

THE CRITICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF FRIDA KAHLO

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Mexican artist and global phenomenon Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) fascinates and inspires people from all walks of life. Rather than simply approaching the life and work of Kahlo from a traditional art historical perspective, this dissertation draws from the interdisciplinary nature of critical human geography to investigate Kahlo. Specifically, this work is informed by two sub-fields of critical human geography—feminist geography and cultural geography. Kahlo’s iconic status as a feminist symbol makes feminist geography an obvious choice while cultural geography provides the dominant methodology of textual analysis. Both sub-fields are drawn together by the use of a poststructuralist theoretical foundation that views no one meaning or interpretation as fixed, but rather posits that meanings and interpretations are fluid and open to a variety of conclusions. The primary research question in this dissertation is, “How are the critical geographies of hybridity, embodiment, and glocalization developed and explored in Frida Kahlo’s art and life?”

The question is answered through the geographical exploration of Kahlo’s work, life, and iconic status as a major public figure. I delve into each of the three components of the question (hybridity, embodiment, and glocalization) by connecting geographical concepts and understandings to Kahlo and her work. I extend this exploration by arguing that Kahlo demonstrates how the self both mirrors and constructs critical geographies.

This research seeks to expand and deepen the understanding of Kahlo as a significant geographical figure—an artist who was intensely aware of people and place. Additionally, this research draws together diverse threads of geographic inquiry by highlighting the interdisciplinary and humanistic qualities of the discipline. Perhaps most importantly, this dissertation positions Kahlo as a critical geographer—defying the sometimes arbitrary and

limited notions imposed on the discipline and its practitioners. I assert that Kahlo's work and life are inherently a lived expression of geographical ideas that manifest themselves in a physical, mental, and emotional sense. Ultimately, Kahlo constructs an embodied geographic text—creating knowledge and helping people understand identity and place in a different way.

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Approved by:

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Dr. Kevin Blake

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Chapter 1 - An Introduction to Frida Kahlo's Critical Geographies

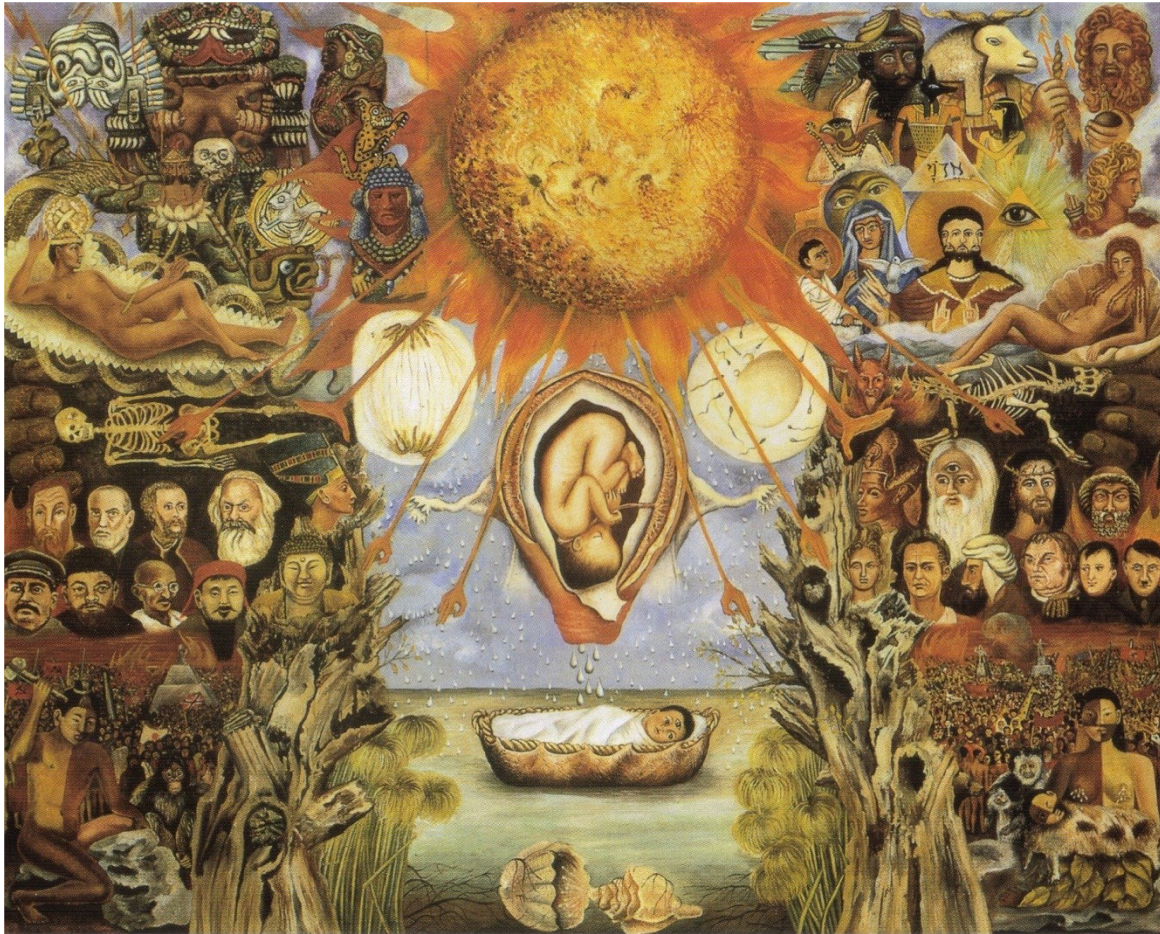


Figure 1-1 Frida Kahlo, *Moses*, 1945. A mature work by Kahlo, incorporating many of the themes in her work and life. The references to indigenous, European, Christian, and Mexican motifs demonstrate Kahlo's expansive and active intellect. Private Collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 10, 2013).

A Geographical Study of Frida Kahlo

“Perhaps the greatest enemy to academic creativity is disciplinary boundaries because they favor marginal advancements appreciated by relatively few specialists locked in disciplinary silos” (Dear, 2011, 11-12)

This dissertation examines the critical geographies of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). Kahlo is a popular figure of study in a multitude of disciplines; most commonly these

include art history, cultural studies, and women's/gender/sexuality studies. Although geographical concepts sometimes feature in these divergent perspectives on Kahlo, there is not an extensive, scholarly study of Kahlo's geographical context/connections/implications. This omission is unfortunate, for representations and conceptions of Kahlo occupy and traverse a plethora of artistic, social, and political spaces. Kahlo's iconic status throughout the world is unique and significant in its transcultural implications. For example, the image of the work that opens this introduction (Figure 1-1), *Moses*, based on Sigmund Freud's book *Moses the Man and Monotheistic Religion*, is representative of Kahlo's strong connection to geographic themes. In *Moses* Kahlo references her ties to both European and Mexican artistic and intellectual traditions. Geographic hybridity plays significantly in Kahlo's work and also forms the foundation for one of the chapters of this dissertation. *Moses* also contains many of the classic representations in Kahlo's paintings, including a rendition of Diego Rivera (1886-1957) in infant form, biblical references, and images of biological reproduction.

In spite of Kahlo's recognition and adulation across borders, her place as a pivotal figure in modern art remains contested. Through a blend of retrospective appreciation, conscious commodification, and political activism, Kahlo has developed into a poster girl for feminism, alternative identities/sexualities, and ethnic pride within the last thirty-odd years. Thus, Kahlo's narrative has become "like a game of telephone" in that "the more Kahlo's story has been told, the more it has been distorted, omitting uncomfortable details that show her to be a far more complex and flawed figure than the movies and the cookbooks suggest" (Mencimer 2002, 27). Given the political and social motivations for promoting Kahlo as an artist, her talent and her originality are often obscured behind the fanfare. Therefore, the intent of this dissertation, to use David Harvey's (1990) phrase, is to lift the "veil of fetishisms" and reveal the cultural and

material practices that construct Kahlo's geographies. Fundamentally, this dissertation answers the question, "How are the critical geographies of hybridity, embodiment, and glocalization developed and explored in Frida Kahlo's art and life?"

Clearly, to speak only of Kahlo's art is not possible. In fact, Kahlo is particularly suited to be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective. The field of critical human geography provides such an interdisciplinary platform for an examination of Kahlo's art and artistic persona. According to Kevin Cox (2005), critical human geography is, by nature, "eclectic" (2). The origins of critical human geography can be traced to the varied responses to the Quantitative Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s. The most significant and influential of these responses include Marxist geography, feminist geography, "new" cultural geography, and humanistic geography (Cox 2005).

Kahlo is an ideal subject to study from the vantage point of critical human geography because, like the field itself, her life and work are not easily definable. Kahlo has been labeled a surrealist, a phony, apolitical, a feminist, an anti-feminist, a genius, a narcissist, a "bad" artist, and many more other contradictory and reductionist designations. The diversity of Kahlo's identities, both contemporary and retrospective, is why critic Peter Schjeldahl (2007) contends, "There are so many ways to be interested in Frida Kahlo." However, Kahlo's most persistent identification is as a successful and highly visible female artist in the male dominated world of modern art. Thus, feminist perspectives on Kahlo dominate the literature. For my study, I draw from the two sub-fields within critical human geography-- feminist geography and cultural geography. The choice of feminist geography is obvious and cultural geography provides the emphasis on textual analysis that is necessary for incorporating Kahlo's art as the primary source of data for this study. Within this dissertation, I use the term "text" loosely, defining a text as

“any kind of discursive practice, whether poetic, literary, philosophical, scientific, visual, tactile or performative” (Grosz 1995, 69). Thus, not only are Kahlo’s art works serving as textual data, but her lived experience does as well.

Feminist Threads

“We cannot ignore the fact that the terrains of artistic practice and of art history are structured in and structuring of gender power relations” (Pollack, 1988, 55)

Since this study is grounded in the controversial and mutable philosophical construct of feminism, I want to clarify exactly what type of feminism is guiding my work. Feminism itself is an expansive term—it refers to a multitude of social, biological, and political inscriptions and practices. It is so expansive, in fact, that it is often referred to in the plural—feminisms.

However, this is not to suggest that feminism lacks a core. Griselda Pollack (1996, 5) explains the epistemological stance of feminism this way:

feminism signifies a set of positions, not an essence; a critical practice not a doxa; a dynamic and self-critical response and intervention not a platform. It is the precarious product of a paradox. Seeming to speak in the name of women, feminist analysis perpetually deconstructs the very term around which it is politically organized.

The specific strain of feminism in this dissertation is known as sexual difference feminism. For sexual difference feminists, the body is “regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product” (Grosz 1994, 23). In this study, I’m positioning Kahlo as an artist who speaks to the concerns of sexual difference

feminism and, in effect, as an artist who anticipated the theoretical threads within this mid-to-late 20th century strain of thought.

It is Kahlo's work, more so than any other Mexican artist of her era, which retains a contemporary translation and visibility in discussions of modern art today. Kahlo's oeuvre is composed largely of self-portraits and representations of her body embedded into specific and fantastical landscapes. For example, *Roots* depicts Kahlo fusing with the earth on a volcanic rock bed (Figure 1-2).



Figure 1-2 Frida Kahlo, *Roots*, 1943. One of Kahlo's most popular works, highlighting her biological connection to nature. Kahlo carries this intertwining between society and nature in many of her works. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 15, 2013).

This dissertation takes a thematic approach to exploring how Kahlo embodies critical geographies in her work and life. Thomas Kaufmann (2004, 7) asserts that, "If art has a history, it has also at least implicitly had, or has, a geography, for if this history of art conceives of art being made in a particular time, it obviously also puts it in a place." One of Kahlo's most significant positionalities is as the most well-known female artist of all time. Thus, one of the

most significant themes is embodied feminism. Embodiment plays a key role in critical feminist theory. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) articulates the reliance on embodiment in critical feminist theory, claiming “For them, the body is crucial to understanding woman’s psychical and social existence, but the body is no longer understood as an ahistorical, biologically given, acultural object...For them, the body is neither brute nor passive but is interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation” (18). Building on the work of other scholars, I assert that Kahlo’s distinctive style was developed through the feminized vehicle of embodiment. Tace Hedrick (2003) contends, “Kahlo used her own mestiza body to figure the paths through which might flow this combination of modern machine and traditional indigenous energies” (48). A feminist *mestizaje*, according to Christina Beltran (2004), “calls existing categories into question...[rather than reproducing] already-existing narratives of romantic identification and exclusion” (596). Thus, although Kahlo herself is often essentialized, her own work challenges such static categorization. The concept of feminist *mestizaje* was popularized many years after Kahlo’s life by Gloria Anzaldúa in her 1987 seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Even though Kahlo’s renewed popularity was in full swing by the late 1980s, Anzaldúa makes no mention of Kahlo or Kahlo’s work.

Geographical Thought and History

“For Kant held that adequate geographical and anthropological knowledges provide the necessary conditions of all practical application of knowledge to the material world” (Harvey, 2000, 531-532)

Kahlo’s focus on the body, on her own body, draws her even closer to geography. In *Places through the body* (1998), geographers Heidi Nast and Steve Pile make the provocative assertion that bodies, like places, are relational and territorialized. Nast and Pile (1998) contend

that, “Bodies and places are woven together through intricate webs of social and spatial relations that are made by, and make, embodied subjects” (4). It is clear that Kahlo saw this connection between the body and place, and her embodiment of her environments (both real and imagined) in her work and life continue to ignite discussions of place and the body today.

The academic connection between feminism and geography was inevitable. Irit Rogoff (2000) contends that “In the same way both feminism and post-colonial theory have insisted on the need for a multi-subjectivity, so does the critical process of geographical spatialization insist on the multi-inhabitation of spaces through bodies, social relations and psychic dynamics” (23). Feminist geographers are typically interested in the lived experiences of women. They base their theoretical assumptions on the fact that female bodies are culturally, historically, and geographically specific (Nast and Pile 1998). They agree with feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1995) who contends that, “If bodies are traversed and infiltrated by knowledges, meanings, and power, they can also, under certain circumstances, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices” (35-36). For geographic researchers interested in gender and place, the feminist project of deconstructing and reimagining gender provides a fruitful theoretical foundation and a critical perspective (Alcoff 1996; Rogoff 2000).

Mona Domosh (1996) defines the aims of feminist geography as “examining how women’s lives shape their experience and/or perception of environments, their design and creation of places, their definition and use of cultural resources, and their construction of geographic knowledge” (420). Feminist geography was a later development than Marxist or humanistic geography. It was not until the 1970s that scholarship on feminism and geography began appearing. Feminist geography is now well established in the discipline and has morphed

and expanded to incorporate more diverse and complex theoretical questions of gender, sex, and the body. While in early feminist thought the body was something to devalue and deemphasize, sexual difference feminists contend that the body must be theorized to avoid the naturalization or automatic assigning of genders (Burns 1993). It is here where one sees how Kahlo's work is so aptly suited for such theorizing. Kahlo's ability to let her body speak through the artistic process is ahead of her time. Through her art, Kahlo combats the Western philosophical tradition of viewing women's bodies "as absence, silence, and nonrepresentability" (Burns 1993, 5). Kahlo uses her own bodily subjectivity as a means of dismantling this patriarchal tradition of feminine representation.

Feminist geography was not only a response to logical positivism that dominated the Quantitative Revolution but also, later in the 1980s, a response to what was perceived as the elite, male and exclusive realm of cultural geography—a sub-field that utilized the tools and modes of inquiry inherent in literary and artistic critique to read and interpret traditional geographic concepts, such as landscapes (Nash 1996; Ekinsmyth 2002; Domosh 2005). Here is where the tension between the two sub-fields arises—a gendered and cultural clash between the political activism that defined 1970s feminism and the perceived ivory tower, male dominated world of academic aesthetic appreciation. Unlike Marxist geography which is seen as having compatible political goals with feminist geography, cultural geography only seemed to reinforce the dominance of the patriarchal system, particularly with its emphasis on the masculine gaze. However, many geographers assert that the two sub-fields have much to offer each other. For instance, Joanne Sharp (2009) contends that "cultural geography share[s] with feminism a desire to challenge instrumental reason as the dominant form of knowledge" (74). Cultural geography's

ties to the larger cultural, linguistic and spatial turns in the human sciences enhance its critical capacity.

Post-structuralism informs feminist and cultural geography. Jonathon Murdoch (2006) asserts that “post-structuralist theory and human geography have much in common: they both examine nature-society interactions and concern themselves with the spatial consequences of these interactions” (2). Clive Barnett (1998) contends that this draw toward post-structural thinking can be defined as a “commitment to epistemologies” and that these epistemologies “emphasise the contingency of knowledge claims and recognize the close relationship among language, power, and knowledge” (380). Barnett also cites the strong and even dependent connection these post-structural sub-fields have to disciplines outside of geography, particularly in the arena of methodologies. For example, Doreen Massey states plainly in *For Space*, “there is no hermetically sealed discipline of geography” (22). Geographers who borrow heavily from post-structuralist ideals view disciplinary boundaries as porous and thus view the project of defining and sealing the discipline of “Geography” as perhaps counterproductive (Longhurst 2001; 1995). In fact, within feminist geography the diversity of methodologies is considered a strength and a tradition that should be encouraged rather than disregarded (Rose 1995). A critical geography that draws from post-structural ideas is one that positions political, natural, and social systems as fluid and open to a variety of interpretations rather than possessing innate qualities or characteristics (Murdoch 2006). In fact, it is clear that post-structural and feminist thought share a theoretical history—each tradition without a doubt questioning the idea of the autonomous self (Pollack 1996).

Geographers such as Domosh (1991; 1996; 1997; 2005) see fruitful opportunities for new and exciting research at the convergence of the critical categories of gender and culture. This

dissertation works from the convergence of gender and culture. Specifically, my research builds upon Don Mitchell's (1995) provocative assertion that culture acts as a powerful idea and not, as many treat it, as an ontological category. Mitchell calls for a radical reconceptualization of culture. His aim is to uncover the ways in which the *idea* of culture is used as a subversive tool. According to Mitchell, since culture is *everything* it is also *nothing*. It becomes, through human manipulation, a powerful term that is used to not only make sense of the world but also to control it. For Mitchell, understanding culture as an idea that is generated through social processes is fundamental to avoiding "culturalism"—a mode of thinking that blindly ascribes certain characteristics to a certain population in a certain location. For example, it is often asserted that Kahlo (because of her Mexican background) desperately wanted children. However, researchers have uncovered that Kahlo's attitude toward motherhood was, in fact, more complex (Zetterman 2006). Thus, culturalism encourages essentialist designations and, consequently, is a dehumanizing process. For Mitchell, the idea of culture operates within a decidedly Foucauldian framework. For example, Mitchell contends, "the term 'culture' becomes a means for representing relations of power. 'Culture' is a representation of 'others' which solidifies only insofar as it can be given objective reality as stasis in social relations. In this sense, it is the idea of culture that becomes important rather than culture itself" (108).

The actions of what Mitchell terms "social actors" determine the perception of cultures. Kahlo's art and her artistic persona operate across time, place, and culture. Although Kahlo's Mexican identity is significant in the study of her work and life, it should not be used in the service of an essentializing narrative about Kahlo. Mitchell demonstrates this element of culturalism when he claims, "The power of "culture" resides in its ability to be used to describe, label or carve out activities into stable entities, so that they can be named an attribute of a

people” (1995, 112-113). Unfortunately, studies of Kahlo often fall into either traps of culturalism or its extreme opposite, universalism—treating Kahlo as if she has no relation to her time and place. Using Mitchell’s definition of culture as a powerful idea employed by social actors, this dissertation demonstrates how Kahlo was constructed and, in turn, constructed her connection to Mexico through her art, politics, and a very public persona.

The political and scholarly motivations (driven largely by feminist ideals) in this work are in direct opposition to the privileging of what Robyn Longhurst (1995) terms ‘masculinist rationality’. Longhurst (1995) demonstrates that, historically, the mind has been linked with the masculine whereas the body has been linked with the feminine. Similarly, all that is associated with the mind/masculine (reason, control, consciousness) has typically held positive connotations while all that is associated with the body/feminine (passion, passivity, non-consciousness) has typically held negative connotations. The mind/body and male/female dichotomy is an artificial duality that has been sustained and propagated by Western culture. One of Kahlo’s most significant accomplishments is her radical and iconic representations of the female form and sexuality (Franco 1991; Bakewell 1992). In painting herself, Kahlo asserted herself as a subject rather than ‘woman as object’—the traditional trope for Western artistic processes. However, given that so many of Kahlo’s works are self-portraits and autobiographical, there is a strong tendency in the literature to locate them entirely in the personal and negate the political implications of Kahlo’s work.

Frida Kahlo in the World

“Neither wholly external nor wholly internal, both symbolic and symptomatic, and crucially symbiotic, her inconsistent and inter-connected realities, it seemed, also painted Frida Kahlo”
(Haynes, 2006, 3)

When speaking of Kahlo's artistic reception, British writer Jeanette Winterson (2005) claims, "Creative women in the arts find themselves explained by, and reduced to, the circumstances of their lives in a way that men are not. Perhaps it is a fear of genius, of women's genius, that no matter what we create, it is ultimately defined in terms of autobiography, the world of the very small" (100). Kahlo's genius and even her very artistic viability continue to be debated, even though she continues to reign as the highest selling Latin American artist when in 2006 one of her self-portraits sold for \$5.6 million (Tuchman 2002). Additionally, Kahlo was the first Latin American woman to have a piece showcased in the Louvre. Yet Kahlo's place as a pivotal figure in modern art remains controversial and contested. Specifically, Kahlo's label as "the most famous artist in Latin America" is both espoused profusely from those profiting from the tourist industry in Mexico and derided by others who feel Kahlo's easy popularity overshadows many other significant Latin American artists. Prior to her rise to individual fame and notoriety, Frida Kahlo was known primarily, both abroad and in Mexico, as Diego Rivera's wife; the headline of her obituary in 1954 in *The New York Times* read "Frida Kahlo, Artist, Diego Rivera's Wife" (*Times* 1954). Today the academic and popular interest in Kahlo is often dubbed "Fridamania" or "Fridolatry" or even "Kahloism,"—a non-stop phenomenon since Kahlo's rediscovery as an artist. Many scholars pinpoint the beginnings of the Kahlo phenomenon to the 1982 exhibition of both Kahlo and Italian photographer Tina Modotti at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, some to the 1983 publication of Hayden Herrera's biography, *Frida*, and yet others to the flowering of Chicana and feminist art movements in the 1970s (Helland 1991; Bergman-Carton 1993; Francis 2001; Dosamantes-Beaudry 2002).

These divergent and weighty issues concerning Kahlo's art and artistic persona are conducive for study within the field of geography because the two have been linked since the

study of art began as a formal discipline (Kaufmann 2005). In particular, art has been a useful interlocutor for investigating geographic conceptions of national identity (Rogoff 2000). Kahlo's own artwork was born out of nationalistic efforts to establish a modern Mexican nation. According to Joanne Sharp (1996), "The nation is created not through an originary moment or culturally distinct essence but through the repetition of symbols that come to represent the nation's origin and its uniqueness. National culture and character are ritualistic so that every repetition of its symbols serves to reinforce national identity" (98). While it was Kahlo's husband, Diego Rivera, and other male artists who were considered the makers of the national Mexican narrative during the post-revolutionary era, it is now Kahlo's image and her work that are more frequently identified as specifically Mexican. For example, the advertisements for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1990 exhibit *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* feature Kahlo's image as well as some of her key pieces, such as *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on my Mind)* (Figure 1-3).



Figure 1-3 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on my Mind)*, 1943. An iconic piece, used often to advertise exhibitions that feature Kahlo. This work highlights one of Kahlo's most pervasive public identities, that of the Tehuana. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 23, 2013)

In this work, Kahlo is dressed in the traditional Tehuana dress of the native women of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, a location that serves as a touchstone for this dissertation because Kahlo's artistic persona was constructed around this ideal of Tehuana women. By identifying herself geographically, Kahlo highlighted her intellectual and artistic interest in regionalism. The Tehuana woman is an iconic figure for women in Mexico to this day. Representations of these women by both Mexican and foreign observers stretch back to the sixteenth century (Campbell and Green 1996). The traditional clothing of the Tehuana includes brightly embroidered skirts and elaborate head coverings. Hailing from what is now the state of Oaxaca and including part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, female descendants of the Zapotec people act as economic producers. Historically, these women have represented strength,

sensuality, and exoticism (Campbell and Green 1996). Also, the region itself symbolizes a purity independent from colonial conquest (Belnap 2001). Kahlo not only painted herself as a Tehuana, but dressed as one in everyday life.

Clearly, Kahlo's artistic persona is closely tied to Mexico, specifically indigenous Mexico. Thus, this study is grounded in an embodied, spatial understanding of social, aesthetic and critical theories. Harvey (1990) refers to these theoretical elements as "spatializations" and he argues that the understandings gleaned from them are fundamentally interdependent. These interwoven theoretical understandings build one's geographical imagination by constructing a feminist cultural geography and upsetting traditional binaries such as female/male and mind/body. This study is representative of the spatial turn in the human sciences. Edward Soja (2009) defines the spatial turn as "an attempt to develop a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal/historical imaginations" (12). According to Barney Warf and Santa Arias (2009) in their edited volume *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, "space is a vehicle for examining what it means to be interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, to cross the borders and divides that have organized the academic division of labor, to reveal the cultures that pervade different fields of knowledge, and to bring these contrasting lines of thought into a productive engagement with one another" (2). My work will engage with a variety of cognate fields that are steeped within the spatial turn, including literary criticism, art history, cultural studies, and gender/sexuality studies.

Methodologies

My primary method for exploring the critical geographies of Frida Kahlo is what Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) refers to as the "interpretive politics of reading and writing." This methodological approach is suited to a study of Kahlo because there is so much material on her,

both scholarly and popular. As well, the information on Kahlo is often contradictory in nature, painting a different picture of Kahlo with each analysis of her work and life. Margaret Lindauer (1999) captures the curious intellectual history of Kahlo by claiming, “the historiography of Frida Kahlo is nearly as dramatic as her life story” (150). Ironically, the revisionist approach to Kahlo started with Kahlo herself when she altered the year of her birth, 1907, to correspond to the start of the Mexican Revolution, 1910.

In addition to the classic humanistic practices of reading and analyzing primary and secondary sources, my study also includes field work at key museums, cultural sites and archival collections. These fieldwork sites are in five different locations: Mexico City, London, New York, Austin, TX, and Kansas City, MO. In Mexico City, my initial research was conducted in March 2011 at Casa Azul, Museo Dolores Olmedo, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Palacio Nacional, Museo de Arte Popular, Museo Trotsky, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Museo de Arte Moderno, Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, Teotihuacan, Temple Mayor, and the Museo Nacional de Historia. In these locations, I interacted with key pieces of art, tourists, tour guides, and everyday Mexican citizens. In these interactions, I learned that Kahlo is not simply an elusive figure outside of her home country, but in it as well. I found that the Mexican responses, attitudes, and opinions toward Kahlo are varied and contradictory. I also found that key Kahlo sites, such as Casa Azul, are important tourist locations for Mexico City and are heavily advertised.

I also traveled to key sites of Kahlo’s current popularity and key global sites of modern art collections. Travel to these locations was instrumental to my research. Seeing the works face-to-face and those that interacted with them broadened my understanding of how Kahlo is an iconic figure in popular culture. In October 2011, I traveled to London and researched in the

library and archives of the Tate Britain and Whitechapel Gallery. As mentioned previously, the 1982 Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti exhibit at Whitechapel Gallery was a launch point for Kahlo's current popularity and iconic status. Additionally, the Tate Modern, one of the most important museums of modern art in the world, held a pivotal exhibition in 2005 cumulating thirty years of Kahlo scholarship and appreciation. In February 2012, I traveled to New York City and researched in the library and archives of the Museum of Modern Art. New York City is a location where Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo lived while Diego painted the infamous *Man at the Crossroads* in 1932 for the Rockefeller family. Because of the prominent image of Vladimir Lenin in the mural, the Rockefeller family tore down the mural. Rivera eventually replicated the mural in Mexico City at the Palacio de Bellas Artes with a new title, *Man, Controller of the Universe* (Figure 1-4).



Figure 1-4 Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934. Infamous for its controversial, initial creation in a Rockefeller building in New York City. This work is often an example of Rivera's commitment to his politics. Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 30, 2013)

In March 2012, I traveled to Austin, Texas to research at The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection and the Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities at the University of Texas at Austin Libraries. These collections at UT Austin are key locations for Mexicanists in the United States and house primary resources of the Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary eras in Mexico as well as two original works by Kahlo including one of Kahlo's most well-known works *Self-Portrait with Necklace of Thorns* (Figure 1-5).



Figure 1-5 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Necklace of Thorns*, 1940. A highly circulating piece in the Ransom Center collection, travelling all over the world for exhibitions. When I visited the

Ransom Center in 2011 the painting was at an exhibition in South America. Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities at the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed August 5, 2013)

Finally, in July 2013 I traveled to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO to their featured summer exhibit, *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Masterpieces of Modern Mexico*. This exhibit was highly publicized and attended, drawing in many Kahlo fans from across the region. The buzz for the Kahlo exhibit in Kansas City was significant, highlighting how people across age, race, and class designations recognize and appreciate Kahlo as an important international figure.

My dissertation includes three topical chapters preceded by a review chapter of Kahlo and her connection to art and geography. The first topical chapter examines how Kahlo's legacy and art explore the crux of early Mexican nationalism—cultural hybridity. In fact, Kahlo's development as a woman and artist paralleled the development of the modern Mexican nation state. Kahlo embraced her own mixed ethnicity from a young age and furthered this awareness and identification with the adoption of Mexican *indigenismo* as well as European modernism in her personal appearance, art, and politics. This chapter constructs a critical analysis of Kahlo's hybridity and its unique relationship to *mestizo* nationalism. Specifically, my work examines how Kahlo's embodied rendition of *indigenismo* differed significantly from that of the prominent post-revolutionary Mexican muralists (including her husband Diego Rivera) and explains why Kahlo's translation continues to resonate with audiences across the Americas. In this analysis, I situate Kahlo within her context and demonstrate how she not only transcended her time but, moreover, how she continues to ignite discussions of ethnicity and place today.

The second topical chapter addresses the thematic thread of bodily geographies in Kahlo's paintings and life. One of Kahlo's most consistent meditations is on female reproduction

and the body. Often, Kahlo's artistic persona is read through the simplistic and restrictive lens of her involuntary childlessness. Yet a closer examination reveals that Kahlo adopts a critical stance toward the maternal metaphors that occupy foundational locations on the Mexican cultural map. In a society where the maternal figures of La Malinche (whore) and La Virgen de Guadalupe (saint) define and confine womanhood, Kahlo provides alternative and revolutionary interpretations through the exploration of her own bodily geographies. In particular, Kahlo's dramatic visual representations of miscarriage, abortion, breast-feeding and conception challenge the traditional dichotomy of mother-woman in Mexican culture. Kahlo's open exploration of woman's physicality is ground-breaking in and of itself and makes her position as arguably the most significant female artist of the twentieth century even more intriguing. Kahlo's examination of the woman-mother bodily landscape effectively breaks the silencing and objectification of women in the avant-garde art world in which she participated and her work continues to speak to questions of body and gender today and how they are mapped onto women's geographies of the self.

The third topical chapter addresses the local/global dialectic in Kahlo's artistic identity. As touched on earlier in the introduction, Kahlo's cross-cultural impact is significant. In fact, Kahlo's popularity from the 1970s to the 1990s grew primarily from people and events outside of Mexico. Although the counter-culture in Mexico City quickly adopted Kahlo as a spokeswoman for a symbolic rejection of the hegemonic legacy of Porfirio Diaz, Spanish colonization, and U.S. economic control, it has taken longer for the Mexican government to recognize Kahlo's significance (Herrera 1983; Bakewell 1993). However, in 2010 both Kahlo and Rivera appeared on the 500 peso bill. Thus, Kahlo is simultaneously a growing symbol of Mexican identity both within and out of Mexico. Not only is the trajectory of Kahlo's popularity

a cross-border/cross-cultural phenomenon, but also the thematic content of her paintings and her current popularity point to the importance of what geographers refer to as ‘glocalization.’ In fact, ‘Fridamania’ itself is a classic example of glocalization—taking a product with local color and distributing it outside its home territory and, in the process, changing and even overlaying that product with values and tastes that reflect where it is being marketed. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Kahlo and her work not only belong to and reflect Mexico but also to a larger, contemporary culture whose core concerns and values are emulated by Kahlo.

All three topical chapters demonstrate how Kahlo’s artistic persona and work are an embodiment of not only her own place and time, but also how her social currency continues to expand. Interwoven into these topical chapters are the epistemologies of feminism and post-structuralism—providing a strong critical foundation for the study. The concluding chapter of this dissertation positions Kahlo as not just an artist, but as a critical geographer herself.

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Chapter 2 - Frida Kahlo, Art, and Geography



Figure 2-1 Frida Kahlo, *Two Nudes in the Forest*, 1939. An often overlooked piece in Kahlo's oeuvre, yet significant in its representation of her duality. The two women in the painting first appeared in Kahlo's *What the Water Gave Me* the previous year. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 12, 2014)

Introduction

"Human geography is the most visual of the social sciences" (Daniels, 1984, 14)

In this chapter, I give a brief overview of the role of art in the discipline of geography. In particular, I focus on the humanistic foundation for the study of art and geography. The recent

publications of geographer Harriet Hawkins (2011; 2012; 2014) are essential to my understanding of both the history of art and geography as well as the current expansion of that field. I will also build a theoretical argument for the study of Frida Kahlo in the field of geography. To my knowledge, Kahlo has never been studied by a geographer although the geographical themes of her work and life have been touched on briefly by other scholars—including the disciplines of art history, cultural studies, and media studies. One of the main functions of this chapter is to provide an overview of Kahlo’s biographical details and how those details helped to form her artistic identity and her strong connection to place. Kahlo is undoubtedly identified with Mexico throughout the world; however, her connection to the avant-garde, European movement of Surrealism is significant and thus is treated in this chapter. This chapter sets the stage for the following chapters on hybridity, embodiment, and glocalization.

Art & Geography

“art does not, or does not only, mean or represent; it produces, it circulates the world, independent of its makers, with singular powers and properties” (Hawkins, 2014, 11)

Studies that feature art and aesthetics as data sources have a long history within the discipline of Geography. Hawkins (2014) traces the practice of art and geography back to the nineteenth century Prussian geographer Alexander Von Humboldt (1769-1859). In addition to his contributions to many of the sub-fields of geography (including biogeography), Hawkins (2014) notes that Humboldt “believed in a single catalyst behind the arts and the sciences: a subjective appreciation of a universal order in nature” (28). Geographer Edmunds Bunkše (1981) posits that what set Humboldt aside, what made him the “Renaissance man” of geography, was his persistent quest to “grasp the world as a whole—to involve the entire cosmos in his thinking” (127). It is here, in the permission to entertain of subjective appreciation, where art acts as a

primary data source for geographical studies. Artistic data is, of course, qualitative and open to a variety of methodological approaches.

As branches of geography became more and more specialized and multiplied in the twentieth century, geographical studies using art as geographical data increasingly fell into the categories of humanistic, phenomenological, and “new” cultural geography (Hawkins 2014). These sub-fields of geography often reject the idea of the rational, objective observer; instead they embrace the project of studying the world from an embodied and, consequently, relational positionality. It is clear to see why these sub-fields in geography would lean toward the artistic renditions of place and space. Art historian Sharon Udall (2000) contends that “Landscapes are sites on which dramas of myth, power, politics, and identity have been enacted over the centuries” (80). Art becomes, then, a powerful source of data for exploring these geographical topics. From a geographical perspective, the term “art” can apply to a number of genres—including photography, literature, music, painting, sculpture, performance, etc. This dissertation is concerned, primarily, with the paintings of Frida Kahlo. And not just her paintings, but the art of the life of Frida Kahlo. French geographer Joël Bonnemaison (2005) encapsulated this idea well in his opening statement to the book *Culture and Space* where he asserts, “Cultural geography positions human beings at the centre of geographical knowledge—human beings, with their beliefs, their passions, and their life experiences” (1). Although this dissertation is focused on a geographical figure and her artistic output, the methodological approaches discussed in this chapter can be applied to expanded definitions of art and scholarship.

An inclusive understanding of art takes artistic studies away from merely the realm of the representational and catapults them into provocative encounters with art as producer, as agent in the world. The idea of an intellectual practice as an active producer of value is explored by Don

Meinig (1983) in “Geography as an art.” Meinig asserts that the discipline of geography is an art itself—that the process of making meaning from geographical data is both humanistic and artistic. In this article, Meinig’s issue is with the disavowal of the humanities within the discipline of geography. Thus, by casting geography itself as an art, Meinig effectively reinserts the value of humanistic inquiry into a discipline that has chosen to align itself increasingly with the natural sciences. Not only Meinig, but others, were concerned about the devaluing of humanistic studies in geography. Inside this sub-field, geographers sought to apply more directly the methodologies of the linguistic turn in fields such as literary studies and art history. These efforts produced classic studies of art and landscape by geographers include the seminal works of Denis Cosgrove (1984; 1988) and Stephen Daniels (1988; 1993). Their works mimicked the patterns of literary criticism and art historical critique to investigate how landscape painting in particular uncovers and illuminates ideas about national identity, nature, and politics. Due to their pioneering work, geographers such as Bret Wallach (1997) claimed that “geography is being drawn closer to the study of art and to the work of art historians” (93). Wallach contends that geographers and art historians are artificially separated by discipline and training, yet are asking many of the same questions.

Expanding from traditional art historical approaches, geographers have developed numerous methods to approach and study creative geographies (Hawkins 2014). Some of these perspectives include examining art practices as a means to develop theories of space and the potential for public art to be participatory in creating space. Deborah Che’s (2007) article, “Connecting the dots to urban revitalization with the Heidelberg Project” explores the idea of art as a catalyst for geographic change. Using Detroit’s infamous Heidelberg Project as a case in point, Che asserts art and artists have the ability to transform the landscape and, consequently,

people's lives. Che's study is similar to Dan Arreola's (1984) and Kevin Blake's (2007) examinations of how artistic expressions on the landscape—whether they be murals or lighthouses—alter not only the landscape but also people's perceptions of it. Recent geographical analysis of art forms has focused on the bodily experience connecting traditional forms of criticism to feminist practices (Hawkins 2011). This work on art and the bodily experience connects to a growing interest in gender theory—including the influential works of Judith Butler (1993; 1999). Increasingly, geographers are incorporating the work of theorists to guide their studies. For example, Anne Raine (1996) explores the connection between body and landscape in her study of Ana Medieta's work. Raine contends that Medieta's work positions the self's relation to its landscape as an embodied one—a relation that is reliant on such categories as gender and the psyche. Art can transform geographical study. It becomes a data source through which the borders of geographical science are expanded. It breaks down traditional notions of what a geographer is and what a geographer does by disrupting existing epistemologies.

Frida Kahlo and Geography

“The most important thing for everyone in Gringolandia is to have ambition and become 'somebody,' and frankly, I don't have the least ambition to become anybody.” FK

It is at this theoretical juncture between art and geography where this dissertation departs. My work adopts the position that Frida Kahlo's geographical biography is fundamental, yet not determinative, to the understanding of her artistic production (Udall 2000). Furthermore, my work demonstrates how Kahlo's art is a window upon several geographical contexts: hybridity, the body, and glocalization. Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser (1989) assert that Kahlo maps a unique Mexican landscape in her work. To some, this is a bold assertion given that Kahlo's oeuvre is populated primarily by self-portraits, yet it is Kahlo's provocative connection between

herself (or representations of herself and other women) and the environment that creates a landscape which questions entrenched post-colonial and gendered identities. Priscilla Frank (2014) contends that Kahlo's work demonstrates how "the self bleeds into the environment and vice versa." For example, the piece that opens this chapter, *Two Nudes in the Forest* (Figure 2-1), creates a surreal Mexican landscape with two women—one light skinned (European) and the other dark skinned (Indigenous). In this work Kahlo explores one of her frequent themes—the conflation of women and the earth, the engendering of the Mexican landscape (Udall 2000). Additionally, in many of Kahlo's paintings this contrast between colonizer and colonized is a focal point. This piece is often understood to represent Kahlo's open bisexuality bringing to the forefront another feature of Kahlo's work—the artist's rejection of a single, definable self (Udall 2000).

Through her reinterpretation of the body and the self, the Mexican landscape is embodied by Kahlo and this embodiment is a stark contrast to the Mexican landscape painted by her male contemporaries. These contemporaries, including Diego Rivera (1886-1957), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), and José Orozco (1883-1949), made up the core of the Mexican Renaissance (1920-1950). The Mexican Renaissance, an artistic movement characterized by muralism, innovative approaches to modern art, and national pride, was a male driven enterprise in which narratives of nation building dominated (Franco 1991). It was not only male artists and writers that represented Mexico, but outsiders as well. In fact, Carl Sauer's 1941 article "The personality of Mexico" is an excellent example of such academic adulation and romantic envisioning of the native Mexican landscape. Kahlo's rendition of the Mexican landscape, however, was located in the female, indigenous form. Udall (2000) contends that Kahlo

had one strong lifeline that was never severed: the ancient women of Mexico's history and mythology whom she uncovered gave her usable female identifications in an androcentric country. In a sense, Latin America's ubiquitous machismo, which reserved the public sphere for male artists, paradoxically freed women to pursue their own private, personal paths within the arts. (2)

Thus, even though Kahlo's work focuses often on herself or other representations of women, it is the place-embodiment of these female forms that draws Kahlo's work into the geographical.

Kahlo's Background

"I drank because I wanted to drown my sorrows. But now the damned things have learned to swim, and now decency and good behavior weary me." FK

In her book on gender and representation in Mexico, Jean Franco (1989) contends that it was the lingering Messianic spirit which over-emphasized male virility in the Revolution that subsequently marginalized women even though, at the outset of the Revolution, women were a rhetorical target for liberation. Unfortunately, other contemporary feminist artists such as María Izquierdo (1902-1955); Rosa Rolando (1895-1970); Lola Cueto (1897-1978); Aurra Reyes (1908-1985); Isael Villaseñor (1909-1953); and Olga Costa (1913-1993) are rarely discussed in the literature on post-revolutionary Mexico. According to Dina Mirkin (2008), these women were also pioneers as they broke the silence of Mexican culture on such topics as childbirth, motherhood, and marriage. Kahlo was one of these pioneering female Mexican artists; yet her close connection to Rivera's circle unfairly diminishes her contributions to countless future artists, including Cindy Sherman, Ana Mendieta, Catherine Opie, Thomas Houseago, Lorna Simpson, and Shirin Neshat. Some critics and scholars even contend that contemporary art as we know it is unthinkable without Kahlo (Frank 2014; Udall 2000). Yet, it is not merely Kahlo's

fame and continued influence that distinguish her from other artists. Sarah Misemer (2008) contends, “The celebrity status that Kahlo achieved after death is not unique to her, but the broad interest in a figure so intricately tied to a certain geography and history is unusual” (18). Again, Kahlo’s significance circles back to her geography and the geographies in her work.

Kahlo selected, as a young woman, the identity of what Jolie Olcott (2005) terms *la chica moderna*. This modern young woman in Mexico City was influenced strongly by the 1920s flapper culture in the U.S. and Europe. Kahlo’s first significant identity as *la chica moderna* was dependent on the clever use of self-presentation. Even at a young age, Kahlo was always mindful of the significance and power of clothing in the process of identity construction (Amador Gómez-Quintero and Pérez Bustillo 2002; Misemer 2008). In her role as *la chica moderna*, Kahlo took the identity a step further by playing with notions of masculinity and femininity (Bakewell 1993). For example, an infamous Kahlo family photo, that was dramatized in Julie Taymor’s 2002 biopic *Frida*, portrays Frida dressed in a gentleman’s clothing (Figure 2-2).



Figure 2-2 Frida (age 19) in gentlemen's clothing (far left) for family portrait. Iconic photo of young Kahlo, demonstrating her early interest in bending gender boundaries. This is one of the most frequently circulated images of Kahlo. Reproduced from <http://www.scene4.com> (Accessed June 19, 2014)

According to some critics, Kahlo's dramatic and persistent exploration of gender and alternative sexualities throughout her life is often glossed over in an attempt to make her fit into the category of "woman" and, unfortunately, victim as well (Borsa 1990). This trend toward heteronormativity continues in the prevalent over-emphasis on Kahlo's marriage to Rivera (Lindauer 1999). Additionally, even though Taymor's film evocatively portrays the time and place of Kahlo's context, many Kahlo fans and scholars were disheartened at Salma Hayek's

sexualized portrayal of the iconic Kahlo that relegates a figure of immense geographical, historical, and cultural significance to stereotypical notions of a “sexy” Latina (Guzmán 2006). Although Kahlo is undoubtedly a feminist icon, there are some critics who question that distinction as well as those who undyingly defend it (Helland 1991; Bakewell 1993; Guzmán 2006). Kahlo’s feminist identity will be explored more thoroughly in the next three body chapters of this dissertation.

While a student, Kahlo first met Rivera as he was painting *Creation* (Figure 2-3) in her high school.



Figure 2-3 Diego Rivera, *Creation*, 1922/23. Mural Rivera was painting when he and Kahlo first met at her school. The mural was being restored during my 2011 trip to Mexico City. Escuela

Nacional Preparatoria, Colegio de San Ildefonso, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 19 2014)

Following Kahlo's recovery from her trolley accident in 1925, they formed a mentoring relationship and were soon married. One oft-cited quote from Kahlo is that there were two accidents in her life—the trolley and her relationship to Rivera. These two events shaped Kahlo's life, art, and image in significant ways. For example, the slow recovery after the trolley accident gave Kahlo the time to develop as a painter and also inspired the legendary and shocking depictions of pain in her art. The relationship with Rivera placed Kahlo at the center of the modern art world and some critics suggest that Kahlo used the unending series of operations in order to keep Rivera's attention in a sort of dramatic display of Munchhausen's syndrome, a psychic disorder that compels one to feign illness in order to receive attention (Herrera 1983).

Explorations of art and geography breathe life into art itself and repurpose traditional notions of art, the artist, the critic, and the audience. Fundamentally, through this process of repurposing, art and geography become creative encounters and transformers of culture (Hawkins 2014). Kahlo's art and self-presentation operate along similar theoretical lines and thus lend themselves to a more holistic, interdisciplinary approach. Kahlo's artistic sensibility came not only from her imagination and participation in the avant-garde world of modern art, but also from her extensive scholarly and intellectual background. As a young girl, Kahlo attended the elite Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City. Kahlo was one of thirty-five female students at a school of two-thousand pupils and, before her tragic trolley accident at the age of eighteen, had planned to eventually study medicine (Richmond 1994). In this environment Kahlo was exposed to socialist and revolutionary politics as well as many literary figures. In addition, much of Kahlo's scholarly and artistic leanings came from her father, Guillermo Kahlo (1871-1941), a photographer and highly-educated immigrant. The role of Kahlo's father in her artistic and

intellectual development is gaining increased interest within Kahlo studies and is informative to the more overarching question of creativity and gender (Nochlin 1971; Beck 2006). In fact, Jeffrey Belnap (2001) contends that Kahlo's highly evolved cosmopolitanism started with the influence of her father rather than with Rivera. In many ways Kahlo's partnership with Rivera is overanalyzed and overemphasized in the literature and in popular films; in fact, this is sometimes done to such an extent that Kahlo appears to be almost a wild Amazon-like woman who was tamed only by Rivera's urbanity. For example, in Tim Robbins' 1999 film *Cradle Will Rock* set in 1930s New York the Kahlo character does not speak, she only shoots animalistic stares and stays close to Rivera at all times. Such representations fly directly in the face of the biographical facts of Kahlo's life, including her lifelong study of writers and thinkers. As aptly stated by Gannit Ankori (1993), Kahlo's library "does have a story to tell" (237).

One of Kahlo's favorite writers was Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). His novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), still sits on the bookshelves at The Blue House. It is easy to see the influence of Wilde's work on Kahlo's artistic practice. For instance, Wilde elevated the construction of the self to the highest art form, specifically in his essay *The Critic as Artist* (1891) where one of the speakers argues passionately for the continuous refashioning of the self as the highest art form, a project that Kahlo devoted her life to through her paintings, her personal dress, and the staged photographs that construct so much of her visual biography. Frank (2014) contends that Kahlo's selves were "always in flux, easily mutable by the whims of a brushstroke, an outfit change or even a stance. There was Frida as frightened bride, Frida as wounded deer, Frida as mass of tangled roots, Frida as baby, Frida as queen." This multiplicity of personalities is a trademark of Kahlo's work. The connection between personality and art is also highlighted in Wilde's essay—even claiming boldly that art springs from personality. Like

Wilde, Kahlo nurtures multiple personalities and selves, all carefully constructed and performed for an impactful effect. One of Kahlo's first acts as a married woman was to wear a household maid's blouse and skirt for her 1929 wedding, in lieu of the traditional European wedding dress that other young women of Kahlo's class in Mexico would have worn (Herrera 1983). This moment of identity construction through the self and personality was painted by Kahlo three years later in her work *Frida and Diego Rivera* (Figure 2-4).

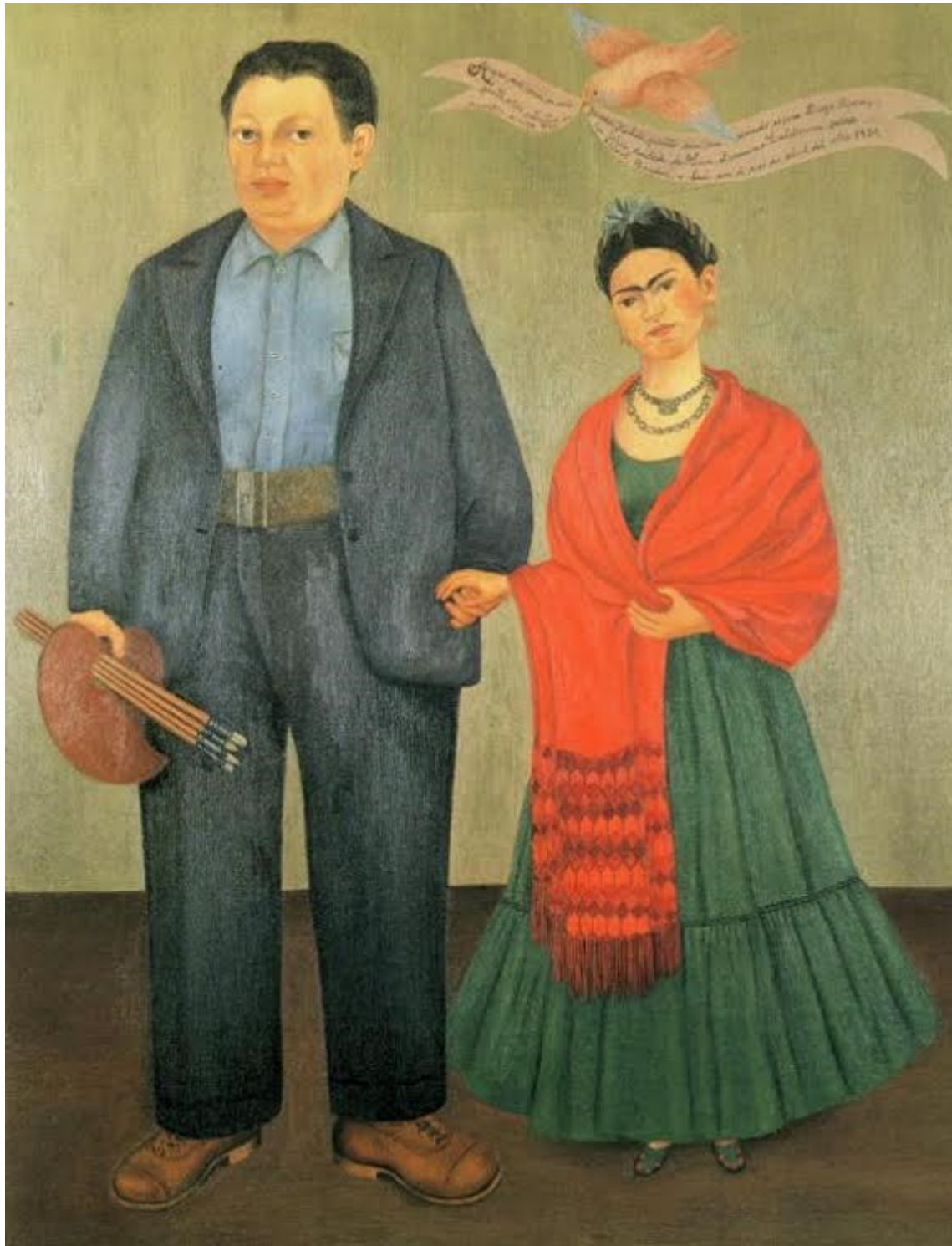


Figure 2-4 Frida Kahlo, *Frida and Diego Rivera*, 1931. Kahlo's recreation of her wedding day. This is one of Kahlo's first representations of herself as indigenous. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 25, 2014)

The event of Kahlo and Rivera's wedding as material for one of Kahlo's paintings pinpoints a major crux in Kahlo research—Kahlo's insistence on performing her art through engagement with her geographic identities.

Kahlo's focus on the self and personality, so often read as narcissism, in fact preempts the writings of Michel Foucault in *The Care of the Self* (1988). In this text, Foucault advocates for a focus on the self—including an advocacy of the Freudian concept of the pleasure principle. Kahlo, a close reader of Freud, was undoubtedly familiar with this intellectual ideal of self-indulgence. Foucault asserts that the exercise of the pleasure principle combats the Christian culture that developed a:

mistrust of the pleasures, an emphasis on the consequences of their abuse for the body and the soul, a valorization of marriage and marital obligations [...]. A whole attitude of severity was manifested in the thinking of philosophers and physicians in the course of the first two centuries. (39)

Kahlo's notion of the self, like Wilde's, embraces the pleasure principle as integral to the creative process. For Kahlo, this creative process was undoubtedly gendered. French feminist Helene Cixous' asserts in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975):

you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible. (334)

Cixous, like Kahlo, connects female sexuality with the creative faculty. It is this creative faculty that is so essential for Kahlo's artistic production—an artistic production that was intimately tied to Kahlo's place and time.

This dissertation connects Kahlo within her geographical and historical context and examines the ways in which Kahlo constructed her own critical geographies through her work and artistic identity. Central to my study is a progression beyond Kahlo's well-known biography. A frequent complaint in the literature on Kahlo is the obsessive focus on the colorful details of her life and their influence on her work. In his introduction to the reproduction and publication of her personal diary, Carlos Fuentes (1995, 10) states boldly, "Born with the Revolution, Frida Kahlo both mirrors and transcends this central event of twentieth-century Mexico." In addition to the alteration of the date of her birth, Kahlo also broadcast other false biographical details in order to suit her agenda. For instance, although Kahlo's father has been and continues to be categorized as Jewish within the literature, he was not and thus, neither was Kahlo (Ronnen 2006). Kahlo's communist ties made a Jewish background appealing as part of her and Rivera's public personas and international stances against Nazism. Although Kahlo's story is significant in any examination of her artistic identity, an overemphasis on it has the tendency to mask what David Lomas (1993, 5) describes as "the disruptive force of her imagery." Thus, although it is crucial to unpack Kahlo's biography, the details of her life should not be viewed as determining her work, but rather inspiring and creating it and her. Again, the connection between Kahlo's art and life can be traced to her theoretical and philosophical influences. In *The Critic as Artist*, one of Wilde's protagonists insists:

The longer one studies life and literature, the more strongly one feels that behind everything that is wonderful stands the individual, and that it is not the moment that makes the man, but the man who creates the age. (557)

Today, Kahlo undoubtedly stands as a symbol of Mexico. In fact, art historian Lusi Cardoza y Aragon even compared Kahlo with one of Mexico's most significant geographic features, the

volcanic mountain Ixtaccihuatl. Although Kahlo represents a significant Mexican geographical feature, her ultimate contribution is in the geographies she created. Udall (2000) asserts that, “Kahlo did not live in our geography; she invented a geography of despair and dislocation [...] places that are unmapped, unrelenting in their harshness, and without visible points of entrance or escape” (197). Kahlo’s habit of building imaginary landscapes is one of her artistic signatures that connect her to the Surrealists.

Surrealism

“They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn’t. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.” FK

In the context of artistic heritage, Kahlo’s Surrealism (or not) is a hotly debated topic. At its most expansive definition, Surrealism is a cultural movement that began in Europe in the 1920s; yet, the visual arts within Surrealism are its most widely recognized and celebrated products. While Kahlo herself sometimes distanced herself from the European avant-garde, making claims that she didn’t know she was a surrealist until André Breton (the father of surrealism) told her she was, she also often talked about her work in connection with the infamous artistic movement. Kahlo asserted, “I use Surrealism as a means of poking fun at others without their realizing it, and of making friends with those who do realize it” (Herrera 1983). If Surrealism is defined as an artistic movement that works to overcome dualities, boundaries, and binaries then Kahlo’s work undoubtedly shares philosophical grounding with it (Allmer 2009).

Not just Kahlo, but Mexico itself was claimed by Surrealism as an idealized geography. Lourdes Andrade (1998, 106) asserts:

As part of their repudiation of the West and its decadent culture, the Surrealists took up an anti-colonialist stand during the 1920s. This led to their enthusiastic

discovery of so-called exotic cultures, among them those of pre-Hispanic Mexico, in which they found a spiritual arsenal that offered them the energy and authenticity they wanted to inject into their poetry and life.

Ironically, this “discovery” and glorification of Mexico can be read as colonialist itself. Geographer Tariq Jazeel (2012) contends that the practices of colonialism and imperialism (both formal and informal) create geographic knowledge. In the case of the Surrealists, the knowledge generated about Mexico is flattering; however, it is still bestowed, labeled, and categorized by outsiders. Undoubtedly, Kahlo recognized the conquest-oriented nature of the Surrealists and therefore developed her own artistic identity by disowning the movement.

One of Kahlo’s strongest connections with Surrealism is her use of the female body. The surrealist use of the female muse and other static representations of women is now highly criticized by feminists. Patricia Allmer (2009, 13) notes that although

surrealist thought radically challenged hierarchies, it often remained blind to its own gender politics, locked in a heterosexual, sometimes homophobic, patriarchal stance positioning and constructing women (and never men) as artists’ muses, *femme-enfants*, virgins, dolls and erotic objects.

Kahlo dismantled this male world by using herself as her creative subject (Udall 2000). For example, one of Kahlo’s works that overtly lends itself to a surrealist categorization is *The Little Deer* (Figure 2-5).



Figure 2-5 Frida Kahlo, *The Little Deer*, 1946. A classic example of Kahlo's heavy and deliberate borrowing from Surrealism. Also representative of Kahlo's close connection with animals and her many pets. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 25, 2014)

Hayden Herrera (1991) reads the painting as a direct reference to both Kahlo's broken body and her broken relationship with Rivera. Herrera also notes the prominence of the branch in front of the Kahlo/deer figure, pointing out the pre-Hispanic tradition of placing branches on graves.

While that is an excellent close reading of the piece, I'm more interested in this work's obvious reference to Salvador Dali's (1904-1989) *Shirley Temple* (Figure 2-6).



Figure 2-6 Salvador Dalí, *Shirley Temple*, 1939. Dalí's piece undoubtedly influenced Kahlo's *The Little Deer*. Although Kahlo's Surrealist connection is often downplayed, here it is undeniable. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Netherlands, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 28, 2014)

Kahlo's connection to surrealism is undeniable. Her rejection of belonging to this world is worthy of examination. Kahlo's deep political commitment to the indigenous and to the folk traditions and culture all but requires her to distance herself from an artistic movement that is highly intellectual and in many respects rootless. Expressing her disgust (real or invented) for the avant-garde world of Paris, Kahlo claimed, "They are so damn 'intellectual' and rotten that I can't stand them anymore...I [would] rather sit on the floor in the market of Toluca and sell tortillas, than have anything to do with those 'artistic' bitches of Paris."

Kahlo is unique not only in her simultaneous borrowing and refuting of Surrealism but also in that she is a successful female artist. The art world in general was dominated by men and Surrealism in particular was especially male focused. Thus, the work of female surrealists is seen to differ from that of their male counterparts in that it “transformed the female body, their bodies, from a male fetish to a site of resistance, psychic power, and creative energy” (Fort, Arcq, and Gies, 2012, 27). When many of these female surrealists came to the United States and Mexico looking for the freedom to create their own work they naturally brought with them European culture, ideas, and values. Mexico City in particular was a haven for foreign artists, revolutionaries, and intellectuals during Kahlo’s time. These foreigners were drawn to the ideology of the 1910 Revolution and postrevolutionary politics that emphasized identity and art (Fort, Arcq, and Geis 2012). It was in this hybrid cultural context that Kahlo formed a friendship with the Italian photographer Tina Modotti (1896-1942). One of the main cultural events that launched Kahlo’s current popularity in the early 1980s was the exhibit of her and Modotti’s work at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1982. The reviews of the show repeatedly and consistently declared that Kahlo’s work had no political significance and was tied only to her “fragile” emotional state. One reviewer went so far as to claim that Kahlo merely painted “her inner world of suffering, fantasy and confession” and that it was only Modotti who had a political agenda. This is a strange critique given that the early 1980s marked the tail end of second-wave feminism, a movement that adopted the battle cry, “The personal is political!”

Conclusion

Udall’s (2000) bold assertion that Kahlo invented her own geography is insightful and largely unexplored in the literature. Unique to Kahlo is her creation of a highly internal or interior geography. Bunkše (2004) notes that “it is not only the sirens’ songs of unknown,

faraway lands and seas that excite the geographic imagination; unknown lands are also waiting to be explored within the human being” (3). In this chapter, I introduced the field of art and geography and have shown how Frida Kahlo fits into that specialized field of study. I also gave extensive background information on the life of Kahlo and began drawing those biographical details into the major strands of thought for this dissertation: hybridity, the body, and glocalization. In the next three chapters, I will further explore these three guiding integrative, theoretical concepts of this dissertation. Throughout my work, I will demonstrate how these concepts are fundamental to understanding Kahlo as a major geographical figure.

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Chapter 3 - Frida Kahlo's Hybrid Geographies



Figure 3-1 Frida Kahlo, *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I*, 1936. An essential work for understanding Kahlo's connection and perspective to both her Mexican and European heritages. This piece has become increasingly important as scholars have begun studying Kahlo's strong connection with her father. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 8, 2014)

Introduction

“The German grandparents are symbolized by the sea, the Mexican by the earth” (Frida Kahlo, Interview with Parker Lesley, 1939)

It is significant that Kahlo lived and participated in the major centers of modern thought and creativity during her lifetime, including New York City, Paris, and, of course most significantly, Mexico City. Yet, even with this rich historical and geographical hybrid context to draw from, the majority of the critical pieces on Kahlo give the trope of hybridity only a passing glance. In the case of Kahlo, the concept of hybridity takes on multiple meanings including disrupting the static duality of nature/culture and racial/cultural mixing. The rejection of hybridity as a central theme downplays the significance of colonialism—both for Mexico and for Kahlo (Bartra 2000; Belnap 2001). This rejection is ironic in light of the fact that the invention of modern Mexican nationalism was constructed around the concept of miscegenation, in particular as it related to women’s roles (Beltran 2004). For instance, the cultural narrative of Malintzin, the mother of all Mexicans and Hernán Cortés’ (1485-1547) mistress and local advisor, drives many of the nationalistic ideals concerning ethnicity and belonging in post-revolutionary Mexico. A more detailed analysis of Malintzin as she relates to Kahlo will be discussed in chapter three. Yet, it is significant because the concept of hybridity runs deep throughout the Mexican geographical imagination. In the case of Kahlo and other Mexican women, it is the expression of *mestizaje* that is the most pronounced (Vaughn 2006).

Geographers have long discussed how racial processes are always spatialized processes (Price 2010). Hybridity, in particular, is of interest to geographers due to its emphasis on place and territoriality (Mawani 2010). In this chapter, I take the geographical concept of hybridity, specifically Mexican hybridity, and demonstrate how it was translated by Kahlo in her work and

life. I begin by analyzing Kahlo's place within post-revolutionary Mexico, describing the way in which Kahlo's connections to and interest in the nationalistic ideals of *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad* connect her to the larger, cultural construct of hybridity. I also highlight Kahlo's interest in the biological nature of hybridity and how she continually connected the representations of people in her work to both Mexican and European landscapes and motifs. Finally, I examine how Kahlo's dichotomous European and Indigenous heritage was a major foundation for constructing both her personal identity and her work.

Frida Kahlo and Post-Revolutionary Mexico

"Frida's mestiza-self, as embodied Mexican nation, is an active, fertile, female agent with a self-generated subjectivity and self-defined sexuality, which challenges the post-revolution constructions of the conquered and raped fatherland" (Bakewell, 1993, 173)

Frida Kahlo embodies the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. Kahlo not only deeply identified with the ideals of the Revolution, but dedicated much of her work to exploring and interrogating the creation and implementation of the modern Mexican nation. The Mexican Revolution was a struggle of cultural ideals rather than a clash over territory. It was inherently geographic in its emphasis on place and the nature of belonging. The Revolution placed Mexico City on the map in a way that created a unique intellectual, political, and artistic climate. This impactful event and its after-effects dominated the political and cultural landscape of Mexico during Kahlo's lifetime and continue to influence the nation today (Gonzales 2002).

Prior to the Revolution, the long reign of Porfirio Diaz (1876; 1877-1880; 1884-1911) had cemented the ruling notion of class differentiation within the country and elevated Mexico City to the status of a primate city. From the privileged vantage point of Mexico City, Diaz successfully controlled a country that, for nearly fifty years prior to his reign, had suffered from

domestic unrest following independence from Spain in 1821 (Gonzales 2002). The Porfiriato's emphasis on the capital city was played out via the pursuit of the two dominant ideals of progress and modernity (Trillo 1996). At this time, Mexico City still had strong ties to Europe not only because of its former status as a colony of Spain but also because after Independence the city looked to Paris as a cosmopolitan ideal (Fuentes 1995; Trillo 1996). The Revolution, then, was in many respects a reaction to the Euro-centrism that defined the Porfiriato as well as an effort to heal the sharp class and racial divisions within the country (Lindauer 1999).

Yet, the post-revolutionary era still retained ties to European ideologies, particularly a strong interest in Marxism. From a global perspective, the Mexican Revolution anticipated the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia—an event more widely known around the globe today because of its connections to the USSR, the infamous Stalinist regime, and the Cold War. Although the two revolutions are not commonly connected in the popular imagination, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (1989) draw many parallels between the two events and their historical connections to modern art. Specifically, the authors point to the strong influence of the Continental movement of Cubism in both countries, the overthrow of archaic and repressive regimes, and a refiguring of society that called for a “new art” (Mulvey and Wollen 1989, 82-83).

This strong cultural element of the Mexican Revolution has encouraged critics to label it a cultural success if not a political one (Fuentes 1995). For example, after the Revolution, in an effort to construct a national culture that was distinct from that of Spain or France, Minister of Education José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) commissioned male artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Siqueiros to celebrate the ancient, indigenous, and folk past of the Mexican land (Castro-Sethness 2004/2005; Flores 2008). These and other large-scale projects

contributed to the movements of *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad*—movements with strong inclinations toward the native that rejected the imperial West (Trillo 1996). It is within these movements that the Mexican Renaissance was born. The Mexican Renaissance, in addition to introducing new artistic styles and philosophies, functioned as a nationalistic project, incorporating the ideals of *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad* into public art.

Kahlo was part of the young intellectual elite that supported and advocated for the ideals of *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad*. As their definitions suggest, *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad* were central concepts (if not the defining concepts) in the strong nationalistic forces that dominated Mexican politics after the Revolution. It is here, in the political realm, where Kahlo and future husband Diego Rivera first intersected. Kahlo was a young girl when Rivera was first recruited by Vasconcelos to return from Europe in order to assist, via the construction of massive murals, with the development of the modern nation of Mexico. Rivera wholeheartedly embraced the nationalistic fervor for *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad* as did his future partner, Frida Kahlo.

It was Rivera's suggestion that Kahlo draw from the native traditions of *retablo* and *ex-voto* paintings—folk art that flourished in rural Mexico after the Independence (Castro-Sethness 2004/2005; Misemer 2008). Consequently, Rivera facilitated Kahlo's strong connection with the indigenous culture of native Mexico and used his popularity for his own agenda of advancing Mexican nationality and pride. As a couple, Rivera and Kahlo amassed a substantial collection of *ex-voto* and *retablo* art works and they used them to decorate their homes and studios (Amador and Bustillo 2002). Much of this collection still graces their garden at the Blue House (Casa Azul) in Coyoacán. Figure 3-2 is an example of one such art piece.



Figure 3-2 Pre-Columbian sculpture, The Blue House, Coyoacán, Mexico, 20 March 2011. One of the many indigenous sculptures that grace the garden at Casa Azul. The garden has a sacred quality that is enhanced by the artifacts of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Photo by author.

I took this photo March of 2011 when I visited Casa Azul and other significant sites of Kahlo's art and life in Mexico City. The garden of Casa Azul is dotted with similar indigenous pieces, creating a vivid scene from the past. The garden at Casa Azul felt more authentic in terms of this nostalgia than the inside of the house. In the garden at Casa Azul, however, visitors are pretty much left alone and can think and/or meditate in the surroundings. These pieces are similar to the hundreds in Mexico City's Museo Nacional de Antropología, the most popular museum in Mexico. During my visit to the museum, I interacted with many pre-Columbian sculptures such as Figure 3-3:



Figure 3-3 Pre-Columbian sculpture, Museo Nacional de Antropología, 18 March 2011. One of the smaller and more photographable figures at the museum. This piece looked very similar to the ones in the garden at Caza Azul. Photo by author.

Kahlo's garden is, in many respects, its own tiny museum of pre-Columbian artifacts. Although a tourist might be visiting Casa Azul as purely a "must do" activity, he/she cannot ignore the deeply embedded context of Mexican history that is visually represented at the site. The indigenous past remains important to Mexicans today. I visited Teotihuacan on the Day of the Sun, the spring Equinox. The site was crawling with people of all ages, and they climbed the pyramids to worship and participate in the indigenous past (Figure 3-4).



Figure 3-4 People climbing Pyramid of the Moon, Teotihuacan, 21 March 2011. A very busy day at the site, 'Day of the Sun,' with both locals and tourists. There was a sense of both celebration and solemnity that day. Photo by author.

Kahlo's immediate and strong identification with Tehuana culture is not surprising. However, some critics are suspicious of the ways in which Kahlo opted to pay homage to Zapotec women, claiming that she participated in an "aesthetization of the other" in line with colonial and masculinist representations of natives (Campbell and Green 1996, 160). Kahlo's approach to the Tehuana figure was influenced strongly by Rivera as he even depicted her in that dress in his own murals. Belnap (2001) contends that Kahlo's image as a Tehuana negotiated an uneasy space between the colonial legacy of Mexico's past and the *indigenismo* promoted by the intellectual, Mexican elite. Figure 3-5 a classic example of how Kahlo performed the role of Tehuana and, consequently communicated Mexican revolutionary ideals as powerfully as a piece of art. Rebecca Block and Lynda Hoffman-Jeep (1999) contend that in this native performance Kahlo constructs herself as a critical geographic subject. In this photo (and many of others like it), Kahlo embodies herself as a hybrid geographical subject—a positionality that is fundamentally anti-essentialist in nature (Beltran 2004).

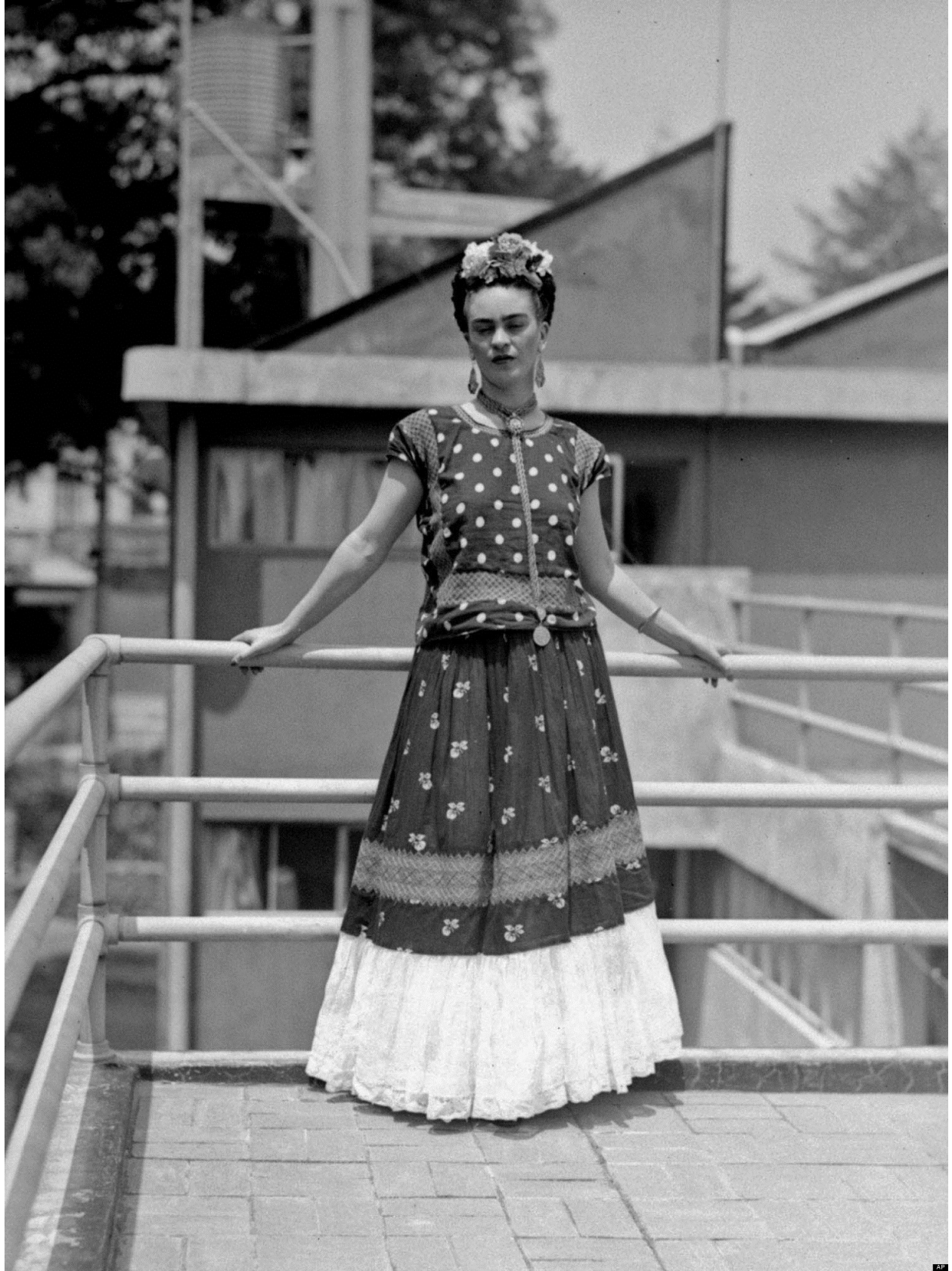


Figure 3-5 Kahlo dressed as a Tehuana, a classic portrait of Kahlo staged for dramatic effect. This is perhaps Kahlo’s most recognizable public identity, Reproduced from <http://www.nydailynews.com> (Accessed July 15, 2014)

Frida Kahlo and Hybridity

“Mexico’s miscegenation, which had perversely fascinated and generated discrimination before the revolution, became a potent indicator of Mexicanness” (Giese, 2001, 64)

Kahlo’s simultaneous and interconnected interests in *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad*, the avant-garde, and global political concerns coalesces in a complex philosophy of hybridity. Hybridity as a cultural concept developed out of nineteenth century biological and botanical theories and became deeply inscribed in imperialistic discourses of scientific racism (Amoamo 2011). Its fundamental ideas about “blending” different races to make a new “race” carried over into the nation building and modernization efforts in Latin America in the twentieth century; one notable example is Vasconcelos’s *The Cosmic Race* published in 1925. Vasconcelos’s influential text helped define and shape notions of *mestizo* nationalism in post-revolutionary Mexico, a time when Mexicans strove to articulate an independent national identity that valued both its native and European heritages.

Kahlo’s hybridization is more complex than traditional Mexican identity. Her immediate European roots played a significant role in her artistic and intellectual development. A 1936 painting (the one that opens this chapter) that reflects Kahlo’s nationalistic and ethnic concerns is *My Grandparents, My Parents and I* (Figure 3-1). The piece stands as not only an expression of Kahlo’s hybridity, but is also understood as a seminal piece that begins developing the central motifs of Kahlo’s oeuvre (Ankori 1993). In this painting, Kahlo claims both parts of herself—the European and the Mexican; however, the prominence and detail of the Mexican landscape and her home, Casa Azul, located in the Mexico City suburb of Coyoacán, suggests that Kahlo

identifies most strongly with her birthplace and nation state. This piece also demonstrates Kahlo's strong interest in the biological elements of hybridity, not only by connecting her naked, child body to her parents and grandparents but also by strategically placing the image of an egg being fertilized in the lower left-hand corner as well as the image of the unborn Kahlo nestled in her mother's womb. In the painting's focus on racial hybridity, it constructs a map of standard Mexican genealogy (Ankori 1993). Although many Mexicans do embody the blending of European and Indigenous backgrounds, Kahlo's is more immediately transformative because she was only one generation removed from the blending.

Although Kahlo visually emphasizes the Mexican elements in her piece on hybridity, it is clearly referencing Henri Rousseau's (1844-1910) *The Present and the Past* (Figure 3-6):



Figure 3-6 Henri Rousseau, *The Present and the Past*, 1899. A strong influence for Kahlo's *My Grandparents*, *My Parents and I*. This work demonstrates Kahlo's strong European influences. The Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 8, 2014)

With this reference, Kahlo is participating in a narrative of transformation—effectively asserting that the post-revolutionary present for Mexico is simultaneously a departure from Eurocentrism.

Ankori (1993) asserts that even although Kahlo

deliberately spoke a “rough” colloquial Mexican vernacular; drank pulque and demonstratively sang popular Mexican ballads known as “corridos”; she wholeheartedly declared her identity with “la raza” and accordingly immersed

herself in all things indigenous. But in spite of what, on the face of it, seems to be a great gap between the diametrically opposed cultural worlds of father and daughter, and in spite of Frida's sincere devotion to the Mexican culture, never did she sever ties with her parental European roots. She never could or perhaps never wanted to reject her father's heritage. (233-234)

Ankori's reading of *My Grandparents, My Parents and I* not only address the cultural implications of the painting's themes, but also the geographical. Ankori contends that Kahlo's self, the "I" in the title of the painting, is clearly a product of place—a hybrid place that in fact constructs individuality.

The element of hybridity in Kahlo's persona and work has been addressed briefly by some scholars such as Lucretia Hoover Giese in her 2001 article on Kahlo's early and often overlooked piece *Luther Burbank*, 1931 (Figure 3-7).



Figure 3-7 Frida Kahlo, *Luther Burbank*, 1931. The famous horticulturist served as an inspiration to Kahlo's ideas about hybridity. This is a rarely discussed piece in Kahlo's oeuvre. Dolores Olemdo Museum, Mexcio City, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 10, 2014)

Giese contends that Kahlo's painting of Burbank (1849-1926) the famous American horticulturist, a scientist renowned for his work on hybridity, is significant to Kahlo's own understandings and renditions of cultural hybridity in Mexico. Additionally, Giese connects Burbank's theories about hybridity to the parallel concerns of ethnicity, national origin, and immigration that dominated social and political thought in both the United States and Mexico in the early twentieth century.

Kahlo's political passion is dramatically demonstrated in her exploration of Mexico's national identity and her demonstration of how that identity is tied to distinctly gendered representations of hybridity. One of her works which demonstrates her embodiment of Mexican hybridity is *Self-Portrait on the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States* (Figure 3-8).



Figure 3-8 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait on the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States*, 1932. An important early piece in Kahlo's oeuvre and representative of her distaste for Gringolandia. This work set the tone for many of Kahlo's later paintings. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 10, 2014)

In this work, Kahlo highlights the native past of Mexico and how it contrasts with the capitalistic, industrial culture of the United States. This work highlights why many of the European surrealists were drawn to Mexico—for them it was a land that represented a source of creativity as well as a landscape of myth and tradition (Fort, Arcq and Gies 2012). Kahlo and Rivera were at the forefront of representing this idyllic Mexico; however, while Rivera's

representations are all exterior to himself, most of Kahlo's use her own body and bodily processes as part of the landscape. Also, the painting speaks directly to what Claudia Schaefer (1992) terms the geographical and cultural "double bind" of Mexico—the almost impossibility of maintaining a distinct national identity in the constant exposure to capitalist and technological realities of the powerful neighbor to the north, the United States. Although there is a clear resistance in Kahlo's painting to the influence of Mexico's northerly neighbor, during the twenty year time span between 1920 and 1940 Mexico and the United States faced similar issues and concerns on the topic of nation building and geographic identity, including both progress and modernization (Hedrick 2003).

Given Kahlo's strong interest and connection to Mexican hybridity, it is not surprising that one of her most iconic works is *Las Dos Fridas* 1939 (Figure 3-9).



Figure 3-9 Frida Kahlo, *Las Dos Fridas*, 1939. Perhaps Kahlo's most important piece and the only one on a large canvas. This is the only piece of Kahlo's I was allowed to photograph while in Mexico City. Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 9, 2014)

In this painting, Kahlo directly addresses her divided self and speaks to the national concerns of Mexican identity and hybridity by embodying that complex duality. On the left is the European Kahlo—sickly, bleeding, and in need of care and on the right is the Mexican Kahlo—indigenous,

robust, and nourishing her weaker half. Eli Bartra and John Mraz (2005) assert that not only is the Mexican Frida healthier but also more overtly sexual, as demonstrated by her seated position with open legs. It is in the continued relevance of paintings such as this one that we realize that the way in which Kahlo is perceived is in fact hybrid itself—Mexican, global, avant-garde, iconic, feminist. Thus, contending with Kahlo’s dramatic and visual embodiment of Mexican hybridity forces one to hybridize his/her own thoughts and perceptions about nationality and identity.

Conclusion

Hybridity is fundamentally a spatial metaphor—generating theories and assertions about the complex combination of people and place. One of the reasons Frida Kahlo is such a significant geographical artist is her treatment and embodiment of hybridity. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Kahlo’s political commitment to the nationalistic project of post-revolutionary Mexico enhanced her connection to hybridity and its foundational concerns of race and belonging. Inherent in the nationalistic program to construct a modern Mexican country were the philosophical ideals of *indigenismo* and *mexicanidad*. Kahlo took these ideals to new and interesting levels by embodying the persona of the Tehuana in everyday life. She also played with the idea of gender in her representation of the indigenous in her work. The element of gender is one of Kahlo’s most significant features in her work. The next chapter on bodily geographies explores the topic more thoroughly.

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Chapter 4 - Frida Kahlo's Bodily Geographies

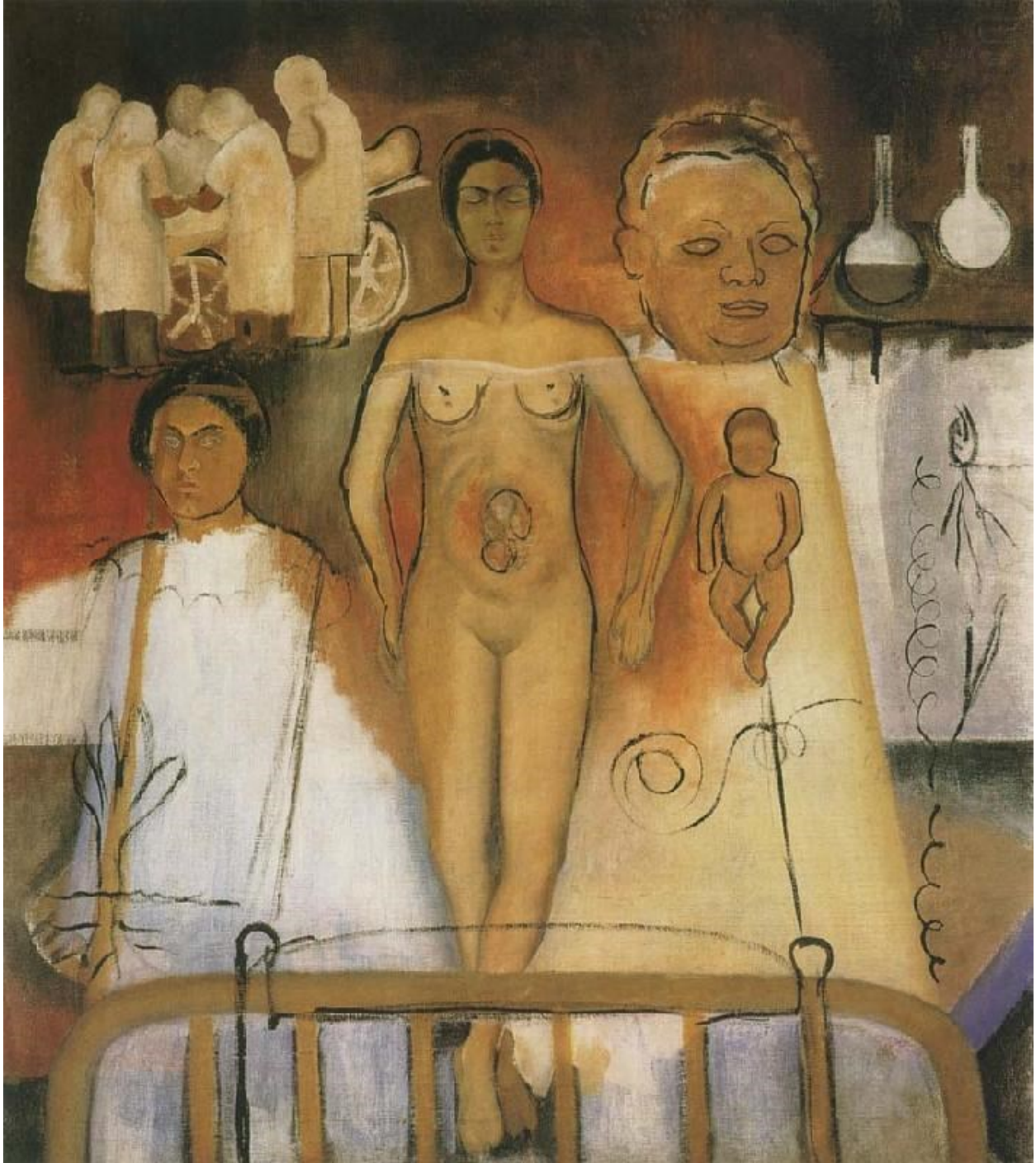


Figure 4-1 Frida Kahlo, *Frida and the Caesarean Operation*, 1932. An examination of Kahlo's intertwined interests with the body and medicine. Collection of Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, Reproduced from <http://www.fridakahlofans.com/c0092.html> (Accessed May 29, 2014)

Introduction

“The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project” (Simone de Beauvoir, 1961, 70)

Poet Adrienne Rich (1976) asserts: “Motherhood—unmentioned in the histories of conquest and serfdom, wars and treaties, exploration and imperialism—has a history, it has an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism” (34). In the case of Frida Kahlo, I argue that motherhood, and Kahlo’s body itself, have geographies too. Kahlo’s body figures prominently in her work, particularly her renditions of her experiences with reproduction and motherhood. Yet, rather than idealizing the female body and its functions, Kahlo questions the very values and emphasis placed on the bodily functions associated with women. Kahlo accomplishes this artistic and philosophical feat by creating the geography of the body as both object and subject—countering the tradition of female objectification in the tradition of Western art. Since Kahlo is most often the subject of her paintings, her representations of her body are not merely translated via a masculine gaze. Griselda Pollock (1988) extends the geographic metaphor by contending that the terrains of artistic practice and even art history have always been structured in terms of gender power relations. Pollock continues to make the connection between the body and space when she explains how the spaces of femininity work within artistic production:

The spaces of femininity operated not only at the level of what is represented, the drawing-room or sewing-room. The spaces of femininity are those from which femininity is lived as a positionality in discourse and social practice. They are the product of a lived sense of social locatedness, mobility and visibility, in the social relations of seeing and being seen. Shaped within the sexual politics of looking

they demarcate a particular social ordering of sexual difference. Femininity is both the condition and the effect (66).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how Kahlo created bodily geographies in her work. Since Kahlo's renditions of reproduction are prominent in her work, there will be a focus on the ways in which Kahlo chose to redefine femaleness outside of the traditional mother-woman dichotomy. Kahlo's feminism plays a significant role in this chapter, since Kahlo's focus on the body anticipates the thread of feminism known as sexual difference feminism. I will also discuss the elements of the Mexican-ness, Surrealism, and cyborg geographies as they relate to Kahlo's oeuvre.

Fundamentally, this chapter helps unearth what geographer Linda McDowell (1996) describes as the connectedness of geography—examining the links between people and place.

Frida Kahlo and the Body

"I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best" FK

Kahlo used her work to develop a voice and a presence within the male dominated discourse on the female body. The female body, to this day, is what Michelle Walker (1998) terms a "privileged domain." Walker (1998) makes a spatial analysis when she contends "if women are located outside a privileged domain, they do not have the opportunity to speak inside it. In this sense, silencing involves a sort of spatial logic. By this I mean that silence and voice are differentiated each according to their status as either *inside* or *outside* a domain" (10). To penetrate this domain, Kahlo employed her background in the biological sciences (she originally intended to study medicine) in her work, thereby creating reproductive geographies of the body. For example, the image that opens this chapter, *Frida and the Caesarean Operation* (Figure 4-1), is an unfinished work that represents Kahlo's self-inflicted abortion (not miscarriage as falsely asserted by Kahlo) in Detroit while traveling with Rivera (Zetterman 2006).

In this work, Kahlo constructs what David Lomas (1993) refers to as “medical iconography of the body” (6). Lomas (1993) contends that Kahlo’s use of medical imagery is disruptive and serves to transgress the socially constructed boundaries of gender and the body. For example, the finished work of Kahlo’s self-inflicted abortion *Henry Ford Hospital* (Figure 4-2) is, as described by Kahlo herself, the “idea of explaining the insides of a woman” (Herrera 1991, 73).



Figure 4-2 Frida Kahlo, *Henry Ford Hospital*, 1932. Iconic piece that was a central dramatic element in the biopic *Frida*. Again, this work strongly references surrealist elements. Collection Dolores Olmedo, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 4, 2014)

Sarah Misemer's (2008, 33) assertion that Kahlo's "approach to her body is both clinical and poetic at the same time" is overt in *Henry Ford Hospital*. By exploding and exposing traditional conceptions of female bodies, Kahlo reestablishes the boundaries and structures of privilege operating in this domain. In this work, Kahlo's bodily boundaries are extended and the associations are not merely reproductive, but social and political as well. Note, for instance, the Ford Motor Company's Rouge plant in the background—an undeniable sign of the industrial and capitalistic United States that Kahlo frequently critiqued in her paintings, writings and conversations. Ironically, the Ford's Rouge plant was where Rivera worked on sketches for his murals—in Rivera's work the plant is depicted as a triumph of modern industry (Herrera 1991).

Philosopher Linda Martin Alcoff (1996) asserts that feminist theory has revitalized and enhanced critical work by highlighting the sexually specific body as a mediating element of knowledge and a constitutive component of reason. Rather than rejecting the body as merely matter, feminist theory includes the body as a medium through which to construct knowledge. In her art, Kahlo was at the forefront of shaping and contributing to feminist knowledge. For example, she often plays with the idea of the seen versus the unseen or the public versus the private in her work, using the female body as a focal point. Kahlo accomplishes this critical project most notably in her graphic portrayals of childbirth and miscarriage/abortion. In *My Birth* (Figure 4-3), Kahlo not only represents the both celebrated and veiled act of childbirth, but also does so in a way that reinterprets a woman's relationship to her own body and to that of her child. Kahlo's work stands in stark contrast to typical Western, Christian depictions of mother and child that suggest fulfillment, tranquility, and an emphasis on the naturalness of reproduction.



Figure 4-3 Frida Kahlo, *My Birth*, 1937. One of Kahlo's most controversial pieces and not widely associated with her popular persona. This work is owned by Madonna. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 4, 2014)

In this work, Kahlo creates a narrative of her life that works against idealized depictions of childbirth and the mother/child bond. The three heads in the painting—the Virgin of Sorrows's in the wall hanging, the mother, and the child—are all either dead (as with the mother and child) or tortured (as with the virgin). Kahlo created this piece after her self-inflicted abortion and, also, at this time her mother passed away. Thus, death acts as a contrast to the birth scene and is the most prominent element in the work. This representation of birth is drawn from the Aztec sculpture of

the goddess of Tlazolteotl, a figure of strength and fertility (Castro-Sethness 2005). Perhaps most startling is Kahlo's graphic depiction of the mother's vagina, forcing the viewer into the obstetrician's vantage point (Herrera 1991). This painting demonstrates that Kahlo's views on childbirth and motherhood were indeed complex and not regulated to the dominant narratives of Mexican culture. *My Birth* is just one of Kahlo's paintings that create a bodily geography in her work; this reimagined geography challenges the traditional dichotomy of mother-woman in Mexican culture. Kahlo turned instrumental reason on its head with her paintings, demonstrating that the body could be used as a pathway to new knowledge. Kahlo demonstrates her radical feminism by developing theories about women, histories about women, and geographies about women through her work.

Frida Kahlo as Feminist

“Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (Woolf, 1929, 35)

Both Kahlo's feminism and place within feminism are frequently challenged. Kahlo's reliance on Rivera is an often cited reason for discounting her as a feminist. Though limited by her geographical and historical circumstances, it is undeniable that Kahlo's investigation of gender and the body is revolutionary and intentional. Misemer (2008) contends, “Kahlo participated in creating myths about herself using different images to mediate upon the things that most concerned her, and her body became a site for acting out various roles: the private and the public” (20). Kahlo's concentration on the public and the private realms solidifies her importance as a feminist figure. The tension between the public and the private is one of the central tensions in feminist thought. Because Kahlo quite actively placed herself and her work in the public eye, she stepped outside of the traditional roles for women in Mexico.

Kahlo's artistic voice further constructs her as a feminist. For instance, Schaefer (1992) contends:

If a woman spoke up, she was no longer dependent on others, nor their interpretation and control of social reality, and consequently she was a threat to the status quo. This was particularly true in the halcyon days after the 1910 Revolution when men were forging mechanisms of power and held a monopoly on all varieties of social discourse (7).

Thus, Kahlo was able to circumvent this patriarchal structure by speaking through her own body and creating an artistic landscape for her own expression. In effect, Kahlo resisted the limited space she and other women were designated to inhabit (Borsa 1990). Kahlo's feminism is inherently geographical. McDowell (1996) asserts that feminism works in geography by examining identity and place as a network of relations which are fluid, and anti-essentialist. Kahlo explores these theoretical concepts again and again in her work.

In many ways, Kahlo deconstructs the notion of the feminine—a provocative endeavor considering that, particularly in art, that project had previously been one entirely constructed from a male perspective. By claiming herself as a subject, Kahlo was able to investigate the cultural markers of femininity including sex, childbearing, and care taking (Bakewell 1992). As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, Kahlo belongs to the strain of feminism known as sexual difference feminism. This expression of the complex philosophical category of feminism focuses on the female body as informative and integral to the female experience rather than limiting or unimportant.

Frida Kahlo's Mexican-ness

"In 1984, the Mexican government decreed Frida's art a national treasure" (Donohue, 2011, 25)

According to Jolie Olcott (2005), during the post-revolutionary era the 'cult of Mexican femininity' intensified and contributed toward the stagnation and marginalization of women. This espoused stereotype of femininity became a source of national pride for all Mexicans, both male and female alike. The female body, then, became a symbol for the qualities that contributed toward what Olcott (2005, 15-16) describes as female *abnegación*, which includes: "selflessness, martyrdom, self-sacrifice, an erasure of self and the negation of one's outward existence."

This Mexican ideal of purity and goodness embodied in gender identity can be traced directly to the twinned female myths of Malintzin and La Virgen de Guadalupe. Malintzin plays the sinner in the dichotomy. Malintzin (or the dishonorable 'La Malinche') is the story of an indigenous woman who is both credited and blamed for giving birth to the first *mestizo* (Hernán Cortes' first son) and for betraying her fellow indigenous people (Misemer 2008). Malintzin's narrative in Mexican cultural production is most often characterized by sexuality; however, scholars have discovered that her main value to Cortés was as an interpreter and cultural advisor (Candelaria 1980). Over time the Malintzin figure became representative of Mexican women with low moral standards, particularly in the realm of sexuality. Consequently, Malintzin remains one of the few indigenous figures of the Conquest who is regarded with disdain (Candelaria 1980). Scholars contend that the cultural myth of Malintzin as the dishonored mother of all Mexicans has its roots in post-revolutionary nationalist cultural production (Taylor 2006). Yet, some scholars have attempted to resurrect the figure of Malintzin, positing that she is in fact

a proto-feminist—a woman who did what was necessary to not only survive but flourish (Kessler 2005; Lara 2008).

La Virgen de Guadalupe, of course, is the saint figure in the Mexican dichotomy of femininity. As a national treasure, La Virgen is the unreachable ideal for all Mexican women. The myth of La Virgen is one that appealed strongly to the post-revolutionary sentiment as well, particularly given that she “appeared” to an indigenous commoner and that her appearance is “given [a] racialized “New World” face” (Lara 2008). In addition, the values of female *abnegación* are embodied by La Virgen. It is in the spaces between these extreme views of femininity and motherhood that Kahlo painted. Kahlo’s most obvious homage to the mother-child motif is her painting *My Nurse and I* (Figure 4-4).



Figure 4-4 Frida Kahlo, *My Nurse and I*, 1937. Kahlo brings together many of her central concerns in this work, including indigeneity, motherhood, and Mexico. The nurse's strong, healthy body stands in sharp contrast to Kahlo's real life physical trials. Collection of Dolores Olmedo, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed June 4, 2014)

In *My Nurse and I*, Kahlo takes the racialization and indigenization of femininity a step farther by the representation of the infant Kahlo sucking at the engorged breast of native Mexico represented as an Indian wet nurse wearing a pre-Columbian mask. Masks are a repeated theme in Kahlo's work. Returning to Kahlo's philosophical connection with Oscar Wilde, masks operate as a visible reminder that there is no one essential self. In *My Nurse and I*, Kahlo protects

the identity and self-actualization of the indigenous nurse by covering her face with a mask. As is common in Kahlo's work, she combines both Christian and indigenous imagery to create something truly surprising. Instead of suggesting tenderness and identification between mother and child, *My Nurse and I* effectively dehumanizes the close bodily connection between mother and infant by identifying the sacred bond with colonialism (Belnap 2001). This piece is representative of what Schaefer (1992) terms the "repeated element of rupture" in Kahlo's work. In contrast to this poetics of fragmentation, the lush landscape of the painting suggests an association of fertility with Mexico, placing the emphasis on a place, on land rather than on a mythologized female figure from Mexican history. Rather than accept the fabled dichotomy of femininity suggested by the myths of La Virgen and Malintzin, Kahlo posits that there is a more visceral and complex Mexican ideal operating.

Surrealism and the Body

"For women surrealist artists the genre of self-portraiture is a way of coming into representation in which the artist is both subject and object and conceives of how she looks in the sense of how she sees rather than how she appears" (Allmer, 2009, 17)

Kahlo's connection with surrealism is also a vehicle for her exploration of geography and the body. One of Kahlo's most referential pieces to the movement of surrealism is the 1938 painting *What the Water Gave Me* (Figure 4-5).



Figure 4-5 Frida Kahlo, *What the Water Gave Me*, 1938. A Surrealist piece that also incorporates previous and future geographies from Kahlo's oeuvre. This piece inspired the British rock band Florence + The Machine to write a song with the same title. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 17, 2014)

What the Water Gave Me inspired André Breton to label Kahlo a surrealist and arrange for her a showing in Paris (Padel 2010). In this influential piece, Kahlo merges the site of woman's bodily objectification—the bath—with a personal narrative of her own geographic history (Belnap 2001). Kahlo's transcultural image of self is displayed, with particular attention to the consequences and repercussions of gendered identities. Jeffrey Belnap (2001) posits that this painting creates a geography that is both nationalist and feminist. By looking closely at the landscape Kahlo constructs, it is easy to pick out references to some of Kahlo's other significant paintings, including *My Grandparents*, *My Parents and I* and *Two Nudes in the Forest*. There is also graphic image of a strangled Tehuana in the bathwater—invoking criticism of the influence of 'Gringolandia' on Mexican culture. In her bath, Kahlo produces a representation of the spatial contexts that infuse Mexico through the application of feminist Surrealist techniques.

Kahlo as Cyborg

"Cyborg geographies enact ways of knowing" (Wilson, 2009, 499)

One of Kahlo's most original and anticipatory explorations of bodily geography is her flirtation with the idea of the cyborg. This is most clearly seen in her work *The Broken Column* (Figure 4-6).



Figure 4-6 Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944. A mature piece that demonstrates Kahlo's complicated relationship with her own body. It continues Kahlo's conscious mixing of the body and science. Collection of Dolores Olmedo, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 17, 2014)

In this work, painted during a five month period while Kahlo was confined by a steel corset due to an operation, Kahlo challenges the idea of the body as whole, as natural, as fixed. Instead, she

anticipates her contemporary, philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, in asserting that bodies are not born, they are rather made—much like geographies. De Beauvoir’s work on the naturalization of gender continues to influence feminist thinkers and theories of the body today.

In her work on women and cyborgs, Donna Haraway (1990, 150) describes a cyborg as a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the power of the parts into a higher unity.

This description fits Kahlo well, particularly with Kahlo’s focus on bodily geographies.

Throughout her work and life, Kahlo repeatedly pushed the boundaries of sexuality and of gender—often times turning those categories on their heads. Anne Balsamo (1996) contends that both gender and the body are boundary concepts. She asserts that the discourses on the female body consistently regulate it to the tightly controlled and bordered categories of natural, sexual, or reproductive. Such discourses provide clear and limiting parameters for women—particularly for casting them as wives and mothers.

In *The Broken Column*, Kahlo shows us something different. Her body is mechanical, fractured—in many respects it is a creation of the society to which she belongs. The body in this painting is certainly not life giving/sustaining. Additionally, the landscape of the painting is excessively bleak (Latimer 2009). Rather than embedding her body within a lush representation of Mexican flora and fauna, Kahlo depicts a fractured and generic environment. Geographer Matthew Wilson (2009) argues that cyborg epistemologies are well suited to critical projects that explore boundaries and boundary making. Anticipating some of the most important theorists of the twentieth century (including Michel Foucault), Kahlo addresses the ever evolving

relationships between the body, culture, society, and place through the representation of the cyborg in her self-portrait.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored Kahlo's most controversial and popular identity—that of feminist. Kahlo's use of the female body, most often her own body, in her paintings was revolutionary and her bold artistic spirit continues to inspire artists today. For Kahlo, the body, place, and art all construct her geographical imagination.

The blurb for the 1983 television A&E Biography of Kahlo attempts to encapsulate the artist with the statement, “She was known for her prominent eyebrows and her marriage to Diego Rivera.” This patronizing description is laughable to those who are familiar with Kahlo's geographic significance and cultural impact. For example, once on a plane one of the flight attendants saw that I was working on a Kahlo presentation. We chatted briefly about Kahlo and the attendant concluded the conversation by passionately declaring, “They say Diego Rivera made her, that's a lie, she made herself!” Undoubtedly, one of Kahlo's most lasting contributions to the field of art and feminism is her innovative approach to representing and imagining reproductive geographies thereby anticipating the provocative and revolutionary strain of sexual difference feminism. It is this contribution that continues to fascinate fans and scholars around the world.

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Chapter 5 - Glocalized Geographies in Frida Kahlo's Work, Life, and Legacy

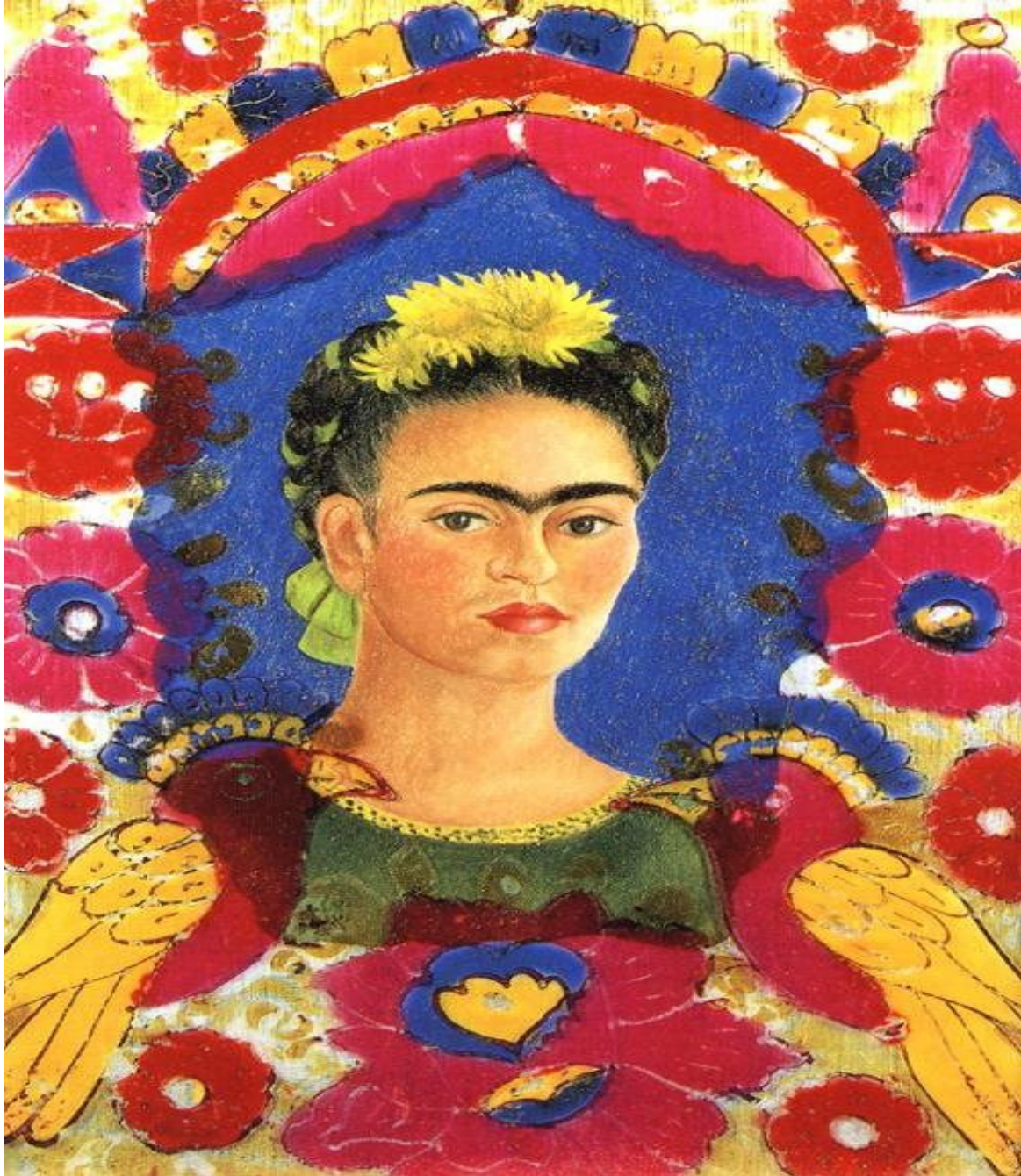


Figure 5-1 Frida Kahlo, *The Frame*, 1937. Kahlo's first piece showcased at the Louvre. It's one of Kahlo's most popular reproductions and directly referential to Mexican culture. Musée National d' Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed August 5, 2014)

Introduction

“When you think about badass, game-changing female artists, Frida Kahlo is probably one of the first to come to mind” (Frank 2014)

Given the intricate and delicate balance to Kahlo’s artistic identity, Tina Lent’s (2007, 75) assertion that “the sources of Kahlo’s creativity and the meaning of her art remain as enigmatic as ever” is the only appropriate mind-frame with which to engage any study of Frida Kahlo. Kahlo and the study of Kahlo is perhaps best encapsulated by Homi Bhabha (1994) in his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*, when he states, “We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1). Bhabha’s provocative statement sets the stage for the organizing theme of this chapter, glocalization.

Isabel Jijon (2013) defines glocalization as “the practical and semiotic exchange between the global and the local, a two-way although generally uneven conversation” (374). Geographer Erik Swyngedouw (1997) posits that the theory of glocalization views the local and the global as deeply intertwined elements of an interconnected world. Glocalization blurs the boundaries between the authentic and the inauthentic.

I contend that Kahlo is a glocalized, iconic figure and that this status continues to develop and grow both in Mexico and across the globe. To unearth the elements of Kahlo’s glocalized self, I demonstrate how she is both a symbol for Mexico (both inside and outside the nation) and a major cosmopolitan figure—both in her lifetime and in the current geographical imaginations of people across the world. I uncover details about the intentional commodification of Kahlo and her work—done both by Kahlo within her own lifetime and by others who, for lack of a better

word, worship her as a symbol of a strong Latina. Kahlo's ability to serve as artist, woman, political activist and source of creative energy is unparalleled and it is her status as a globalized figure that provides this rich multiplication of selves.

Frida Kahlo as a Mexican Symbol

“Clearly Kahlo combines the private and public aspects of her life in her sartorial allegory of postrevolutionary Mexico” (Block and Hoffman-Jeep, 1999, 10)

In her article “Frida Kahlo once again” Teresa Conde (1997) asserts boldly, “None of Frida's paintings could have been born of a spirit with any other country than Mexico as its origin” (48). Kahlo's commitment to her country has translated into a unique iconization. Kahlo now graces the 500 Mexican pesos note (Figure 5-2).



Figure 5-2 500 Mexican peso, 2010, An important sign that Kahlo is a national treasure Diego is on the back, highlighting their Mexican celebrity couple status. Reproduced from <http://www.seattletimes.com> (Accessed August 5, 2014)

Additionally, in 2001, Kahlo was the first and is still the only Latina to be placed on a U.S. postage stamp (Figure 5-3).



Figure 5-3 U.S. postage stamp, 2001. An important sign that Kahlo's importance crosses borders. Also significant in the innocent and basic representation of Kahlo. Reproduced from <http://www.astimegoesby.us> (Accessed August 5, 2014)

Kahlo's importance in Mexico has steadily grown. Rivera's murals continue to grace important public buildings in Mexico City, but it is Kahlo and her art that stand as the most recognizable and popular symbols for Mexican national pride today. Critics tend to trace Kahlo's current supremacy to three key events in Mexico City: the 1968 student uprising against the Mexican government and subsequent massacre, the 1973 retrospective of Kahlo's work at the Museo de Arte Moderno, and the 1977 Kahlo retrospective at Palacio de Bellas Artes (Orenstein 1973; Herrera 1983; Bakewell 1993). According to Bakewell (1993), the tumultuous nature of the

intellectual and artistic activity in Mexico City during the late 1960s created a movement of experimentation and rejection of the status quo—a movement that celebrated Kahlo’s resistance to the hegemonic legacy of Porfirio Diaz, Spanish colonization, and U.S. economic control. Misemer (2008) contends that after the NAFTA agreement in 1994, Kahlo’s popularity rose in Mexico and that women used Tehuana clothing in direct homage to Kahlo in order to protest the 1990 summit between Mexican President Carlos Salinas and U.S. President George Bush. Misemer also notes that the 1990 *Thirty Centuries of Mexican Splendor* exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City was advertised, primarily, on billboards with Kahlo’s self-portraits. More recently, Kahlo headlined the 2013 exhibition *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Masterpieces of Modern Mexico* at the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

Yet Margaret Lindauer (1999) warns not to read Kahlo or her work as direct representations of Mexican nationalism but rather as complex compilations of a form of Mexicanness. Thus, it is quite possible, and some might even say necessary, to read Kahlo as both an international, cosmopolitan figure and a figure of increasing national importance in her home country. What is undeniable is that Kahlo’s influence and symbolic importance span both national and international perspectives. Thus, the reading of Kahlo’s art as symbols of Mexican nationalism coupled with the explosion of Kahlo’s image into popular culture has re-shaped her geographic context.

Kahlo’s journey to unprecedented iconic status is tied directly to her unique geographic identity. Not only during Kahlo’s lifetime but going back to the nineteenth century, there was a fascination for all things Mexican among American and European artists, intellectuals, tourists and consumers (Oles 1993; Delpar 1992). In particular, the Mexican landscape, a landscape

created and reimagined by Kahlo time and time again, became a beacon-like symbol for those who eschewed the brash materialism of industrialized societies. Interestingly, the Mexican landscape was also used in artistic representations, particularly murals, as a vehicle to promote cultural nationalism (Oles 1993). Because of the rich and varied culture and geography of Mexico, it became common for outsiders to view Mexicans, particularly indigenous Mexicans, as innately and giftedly artistic—ironically this adoration did not and does not spill over to the persistently negative perception of Mexican immigrants (Oles 1993; Delpar 1992). Jeffery Belnap (2001) goes so far as to describe Mexico as a refuge for Americans looking for something more lasting, more transcendent.

The social geography of Kahlo's circumstances also contributed to her iconisation. As mentioned previously in chapter three, Kahlo attended the intellectually rigorous and radical Escuela Nacional Preparatoria—a breeding ground for future artists and thinkers of the modern Mexican nation (Oles 1993). As Kahlo established herself as an artist, her social position became even more significant. Lindauer (1999) notes that in Kahlo's milieu the role of 'artist' was equated with masculinity and that Kahlo's marketable success during her own lifetime edged her out of a thoroughly feminine realm. In particular, the Mexican School, of which Rivera was a leader, was centered on the male artist—this is true to such an extreme extent that Bakewell terms that environment “a male cosmos” (1992, 190). Although Kahlo's iconisation is affected by her social, cultural, and geographic conditions, she did not lack agency. Many critics specifically point to the deliberate and innovative ways in which Kahlo redefined femininity in her work and her life, not just in respect to Mexican society, but on a global scale as well.

Frida Kahlo and Cosmopolitanism

“Kahlo’s folkloric retablo style surrealist paintings became the first by a Mexican woman to be exhibited in New York, Paris, and Mexico” (Guzmán, 2006, 238)

At the time Kahlo was working, Mexico City was a haven for cosmopolitanism (Delpar 1992). The city acted as a beacon for artists and intellectuals from all over the world as well as a shining example of revolutionary politics. Though it may seem out of place to incorporate a discussion of cosmopolitanism into the analysis of an artist who is a national icon, cosmopolitanism and nationalism are concepts that are often misunderstood. In tracing cosmopolitanism back to its Kantian roots, Pheng Cheah (2006) notes that one common yet incorrect assumption is that cosmopolitanism is directly opposed to nationalism. Cheah (2006) notes that Kant’s formal reflections on cosmopolitanism occurred prior to the rise of popular nationalism in Europe and that what Kant argued against with the formation of a cosmopolitan viewpoint was in fact absolutist statism and not early nationalistic ideals. Thus, the fact that Kahlo and Rivera were ardent nationalists does not contradict the assertion that they were also cosmopolitanites. In his article “Nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and geographical imaginations” geographer Barney Warf (2012) contends that nationalism and cosmopolitanism are fundamentally at odds with each other; however, for the purposes of this dissertation, I strongly disagree. In the case of Kahlo and Rivera, nationalism informs their expression of cosmopolitanism. This is in part to their geographical sensitivity and imagination. In his editorial essay “Cosmopolitanism and space,” Warf (2012) categorizes cosmopolitanism as a fundamentally geographical topic and, as such, it is unavoidable when exploring the critical geographies of Kahlo.

Kahlo in particular, with her connection to the Surrealist movement in Europe, stood out early on as a cosmopolitan figure. Although she is famous for repeatedly rejecting her connection to Surrealism, many scholars argue that it is very unlikely that Kahlo, who was well educated, of direct European descent, often socialized with an international crowd, and traveled extensively, was unaware of and uninfluenced by the Surrealist movement (Zarzycka 2006). In fact, in the eyes of André Breton, the spirit of Surrealism in Europe was embodied by the national character of Mexico and, consequently, by Kahlo herself (Fauchereau 1980). Victor Roudometof (2005) posits that globalization practices produce two types of cosmopolitanism—one situational and rooted, the other thin and detached. I suggest that Kahlo's version of cosmopolitanism is rooted—springing from her deep attachment to Mexico and incorporating her curiosity and intellectual appetite for otherness. Again, it is evident that her nationalism informs and expands her cosmopolitanism.

Given Kahlo's intimate connections to cosmopolitanism during her own lifetime, it is not a surprise that she looked to other iconic non-Mexican figures in her work. In *My Dress Hangs There* (Figure 5-4), Kahlo depicts a billboard of Mae West (1893-1980) in the background of the

corrupt, crowded and filthy landscape of New York City.



Figure 5-4 Frida Kahlo, *My Dress Hangs There*, 1933. A complex landscape of Gringolandia. This vision of New York City stands in contrast to the mythical immigrant vision of a ‘land of opportunity.’ Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 28, 2014)

Udall (2000) makes a compelling argument that Kahlo identified with Mae West’s theatricality and hyperfemininity as she simultaneously positioned West in her painting as an icon of northern decadence and decay. Clearly, Kahlo was drawn both in the construction of her public persona and in her art to this notion of icon—be it Mexican or international. Although Kahlo borrows

inspiration from the celebrity culture of the U.S., this painting also provides a harsh critique of U.S. culture. Herrera (1991) contends that Kahlo's message is both personal and sardonic—in contrast to Diego's more obviously didactic critiques of capitalism in his murals.

The internationalism of Mexico City as well as Kahlo and Rivera led to famed Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) seeking asylum in Mexico City in 1937. Kahlo and Rivera provided the initial accommodation at Casa Azul for Trotsky and his second wife, Natalia Sedova. Kahlo's brief affair with Trotsky is one of those widely known Kahlo biographical moments that is heavily circulated and highlighted within her complex narrative. In typical Kahlo fashion, she contributes to the narrative and myth of her romantic life with the piece *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky* (Figure 5-5).



Figure 5-5 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky*, 1937. A memento for Kahlo's affair with Trotsky. Kahlo depicts herself in a decidedly feminine fashion. National Museum of

Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 28, 2014)

This self-portrait is a radical departure from the Tehuana and/or decidedly political images that Kahlo typically projects. Rather, she dresses herself in colonial, aristocratic clothing with a demure expression (Herrera 1991). Although Kahlo's identity was often tied to indigenous Mexico, it was not limited by that category. Today it remains inherently cosmopolitan. One clear example is that the Museo Casa de León Trotsky is just around the corner from Casa Azul. The museum is housed in Trotsky's second home in Mexico and it is where he was assassinated in 1940. I had the chance to visit the museum on my research trip to Mexico. The museum and grounds are not only a celebration of the great revolutionary but also serves as the grave site for Trotsky and his second wife Natalia Sedova (Figure 5-6).



Figure 5-6 Grave of Leon Trotsky and Natalia Sedova,. Coyoacán, Mexico, March 20, 2011. Memorial to the great Russian revolutionary and his wife. The museum site is literally around the corner from Casa Azul. Photo by author.

Frida Kahlo: Angel of Anarchy

“During Kahlo’s life there were basically three areas in Mexican society where women could achieve wide recognition: in the entertainment world, in marriage, or in the religious sphere. In her own inimitable fashion Kahlo draws upon all three of these spheres simultaneously to construct of herself a recognizable persona” (Bakewell, 1992, 190).

It is common for pieces on Kahlo to open with a discussion of the hagiography that dominates the discourse. Kahlo is venerated around the world and, in many people’s eyes, has a secular saint-like status. When I visited the Museo Arte de Popular in Mexico City, the gift shop was filled with both trinkets of Kahlo and the Virgin of Guadalupe—identically displayed and represented. Germaine Greer pays tribute (tongue in cheek) to this approach to Kahlo with the title of her piece, “Patron saint of lipstick and lavender feminism” (2005). Greer asserts that there are far more photos circulating of Kahlo than there are Kahlo’s own artistic works. The audiences for these photos at the time included national and international newspapers (particularly for the photos of Rivera and Kahlo together) as well as close friends and lovers of Kahlo. Some of the most iconic photos are the ones taken by Kahlo’s lover, Hungarian

photographer Nickolas Muray (1892-1965) (Figure 5-7).



Figure 5-7 Frida Kahlo and Nickolas Muray. One of the few photographs with Muray, Kahlo's friend, lover, and photographer. Reproduced from <http://www.artistandstudio.tumblr.com> (Accessed July 28, 2014).

Muray was instrumental in helping Kahlo create her public persona. Greer likens Kahlo's lived performance of posing for pictures in her Tehuana clothing and incorporating other aspects of native Mexican culture into her persistent and powerful *tableau vivant* to another Latin American icon, Carmen Miranda. Greer's analysis looks for a way to respond to art critics such as Tom Lubbock (2005), who complain of Kahlo's bad painting while still holding the artist up to serious critique. Greer goes so far as to contend that Kahlo's paintings function as advertisements, an assertion that does not meld well with Kahlo's politics, and an assertion that can only be made

from the vantage point of the current political and social milieu of Western globalization and market-driven economies.

Frida Kahlo as a Commodity

“The distillation of this very complex artist into a single essential “Frida,” a figure whose physical features have been permanently etched onto our collective visual memory, was greatly facilitated by the Herrera biography that has itself become a cult object” (Bergman-Carton, 1993, 445-446)

The photos and paintings of Kahlo built her international reputation and they have been made over into innumerable items for sale all over the world. A significant part of this marketing was enabled by Julie Taymor and Salma Hayek’s biopic *Frida*. As previously mentioned in chapter two, the film did receive extensive criticism; however, some critics applaud the film for its portrayal of what is now a Mexican hero. Bartra and Mraz (2005) contend that, “in placing a Mexican mestizo communist woman—who, moreover, drinks heavily, takes drugs, and has lesbian relations—at the center of the story, Frida has gone against the grain of biopics, where history is ‘male, white, and American’ (455). Thus, although the commercial exploitation and misrepresentation of Kahlo is undeniable in contemporary renditions of her life story, these products also ignite change.

Kahlo dramatically and overtly utilized the cultural artefacts of Mexico and other lands in her work and image. This *mélange* of Kahlo and cultural appropriation began to be bandied about the globe freely and ardently within two decades after her death. Critics often speculate on how Kahlo would have reacted to this adoration—some claiming she would have been disgusted and others asserting her potential delight at the ironic humor of the situation. Thus, although many critics are dismayed by the ways in which Kahlo’s Mexicanness and personal tragedy have

been commodified (Baddeley 1991; Lindauer 1999; Zarzycka 2006), some accept it as part of Kahlo's enigmatic nature. This tension provides room for assertions such as Teresa Conde's (1997) that Kahlo's enduring value to art and culture is in her painting and not in the fact that she and/or her work grace tote bags and other cheap collectables. Indeed, Joan Borsa (1990) is adamant that Kahlo's work (which is continually globally commodified) informs and even disrupts a number of culturally and politically relevant issues, including "the intersection of art and politics, strategies of resistance, the significance of colonial discourse and the practice and process of negotiating critical subjectivity in an attempt to 'deconstruct' and 'reconstruct' our own histories" (38). Borsa, therefore, places a high value on how Kahlo is understood now and rejects the trivialization of Kahlo's *oeuvre* simply because she stands as a popular icon throughout the world. Some scholars, like Isabel Guzmán (2006), view the commodification of Kahlo as a credit to her stature in society. Guzmán asserts, "The commodification of Kahlo and her artwork is informative of the ways in which she stands in as both a local Chicana/Mexicana and global Latina cultural figure and symbol of Latinidad" (235).

Current incarnations of Fridamania are displayed on the social media website Pinterest. Pinterest connects people with similar interests by providing a platform where users can create online "boards." These boards are accessible to followers on Pinterest and they are arranged by theme. I have a Kahlo board and I currently follow approximately 200 boards also about Kahlo. I think if I searched every day I could find additional, new boards about Kahlo. Pinterest is image-based and the Kahlo boards contain photographs of her, her paintings, Kahlo-themed crafts/fashion, Kahlo quotes, and Kahlo mash-ups. I'm particularly interested in the mash-ups. These images combine images of Kahlo with other celebrities or other random

bodies/backgrounds. For example, Figure 5-8 places Kahlo's face on the body of another iconic woman, famed punk rocker Patti Smith (1946-present).

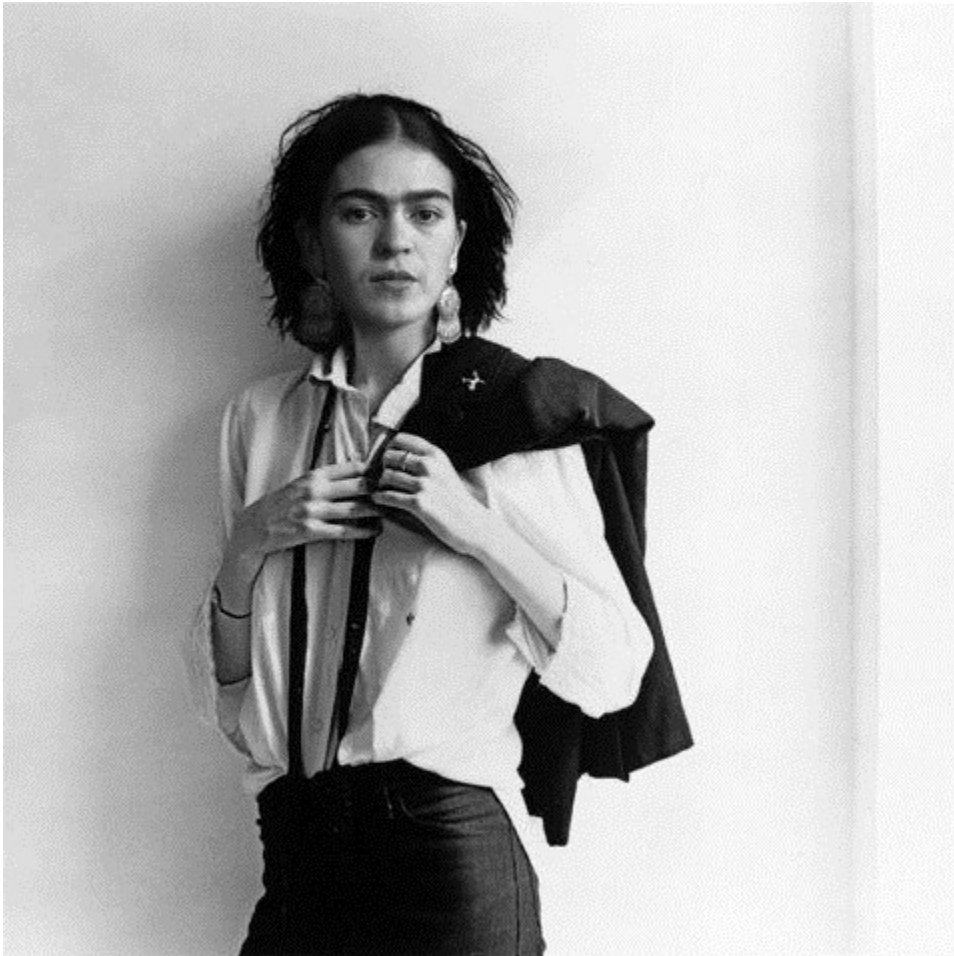


Figure 5-8 Frida Kahlo/Patti Smith mash-up. Two iconic women blended together for a new art form. Many of these mash-ups exist, including combinations of Kahlo with Amy Winehouse, Rosie the Riveter, etc., Reproduced from <http://imggave.com/search/patti%20smith> (Accessed July 28, 2014).

I picked this image because it demonstrates how people identify Kahlo with other strong, iconic females. The proliferation of images such as this one points dramatically to Kahlo's ability to not only traverse borders but also time. Rather than merely being a mixture of her own circumstances and conditions, Kahlo's global identity demonstrates the degree to which she was a product of her own invention. Bartra and Mraz (2005) note that this element of invention and

reinvention of the self by Kahlo is very American and perhaps a major reason why her new-found popularity began in the United States.

In her analysis of Kahlo as a cultural icon, Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry (2002) furthers Schjeldahl's inclusiveness of Kahlo by detailing the function that Kahlo performs in the current milieu as both a receptor for others' perceptions and as an independent image/identity operating within a borderless world. Dosamantes-Beaudry also touches on a major theme throughout discussions of Kahlo, the divide between public and private. This is a theme I explored briefly in chapter three as part of Kahlo's feminist identity. As a cultural icon, Kahlo seems to bridge these two spheres of lived experience. According to Jean Franco (1991), this divide between public and private is quite complex. She asserts that "Kahlo's paintings actually expose the myth of privacy, often depicting a body that was both irredeemably connected to reproduction but also invaded by science, pinned to surgical instruments with the inner organs exposed to public view. What Kahlo's paintings often put on display is the social nature of the body as well as the staged nature of representation" (226). These themes of the body, technology, and intimacy are what push Kahlo across borders; they are what make her accessible to an international audience, male and female, straight or gay (Adams 1992; Udall 2000). For example, one of Kahlo's most powerful pieces, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* is intentionally barren, depicting an androgynous self (Figure 5-9).



Figure 5-9 Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair, 1940. An important piece in Kahlo's oeuvre, highlighting her play with gender boundaries. This piece also featured prominently in the biopic *Frida*. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed July 28, 2014)

Hayden Herrera (1991) describes this placelessness as “a vast expanse of uninhabited earth” (125). It is clear that Kahlo is not simply a representation of Mexico, but rather a complex figure that continues to baffle and excite people across the globe.

Conclusion

Frida Kahlo's glocalization has produced a powerful, mythic public figure who transcends borders, nationalities, and ethnicities. More than any other female artist, Kahlo speaks to both her nationalistic origins and the larger globalizing forces that have dominated for the last thirty years. In this chapter, I demonstrated how Kahlo's early connection and embracing of cosmopolitanism set the stage for her mass appeal decades after her death. I also demonstrated how Kahlo is a significant and widely recognizable symbol of Mexico—both within and outside of the nation itself. Although the commodification of Kahlo carries profound implications—both for contemporary society and for its disregard for her politics—it is an important factor in the study of such a ground-breaking artist. All of these elements construct a vivid picture of Kahlo's growing geographical significance.

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Chapter 6 - Frida Kahlo as Critical Geographer



Figure 6-1 Frida Kahlo, *The Dream*, 1940. Kahlo embraces and reimagines the Mexican fascination with death. The work is a nice connection to Kahlo's interest in Oscar Wilde (1927, 576), who wrote, "Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer. The beautiful sterile emotions that arts excites in us are hateful in its eyes." Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed August 18, 2014)

My work takes a geographical point of view on a major public figure, Frida Kahlo. From a theoretical vantage point, my dissertation adopts the philosophical position described in James Duncan's landmark 1980 article "The superorganic in American cultural geography." Duncan critiques the tradition in American cultural geography of analyzing culture as independent of individuals, instead asserting that culture is constructed by the actions, beliefs, and values of the people in it. I posit that Kahlo not only created critical geographies during her time, but that she

also continues to do so posthumously. Thus, Kahlo is more than just an artist, or an iconic figure, or a significant historical person—she is in fact a critical geographer. Kahlo repeatedly provides reflection on what, according to geographer Kirsten Simonsen (2012), are key geographical questions, including:

- What is it to be human?
- What are the capabilities and capacities of humans?
- How are human bodies produced and transformed?
- How are boundaries between humans and animals, bodies and machines drawn?

Although many people respond emotively to Kahlo and her work, she also constructed not only artistic innovation but exciting intellectual and philosophical thought as well. The integrative, theoretical concepts of hybridity, embodiment, and glocalization all touch on and inform each other in Frida Kahlo's work and life. She created personal and political geographies that questioned the prevailing ideologies both of the past and those of today.

Kahlo's wide reaching significance and influence opens her up to a number of criticisms and critiques, including attacks on her ability as a painter, her character, her feminism, and her legacy. *The Dream* (Figure 6-1) not only highlights Kahlo's artistic connection to both Mexican culture and European Surrealism, but also is representative of the brave manner in which she lived and worked—fashioning an artistic sensibility that echos Oscar Wilde's provocative assertion in the *Decay of Lying* (1891) that life reflects art, rather than art reflecting life. Kahlo's constant references to her dream world and its inspiration for her work point to a disdain for the factual and for entities that embrace it, such as the United States. Wilde shared Kahlo's disdain for Gringolandia, viewing the geographic imagination of the United States as a barrier to artistic expression that, in fact, creates life. He claims:

[f]acts are not merely finding a footing-place in history, but they are usurping the domain of Fancy, and have invaded the kingdom of Romance. Their chilling touch is over everything. They are vulgarizing mankind. The crude commercialism of America, its materializing spirit, its indifference to the poetical side of things, and its lack of imagination and of high unattainable ideals, are entirely due to that country having adopted for its national hero a man, who according to his own confession, was incapable of telling a lie. (158)

Bergman-Carton (1993, 445) notes this guiding element in Kahlo's work, "the indistinguishability of art from life," and counts it as one of Kahlo's distinguishing and translative features.

Kahlo's willing play with dreams, with fancy, allows her to connect to landscapes and nature without worry of the realistic. One of Kahlo's most elaborate and important nature paintings (it is on the Mexican 500 peso note as a watermark) is *The Love Embrace of the Universe* (Figure 6-2).



Figure 6-2 Frida Kahlo, *The Love Embrace of the Universe*, 1949. A mature work, encompassing many of Kahlo's overarching geographical and spiritual themes. This is the watermark behind Kahlo on the 500 Mexican pesos note. Private collection, Reproduced from <http://www.abcgallery.com> (Accessed August 18, 2014)

In reference to the piece, La Muz Gonzalez (2008, 16) contends "Nature is transformed into "a geography of the unconscious" in which landscape is perceived as female, and human relationships and emotions merge with landforms." Although speaking specifically of *Love Embrace*, Gonzalez's assertion applies to much of Kahlo's work. Kahlo's geography of the

unconscious allows her to explore political and social landscapes that cannot be examined via positivistic reasoning.

As explained in the introduction, this is a work of critical human geography. Interdisciplinary in nature, critical human geography not only borrows heavily from cognate fields but also crosses the boundaries of many sub-fields within geography including Marxist, feminist, cultural, and humanistic. My dissertation pulls most strongly from feminist and cultural geography, concentrating specifically on the post-structural veins within those two sub-fields. Although my work utilizes Kahlo's work as its primary data set, it does not adopt the position of literal or final reading of that work. Rather, I seek to construct a creative and critical approach to both Kahlo's work and the existing literatures about Kahlo. Fundamental to my methodologies are my own experiences visiting museums, archives, and historical sites related to Kahlo's artistic selves. These experiences not only provided me with a rich resource of material to draw from but also cemented Kahlo's inherent geographic importance as I traveled to Mexico, Europe and locations in the United States.

My work of critical human geography borrows from a wide variety of disciplines, yet by far the strongest thread is from feminism. My work borrows from sexual difference feminists and positions Kahlo as a proto-sexual difference feminist. Although some gender and sexuality scholars are moving away from the term feminism, I believe it still has social, political, and scholarly merit (Duncan 2010). Feminism is, in general society, a dirty word. This manifests, for example, in the Women Against Feminism movement (<http://womenagainstofeminism.tumblr.com>), a popular social media movement that seeks to dismantle outdated and exaggerated ideas about feminism, including ideas such as women cannot be feminists and have families or that women cannot attend to their traditional femininity

and also be feminists. If people are forming anti-feminist movements that are receiving national press, then I would hardly say that feminism is dead. I position myself and Kahlo as feminists. My work demonstrates Kahlo's preoccupation with the lived experience of herself as a woman and of women in general. Even though much of the work done on Kahlo is in the feminist tradition, my work differs significantly by combining that feminist perspective with a geographical one. In her presidential address to the Association of American Geographers, Susan Hanson (1992, 570) identifies three core analytic traditions that geography and feminism share: "a fascination with everyday life, a realization of the importance of context, and a focus on difference." My work uses these three areas of analyses throughout and, in effect, asserts that a true understanding of Kahlo is impossible without them.

Kahlo's iconic stature in art, Mexico, and popular culture continues to rise. In particular, Kahlo's effect on contemporary art and culture is significant and shows no signs of slowing down. Seattle artist Vaughn Bosley (2014) contends that Kahlo is one of the leading influences in the art scene today. Kahlo's bold style and subject matter function as a continual source of inspirational material. For example, this Bosley original, *Frida Homage*, places Kahlo as the central focus and combines many of the elements of her life, such as Diego, indigenous symbolism and Mexico (Figure 6-3).



Figure 6-3 Vaughn Bosley, *Frida Homage*, 2012. A Kahlo tribute that expresses an emotional response to her legacy. Private collection. Photo by author.

Kahlo not only plays a role inspirationally with young artists, but she also provides a lucrative business for those who manipulate her image into sellable items. Pike's Place Market vendor and artist Kelly Williams (2014) repeatedly has requests to create Kahlo-inspired pieces at her stall. Currently she creates many Mexican-inspired items blended with local flavor, such as *Seattle Skull* (Figure 6-4).



Figure 6-4 Kelly Williams, *Seattle Skull*, 2014. A tribute to Mexico's celebration of Day of the Dead with a marketing appeal to Seattle tourists. Pike's Place Market, Seattle, WA. Photo by Ms. Williams, reproduced with permission.

While she has resisted thus far out of respect for Kahlo's stature as an artist, Williams is currently working on making wooden box devotionals of Kahlo to sell at her stall. In Kahlo, the public seeks a representation of place, meaning, and identity.

Frida Kahlo is one of the most important artists today. My dissertation demonstrates that Kahlo is also a provocative and thoughtful geographic thinker. Through the integrative concepts of hybridity, embodiment, and glocalization, I provide evidence that Kahlo was not merely tortured by her physical ailments and personal relationships but that she also created influential and relevant geographies in her work and life. In his treatise on *terrae incognitae* (totally unexplored territories) geographer John K. Wright (1947, 4) provides an expansive definition of what a geographer is and does, claiming:

What distinguishes the true geographer from the true chemist or the true dentist would seem to be the possession of an imagination peculiarly responsive to the stimulus of *terre incognitae* both in the literal sense and more especially in the figurative sense of all that lies hidden beyond frontiers of geographical knowledge.

In her work and life, Kahlo embodies Wright's definition. By examining Kahlo as a critical geographer, my dissertation opens up the field of geography to a wider interdisciplinary conversation. It also reconciles the sometimes conflicting stances between intensely political and intensely artistic geographic perspectives. My hope is that others, geographers and non-geographers, can build upon my work on Kahlo in order to tackle other public figures who have made significant impacts on geographical concepts in both scholarly and popular realms. It is certain that Frida Kahlo continues to merit study by geographers and others.

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