evidently these actions were a direct intrusion in the parish organization, and it represented a state led imposition of a religious pastor that would not take into account the spiritual needs of the faithful. Also, it constituted a rejection to Church authority on religious matters, as bishops are the ones who assign priest to parishes. Fr. Parisot proceeded in the next day to try to visit the imprisoned Priests again without success and learned that they were “placed in the dungeon where those who are sentenced to death are confined and await the day of their execution” (71). The situation seemed to be escalating and immediately sought to meet with the Governor. He was granted an

⁷⁴ It is worth to mention that Fr. Parisot neglects to share the full name of both generals. However, it is known that José María Jesús Carvajal (1809-1874) was appointed governor of Tamaulipas and that he did make the order in question in 1866. See, Chance *Jose María De Jesús Carvajal: The Life and Times of a Mexican Revolutionary* (2006), 192-193.

audience where he was able to gather the reasoning for the arrest in the form of a conversation.

The Governor argued that he had received information that the greatest enemies to his cause were the priest and argued that this was because they had considerable influence over the people. He would then justify the imprisonment of the four men by saying that: “the priests of this place are imbued with monarchical principles and on many occasions have preached from the pulpit against our government and the cause we advocate” (71). Parisot refuted this accusation by arguing that the new official was misinformed and assured that the priest would only preach the word of God. The General, however, maintained his posture and explained to Parisot that his priests were all Frenchmen and that he had the wish to replace them by a Mexican priest of his choosing. This man was favorable to their cause and had the rank of Colonel in the Mexican army (72).⁷⁵ The situation would eventually be resolved by according to Parisot by making the General believe that he would accept some of the conditions of the new government by handing the keys to the Church in exchange for the release of the prisoners. This compliance would not be carried out by Fr. Parisot, however, because he allegedly gave the authorities a different set of keys of the Oblate house. This ruse gave the priest enough time to escape to Brownsville before they would be re-captured (73-74).

Though Fr. Parisot’s narrative can appear to be somewhat hyperbolic and

⁷⁵ According to Doyon and Chance this Pastor was an unfrocked priest by the name of Zertuche. See, *Cavalry of Christ* 114 and *Jose María De Jesús Carvajal: The Life and Times of a Mexican Revolutionary*, 193.

definitively pro-Catholic, it attests to the changes in the political climate of Mexico where anti-clericalism had turned against the Oblates and, as a result, their mission had to be re-considered. This would also have an effect on the religious order leadership in relation to the continuous presence and viability of a mission in Texas as it would be reconsidered throughout the late 1870s. Under the leadership of both a new bishop in Galveston, Claude Marie Dubuis, and an Oblate superior, Father Gaudet, the Oblates sought to be replaced by the Company of Jesus who had been expelled from Mexico due to the political climate (Doyon 213-16). Though the abandonment never took place, it reveals the precarious nature of the mission, and the social and economic conditions that surrounded the faith in the first years of the Texas-Mexico border. The region that surrounded the Rio Grande quickly became a place in which multiple discourses would clash and interact and where beliefs were malleable. This characteristic of borderland culture is seen in the rise of heresies and the prevalence of violence and injustice depicted in several accounts of Fr. Pierre Parisot that take place in both sides of the Rio Grande Valley between the years of 1859 and 1866. The first is observed in the form of Parisot's investigation of a man who passed himself off as a Saint in 1860 in the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. The prevalence of violence and injustice is best understood with the activities of stage robbers and the revolt lead by Juan Nepomuceno Cortina. These features of the Texas-Mexico border will be analyzed next and will provide a firsthand source to the study of Catholicism and the processes at work during the time in question. This information will be crucial when studying the portrayal of the border and the cultural artifact of religion in Carmen Boullosa's *Texas: La gran*

Ladroneria en el Lejano Norte (2013) and in the work of Rolando Hinojosa.

2.8 A Heretic Saint in the Border

In 1860, Fr. Parisot was assigned to visit the town of Reynosa, situated sixty miles away from Brownsville. The Bishop of Monterrey, Monsignor Vereá, had asked the Superior of the Missionary Oblate Fathers of Brownsville to send a priest to this town as it did not have a pastor and was in need of pastoral and spiritual care. During that time, a rumor had spread that a saint had appeared in the Mountains of Nuevo Leon who was performing miracles of healing and prophecy⁷⁶. People would leave their homes and livelihoods to pay respect to this man, or to be healed. Fr. Parisot explains that people would often approach him for council on the matter before undertaking the pilgrimage. He would originally answer by stating that “the hand of God is not shortened. What has been seen so often may be repeated for the edification of the faithful, and the conversion of sinners,” meaning that he would not object on the work of the man in question as long as it would be consistent in building up the faithfulness of his Church (Parisot 43). These views were drastically altered once he arrived to the city of Reynosa and had the opportunity to investigate the man in question. The mayor and aldermen of the town were going to see the saint, but had chosen to go to Confession and Receive Communion before embarking in their pilgrimage. As a result of their exchange, Fr. Parisot decided to embark the journey with them. This encounter would take place in Mier, a town

⁷⁶For information about Bishop Francisco de Paula Vereá y Gonzales see, <<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bdepaula.html>>

located sixty miles from Reynosa.⁷⁷

Before leaving for the pilgrimage, Parisot said his Sunday mass and noted that the church was not well filled as many of the parishioners had gone to see the saint. This lack of participation caused the priest to question the pretensions of the man and his claims of divine power. These concerns would only grow during his travel, especially after meeting with a priest at Camargo, a halfway point between Reynosa and Mier. Here, he spent the night before continuing his travel and learnt of acts and circumstances concerning the saint that, if true, would prove that the man was an impostor.⁷⁸ He would then go onto describe the crowds of pilgrims on their way to Mier which featured invalids being carried by any and all means to see the saint who was called Tatita.⁷⁹ Once in Mier, he would see the streets crowded and the main plaza of the city packed with people (Parisot 44). Clearly, the teachings and the acts of the man were well known by the Mexican communities surrounding the Rio Grande Valley and were gaining popularity.

As for the man in question, Parisot explains:

[Tatita] appeared to be 60 years old, with stolid features. His hair and beard seemed unacquainted with comb and brush. He wore a kind of Franciscan garment reaching to a little below the knees, and a long cord knotted at the end, hung down by his side as far as his feet.

⁷⁷ Mier is located 10 miles away from Roma, Texas which would become a second base of operation for the Oblate Mission. See, Doyon 140.

⁷⁸ Though Parisot doesn't elaborate on the matter further, it can be inferred that the information he gather from his encounter with the priest was similar to what he perceived when he finally met the healer.

⁷⁹ Tatita was an affectionate term meaning linguistically Grandfather. See, Parisot 46.

A Rosary with large beads hung from his neck, and he wore sandals. These were his principal external characteristics. He was kneeling before 100 lighted candles, which were stuck in the ground in the form of a cross. These candles he extinguished himself and gave as a reason for so doing, that any else attempting to extinguish them would drop dead on the spot. Close by was a coarse, wooden cross, about five feet long, which he used to carry on his shoulders during his wanderings, which were constantly performed on foot. (44)

In other words, the zealot played the part of a missionary by his dress and demeanor. He would perform for the pilgrims by acting out ritual healings while also threatening them with a form of punishment if the crowd did not follow his lead. Such a display would capture the attention of the witnesses and create the perfect setting to spread the following message:

My brethren! The new religion, which I am sent to deliver to you, was revealed to me by the Almighty God Himself, for the Mexican nation. It consists exclusively in three things: To adore the Eternal Father and the Holy Cross, and to say the Rosary. Confession, mass, and all other religious practices are abolished. Follow me, adore the Cross, and you shall be saved. (45)

With this message, Tatita rejected the core teachings of Catholicism and would equate himself to Jesus. This is because he claimed to have the authority to abolish the faith which, according to the Catholic Church, the Nazarene had instituted and had been

passed down through generations of martyrs and believers (CCC 787-796). Parisot reacted accordingly and, not surprisingly, set his mind to the task of refuting a message that had not fallen on deaf ears. According to the local pastor that was among the crowd, six women had been in attendance during his last Sunday mass and the saint had the support of a group of 300-armed individuals who called themselves *Hermanos*, and would profit from the scheme (45). The Priest had the impression that his flock had abandoned him and would caution Fr. Parisot against the dangers of confrontation in this instance. This was because his attempts to intervene would be regarded as an intrusion by an American priest. Disregarding all caution, Parisot met with the man and would speak his mind on the dangers of his teachings. The Oblate would, in fact, attempt to reason with the heretic by confronting him on “feigning sanctity under the cloak of religion, deceiving the weak and the ignorant, making them believe that all his cures were the work of supernatural agencies, the better to deceive the credulous” (47). Tatita, on his part, would not change his position and would patronize the Oblate by inviting him to speak to the crowd showing confidence that his position was untouchable. This contempt and confidence was evident in the way in which he told the *Hermanos* to not to intervene in this discussion. He would also allow the priest to address the crowd about his judgment and over the saint and his practices, which would prove to be disturbing to those present. Parisot narrates the arguments of his speech by stating:

If this man would confine himself to administering natural remedies and not with a semblance of religion, mix heresy, superstition, and deception, with his dealings in medicines, he would be let alone. But when a man

announces himself as a messenger of God, and a framer of a new religion, different from the one, holy Catholic religion, believe him not, he is a deceiver. (48)

The unrest was such that the mayor with whom the priest had traveled with had to take control of the situation and would have to escort the priest back to Reynosa for his protection. This was because Tatita had addressed the crowd after Parisot and called on vengeance against the Oblate. This episode ended very quickly however with tragedy when a group of people from a neighboring village killed the man (49).

The information provided up to this point with this episode on the history of the border is rich in detail concerning the diffusion of a religious belief in both sides of the Texas border. At the surface level it is clear that a heresy had arisen as the influence of the Tatita and his *Hermanos* had extended both in Mexico and Texas. Much like other heresies, it had amassed a large enough following that the authority of a priest had been called into question despite long held Catholic traditions. This influence was based in the reconfiguration of artifacts and concepts of importance for the Catholic faith.⁸⁰ The Rosary for instance, would be transformed from a device that engages the believer in a profound reflection of the mysteries concerning his faith into a prayer that directly leads to salvation. Similar changes would take place with the other artifacts the false priest would emphasize or discard in his new religion. The cross would become an idol of

⁸⁰ This would not be an uncommon sign of the religion in the border. Fr. Parisot would express for instance that when Catholic performed Baptisms without a priest, they would not be valid because of a mistake in the formula they would use. Instead of baptizing the children by saying *Yo te bautizo en el nombre del padre, y del hijo y del Espiritu santo* they would often say *yo te hecho el agua en el nombre del padre, y del hijo, y del Espiritu Santo*. See, Parisot 107.

worship with the same status as the Eternal Father, while Christ would be abandoned completely as the source of truth, salvation or grace. These three important features of the religion were reconfigured under the leadership of Tatita who, as it was pointed out earlier, claimed to have the God-given authority to replace Jesus.

These changes were problematic for the priests at a theological level because they would shift the theological foundation for the millenary faith, which is Christ-centered. At the same time, they revealed a weakness in the religious foundation of the border that was in dire need of attention. The border religion needed leaders and a prolonged evangelization effort. This weakness and need is perhaps best understood by the brief description of the status of neglect of the parish of Reynosa as described by the Oblate. The physical church, the building, was in a dilapidated condition and the spiritual work was slow. It would take him several visits before the numbers of active participation would climb to have three hundred people perform their Easter duty.⁸¹ This description is consistent with the work performed by the Oblates across the border as Parisot, Doyon, and Castañeda tell us but needs to be further analyzed as the lack of participation in the rite does not necessarily mean lack of belief. Though historical religious orthodoxy would suggest against this, Catholic Theology in fact would hold, as it has been pointed out in this chapter, that the Body of believers that make up the Catholic Church is not intrinsically dependent on institutional participation. Far from it, it would compare the praxis of the faith to a journey filled with struggles which echoes

⁸¹ Catholics are required to receive the sacraments of reconciliation and communion at least during Easter every year. See, CCC 1389.

the experience of the border. Further consideration to this matter will be given after exploring Fr. Parisot's experience with violence in the Texas side of the border as it will be a common discussion in the study of the literary representations of Catholicism of Carmen Boullosa and Rolando Hinojosa.

2.9 Raids, Robberies, and Violence Across the Rio Grande Valley

The first instance of violence to be considered took place six miles away from Brownsville between the years of 1861 and 1866. During this time both sides of the border were facing turmoil and Fr. Parisot would consistently visit the port town of Bagdad, a town he describes as a:

Whirlpool of business, pleasure, and sin. A common laborer could easily gain from five to six dollars per day, while a man who owned a skiff or a lighter could make from twenty to forty dollars. The saloon and hotel keepers were reaping an abundant harvest. The gulf, for three or four miles out, was a forest of masts. Ten stages were running daily from Matamoros to Bagdad. (56)

This population center was very much alive and, as a result, would be an attractive though challenging place for the Oblates' to minister.⁸² It also represented a microcosm for the Texas-Mexico border experience in regards to violence and insecurity. Here, robberies would be a common occurrence as the priest reports first with an experience he

⁸² This port town does not exist nowadays but was located in the southern bank of the Rio Grande. See, José Raúl Canseco Botello *Historia de Matamoros* 70-76.

had on his way to Bagdad when his stage would be held up and shortly after the thief would be caught and punished swiftly. Violence was not only located on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande as Parisot writes in his reminiscences.

Six months after the violent experience of the capture and execution of a stage robber in Bagdad, which he witnessed, Parisot's stopped at the Resaca de la Guerra near Brownsville after a regular visit to the port town, and he was held at gunpoint along with seven other passengers (56-57). Three men had approached the stage by horse and with revolvers and had asked for their money. The experience would be terrifying for some of the passengers who would plea for their life only to be reassured by the robbers that all they wanted was their valuables, which at the end would amount to "eight hundred dollars in money, three gold and four silver watches" (58). Parisot, however, would be spared from the theft as he would plea that he did not have money for them because he was a poor priest. The robbers would ask him for his watch pointing to the string of his old missionary cross, but ultimately they would believe that he had no possessions and left him alone and retreated saying, "Good bye gentlemen, if you want your money back, come to Mexico" (57). This robbery was reported to the authorities but it ends up as a victory for the outlaws, as they were able to escape to Mexico before soldiers could capture them.

Though these accounts of stage robberies along the routes to Bagdad differ in their details and ultimate results, it is clear the danger of violence was part of the daily lives of the inhabitants of the Texas-Mexico border. Whether it was because of war, revolutions, or the presence or memory of indigenous people and lawless men,

instability and precariousness reigned in the Rio Grande Valley.⁸³ This constant threat of danger would prove to be a struggle to assimilate through the work of the Oblate missionaries.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, this reality became the key feature of the religious experience of Mexicans in the Texas-Mexico frontier and the anchor that grounded the work of the Oblates in the southern United States. After all, the vocation of the Oblates of Immaculate Mary Missionaries was, and is, particularly geared to the poorest and most marginalized communities. In the case of the precariousness of the Rio Grande Valley, this marginalization would involve both the Spanish and English-speaking Catholic communities as Parisot's account of the Juan Nepomuceno Cortina raids of Brownsville will show.⁸⁵ This is the final historical account to be explored in this chapter and will be linked to the study of Carmen Boulosa's work.

Fr. Pierre Parisot's account of the Cortina revolt revolves around the use and abuse of violence by the Mexican-American *ranchero* beginning in September, 1859, when Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, along with fifty men, took possession of the city of Brownsville with the objective of taking revenge from twelve citizens by killing them. Parisot does not elaborate on the names of the targets, but he explains that Nepomuceno Cortina's vengeance originated on the belief that these men were unfriendly towards

⁸³ It is important to notice however, that although the accounts of violence here explored only show the activity of Mexican outlaws during the Cortina wars, Parisot's accounts include instances where the oblate does not specify the nationality or race of the assailants. As a result, it is not possible to discard outlaw activity perpetrated by Americans. One example of this omission can be seen in an account of a stage coat robbery. In this case, which takes place in the American side of the Rio Grande, the Oblate does not specify if the crime was perpetrated by Mexicans or American outlaws. See, *Reminiscences* 58.

⁸⁴ Among these dangers, it is possible to include as well the danger of Yellow fever which was a yearly occurrence and took the lives of seven of the Oblates during the epidemics in less than nine years (1853-1862). See, Doyon 156-163.

⁸⁵ These spurts of violence are also known as the Cortina Wars. See, Jerry Thompson "CORTINA, JUAN NEPOMUCENO" <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fco73>>.

Mexicans and that they had taken unjust possession of lands belonging to his countrymen. Cortina's act of violence would last for three or four hours and would result in the murder of six Americans.⁸⁶ This situation would escalate as Parisot explains in his narrative:

Organized resistance was out of the question. The Americans, terror-stricken, had only time to look for hiding places. At day-break the assassin and his accomplices withdrew to his ranch. There he did not remain inactive. His little army of fifty increased daily and soon numbered as many as 200 well-armed men. The prospect was gloomy. Many inhabitants had crossed the river to Matamoros to find a place of security. (97)

The stage was set for a second confrontation and preparations would begin from both sides. The Mexicans, who Parisot called the enemy, would fortify the area around Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's ranch.⁸⁷ The citizens of Brownsville on the other hand would prepare themselves for a second attack by barricading the central portion of the city with two cannons. Soon, they faced Nepomuceno Cortina's men and forced them to cross the river by enlisting two hundred men volunteers. Their efforts would be

⁸⁶ Although Doyon's account of the may justify Parisot's attitudes towards the violence of Nepomuceno and his men, there are differences between the two accounts. Specifically, the number of deaths according to Doyon records amounted to five, three Americans and two Mexicans. This difference is addressed in brief by referring to the accounts of the events given by Fr. Gaudet and Fr. Parisot in their correspondence. However, the differences are not explained nor resolved. A possible explanation could be found by the distinct criticism to the political and social climate of the Rio Grande Valley. Mainly, where Parisot has issues with the use of irrational violence, the other seems to emphasize the racial tensions. See, *Cavalry of Christ* 164-66.

⁸⁷ According to Parisot, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's residence was situated on the left bank of the Rio Grande, about nine miles away from Brownsville. See, *Reminiscences* 97.

disastrous, however, as they would be ambushed after a three-day journey to the enemy camp and were forced to retreat losing one of the two cannons they had brought (98). This situation would continue through December when Captain W. G. Tobin came with reinforcements from San Antonio to join Colonel J.S. Ford, and Cortina was defeated and forced to cross the river.

Parisot's account of the Cortina Wars brings into consideration many socio-cultural aspects regarding the use of violence in the Rio Grande Valley as it represents a testimony that directly addresses a critical historical event. These include the evident racial tensions that existed between the original settlers and the English-speaking newcomers to the Texas-Mexico border. Such relations would ignite conflicts and, if uncontested, would result in the spread of violence in the region. It is important to assert, however, the limits of Parisot's reminiscences as a source of historical factual information due to the priest's lack of precision with regards to dates as well as with his omission of names of peoples and places. The Oblate does not follow the role of a historian in disentangling his work from the multiple interacting discourses, nor does he maintain a balance with regard to his own opinions. Far from being a disinterested reader of history that balances competing narratives, Parisot emphasizes his testimony by passing judgement on his subject. This is easily seen in Cortina's episode in question as the Oblate has a proverbial "bone to pick" with regards to the actions the Mexican landowner took in 1859 when he attacked Brownsville. Here, he clearly expresses his rejection of the reigning violence that affects his Parish by describing the event as "unrestrained lawlessness of ignorant and unprincipled men" (98). This attitude is

manifested at several points in the text and, it creates the possibility to analyze Parisot's work in a first-hand account of historical and anthropological information in need of analysis once his statements are contextualized with the socio-cultural setting in which they were written. Under this scope, it will be possible to reconsider the instances summarized up to this point to provide a rough picture of the Catholic experience in the Texas-Mexico Border.

As can be appreciated throughout the different events described by Fr. Pierre Parisot, along with the historical summary of the spread of Catholicism depicted earlier in this chapter, the socio-cultural context of the Texas-Mexico frontier has been heterogeneous and conflictive. From its arrival to the new continent, the millenary religion had to compete with the contrasting influences, as exposed by Parisot's account. Secularism, heresies, and violence have coexisted with the steady influx of the Catholic faith into former Native American territories along with shifting geopolitical and social realities. Competing discourses and religions have continually shaped the course of history in the Texas-Mexico frontier and, along with the influence of social, natural, and political pressures, have determined the experience of people in the Rio-Grande Valley. As a consequence, the creation of a working definition of Catholicism in the border needs to account for a multi-origin point of reference that traces the multiple threads that arise from the long-lasting processes of culture. In the case of the Spanish religious beliefs, every time an European Catholic would come into contact with a non-believer, the religion would undergo challenges, transformations and reconfigurations that, under normal circumstances, would continue indefinitely interacting with old and new cultural

threads. These facts are seen in Fr. Parisot's experience with Tatita's heresy where the new influx of the Catholic faith brought into the frontier by the Oblates would face the effect of competing faiths and cultures along with the pressure of violence embodied by the *Hermanos*. The last two factors would in turn have a major effect in the life and beliefs of the inhabitants of the Rio Grande Valley as they would be drawn to participate in the new practice and would be faced with physical or spiritual displacements by the threat of violence. Such powerful effects can be inferred from reactions of the priests to the lack of participation and often distrust that the Oblates faced at different points of their ministry. Mexicans were often left without a significant source of guidance in practicing their spirituality and very often would be slow to accept the changes which the different waves of evangelization would bring. This effect, would be seen in both English and Spanish-speaking communities during the first stages of evangelization as reported by the missionaries and may prove to be the common link to understand the Catholic experience in the border as this study comes closer to the analysis of the narratives. Before closing this chapter however, it is imperative to return to the discussion of the pro and anti-Catholic discourses in order to reach conclusions about the Catholic Experience portrayed in the historical record.

2.10 The Make of a Texas-Mexico Catholicism

The idea of a historical representation of Borderland Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley is problematic due to its association with the social and economic realities of the believers. Historical records show that Mexican interests would become secondary both

in the newly formed Nation of Texas and in the American State even though allegiances were shifted. This process of marginalization would become second nature in the tactics with which US governmental officials would approach the assimilation of the local populations in all the former Mexican territories, mainly through the program of Americanization. In the newly formed nation, becoming American would imply the abandonment of the Spanish language along with other aspects of Mexican identity, mainly Catholicism.⁸⁸ This experience of transculturation, which can indeed be regarded as anti-Mexican and anti-Catholic, would be spread through the activities of Nativist in the XIX century, and would affect directly and indirectly the lives of the members of the Catholic Church throughout the US. Regardless of their origin, Catholics would become the target of a discourse that viewed the religion as anti-American in nature and would face violence, prejudice, and discrimination over time (Jenkins 28-29). The described observations do not match modern scholarly work on the History of Catholicism from the Chicano Studies viewpoint, as the idea of an anti-Mexican Catholic institution has become favored in some academic circles (Wright “Beyond Chicano” 75-77). With the exception of Castañeda, Doyon, and Wright’s work already discussed in this chapter, the work of the oblates and the policies of the Church came to be regarded overwhelmingly as anti-Mexican, or pro-English in the best of circumstances. This was despite the heavy interest the founder of the religious order had of establishing a long lasting presence in the Mexican nation and the support that Bishop Jean Marie-Odin gave to the missionaries

⁸⁸ An example of this practice can be found in Albert Camarillo’s *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930*. See, 225-229.

during his tenure. These anti-Mexican attitudes were attributed to the statements made by Bishops, Priest, and Missionaries studied in José Roberto Juarez' "*Los Padres Rancheristas: The 19th-Century Struggle for Mexican-American Catholicism in south Texas.*"

This article takes into account correspondence between leaders of Catholic hierarchy, which includes the Oblates, throughout mid XIX century and criticizes decisions, such as Bishop Odin's deposition of Fr. de la Garza, mentioned earlier in this chapter, due to his refusal to baptize a dying child unless he was paid two dollars. In this particular example, Juarez criticizes the treatment of the Mexican priest in light of the lack of clergy suggesting a latent anti-Mexican bias in the highest office of the institution of the Church. This was because the Bishop did not seek to "rehabilitate" him in-order to maintain a local Mexican presence in the clergy (17). Though exposing the many problems that lay behind Juarez analysis falls outside the scope of this chapter, it suffices to say that his historical revision on the spread of Catholicism does not contextualizes the deeper theological meaning behind the actions of the ordained members of the Church nor takes into account the actual beliefs of the people he is studying. In short, sacraments cannot be purchased under Catholic teaching and cannon law, and as a result the Bishop's decision cannot be misinterpreted.

A second point of Juarez that needs to be reconsidered is the claim of anti-Mexican attitudes found to Oblate Priests due to their correspondence. This accusation includes some of Parisot's accounts found in his *Reminiscences*. According to the Chicano historian, in these letters different priests share negative attitudes about

Mexican spirituality and religiosity during the XIX century (18-19). This historical criticism does not take into account the many praises that Fr. Pierre Parisot devotes to Mexican Catholics throughout his memoirs. This includes his first impression of Mexican Catholicism during a Eucharistic procession. The Holies of Holies, which sits at the core of the beliefs of Catholics, was being carried to the sick and the devotion and love witnessed in that day made him write: “The people know that Jesus is there. What a difference between 1858 and 1897; yet faith of the people remains the same, for the true faith cannot die out in Mexico” (74-75). Clearly, the argument of an anti-Mexican church needs to be reconsidered under the light of Philip Jenkins’ comment on the myths embedded on popular thought and in the context of the definition of the Catholic Faith. After all, this chapter has demonstrated the heterogeneity of the make-up of the church and its members and therefore this generalization cannot be extended to all the body of the Church.

Although the works of Wright, Doyon, and Castañeda can be argued of being part of the pro-Catholic bias due to their religious affiliations, the nature of the pastoral work, Parisot’s testimony, and the evidence of a long-lasting Oblate presence in the Mexican communities speak for themselves. Far from being anti-Mexican, Catholicism in the borderland would be exemplified in the experience of Mexican Catholics as they would share the same experiences in the frontier with their English-speaking counterpart. The struggles with violence, injustice, heresies, and the example of the ministry of the Oblates would resonate within both congregations as the core of the teaching of the religion would transcend language barriers. The free flow of people

across the border, in addition to the common language that would be shared in the administration of sacraments and the mass, would link the experience of all parishioners regardless of their demographic.⁸⁹ This communion between the two demographic groups would be such that even Fr. Pierre Parisot, who was in charge of the English speaking community at Brownsville, would commonly serve across the Mexican border. As a consequence, the linguistic barriers that would limit the contact between populations and communities would become less important in the continuous spread and diffusion of the millenary religion.

2.11 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated through the use of a non-institutionalized approach to the study of religion that the diffusion of Catholicism into the Rio Grande Valley has not followed the same pattern of the institutions. Despite being linked theologically to the seed of sacramental power and authority, the cultural artifact of religion would have arrived into the Texas-Mexico frontier with the first believer that had contact with the indigenous population. The evangelization efforts of Franciscan missionaries financed by the Spanish Crown would follow and over time would slowly transform the religious makeup of the Texas-Mexico Border. Some of these changes were directly related to the continuous reconfiguration of the social, cultural, and political realities of the times, which lead to the arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the beginning of a new

⁸⁹ It is worth to recall that before the second Vatican council, the liturgy of the catholic mass and the administration of sacraments would be spoken in Latin.

Catholic Experience in the Borderland. This experience continues to reconfigure itself in the face of movements and influences as is seen in the present with the New Evangelization movement which Pope John Paul II began in the 1980s. The reconfiguration notwithstanding, Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley remains deeply rooted in the original work of the Oblates in the ministry to the poor and in the struggles Catholics faced in the beginnings of their mission work. Violence, injustice, prejudice, secularization and the heterogeneity of cultures, religions, and discourses at large still dominate the world of Catholics in the Texas-Mexico border as they struggle to reconcile individual beliefs and practices, with both Catholic Orthodoxy and the world at large.

This continuous struggle is the common denominator to understand the brand of Catholicism depicted in the historical records; a faith that can trace its theology and tradition over two millennia and that (re) assesses itself in the midst of pro and anti-Catholic discourses, and social pressures such as Americanization. This depiction of the Roman faith is the socio-cultural context that will be used in the study of the narratives of Carmen Boullosa and Rolando Hinojosa. Their works will resonate with Parisot's *Reminiscences* as their characters' lives are determined by heterogeneous influences affecting their lives that include the same violence, injustice, and multiple religions mentioned in the oblate's work. The study of this link begins with the analysis of Carmen Boullosa's ethnographic depiction of the Texas-Mexico Border and the Cortina troubles of 1851 found in the NHN *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013).

3. BORDER CATHOLICISM IN CARMEN BOULLOSA'S *TEXAS* (2013): FAITH AT THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

“The people know that Jesus is there. What a difference between 1858 and 1897; yet faith of the people remains the same, for the true faith cannot die out in Mexico” (74).

– Fr. Pierre Parisot O.M.I.
Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary

For over six decades Carlos E. Castañeda's seven-volume *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas* (1936-1958) has provided the foundation for historiographical research on the subject of Catholicism in Texas. His work provided unequivocal proof of the enduring mark the Spanish Catholic Crown left in the Lone Star State, despite the assertion of a declining influence and importance of Catholicism as a consequence of Americanization as explained by Chicano historians.⁹⁰ Although Castañeda did not downplay the importance of the shift of political and social programs, he would not account for the effects of Americanization on the diffusion of the cultural artifact of religion. The prolific historian was more concerned with tracing the evolution of the institution and its continuous presence in Texas, therefore he would fail to account on the experience of Mexican Americans.⁹¹ This lack of attention has led to the prevalence of interpretations of history that often disregard sentiments that fall outside the scope of race. As explained

⁹⁰ See, Albert Camarillo *Chicanos in a Changing Society* 225-229.

⁹¹ It is worth to mention that the scope of Carlos E. Castañeda's *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas* (1936-1958) differs considerably from other Chicano historiographies such Albert Camarillo, Mario T. Garcia, or George Sanchez. Where Castañeda's work sought to recuperate the development and spread of a religion into a single state, these more contemporary historiographies have been concerned with how larger historical processes, such as Americanization or marginalization, have affected the immigrant experience of Mexican-Americans in the US.

in the first chapter, anti-clerical sentiments that became pervasive in both sides of the Rio Grande Valley in the XIX century were often ignored by institutional-centered inquiries about the spread of Catholicism. These would argue that the Church was anti-Mexican by generalizing statements written in missionary correspondence without fully scrutinizing the heterogeneous context which gave rise to those letters. The present chapter addresses this void in historiography by studying the depiction of Catholicism in Carmen Boullosa's *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013), since it presents a unique opportunity to explore the portrayal of religious experiences at the Rio Grande Valley.⁹² This analysis will take the form of an ethnographic reading of the novel that considers the philosophical/theological discourse of the New Evangelization described by Bishop Robert Barron in the *Catholicism* series (2011); historical works by Carlos E. Castaneda's and Bernard Doyon will also be employed. In order to accomplish this goal, it will be necessary to establish this Borderland novel's place within the tradition of the New Latin-American Historical Novel through a comparison of details found in Fr. Parisot's depiction of the Catholic experience introduced in the first chapter with Boullosa's work. The envisioned analysis will specially dwell in the depiction of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, his revolt, and the rise of a religious leader called "El Iluminado," both characters provide the novel's historical setting.⁹³ The comparison of

⁹² Throughout the rest of this chapter, Carmen Boullosa's novel will be referred to as *Texas* (2013).

⁹³ The official historical record holds that in the decade following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Juan Nepomuceno Cortina came to hate a clique of judges and Brownsville attorneys whom he accused of expropriating land from Mexican Texans unfamiliar with the American judicial system. He became a leader to many of the poorer Mexicans who lived along the banks of the river. The incident that ignited the first Cortina War occurred on July 13, 1859, when Cortina saw the Brownsville City Marshall, Robert Shears, brutally arrest a Mexican American who had once been employed by Cortina. Cortina shot the

the works of Parisot and Boulosa will reveal multiple faces of criticism aimed at the official discourse of Americanization which the US has adopted with regards to the inflow of immigration and the borderlands. It will allow also a more contextualized view of the religious experience of the Texas Borderland from the years that immediately follow the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 which is the setting for Boulosa's novel.⁹⁴

3.1 Texas: *La gran ladronería en el lejano Norte* (2013) as a New Latin-American Historical Novel

In 1995 Seymour Menton published his *La Nueva Novela Histórica de la América Latina 1972-1992* where he synthesized the definitions and origins of a literary current that had been a subject of discussion in the academic circles since the 80s. The New Historical Novel (NHN) or *la nueva novela histórica*, as it was denominated by Menton, had become a trend in Latin-American narrative with an explosion or predominance of the genre since 1979 but was yet to be defined in a way that satisfied the literary critic

Marshall in the impending confrontation and rode out of town with the prisoner. Early on the morning of September 28, 1859, he rode into Brownsville again, this time at the head of some forty to eighty men, and seized control of the town. Five men, including the city jailer, were shot during the raid, as Cortina and his men raced through the streets shouting "Death to the Americans" and "Viva Mexico." Many of the men whom Cortina had sworn to kill, however, escaped or went into hiding. For more information see, Acuña *Handbook of Texas Online*

<<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fco73>>. See also, Thompson *Cortina* 7-33

⁹⁴ The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, ended the Mexican War, recognized the annexation of Texas to the United States (consummated nearly three years before), and ceded to the United States Upper California (the modern state of California) and nearly all of the present American Southwest between California and Texas. The treaty traced the boundary between the United States and Mexico from the Gulf of Mexico up the main channel of the Rio Grande to the southern boundary of the Mexican province of New Mexico. See, Pletcher *Handbook of Texas Online*

<<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/nbt01>>.

(29-30). This is shown briefly when Menton criticizes in his notes Fernando Ainsa's work "La Reescritura de la historia en la Nueva Narrativa Latinoamericana" (1991). Though the American critic acknowledged the detailed description of ten recurring elements or characteristics of the new literary current, he argued that Ainsa did not define the genre. As a result, Menton set his description apart from Ainsa's work by defining the genre under six characteristics that emphasized ideological aspects in the narratives. This distinction ultimately created a complementary theoretical framework through which Carmen Boullosa's novel can be understood. Such a theoretical complement needs to be further explained before turning to the study of Carmen Boullosa's depiction of Catholicism in her novel through an ethnographic lens.

Fernando Ainsa traced the origin of the NHN in his "La reescritura de la historia" (1991) to a trend found in Latin American writers seeking to re-read the continent's history under a critical and revisionist perspective. This re-interpretation of history through literature, by the 1980s, had become a vigorous genre throughout the Americas.⁹⁵ These new novels were linked together by an obsession with deconstructing

⁹⁵ Ainsa lists the following titles: Pedro Orgambide's *El arrabal del mundo* (1983), Abel Posse's *Daimon* (1978) y *Los perros del Paraíso* (1983), Francisco Herrera Luque's *La historia fabulada* (1981-83), *La luna de Fausto* (1983), and *La casa del pez que escupe el agua* (1975), Fernando del Paso's *Noticias del Imperio* (1987), Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar* (1974) and *La noche oscura del niño Avilés* (1984), Reinaldo Arenas' *El mundo alucinante* (1973), Juan José Saer's *El entenado* (1983), Tomás Eloy Martínez' *La novela de Perón* (1985), Denzil Romero's *La tragedia del generalísimo* (1983) and *La esposa del Dr. Thorne* (1987), Jorge Ibarguengoitia's *Los pasos de López* (1982), Homero Aridjis' *1492 vida y tiempos de Juan Cabezón de Castilla* (1985), Saúl Ibargoyen Islas' *Noche de espadas* (1987), Tomás de Mattos' *Bernabé! Bernabé!* (1988), Lisandro Otero's *Temporada de ángeles* (1983), Ernesto Schoó's *El baile de los Guerrero* (1978), Luis Britto García's *Abrapalabra* (1979), Antonio Benitez Rojo's *El mar de las lentejas* (1984), Martha Mercader's *Juanmanuela, mucha mujer* (1980), Arturo Azuela's *Don de la palabra* (1985), Héctor Libertella's *Cavernícolas!* (1985), Napoleón Baccino Ponce de León's *Maluco (La novela de los descubridores)* (1989), Herminio Martínez'

the old historical novel; works such as *Terra nostra* (1975) can be considered precursor texts. Ainsa explains that with this novel Carlos Fuentes

“ingresó en el género histórico por la anacronía, la ironía y el grotesco e inauguró la corriente de obras donde los hechos históricos, si bien son reconocibles, han sido integrados a la ficción a través de un tratamiento de deformación y adulteración deliberada. Si *Terra nostra* aparece como un manifiesto y programa, Fuentes multiplica las maneras de contar y los puntos de vista para borrar los referentes inmediatos y relativizar toda posible verdad histórica. (16)

It becomes clear then that the deformation, adulteration, and relativization of history are central in creating the ten overarching characteristics of the genre that Ainsa sees expressed also in Alejo Carpentier's work. Though the Uruguayan critic does not consider *El reino de este mundo* (1949) as a break with the old historical novel, he did explain that the abandonment of historical precision of Carpentier's original work is present in *El arpa y la sobra* (1978) and *El siglo de las luces* (1962). These two works “Anuncian la corriente de novelas donde la historia puede ser un simple pretexto para una relectura y una rescritura en forma de *pastiche*, alegoría o fábula iconoclasta de significados contradictorios” (17). Starting from this production, and acknowledging the heterogeneous nature of the current, Ainsa creates the following framework of characteristics for the genre: 1) The NHN performs new readings of official

Diario maldito de Nuño Guzmán (1990), and *Cómo conquisté a los aztecas* (1980) ironically attributed to Hernán Cortés and written with the collaboration of Armando Ayala Anguiano. See, Ainsa 15.

historiographical discourses; 2) It questions the legitimacy of discourses; 3) It eliminates historical distances; 4) It demystifies the past; 5) The historicity of its discourse can be textual and with many in-depth references. Alternatively, it can be made up by mimesis; 6) It is characterized by a superposition of times and anachronism 7) It features a multiplicity of perspectives that makes it impossible to have a sole or unique historical truth; 8) It contains diverse modes of expressions such as false chronicles, glosses, testimonies; 9) The use of language is emphasized through archaisms, *pastiche*, and parody; 10) A NHN can be characterized as a *pastiche* of another historical novel (30-31).⁹⁶ These characteristics were also considered by Seymour Menton in his already mentioned work *La Nueva Novela Histórica de la América Latina* (1995). Here, the critic establishes an independent model that traces the origin of the NHN to the work and influence of Alejo Carpentier and Carlos Fuentes, while it also acknowledges the contribution of Jorge Luis Borges and Augusto Roa Bastos. According to Ainsa, the new genre distinguished itself from previous historical novels by presenting six common characteristics that include: 1) the subordination of mimesis; 2) distortion of history; 3) fictionalization of historical characters; 4) metafiction; 5) intertextuality; and 6) the

⁹⁶ Antonia Viu also makes the following summary of this framework “a) la relectura de la historia fundada en un historicismo crítico; b) la impugnación de las versiones oficiales de la historia; c) la multiplicidad de perspectivas (múltiples verdades históricas); d) abolición de la distancia épica (“nivelación” y desmitificación de la historia); e) distanciamiento de la historia oficial mediante su reescritura irónica, paródica y muchas veces irreverente; f) superposición de tiempos históricos diferentes; g) historicidad textual o pura invención mimética de crónicas disfrazadas de historicismo, glosa de textos auténticos en contextos hiperbólicos o grotescos y el uso de la ficción para el llenado de los vacíos de la historia conocida; i) relectura distanciada, ‘pesadillesca’ o acrónica de la historia mediante de una escritura carnavalesca, y finalmente, j) usos del lenguaje: arcaísmos, pastiches, parodias y sentido del humor agudizado para reconstruir o desmitificar el pasado.” See, “Una Poética Para El Encuentro Entre Historia Y Ficción” 171. For a similar summary and explanation of this framework see, Pulido Herráez *Poéticas de la novela histórica* 24-27.

presence of Bakhtinian concepts of the dialogic, carnivalesque, parody, and heteroglossia that represented a break with old notion of exploring historical truths in the narratives (Menton 42-44).^{97 98 99} The neo-Historical novels sought to problematize the writing of History while criticizing the pursuit of ultimate truths in both literary narratives and historiographies. This critical endeavor resulted in the mission of questioning the past, (re)vindicating discourses previously ignored, and creating alternative versions or explanations of historical events.

These two models provide a mutually complementary vision of the characteristics and scope of the NHN. Though Ainsa did not fully define a corpus in his work, his ten characteristics allow for a broader variation of narratives that he expected to continue for the foreseeable future.¹⁰⁰ Menton, on the other hand, ventured to describe a narrower corpus by creating a more aesthetical model that somehow revolves around Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts. Taking these two models into consideration it is possible to include Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* as one more example of the tradition of the NHN by briefly describing how this novel fulfills both Ainsa and Menton's conceptualizations. It is worth to mention that Carmen Boullosa is no stranger to the discursive mission of the

⁹⁷ Simon Dentith explains the concept of the dialogic within the context of Bakhtin's work on the novel as a polyphonic creation. That is in the novel authors grants the voices of main characters as much authority as the narrator's voice. This in turn allows for the active dialogue with the characters voices. See, *Bakhtinian Thought: An introductory reader* 41-64.

⁹⁸ The carnivalesque and the parody are concepts explained in short by Dentith in the context of what he called carnivalized writing. This is a kind of writing that reproduces the characteristic inversions, parodies, and subversions that take place during carnival. See, *Ibid* 65-87.

⁹⁹ Heteroglossia is a neologism that Bakhtin created to explain the multiplicity of actual 'languages' and discourses that are uttered in a novel. These are the discourses of social groups and classes that speakers adopt even within any broader distinctions. See, *Ibid* 22-40.

¹⁰⁰ It is worth to mention that though Ainsa emphasized a thematic link over the aesthetics, he does acknowledge a relative aesthetic cohesiveness rooted in the work of Carpentier, and company. See, Ainsa 15-18.

NHN as Ann Reid explains in her analysis of *Llanto, Novelas Imposibles* (1992) where the Mexican writer explored the conquest and death of Montezuma, problematizing both history and fiction while demystifying people and historical events in her search of unofficial facts. Such re-evaluation of the historical record ultimately leads to the creation of a metahistory that contributes to the “discusión contemporánea sobre el problema del saber histórico y el problema de narrar la historia, la cual no se compone tan sólo de palabras, sino que se configura, asimismo, a través de la vista, el tacto y el olfato” (3). Carmen Boullosa sought to create an alternative world where the readers of history could re-live every aspect of the writing of history; a practice in which past and present discourses clash within the multiple narratives at stake in the historiographical experience.¹⁰¹

Texas (2013) can be situated within the revisionist project of the NHN because it matches the aesthetical and thematic frameworks proposed by both Ainsa and Menton. Starting with the interpretation given by the American Critic to the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, Boullosa’s borderland narrative fits the description of Menton because she portrays over two hundred interacting characters throughout the novel. These include fictional, historical, and anachronic actors contesting the events that took place during the Cortina war, an event explored in the previous chapter. Most of these individuals are described by name and trade in an effort that can be interpreted as a reconstruction of the

¹⁰¹ It is worthy of mention that several of Carmen Boullosa’s works can be included in this tradition. In fact, Lore Callewaert’s Master’s Thesis *Carmen Boullosa en búsqueda de la identidad mexicana: hacia un análisis de su novelística a la luz de la nueva novela histórica* proposes a corpus that includes *Cielos de la Tierra* (1997), *Duerme* (1994), *El médico de los piratas: bucaneros y filibusteros en el Caribe* (1992), *Son vacas, somos puercos: filibusteros del mar Caribe* (1991) in addition to *Llanto: novelas imposibles* (1992). See, Callewaert and Houvenaghel 12.

inner works of the border towns. The complex structure represented by Boullosa needs to be further described aided by Ainsa's thematic framework; also it must be noted that the same framework permits *Texas* (2013) to be defined as an ethnographic text.

The already mentioned qualities of rereading and demystifying history, the elimination of historical distances while questioning the past, are both present and emphasized in Boullosa's novel. Some examples of this historical demystification can be seen in alterations of names and locations such as Bruneville, Matasanchez, or in the criticism of discourses found in dialogues throughout the novel.¹⁰² For instance, the discourse of Americanization is set against views brought into the Texas Bordertown by anachronic characters like the Henrys.¹⁰³ This takes place in the story during a meeting held by Charles Stillman (Charles Stealman in the novel) after the encounter between the Sheriff and Cortina.¹⁰⁴ In a similar manner, history is distorted by the portrayal of characters such as Elizabeth, Stealman's wife, who is given the carnivalesque nickname of "la floja" and is placed in the city at beginning of the conflict. This is because official history says that she left Brownsville in 1853 never to return (Stillman 14).

The qualities that have been exposed up to now have a paradoxical effect when it comes to the depiction of the Texas Frontier reality. On the one hand NHN is

¹⁰² Brownsville and Matamoros are renamed as Bruneville and Matasanchez respectively.

¹⁰³ Though it is difficult to ascertain a direct connection between the characters with their historical counterparts due to the liberties Boullosa takes in their depiction, the three Henrys are fictional representations of Catherine Anne Waterfield and Eleanor Percy Lee and Sarah Anne Ellis. They were female writers from the confederacy and members of the Percy family. For a biography of these women see, Wyatt-Brown 104-136. For Boullosa's comments on her adaptation of these characters see, *Texas* 359.

¹⁰⁴ Carmen Boullosa's transformation of Charles Stillman's is a play on words that refers to the great theft of mentioned in the NHN's title. This is because the noun steal echoes the injustice of the *ladronería* that Juan Nepomuceno Cortina seeks to fight against with his raid of Brownsville and his proclamation.

characterized for rejecting or distancing itself from the epic nature of history as both Menton and Ainsa's framework have pointed out. However, a closer reading of Boullosa's novel suggests that there is a certain realism rooted in the Bakhtinian concepts that characterized her literary work. By re-creating the multiple interacting discourses and voices that existed in the Rio Grande Valley, the Mexican author created a fictional universe in which culture and history were recovered and reassessed; these dialectic and heteroglossic qualities are thus essential for the ethnographic framework of a novel being proposed in this chapter as an anthropological NHN. This concept will be applied also to the study of Rolando Hinojosa's narrative in the next chapter of this dissertation.

3.2 Towards an Ethnographic Reading of the Rio Grande Valley

Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) is a NHN set in the Texas-Mexico border. Divided into two parts, this narrative explores the events that surrounded Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's uprising in Brownsville and Matamoros in 1859. These two Rio Grande Valley border towns alluded in the novel with the literary names of Bruneville and Matasanchez are depicted along with an amalgam of interacting characters that recreate the precarious reality of the people inhabiting the region during the years following the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. As it was revealed in the previous chapter, Fr. Parisot O.M.I. bore witness to the lawlessness, violence, and racial intolerance created at the

time.¹⁰⁵ These tensions were, on the one hand, followed by responses such as Nepomuceno Cortina's and other attempts to resist the loss of rights and opportunities generated by the new nation model introduced by Americans.¹⁰⁶ This environment set the stage for a continuous interaction of religions: Mexican Catholics would begin to be outnumbered by newcomers from multiple faiths and races, and thus were forced to assert themselves in the face of new competing discourses. This borderland experience is prominently featured in Boullosa's neo-historical portrayal of Texas through her over two hundred interacting characters. These characters and her narrator share, engage, react, and debate their ideas and stories as they experience the actions of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina against the racial oppression and injustice that escalated into the historical events such as his raid of Brownsville. Such events will be subject to an ethnographic analysis; however, this connection to the field of cultural anthropology needs to be explained before returning at the study of religion of the Rio Grande Valley.

The notion of an anthropological approach to the study of a NHN novel, or a fictional work in general, is rooted in the possibility of exploring, criticizing, and recreating reality through literature. After all, the discipline of cultural anthropology has defended the idea arguing that anthropologists are interpreters of cultures (Langness and Frank 18). Clifford Geertz was the first anthropologist to explore on the subject in the 70s with his *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), where he argued for the interpretative study of cultures. In the decade that followed Geertz's work such as James Clifford,

¹⁰⁵ Rippey, J. Fred, provides another account of the violence, intolerance, and tension found in the Rio Grande Valley during the years that followed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. See, 91-111.

¹⁰⁶ Other examples of responses are explained by Treviño in his *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* (2006). See, 42-80.

George E. Marcus, Michael M. J. Fisher began to call for a push towards interpretation that would account for the multiple waves of significant inherent to the study of cultures. According to a recent study of anthropologist Dan Rose, this experimentation would amount to the creation of ethnographies based on the relationship between literature and anthropology; a practice that in turn would lead to the creation and use of a polyphonic, heteroglossic, multi-genre construction (219). This hybrid anthropological endeavor set itself apart from traditional ethnographies as it implied the “dissolution of boundaries between literature, sociology, anthropology, critical theory, philosophy cinematography, computer sciences, and so on” (220). In other words, the new anthropological writing, or ethnographic novel, would create a bridge between various disciplines that dwell in the human condition. This creation however has yet to be systematically theorized despite the existence of over thirty years of discussions about the relationship between fictional creations and cultural anthropology (Laterza 125). Though there is certainly a consensus about its place as a bridge between disciplines, current formal theorizations are limited to what can and cannot be accomplished through Elizabeth Fernea’s broad definition of an ethnographic novel.

In her article “The Case of *Sitt Marie Rose*: An Ethnographic Novel from the Modern Middle East” Fernea defines the new creation as:

a text, like other literary texts, that in the course of presenting a fictional story creates a setting (or physical and social context), characters (or people), plot and action that the reader judges to be authentic in terms of the particular cultural, social, or political situation portrayed. If the reader

judges the text to be *authentic*, he or she then not only will accept any messages explicit or implicit in the text itself but will also find information about matters outside the text itself: matters of love and death, the appropriate conduct of life, and the proper direction of culture and society. One must also make the distinction between an ethnographic novel, written by an outsider about an *other*, and an ethnographic novel written by an artist from within the culture. (154)

This broad definition confirms the abolishment of disciplines but fails to account for the multi-genre description that Dan Rose had foreseen in the 80s and Vito Laterza still warns about in his recent study of 2007.¹⁰⁷ Such void explains the lack of an established cannon of this particular genre of ethnographies, a void that becomes evident when compared to the already discussed NHN. Taking this into account, it is necessary to revisit Rose's observations concerning the future of ethnographic writing because he proposes a set of characteristics that can be useful tools in the study of the novels analyzed in this dissertation. His observations will be contextualized with the broader description provided by Fernea. The aim will be reconciling Ainsa and Menton's notions of the NHN with notion of an ethnographic novel. Through these observations it will become clear how these new ethnographies bridge the separation between the social sciences in the study of the Catholic experience in the Rio Grande Valley.

¹⁰⁷ Vito Laterza would in fact dwell on the limits of ethnographic novels in his analysis of the novel *Madumo, a Man Bewitched* (2000). See, 131-132.

3.3 Dan Rose Revisited: Characteristics of an Ethnographic Novel

In his “Ethnography as a Form of Life: The Written Word and the Work of the World” (1992), Dan Rose makes several observations vis-à-vis a trend of reconfiguration and experimental practices of cultural sciences concerning writing. He notes that a first phase of experimentation has been completed with the creation of a growing number of narrative ethnographies and, as a result, the novel has transformed scientific writing.¹⁰⁸ Using the theoretical framework of Mikhail Bakhtin, already alluded to in this chapter, Rose explains that the changes to ethnographic writing are found in the “descriptive setting of the scene, the narration of the local peoples’ own stories, the use of dialogue, the privileging of the objects of inquiry along with the subject or author who writes, and the notation by the author of emotions, subjective reactions, and involvement of ongoing activities” (217). These features provide the basis for the following six characteristics that Rose sees as becoming prominent in the future of ethnographic literature:

1. The author’s voice and emotional reactions;
2. Critical, theoretical, humanist, mini-essays that take up and advance the particular literature or subliterate of the human sciences and particular disciplines; perhaps an ethnography will develop one or two ideas that provide coherence to the entire book;

¹⁰⁸ Rose also gives the following list of works written since 1985. John Dorst’s *The Written Suburb* (1989), Michael Jackson’s *Barawa* (1986), Kirin Nayaran’s *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels* (1989), Robin Ridington’s *Trail to Heaven* (1989), Dan Rose’s *Black American Street Lie* (1987) and *Patterns of American Culture* (1989), John Stewart’s *Drinkers, Drummers, and Decent Folk* (1989). Paul Stoller’s and Cheryl Okkes’ *In Sorcery’s Shadow* (1987), and Stoller’s *Fusion of the Worlds* (1989). Though it is not the scope of this dissertation to suggest a corpus of ethnographic novels, this list may prove to be a starting point to develop a canon for this expanding genre in the disciplines of Anthropology and World Literature. See, 217.

3. The conversations, voices, attitudes, visual genres, gestures, reactions, and concerns of daily life of the people with whom the author participates, observes, lives with will take form as a narrative and discourse in the text; *there will be a story line*;
4. A poetic will also join the prose;
5. Pictures, photos, drawings will take up a new, more interior relation to the text, not to illustrate it, but to document in their own way what words do in their own way;
6. The junctures between analytic, fictive, poetic, narrative, and critical genres will be clearly marked in the text but will cohabit the same volume. (218)

Although Dan Rose does not explore or delineates how each characteristic can be featured in the new genre, the anthropologist's framework provides an initial point of reference from which Elizabeth Fernea's broad definition of the ethnographic novel can be expanded. Such a synthesis will prove to be useful in the study the Rio Grande Valley narratives as the rest of the chapter seeks to establish a place of the Rio Grande Valley narratives under scrutiny within this genre. However, before exploring the points of contact of Boullosa's novel with anthropological writing, it will be useful to briefly reconcile Rose and Fernea's assertions in order to explain why Boullosa's novel can be considered both a NHN and an ethnographic work.

3.4 Ethnographic Novel vs. New Historical Novel

Much like the NHN, the ethnographic novel as described by Fernea and Rose can be defined as a narrative that results from the experimentation of authors with the study, criticism, and re-writing of culture. It is polyphonic and heteroglossic because it contains a number of interacting characters that embody or represent aspects of the societies or cultures depicted in the novel in question.¹⁰⁹ In other words, this genre is defined by the writer's ability to incorporate the multiplicity of discourses, voices, and registers, as well as intertextual features characteristic of the novel. Such elements (varied and innovative as the multiple layers inherent to cultures) are usually interpreted by a narrator or fictional character that may serve as a translator for the reader. With this in mind, it is possible to turn to the analysis of Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) and narrow Rose's theoretical framework to 4 characteristics that, if present, will allow the extraction of socio-cultural information from any properly contextualized novel.

Starting with the assumption that contemporary novels are fundamentally a multi-genre construction, the first element to consider in Boullosa's narrative is the presence of a number of interacting characters that seek to represent or portray the community and culture of the novel; these characters are not required to be real, or historical, but must present socio-cultural characteristics that give light to the daily life of people portrayed in the narratives. This initial component of the ethnographic novel incorporates elements from both Fernea and Rose's descriptions in order to create a

¹⁰⁹ Culture is understood here under the terms of Clifford Geertz: As webs of significance. See, *The Interpretation of Cultures* 5.

point of reference from which cultural elements can be observed. Such a multiplicity of voices is evident from the first moments of *Texas* (2013) where the discourses, attitudes, and reactions of two border towns are recuperated by the narrator. This characteristic will be further analyzed in the next section as the interaction of individuals within the novel provides the foundation for the anthropological observation.

The second element is the presence of a narrator or character that fulfills the role of an interpreter or translator between the readers and the characters. This role is an important point of contact between the anthropological and historical creations as it often provides the opportunity, as Dan Rose points out, of expressing the author's own voice and ideas (218). This is because the NHN is not a stranger to this feature as the revision of historical facts and the transgression of discourses is a common trend found in both Fernando Ainsa and Seymour Menton's description of the novel. However, both creations differ on the need or usefulness of such a character in their narratives. The explicit presence of such an active participant in the story is not an important necessity in a NHN yet it is crucial for the interpretation and validity of an ethnographic narrative as it provides an important point of reference to contextualize and therefore to understand the reality of the culture in study. Carmen Boullosa provides one such narrator with the historian that re-visits the Cortina troubles. She provides a knowledgeable narrator that at times takes up the mantle of a reliable informant who transmits his or her version of the events that took place during the story.

The last two conditions to consider are the presence of an event that causes characters to react in a culturally concise way and the presence of a cultural process

(such as diffusion or acculturation). These last two elements can be inferred from Elizabeth Fernea's broad description of the ethnographic novel and from the mission of the anthropological endeavor; that is to interpret the cultural processes and its waves of significance in order to understand the human experience. In the case of Boullosa's narrative, the events of cultural significance that can be appreciated are the feud between Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and the Sheriff, the creation of a cult to the Holy Cross, and the raid of Brownsville. These three instances will be further analyzed along with the cultural process of diffusion, the fourth element of the novel, which can be appreciated throughout the novel through the spread of the news. Moreover, the fusion of these two characteristics provides a fulcrum upon which Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) can be analyzed anthropologically. The events and the cultural process provide an ontological link that reconciles the heteroglossic representation of characters and their daily lives, as they are observed by a participant observer.

Now that the link between anthropology and literature has been addressed, it is possible to turn to the ethnographic reading of Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) with the affirmation that it fulfills the depiction of the NHN the ethnographic novel traditions. The next pages in this chapter will study the points of contact between anthropological writing and fiction in Boullosa's novel as well as her depiction of Catholicism.

3.5 An Ethnographic Reading of Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013): Faith at the Rio Grande Valley

As it has been previously stated, the study of religious experiences may be among the most problematic subjects in the humanities. It's very difficult to take into account philosophical or theological beliefs while disentangling discursive biases contained in the cultural artifact. Whether these accounts originate from a recorded ethnographic description of a particular religious practice or from the imagination of a fiction writer, scholars are often only able to interpret some pieces of the puzzle. This has been the case with the study of the religious experience in the Rio Grande Valley, where omissions in historical records have been the norm. As it has been established, the study of the pressures of Americanization and its criticism within the discipline of Chicano Studies has led to the prevalence of interpretations of history based on the notion of resistance to exploitations. Biases such as the mentioned anti-Catholicism have been ignored in the benefit of more institutional-centered inquiries such as historical studies on the spread of Catholicism. In order to avoid falling in this trap, this chapter will analyze Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) through the proposed ethnographic lens. This perspective will bridge some of the gaps in the historiographical record for the religious experience in the border as this NHN and ethnographic novel completes Carlos E. Castañeda's seventh volume. This is because his final publication concentrates on the events that take place at

the institutional level and disregards the analysis of the religious experience of Mexicans.¹¹⁰

Carmen Boullosa's NHN novel reassesses an armed confrontation ignited by a racial slur that the Sheriff of Bruneville utters against Juan Nepomuceno Cortina during a confrontation; the Sheriff is a member of the English-speaking enclave that has settled the new border town, while Cortina represents the descendants of the original Spanish settlers of the Rio Grande Valley. The slur "Shut up, greaser pelado" spreads like wildfire via gossip and set up the events that occur throughout the novel (Boullosa 17).¹¹¹ Shears' insult and Cortina's reaction to the utterance break the uneasy balance in the border and force every member of the community, including the narrator/historian, to take sides with regards to the treatment of Mexicans by the new social and political class of the newly annexed state. Lynching, mob reactions, plots, and revolutions ignite while the novel re-visits and analyses history through a multilayered narrative full of anachronisms and criticism.¹¹² Such heterogeneity points towards the many layers that define the lives of people in the Rio Grande Valley, as they represent the levels of significance mentioned by Geertz in his seminal work. This approximation is anchored

¹¹⁰ To be more precise, the Chicano Historian concentrates on the retelling of the establishment of Texan dioceses from the years that followed the treaty of Guadalupe until the 1950s. He also does not explore the impact of events, such as the Cortina wars, had on the religion. Though there have been indeed historical and biographical studies conducted on the time period such as Rippey, J Fred's article "Border Troubles Along the Rio Grande 1848-1860" no other Chicano historian has tackled the subject of Chicano religion or Mexican Catholicism with the same ambition as Castañeda. For Castañeda's summary of the development of dioceses see, Vol. 7 108-164.

¹¹¹ Greaser is a derogatory word used to define Mexican-Americans. In this specific context it is used offensively.

¹¹² In the case of anachronisms, these include the presence of historical characters from different time periods such as the already mentioned Henrys. Another example is that of a modern singer La Tigresa del Oriente who had been invited into Brownsville into the establishment of La Grande. This characteristic is a common strategy used by the NHN in order to demystify History.

in the before mentioned study of events that, when depicted in the narrative, cause the manifestation of cultural information that can be harvested for analysis. Critical information is presented in the form of testimonies, reactions, stories, or actions, and is usually followed by the expression of views or arguments by many of the interacting characters including Boullosa's narrator. It is worth to mention that, though every aspect and interaction of the novel could be analyzed under this scope, this chapter only concentrates on the religious information found in the novel. This aspect relates mostly to the actions of Guadalupe (El Iluminado) and his "Talking Cross," his followers, the religious clergy, and Nepomuceno Cortina himself. The rest of this analysis will center in the interpretation of the feud between Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and Sheriff Shears, the raid of Brownsville, and the ignition of a religious cult. These ethnographic events are at the heart of Boullosa's narrative because they generate responses or attitudes that reveal the reality of cultural processes, such as transculturation, and artifacts such as religion.¹¹³

3.6 Diffusion and the Ignition of the Cortina War

The first ethnographic event contained in Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) is the diffusion of the news related to Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's encounter with Sheriff Shears. As it is fragmentarily revealed throughout the novel, the newly elected sheriff wanted to arrest Lazaro Rueda, an old cowboy, under the charges of public indecency and intoxication because he had urinated in a park. The Sheriff would engage the old

¹¹³ For a definition of artifact refer to note 17 in Chapter 1.

cowboy and become enraged by the answer “¿Pos de cuándo acá se pone a alguien preso por beber hasta quedar turulato y echarse una meadita?” and would then respond by hitting the old man repeatedly with the grip of his gun (73). It was at this time that Juan Nepomuceno Cortina intervened by trying to defuse the situation by saying “Deje a este pobre hombre en paz, mister Shear” but without acknowledging Shear’s political authority because he rejected the carpenter’s status as Sheriff (78). Conflict followed and escalated, and the situation would turn violent with gunfire exchange between the two men that lead to the injury of the Sheriff and the escape of Cortina with his men. This escalation marks the start of the Cortina Wars, and provides an initial confirmation of the ethnographic potential of the novel as the spread of the news follow.

Through the described spread of news, it is possible to see that the mechanism of diffusion, defined albeit briefly in the first chapter, is present. From the first pages of the novel, characters begin spreading the news of the fight throughout the twin cities. By the time the dust settles in the Plaza del Mercado, it is revealed that the message has spread throughout the country and beyond. This conflict was initially witnessed by a handful of characters near the market and by the time Cortina had left Bruneville with his men, the message had spread outside the town by means of messenger doves, running natives, and through the many boats in the harbor. This encounter would eventually become the triggering point for the Cortina Wars, creating a backdrop through which the reality of the citizens of Bruneville and Matasanchez is examined and reconsidered. This characteristic coincides directly with an understanding of the NHN where history is the pretext that allows authors to explore and critically recreate history. However, Carmen

Boullosa's backdrop transcends the scope of the NHN because the Mexican author creates an ethnographic dimension not accounted for by Ainsa or Menton's framework. Meaning that, through her depiction of the anthropological process of diffusion, new theoretical possibilities arise.

The process of diffusion is engraved within the construction of the novel as the story begins with the spread of news among the over 200 characters. With their names, professions, initial location, and views of the matter, Boullosa is able to re-create a lively day in historical Brownsville, Texas. The many racial interactions and tensions contained in the multi-ethnic port town take center stage as well as the socio-political climate in which Juan Nepomuceno Cortina was a major actor due to his influence with Mexicans.¹¹⁴ His racial group had begun to lose lands and the prominence they once held

¹¹⁴ Juan Nepomuceno (Cheno) Cortina (1824-1892) was born in Camargo, Tamaulipas into a wealthy cattle-ranching family on May 14th, 1824. His father was Trinidad Cortina, an attorney who passed away during Juan Cortina's youth. His mother, Estefana Cavazos, a strong fearless woman with a good sense for business, was an heir to a large land grant in the lower Rio Grande Valley. She was in charge of the upbringing of the Young Cortina.

Sometime during the 1840s, Cortina moved north of the Rio Grande river in order to take over the management of his mother's land. This was a step that eventually led the Mexican Landowner to become an important leader of the region and to defy the status quo of the new American Republic. As historians Carlos Larralde and Jose Rodolfo Jacobo put it, this was a leadership that was rooted in intuition rather than in formal education. Cortina's authority was founded in the love for the land and his charisma which would give him unparalleled fame and notoriety in the region as the Mexican outlaw would become a symbol of the raza.

Such recognition would be accompanied by mixed opinions as the same historians explain. The polarizing persona of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina was considered by many people a thief and a merciless assassin. For others, he was a hero, a saint, or even a religious leader. Larralde and Jacobo point out that Cortina would present himself as God's agent to the people. Such a polarization would only be exacerbated with the events of July 13th, 1859 in Brownsville when Cortina witnessed the Marshall pistol-whipping one of his former family employees. Outraged, Juan Cortina would ignite the conflict explored by Boullosa and described by Fr. Pierre Parisot O.M.I. that left the legacy of a proclamation in which the Mexican outlaw would invoke the right of self-preservation. The exposition of this message took place on September 28th during the raid of Brownsville which would last less than a day and would resume six months later after one of Cortina's lieutenants was lynched.

It is this initial struggle for justice that has elevated the persona of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina to the status of a symbol of resistance and a myth; a mantle that the Mexican folk hero would maintain throughout the

as they quickly became outnumbered in the Texas frontier. This shift in demographic and political importance would be revealed to be crucial to the story as it explains Cortina's reaction against the Sheriff. However, it does not reveal many of the cultural details that can be harvested as the message spreads. For instance, Frank, who is the first character to disseminate the news of the encounter, is the only Mexican in the novel who abandoned his Spanish name in the novel (Boullosa 17). Though it is not possible to state that this shift was a trend in the border during the years that followed the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), it does suggest that a possible strategy was followed by Mexicans and Americans in their struggle for power. Keeping this example in mind, it is necessary to interpret the religious information that can be observed as the message diffuses in the novel.

The first aspect to consider is the role of the clergy in the depiction of Catholicism in *Texas* (2013). In her novel, Boullosa portrays two Priests: Fr. Rigoberto at Bruneville and Fr. Vera at Matasanchez. These two clergymen have different relationships with the Mexican community despite the ongoing administration of the sacraments in both towns. On the US side, Doña Estefania's attitudes towards Burnsville's local priest may represent the feelings of the Mexican community towards

rest of his life. First, by fighting with Benito Juarez and the nationalists against French intervention in the 1860s, and later with his aid to the Union during the US Civil War, Cortina proved himself to be a man of the people that would transcend the status of outlaw.

Much more could be said about the person of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and his exploits but it would fall outside of the scope of this dissertation. However, it is worth to state that his achievements also include being a general in the Mexican Army and serving as Governor of Tamaulipas. Cortina was imprisoned in 1872 by Porfirio Diaz who feared his popularity and would remain his prisoner until 1890. He died in Tamaulipas in 1892. See, Larralde and Jacobo 3-9; 37-46. See also, Acuña *Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fco73>>; Thompson *Cortina* 7-33; Archives of the west 1856-1868: Juan Cortina (1824-1892) <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/cortina.htm>.

the local church. Nepomuceno Cortina's mother rejects the idea of tithing for the church of Bruneville. The priest, on the other hand, regards the woman as a somewhat heretic and abusive witch (180). This relationship of mutual rejection is best seen during Cortina's uprising when Fr. Rigoberto is depicted as having problems with the Dioceses of Galveston (Galvez). At the same time however, Fr. Vera is consistently engaging with the community at the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. He participates in the procession that goes to Nepomuceno Cortina's camp and is also shown engaging with "the Persignadas." These are women who are always attending mass, a feat that shows his involvement with an active center of the Catholic Faith. Such contrast begs the question of the state of the Catholic faith and of its institution in Bruneville where *el cura* Fr. Rigoberto is depicted as being disconnected with the reality of town.

Instead of being the vibrant community that reflects the work of the Oblates of Immaculate Mary described in Fr. Parisot's account, Bruneville is represented as a town where the priests is unaware of the implication of a violent situation that arises at his doorsteps when he falls asleep due to a narcoleptic episode triggered by an encounter with a female parishioner. While the message of Cortina's quarrel with the sheriff is diffusing, Fr. Rigoberto sees a woman dressed provocatively coming towards him and is unable to reproach her because he is not capable of controlling his emotions (87). Regardless of the sexual struggle portrayed in the episode, the lack of participation or attention to the social turmoil from the priest can only be described as negligent as it relates to the priest's pastoral duties. Up to this date, it's expected for a priest to interact actively in the daily lives of the community he serves. This expectation was especially

true during the years that followed the arrival of the Oblates to Brownsville as Bernard Doyon explains in *Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande, 1849-1883* (1956). Regardless of the violence, revolutions, and theft, the ministerial work of the Oblates left a strong mark with their missionary work that would eventually lead to the construction of the Cathedral in Brownsville and the expansion of their ministry (58-82).¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the indifference represented by Fr. Rigoberto may also be interpreted as an indicator of a perceived lack of trust between the laity and clergy.

Notwithstanding the historical inaccuracies contained in Boullosa's novel, which will be addressed later in the chapter, these perceived tensions could indeed have arisen between the French newcomers and local Mexican Catholics.¹¹⁶ During the 19th century, anti-clerical and anti-French sentiments affected Priests in both sides of the Rio Grande and would test the relations between clergy and the parishioners. Keeping this in mind, Boullosa's novel does not explicitly depict tensions between popular and institutional practices during the spread of the fight's result. This is because she does not portray any overt rejections of the Catholic Faith or opinions in favor of the Roman institution as the news of Cortina's defiance spreads. The members of the clergy are left voiceless during the initial scrimmage as shown with Father Rigoberto.

The result of this narrative's perspective is that, instead of being an institutional-centered historical account of the Cortina troubles, Boullosa's work provides a popular point of view of history. This is particularly true with regards to the religious experience

¹¹⁵ See also, Doyon *Cavalry of Christ* 14-57

¹¹⁶ Inaccuracies are supposed to be part of the NHN.

in the Rio Grande Valley as popular forms of piety are emphasized in the narrative when the many characters become aware of the news of the violent encounter. One example worthy of consideration is that of Peter Hat and his family. Peter Hat is a first-hand witness of the encounter and sends his wife Michaela and his children into hiding while he closes his business. Boullosa narrates:

Peter pasa al patio, corta con la navajita que siempre trae en el bolsillo dos pequeñas rosas blancas, se sigue hacia el pequeño altar a la Virgen, a un costado de la puerta principal de la casa. Se hinca en el reclinitorio. Empieza a rezar, en voz alta. Se le unen Michaela y sus hijos – ella toma las rosas de la mano de Peter, acomoda una en el Delgado florero del color azul del manto de la imagen, pone la segunda en el ojal del cuello del marido.

La mamá y los hijos van disolviendo la preocupación en santamariapurísimas rezadas muy deprisa.

Pero Peter... más reza, más se ansía, su alma parece fieltro disparejo, con gordos nudos y tramos desvaídos. (29)

As it can be appreciated above, this family's religious reactions are found outside of the institutionalized context of a Church building. Though it features an altar, a kneeler, and an image, this family demonstrates a popular kind of Catholicism that is not necessarily attached to the institutionalized practice of the Roman Catholic Church. The making of altars belongs to a popular tool kit of the Mexican faithful, but it does not imply a

theological unity or belief in Roman Catholicism.¹¹⁷ This is because the practice or act of praying can be detached from the worship as it depends of the intent or will of the actor.¹¹⁸ To give an example using a character in Boullosa's novel, it could be argued that any prayer that Werbenski, a Jewish immigrant, makes to the Virgin Mary would be problematic in the cultural and religious context depicted in the text. This is because any analysis of his religious decisions must take into account his wish to avoid anti-Semitic bias. This concern is specifically appreciated in the novel when he worries about how Cortina's encounter may affect his family: "Solo le alegra recordar que bautizó al niño, que no se irán contra el hijo, 'a mí a ver qué me hacen por judío, pero mujer e hijo se me salvan'" (32). Despite Werbenski's best intentions to save his child from prejudice, it is clear that his religious alliances do not match the orthodoxy of Christian belief. The problematic interpretation of religious experiences is not without a solution in a traditional ethnographic setting as it is possible to interview the informants or follow up on their individual actions. However, in Boullosa's novel, such a task is difficult to achieve due to the historical detachment created by the author and the subject matter.¹¹⁹ To account for this dilemma, however, it is possible to turn to the analysis of the second anthropological event ignited by the character known as "El Iluminado." He is

¹¹⁷ An example of this theological dilemma with popular devotions can be appreciated in the context of the use of paper figurines in altars as Alan R. Sandstrom's ethnographic work in Amatlán, Mexico reveals. He explained that occasionally an itinerant priest would rant at the townspeople about their use of these effigies for their worship as he considered them to be a continuation of pagan beliefs. See, *Corn Is Our Blood* 232.

¹¹⁸ This can be said as well of institutionalized practices such as the sacraments which must be entered into free of coercion and of grave external fear if they are to be considered valid.

¹¹⁹ In the case of the Jewish character one can only affirm that religious choice is a performance that can be interpreted in light of the cultural tensions present in the time period and, as a result, it cannot be acknowledged as a real act of faith.

responsible for the creation of a religious cult that echoes Parisot's historical account of Tatita, the heretic religious leader discussed in the first chapter.

3.7 The Rise of a Popular Devotion or the Creation of a Cult?

“El Iluminado,” called Guadalupe, makes his first appearance in Boullosa's narrative at the other side of the river, Matasanchez, when he wakes up from a trance. Immediately his beliefs are depicted in a reflexive manner as the narrator reveals his thoughts through a vision decoded and contextualized by the narrator/historian.

“Me habló la Virgen — la anterior conversación había sido con el Arcángel Miguel— : “Hijo mío muy iluminado—por algo es que así te llaman —, los hombres sin fe son Lázarus dormidos. Una lanza vuela. Ve tras ella, ésta levantará a tu gente, despertará a los perdidos; pero hay que tener cuidado; debes llevar mi luz en la punta de esa lanza, y cuidar que no se beba de Laguna del Diablo.” (98)

This first vision of the Virgin foreshadows a widespread belief of the existence of the supernatural and ultimately leads “El Iluminado” to participate in Cortina's revolt in Bruneville. It also sets the stage that will mark the experience of Guadalupe throughout the novel as he achieves the status of a religious leader. This advancement is sparked when he hears a voice coming from a set of planks that asks to be turned into the shape of a cross. This supernatural entity would direct El Iluminado with the promise of speaking the Word (Gospel) and helping him. Such a spark needs to be described in

detail as it marks the beginning of the religious following and procession that is the second event being considered in this chapter under the anthropological lens.

The first public appearance of the speaking cross or “Cruz Parlante” with “El Iluminado” takes place at Bartolo’s store when Guadalupe gets four nails from the incredulous clerk to put it together. This scene unfolds before the eyes of Doña Eduvigis; she, along with Maria Carranza, becomes a witness to the Cruz Parlante and begins to spread the message of this effigy in the following dialogue:

– El pobre Guadalupe está cada día más loco. ¿Qué me había dicho, doña Eduvigis, en qué estábamos?

– Pues usted diga lo que quiera del Iluminado, señor Bartolo. Yo clarito oí a la Cruz Parlante. ¡Santa María Purísima!

Sale Eduvigis de la tienda persignándose repetidas veces. Bartolo maldice apenas le queda fuera de vista:

– ¡Con un demontre! ¡Esta mensa! Guadalupe finge la voz y aprieta lo más que se puede los labios, ¿y me sale con que es una Cruz Parlante?

Frente a él, María Elena Carranza dice muy pensativa:

– A mí usted me va a perdonar, don Bartolo, pero que conste: sí es la cruz lo que habla.

Eduvigis va de chismosa a contar a las persignadas que El Iluminado trae una Cruz Parlante. (123-124)

Word spreads to the church, which is the second stopping point for “El Iluminado.” He enters into the temple to submerge the object in the holy water fountain. This action, though understandable given the nature of the religiosity of the Mexican faithful, is mysterious to the narrator as it is unclear whether the volition comes from the new religious leader or from the cross. The priest of Matamoros, Father Vera, is shown as reacting towards the actions in an unexplained manner as he runs from the confessional to stop El Iluminado from dipping the dirty planks, now a cross, in the holy artifact. However, this interaction will only confirm the supernatural nature of the Cruz Parlante as Boullosa writes:

Con un tono que hiela los huesos, la Cruz Parlante habla –
“Clavado en una cruz y escarnecido” – y el coro de rezonas que sigue al Iluminado canturrea sus “grandes es Dios”, “bandito sea” y otras como ésas.

El padre Vera toma agua de la pila y bendice con larga plegaria la cruz. Las persignadas, ensartadas en la ristra de ruegapornosotros, se mantienen a dos pasos de ellos, no demasiado cerca, la Cruz Parlante les impone algo de miedo.

Inmediato corre la voz de que la Cruz Parlante se ha bañado de cuerpo entero en el agua de la pila (cosa que como sabemos no es verdad), y hay quien cree que ha adquirido poderes curativos. (124-125)

This benediction has a dual effect on the novel’s religious depiction. The Cruz Parlante becomes a sanctified object that could be reconciled with the orthodoxy of the religion.

At the same time, “El Iluminado” becomes officially anointed as a religious leader with direct access to the supernatural, meaning that he acquires the power and authority previously held by religious clergy. This holy man quickly acquires a large following that becomes devoted to the talking cross and will be led by Guadalupe into a pilgrimage to join Nepomuceno Cortina’s cause. In this endeavor this religious cult will reunite believers in the holy object as well as people who want to break with the status quo in Bruneville. The nature of the procession will remain nevertheless religious as described by Boullosa when she refers to the initial moments of religious following of the cross by stating: “la cola que los creyentes y los muertos de hambre han formado para persignarse con el agua bendita donde se remojó la cruz parlante (y milagrosa) llega hasta el edificio del Ayuntamiento” (129). This mixed group of believers and bystanders had grown to a number so large that it crosses the plaza and would get even bigger once “El Iluminado” called into action to begin his procession to the Laguna del Diablo.

The event of the procession to join Nepomuceno effectively begins on the eve of a solar storm that covered North America in 1859. This historical event came to be known as the Carrington Event as Boullosa narrates:

El Iluminado ignora el término científico, le pone “La llamada.”
Sube al campanario de la iglesia principal y toca a rebato. Baja por su cruz – que ha dejado remojando en la pila baptismal (ya nadie se lo objeta) –, y en el centro del atrio convoca a viva voz, “vamos con Nepomuceno, ¡Viva la Guadalupana!. ¡que mueran los gringos!”

Felipillo holandés se orina en los calzones. Laura su vecina, exaltada, instiga a la abuela a salir a ver qué está pasando “!los campanazos, abuelita!”

El mismo día, la procesión del iluminado parte hacia Laguna del Diablo. Van cantando. Los más, llevan estandartes de la Virgen. Suman más de un ciento. Marchan algunos que o parecen tener nada que ver con su corte. Se diría, si uno mira con atención, que usan a las rezonas y al Iluminado como una máscara. ¿Qué hace ahí Blas, el hombre de Urrutia, el amigo del alcalde malito que tiene Bruneville? También va el comanchero (¿qué hace aquí?) y algunos que tienen fama de bandidos, mexicanos todos. Se diría que los pillos buscadores de ganancia rápida ya encontraron caminito. Cierra la procesión el padre Vera (por no quedarse atrás).

No traen ninguna prisa. Cada rato se detienen a rezar, a cantar, a quien sabe cuanta cosa (incluyendo desmanes, los forajidos son los más movidos, saquean parejo), como traen tanto viejo e inútil se cansan al luego luego – entre éstos, la abuela de Laura, la ha jalado a esta “tontería” su niña –. Además están las voces que le hablan al Iluminado. Si comienzan, hay que parar. Caminan minutos, se detienen otros largos. (262-263)

As this excerpt reveals, the initial tone of the religious following remains. “El Iluminado” has visions and hears voices from different saints in addition to the Virgin

and the Cross, and makes countless stops on the way to the lagoon which involved consistent prayers. Also, the mixture of people in the religious cult has increased as some of the bystanders see useful opportunities in the movement. These are “creyentes, rezonas, malhechores, pegadizos y oportunistas algunos convencidos de que emprenden guerra religiosa contra los protestantes y salvajes” (277-78). This pilgrimage causes fear, awe, excitement and cynicism in the community, and some are taken into the procession against their will. This is the case of Laura’s Grandmother, who ultimately dies on her way to the meeting place. Her death shows, however, that the institutionalized sacraments are carried out in this movement because the priest is among those attending. However, the popular flavor of the movement remains even in this institutionalized religious practice because, far from being solemn, “el entierro en despoblado es como una fiesta, cantos, juramentos, se gritan consignas nepomucenistas” (269). Clearly, this is not a very orthodox funeral.

With the rise of this religious procession, Boullosa shows the popular nature of the Catholic faith found in the frontier while she also brings into discussion a certain predisposition to believe in the involvement of the sacred and supernatural in the running of Mexican lives. This deep spirituality rooted in the belief in the supernatural is, often times, the base upon which Mexican Catholics are criticized by secular, protestant, and even American Catholic sources alike. Yet it paints a deep level of the religious experience. “El Iluminado’s” belief in the power of intercession of the Virgin, the saints, and the sanctity of the cross are, after all, part of the core of Roman Catholicism regardless of the circumstances under which they are depicted. These veneration in fact

are shared across Catholic nations as they belong to the common creed of Roman Catholicism as well. One only needs to travel to regions of Spain or Italy to find communities where, year after year, processions and devotions bring together numbers of individuals very similar to the ones depicted by Carmen Boullosa.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, the emphasis that is given in the novel to the importance of this particular incarnation of the cross, in addition to the depiction of the priests and the group of women involved in the religious life, gives this representation a much more Mexican and popular flavor; one that incidentally coincides with the historical record explored in the first chapter. As a result, Boullosa presents a local version of Catholicism that can be traced as readers disentangle the cultural layers depicted by the narrator. To be more precise, the tension between the institutional, family, and local body of the church is reflected in the procession that begins in the footsteps of the church building in Matasanchez.¹²¹

This chapter will discuss now a third event in Boullosa's novel in order to analyze the rejection of the Americanization discourse and its project as it pertains to religion. This project is depicted in *Texas* (2013) through the efforts of the White Anglo interest groups called the "Reds," who are continuously shown attacking and often killing Mexicans in the novel (75). In order to understand the layer of Mexican

¹²⁰ To give one example that I am personally familiar, every year thousands of Catholics in Northern Italy congregate at the Isola Barbara in commemoration of a miracle that took place in xiii century. The island of Grado and their inhabitants were spared from the Plague despite being a few miles away from the city of Aquilea, an important economic and political center at the time. Some families have made the pilgrimage year after year for generations, and miracles are still being attributed to the intercession of the Virgin. For another depiction of this kind of devotion as well as a theological explanation of the role of Mary in Roman Catholicism see, Baron *Catholicism* (2011) "Episode 4- Our Tainted Nature's Solitary Boast: Mary, The Mother of God."

¹²¹ This building would be located in the current site of Nuestra Señora del Refugio, which is the Cathedral of Matamoros.

religiosity contained in this moment of Boullosa's narrative it is necessary to pay attention to the persona of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina. The multiple intertextual depictions of this character creates a picture that frames the interacting discourses contained within the novel and shows the consequences of a detached religious leadership personified by Fr. Rigoberto.

3.8 The Raid of Brownsville

The third event that brings into consideration the religious information depicted in *Texas* (2013) is the raid of Bruneville, an event that takes place six weeks after the initial encounter between Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and Sheriff Shears. This historical episode is explained by Boullosa's narrator as a logical consequence of the injustices Mexicans have been undergoing in the Rio Grande Valley since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The diffusion of the news explained earlier in this chapter had ignited popular unrest and Cortina's men wanted to "asestar un golpe mortal, expulsarlos hasta el norte del Río Nueces, por lo menos regresar a su sitio verdadero la frontera Mexicana" (293). The armed encounter occurred despite the wishes of Cortina who is depicted as wanting, in a more strategic manner, to achieve real justice against the men responsible not only for the transgressions against him, but also for the theft of his ancestral lands.

Nepomuceno Cortina shows this as he explains the plan of attack to his commanders:

“No haremos más violencia de la necesaria para hacerles respetar a La Raza. Los que permanecen en el campamento son la punta de la fuerza que entrará a Bruneville. Iremos con cautela para volver la nuestra una causa de *verdadera* justicia. Vamos contra los directos responsables, los que nos ofendieron. Tres golpes, yo encabezo el primero – ignoremos por el momento la trampa que les hemos tendido, no es cosa nuestra – el segundo, el lugarteniente Salustio; el tercero, Juan Caballo, jefe mascogo (seminola, para los americanos) (que es más negro que tres noches sin luna). Esta es la orden que doy, y debe respetarse a pie juntillas: capturar a los directos responsables, a saber: Glevack (antes que nadie); el carpinterillo y dizque sheriff Shears, Juez Gold (que es un corrupto), mister Chaste, alcalde y boticario (por traidor). Sólo esos cuatro. (293-94)

By choosing these four men, Cortina believed that he would reconcile the transgressions Mexican people had received by the “Reds and Blues,” the two political parties that had taken control of the region. He even goes to the extent of writing a proclamation in which he submits himself to the authority of the state governor by pleading to him for the justice he will take into his own hands.¹²² The raid occurs at night and the plan is carried out following Cortina’s thought of “ésta no es noche para lágrimas mexicanas” which he tells to Lupis, Werbenski’s wife (303). Nepomuceno proceeds then to the center of the plaza and begins to read out loud his proclamation. Finding no resistance,

¹²² A transcription of this proclamation can be found in PBS Online’s “Archives of the west 1856-1868: Documents on the Brownsville Uprising of Juan Cortina.” See, <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/four/cortinas.htm>>.

he then sends his men to carry out his revenge. Events fail to go according to plan, however, and the Mexican outlaw is forced to retreat back to the lagoon after enemy forces capture his wife and daughter.

This failure is only exacerbated by tragedies that take place when Cortina's men try to carry out their respective assassinations orders. Caroline Smith and Rayo de Luna, an Asinai Indian, are accidentally shot and killed as the result of the cowardice of the marked men (310-311). These accidental deaths are blamed on Nepomuceno Cortina's men by the real culprits and justice is swiftly taken against Lazaro Rueda in the public square a few days after the raid. The old cowboy was captured and beaten up when he tried to take control of the jail following Cortina's orders (315). Now that the event has been delineated and explained, it is possible to interpret its violence, which is historically rooted as Fr. Parisot mentioned in his reminiscences.

The depiction and reactions that Nepomuceno generates within the novel are well summarized when Boullosa calls him "the Robin Hood of the border" (359). This nickname is given to him because Cortina was an individual who faced persecution and the loss of land while gathering enough followers and popularity to transcend into popular lore. Despite initially intending to work with the new status quo brought by the annexation of Texas, he came to be regarded as the hero of the Raza. Nepomuceno became well known in the two shores of the river as he gathered the attention of journalists from other states. One of them, Dan Press, even embarked on a journey from New York that took him to the site of the Laguna del Diablo, where he tried to interview the Mexican outlaw and witness the movement (252-253). As a consequence of this

attention, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's character gathered a multidimensionality that complicates his ideological designation as well as his classification within any of the religious traditions found in the Rio Grande Valley. This problematic classification is exacerbated because every group depicted in the novel claims to know the truth about this particular figure. Nonetheless, his choices, in both personal relationships and military decisions, show a Roman Catholic dimension. It is worth to make the observation that, under the perspective of the New Evangelization, Cortina's active church participation or lack thereof does not preclude him from being an important member of the body.¹²³ Therefore, it is necessary to look at Juan Nepomuceno's Catholicism and consider his actions under the proposed lens to arrive to some final conclusions about the representation of religion in Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013).

Under the anthropological lens, it is possible to appreciate Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and his follower's ongoing struggle in keeping the teaching of the Catholic Church. Though the action of war Cortina undertakes may be justified, the Mexican Outlaw has to deal with the pillaging and murders that result from his revolt. In a similar way, the sanctity of marriage, the sacraments, and the doctrines of mercy and

¹²³ As it was mentioned in the first chapter, this is due to the overwhelming emphasis this new discourse gives to ecumenism and its open call to the spread of the Gospel. This is an approach that, as it was explained in the first chapter, seeks to avoid chastising the members of the body when falling short. Instead it emphasizes the importance of seeking opportunities of conversion and reconciliation of all its members. Though more can be said about this new evangelization approach, Bishop Robert Barron's ministry "Word on Fire" may once again be the most concrete example of this new point of view. His use of popular media as a source of outreach and education for Catholics serves as a source for exchange and discussion of ideas in the modern world and culture that maintains the openness to embrace any willing to return to the Church. This is in fact the case with *Catholicism: The New Evangelization* (2011) because this documentary can be read as an open call to all for unity and reconciliation. This video series explains and exposes basic theology while it emphasizes the diversity of stories that are inherent in the Catholic experience.

reconciliation seem to be at odds with the popular struggle that he leads as well as with his romantic relationships. He is shown to have an affinity for his wife, even a preference or love, while having multiple affairs. He also seeks justice with his revolt but in the process innocent lives are lost. Clearly, he is neither just nor chaste. Such a contradiction in his character suggests that Boulosa re-creates with Cortina's depiction the reality of a male member of the body of Catholic Church of the time. This is a man who sins, falls, struggles and seeks to come into terms with the multiple discourses that are at odds in the world in which he lives. These discourses include racism, of course, and also include competing religious theologies and philosophies diffused into the area. Juan Nepomuceno Cortina also fights for his family and his livelihood while dealing with the male-centered discourses that led him to be self-centered and oblivious to his wife or daughter's reality. In addition, he sees atrocities at the hands of the Comanche, the Anglos, the thieves, and even among the Mexicans. He sees friends and foes alike engaged in a never-ending struggle for power and dominance where injustice has the winning hand. As a result, he is unable to fully sympathize with the Church or with other members of his faith though he remains a part of the body.

3.9 A Historiographic Comparison of Boulosa's *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013)

As it has been observed in this chapter, the diffusion of the message of Cortina's encounter with the Sheriff, the rise of the cult to the Cruz Parlante, and the raid of Bruneville, provide a much more popular depiction of Catholic Church than those seen

in traditional historiographies such as Carlos E. Castañeda's seven volume work *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas* (1936-1958). This is especially true in Castañeda's final volume which encompasses the second half of the XIX century but concentrates on the establishment of modern dioceses, their financial structure and activities, and the importance of lay organizations such as the Knights of Columbus.¹²⁴ However, Boullosa's NHN creates a depiction of the Rio Grande Valley that allows for what can be considered an ethnographic reading. Given this nature, it is possible to discern in the novel specific points of overlap within the cultural and historiographical record studied in the first chapter of this dissertation. Under the context of Fr. Parisot's memoirs that take place in both sides of the border between 1859 and 1866, these characteristics were explained as the rise of heresies, and the prevalence of violence and injustice. These points of contact need to be explained further under the vantage point provided by Boullosa's NHN because they serve a role in explaining links that could unify the overarching religious experience of the Rio Grande Valley.

The first element of the Rio Grande culture addressed in Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) is the rise of the cult to the talking cross. It was argued in the first chapter that the development of such a following was characteristic of the Rio Grande Valley environment in the 1860s as it followed the natural cultural order or diffusion of religions. As new immigrants would arrive into the Texas frontier, they would bring with them new cultural artifacts among which religions could be included. These new

¹²⁴ The Knights of Columbus is a semi-secret fraternal insurance society founded in New Haven, Connecticut in 1884. Castañeda devotes 1 chapter of his final volume to the activities of this lay organization. See, 422-454.

ideologies would compete with beliefs established by the original mission systems; some would be recontextualized and adopted while others would fade away. This historical and cultural fact is present in the historical record with the person of *Tatita* who was accounted for in the first Chapter. Boullosa's account of the Rio Grande Valley presents a similar situation in the sense that a religious following is also created. In this case however, the Mexican author differentiates from the discursive nature of historical writing by not passing judgment on the theological accuracy of "El Iluminado's" religious group. Far from being a repetition of Fr. Parisot's account, Boullosa's narrator gives the rising religious leader the benefit of the doubt with regards to his mental sanity and the source of the supernatural inspiration. This strategy can be understood under two perspectives. On the one hand the presence of magic realism in a novel is a common feature of Latin American writing since the 60s and has continued to be featured in the NHN. On the other hand, this election can also be understood by the nature of the religious experience depicted. The Roman Catholic Church is filled with stories of transformative visions or apparitions since the very beginning of its history such as the vision Paul the apostle had when he sees Jesus on his way to Damascus (*The New American Bible*, Acts. 9:1-9). This trend is also appreciated in the history of Mexican Catholicism with the spread of the belief of the Virgin of Guadalupe since her original appearance to Juan Diego.¹²⁵ As Jeanette Rodriguez explains in her book *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, the apparition of Guadalupe and the development of devotion to the dark

¹²⁵ For a more in depth explanation of the spread of this belief See, Matovina *Guadalupe and her faithful* 1-23.

skin Virgin became the foundation for Mexican Christianity and the link for two different traditions – The Spanish and the Indigenous Cultures (45). Spaniards were able to connect her to the old traditions and fiestas that would take place in the peninsula and for Mexicans she came to be symbol of a new kind of Catholicism that was local in nature. Regardless of these differences, the cultural mechanisms of diffusion and recontextualization described in the first chapter can be observed in the context of the events depicted by Boullosa.

First of all, the diffusion of the belief is evident as the knowledge of the existence of the “Cruz Parlante” is shared orally across the Rio Grande Valley. Though it first spreads in the Mexican side, it is possible to assume it becomes widely known in the northern territories given the fluidity of the border. The recontextualizing mechanism is present as well in Boullosa’s narrative because the message is mediated, debated, and altered as it spreads throughout the country. This can be specifically observed when the narrator/historian negates the rumor that the cross was fully submerged in the baptismal fountain (125). The message is adapted and transformed as it reaches other voices and it becomes internalized in the imagination of the new believers. This eventually causes the transformation of the religious beliefs in the Mexican side of the river and the priest has no other option but to adapt (262). Although the shift away from the institutional center of the faith does not necessarily represent a heresy, it is worth to consider some of the

implications of the popular religious movement that arises in Boullosa's before turning to the study of violence and injustice.¹²⁶

The first aspect that needs to be considered is the implication of a shift with regards to who holds the truth, power and religious authority in the novel. Given the continuous change in the priest with regards to his reactions to the cross, it is possible to infer that a shift in authority took place during the revolt. The Church is losing its influence over the people to the benefit of a new prophet who has "direct contact" with the supernatural. At the same time, the center of the Catholic religious faith appears to begin moving away from the Sacrament of the Eucharist to the effigy of the cross and the gospel that it preaches. This development is very interesting given the contact and influence of protestant religions or theology as many consider the Eucharist merely as a symbolic institution.¹²⁷ However, mainstream protestant theology would also caution against the worship or veneration of tangible figurines such as "El Iluminado's" Talking Cross. Considering the previous observation, it is possible to infer that the following that arises effectively represents a break with the institutional-centered tradition of the Roman Catholic Church to the benefit of popular form of piety. As a result of this shift, the new tradition can become a heresy if the two priests continue to fail to provide the leadership their communities need and if the teachings of "El Iluminado" systematically contradict Catholic Theology, exactly as *Tatita* did in Fr. Parisot's account.

¹²⁶ The definition of heresy can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and it states that: "Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same." See, 2089.

¹²⁷ Though Phillip Jenkins does not attempt to give an in depth theological explanation of the theological debate that surrounds the Eucharist belief, he does provide a good summary of this Catholic Doctrine. See, *The New Anti-Catholicism* 55-57.

The last characteristic in Boullosa's novel to be addressed with regards with the historiographical context is that of violence and injustice. Though it has been addressed to a certain degree with the analysis of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's persona, it is necessary to note that Boullosa's depiction of this regard is very accurate regardless of the anachronism and historical inconsistencies characteristic of the NHN. This consistency may be due to the ethnographic nature of the novel as the multiplicity of voices and the experimental references point to a constant struggle emerging through the confrontation of official and alternative historical sources. Some of these examples are already mentioned in the work of Carlos E. Castañeda who documented the rise and fall of missions and settlements due to external pressures such as raids from the Comanche. Parisot's account and secondary sources such as Doyon's analysis of the Oblate correspondence also attest to this reality. The Rio Grande Valley in the 1860's presented a challenge (both in the human and in the religious sense) for all of the inhabitants, as those who possessed political or social power could transgress the rule of law. Whether it was Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, or any of the "Reds" or "Blues" in the area committing the violence, the reality of the daily lives of people in the border was filled with uncertainty as theft and violence was the law of the land. As this chapter comes to an end, it is necessary to mention that although the theft and violence in the Valley eventually ended with the advent of the twentieth century and the modernization of the United States, the sense of uncertainty has remained for Mexican-American citizens. As it was pointed out in this dissertation, the Rio Grande Valley retained its status as a bridge between discourses and cultures while the original inhabitants have been

marginalized at different points in the recent past. The discursive pressures and tensions experienced by Mexican-Americans will be an important subject to address in the final chapter of this dissertation which analyses the work of Rolando Hinojosa.

3.10 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) falls within the tradition of the New Latin-American Historical Novel and the mission of recuperating discourses that fall outside of historical records. This link between history and literature is transcended, however, to incorporate the anthropological project of the ethnographic novel. That is, the creation of a narrative that is anchored in the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, observed via the ethnographic depiction of the towns of Matamoros and Brownsville, along with the intertextuality and historical revisionism of Nepomuceno's story and proclamations. Such a connection to these genres is appreciated in regards to Catholicism, as Boullosa provides a clear break with the institution-oriented approaches followed by historians. By means of an anthropological analysis, this chapter has demonstrated the unequivocal presence of a Catholic heritage found in Boullosa's novel. This is a much more popular version of Catholicism that contrasts with the institutional-centered descriptions of the Roman Church of historiography in general as seen in *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas* (1936-1958). Far from being clergy centered, the faith of the Rio Grande valley is delineated by Boullosa as a multi-layered puzzle fashioned by the experiences, attitudes, and struggles of Church members. Consequently, a fuller picture of the religion in the Rio Grande Valley is presented that gives depth to the more

traditional historiographical works and fulfills what Castañeda began with his last volume. Through the Mexican writer's portrayal of the diffusion of Cortina's encounter with the sheriff, the popular devotion, and the raid of Brownsville, the Catholic heritage in Boullosa's narrative transcends the history of an institution and becomes a living faith.

4. A NEW KIND OF ETHNOGRAPHY: FAITH JOURNEY IN HINOJOSA'S
GENERACIONES Y SEMBLANZAS (1977), *CLAROS VARONES DE BELKEN* (1986),
AND *BECKY AND HER FRIENDS* (1990)*

“Sí; verdaderamente, todo depende del Señor.”

– Esteban Echevarría
Claros Varones de Belken (1986: 223).

As it has been stated in this work, some of the Latin-American traditions most commonly explored by anthropologists are those linked to the Catholic faith. The respect or honor conveyed in the practice of faiths often transforms communities as these rituals diffuse over generations despite any social or political pressures. This reality makes the subject of religion a rich field to explore through new theoretical approaches applied with the reading and writing of narratives. In this dissertation one such approach has been explored with the study of Carmen Boullosa's *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013) as the NHN was scrutinized under an ethnographic lens to gain an understanding about the religious experience of the Rio Grande Valley during the XIX century. This time period had remained somewhat obscure despite the considerable efforts of historians such as Carlos E. Castañeda, Timothy Matovina, and Robert E.

*Part of the discussions and analysis of the novels *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986) contained in this chapter is taken with permission from “Revitalización y transculturación: El camino de la fe de Jehú Malacara en *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) y *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986).” By Hector Weir, 2017. *Hispania*, 100.1 (Forthcoming). Copyright [2016] by The American Association of the Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.

Wright in creating and updating religious scholarship. However, it is necessary to further elaborate on the anthropological approach to the study of literature by applying it to the narrative of Rolando Hinojosa. His *Klail City Death Trip Series* (KCDTS) is a 15 volumes series that has been considered a chronicle for the culture and experience of the Rio Grande Valley.^{128 129} In order to accomplish the task, this final chapter studies the depiction of Catholicism in the fragmentary novels *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990).¹³⁰ This analysis will be done by studying the religious transformation of Jehú Malacara, depicted in the first two fragmentary novels, and the reactions that a divorce generates in the Rio Grande Valley community found in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990). The discussion will also attempt to propose *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) as an archetype for a new kind of ethnographic genre that may allow anthropologist to avoid some of the classical difficulties found in participant observation. Such reading is supported by an

¹²⁸ *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) are all novels that form part of the chronicle project of Rolando Hinojosa that has been titled *Klail City Death Trip Series*. This project shares, according to David Arbesú, a historiographic vocation that can be traced to the tradition of the Chronicle due to a link that his novels share with the homonyms of *Generaciones y semblanzas* (1450) by Fernán Pérez de Guzmán and *Claros varones de Castilla* (1486) by Hernando de Pulgar. This quality allows for the analysis of individual characters as well as the contextualization of chronic which includes works of many genres such as Latin-American costumbrism in *Estampas del valle y otras obras* (1973), epistolary novel with *Mi querido Rafa* (1981), short novel with *Korean Love Songs* (1978), novella with *Rites and Witnesses* (1982), journalistic novel in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990), and diaries with *The Useless Servants* (1993). See, Arbesú “Cronicones de frontera” 2-4.

¹²⁹ It is worth to mention that both Hinojosa and Boullosa’s borderland narratives have been recently linked together. In 2015 Nicolas Kanellos held an interview with the two writers in which they reflected upon the points of contact between their writings about the Texas-Mexico experience. See, “Texas and Mexico in New York” 200-206.

¹³⁰ According to Rolando Hinojosa, his *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) was initially published under the name *Klail City y sus alrededores* with which he won the Casa las Américas price in 1976. This title has changed in the many editions as it is explained in the critical re-edition *El condado de Belken: Klail city* (1994). This dissertation uses the first bilingual edition which was published by Justa in 1977 at Berkeley and translated by Rosaura Sánchez as a reference. See, *El condado de Belken: Klail City* 24.

examination of the reactions and attitudes found in the novel that are directed at the Catholic Church and towards the Sacrament of Marriage as a consequence of its rejection by Becky. A character known as “Listener” collects these accounts in the novel and he can be defined as the anthropologist in Rolando Hinojosa’s book.

The analysis of Becky’s transgression gives insights into changes in the religiosity of the Rio Grande Valley and provides a link that connects the overarching Catholic experience delineated thus far in the previous chapters. Taking this into account, it is possible to turn the initial focus of the present chapter to the discussion of the revitalization of Catholicism as a mechanism of the Valley’s transculturation, which will be the framework under which the religious experience will be analyzed in Rolando Hinojosa’s narrative. The next few sections will address the portrayal of one of Rolando Hinojosa’s main character’s religious transformations in KCDTS.¹³¹ This character, Jehú Malacara, undergoes a coming of age experience that will see him reject the traditional faith of the Rio Grande Valley for that of a Protestant pastor; such choice will be read as coinciding with the long-held perception of the transformation of the Borderlands in terms of faith. The concept of transculturation found in Fernando Ortiz’ *Cuban Counterpoint of Tabaco and Sugar* (1949), which is also known as “acculturation,” has been refined here to account for the dynamic nature of the mechanisms of culture that

¹³¹ As seen in the latest criticism of Rolando Hinojosa’s work Hinojosa and his critics refer to his works collectively as the *Klail City Death Trip Series*. However, his 15 volume creation does not have a traditional sequence for publication that could be found in a title listing in library catalogs, online or otherwise. As a result, this dissertation will refer to the Hinojosa’s series with the common title *Klail City Death Trip* and will abbreviate it to KCDT. See, Miller and Villalobos ix. See also, Glover Lee 24.

can be seen in the incarnation of the Rio Grande Valley (Weir 1).¹³² This theoretical frame ultimately provides tools to contextualize the Catholic experience in the Rio Grande Valley with pro and anti-Catholic attitudes found in Hinojosa's narratives. It will also account for the discursive pressures diffused into the region by immigration and the project of Americanization.

4.1 Recontextualization and Revitalization as Mechanisms of Transculturation

The definition of the concept "transculturation" and its mechanisms originate from anthropologists Fernando Ortiz and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's work on "acculturation." Although they differed in their approaches to the subject, both understood this process as a set of dynamic reactions that takes place during and after contact between cultures. Ortiz abandons the use of the word "acculturation" in his book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) for the neologism "transculturation." He argued that the latter word needed to be replaced by a term that could represent the bilateral nature of the cultural transformation that takes place during and after contact between cultures. "Acculturation" could not summarize the acquisition and transmission of information and implied an imposition or conquest of sort by a dominant culture (9). In a similar manner, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán collaborated to the anthropological discussion by describing different instances and reactions that can take place after contact. The Mexican anthropologist would emphasize throughout his book *El proceso de*

¹³² A thorough discussion can be found in my article "Recontextualization as a Mechanism for Acculturation: Protestant and Native Interactions in Chan Kom and Amatlán." See, 1-3.

aculturación y el cambio socio-cultural en México (1957) the necessity of understanding the context under which the definition was created in order to fill any existing hole in the definition (11-15). However, these seminal works concentrated in the reconfiguration of the descriptive term without describing the mechanisms that run the change of culture.

This lapse in the theoretical discussion has remained constant in academic circles despite continuous scholarly work on the subject of acculturation as Javier Valiente Nuñez' recent publication shows. In his "La transculturación religiosa de Cabeza de Vaca, la senda secreta del chamán y el surgimiento de una teología de la liberación indígena en *El largo atardecer del caminante*" (2012), Nuñez traces the continuity of the term from its origin in Ortiz' work while maintaining its descriptive character. His review includes references to the period of redefinition and revision that the concept underwent during the seventies, eighties, and nineties with the work of Angel Rama, Silvia Spitta, and Antonio Cornejo Polar, among others (62). In other words, Nuñez does not mention the existence of any mechanisms that need to interact in order for such a process to be effective. Though this oversight does not discredit his analysis or the works that have been produced since the origin of this concept, it suggests a need of re-examining the process in order to establish and mechanisms that run it.¹³³ One of these mechanisms is the already mentioned "recontextualization" that can be defined as the redefinition of conceptual symbols or ideas at the moment in which two systems of belief come into contact. Such mechanisms can be interpreted as the product of a

¹³³ Javier Valiente Nuñez writes a good summary of the intellectual discussion about this process. See, *La transculturación religiosa* 62-63.

dialogue between perspectives or multiple cultural elements (Weir 2).¹³⁴ Keeping this re-definition of “transculturation” in mind, “revitalization” can be defined as the recovery, transformation, and re-introduction of elements innate to an original culture after these have been rejected as a consequence of the recontextualizing mechanism. This resurgence can act in synchrony with the already mentioned cultural dialogue and becomes present regardless of the duration of contact between cultures. Furthermore, it can be triggered by pressures such as Americanization or be purposefully activated, in theory, by a culture if need arises.

4.2 The Historical Context for the Americanization of Hinojosa’s Rio Grande Valley

Starting from the framework of the mechanisms of transculturation, it is possible to contextualize the religious experience of the Rio Grande Valley with the effects Americanization and immigration in the United States at large. In many cases, these two pressures have laid down the foundations for the development of the nation and conditioned the immigrant experience. One only needs to look over a high school roster, or to drive through a small US population such as the German town of Muenster, Texas, to see how the social and political assimilations of immigrants have left a mark on American life. Nonetheless, the colonization process and historical influx of immigrants into this nation differ considerably with regards to the origin of Hispanic populations in

¹³⁴ For more information of the definition and description of transculturation under this light refer to Weir, Hector “Recontextualization as a Mechanism for Acculturation: Protestant and Native Interactions in Chan Kom and Amatlán.” *HISPANET 4* (2011) 1-30. See also Ortiz, 93-97 and Aguirre Beltrán, 30-51.

Texas and their experiences as portrayed in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990).¹³⁵ The Rio Grande Valley of Rolando Hinojosa, in terms of its history, can be traced to the time before the Mexican Independence. This is a time in which, as the writer states, the river was not a jurisdictional barrier and would not become one in more than one hundred years. The Valley had a tradition of its own that could trace its roots to the Spaniard and Mexican founders of the land originally known as the province of Nuevo Santander (“The Sense of Place” 19). Meaning, the Rio Grande Valley and its culture predates the transformative pressures of American Anglo culture and the American dream.

As a consequence of the contrasts in origins and dominance, the interactions between Anglo and Mexican traditions have caused different effects in Texas than those seen in the northeastern states of the US with European newcomers. Instead of experimenting an immediate transition to American culture, Mexicans from the Rio Grande Valley begun to lose their already established subsistence methods, family lands, and, political power.¹³⁶ The effects of this pressure can be observed in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986) and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990). The social and economic strength of Mexicans virtually disappeared during the

¹³⁵ Roberto R. Treviño mentions for instance that Mexican immigration was not accompanied by a large-scale transplantation of their clergy and religious structures and resources. They thus lacked the kind of support that most Europeans used to soften incorporation into a new society. He also affirms that Cuban immigrants, in contrast, brought with them many clergy, and they transplanted a number of important religious schools and other organization to Miami in their post-1959 migration, much like European Immigrants had done. See, *The Church In the Barrio* 16.

¹³⁶ Albert Camarillo’s *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (1979) is the classical work for the study of the progressive socio-historical changes that take places as a consequence of assimilation policies in the US. These effects include the barriozation, the political weakening, the loss of lands and the proletarianization of Mexican-Americans. See, 100-101.

generation of the 1920s and was not fully recuperated despite of the success of the next generation represented by Rafa Buenrostro and Jehú Malacara, cousins who attend the University of Texas. In the case of these two protagonists of Hinojosa's KCDTS, they are unable to maintain the use or possession of their family lands and they seem to assimilate socially and economically to the dominant culture. This is first seen with their enlistment in the military forces to fight in the Korean War, and, later, by their abandonment of the possibility of returning to a rural life through their professionalization at the University of Texas. A change that, even though is well received by the Mexican American generation, it suggests ambivalence towards the Mexican heritage and especially towards the arrival of new immigrants from Mexico. The cousin's attitude agrees with the observation David G. Gutierrez makes in *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (1995).

Gutierrez explains that mixed opinions arose regarding Mexican immigrants and the general maintenance of their culture. Starting from the late 1920s and during the Great Depression, many reached the conclusion that the interest of America and its citizens needed to take precedence over those of immigrants. As a consequence, conditions towards assimilation into mainstream culture improved thereby creating internal conflict within this ethnic enclave (70-71). This social historical detail is important given the tension between the Mexican culture and the American assimilation discourse, represented by Jehú and Rafa's apathy towards their countrymen. One example of this attitude is seen during a visit the cousins pay to a Mexican family from the Rio Grande Valley while they are freshmen students at the University of Texas. Rafa

narrates the experience in *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986): “Israel me había contado que Aarón y otros del Valle las recomendaban como buenas gentes. La pasamos bien y se portaron de lo mejor. Lo malo era que el tufo a casorio era bastante fuerte. No volvimos” (28). The latter, implied a rejection to Mexican culture and the Catholic sacramental tradition that would tie them permanently to their native land. At the same time, neither cousin show interest in keeping in touch with the region nor returning; they, in fact, show a predilection for the non-Latin as the cousins are interested in “*Bolillas*” instead of the “*Mexicanas*” and Jehú’s classes have no relation to his Mexican identity.¹³⁷ He prefers courses such as geography of Japan or China, and classes on classical English literature instead of courses on the history of contemporary Mexico. Despite these reactions, the two relatives remain tied to the Rio Grande Valley and they even return, although they seem to have resigned themselves to the inevitability of Americanization and the end of their parents’ Catholic and Mexican culture. This specific change, which can be interpreted as the beginning of a new cycle, is represented in great measure by Jehú Malacara’s exposure to the two major religious traditions in Texas, Protestantism and Catholicism.¹³⁸ His life experiences will be the fulcrum for the discussion to follow in this chapter with regards to the presence of the mechanisms of transculturation and the portrayal of Catholicism. It will also provide the basis to understand the overall depiction of the Roman Catholic Experience as portrayed in the ethnographic novel *Becky and Her Friends* (1990).

¹³⁷ *Bolillas* are women of Anglo heritage of white complexion.

¹³⁸ Rolando Hinojosa situates the religious tradition of Tomas Imas near one of the smaller branches of the Protestant Faiths. For more information about Tomas Imas and Hinojosa’s reflection on his religious component on his work See, Interview Annexed.

4.3 Between Transculturation and Americanization: The Faith Journey of Jehú

Malacara

Throughout the course of his KCDTS Rolando Hinojosa recreates the oral reality of a changing region with the use of dialogues, interviews, letters, songs, and other literary forms. Known in the novel as Belken County, the area described by the writer includes various towns and cities that, according to the work of Rogelio Saenz, “Rolando Hinojosa’s *Klail City: Sociological and Demographic Reflections of a Hometown*” (2013), can be translated to those populations located in the Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy counties in south Texas. This is a region whose history can be traced back to the Spanish ranchers from the Nuevo Santander province, and that has experienced the same changes associated with Americanization. Starting with United States’ acquisition of Texas in 1845, the Spanish and Mexican heritage began to undergo a process of marginalization that was accompanied by the incorporation of cultural contributions by Anglos (198-201). Among these influences it is possible to include the different Protestant Missions and beliefs that came to the region with the intention of transforming Mexicans Catholics by helping them assimilate to the new dominant culture. This socio-cultural detail is very important because Rolando Hinojosa represents it through Jehú Malacara’s own experiences throughout the fifteen volumes of the series. The young Malacara abandons his duties as an altar server for Don Pedro Zamudio, the priest of Flora, to become the apprentice of Tomás Imás, a Protestant preacher. The episode is narrated specifically in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) and takes place four days

after the funeral and burial of two older gentlemen of the same community, Bruno Cano and Melitón Brunitas. It is worth mentioning that Jehú's defection of the Church reveals some of the tensions that existed between members of the parish and the old priest and would be a factor in Jehú's rejection of Catholicism.

Before the burial, two local brothers from Flora, the Carmonas, had enraged the priest through what Jehú explains were actions of *mala fe*. The siblings had tricked the priest into holding a public funeral even though he resisted the idea of burying Cano in holy ground.¹³⁹ They had initially convinced the prelate to hold a private service with them the same night of Cano's death. However, the two brothers spread the news across the town of the time and place of the burial and ultimately force the priest to celebrate the ritual regardless of his will. Jehú comments that this mischief would be a subject to be addressed in many sermons to follow due to the anger the brothers had generated on the clergyman. Jehú Malacara would witness the extent of his anger and the beginning of his writing as he was present at the burial and had carried the priest's garments as well as his Bible and candles to a home where they would dine. He narrates the instance as follows:

Por fin llegamos a la casa y a la cena. Chana, como si nada, tenía la mesa dispuesta y anunció que todo estaba listo. La muy o larga se hacía zonza pero yo la había devisado en el entierro y para que lo supiera le guiñé un ojo; ella (no pendeja) disimuló y fue a sentarse en el corredor.

¹³⁹ In *Estampas del Valle* (1976) this event and Don Pedro Zamudio's refusal for holding the funeral due to a drunken quarrel with the deceased are narrated in the form of a dialogue. See, 21-24.

Se me olvidó decir que don Pedro llevaba cerca de dos horas de no pronunciar palabra y así fue que la cena también fue en silencio. Cenó lo que se dice regular y, otra vez, sin hablar, se metió en su cuarto cerrando la puerta con un golpe todavía más fuerte de lo común. A eso de unos cuantos minutos don Pedro empezó a hablar y luego a alzar la voz, maldiciendo a la parroquia, al pueblo, al valle y, a cada momento, a los Carmona y al difunto Cano. Mientras trabajaba en el sermón, pues, iba poniendo a todo mundo de color de hormiga. (27)

Though the priest was fulfilling his pastoral duties by preparing a future homily that would address a current event of the town, he was demonstrating an uncharitable attitude unbecoming of a prelate. This attitude would create an insurmountable rift that led Jehú away from the Church four days later after meeting brother Imás. He was a Chicano-looking stranger who would greet the youth as he was on his way to fill the hole where Bruno Cano had perished. This first meeting involved a friendly conversation. The stranger would introduce himself as a brother preacher and openly embrace the child by inviting him to join in his ministry as the following exchange reveals:

Jovencito, yo pasar un otro día más aquí y después yo ir a Klail City. ¿Tú querer ser mi ayudante en el trabajo de abrir almas a la alabanza y el conocimiento del Santo Señor? ... No tener que responder ahora. Tú seguir tu trabajo y puedes me decir mañana viernes

No sé... pero a ver qué pasa entre hoy y mañana.

Bien. (31)

Though Jehú had not initially accepted to follow him, this interaction marked the young Malacara as it showed him a true example of pastoral charity and acceptance which would be remembered in the hours that followed. The priest had now become enraged with Jehú who had abandoned the task of filling the hole to go for a swim in the river. A girl had fallen and broken her leg due to Jehú's unfulfilled task, and instead of joining the Carmona brothers, as a recipient of the priest's anger, he chose to follow the preacher into Klail City to begin anew.

Taking all these circumstances into account, Jehú Malacara's initial rejection or abandonment of the Catholic Church can be interpreted as a moment of great importance within the historiographical context of the novel. This is because it clashes with Roberto R. Treviño's observations made in *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican-American Ethnecatholicism in Houston* (2006). In this book he explains that: "Mexican Texans held tenaciously to their own brand of Catholicism because it's suited their particular spiritual needs and help them with their social subordination" (24). Meaning that Jehú's abandonment implies a rejection to the strategies or unifying tendencies with which Mexicans could confront the influx of Anglos into the region. This act of ambivalence towards his Mexican identity will be repeated once more when Jehú Malacara abandons his role as a preacher and, as a result, his position as a leader in the Mexican community. Now that this brief introduction of the intersection of history and religion within Hinojosa's works have been established, it is possible to turn to the discussion of the portrayal of Catholicism as seen in Jehú Malacara's faith journey.

4.4 The Catholic Faith in Belken County

In the article “The Polifacetic Individualism of Rolando Hinojosa’s *Klail City Death Trip*” (2013), Mark McGraw makes the observation that Hinojosa’s narrative is filled with characters that demonstrate their individuality before the institutional pressures found in Belken County. One of them is the already mentioned Jehú, who personifies the individualistic attitude through his experiences with brother Imás and his total abandonment of organized religion narrated in the two novels under scrutiny (47-48). This rejection can be understood as a consequence of the pressures Mexicans needed to confront within the same church; as Treviño explains, the worship tradition of Mexican Catholics differed from the Catholicism practiced by other ethnical European groups in the United States because the European newcomers would bring with them their institution (16). Mexican Catholics, from their part, would follow their original traditions and were guided initially by French missionaries who were eventually replaced at the beginning of the XX century by Spanish priests of the same order (24).¹⁴⁰ Despite the best intentions of these priests, tensions came to exist between the clergy and lay communities as a consequence of their racial and cultural differences.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ For an example of the work of the Spanish Oblates and their historical ministry in the XX century refer to Secundino Valladares’ *Oblatos Españoles en Texas* (1969). This book features small biographies of the different Spanish members of the Oblates that were in South Texas along with pictures, testimonies, and poems related to the different parishes where they were stationed.

¹⁴¹ It is worthy of mention that before the Texas independence, there was a considerable presence of diocesan priests in the Southwest. This history is studied in Robert E. Wright’s “The Hispanic Church in Texas Under Spain and Mexico.” He explains that there is an apparent obsession with the alleged disappearance of the native missions in the lone-star state and with the related conclusion that their evangelizer influence did not leave a permanent mark. This notion is of importance as the Catholicism practiced by the people described in the novels would be the same that arrived to the region with the native missions. See, 16-29.

Rolando Hinojosa has explained that he witnessed in his teen years the arrogant attitudes Spanish prelates would display towards their Mexican flock. Such kind of attitudes and the separation that existed between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking parishes marked his perspective of the religion in the Rio Grande Valley and his portrayal of the prelates in his novels (“Always Writing” 67-68). Keeping these attitudes in mind, it is pertinent to recall the framework of Michael de Certeau’s ideas about the discursive creation of history mentioned in the first chapter and the role of the historian. Specifically important is his statement that a historian must become a reader who is able to “recognize today that the conflict between discourse and power hangs over historiography itself and at the same time remains an integral part of it” (“History: Science and Fiction” 215). In other words, the work of the historian is to contextualize reality within the discourses and to correct any polarizing effect that occurs within the field of history. In keeping with his ideals, the study of the history of Catholicism in the Texas-Mexico border contained within this chapter will need to uncover what lays behind the stories which dominant discourses attempt to institute as realities. Hinojosa engages in this discussion under the faculties of both a reader and historian by creating an alternative social history by means of his Rio Grande Valley chronicle that challenges the different interacting discourses of the region. This history takes into account the oral tradition of the Valley and implies that the participant observer is a member of the culture portrayed in the novel.¹⁴² Keeping in mind how Rolando Hinojosa participates in

¹⁴² This tradition includes the conversations that Hinojosa has carried with people of other generations such as his parents. This is something that Hinojosa shows when he mentions one of his mother’s sayings

these tenants, it is possible to turn the attention of this chapter to the analysis of clues found in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) and *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986) in order to reveal features of the Rio Grande Valley Catholic experience.

4.5 Hinojosa's Catholic Puzzle

The representation of Catholicism in the KCDTS can be found in the background of the many generational groups that live in Belken County. Through the fragments of conversations seen in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) and *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), it is possible to see how religion occupies a special place for Mexican-Americans. However, a simple reading of these *estampas* is insufficient for the task of understanding the various Catholic beliefs and practices found in the Rio Grande Valley. Rolando Hinojosa leaves too many voids to fill if the goal is to solve the puzzle of the Valley's Catholicism. In order to fill these voids, anyone interested in the study of religion in Hinojosa's narrative must observe the actions and comments of characters that echo those cultural artifacts, symbols, and mechanisms mentioned in the beginning of this dissertation. Then, it becomes possible to integrate the picture of the Catholic faith by means of an involved reading of the work. Put in a different way, it is necessary to approach the reconstruction of Mexican-American Catholicism of Rolando Hinojosa with an anthropological or ethnographical view in order to understand the pressures, attitudes, and obsessions that codify its portrayal in his works. This is the same approach

in relation to the information of the number of Texan and Mexican nuns who she knew. See, "Writing Always" 69.

that was proposed for the study of Carmen Boullosa in the previous chapter and involves interpreting the anthropological clues to re-construct the cultural experience portrayed in the novel.¹⁴³

The first clue that Rolando Hinojosa gives to discover the Rio Grande Valley Mexican-American Catholicism is the continuous presence of the sacraments. Marriages and funerals tinge the progression of the year as the history of the Valley unfolds in the different novels of the KCDTS as it has been demonstrated with the two examples of Bruno Cano's funeral and the rejection of the Sacrament of Marriage by Jehú and Rafa.¹⁴⁴ Both instances show an implicit meaning that can be understood as the exhaustion of the tradition which is followed by a rupture with convention as the two cousins prefer searching for the pleasures of Americanization instead of maintaining the models of old. This position would contrast with the importance that a group of the population of the Rio Grande Valley would give to the maintenance of the cohesion of the *raza* and of religious traditions. This continuity is seen as well with the participation

¹⁴³ This approach also shares an origin with David Carrasco's "A Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimensions in Chicano Experience: *Bless Me, Ultima* as a Religious Text." In his study over Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), this Chicano scholar notes the necessity of becoming religious historians in order to overcome theological or sociological approaches to the study of the Mexican and Chicano experiences. According to him, these studies were influenced by Judeo-Christian concepts and categories. His study proposes that religious experiences and their respective religions can be understood if we approach them as a) areas of scientific inquiry and b) in relation to the variety of human expressions that seem to be religious in nature. The goal of this approach does not assume a relationship with the supernatural but examines testimonies of those individuals whose lives have been affected or determined by manifestations that have a sacred nature or quality. In other words, the main goal of the scholar is to understand the individual without judging its beliefs through an anthropological study of the cultural artifact. In this chapter this approach centers on the cultural mechanisms that can be found in all religions and cultures that are in contact in order to maintain the scientific and human character that must be inherent in the study of religion. See, 199-200.

¹⁴⁴ See, *Claros Varones* 28.

of priests in the rites.¹⁴⁵ Though the presence of the clergy is expected in such events, their interaction with the attendees provides deeper layers of information about Catholicism. These dialogues expose attitudes that would be less revealing if shown outside of the sacramental context.

One example of this feature of Hinojosa's work can be appreciated in a dialogue that takes place during the baptism of Epigmenio Salazar's grandson in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977).¹⁴⁶ In this interaction Don Efrain, the celebrant priest, scolds Epigmenio about his predilection for German names. It also contextualizes a description that disentangles the multiplicity of religions and attitudes found in Hinojosa's Rio Grande Valley:

El Epigmenio fue marido fiel (a su manera, según él), padre de familia (de Yolanda, la esposa de Arturo Leyva, el contador, y hombre recto (cuando se lo permitía la hernia).

Todo esto, quizá lo colocaría su yerno al lado derecho, el haber. El hombre no trabajó un solo día desde su casamiento con doña Candelaria Munguía de Salazar. También fue sinvergüenzón, chismoso, y gorrón. Esto, sin duda, cabría en lado del débit. (77)

The narrator explains that Epigmenio is not a truly practicing Catholic, although he probably has been initiated into the Church by receiving the sacraments. He also

¹⁴⁵ Becky's divorce also falls within this category as it will be seen in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁴⁶ This dialogue and the description of El Epigmenio are narrated retrospectively by a witness of the funeral of the late Epigmenio Salazar.

explains that the man has earned a negative reputation within the community.¹⁴⁷ This description notwithstanding, Epigmenio's conversation with the priest and his subsequent reaction shows a rejection to the authority of the Church that, as it has been mentioned already, begins to be a common pattern in communities under the effects of Americanization. Nonetheless, the old man's actions show that a dialogue is taking place with regards to Catholic prescriptions or practices. The age-old tradition of Baptism under the Roman Rite is maintained due to the influence of his wife. She accepts the suggestions of the prelate and forces her husband to accept the baptism of his grandson under the name of Arturo despite his disapproval.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, the conversation reveals attitudes of intolerance and resentment directed towards people who do not conform to the Latin rite and possibly explains the priest's attitudes against Epigmenio. The prelate says: "¡Póngale nombre cristiano a la criatura! ¿qué es eso de nombres de herejes? (79). In other words, a latent resentment is present in Rio Grande Valley Catholic Church that is directed towards Protestants and, especially Lutherans.

The resentful attitude is also observed in a conversation Jehú has with a Protestant brother whose last name is Flores during Jehú's ministry of a Mexican Baptist Church. The episode is narrated by P. Galindo, a recurrent character of Hinojosa, in *Claros Varones* and shows the most Protestant image of Jehú in the work. At this point in Hinojosa's narrative Jehú Malacara had become an apologist for the reformation and completely breaks his relationship with the Catholic Church by embracing all the ideas

¹⁴⁷ It is important to mention that by being married under the eyes of the Church, it is possible to assume that both him and his wife completed all of the initiation rites of the Catholic Faith.

¹⁴⁸ Although they baptize their grandchild with the name Arturo, Epigmenio calls him Rommel, a German name. See, *Generaciones y Semblanzas* 79.

of Martin Luther rejected by the Catholic Church of the Valley, especially by its Priesthood. Regardless of Jehú's beliefs, the rejection to Luther's ideas can be found as well in Brother Flores' beliefs; although he can be identified as a Mexican Baptist, he chastises Jehú's selection of a song of the German Theologian for the closure of the service by saying: "¡Si Lutero es el Anticristo! ¿Cómo se pone usted a traerme ese himno? Ay, Hermano, si no lo conociera tan bien diría que usted andaba tomado... con mil perdones" (69). This indicates that, in fact, some Mexican Protestants show an affinity with Catholic beliefs as Flores confirms when he attacks Jehú's admiration of Luther saying: "Pero es que – y usted más que nadie lo sabe – es que Lutero destruyó la Santa Madre Iglesia, Hermano" (69). Though Jehú maintains his posture in the rest of the conversation, he decides to abandon his position as a preacher. From that moment forth, he will acquire an anti-institutional attitude though he could still be defined as a Christian. He will later marry a divorced Becky and is seen taking her children to Catholic religious education showing that the tension between beliefs, ideologies and ritual practices remain very much present regardless of the negative attitudes or pressures found in the Rio Grande Valley.

One last example that will be discussed about this topic brings into consideration Jehú's last interaction with brother Imás under the scope of the mechanism of transculturation. This event takes place after the Protestant missionary loses his leg due to a snake's bite. Jehú is left traumatized after he grabbed barehanded the serpent that caused Tomás Imás' ailment and is only able to heal when the Protestant preacher takes up the role of a priest and washes Jehú's hands. By the time Malacara sees the pastor, a

week had passed since the accident and several community members tried to apply home remedies to no avail. This scene is of importance for the discussion of the recontextualizing mechanism because it provides a representation of the hybridity of beliefs found in the Rio Grande Valley. Hinojosa's portrayal includes the absence of the priesthood in a traumatic life event, though there is a strong influence of Mexican-Catholicism in the form of piety displayed by people in this incident. Popular devotions included the already mentioned use of home remedies, prayer vigils, and even the actions of Protestants. Jehú is the affected individual and the brother fills the void that one of the priests should occupy in such an event. Such hybridity of beliefs provides the literary example of the process of acculturation that explains the space where a possible revitalization can present itself.

When the Protestant and Catholic traditions come into contact in the Rio Grande Valley, the different elements of their rituals begin to mix through the recontextualizing mechanism. The result of this contact has caused that the preacher understands the existence of an important role that needs to be occupied in such a situation. In the absence of a priest, Brother Imás adapts his prayer so that it can be used in a new context and revitalizes roles or traditions that are not inherent in the Protestant practice. It is important to reiterate that in this fragment of the novel, Catholic priests are not found because of the distrust they generate on other characters. In a traditional context however, it would not be out of the ordinary to see a priest making a visit and administering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to Jehú who has been initiated into the Church. However, the lack of tact that has been mentioned throughout this

chapter eliminates any possible participation for these men. As a result, Tomás Imás is elevated to the status of a saint by Doña Amalia, who was in charge of taking the convalescent to visit the preacher. This honor given to the Protestant minister demonstrates the empathy that he has gained in this society with his work over the years and reveals that new spaces are becoming available with regards to the faith life of the Rio Grande Valley. New strategies are needed in order to maintain or reconfigure Mexican Catholicism if this is to remain relevant in Belken County.

Even though it is difficult to extrapolate a concrete or satisfactory response about the presence of a revitalized Mexican-American Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley from Hinojosa's work, it is indeed possible to assert that the culture portrayed in *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) and *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986) possess all the necessary conditions to sustain the mechanism of recontextualization and revitalization. Rolando Hinojosa represents in these two novels a continuous dialogue between Mexican Catholic traditions and foreign pressures brought by newcomers with their customs. This feature of Hinojosa's work coincides with the definition of acculturation of Fernando Ortiz and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. The cultural counterpoint can be appreciated in the general historiography of the region where the influx of peoples and ideas are maintained despite the discursive pressures pointed out by Michael de Certeau's work. Far from assimilating or losing themselves culturally, Mexicans of the Rio Grande Valley have maintained themselves between the Mexican and American cultures in the never-ending debate between discourses. Consequently, a society that exemplifies the activity of a recontextualizing mechanism has emerged and suggests the

presence of a revitalization of the Catholicism as seen in Rolando Hinojosa's novels. The Roman Faith is a religion and lives and is nourished by the introduction, abandonment and resurgence of elements that originate from the contact of people such as Doña Amalia and Brother Tomas Imás. This dialogue or counterpoint will be the subject of discussion in the next few pages as the Catholic experience in Belken County is further explored in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) under the scope of the ethnographic novel.

4.6 *Becky and Her Friends* (1990): Towards a New Kind of Ethnography of the Rio Grande Valley

When it comes to the study of religious traditions in both their practices and transgressions, researchers find themselves at a standstill with regards to theoretical approaches. Etic and emic approximations to the study of cultures often fall short in exploring the magnitudes of changes in societies because there is an inherent difficulty in taking into account the myriad of interacting viewpoints found in any event. As it was explained in the previous chapter, this reality has transformed the social sciences and now it is possible to find approaches that expand the roles of local informants and researchers, therefore modifying the age old toolkits of participant observation. There has been a push towards the conception of new interdisciplinary approaches that allows academics to bring light into the experiences of subjects while keeping in mind the multiple lenses or discourses involved in any study. One of these approaches is the use of the polyphonic, heteroglossic, multi-genre construction of the ethnographic novel to

explore those areas of culture that traditional approaches fail to account. Much like Carmen Boullosa's *Texas: La Gran Ladronería en el Lejano Norte* (2013), Rolando Hinojosa's KCDTS also falls within the scope of these works. After all, it has been demonstrated that Rolando Hinojosa's narrative generates insights into the Catholic experience that can be scrutinized under an anthropological lens. This analysis however has focused up to now on the experiences of Jehú Malacara. As a result, it is necessary to expand the present analysis to include the study of a culturally significant event that will generate reactions that, when interpreted, reveal the multiple layers of Catholicism Rolando Hinojosa portrays in his novels. The writer's most anthropological novel *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) is a work that may allow readers to avoid some of the difficulties in participant observation while expanding the possibilities of the anthropological endeavor.

The designation of *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) as an ethnographic novel is supported by considering the heterogeneous reactions and attitudes of people that directed at the Catholic Church and towards the Sacrament of Marriage as a consequence of its rejection by Becky Escobar. The accounts and reactions are collected and explained throughout the novel by a character called Listener. He can be regarded as an anthropologist in Rolando Hinojosa's book because he conducts research and interviews while revealing the significance of the cultural developments that are taking place in the narratives. The analysis of Becky Escobar's transgression of the norm brings into discussion insights into the changes in the religiosity in the Borderlands that are yet to be accounted under the framework of the process of transculturation and its mechanisms as

seen in the literary incarnation of the Rio Grande Valley in Belken County. It is important to clarify a few points on the official discourses of the Catholic Church related to the Sacrament of Marriage vis-à-vis the common law meaning of the union. This will contextualize multiple perspectives portrayed in *Becky and her Friends* (1990) including the opinions of clergymen. This elucidation, based upon a brief summary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), will put into question the idea of who is truly Catholic in Hinojosa's Belken County.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, it will possibly lead readers to wonder whether any of the lay churchgoers depicted by the series fully understand the Church teachings and dogmas.

4.7 A Brief Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church

The official discourse of the Catholic Church on marriage as an institution is that Matrimony is a Sacrament that unites the physical and spiritual essence of a man and a woman in an unbreakable bond. Such a union must be entered into with the consent of the two spouses, free of coercion, and of grave external fear, and it has to be in accordance to both natural and ecclesiastical law. If any of these conditions are not met the unions are null but if it's deemed legitimate, the Church claims that is unable to dictate or annul the union. This position has a philosophical and theological explanation related to the creation of men and women in God's image that transcends the

¹⁴⁹ For a full theological explanation of the views of the Catholic Church on the subject of marriage. See, Catholic Church *Catechism* 1602-1666.

institutional definition found in common law.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of the reason, or the validity of the explanation, the experiences of many modern lay churchgoers have been affected when they find themselves in situations where living together with their spouses is no longer an option. In such cases, physical separation is permitted but the pursuit of new physical or marital relationships fall under the category of a transgression that breaks their communion with the Church. Under the explained discourse, people that remarry are unable to fully participate in Mass and fulfill certain ecclesiastical responsibilities as they commit the sin of adultery, a position that many people share in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) as they express their rejection of Becky's actions that ultimately ended her marriage. However, the Church position on this matter states that the "priest and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate" (CCC 1651). That is, divorced members of the Roman Church must be treated with sensibility and understanding rather than with gossip and scorn. Such a balance is not found in the attitudes collected by Hinojosa's character, the Listener, in the many interviews he conducts with practicing Catholics and as a result suggests the existence of a range of religious views and understandings of this sacrament which differ from official Church teaching.

¹⁵⁰ This theological foundation has been framed under the name of the "Theology of the Body." This is the working title Pope John Paul II gave to the first major teaching project of his pontificate. See, West *Theology of the Body* 1-18.

4.8 The Religious Conundrum in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990)

As it has been pointed out thus far, the portrayal of Catholicism in Rolando Hinojosa's KCDTS can be observed at first glance in two different but interrelated layers. First, through the presence of the sacraments, which are important rites of passages in the community at large, and secondly with attitudes found in their practice. These serve to create connections between the characters in Belken County and often are linked to the expectations that these individuals have within the society. An example of such expectations can be seen in the testimony of Nora Salamanca collected by the Listener; she is the aunt of Becky Escobar and another inhabitant of the Rio Grande Valley. Nora reveals how important marriages between families, or *familias directoras*, are for the community when she expresses her initial admiration of the union between Becky and Ira and how scandalized she was because of the divorce. Such importance is shown as well by Matias Soto, O.M.I in his interview. He is one of the two priests interviewed in the book and expresses his concern for couples like the Escobars who, belonging to the *clases directoras*, must serve as the examples for the bulk of the community or parishes (136). Both faces of the Church represented by these examples are important because they provide outliers for the faith under scrutiny and are heterogeneous in nature as its body includes people who are nominally Catholic. These members will interact with the community without truly leaving the Church and will question the official discourse represented by Father Matias Soto, O.M.I and Father Gualberto Ornelas, O.M.I., priests that have served at the parishes where Ira and Becky attended prior to their separation. The clergymen on their part provide the literal representation of the official church

discourse. Moreover, in the case of Fr. Ornelas, readers are given a window to observe the perspectives of the Church in the Rio Grande Valley through the eyes of a local priest who reflects on the views of other clergymen such as Father Eloy and the Bishop Urbano Otrégón, who was the first Valley Mexican to enter the priesthood.

The second level of this Catholic representation is seen in the attitudes that the parishioners or the community show against the institution of the church. This is by far the most heterogeneous dimension appreciated in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) as it is possible to see a spectrum of attitudes that range from appreciative, as seen in the comments of Nora Salamanca, to the criticism of Viola Barragan. It is possible to infer as well actions of non-church goers such as Jehú Malacara even though he is not present in the interviews, or Becky who only appear at the end of the book.¹⁵¹ The range of views and attitudes towards Catholicism, in addition to the different dimensions described until now, are crucial to the understanding of the religious experience portrayed in this novel. In order to confirm such an observation, however, it is necessary to return to the discussion of transculturation and its mechanism and interpret their presence in the context of the depiction of the Church as seen in *Becky and her Friends* (1990). This review will help to explain for the pressures and ongoing dialogues between traditions exposed thus far that have resulted in the conversions or defection of many Mexicans from the Catholic faith, the abandonment of English, and the use of new strategies to adapt to the social circumstances.

¹⁵¹ This is also known from the study of *Generaciones y Semblanzas* (1977) and *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986) developed thus. As it was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jehú is a lapsed Catholic and a former Protestant minister who has abandoned the institutionalized practice of his faith.

4.9 An Ethnographic Interpretation of Becky and Ira's Divorce

The concept of the mechanism of recontextualization holds that after an idea is introduced, it experiences a period of dialogue, although at a seemingly unconscious level, where the community discerns its adoption or rejection. This dialogue is constantly developing and can be observed in all the components of culture: at its material, social, and ideological cognitive levels. In the case of *Becky and her Friends* (1990), this mechanism is observed in the ongoing debate that surrounds the legitimacy of Becky's decision of leaving and divorcing Ira Escobar. Her actions split the views and perspective of the members of the community which often times look at the teaching of the Catholic Church as a source of inspiration or as the scapegoat in relation to the current scandal. Viola Barragán, for instance, argues that the Church can be flexible when it suits it while criticizing the hypocritical nature of the institution from which she is a contributor. She says "Does it take my money for donations here and there? Bet on it. It takes it, and I get my thanks, day and night, in rain or shine. And if the Church needs excuses to do so, all it's got to do is to look it up in some Bible or other, in some dogma, tenet" (33). This idea of participating while disagreeing is not uncommon in the interviews obtained by the Listener. Ursula Otrégón, the sister of the bishop and Becky's godmother, tells Hinojosa's participant observer for instance:

I attend Mass, still go to confession, and I'm a communicant, but it's become a pastime now. Oh, I donate money, of course. I wouldn't look good for that silly goose brother of mine if I didn't give to charity. He's the bishop, after all, and that should give you a fine idea of what the

Roman Apostolic has come down to. So, I believe in Mary, in her Son, and in God; nothing easier. I just don't believe in the Church. (69)

Meaning, she is a practicing Catholic who has become disenchanted by the institution and is content with keeping the appearances. Her views on divorce at the same time are peculiar as she agrees with the idea of avoiding such a situation. This perspective does not originate from an agreement with the teachings of the Church but rather from personal opinions or beliefs. She also does understand the reasons why Becky left Ira though she is clearly conflicted by the situation. After all, as the character of Julia Otrégón explains in her account of the beginning of the relationship, both Ira and Becky shared a Traditional Roman Catholic upbringing. Both of them attended Catholic schools and Ira even finished his education at a Catholic university. That's not to say that they were fully practicing members of the community, or that people of the Rio Grande Valley understand the theology that is behind Catholic devotions or practices. However, it does bring into question the original validity of their marriage under Catholic teaching. After all, the official discourse of the Catholic Church is that the consent to enter in to a marriage must be free of coercion or external fear in order to be valid. Meaning that Lucas Barrón's argument in support of Jehú may be in line with the teaching of the Church when he says "sure she married, she was almost forced to" (97). In other words, he may be more Catholic than those who consider themselves to be in line with the Catholic Church.

This complex balance between tradition, practice, and the views on the church come to a climax with the intervention of Gualberto Ornelas, O.M.I. He is an Oblate of

Mary Immaculate from the Rio Grande Valley and is revealed to be the third Mexican Valley priest known by the listener. This particular testimony is very relevant for the ethnographic reading of Rolando Hinojosa's narrative as it provides an emic viewpoint and interpretation to Catholic theology in the border. This is because the Mexican priest can be considered an insider to both the religious clergy and the Rio Grande Valley community. Moreover, the priest's testimony is interpreted by the Listener who is also an insider. As a result, the ethnographer is able to judge the status of his culture and the religion with the authority that his condition as a member of the community gives him every time he engages with the story. He states that: "the Listener thinks this is a sorry record, given the number of Mexican Catholics in Belken County. The Listener, however, sets down facts; some Valley Mexicans find this a disturbing, disgraceful fact" (114). In other words, Hinojosa's anthropologist reveals how the community values having a native born priest in their midst while acknowledging a certain duality that evident in the track record of the clergyman. Tensions embodied in the priest who is both an insider to the culture become the focal point of the narrative as he is shown to sympathize with the reality of the Rio Grande Valley while he also serves as a source of authority with regards to Catholic theology. This duality becomes even more important when considering that Fr. Ornelas, the oblate, agrees with the views of the church on divorce but disagrees with the perspective of Fr. Eloy, who is an older priest that "sees divorce as a passport to Hell" (114). This disagreement, found in his testimony, needs to be examined as it provides an in depth explanation of the position of the clergy on divorce while it gives insight into the repercussions it's had within the community of the

faithful. The analysis of the prelate's reaction also provides a connection to the historical and cultural context of the region explored in the first chapter of this dissertation given Fr. Ornelas's membership to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Such an inclusion may imply as well that the work of the religious order has remained a constant in the Rio Grande Valley contemporary history.¹⁵²

4.10 The Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Belken County and a Heterogeneous Church

The first detail that needs to be considered from the testimony of Fr. Gualberto Ornelas O.M.I. is the underlining theological discourse it contains as it sets the local priest apart from older clergymen starting from his position against divorce. The Listener records the following explanation of his position in which the oblate summarizes Catholic doctrine:

I don't agree with Father Eloy although this should not be taken to mean – nor do I wish to be misunderstood that I mean – that I approve of the divorce. I'm looking for a reconciliation, and if the search, or if the road to it takes time, then, time is what the Mother Church offers all of us as an arm and support against adversity and during times of weakness.

No, I most assuredly do not believe in divorce is a passport to Hell eternal; I know Father Eloy believes it to be so... and he preaches it; you yourself must have heard him on occasion.

¹⁵² *The Oblatos Españoles in Texas* (1969) serves as a contemporary example of the current work of the oblates and the maintenance of their work until the XX century. See, Valladares 1-20.

A divorce is harmful to society, and that's where one should start; closer to home. Too, a divorce harms, even torments, the children if there are any. In Becky's and Ira's case, there are two. (114-115).

This explanation emphasizes a need for conversion and reconciliation with the creator and the Church that coincides with New Evangelization discourse. This is a perspective that does not shy away from engaging in intellectual discussion and emphasizes the constant call to evangelize and help people in need. Such a position differs considerably from the viewpoints portrayed through Fr. Eloy's attitude as they emphasize compliance with behavioral protocols and fear of eternal punishment. It moreover contrasts with the actions of other priests mentioned in Hinojosa's series such as Don Efrain who appear to be more concerned with the maintenance of rituals and grudges than fulfilling pastoral duties although the oblate does not explicitly express any negative attitudes towards questionable practices or perspectives of priests that are widely known in the community portrayed by Hinojosa. The omission is further confirmed with Fr. Ornelas's professed compliance with Church authority as he explains to the Listener: "I won't be the one to speak of changing the Church, that is to say, to attack it or disagree with it" (115). This is despite having a difference of opinion in how to administer to the poor, which is the charism of the oblate religious order. It is worth to consider as well that his testimony does not address any specific example with relation to his pastoral assignments prior to Klail City or previous disagreements with the Bishop or the Church. The Listener comments however that Fr. Ornelas had proved to be an embarrassment for his two past bishops in Houston and Laredo, although the only factual charges he brings against him

are his “talent for being disobliging and for organizing the unorganized” (117). Or as it is explained in the context of his assignment at Laredo, he neglects his religious duties due to his insistence of “working to organize the poor and the needy, unwed mothers, and other so-called social undesirables” (117). This discrepancy between testimonies can be reconciled by considering Fr. Ornelas’ comments on this issue:

I believe in justice, and I also believe that one must work for it, for justice, and one must work in favor of those who are defenseless... The Church, the Bishop, and I, in my role here all of us agree in this, although we are not always in agreement as to how to defend people in need.

Father Eloy, and I recognize his kindness, and let there be no doubt that, his counsels that prayers remain the most... efficacious remedy in these cases.

For my part, I maintain otherwise, and so I try to have our parish[i]oners help themselves. This is also counseled by the Holy Bible. However, since people are not always prepared to help themselves, I see that as a fault which must be corrected. It’s no mystery that they must help themselves, but this doesn’t mean that I’m to stay in the rectory waiting for them to come to see me. And so, because of what I feel and believe, I go to their meetings, and that’s how I use whatever time I have available.

I did the very same thing in Houston and in Laredo, and now, more than twenty years later since I entered the seminary, I now find myself with two years in the Valley, and the last two months of them in Klail. (115-116).

Though no specific examples of Fr. Gualberto Ornelas's offenses can be inferred from either remark, it is clear that this clergyman truly sets himself apart from the diocesan clergy found in the Valley. He follows in the footsteps of his many predecessors in the Valley who have personified the missionary spirit of the Oblates by answering the constant call to minister to the poorest of the poor. This is the principle upon which their order has been based from the creation of the order in France and that took foot in the Rio Grande Valley with the years of activity of the Cavalry of Christ (1849-1883) discussed in the first chapter. In short, Fr. Ornelas and the oblates are portrayed as being invested in the community and he appears to personify the spirit of his order and the discourse of the New Evangelization at least at the discursive level.

In addition to the example of Fr. Ornelas, is necessary to mention that *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) contains viewpoints that at first glance contradict the testimony, discourse, or recorded actions of the priestly ministries as expressed by the native oblate and the interpretation of his testimony by the Listener. Specifically, the character of Otila Macías Rosales, wife of the owner of the local funeral home and a parishioner in the Valley, displays strong opinions against the Catholic Church when she criticizes the use of language of French and Spanish priest and their report with Mexicans. Her comments need to be considered along with the testimony of Fr. Matias Soto O.M.I. by

returning to the discussion of anti-Catholic discourses and biases. Fr. Soto is another oblate priest found in the narrative and, although he also disagrees with Fr. Eloy's condemnation of divorce. He shows an affinity with the worship of the pre-second Vatican Council and claims to be last priest from Spain left in the Valley. This affinity with pre-second Vatican council worship practices also needs to be interpreted in the context of the new Evangelization discourse that has been inferred in the behavior of the oblates in the Valley. Their relationship contrasts with the actions of other priests depicted by Hinojosa as well as with other general criticisms directed to the Rio Grande Valley Catholic Church. These differences are important because they are related to observations pointed out in previous chapters with relation to the new evangelization and the anti-Catholic discourses.

4.11 Anti-Catholicism in Rolando Hinojosa's *Becky and Her Friends* (1990)

As it was mentioned before, the Catholic faith may be one of the most polarizing forms of worship. This is particularly observed with Anti-Catholic biases and reactions that continue to permeate the social and cultural context in the United States. These attitudes can and are often present in popular forms of discourse and can even be seen among Church members as Philip Jenkins explains in his *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (2003). This prevalence can be appreciated in the similarities that exist between historical anti-Catholic imagery and the many criticism and pressures the Church is subjected to despite efforts from the faith in reconfiguring itself to address the changing times. In the case of the Valley, these criticisms included the accusation of lack

of communication and tact between the foreign priests assigned at the Valley with their community. The historical reproach also addressed the alleged reluctance to learn the Spanish language in order to fulfill their priestly ministries and negative attitudes directed at the language spoken by the locals. Such criticisms would ultimately contradict the positions and testimony of historical priests such as a Fr. Parisot or any of the Oblates who have kept a presence in the Rio Grande Valley since the XIX century. They would emphasize the importance of ministering to the Mexican Communities and would even fantasize about spreading their ministerial work to Mexico in the long run as Doyon Reveals in his *Cavalry of Christ* (1956).¹⁵³ These perceptions and attitudes are echoed at different points in Rolando Hinojosa's *Klail City Death Trip*. However, *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) provide a specific example that summarizes this perceived discontent in the community towards the Catholic Church. This is seen in Otila Macias Rosales' testimony collected by the Listener in which she explains her reactions towards the divorce and subsequent remarriage of Becky. Otila states:

If the Church has a worry, let the Church worry about it, if it wants to. Better yet, the Church's priest who come to the Valley, should come prepared to speak Spanish, YESSIR. I say this with some heat, because once in too many whiles they'll send us some Irishman or a French guy, and worst of all, one of the damned Spaniards whose tongues, I swear on St. Elmo, Patron Saint of Sailors, I swear those Spaniards have tongues that just don't seem to fit in their mouths. So they send that type, old

¹⁵³ See, Chapter 1.

Church, old Church, old Church. Irish, French, Spaniards, whatever. Divorce, is bad, yes, it is terrible, but it is also human, isn't it? I mean, animals don't divorce... so what do they recommend? Prayer and reconciliation. That's what comes from not being married, don't you think? *Que recen ellos, nosotros a trabajar*. That's what my father used to say: Let them pray, as for us, we got to work...

Anyway... who understands those *gachupines*? I bet even they don't understand each other. As for the French, well! And the Irish? They can say what they wish, but that's not English, is it?

May God forgive me, but I only go to Mass to go. I lost my religion along the way, and like what Jehu said on the day when he brought Damián Lucero for a visit.

"All you have to do is believe, have faith. Everything else, what they demand, that has nothing to do with believing."

How about that? That's the type of advice I can live with.

My Alfredo Ramón Says Jehu is right. I do too, and that's why I think that he must be something special. Got to be. (104-105).

With the above statement she states her rejection of the leadership of the Church in matters of morality. She is particularly disenchanted with the clergy that is unable to speak Spanish and also disregards the value of their leadership based on their nation of origin. Though this rejection could be related to perceived cultural tensions between foreign nationals with people from the Rio Grande Valley, her comments also suggest a

disdain and disregards towards their leadership and a contradiction to Catholic Teaching and Theology. Put in a different way, Otila's testimony both enunciates and exemplifies the anti-Church discourses found in the narrative of Hinojosa. This is a discourse that matches the many criticisms listed by historians that have been demonstrated to clash and contradict pro-Catholic or New Evangelization discourses represented by groups such as the Oblates of Immaculate Mary in the novels. These are members of the Church who have sought to reconcile Catholic beliefs with the reality of the people while bridging any gaps created by past mistakes and crimes committed by the clergy or lay members of the Church's body. The corpus of believers needs to be further defined, however, given the tendency to homogenize religious experiences as seen in the first chapter. After all, it's easy to disregard the role of laity and generalize the Catholic clergy as divided into factions such as pre and post-second Vatican council given the "old-Church" criticism found in Otila's testimony.

Far from being polarized, it is possible to see heterogeneous experiences within the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church engaged with the task found with the project of the New Evangelization and its discourse. This is because a preference for ancient devotions, rites, or practices does not imply a fundamental break or rejection with Catholic Theology. What it suggests, in fact, is the presence of dialogues that often lead to the spread, change and adoption of new worship forms or rules such as the already mentioned anointment performed by Brother Tomás Imás on Jehú. In this instance, Hinojosa's narrative sees that the Protestant pastor takes up the persona and authority of the Priest in a prominent Catholic context. Despite the tensions depicted in the

community between the Catholic faithful with the clergy, Jehú's beliefs required someone to perform such a ritual in order for him to make a full recovery. Another example of this dialogue between faiths, traditions, and forms of worships is found again in the context of Fr. Matias Soto O.M.I. and his preference for the "Old Church." It is stated that he prefers pre-Vatican II forms of worship that entail the use of Latin during the celebration of the Mass, among other changes in the order of the liturgy.¹⁵⁴ This preference however does not imply a lack of theological consistency within the Oblate community as it can be appreciated with the similar reaction Fr. Soto O.M.I. has with regards to the divorce of Becky and Ira. The Galician oblate does not think that a divorce signifies "the end of the world" or the eternal damnation of his parishioner's Souls (135). Fr. Soto in fact shows to be consistent with Fr. Ornelas by stating:

This parish certainly will not close its doors to her when and if she repents with all her heart and after she's undergone an examination of conscience with cleansed, sane thoughts proving, too, that everything is in place. We're not living in the era of the Inquisition, goodness knows; we're flexible and ever ready to embrace the fallen. We live and work with human beings who are, after all, imperfect because of their humanity. It's because of this knowledge in mind that we are always disposed to help those who've suffered from transient, momentary lapse.

It all has to do, let there be no doubt, with saving souls and with praying

¹⁵⁴ Some of the changes include a more active inclusion of the laity in the celebration of the mass as the priest faces the congregation as he prays the liturgy. Heraty, J. Ed. Vatican Council II" *New Catholic Encyclopedia XIV* provides a more thorough explanation of the changes that take places due to this council. See, 407-422.

that they attain a personal conviction of the Holy Faith. And too, how is one to know that this is just one test on the part of the Lord? Anything is possible. There exist many mysteries in this world, and let's all pray that Becky take[s] measure of herself and her actions, and that she direct[s] her feet on the road to righteousness. (137)

In both cases, the oblates are ready to enter into communication with Becky, Ira, or any person who has fallen away from the faith with the idea of bringing them back instead of condemning them. They, however, do have differences in what they consider important with regards to the current state of their faith and institution. The Spanish priest laments the abandonment of Latin as the ordinary language for the Mass and Sacraments in his interview with the Listener and warns against the survival of the Church if the theology or doctrine becomes compromised. Fr. Gualberto Ornelas O.M.I. on the other hand emphasized the need to maintain the focus of the Church on tending to the poorest of poor in order to remain pertinent to their current reality and status of the Catholic Church. Such a commitment provides as a result a coherent picture of the oblates in which Heterogeneity is the norm.

In the case of *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) and the KCDTS in general, this heterogeneous reality can be also observed in the multiple perspectives, attitudes, and reactions found within the context of every religious practice. Funerals, marriages, divorces, and the interactions of the priests with the community continuously point towards a heterogeneous faith experience that engages with other beliefs and cultural practices. As a result, the faith in the Rio Grande Valley is still subject to the same

cultural processes that saw people such as Tatita, in Parisot's account, or el Iluminado, in Boullosa's novel, in the 1800s engage with Catholic faithful in a meaningful way. This never ending negotiation continues into the modern time as the project of Americanization, Protestant theology, Anti-Catholic discourses, the New Evangelization, and different forms of Catholic worship and devotions are continuously interacting as the faithful struggle, question, and often reassess their beliefs. The result of this dialogue and subsequent portrayal is the depiction of a living faith which is not set in stone and is subject to the many cultural processes enunciated and explored in this dissertation.

4.12 Conclusions

With the discussions laid out in this chapter it has become evident that Rolando Hinojosa's *Generaciones and Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and her Friends* (1990) allow readers to witness the complexity of the interactions and beliefs that surround the Catholic Church in the Rio Grande Valley. First with the analysis of Jehú Malacara's faith journey, it was possible to show how the faith in the Rio Grande Valley is affected by the many historical pressures and cultural processes and how the Catholic Faith is affected and transformed in their presence. These pressures and processes were also observed in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) where Catholics are depicted as not being in line with Catholic teaching as they gossip and slander Becky. To be more precise, many people Belken County are depicted as engaging in the continuous process of dialogue and struggle with the ideas and teaching of the church. In the case of Becky's divorce, characters who themselves are non-

Catholics show attitudes that fall more in line with official Catholic teaching and practice than those who actively participate in the Catholic Church. This pattern is consistent throughout the three novels studied in this chapter as readers are able to explore cultural processes and mechanisms that act on the Rio Grande Valley. Such ability permits proposing *Becky and her Friends* (1990) as new ethnographic novel that coincides with the description proposed in the second chapter. It additionally makes it possible to compare this chapter of Hinojosa's series to research performed during the creation of classical ethnographies.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, it is possible to conclude proposing that the many *estampas* created by Hinojosa in his KCDTS come to fruition in *Becky and her Friends* (1990) with the work performed by the ethnographer who gathers the accounts of the many characters as they react against the cultural significant event. This novel, in addition to the heterogeneity that has been a constant in the author's narrative, may serve as template for a future ethnographic work to be carried out by insiders or outsiders who want to write and interpret culture.

¹⁵⁵ One example that comes to mind is Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas' *Chan Kom: A Maya Village* (1934) which laid the foundation for groundbreaking works that created the space to study and revisit the transformation of Mayan culture in Mexico and Central America in the last 80 years.

5. THE CATHOLIC PUZZLE: SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS

The focus of this dissertation has been to establish a theoretical framework from which the Rio Grande Valley Catholic experience could be better understood. This task has been accomplished by following a non-institutionalized approach that revisited historical and creative accounts of the lives of the Texas-Mexico border contained in the writings of Fr. Pierre Parisot O.M.I, Carmen Boullosa, and Rolando Hinojosa. Despite the obvious differences between each account, as well as the presence of pro and anti-Catholic biases, each work has provided unique insights that complement the historiographical accounts described in the first chapter and therefore provide a clearer picture of the brand of Catholicism of the Valley. Nonetheless, the task of a synthesis of each chapter's findings is still needed in order to reach a final satisfactory definition of Borderland Catholicism. Within the same summary it will be necessary to return to the discussion of the possibilities the ethnographic novel provides to propose a key that bridges the gaps between the traditions of historiography, ethnography, and creative writing and will allow for the intended generalization.

5.1 Summary of Conclusions and Findings

The analysis that has been conducted in the preceding chapters has demonstrated that the diffusion of Catholicism into the Rio Grande Valley did not follow the same institutional pattern as suggested by earlier historians. Far from being rooted in the spread of an organization, the cultural artifact of religion arrived to the Americas along with

European believers who diffused their religion as they started to interact with the indigenous populations. The same pattern of diffusion has been a constant in the region since the XVII century and has coexisted with the evangelization efforts of missionaries who followed the initial spread of the culture that would transform the religious makeup of the Texas-Mexico Border over the course of the centuries. These changes were also directly influenced by the continuous reconfiguration of the social, cultural, and political orders of the times as it was seen with the arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the 1850s, as well as with the influx of immigrants from diverging religious backgrounds. This same cultural, religious, and discursive heterogeneity has continued to affect Catholic official discourse until present time as seen with the New Evangelization movement of the 1980s.

Despite of the reconfiguration process here described, the historical analysis presented in this dissertation has revealed that the Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley is deeply rooted in the work of the Oblates. Their ministry to the poor has been a constant that has withstood the test of time as Mexicans have struggled with violence, injustice, prejudice, and heresies. Their continuous work in addition to the struggle of the believers is a key that permits understanding the brand of Catholicism depicted in the accounts studied in this dissertation through the anthropological lens that the ethnographic novel provides. This framework was applied in the study of Carmen Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) as the novel bridges the traditions of historiography and ethnography as it displays the characteristics of a New Latin-American Historical Novel and an ethnographic novel. These are four characteristics that reconcile the work

of anthropologist Dan Rose and Elizabeth Fernea that include: 1) presence of a number of interacting characters that seek to represent or portray the community and culture of the novel; 2) the presence of a narrator or character that fulfills the role of an interpreter or translator between the readers and the characters; 3) the presence of an event that causes characters to react in a culturally concise way; and 4) the presence of a cultural process (such as diffusion or acculturation).

The link between history, ethnography and literature was clearly shown in the Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia observed in the ethnographic depiction of the towns of Matamoros and Brownsville along with the intertextuality and historical revisionism of the Cortina Wars. A condition that in addition provided unequivocal signs of a Catholic heritage found in Boullosa's novel. This was a very popular version of Catholicism that contrasted with the institutional-centered descriptions found in Carlos E. Castañeda's *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas* (1936-1958) and was more closely aligned with the observations presented by Fr. Pierre Parisot in his *Reminiscences of a French Missionary* (1899). The evidence provided by the Mexican author suggested that, far from being clergy centered, Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley was shaped by the multi-layered experiences, attitudes, and struggles of Church members such as Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's or the members of the Iluminado's procession who participated in the raid of Brownsville. Such a break from the historiographical record would also coincide with the observations made in the analysis of Rolando Hinojosa's work in the third chapter of the dissertation which were considered under the same ethnographic scope.

It was argued that Rolando Hinojosa's *Generaciones and Semblanzas* (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and her Friends* (1990) allow readers to consider the complexity of the interactions and beliefs that surround the Catholic Church in the Rio Grande Valley. Through Jehú Malacara's faith journey, it was possible to observe that Catholicism in the Rio Grande Valley is affected by the same historical pressures and cultural processes discussed in earlier chapters as people are affected and transformed in their presence throughout the novels. These pressures and processes are specially observed in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) where Catholics are depicted as not agreeing with Catholic teaching when they gossip and slander Becky. As a matter of fact, characters are depicted in the book engaging in a continuous process of dialogue and struggle with the teaching of the church which ultimately shows the heterogeneous reality of church membership. This pattern is consistent throughout the three novels studied in the dissertation and can be corroborated with cultural processes and mechanisms that have been studied by anthropologists such as Fernando Ortiz and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. As a consequence of these findings, the chapter concludes by proposing that *Becky and her Friends* (1990) is an exemplary ethnographic novel as it contains the four characteristics of the ethnographic novel. This final thought and its implications to the overarching question of the religious experience needs to be further considered as this dissertation comes to a close.

5.2 Final Considerations on the New Ethnographic Novel: *Becky and Her Friends* (1990)

The possibilities the ethnographic novel creates in closing the gaps that exist between the historiographical, ethnographic, and creative writing traditions is well represented by the KCDTS and specially *Becky and Her Friends* (1990). Rolando Hinojosa has created a fictional universe that incorporates the history of the Rio Grande Valley through the heterogeneous interactions depicted in the many works that make up the nontraditional series. Multiple voices, stories, genres, and registers have captured the imagination of readers and scholars alike who have unanimously come to regard the 15 volume work as a chronicle of the Rio Grande Valley. This facet of the work had not been theorized to the fullness of its potential as it has been demonstrated in this dissertation. The ethnographic novel had not been theorized in a useful manner for literary criticism and the subject of religion had not been engaged as a topic of discussion with regards to the KCDTS. This is despite of the invitation for discussion and consideration that Hinojosa had created through the many *estampas* contained in his work. What could be considered as an open call to do an ethnographic reading of his work had been impossible to complete prior to this dissertation. However, with the approach laid out in this work it is possible to continue to perform the labor of the ethnographer. Each character presented in Hinojosa allows for the possibility of gathering a first hand account of the Rio Grande Valley as each one reacts against a plethora of cultural significant events. After all, the novel is situated in the same historical universe of Hinojosa who writes about his past

and present, while looking into the future possibilities for the future generation of the people in the Valley.

The same labor also permits to consider the 15 volume series as a testimonial account for overarching cultural realities. In this dissertation the process of cultural change that has been referred to as transculturation in this dissertation, and the presence of cultural artifacts such as religion have been considered and catalogued. However, these are but the tip of the iceberg of the possible subjects that can be studied through the genre exposed with the narratives that have been considered in this dissertation. More in depth analysis of the culture of the Rio Grande Valley can be and should be carried out by any interested reader who wants to inquire about the reality of the people represented by Hinojosa and Boullosa. Moreover, writers and interpreters of any cultural artifact may look at these works as templates for future ethnographic work as they have laid out the foundation for a new possibility of approaching the labor of the ethnographer. That is to consider the many layers of human experience and reach generalizations that will further our understanding of what it means to be human.

All theoretical considerations aside, this dissertation needs to answer the lingering question of the catholic experience. In the midst of such a heterogeneous cultural setting that accounts of competing religious discourses, pressures, and historical progress, has the de-institutionalized approach conducted throughout the dissertation provided new insights to understand Catholicism? In other words, is it possible to reach satisfactory generalization that provides valuable insights that fulfill the call of the

anthropologist as laid out in earlier chapters? Is the de-institutionalization approach to the study of religion what is the Catholic Experience?

5.3 The Catholic Experience in the Rio Grande Valley

Throughout every chapter in this dissertation it has been possible to appreciate a few continuous trends related to the religious experience of Catholics in the Rio Grande Valley. Three overarching constants have been present historically as reflected in the accounts of Carmen Boullosa, Rolando Hinojosa, and Fr. Pierre Parisot O.M.I. From the arrival of the Oblates in Texas to the contemporary world represented by Hinojosa, Catholics from the Rio Grande Valley have faced with a heterogeneous cultural context fueled by the influx of immigration, the presence of competing theological frameworks, and people struggling with the teachings of the church. These three trends were observed and delineated in the three chapters first with Parisot's account that featured examples of the violence of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, the heresy of brother Tatita, and the multicultural nature of towns such as Baghdad or Brownsville during the years that followed the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. The same violent contexts was appreciated in Boullosa's *Texas* (2013) which deals with the same years accounted for in Fr. Parisot's Reminiscences and include the Cortina Wars of 1851. The Mexican novel also shows the creation of a religious cult following lead by the character of El Iluminado and can be considered heretic in nature as explained in the second chapter. These three characteristics are observed at a more individualized level however in the three novels of Rolando Hinojosa Smith studied in the third Chapter. *Generaciones y*

Semblanzas (1977), *Claros Varones de Belken* (1986), and *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) portray the religious struggle of people through the life experience of characters such as Jehu Malacara or Becky Escobar who evolve throughout the length of the series. This crucial difference between the accounts was explored in the dissertation by looking at Jehu Malacara's faith journey and provided a chronological dimension that accounted for the observation anthropologist have made with regards to the cultural and religious change in the Rio Grande Valley. Through these observations the patterns of cultural heterogeneity, competing theologies, and the struggle with the teachings of the church become evident permitting thus reaching a final generalization about the Rio Grande Valley Catholic experience.

Catholicism and the experience of people with regards to the faith in the Rio Grande Valley is dependent on the continuous heterogeneous influx of cultures, ideas, and religions that come into contact via cultural processes and mechanisms such as transculturation or diffusion. This practice has been far from monochromatic in the area depicted by the accounts of Fr. Parisot, Boullosa, or Hinojosa. Each individual's journey can resemble that of Jehu's Malacara and lead him far from Catholic Orthodoxy. At the same time, practicing Catholics such as those interviewed in *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) by the Listener can find themselves being at odds with Church teaching when they act against catholic doctrine. In the case of the most ethnographic novel of Rolando Hinojosa, non-Catholics were shown to be more in line with Catholic with regards to their attitude towards Becky due to her divorce. As a result, a generalization of the Catholic experience can only be put in a broad sense as the religious faith journey of

people whose beliefs can be traced to the theological tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. This experience includes the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual struggle with the complex reality that people face over time; a reality that includes multiple discourses, pressures, obsessions, and disagreements, as the Rio Grande Valley Catholic lives his or her life.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH ROLANDO HINOJOSA

One of the most interesting and surprising dilemmas considered in this dissertation has been the silence in the literary criticism of Rolando Hinojosa's narrative with regards to the subject of religion. Despite the numerous works regarding his narrative, the many interviews that have taken place through the years, and the unequivocal presence of religious elements in his narrative, very little had been said with regards to the religious experience of the Rio Grande Valley. Due to this gap in the subject, it became important to approach Rolando Hinojosa to engage with him in a conversation about his experiences with Catholicism and Protestantism in order to give him an opportunity to express his ideas with regards to the religious component of his creation. This conversation began in 2014 during the "New, Past, and Future Construction of Latinos: Shifting Times, Shifting Identities" Conference held at Texas A&M University after presenting the ideas of what became the study of *Becky and Her Friends* (1990) presented in this chapter which Hinojosa witnessed and later shifted to the online arena. In this final annex of the dissertation the final exchange of questions is displayed first in the form of correspondence with Rolando Hinojosa, and later in an interview format.

As it is appreciated in the interview, the fruitful exchange provides valuable insights into the Rio Grande Valley life depicted in the KCDTS. It also reveals the presence of some of the limitations of participant observation that were alluded throughout the theoretical framework. The interview specifically show that insider and

outsider's observations need to work side by side in order to reach better generalizations of the cultural life of the people under scrutiny. Hinojosa's remarks suggest what can be interpreted as a relative unawareness to the extent of the religious scope of his work though he shows to be knowledgeable of many details that surround the interactions of believers. He shows this fact through his explanations of the organization of the religious activities as well as his responses of the differences between his own experiences with that of Jehú. His condition as an insider, however, limits his vision of the implications of the religious differences, making it subject to the contextualization from the perspective of an outsider provided by the present dissertation. Though the study of this interview is undoubtedly a task that will need to be completed in the future, this conversation serves as an interesting final coda to the study here displayed.

A.1 Email Correspondence with Rolando Hinojosa

Hector E. Weir

Texas A&M University

Department of Hispanic Studies

Dear Rolando,

Thank you for taking the time to read and answer these questions.

It is said that there are many alter-egos for Rolando Hinojosa in the Condado de Belken among which Jehú Malacara is included.

How much of Jehú's religious experience is Hinojosa's?

In your work we find references to all the sacraments of the Catholic Church and even see children serving as altar servers. This reference would imply a consistent presence of Catholic Education in your generation and that of Becky's children.

Taking this into account, were all children born into Catholic families enrolled in this education? Are there any generational breaks?

You once mentioned in a private conversation that there were two Catholic Schools in the valley. Was religious development left up to those institutions?

Were parents or grandparents involved in this part of this religious experience?

Was religious education free and in what language did it take place?

One of the most studied Mexican popular devotions is that of altar making and novenas.

Did you experience these during your childhood?

Where these types of popular devotions encouraged by any priests?

Where the Oblates of Mary Immaculate included within the priests you were acquainted with?

If so, what was your experience with them?

How did men see such popular devotions - novenas, altars?

Would you place these devotions in any particular generation in your work?

As for the presence of Protestantism in your work and in the Valley, what branch of Protestantism would you place Tomas Imas and Jehú in?

To your knowledge, did Protestant pastors and churches share any particular concern with priests in the Valley?

Lastly, do you have any final reflections about the presence of a strong Catholic component in your narrative?

Thank you for your insights.

[College Station]

A.2 Original Email from Rolando Hinojosa

Good afternoon.

In re Jehú's religious experience in my work.

None; ours was not a religious family. My father knew all the prayers and I once heard

him recite many of them, however, we did not attend mass or church as a family.

My mother, during World War II, went to mass and I was dragged along with her, but none of this influenced me as far as religion and credence were concerned. She ceased to go when World War II ended. And that was it.

As for my father, he was taken to church when he died, and that, too, was it. In re Mother, a fine person, generous, witty, and much loved and respected by those who knew her, but she, too, was not religious.

Religion was not a subject in our home.

As for Jehú's religious experience, that was his, a fictional character, but nothing to do with me or us.

As for as other churches, the Mexican American Protestants consisted of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists along with some of the other sects. Two of them had fine brick-built churches except for the Presbyterians but theirs was a fine looking building and well-kept. The Mormons also came to the Valley, and some Mexican Americans converted or accepted, but that was all I knew about them.

In Brownsville, in the forties, there were two Catholic churches and two school, St.

Joseph's for the boys and Villa María for the girls. My two sisters married Brownsville men, one was a Catholic, the other a Presbyterian; in the latter, my brother-in-law law met with friends at a local hotel on Sunday mornings, but the group didn't attend church. My other sister married a Catholic and attended Mass and were friends with one of the priests, but that was about it. Their children attended Brownsville public schools.

The two Catholic schools mentioned above were not free. Many of the Mexican American students at St. Joe's (I knew a bunch) spoke English with a strong Spanish into-
nation. Why? Because, among the teaching Brothers, many came from Central America. Others spoke English without a Spanish intonation.

In re altar making and novenas, until your questions, I had no idea parishioners were engaged in such matters. If they did, they must have been the ones who lived close or closer to the churches.

In my hometown*, there were two Catholic churches, one for Anglos and one for Mexican Americans although some Anglos attended the Mexican parish. At times, I attended with my mother during W W II and that's how I saw them. But this was irregular: as a teen ager, I caddied at the Mercedes golf course on Saturdays and Sundays.

My father? As said, he was taken to the church the day he died.

I don't know about my older brothers and sisters, but as for me, I didn't go through the ceremony of a first communion. We weren't anti-church, we just didn't attend.

As you can see, I had no truck with the Oblates; we were indifferent. In the army, here in the States, I went with a bunch of Catholics one Sunday, and that was it.

While overseas, I didn't attend at all.

In re Tomás Imás, I would place him in one of the smaller sects not with Baptists, et alia. As for Jehú, I'd have to place him with Catholics, but that too was sporadic until he met the Mexican American minister who was raised 'up north.'

When I wasn't playing ball in the neighborhood, I would listen to adult men's conversations in the evenings; they met across the street from our house.

(Mercedes had a population of 6300 at that time).

I don't think religion was ever a topic; to them, at that time, the '40s, the subject, often enough, would be town gossip as well as mention of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, work, or lack of work.

I doubt the priests met with the Protestants. There was no hostility I heard of.

A family last-named García and the de la Cerdas were Presbyterians. The boys I knew were Genaro García and Segundo and Santiago de la Cerda. We knew each other because of school and the size of our hometown. We weren't close friends because they didn't live close to us or in our neighborhood.

I know nothing about the Protestants sects and not much more about the Catholics. As for the strong Catholic component appears in the KCDT, I have no idea why it appears so much.

I was not baptized until I was almost four-years-old. My godparents lived in San Diego, Texas (it's in Duval County in South Texas). My godfather and my father had been partners during The Mexican Revolution (buying, selling, and trading horses) and remained friends until their deaths. How they met, I have no idea.

I come from a family of readers; of the five of us, four went into teaching. As a young woman, my mother helped her mother, (Martha Phillips Smith) teach English to the Mexican American kids at the ranch. My mother, raised among Mexicans, was bilingual and bicultural: reading, writing, etc.

Rolando

(* Mercedes).

A.3 Interview Format for Email Correspondence

[HEW] It is said that there are many alter-egos for Rolando Hinojosa in the Condado de Belken, among which Jehú Malacara is included.

How much of Jehú's religious experience is Hinojosa's?

In your work we find references to all the sacraments of the Catholic Church and even see children serving as altar servers. This reference would imply a consistent presence of Catholic Education in your generation and that of Becky's children.

Taking this into account, were all children born into Catholic families enrolled in this education? Are there any generational breaks?

[RHS] *In re Jehú's religious experience in my work.*

None; ours was not a religious family.

My father knew all the prayers and I once heard

him recite many of them, however, we did not attend mass or church as a family.

My mother, during World War II, went to mass and I was dragged along with her, but none of this influenced me as far as religion and credence were concerned. She ceased to go when World War II ended. And that was it.

As for my father, he was taken to church when he died, and that, too, was it. In re Mother, a fine person, generous, witty, and much loved and respected by those who knew her, but she, too, was not religious.

Religion was not a subject in our home.

As for Jehú's religious experience, that was his, a fictional character, but nothing to do with me or us.

As for as other churches, the Mexican American Protestants consisted of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists along with some of the other sects. Two of them had fine brick-built churches except for the Presbyterians but theirs was a fine looking building and well-kept. The Mormons also came to the Valley, and some Mexican Americans converted or accepted, but that was all I knew about them.

[HEW] You once mentioned in a private conversation that there were two Catholic Schools in the valley. Was religious development left up to those institutions? Were parents or grandparents involved in this part of this religious experience? Was religious education free and in what language did it take place?

[RHS] *In Brownsville, in the forties, there were two Catholic churches and two school,*

St. Joseph's for the boys and Villa María for the girls. My two sisters married Brownsville men, one was a Catholic, the other a Presbyterian; in the latter, my brother-in-law met with friends at a local hotel on Sunday mornings, but the group didn't attend church. My other sister married a Catholic and attended Mass and were friends with one of the priests, but that was about it. Their children attended Brownsville public schools.

The two Catholic schools mentioned above were not free. Many of the Mexican American students at St. Joe's (I knew a bunch) spoke English with a strong Spanish intonation. Why? Because, among the teaching Brothers, many came from Central America.

Others spoke English without a Spanish intonation.

[HEW] One of the most studied Mexican popular devotions is that of altar making and novenas.

Did you experience these during your childhood?

Where these types of popular devotions encouraged by any priests?

Where the Oblates of Mary Immaculate included within the priests you were acquainted with?

If so, what was your experience with them?

How did men see such popular devotions - novenas, altars?

Would you place these devotions in any particular generation in your work?

[RHS] *In re altar making and novenas, until your questions, I had no idea parishioners were engaged in such matters. If they did, they must have been the ones who lived close or closer to the churches.*

In my hometown, there were two Catholic churches, one for Anglos and one for Mexican Americans although some Anglos attended the Mexican parish. At times, I attended with my mother during W W II and that's how I saw them. But this was irregular: as a teen ager, I caddied at the Mercedes golf course on Saturdays and Sundays.*

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As you can see, I had no truck with the Oblates; we were indifferent. In the army, here in the States, I went with a bunch of Catholics one Sunday, and that was it.

While overseas, I didn't attend at all.

[HEW] As for the presence of Protestantism in your work and in the Valley, what branch of Protestantism would you place Tomas Imas and Jehú in?

[RHS] *In re Tomás Imás, I would place him in one of the smaller sects not with Baptists, et alia. As for Jehú, I'd have to place him with Catholics, but that too was sporadic until he met the Mexican American minister who was raised 'up north.'*

When I wasn't playing ball in the neighborhood, I would listen to adult men's conversations in the evenings; they met across the street from our house. (Mercedes had a population of 6300 at that time).

I don't think religion was ever a topic; to them, at that time, the '40s, the subject, often enough, would be town gossip as well as mention of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, work, or lack of work.

[HEW] To your knowledge, did Protestant pastors and churches share any particular concern with priests in the Valley?

[RHS] *I doubt the priests met with the Protestants. There was no hostility I heard of.*

A family last-named García and the de la Cerdas were Presbyterians. The boys I knew were Genaro García and Segundo and Santiago de la Cerda. We knew each other because of school and the size of our hometown. We weren't close friends because they didn't live close to us or in our neighborhood.

I know nothing about the Protestants sects and not much more about the Catholics.

[HEW] Lastly, do you have any final reflections about the presence of a strong Catholic component in your narrative?

[College Station]

[RHS] *As for the strong Catholic component appears in the KCDT, I have no idea why it appears so much.*

I was not baptized until I was almost four-years-old. My godparents lived in San Diego, Texas (it's in Duval County in South Texas). My godfather and my father had been partners during The Mexican Revolution (buying, selling, and trading horses) and remained friends until their deaths. How they met, I have no idea.

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Rolando

(Mercedes).*