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Arms of America:

Latina Literary Re-Interventions and Reinventions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in English

by

Guadalupe Escobar

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Arms of America:
Latina Literary Re-Interventions and Reinventions

by

Guadalupe Escobar

Doctor in Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Rafael Pérez-Torres, Chair

As the fiftieth anniversary of *testimonio* approaches in 2016, *Arms of America* reflects on the aftermath of states of emergency and reevaluates the continuous development of the genre. Drawing on the retrospective nonlinear women's narratives about Central America—including the writings of Claribel Alegría, Gioconda Belli, Demetria Martínez, and Ana Castillo—I argue that such testimonial texts re-intervene in the war of words, historical silencing, as cultural memories and timeless consciousness-raising tools. Contesting the claim that *testimonio* has an expiration date predicated on immediate crisis, my readings of mixed-genre testimonies such as Alegría's *Ashes of Izalco* (1966) and Belli's *The Inhabited Woman* (1988) together with newly written works like Martínez's *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* (2005) and Castillo's *Psst: I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor* (2005) reveal the ways in which wartime and postwar testimonial texts alike recover hidden histories related to the body from labor in the globalized garment industry, to sexual agency within revolutionary movements, to the inner war of

depression, to torture traceable to the School of the Americas. The inclusion of U.S. Latina testimonial writers is meant to engage in a transhemispheric dialogue that complicates former approaches to this decolonial literary tradition strictly bound to Latin America; applying postcolonial, queer, and feminist theories, I illumine the interweavings of unofficial truths in literature to explore their vexed relationship to history, temporality, and materiality. *Arms of America* challenges the commonly held assumption that *testimonio* is “against literature,” by shedding light on women’s writings simultaneously engaged in transtemporal activism *and* art.

The dissertation of Guadalupe Escobar is approved.

Ali Behdad

Juan Luis Sánchez

Leisy Janet Ábrego

Rafael Pérez-Torres, Committee Chair

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2014

For my siblings—

Tony,

Dianita,

Junior,

and Tiff

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GUADALUPE ESCOBAR

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INTRODUCTION

*See across the field
See the sky ripped open
See the rain comin' through the gapin' wound
Howlin' the women and children
Who run into the arms
of America.*

—U2, “BULLET THE BLUE SKY”¹

In 2016 *testimonio* will turn fifty. The 1966 publication of Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un cimarrón (Biography of a Runaway Slave)*, winner of the 1970 Casa de las Américas prize, established *testimonio* as its own distinct genre.² This prolific and pervasive

¹Despite the enduring popularity of Irish rock band U2’s fifth album *The Joshua Tree*, released in 1987, many contemporary U.S. listeners may overlook the antiwar message embedded within two songs—“Bullet the Blue Sky” and “Mothers of the Disappeared”—which critiques the horrors of U.S. military might in Central America during the 1980s. While “Bullet the Blue Sky” may seem to be a global antiwar anthem, it localizes human rights atrocities that transpired in El Salvador. At the beginning of the live recording of “BTBS,” at Slane Castle featured in *Rattle and Hum* (1989), a stadium screen displays a contradictory list. At first, fans discover that the five permanent members of the United Nations Council are U.S.A., U.K., France, China, and Russia. But then, after a long pause, the audience finds out that “the five biggest arms traders in the world” are the same countries just listed a moment ago. By revealing the countries that are allegedly committed to peace, but are, in reality, invested in war efforts, U2 exposes hypocrisy and global injustice.

²In the view of some critics, however, the inaugural *testimonio* is actually the 1958 Brazilian *Quarto de Despejo (Child of the Dark)* by Carolina María de Jesus. Still a few others might trace the origins of *testimonio* further back to Spanish crónicas such as Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las indias (An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies)* (1552), Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios (Castaways)* (1559) and Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera (The True History of the Conquest of New Spain)* (1632). Another salient prototype is Mexican Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s “Respuesta a Sor Filotea” (The Poet’s Answer to the Most Illustrious Sor Filotea de la Cruz”) (1691). In the first book-length study of women’s testimonial literature in Latin America, *Woman as Witness* (2004), Linda Maier observes a noticeable absence of women within the early formation of the Latin American literary canon and locates the predominance of Latin American women writers alongside the post-boom phenomena. Prior to the 1970s, other salient women writers, aside from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, included Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda (Cuba) and Gabriela Mistral (Chile) (Maier 1).

Latin American genre emerged in the 1960s alongside leftist radicalism in the Americas.³ During the 1980s, Latin Americanist Alberto Moreiras observes that, “a proliferation of civil wars in Central America and the quasi-genocidal practices of the military made the dissemination of testimonial accounts one of the most important ways for those in a position to do so (which generally meant outside of Central America) to express solidarity” (213).⁴ Thus, *testimonio* has long been considered a form of liberatory literature.

As *testimonio*'s fiftieth anniversary approaches, it is a seasonable time to reflect on the aftermath of the states of emergency by revisiting catastrophic historical events with special attention to how the genre continues to evolve across American hemispheric histories of repression and resistance. By “states of emergency,” I not only mean political repression and military dictatorships, in particular U.S.-backed wars witnessed in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, but, more specifically, disappearance, torture, mass murder, imprisonment, sexual assault, and exile (Partnoy *You Can't Drown the Fire* 14).⁵ Because such state-sponsored terror produced widespread trauma in Central America, and not to mention other parts of Latin America, time and timing play a critical role in these historical as well as literary narrative constructions. As Montejo and Barnet wisely illuminate: “The best thing for memory is time. Time preserves the memories. When you try to remember something from more recent times, you can't. On the other hand, the farther back you look into the past, the clearer you see it all” (*Biography* 90). Drawing on contemporary women's testimonial narratives about Central

³ An excellent body of work on the interplay between national liberation movements and *testimonio* includes: Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (1987); Georg Gugelberger's edited collection *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (1996); and John Beverley's *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2001).

⁴ Moreiras also notes that “A similar point could also be made for the urgency of dissemination of a different kind of testimonial accounts: those concerning torture and political murder in the Southern Cone” (213).

⁵ My historical parameters are 1960-1996, reflecting the longest Central American civil war in Guatemala, though some of the selected writers consider additional connections to pre- and postwar contexts.

America, as a case study, then, I investigate such historiographical re-interventions and literary reinventions.

Over these past few decades, testimonial criticism has fluctuated from enthusiasm to enervation to resurged fascination.⁶ In their recent collection *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony* (2012), editors Louise Detwiler and Janis Breckenridge describe testimonial criticism of the past as “a never-ending, pendulum-like cycle between ‘the subaltern can speak’ and ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ (1). In fact, there was an even a point in which *testimonio* was pronounced dead. In 1996, the same year Guatemala signed a peace treaty after enduring thirty-six years of U.S.-sponsored state terrorism, “a war the United Nations would later declare genocidal (Ortiz x),” testimonial scholar John Beverley announced that, “testimonio’s moment, the originality and urgency or—to use Lacan’s phrase—the ‘state of emergency’ that drove our fascination and critical engagement with it, has undoubtedly passed” (77). While Beverley certainly did not mean that testimonial narratives themselves would fade, his portentous prophecy that testimonial criticism would wane did not prove true. As studies such as *Woman as Witness* (2004), *Subject to Change* (2005), *Can Literature Promote Justice?* (2006), and, more recently, *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony* (2012) have shown, the testimonial moment is not over. In the words of Detwiler and Breckenridge, “the conversation has just begun”(6). What is more, I concur with Detwiler and Breckenridge’s other claim that “it is time for testimonio de jure of scholarship to move forward because testimonio de facto on the

⁶ During the late 1990s, testimonial criticism erupted over issues of canonization and anthropologist David Stoll’s controversies about the truth value of the paradigmatic *testimonio* Rigoberta Menchú’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983). Great anthologies on these debates include: Georg Gugelberger’s *The Real Thing* (1996), Arturo Arias’s *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (2001) and Ileana Rodríguez’s *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (2001). I touch on these polemics in my reading of Ana Castillo’s performative *testimonio* (see chapter 4, specifically the section titled “Castillo’s Queer Subalternities”). While Menchú’s text is undoubtedly indispensable to a study of *testimonio*, I have not included it in my set of women writings mainly because it has been well-mined. Also, my focus is on women writers who openly embrace aesthetics as part of their activist agenda.

ground has undergone a profound metamorphosis and many migrations” (1-2). In other words, *testimonio* continues to thrive in new forms, in new places. Perhaps most significantly, Casa de las Américas still issues awards in the category of *testimonio*.

Much has been made about the conditions coalescing into the mode of testimonial production. Less has been said about the actual testimonial texts themselves. In her book *Can Literature Promote Justice?* (2006), Kimberly Nance astutely points out that “Critical attention to the process should not have precluded analysis of the textual products” (10). It is worth analyzing in more detail just how Central American women writers and U.S. Latina authors redefine *testimonio* to begin to widen the possibilities of understanding not only what feminist scholar M. Jacqui Alexander refers to as “the different cartographies of feminist struggle in different parts of the world (264),” but also how literature of the Americas invites transtemporal and transhemispheric dialogues. It is now an opportune moment to have such a critical conversation since the field of American Studies has undergone a major make-over in recent years. In his 2009 *PMLA* article, Ralph Bauer notes that “[s]ince 2000, we have witnessed a veritable explosion” of “hemispheric scholarly activity” (235). This current “hemispheric turn” in American Studies significantly alters the former critical approach of Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s “transnational turn.” True to transhemispherism, then, I have included women’s writings from the global South to balance out my comparative approach.

REDEFINING TESTIMONIO

Not surprisingly, there have been endless debates about defining *testimonio*. John Beverley’s classic essay “The Margin at the Center” (1989) delineates some of its most notable components. In it, Beverley describes *testimonio* as,

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, graphemic as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. The unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience (for example, the experience of being a prisoner). Since, in many cases, the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate, or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of *testimonio* often involves the tape recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, journalist, or writer. (70-71)

For Beverley, the point of greatest contention regarding the testimonial mode of production has to do with the degree to which there has been mediation, editorial intervention. While Beverley provides us with a clear-cut definition, other critics such as Elzbieta Sklodowska argue that *testimonio* is simply indefinable or elusive at best (Detwiler). My discussion of *testimonio* deviates from Beverley's standard formulation by including autobiographical and biographical testimonial writings by professional women writers. I specifically address issues and privileges related to class and geopolitical location when analyzing authorial agency and the various kinds of writing partnerships and collaborations.

I loosely define *testimonio* as a politicizing personal narrative, a text that is potentially liberatory *and* literary. The standard way of thinking about *testimonio* has it that this "genre emerg[ed] from the Third World that permits the literate, though not necessarily literary," "to address the reading world in a language and on topics not sanctioned by the literary institution" (Saldívar-Hull *Feminism on the Border* 168). Critics such as Sonia Saldívar-Hull are certainly correct about these attributes applying to certain texts such as Domitila Barrios de Chungara's *Let Me Speak: Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines* (1977), Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983), and Elvia Alvarado's *Don't Be Afraid, Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks From the Heart* (1987). But this view is not true of all testimonial texts. The distinction I want to make is that some testimonial

practioners have been and continue to be explicit about making activist art. That said, however, it is crucial to keep in mind that there is a particular danger in solely focusing on literary merits—or what George Yúdice calls “the aesthetic fix”—in that it empties out the purpose of *testimonio*. Alberto Moreiras warns, “As an aesthetic fix, of course, *testimonio* produces not solidarity but only a poetics of solidarity of a fallen and derivative kind” (216). By reviewing *testimonio* of past and present, I am not approaching this body of literature as “just a fetishized elite product,” (Arias *Taking Their Word* xi)⁷ or “mere fashion” (Partnoy *You Can’t Drown the Fire* 12), but rather reevaluating it for its cultural memories and the ways in which it functions as a timeless consciousness-raising tool.

Stressing a slightly different angle, Argentine author Alicia Partnoy insists that “The central feature of *testimonio* is neither its truth value nor its literariness (or lack thereof), but its ability to engender and regenerate a discourse of solidarity” (176). I reaffirm Partnoy’s point that solidarity is at the heart of *testimonio*, yet I would like to suggest that truth value and literariness do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. I am particularly curious about the coexistence of politics and poetics in tandem with how *testimonio* can (re)generate a kind of shared radicalization that transcends time, across generations. In “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Testimonio*,” the Latina Feminist Group approaches *testimonio* more methodologically as “a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (2). Understood in this light, then, another radical realm of *testimonio* is how it works as a literary artifact, protecting cultural memories from historical disappearance.

⁷ Arias draws, in part, from Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline*.

Testimonio, Beverley has observed, usually presents itself “without literary pretensions” (“Margin” 72). Put differently, *testimonio* is “against literature” in the sense that it is not fiction (though, of course, literature is not to be conflated with fabrication). Beverley explains,

We are meant to experience as real both the speaker and the situations and events recounted. The legal-religious connotation implicit in its convention implies a pledge of honesty or sincerity on the part of the narrator that the interlocutor/reader is bound to respect, and the assumed lack of writing ability or skill on the part of the narrator, even in those cases where the story is written instead of told orally, contributes further to the ‘truth effect’ of *testimonio*. (“Margin” 73-74)

Yet, separating the two distinct modes of writing, history and literature, as Ariel Dorfman has noted, is not so easy. For Dorfman, political violence converges with “creative intervention of memory, the role of myth and language in resistance” (“Introduction” xi). Echoing similar sentiments, Nancy Gates-Madsen argues that “the division between testimony and fiction is rarely straightforward, especially in contexts of trauma” (88). Because the testimonial texts I analyze each wrestle with multidimensional violence and fragmented memories, I consider why and to which degree some women writers might want to fictionalize certain aspects of the past, if at all.

Critics like René Jara have observed that *testimonio* is intimately linked with timing: it is a matter of urgency. *Testimonio* prompts action now. But what happens if we read *testimonio* after the states of emergency have passed? Would it be doomed or deradicalized at best? To address these concerns, I suggest thinking in terms of *transtemporality*. I demonstrate how testimonial texts are from the start deeply anchored to historiographies of unrecognized truths that prompt a sort of historical awakening. As such, time is set in a cyclical continuum, not necessarily a discrete teleology. For this reason, I employ the term *transtemporal* to consider how the past is powerfully present though I do so while maintaining that the future is radically open

for change. As we will see, many of the inequalities and injustices witnessed decades ago speak to unfinished revolutions today; however, the narratives themselves reveal creativity in adapting, surviving, resisting.

GENRE & GEOPOLITICS

Although *testimonio* has generally been a literary genre located in the global South—the other Americas—several U.S. Latinas/os have experimented with this form too, creating new generic blends in many cases.⁸ Recent renovations of the testimonial form have moved beyond Latin America and flow from “discipline to discipline and border to border; from text to textiles, radio and graphic art; from transcribed and written to spoken, public, and performative” (Detwiler and Breckridge 2). These narrative migrations and “meta-morphoses” reveal undergirding postcolonialities.⁹ As such, I use the term *transhemispheric* to not only underscore overlapping narratives between the U.S. and Central America but also to stress migratory narratives such as Central American dispersion to northern regions like the U.S. and Canada that characters such as Martínez’s José Luis and Alegría’s Marina González’s husband reflect.¹⁰ Transhemispheric also captures the reverse: U.S. citizens, like Sister Dianna Ortiz, traveling south to Central America.

The central metaphor “arms of America” from U2’s lyrics, included in the opening epigraph and dissertation’s title, emphasizes war stories, particularly by women. As we will see, such stories are not artless but rather intricately woven embodied memories. These retellings of

⁸ Of course, México is technically in the global North but is usually grouped with the global South.

⁹ I borrow this term from Detwiler and Breckenridge. My analysis certainly elaborates on metafictional moments.

¹⁰ Less studied have been the exilic narratives from Central America to Europe as Claribel Alegría’s own life and Ana Castillo’s figure Máximo Madrigal in *Sapogonia* encompass.

unrecognized truths reveal the multifaceted nature of violence against women and antiwar activism. Women find extraordinary ways to survive state terror and heal from horror.

U2's salient phrase, moreover, speaks to broader implications beyond the scope of this study pertaining to U.S. armed interventions and immigration policies. In one sense, "arms of America" connotes military weaponry that annihilates and brings multivalent devastation (e.g., land seizures, neoliberal exploitation, wartime sexual abuse, environmental crisis). Indeed, the journalist Juan González informs us in *Harvest of Empire* (2000) that "Fatalities from those [U.S.-sponsored Central-American civil] wars had passed a quarter of a million by 1989 – five times the U.S. death toll in Vietnam. More than 140,000 died in Guatemala, 70,000 in El Salvador, 60,000 in Nicaragua – unimaginable devastation for a region that has fewer inhabitants than the state of Texas" (130-131). Although U2 uses "America" synonymously with the U.S., I invoke the phrase with a hemispheric sensibility in mind: I draw attention to *las Américas*, specifically U.S.-Central American relations.¹¹ In another sense, "arms of America" conjures the misleading symbolism of the Statue of Liberty's open arms: the false expectation of hospitality towards immigrants, many of which arrive because the U.S. has ravaged their home countries. As postcolonial critic Ali Behdad argues in his incisive work *A Forgetful Nation* (2005), "Historical amnesia toward immigration is paramount in the founding of the U.S. as a nation" (3), a nation built on notions of exclusion. U.S. interventions frequently generate displacement abroad and contribute to subsequent migration patterns into the U.S.

¹¹ Another fitting frame for Central American Studies is Ana Patricia Rodríguez's idea of the *Transisthmus* used to describe "the ever-shifting literary, cultural, and historical configurations of the Central American isthmus as an in-between discursive space linking regions, peoples, cultures, and material goods" (*Dividing the Isthmus* 2).

RE-CENTERING CENTRAL AMERICAN STUDIES

In her 2014 debut *The Cha Cha Files: A Chapina Poética*, U.S. Guatemalan poet Maya Chinchilla opens her piece “Central American-American,” with

Centralamerican American
does that come with a hyphen? a space?
Central America
America
América
Las Américas. (21)¹²

Chinchilla’s questions explicitly punctuate the inner qualms of the Central American diaspora: marginalization and invisibility. Chinchilla’s musings not only suggest a search for self-identity as part of the Central American immigrant community, but also, perhaps more importantly, complicate geopolitical notions of the Americas. For example, the repetition of American-American evokes an overlap of social spaces within the hemisphere. The hyphen here accentuates linguistic and ethnic borderlands. The progression from “Central America,” to “America,” to “América,” to finally “Las Américas,” signifies subtle shifts in pronunciation—signaled by accent marks—that reveals a convergence of language, power, and affect; the way the stanza culminates with “Las Américas” not only suggests a pluralization—a collective power—but also pride. The slippage of America/América, moreover, contests the conflation of the U.S. and America. Such meditations of “América” recall Cherríe Moraga’s *A Xicana Codex* (2011) where she explains that

For the most part, I refrain from using *America* and *American* to refer exclusively to the United States, since the peoples of all Americas are, in fact, Americans or americanos. When I do use *America* to mean the United States, it is always qualified by the word preceding or following it; for example, “middle-class America.” *América* with an accent refers to the entire American continent, North, Central, and South. “America” in quotes indicates that the term’s conventional meaning is contested. (xxii)

¹² “Central American-American” first appeared in *La Revista* (UC Santa Cruz, 1999).

For Moraga and Chinchilla, an accented América(s) evokes self-determination and transhemispherism. Further, Chinchilla encapsulates what Yajaira Padilla calls a “Central American transnational imaginary,” which is to say, an envisioned social space “marked by memories of war, settlement in the United States, and crossings through Mexico, and in which individual and communal identities are being continuously defined and renegotiated” (“Central American” 151). Chinchilla later expresses, “they tell us the American dream is the truth / but that our stories of escape from horror are not” (21-22). Here, Chinchilla inverts illusion and truth to speak to the silencing of histories. Chinchilla concludes “am I a CENTRAL / American? / Where is the center of America? (22). Ana Patricia Rodríguez suggests that “Now as then, the question of who / what are Central American-Americans remains a burning issue for the Central American diaspora” (“Foreword” xiv). That Chinchilla ends her poem with the pun on “center” / “central” strikingly addresses ironic marginality.

A repeated void in current media representations of Central American immigration today, and not to mention the current crisis of unaccompanied minors, is the legacy of U.S. imperialism and how that has influenced such diasporas. Put slightly different, what is often omitted in popular discourse of Central American migration is what critical race studies scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw refers to as “the multilayered and routinized forms of domination” (“Mapping the Margins” 1245). Such Central American discourse obscures U.S.-Latin American Cold War¹³ politics, endorsing what Americanist scholar Amy Kaplan has memorably called the “denial of empire.” Along the same lines, feminist critic and human rights activist Margaret Randall has

¹³ While the Cold War is commonly dated from 1941-1989, the end of which was declared by the USSR and the U.S. at the Malta Summit, I employ this term distinctly within a Central American context that regards 1996 as its final year.

observed that “Memory is short in a country that trains people to forget” (*When I Look* 62). *Arms of America* offers readings of testimonial historiographies that will help us better understand Central American immigrants of past and present.¹⁴

Historical erasure can leave indelible scars on Central American cultural heritage and ethnic self-identity. The Central American geographer Rosamaría Segura has perceptively detected the adverse effects on personal and social identities:

It has often been the case that the first immigrant group of Central Americans hides their origins, opening to claim that they are from Mexico or other Latin American nations in part because of their undocumented status and fear of deportation, or to protect their children from discriminatory stereotyping by other Latino and Anglo groups. Other factors include the desire to repress traumatic psychological war experiences in their respective countries, or the emotional scars of the perilous voyage over the borders of the northern continent, which often includes rapes, deaths, and body parts being scattered in the deserts, railroads, and seas. For these reasons, many second and third generations of Central American youths have struggled to find their own cultural identity and consequently have grown up unaware of their roots. (79)

The “search for antecedents,” as Laura Barbas-Rhoden has put it, is paramount to U.S. Central Americans curious to unearth their roots. By revisiting ignored histories of Central America and the U.S., this study speaks to these millennials’ “pragmatic need” to know their past (Arias *Taking Their Word* xiii).

Within Latina/o Studies, Central American Studies has witnessed considerable change as of late. In a 2013 editorial piece “Latino Studies: Latinidades – Under Construction,” Lourdes Torres outlines the trajectory of this emergent field. Tracing the growth of Central American Studies over the past ten years, Torres begins with a statement from Suzanne Oboler, the previous founding editor of the *Latino Studies* journal. Oboler had noted early on that Central

¹⁴ Of course, this is not to simplistically say that Central American migrations are merely consequences of U.S. imperialism (*Vigil War Echoes* 1). My point is that U.S. interventions have certainly played a crucial role in prompting such movements.

Americans are “an increasingly significant group in the US context, about which very little research is currently available, in spite of its growing numbers. Still, its presence is yet another reminder of both the increasing diversity within the Latino population, and the unabating impact of the United States in the causes and consequences of transnational migration in the hemisphere” (129). Extending Oboler’s comment, Torres insists that, “While there is more research on Central Americans in the United States now than there was a decade ago, Oboler’s statement is still valid” (129). Distinguishing Central Americans from the predominant U.S. Latina/o group, Mexican-Americans and Chicanas/os, will add to a richer understanding of Latina/o heterogeneity. I employ the term *Latina/o* in my study to refer more broadly to people of Latin American descent; my intention here is not to flatten significant cultural and geopolitical differences or uncritically reproduce rhetorical immersion but stress confluences of decoloniality. As a Latina, specifically from Salvadoran roots, it has been fulfilling to see Central American Studies slowly evolve in meaningful ways over the course of my doctoral study: it is now a timely dialogue.

On a wider American Studies scale, it has been exciting to observe increased interest in the relationship between the U.S. and the other Americas. In their Introduction to *American Quarterly*’s 2014 special issue *Las Américas Quarterly*, Macarena Gomez-Barris and Licia Fiomatta suggest that “[W]hile Las Américas might still grapple with violence, repetitions, and mnemonic returns, North and South, its future is open to contestations, reinventions, and even hope” (504). *Arms of America* has this kind of transhemispheric sensibility in mind with an intersectional “analytic disposition” (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall 795).

POCO FEM THEORY: GLOBALIZING INTERSECTIONALITY

Even though I outline continuities in my study of women's testimonial literature in *las Américas*, specifically from Central America and the U.S., it is vital to acknowledge differences and asymmetrical power relations among women. In their 1983 signal essay "Have We Got a Theory for You!," feminist philosophers María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, contend that in addition to recognizing differences among women, it is essential to take notice of how such differences may be silenced (573). Throughout my study, I primarily trace Latin American and Chicana feminisms to explore points of convergence as well as dissonance. I also draw from some traditional feminist theorists and women-of-color scholars. The term "feminism" itself has been controversial and objectionable mainly because it derives from a U.S. cultural imperial context that usually connotes white-identified middle-class women and tends to homogenize gender oppression or the "Third World"; or, perhaps both. As critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty have long noted, feminist studies still needs further decolonizing. When I use the word "feminisms," I do so with an openness that incorporates diverse perspectives of promoting equal treatment between men and women, including the rejection of this label. I add the "s" at the end of feminism to dispel a monolithic universal understanding and to emphasize "self-determination."¹⁵

In my view, it would be reductive to view gender oppression as an isolated category of analysis. Intersectionality, a feminist methodology, instead analyzes gender inequalities alongside other prisms such as race, class, and gender. I intend to expand on those axes by considering other subtle social variables that come into play in the subjugation of women (e.g. sexuality, geography, and so forth). By rendering such invisible power dynamics, women can

¹⁵ Indeed, there has been a proliferation of phrases such as "global feminisms" and "women of color" that reflect the diversity of women within the multifaceted study of gender inequalities.

gain heightened awareness and make better choices. I will consider each woman's sensibility in promoting equality between the sexes as well as take into account the varied power differentials among women. The women writers presented in my study share a class privilege and have light phenotypes which place them in certain advantages if we were to assess their status in most modern social hierarchies worldwide. Nevertheless, I aim to integrate disparate threads of analysis across various social categories, particularly geopolitical positionality.

GENRE & GENDER

While the contemporary testimonial genre is now generally associated with women storytellers, it has not always been the case. In fact, *testimonio* used to be affiliated with male authors. As noted, Montejo and Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1966) and Salvadoran Roque Dalton's *Miguel Mármol* (1972) were incredibly important to establishing the genre. In addition, the development of war narratives, particularly those from a guerrilla perspective, such as Argentine Ché Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban War* (1963), Salvadoran Manlio Argueta's *One Day of Life* (1980), and Nicaraguan Omar Cabezas's *Fire from the Mountain* (1982) affirmed a male presence in this style of writing. Indeed, Chilean Ariel Dorfman, in his enormously influential essay "Political Code and Literary Code," points out an odd evocation of the term *testimonio*: testes. He informs us that "testimony" originates from the Latin word testicles "since one could not give testimony in Rome if the latter were not healthy and in their place. To testify, to tell the truth, was originally related to virility, to speak with the capacity to father children" (187). Curiously, at the time of Dorfman's writing in 1986, he laments an absence of women writers and suggests that "this absence, from the texts, although not from the concentration camps, could be one of the keys to explore more deeply the dichotomies that we

are examining and the concept of ‘manliness’ that magnifies at the same time that it distances the combatants” (187).

The publication of the single most widely read *testimonio* I, Rigoberta Menchú (1983), radically shifted the gendering of the *testimonio* genre. Other notable *testimonios* written by women have included: Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s edited collection *This Bridge Called My Back* (1979); Alicia Partnoy’s *You Can’t Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile* (1988); Esmeralda Santiago’s *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1993); among others. I have decided to exclusively focus on women writers for this transhemispheric study mostly to explore the multidimensionality of gender violence, especially obscured histories.

As the fiftieth anniversary of *testimonio* approaches in 2016, *Arms of America* reflects on the aftermath of states of emergency and reevaluates the continuous development of the genre. Drawing on the retrospective nonlinear women’s narratives about Central America—including the writings of Claribel Alegría, Gioconda Belli, Demetria Martínez, and Ana Castillo—I argue that such testimonial texts re-intervene in the war of words, historical silencing, as cultural memories and timeless consciousness-raising tools. Contesting the claim that *testimonio* has an expiration date predicated on immediate crisis, my readings of mixed-genre testimonies such as Alegría’s *Ashes of Izalco* (1966) and Belli’s *The Inhabited Woman* (1988) together with newly written works like Martínez’s *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* (2005) and Castillo’s *Psst: I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor* (2005) reveal the ways in which wartime and postwar testimonial texts alike recover hidden histories related to the body from labor in the globalized garment industry, to sexual agency within revolutionary movements, to the inner war of depression, to torture traceable to the School of the Americas. The inclusion of U.S. Latina

testimonial writers is meant to engage in a transhemispheric dialogue that complicates former approaches to this decolonial literary tradition strictly bound to Latin America; applying postcolonial, queer, and feminist theories, I illumine the interweavings of unofficial truths in literature to explore their vexed relationship to history, temporality, and materiality. *Arms of America* challenges the commonly held assumption that *testimonio* is “against literature,” by shedding light on women’s writings simultaneously engaged in transtemporal activism *and* art.

Arms of America is presented in two parts organized around a constellation of feminist themes related to historiographies, temporalities, and bodies shared between and across chapters. The first half, “Desde el Istmo” (From the Isthmus), focuses on what Barbara Harlow calls “resistance narratives” – which is to say, *testimonios* formally linked to national liberation struggles. Alongside reinterpretations of two classic *testimonios* written *in medias res* of the grand civil war narrative, I analyze two others outside the parameters of the revolutionary period. Part II, “Desde las entrañas” (From the Belly),¹⁶ considers postwar manifestations of mixed-genre *testimonios* concerning Central America by women writers in the U.S.

The first chapter, “Timeless Testimonies: Claribel Alegria’s Cultural Memories,” argues that Alegria’s testimonial texts complicate trajectories of time, destabilizing the linearity of History by instead presenting a constellation of multilayered marginalized true stories. The first half of this chapter applies Dutch cultural studies scholar Mieke Bal’s formulation of narrative memory to better understand the creative ways in which Alegria revisits her childhood witnessing to develop a 1932 cultural memory of *La Matanza* (The Massacre); it also considers revisions of time and narrative techniques behind what I term *polywitnessing*. I show how a chain of witnessing ensues as the reader witnesses characters witnessing each other. In this

¹⁶ The phrase “*desde las entrañas (del munstruo)*,” roughly translated as “living in the belly of the beast” alludes to Cuban liberator Jose Marti’s “Nuestra America.” The beast serves as a metaphor for the U.S. See Rotker, pp. 63-64.

manner, Alegría's testimonial novel *Ashes of Izalco* (1966) models an active critique of discursive power. Although *Ashes of Izalco* predates the Salvadoran civil war, I suggest that it sets the stage for reading the later work *They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation* (1983) through the embryonic manifestations of testimonial narrative devices. Further, the shared presence of the national hero Farbundo Martí, across two distinct time periods, weds these texts together.

The latter half draws on the feminist insights of Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Melissa Wright to appreciate Alegría's groundbreaking garment worker *testimonio*. I argue that Alegría's classic *testimonio* *They Won't Take Me Alive* thematizes U.S. neoliberal practices and elaborately illustrates the ways in which globalization and gender intertwine. As such, it historically contextualizes the intersecting grand narratives of free trade and war in the Americas. By dramatizing how multinational corporations, like Maidenform, began setting up shop in El Salvador as early as the 1960s but more prominently so during the 1970s, *They Won't Take Me Alive* shows not only neoliberalism's impact on women's brown bodies but also the economic underpinnings driving many women to join labor and national liberation movements. My comparative analysis of Alegría's literary texts ultimately reveals the multidimensionality of historiography, the multidirectional linkages across time, and how U.S./Central American histories overlap.

Chapter 2, "La Gioconda's Smile: Erotohistoriography in Belli's Opaque and Transparent Testimonios," looks at the relationship between the embodied past and discordant temporalities. Drawing on Elizabeth Freeman's conceptualization of "erotohistoriography" and José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queer futurity, I read *The Inhabited Woman* (1988) as a testimonial novel that situates the body in magical realism—queer time—to dramatize indigenous women's biopolitical

battles alongside gender politics within the Sandinista movement. I argue that Belli merges the past and present in a homoerotic fashion to not only show a continuum of decolonial feminist struggles but also to experiment with narrative devices such as temporality and point of view. The body, in *The Country under My Skin* (2001), by contrast, is located in exilic spaces and serpentine time: as such, it is nostalgically linked to “home.” Applying a feminist lens based on the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, I demonstrate that Belli’s exilic status shapes her struggles for self-sovereignty as an author. I suggest that even though *Country* exhibits signs of anti-testimonial tendencies, it still reads as a mixed-genre autobiographical *testimonio*. The point of reading Belli’s texts contrapuntally is to gain a clearer sense of the erotic, timing, and changing politics of the protesting body.

Chapter 3, “Tongue Untied: Disappearance and Depression in Demetria Martínez,” examines the reconfigurations of disappearance in Martínez’s 1994 semi-autobiographical novel *Mother Tongue*. By putting Martínez’s autobiographically-informed novel in conversation with her more overt and explicitly self-referential text *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* (2005), I suggest that we can attend to the ways in which Martínez, as a Chicana author, renovates the Latin American testimonial form and analogizes “self-disappearance” to depression. In doing so, we reach a better understanding of not only the contextualization of U.S. transnational violence in El Salvador and women’s antiwar activism, but also how wars themselves are, at times, inner. I argue that Demetria Martínez’s testimonial literature addresses complex issues related to overcoming multifaceted linguistic terrorism: censorship, historical silencing, and self-repression. Intersecting *Mother Tongue* and *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* speaks on three registers—the personal, historical, and affective—to raise awareness of the long-term effects of war and the vital role that narrative therapy plays.

Finally, chapter 4, “‘¡Qué Lindo Habla la India!’: No Bodies and Queer Subalternities in Ana Castillo’s Performative *Testimonio*,” reads Castillo’s 2005 play *Psst: I Have Something to Tell You*, a dramatic adaptation of Sister Dianna Ortiz’s original *testimonio The Blindfold’s Eyes* (2002), as a meta-*testimonio*. Mostly drawing from a trauma studies framework, I outline the transformative process of adapting Ortiz’s “no body” memoir to performative *testimonio* with close attention to the textualities and materialities of tortured subjects. I suggest that Castillo bridges the Latin American *testimonio* form and Chicana/o political theatre to reinforce its radicalism with an eye towards abolishing torture practices worldwide; the consciousness-raising aspect of *testimonio*, when combined with performance, creates a critical space to politicize spectators. The compelling character The Friend, I argue, not only invokes the Rigoberta Menchú controversy but also functions as an allegorical figuration of subalternity and queerness. As a specter, The Friend problematizes language, materiality, sexuality, gender, race, and global status. By employing a distinctly Latin American genre, Castillo’s text situates itself as a transhemispheric critique and yet defies expectations of genre and geopolitics in considering U.S. militarism beyond the Americas.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to better understand stories concerning U.S. military presence abroad, revolutionary movements, and revolutionary forms of storytelling. I hope this project especially serves Central Americans, of all generations, who, like me, are children of exile. Beyond this limited audience, however, this study should speak to anyone who cares about the larger real-world consequences of “refugees in a world of fire” as Cherríe Moraga has put it.

PART I:
DESDE EL ISTMO

**TIMELESS TESTIMONIES:
CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA'S CULTURAL MEMORIES**

*I walked around
my past
my future
and suddenly
there my present
took fire.*

—CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA, “TIME”

Claribel Alegría's testimonial novel *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966) (*Ashes of Izalco* [1989]) tells the story of a daughter, Carmen Rojas, who flies from Washington D.C. to her childhood home in Santa Ana, El Salvador, to bury her mother, Isabel. Santa Ana is portrayed as a sleepy stagnant site, known for its coffee empire, just ten kilometers away from the volcano Izalco. While revisiting her childhood home and dwelling on its memories, Carmen comes to clandestinely inherit a diary recorded nearly three decades ago, during 1931-1932. This diary details the romantic interlude between Carmen's mother and a U.S. writer from Oregon, Frank Wolff. At the very end, Wolff recounts the accidental witnessing of political terror, *La Matanza* (The Massacre). The final image of *Ashes* is that of Isabel's funeral and “black volcanic earth” (“tierra negra del volcán”) “covering them all” (“cubriéndolos a todos”; 173; 175).

Whereas *Ashes of Izalco* reinvents historical trauma from the 1930s, Alegría's classic *testimonio No me agarran viva: la mujer salvadoreña en lucha* (1983) (*They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation* [1987]) orbits around memorializing the dead heroine, Eugenia, but, as I will show, Alegría's text touches on a subject

rarely discussed in Central American literary criticism: the rise of the globalized garment industry during the 1970s. To that end, Alegría depicts and critiques the economic crisis, particularly the emergence of Maidenform assembly plants, leading up to the Salvadoran civil war. Indeed, Alegría dryly asserts: “If President Reagan and his advisors really want to know why the Salvadoran people are up in arms, they’d understand a lot more from Marina González’s biography than from searching for proof of hypothetical conspiracies of Cuban and Russian origin” (“Si el presidente Reagan y sus consejeros realmente quisieran saber por qué el pueblo salvadoreño está en pie de lucha, aprenderían mucho más escuchando la vida de Marina González que buscando pruebas de hipotéticos complots cubanos o soviéticos”; 117; 115). Marina González’s life narrative, embedded within the collective storytelling about *guerrillera* Eugenia, illustrates how women have long been “unseen assemblers of consumer goods such as toys and designer jeans” (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 5) – and not to mention bras.

While Alegría’s *Ashes* and *They Won’t Take Me Alive* were published during “the testimonial moment,” I argue that these literary texts concern themselves with complicating trajectories of time; they destabilize the linearity of History by instead presenting a constellation of multilayered marginalized stories based on true events. In so doing, these revisionist narratives serve as artistic archaeological projects excavating repressed preexisting crises. Such signs of retrospection complicate the importance of testimonial timing. Not only is reinterpreting these *testimonios* significant for their historical value at the moment of enunciation (the pressing context of war, for instance), but so too for the retellings of their own hidden histories.

The first half of this chapter applies Dutch cultural studies scholar Mieke Bal’s formulation of narrative memory to better understand the creative ways in which Alegría revisits her childhood witnessing to develop a cultural memory of *La Matanza*; it also considers

revisions of time and narrative techniques behind polywitnessing. I show how a chain of witnessing ensues as the reader witnesses characters witnessing each other. In this manner, Alegría's *Ashes* models an active critique of discursive power. The latter half draws on the feminist insights of Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Melissa Wright to appreciate Alegría's groundbreaking garment worker *testimonio*. I argue that Alegría's *They Won't Take Me Alive* thematizes U.S. neoliberal practices and elaborately shows the ways in which globalization and gender intertwine. As such, it historically contextualizes the intersecting grand narratives of free trade and war in the Americas. By dramatizing how multinational corporations, like Maidenform, began setting up shop in El Salvador as early as the 1960s but more prominently so during the 1970s, *They Won't Take Me Alive* shows not only neoliberalism's impact on women's brown bodies but also the economic underpinnings driving many women to join labor and national liberation movements.

NARRATING CULTURAL MEMORIES

Born in 1924, Clara Isabel Alegría Vides (*nom de plume* Claribel Alegría) is a preeminent contemporary Central American writer. Due to her father's political exile, Alegría, while just a nine-month-old infant, and her family fled from Nicaragua to relocate to El Salvador. Alegría later traveled to the U.S. to complete her studies at a finishing school in Louisiana. In 1943, she married Darwin "Bud" Flakoll and from there fused a life-long professional partnership with him as co-author and co-translator for several literary projects. Between the years 1944-1947, Spanish poet and future Nobel Laureate in Literature Juan Ramón Jiménez mentored Alegría. In 1948, she earned her bachelor's degree in Philosophy from George Washington University. Alegría initially began her literary career as a poet. Her poetry collection *Sobrevivo* (1978) (*I*

Survive) received the Cuban-based Casa de las Américas Award alongside Nicaraguan Gioconda Belli (the focus of the next chapter). Alegría's opera, exceeding forty books, traverses the vast literary terrains of poetry, *testimonio*, short stories, essays, translations, anthologies, among others. Alegría has been recognized for her global status and significance: she recently received the 2006 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, an honor she shares with previous laureates such as Gabriel García Márquez (1972) and Octavio Paz (1982).

In a 1991 interview with Marcia Phillips McGowan, Nicaraguan-born but Salvadoran-raised writer Claribel Alegría disclosed: "I like to write testimony because there I can jump to many solid facts. [. . .] I can be more objective, and I don't have to wonder what is real" ("Closing the Circle" 228). Alegría's position on testimonial prose makes explicit the assumed discursive formations between and implicit hierarchies of objective history and subjective literature. Even though Alegría brings to light assumptions embedded within such stratified disciplinary borders, she subverts these very dichotomies of history/literature and objectivity/subjectivity by frequently combining both narrative modes.

The development of *Ashes of Izalco* resembles this kind of "testimony," which is at once fact-based, *and*—contrary to Alegría's assertion—that which still makes us "wonder what is real." Reflecting on the creative process, Alegría asserts,

So many things have happened that otherwise would not be recorded or remembered. For instance, in El Salvador in 1932 a cultural lobotomy was performed on the entire nation by the dictator Martínez when he ordered the burning of all magazine and newspaper files dealing with the peasant massacre, and it was done. Our book, *Ashes of Izalco*, was the first historical novel written about the events of 1932. Later there was a documented study, *Matanza*, and Roque Dalton's testimonial book with Miguel Mármol. But I feel it was necessary to tell that story in order to fill a gap in historical memory. ("Closing the Circle" 228-29)

What Alegría is essentially describing is the makings of cultural memory.¹⁷ As Mieke Bal has demonstrated, cultural memory, “mediate[s] and modif[ies] difficult or tabooed moments of the past—moments that nonetheless impinge, sometimes fatally, on the present” (vii). Thus, Alegría situates her first novel *Ashes of Izalco* within the historical-literary discourses of *La Matanza*, preceding Thomas P. Anderson’s “documented study” *Matanza: El Salvador’s Communist Revolt of 1932* (1971) and journalist and poet Roque Dalton’s *Miguel Mármol* (a biographical *testimonio* published posthumously in 1972). *La Matanza* refers to a defining moment in Salvadoran history that transpired on January 22, 1932. In the western region of El Salvador, including the town of Izalco, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez led the genocide of 30,000 *Ladino* (mixed-race) and indigenous campesinos, mostly Pipil Indians. Martínez and his army brutally quelled a communist-inspired revolt against the coffee oligarchy: the upper strata that controlled 90% of the nation’s land.¹⁸ The legendary communist leader Farabundo Martí was among those who spearheaded the insurrection and died in combat. Martí’s name would later be invoked in El Salvador’s subsequent liberation struggles especially with the formation of FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). Thus, the War on Communism, popularly routinized during the dirty wars, stemmed from the 1930s. Whereas Alegría comments upon her usage of the testimonial form and the development of cultural memory in her conversation with Marcia Phillips McGowan, in an earlier 1984 interview with acclaimed U.S. poet Carolyn Forché, Alegría reveals personal details that factored into the compilation of *La Matanza*’s

¹⁷ Bal explains that “the topic of cultural memory has surfaced in various contexts, but particularly that of Holocaust memory and trauma” (xi).

¹⁸ Of course, the economic and political problems undergirding this moment of social unrest were more complex than how I have just adumbrated. For a comprehensive historical view on *La Matanza*, see the groundbreaking study Gould and Lauria’s *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-32*(2008). See also the film *Scars of Memory* (2002).

historical survival and led to the creation of “narrative memory,” to borrow again from Bal.

Alegría recalls:

I was very much marked by the peasant uprising in El Salvador in 1932. I remember the Guardias Nacionales bringing dozens of prisoners into the fortress across the street from the home with their thumbs tied behind them with bits of cord, shoving them along with rifle butts. I remember the shots at night. I remember the Colonel striking a peasant who had his hands behind him, and my father running out of his clinic, his doctor’s tunic flapping, to shout: ‘Colonel, a real man doesn’t hit anyone who can’t defend himself.’ (“Interview” 11)

Alegría was seven years old when she witnessed what she would later refer to as her “childhood nightmare” (“The Writer’s Commitment” 349). By integrating aspects of her own autobiographical experience of witnessing in *Ashes of Izalco*, Alegría, in effect, constructs a “narrative memory,” that is, a memory distinct from the commonplace in its being “affectively colored, surrounded by an emotional aura that, precisely, makes [it] memorable” (Bal viii). Some of these artistic renderings include reimagining environmental catastrophe: “the black cloud boil[ed] up behind Santa Ana from the volcano Izalco, which was in continuous eruption during the uprising, the people walk[ed] the street of Santa Ana with handkerchiefs over their noses, volcanic ash dropp[ed] from the cloud to powder their hair and coat the streets with a grey film” (“Interview” 11). Alegría, interestingly, recalls that “a few weeks later a peasant woman from Izalco coming to our door to beg for herself and for her children. She shook her head at my mother’s question and replied: ‘There is only a handful of us left, señora, only a handful’” (“Interview” 11). This particular memory forms a significant moment in Frank’s retelling of *La Matanza*.¹⁹

On narrative innovations, Maarten van Delden and Yvon Grenier illuminate the back-story of this undeniably experimental novel. They tell us that Claribel Alegría and her husband

¹⁹ For a more thorough review of autobiographical elements in *Ashes*, see Varas.

Darwin Flakoll were in Paris during the 1960s in the company of some of the finest writers (including Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Benedetti, and Mario Vargas Llosa) when the seed of *Ashes* was planted. As already noted, Alegría was deeply moved by the historical trauma of *La Matanza*: this event was a “political antecedent” that “mark[ed]” her (“The Writer’s Commitment” 348). When Carlos Fuentes learned of this intense imprint he suggested that she write a “historical novel” which is exactly what she and her husband set out to do (van Delden and Grenier 216). As Arturo Arias has shown, *Ashes* is a particularly memorable work precisely because it marks Alegría’s transition from poetry to prose. Indeed, *Ashes* is a work of lyrical historical fiction, among other forms.

Following Alegría’s development of the testimonial novel, testimonial theorist Miguel Barnet addresses this tension between history and literature in his own testimonial text’s “Afterword: Testimonial Narrative.”²⁰ According to Barnet, the coming together of style and content present within the testimonial novel confronts “problems within the American context: violence, dependency, neocolonialism, the falsification of history” (204). Barnet elaborates:

The testimonial novel critically examines not only ethnic, cultural and social stereotypes, it also reworks several traditional concepts of literature: realism, autobiography, the relationship between fiction and history. History will always appear through the significant, individual moments of marginalized persons. Testimonial literature will revise a mangled, deformed interpretation of the past to offer a vision from the perspective of the class struggle. (204)

The testimonial novel, in other words, simultaneously concerns itself with aesthetics and rectifying historical (mis)interpretations. Testimonial literature challenges the very form and function of Literature.

²⁰ While Barnet’s text has been credited for formalizing the emergence of testimonial discourse, scholars have debated over earlier manifestations of this genre. For instance, Doris Sommer claims that “Testimonials surely existed before the 1960s, but they were relatively isolated, even ignored” (115). Sommer cites the Brazilian *testimonio* Carolina María de Jesus’s *Child of the Dark* (1958) as a case in point.

The publication date of Barnet's *testimonio* is significant; it also marks the year of Claribel Alegría's testimonial novel *Ashes of Izalco* appearing in print. Of this text's monumental import, Arturo Arias comments that the 1960s saw more transgressions and experimentations of fictional forms while still maintaining a profound relationship with social content. "For Central America," Arias argues, "this attitude signified a rupture with the preceding period. The 1960s was a time of cultural revolution, and Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll's *Ashes of Izalco* became the first of a series of novels to express this transformation in its literary form" ("Claribel Alegría's Recollection" 22). Echoing Arias but focusing more so on gender, Patricia Varas posits that "*Cenizas* occupies a unique position in the debate about the historical novels written by women in Latin America. Other than the female narratives that promoted independence, it is one of the first narrations of the historical genre by women (appearing in 1966), and it precedes by a few years the revolutionary movements in which the Central American nations would be involved" (49-50). For all of these sketched out reasons, *Ashes* is a key text for understanding the development of women's testimonial narratives.

The tenacious memory of witnessing *La Matanza* along with later finding out as an adult that this particular historical moment was "forgotten" played critical roles in Alegría's decision to write a novel of remembrance. Nancy Saporta Sternback offers further insight into the textual origins:

When questioned about how she, the writer, was able to *unsilence* the story of the Matanza, Alegría tells us that she found three newspaper clippings hidden in her father's library that enabled her to reconstruct the event. Until then, Alegría claims, there was absolutely no documentation about it thanks to the round of dictators whose efforts produced a national amnesia. Therefore, in much the same way that her father's newspaper clippings help to produce the novel for the author, so, too, do the existence and survival of family texts such as Frank's diary help to reconstruct history, shake memories, and ultimately recreate national episodes that had been erased. (64)

The pre-existing journalistic narrative indirectly inherited from her father together with personal childhood recollections constitutes essential fragments for formulating Alegría's testimonial novel. Alegría interweaves these pieces of personal past and journalism in a narrative mode that resists "cultural lobotomy," "national amnesia."²¹

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

The evocative image of the real and imagined volcano—as suggested in the title *Ashes of Izalco*—foregrounds the passing of time. Aside from the title itself, the epigraph that greets the reader underscores the metaphors of ash and dust. In her recent book *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013), Cathy Caruth tells us that "To search for traces in the ash: this is the story of an impossible quest, not for what lies buried beneath the ashes, but for what may be impossibly, evanescently, inscribed upon them" (92). In this sense, ashes are at the heart of this text as an emblem of the endless search for meaning and memory. In another sense, the epigraph contains the final verses from a love sonnet written by the prominent Spanish Golden Age poet Francisco de Quevedo that reads: "They will be ash; but it will have feeling / they will be dust; but dust which is in love" ("Serán ceniza mas tendrá sentido, / polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado"; my translation; 7). Such lines recall funeral rites that allude to scripture such as "Dust thou art, and

²¹ As with Alegría, journalism inspired Barnet's testimonial prose. Barnet perused the newspaper when his eyes fell upon a story about retirement home residents who were over a hundred years old. One such resident, Esteban Montejo, who in 1963 was 103 years old (and lived to be 113 years of age), related an extraordinary life narrative involving slavery in the sugarmills, escaping and living independently in the woods, returning to labor in the sugar plantations after abolition in Cuba, and fighting in the War of Independence (1895-1898). From that point, Barnet arranged interviews with Montejo over the period of three years and compiled his Afro-Cuban life narrative which would become the landmark *testimonio*, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*. While Barnet clearly establishes the text as a biography in its title, Barnet has "phrased the story in the modulated first person voice" (Hill 12). In fact, the first English translation (1968) assumed the title *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, but, as translator Nick Hill has pointed out, such presentation of presumed monovocality "fail[s] to reproduce the complex process of reproducing the text" (12). The complex storytelling in this case involves a tripartite mediation: the informant Montejo, the interlocutor Barnet, and the translator Hill. Notwithstanding those narrative interferences, Montejo's account tells "the unvarnished story of 'an authentic actor in the process of history in Cuba'" (Hill 11).

unto dust thou shalt return" (Genesis 3:19), thus emphasizing the delicacy of human life: its cyclicity, its ephemerality. The personification of ash as "hav[ing] feeling" and dust "in love" evokes transcendent affect and foreshadows star-crossed love, doomed romance.

But, the volcano signifies still more. It symbolizes the wake of peasant uprising led by Augusto Farabundo Martí, a hero whose name is further memorialized by the FMLN (Farabundo Martí Liberation Front) as I will discuss shortly when we get to Alegría's *They Won't Take Me Alive*. That Alegría would use a volcano in such figurative ways, is hardly surprising. Perhaps what is more startling is that the synchronicity was in fact true: Izalco erupted at around the same time of *La Matanza*. Alegría didn't have to imagine that. Historian Thomas P. Anderson's seminal study *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt* (1971) opens with the literal ashes of Izalco. While not from a literary background, Anderson poetically describes this strange simultaneity:

It was as if nature had gone mad. All of the northern portion of Central America had been set rocking when Volcán de Fuego, Volcán de Agua, Acatenango, and several lesser craters in Guatemala all erupted at once on the night of January 22, 1932. Not to be left out, the 'lighthouse of the Pacific,' El Salvador's famous volcano Izalco, joined in. A cloud of ashes blanketed the skies as far as Nicaragua. The population of western of El Salvador, the heart of the volcano region, was in terror. Molten lava began to drift down the slopes of Izalco, and those who lived near the mountain began to pack hastily, for Izalco was noted for its destructive rampages. (1)

What Anderson is getting at is that these volcanic explosions were, in fact, a transisthmian phenomena. Even Anderson cannot resist using the trope of the volcano to prefigure "destructive rampages." El Salvador's ecological eruption, in other words, was not simply a metaphor or, an aspect of merely aestheticizing the landscape, but rather a real event that happened alongside genocide.²² In sum, Alegría's rendering of cataclysm correlates with other catastrophes, which

²² Incidentally, since the 1966 eruption, the volcano Izalco has lain dormant.

Patricia Varas locates as “three instances of crises that occur simultaneously: the eruption of Volcano Izalco, a natural disaster; the infidelity of one of the protagonists, Isabel, a bourgeois mother, a social disruption; and the massacre of *campesinos*, a national conflict” (48). Put differently, the volcano takes on new meaning as the emergence of feminist consciousness or sexual awakening that is not only true for Isabel but also her daughter, Carmen.

Alegría, akin to the Chicana poet Demetria Martínez (as we will see in chapter 3), recycles real-life material from prose to poetry and vice versa. Unlike Martínez, however, who expands her poem “Nativity,” among others, to produce her first novel *Mother Tongue*, Alegría does the reverse: she condenses her novel *Ashes of Izalco* to subsequently publish poems such as “Flowers from the Volcano” (1978) and “The Volcanoes” within *Luisa in Realityland* (1983), a text Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval characterizes as a “poeticized testimonial prose/verse novel” (98). Whereas Martínez’s prose and poetry record Salvadoran history from the vantage point of a Chicana activist in the U.S. sanctuary movement, Alegría’s creative works capture fragments of her haunting memory of *La Matanza*. In “Flowers from the Volcano,” Alegría eloquently expresses, “The cycle was closing, / Cuscatlán flowers / thrive in volcanic ash, / they grow strong / tall / brilliant” (*Halting Steps* 181). The paradoxical “flower[ing]” and “thriv[ing]” in the face of the “closing” “cycle” and “volcanic ash” suggest a beautiful rebirth that counterbalances devastating disintegration. In so doing, Alegría illustrates glowing cinders of hope and remnants of memory. This sort of intermingling of fact and fiction, typified in the trope of the volcano, raises questions about distinguishing between what makes certain literature “testimonial” and others not. In my view, the difference lies in whether or not there is a political valence, a social justice agenda. In Alegría’s case, what makes her text “testimonial” is not only how it integrates

personal matter but rather, more importantly, how it subversively stirs a transhemispheric historical consciousness.

POLYWITNESSING

I now turn from the multiple meanings of the volcanic trope and the ways in which it is suggestive of class, gendered, and racialized rebellions to consider Alegría's revision of time and narrative techniques behind witnessing. As Rick Mc Callister has shown, *Ashes of Izalco* reanimates the past in two ways: "It is a remembrance of Isabel Valdés de Rojas by her daughter Carmen, who compares her life with her mother's. But, it is also a historical novel that takes place during the massacre of 1932 and the first acts of resistance against the local oligarchy" (162). For Mc Callister, "*Cenizas de Izalco* is a historically relevant text documenting the breakdown of a bourgeois democracy into a nomadological nightmare" (170).²³ Likewise, Nancy Saporta Sternback observes that, "[T]he novel is written on two time scales: Frank's life in 1931 and Carmen's in 1962. Each time she reads Frank's words from thirty years earlier, the narrator identifies with this search" (67). In other words, there are clearly two distinct narratives occurring on two separate timelines yet the identification that Carmen has with the primary text, in this case Frank's diary, signals an overlap. The way in which Frank mediates Isabel's story is set within a testimonial frame. It is through the portal of Frank's diary that Carmen rediscovers her mother, Isabel, and we, as readers, time travel to the 1930s.

Chapter 5 exposes us to the first of Frank's many diary entries. Alegría's temporal schema within a diary format is further developed and adapted in later Central American literary

²³ Earlier in the essay, Mc Callister uses the theoretical term nomadology by drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's *Nomadology: The War Machine* (1986).

works such as the Salvadoran pseudo-testimonial novel Manlio Argueta's *Un día en la vida* (1980) (*One Day of Life* [1983]), wherein the fictional principal protagonist Guadalupe Guardado relates her personal account by documenting time in a singular date.²⁴ Thus, Argueta “reworks narrative time and historical determinism in such a way as to present a critique of the social order of terror and repression holding sway in that country” (Harlow 98). In Alegría's case, conversely, we discover a minor discrepancy in time-keeping. Although the first entry is dated November 16, 1931, we are told that the diary's primary reader, Carmen, has previously begun reading it the night before and has jumbled up the dates since she is slightly unsure of where she last left off. Carmen speculates: “October 31, November 2, no, About mid-November, I think” (“Octubre 31, noviembre 2, no, fue a mediados”; 34; 35). The text's free indirect discourse reveals to us a temporal disruption, albeit briefly. In chapter 6, Carmen revisits the original date October 31, 1931 so as to close any narrative gaps. Such blurred chronological order, which is instantly rectified, subtly calls attention to how we as readers depend on Carmen's reading: we rely on her, in part, to make sense of the otherwise neatly organized temporal sequencing expected of a private journal. Thus, “witnessing can become a model for critical reading” (Bal x). *Ashes*, notably, features a chain of polywitnessing: we, as readers, witness Carmen witnessing Frank witnessing Isabel. In this way, Alegría mediates and meditates on the reading process itself through reconfigured narrative time.

Frank's diary commences as a solitary monologue, a novelistic format that M.M. Bakhtin would describe as bearing “no witness,” that is to say, at least not yet; or, perhaps, interpreted another way, could be what Mieke Bal terms “self-witnessing,” prefiguring an appropriation of cultural memory, a shift from individual to collective, from national to transnational. I lean more

²⁴ Argueta's text features other female narrators as well; thus it is polyvocalic in a manner analogous to Alegría's later testimonial text *They Won't Take Me Alive*.

towards the latter for reasons I'll explain shortly. Frank's first entry immediately alerts us to his disabled state but we later find that Frank's wounded body—his pierced abdomen, his “thorn on the side”—evokes a greater existential crisis. As an invalid, he plays chess with the Dr. Alfonso Rojas, a character openly having extramarital affairs yet whom will later be cuckolded when his wife Isabel has a tryst with Frank. The chess pieces foreshadow the 1932 revolt: the pawns (the landless laborers) are plotting an uprising against the knight (agrarian aristocracy) and the bishop (suggesting anti-clerisy, arguably a rejection of missionaries such as the character Virgil). A meta-moment ensues when the doctor inquires about Frank's motives for staying in El Salvador and speculates upon his occupation. To the doctor's assumption of Frank's career choice as an archeologist, Frank replies: ““No, I'm a writer,' I lied to simplify matters. 'But I'm interested in the Mayan civilization, and I'd like to see as much of Central America as I can. I'm thinking of using it as a background for a novel'” (“No, escritor – mentí para simplificar—, pero me interesa mucho la civilización maya y me gustaría explorar Centro América. Me servirá de fondo para una novela”; 35, 37). Even though Dr. Rojas assumes incorrectly about Frank's profession, in some ways he is right. In effect, Frank is an archeologist of knowledge, a historian.

While Frank confesses his compulsive “fib[s]” (“mentira[s]”; 35; 37) from the outset, the transparency of his deceptive ways, through the confessional mode, works rather paradoxically to establish him as a reliable narrator. He evades complications with others by simplifying matters, speaking half-truths. In any case, Frank covers his left-leaning tracks by posing as a mere tourist, an outsider, a novelist: an “idealistic wanderer” (Sternback 69). The text makes plain that Frank lacks a plotline. He escapes U.S. reality – namely, his romantic and career crises. His life has stagnated on account of his recent divorce and writer's block. As Mc Callister puts it: Frank's true motives for traveling to El Salvador have to do with “conquering alcoholism

and escaping the consumer rat-race of Los Angeles” (167). Oddly enough, when “[f]aced with the numbing poverty of El Salvador, Frank begins to overcome his spiritual misery”; moreover, Frank eventually “discovers for the first time in years that his life has meaning” (Mc Callister 167).

Despite depoliticizing himself as a tourist, and appearing “innocent,” Frank’s presence as a U.S. citizen in El Salvador, nevertheless, marks an imperial encounter, a formation of a “contact zone.” Mary Louise Pratt informs us that a “contact zone” “invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect” (8). By ultimately documenting the natural history (i.e., the natural catastrophe of the volcano) together with the historical trauma of *La Matanza*, Frank functions as a “seeing man,” an eyewitness, in an “anti-conquest” sort of fashion.²⁵ Frank’s perspective, then, is framed, as a mode of sentimental travel writing within Alegria’s broader testimonial novel.

Frank’s disillusionment in El Salvador as a Western observer brings to mind Joan Didion’s *Salvador* (1983). Didion’s opening epigraph, extracted from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, underscores “the making of a report” for “future guidance” (11). Just as Frank shapes Salvadoran history as a U.S. sympathizer so too Didion molds “journalistic-touristic reports of alienated horror” (Sommer 119). Like Frank, Didion describes her arrival in El Salvador by considering a tourist mindset. She writes, “In the general absence of tourists these hotels have since been abandoned, ghost resorts on the empty Pacific beaches, and to land at this airport built to service them is to plunge directly into a state in which no ground is solid, no depth of field reliable, no perception so definite that it might not dissolve into its reverse” (13). Unlike Frank,

²⁵ Pratt coins the term “anti-conquest” to denote “a Utopian, innocent vision of European global authority” (38). The same principle of “global authority” could apply to U.S. empire-building.

however, Didion regards herself as a visiting journalist on a quest for truth in El Salvador. While Didion is also an outsider, a foreign correspondent of sorts, her marital status and employment set her apart from Frank. Didion is deftly aware of the socio-political crisis at hand in her journey into “the heart of darkness,” whereas Frank naively stumbles upon historical violence. Didion describes the Massacre at El Mozote (although she arrives six months after the event) and Frank presents an immediate depiction of *La Matanza*. What is more, Frank’s account closely considers race by elaborating upon the anti-indigeneity at the heart of the Massacre. Those suspected of indigenous peasantry through signifiers of appearance, attire, or accent were targeted and set aside for death. Because of this racial profiling, ironically by a military man who was known as “el indio,” many indigenous peoples in El Salvador hid any such markers of ethnic difference.

Returning to the contours of Frank’s pseudo-testimonio, the monologic nature within his writing gradually shifts to a more dialogic style, an epistolary form, as he falls in love with Isabel. A total of four letters constitute chapters 16 and 17. Curiously, the entire account of *La Matanza* is related in a letter. This limited format of documentation makes explicit how “we can recognize the persistence of a language, or a writing, that emerges precisely as the archival resources of meaning and tradition slip away” (Caruth xi). Frank accidentally witnesses yet at the same time partially misses this defining moment of Salvadoran history. He confesses: “I had spent the two days of the brief, bloody civil war sleeping in ravines and on hillsides, limping through the sulphurous wilderness, unaware of it all” (“Y yo durmiendo en barrancos los dos días de la breve y sangrienta guerra civil, sin darme cuenta de lo que sucedía, cojeando entre matorrales sulfurosos”; 159; 160). His mental state is that of a lovesick inebriated, partly clueless, U.S. outsider. For instance, in the beginning he recounts seeing blatant violence: “There was a pretty, young girl several seats ahead of me, and one of the peasants who had entered the

bus pulled her out and dragged her off, screaming and scratching, in a different direction” (“Uno de los campesinos se fijó en una muchacha joven y bonita y la arrastró en otra dirección mientras ella gritaba e imploraba”; 149; 151). Yet, after witnessing such abduction, Frank seems numb to it and does not process it. He later puts scrambled splices of violence together as he recalls: “I remembered the arc of the machete swinging down on the bus driver’s head, the screams of the girl who was dragged away into the darkness” (“Recordé el machete ondeando sobre la cabeza del conductor, la muchacha a la que arrastraron dando gritos”; 161; 162). As the penultimate chapter progresses we notice a significant shift from a muddled understanding of atrocity to hard-edged lucidity. In conversation with Eduardo (a journalist and Dr. Rojas’s brother-in-law), Frank comes to terms with historic reality. Eduardo’s words greet Frank “sepulchrally through the receiver” (“sus palabras me llegaron a través del teléfono con eco de sepulcro”) when he says: “Our generation is stained with blood [...] There can be no forgiveness for such crimes” (“Nuestra generación está manchada [...] No hay perdón para lo que pasa”; 161; 162). These ominous words follow Frank as he subsequently watches the surreptitious ambush—*La Matanza*—from a cantina with Virgil, an event that further alienates him when Virgil dies.

Frank’s diary ends with a final address in the form of a farewell letter. Thus, the entirety of the diary, his self-narrative, transforms into a missive between lovers, another private format.

In so doing, Frank shares his “self-witnessing.” Frank writes:

Isabel:

I have returned Eduardo’s car to his office. I have gathered some of Virgil’s things (his Bible, his sermons, some shirts and clothing, his razor) and I have spent the night at his table, writing you. Why? To settle an outstanding account, perhaps – or to raise a candle to glimpse the face of truth. To tell you, in any event, that you were right.

I love you,
Frank (172)

Isabel:

Hoy le devolví su auto a Eduardo, recogí algunas de las cosas de Vigil (su Biblia, su estuche, algunos de sus sermones) y estuve toda la noche, sentado a su mesa, escribiéndote. ¿Por qué? Para cerrar una cuenta pendiente quizá, para levantar una vela y escrutarle el rostro a la verdad; para decirte, en fin, que tenías razón.

Te quiero,
Frank (172-173)

The gifting of his diary, his heart, suggests surrender. The unilateral way in which only Frank's letters are produced without Isabel's responses reinforce a type of unrequited love, yet we know that the pages of Frank's diary have been well-worn by Isabel's (and other readers') rereadings indicating a hidden reciprocal tie after all. Thus, writing and reading share an unspoken intimate relation.

Frank's narrative ultimately falls into the hands of Isabel's daughter, Carmen. Through the inheritance of this diary, Carmen gradually begins to understand her mother's mysterious interior life. Prior to reading Frank's account of Isabel, Carmen realizes she had not truly known her mother. She muses: "The picture [Frank] paints of Mother is so different, so strange..." ("La imagen que dibuja de mamá es demasiado extraña, no he podido asimilara"; 34; 35). When Carmen recognizes she had never seen past her mother's façade, she inquires about any record she may have left behind. Towards the end of the novel, Carmen asks her mother's friend Eugenia:

"Did she ever leave any of her diaries, Eugenia? She always kept a diary, but I've looked everywhere."
"She must have burned them."
"Didn't she even leave me a letter?"
"Nothing." (139)

- ¿Mamá no dejó su diario, Eugenia? Yo sé que llevaba uno, pero no he podido encontrarlo.
- De seguro lo quemó.
- ¿Ni siquiera una carta me dejó?
- Nada, que yo sepa. (140)

Carmen's curiosity raises broader issues of authorship within debates of testimonial discourse. In other words, Carmen is not satisfied with hearing a biographical account of her mother's life story, or, Isabel's pseudo-testimonio transmitted through the interlocutor Frank: she wants primary material. The fact that her mother has burned her self-narrative is emblematic of the self-silencing prevalent in gender oppression. More generally speaking, then, Carmen challenges women's suppressed perspectives in historiography.

Such interactive and improvisational engagement with Frank's "story," the central narrative standing in for the gendered and colonial archive, creates a co-presence. Such co-existence can more accurately be called "transculturation." For Mary Louise Pratt, this particular ethnographic term describes "how subordinated and marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (7). Seen in this light, *Ashes* models an active critique of discursive power.

Searching for her mother's voice leads Carmen to investigate her own. In this manner, Carmen echoes Alice Walker's oft-cited inner quest: "In search of my mother's garden, I found my own." Through this inter-generational reading process, Carmen, notably, begins to develop an ardent desire for memory and self-archivization. In the words of Sternback, "[the diary] permits the narrator to question her mother's motives, to understand her mother outside the maternal role, and more importantly to give birth to a new model: woman as reader and, therefore, interpreter and inventor of her own reality" (63-64). Along the same lines, McCallister discerns uncanny similarities between Isabel's and Carmen's marriage plots: "Upon reading this in the diary, Carmen discovers that there was no relationship of love and trust between Isabel and Alfonso; that Isabel had stayed with him for what she perceived as the good of the children, even though she predicted that they would trapped in the same life" (168). Thus,

reading plays a critical role in the realization of marital entrapment, the awareness of gendered confinement. From that point of departure, Carmen draws the connection that “Paul, her husband, is like Alfonso, he accepts social norms, materialism, the official line – without questioning anything” (Mc Callister 168). Needless to say, Carmen grows critical of the uncritical. Later on in the text, Carmen ponders on her own sense of independence and reexamines her creative capacities. She discloses how she had attempted the craft of writing but had found what she had to say vapid. Carmen complains:

I’ve tried writing, but I have nothing to say that would interest anybody else. What comes out on the page is self-pity. Self-pity for what? Because I’m empty inside? Is it a long, thin whine at the injustice of Carmen not being what Carmen always imagined herself to be? I look down on Paul because he lacks passion, but what have I ever hurled myself into blindly, confidently? Am I afraid of losing my central heating, my car, my television set? Am I merely afraid to be alone with my emptiness? (140)

He intentado escribir, a veces, pero no tengo nada de interés para contar. Lo que trasluce en mis páginas es lástima a mí misma. ¿Por qué lástima? ¿Es que estoy vacía por dentro, es que sólo tengo una larguísima y delgada queja por la injusticia de que Carmen no es lo que imaginó ser? Desprecio a Paul porque le falta pasión; ¿cuándo me he lanzado yo a ciegas? ¿Temo acaso perder mi casa con calefacción central, mi auto, mi televisor? ¿Temo quedarme a solas con mi vacío? (142)

At the root of her writing, Carmen discovers a fear of being herself. What Carmen sees when she looks inside herself is a hollowness, an emptiness echoed by her mother and not to mention Frank. Speculating further on this emotional void, Carmen ponders: “Carmen existed once; where did she go? Did she dissipate and vanish behind her masks and roles and labels? What ever happened to Mother? Did husbands and children drain us both of our substance and leave only an empty shell” (“¿me sería posible reinventar a Carmen? ¿Podría imaginarme como una persona segura de sí, que ocupa espacio, que pasa por experiencias que la marcan, que la afirman en su individualidad, en vez de ir repitiendo ecos por un corredor vacío donde las puertas tienen

signos y están cerradas”; 108; 111). The Spanish translation, interestingly enough, does not mention the roles of wife and mother nor the connection to her mother’s legacy of self-abnegation; therefore, Carmen’s individuality is portrayed more radically. Ultimately, Carmen functions as a resistant historical subject. Such levels of inquiry challenge the traditional notions of womanhood leading self-sacrificial lifeless lives. These questions, furthermore, signal a budding sense of gendered self-identity and undoing of gendered hierarchies.

One of the ways in which *Ashes of Izalco* reshapes time is through textual transformation: the text’s meaning shifts according to who reads it. The text moves from a private repository of the past to a collective record. Frank’s diary begins as a self-narrative (self-witnessing), that is then directed to Isabel, and finally, inadvertently, morphs into a family archive under Carmen’s gaze and historical document for us as readers. As such, there is a merry-go-round of readership: a circulation of textual exchanges. *Ashes of Izalco* makes plain that while we cannot change the past, the way we understand it can.

Ashes of Izalco does indeed change history by changing its possible interpretations, transforming silence into what Arturo Arias calls “an articulated creative memory” (*Taking Their Word* 6). In so doing, Alegría forms a creative counter-archive. Nancy Saporta Sternback outlines the ways in which *Ashes* anticipates *They Won’t Take Me Alive*. For Sternback, “These two techniques, to take note of the words of a another woman, through her conversation and to tell stories through the appearance of familiar objects such as diaries and photograph albums, have begun to take on a great symbolic importance in Alegría’s works” (71). In addition to these techniques commonly deployed in testimonial narratives, Sternback argues that “If one of the purposes of testimonial literature is to break silences, Alegría’s own prose anticipates broken fragments and silences in *Ashes* that will later be used metaphorically in *No me agarran viva*”

(72). Thus, *Ashes of Izalco* sets the stage for reading the later work *They Won't Take Me Alive* through the embryonic manifestations of testimonial narrative devices. Further, the shared presence of the national hero Farabundo Martí, across two distinct time periods, weds these texts together.

“THEY WON’T TAKE ME ALIVE”

This subsection of the chapter briefly surveys how Alegría’s *No me agarran viva: La mujer salvadoreña en lucha* (1983) (*They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation [1987]*) is structured as a whole, with special attention to experimentations of temporal dissonance and chronicling of suppressed histories, before turning to an in-depth analysis of Marina González’s account of working at Maidenform.²⁶ *They Won't Take Me Alive* begins with Eugenia (*nom de guerre* Ana María Castillo Rivas) at the apotheosis of her guerrilla participation as she commands fellow FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) *compañeros* transporting and delivering weaponry.²⁷ That Alegría’s classic *testimonio* commences at an apex of action featuring a *guerrillera* in command radically ruptures

²⁶ As with *Ashes*, Alegría is not the sole author of *They Won't Take Me Alive*. Her late husband, Darwin J. Flakoll, was a joint contributor though the English translation does not credit his coauthorship. By referring to Alegría as the principal author I do not intend to be complicitous in this exclusion too but rather so as not to encumber the essay. For more about Alegría’s transnational collective authorship with her husband, see Craft.

²⁷ *Guerrilla* etymologically stems from the diminutive of the Spanish *guerra* “war” that was first introduced during the Peninsular War (1808-14). Against the backdrops of the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan civil wars, during the mid-late twentieth century, the FMLN (the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) were well-known guerrilla movements that fought against U.S.-backed armies. Sociologist Jocelyn Viterna, in her latest study *Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador* (2013), considers a woman a *guerrilla* if she has lived in the guerrilla camps for at least half a year, regardless of specific duties performed in the camp(s) (35). For an extensive gender analysis of guerrillas, see Rodríguez (1996) and Padilla (2012). On another note, “The FMLN—an umbrella organization drawing five separate armed groups into one coordinated unit—formed officially at the end of 1980” (Viterna 29). References to FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) and its subset FPL (Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí/Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces) are included in the English translation’s “Glossary.”

monolithic views of women's passivity during armed conflict.²⁸ This climatic scene, however, ends abruptly with Eugenia's capture and death in the line of fire. Consequently, Eugenia's apotheosis quite literally signifies "a point of culmination and departure" (I. Rodríguez 164). According to Yajaira Padilla, in her recent work *Changing Women, Changing Nation* (2012), Eugenia's death scene is notably "the only part of the text that is told by way of a fictional account" (60). In other words, the text reinvents Eugenia's final hours on January 17, 1981. Although Alegría reshapes Eugenia's life narrative in a manner that novelizes *testimonio*, what comes to the fore is a compilation of cultural memories involving other revolutionary women such as Marina González. In so doing, Alegría redefines and revitalizes representations of *guerrilleras* from diverse class backgrounds.

Originally published in Spanish, in 1983, *They Won't Take Me Alive* is a woman-centered revolutionary narrative that charts the personal evolution of the heroine Eugenia; yet, as the subtitle "Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation" suggests, the individual converges with the communal, nationalism intersects with feminist consciousness.²⁹ Thus, Alegría creates an innovative amalgamated narrative that crosses various disciplinary borders such as literature, history, sociology, and women's studies. In Marjorie Agosín's view, Alegría's texts as a whole are "encountered promiscuously; they pour in on us from all directions in diverse, coexisting genres, and in differently paced flows" (xxii). Agosín continues: "[Alegría's] textual material is complex, multiple, overlapping, coexistence, juxtaposed—in a word, 'intertextual.' If we use a more agile category like discourse, indicating elements that cut across

²⁸ Despite the persistent patriarchy of FMLN, I call attention to Eugenia's high rank to underscore the arc of her political maturation. I occasionally consult the anthology *A Dream Compels Us* as a resource because it offers us another historic angle of Eugenia's story that builds upon Alegría's literary text.

²⁹ Though *They Won't Take Me Alive* is regrettably no longer in print, it has attracted a fair amount of critical attention.

different texts, we can say that all her works are also ‘interdiscursive’” (xxii). That Alegría adopts the roles of oral historian and compiler of collective *testimonio*—“together with the research undertaken by [Javier] and the testimonies of many of Eugenia’s comrades-in-arms” (32)—exemplifies Agosin’s notions of ‘intertextuality’ and ‘interdiscursivity.’ *They Won’t Take Me Alive* is a polyvocalic narrative that incorporates what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia” and resists codifications of genre normally allotted to the biographical literary mode by disrupting the linear storytelling model and pluralizing subjectivities.³⁰ These polyvocalic perspectives are filtered through manifold mediations such as Alegría’s authorial control, which shifts from omniscient third-person to first-person interlocutor.

As already noted, the first chapter opens with Eugenia’s tragic end. More to the point, Eugenia’s “account is composed and published posthumously, since she was killed in an ambush” (Crawford 30).³¹ As such, characters reflect on Eugenia’s life story postmortem; hence, we embark on a rearview reading to unfold this *guerrillera*’s secret life leading up to her death. After we sift through multiple mediations and foregrounding fragments—the translator Amanda Hopkinson’s “Historical Introduction,” “Preface,” and “Glossary”—and finally arrive at the

³⁰ As Bakhtin demonstrates in his key essay “Discourse in the Novel,” a salient feature of the novel is a coexistence of “social diversity of speech types” such as “[a]uthorial speech, the speeches of the narrators, inserted genres, the speech of the characters” that allow “links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)” (263). So too is such characteristic translatable to Alegría’s text.

³¹ During the surprise attack, Eugenia is imagined to have shouted the recurrent slogan of the text: “They won’t take us alive!” (“Que no nos agarren vivos”; 40; 17). The slight discursive switch from “me” to “us” signals a shift from the isolated to the social, echoing the point that this “story is not just Eugenia’s” (32). The text’s title “They Won’t Take Me Alive” conveys a few meanings. “They” clearly refers to the repressive state agents such as death squads; “take,” within the context of war, connotes violent encounters such as abduction, torture, or assassination. And, finally, “alive” evokes the dualisms of death and life, the material and the spiritual. As such, Eugenia articulates that in spite of any opposition, even embattling death, her spirit will triumph; this self-fulfilling prophecy proves true through others’ lasting memories of her. At the *testimonio*’s close, Eugenia’s husband Javier paraphrases her recurrent defiance to: “And they didn’t take her alive” (“Y no la agarraron viva”; 146; 145).

threshold of the literary narrative itself, we encounter yet another preliminary section titled “About This Book,” wherein Alegría takes liberties to explain the *testimonio*’s origins:

They Won’t Take Me Alive (No me agarran viva) was created to fulfill a promise to Javier, Eugenia’s husband, who wished he were a writer, in order to be able to tell Eugenia’s story. Claribel Alegría *is* a writer and, together with the research undertaken by her husband and the testimonies of many of Eugenia’s comrades-in-arms, has recounted the development of her political struggle. Not only was this a struggle undertaken against one of the bloodiest and most brutal military regimes within even the aggressively oppressive contexts of many Latin American countries, but it shows the personal struggle of a woman coming to terms with a series of ideological and political steps that lead her to lose her life in a violent confrontation.

But the story is not just Eugenia’s. It is that of her suffering and rebellious fellow-nationals, still engaged in waging the ‘popular war’, against a system that many of them describe here in cruel and personal detail, and for a system that some of them have begun to see realised in the zones liberated by the guerrilla armies of the FMLN. And it is a book dedicated to Salvadorean women engaged in political struggle, to Ana Patricia (Eugenia’s daughter), to the next generation and a new civilisation. (32)³²

Alegría’s text makes increasingly plain how this literary narrative is deeply dedicated to historiography and the preservation of memory. Indeed, the Spanish prologue, not included in the English version, echoes similar archival inclinations: “The list of notable Salvadoran revolutionary heroes and martyrs is too long reproduce here, but we would like to leave a record that this book is dedicated to their memory, and in equal measure, the thousands of Salvadoran girls, young women, and older ones who continue in the struggle without surrendering” (“La lista de las héroes y mártires reconocidas de la revolución salvadoreña es demasiado larga para reproducirla aquí, pero queremos dejar constancia de que este libro está dedicado a su memoria, y en igual medida a las miles de muchachas, mujeres y ancianas salvadoreñas que siguen de

³² The Spanish edition does not feature “About This Book.” Instead, it provides the following Prólogo (Prologue): “Eugenia, an exemplary model of abnegation, sacrifice, and revolutionary heroism, is a typical case rather than exceptional one of so many Salvadoran women who have dedicated their efforts, including their very lives, to their people’s struggle for liberation. . . .” (“Eugenia, modelo ejemplar de abnegación, sacrificio y heroísmo revolucionario, es un caso típico y no excepcional de tantas mujeres salvadoreñas que han dedicado sus esfuerzos, e incluso sus vidas, a la lucha por la liberación de su pueblo. . . .”; my translation; 7).

frente en la lucha, sin claudicar”; my translation; 9). Here, the social project involving “the politics of mourning” merges with literature to create an alternative archive. A written record ensures protection from historical erasure. In addition to eulogizing Eugenia, this *testimonio* gradually expands its dedication to the present women in struggle, “the next generation,” and the future global society at large. Javier’s request to memorialize his dearly deceased wife Eugenia is made “so that their daughter would remember her, and be aware of her contribution to history” (Crawford 30). Thus, the book’s formal dedication to Eugenia’s daughter, Ana Patricia, further reveals an investment in futurity. Ana Patricia represents a budding politicized protégé, one of the many imagined heirs of history.

Complicating matters of mediation within the text, British translator and editor Amanda Hopkinson provides the front matter and positions its political bent. “The Historical Introduction” interweaves *La Matanza*—a “date in the twentieth century [that] stands out as the culmination of El Salvador’s history, and the inauguration of a changed perspective” (Hopkinson 1)—into the broader trajectory of violence in El Salvador. In other words, it begins where *Ashes of Izalco* left off. Indeed, Hopkinson references Alegría’s former text “describ[ing] the uprising that occurred when she was a young child” (2). Alegría’s reinvented histories give us a psychological passport to the past. As Marjorie Agosín has put it, “Tracing the heights, depths, and contours of her memory, [Alegría] charts the most recondite and trauma-laden regions of her psyche” (xviii). Moreover, by commencing with the historical contextualization and alluding to the *Ashes of Izalco*, foregrounding repression and resistance, *They Won’t Take Me Alive* establishes itself as a sequel. Following this rhetorical move, Hopkinson retrogresses further to touch on the violent colonial past pertaining to Spanish conquest. To that end, Hopkinson asserts that: “Violence is endemic in El Salvador, as in so many colonised countries, and dates from the

imposition of Spanish rule upon the Pipil, Lenca, and Mayan-related tribes of Indians” (2). Hopkinson later returns to 1932’s *La Matanza* to highlight the continuity with the present condition. “The real horror,” Hopkinson argues, “is that the army still continues to behave much as it did in 1932, only equipped with all the sophisticated weaponry another half-century of United States’ technology (and money) can buy” (15).

The fact that Alegría’s text was originally published in 1983 with a slight update in 1987 for the English translation means that it presents an unfinished portrait of the Salvadoran civil war. While the war officially ended in 1992, its aftermath lingers, as many commentators have pointed out. Notwithstanding an incomplete picture of the war’s resolution, *They Won’t Take Me Alive* uncovers a hidden history through its “subversive storytell[ing]” (xviii). By 1983, a clear chronology of cruelty had already emerged consisting of Archbishop Romero’s assassination (1980), the rapes and murders of Jean Donovan and three other U.S. churchwomen (1980), the Massacre at the Sumpul River (1980), the Massacre at El Mozote (1981), among other atrocities. In total, more than an estimated 70,000 lost their lives during Salvadoran civil war (1979-1992). Journalist Juan González informs us that “Central America’s victims perished mostly at the hands of their own soldiers or from right-wing death squads, and invariably from weapons made in the U.S.A., since in each country our government provided massive military aid to the side doing most of the killing” (131). The U.S. sent \$6 billion to El Salvador for weapons and war assistance. Unsurprisingly, “[a]s the number of weapons in the country escalated, so did the numbers of Salvadorans fleeing the devastation those weapons caused” (González 135).

MAIDENFORM MADE IN EL SALVADOR

Since eight of the ten chapters of Alegría's *They Won't Take Me Alive* are devoted to spotlighting Eugenia, Marina González may easily lie in a blind spot. Even though Marina appears as a minor figure, however, she, in fact, interweaves two significant strands: the behind-the-scenes of the Salvadoran civil war and the "behind the seams" of Maidenform.³³ Alegría's text exposes us to the ongoing feminization of global factories and related dehumanizing conditions. This part of the chapter extends literary critic Michael Dowdy's dialogue on the interface between Latin American literary texts and neoliberalism by examining how Alegría's *They Won't Take Me Alive* "configure[s] and critique[s]" "globalizing processes" (8) through Marina González's personal experience of working in the garment industry. I suggest that Marina's *testimonio* plays a crucial role in helping us understand the intersecting grand narratives of war and free trade in the Americas.

Because the entire penultimate chapter is dedicated to Marina González, it reads much like a vignette. The chapter preceding Marina González's *testimonio* provides the biography of Mélida Ana Montes (*nom de guerre* Ana María) and touches on teachers' unionizing and revolutionary organizing. While that particular chapter claims to spotlight "Ana María," it ultimately focuses back on Eugenia with Javier's overlapping voice: thus, it continues a multivocalic current. Conversely, Marina's narrative remains centered on a singular subject. Moreover, Marina's anomalous narrative is presented in a dialogic format between Marina's autobiographic voice and alternating omniscient narrator and transparent interviewer. As such, Marina's life story could very well be presented as its own independent narrative, but juxtaposing Marina's profile with Eugenia and other women revolutionaries deepens the

³³ Here, I borrow the phrase from the report titled *Behind the Seams: Maquilas in Nicaragua* put forth by Witness to Peace.

dimensionality of the gendered power struggles within the joint revolutionary and labor movements.

As with Eugenia who is “a typical case rather than an exceptional one,” Marina is portrayed as an Everywoman. More to the point, the text depicts her as “a typical Salvadoran proletarian woman, a Mother Courage from Cuscatlán, whose biography is included here because it could very well be representative of thousands upon thousands of lives denied, lives at once anonymous and combative” (“una arquetípica mujer proletaria de El Salvador,” una cuzcatleca, cuya historia debemos incluir aquí porque bien podría ser el resumen de miles y miles de vidas abnegadas, anónimas y a la vez combativas” 117; 115). The translation of *historia*, interestingly, as simultaneously “history” and “story” in English, heightens the slippage between the two discursive disciplines, history and literature, as previously discussed. That Marina comes from humble origins contrasts with the bourgeois backgrounds of other *guerrilleras* such as Eugenia and Gioconda Belli (the subject of the next chapter). Transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty is right in warning us that a certain problematic arises when we use “women” as a “stable category of analysis” for “it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination” (*Feminism Without Borders* 31). Though Marina is said to represent the proletariat, it is important to still keep in mind how differences may arise involving other identity markers such as phenotype, age, (dis)abilities, and so forth, influencing otherwise seemingly undetectable social (dis)advantages.

Marina’s personal narrative resists what geographer and feminist critic Melissa W. Wright calls the “myth of the disposable third world woman” worker (2). This myth that Wright refers to entails a key protagonist, often a young woman from a developing country, who, over time, comes to embody “human waste,” “a living state of worthlessness” (2). A paradoxical

relationship emerges from the high quality product and the producer's degraded status. Moreover, with age, the producer's labor capital is perceived to diminish: the decreasing value of the female laborer has serious implications for regarding the intrinsic value of personhood. Dispelling this myth often used to justify the abuse of women—the unfair exploitation and dehumanization—is at the crux of Alegría's *They Won't Take Me Alive*. As such, Marina's resistance narrative is a precursor text to others dealing with similar subject matter such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba's novel *Desert Blood* (2005) and protest poetry like Marjorie Agosín's *Secrets in the Sand: the Young Women of Juárez* (2006). Alegría demonstrates how women engaged in forms of national liberation struggles as actors in a global economy. Marina's biography reveals the rise of globalized capital through the establishment of *fábricas* (assembly factories) such as Maidenform.

Though globalization and neoliberalism may seem interchangeable, it is worth differentiating these hotly contested terms. In his 2013 book *Broken Souths: Latina/o Poetic Responses to Neoliberalism and Globalization*, Michael Dowdy traces some of the uses of globalization and observes how Tim Libretti interprets it as a euphemism for “economic imperialism” (8). Citing Duménil and Lévy, Dowdy explains that their conceptualization involves the “internationalization of the world economy” (8; quoted in *Broken Souths* 10). On neoliberalism, Dowdy succinctly describes it as:

a theory of political economy emphasizing the free market as the best way to organize social and economic life. Whereas the theory rejects nearly all state interventions in the economy and promotes privatization, deregulation, free trade, and other similar arrangements, in practice neoliberalism has often eschewed principle for plunder, abject violence, and corporate welfare. In short, profit has trumped ideals and plunder has been exposed as the ideal. (viii-xi)

Alegría's testimonial narrative thematizes U.S. neoliberal practices and elaborately shows the ways in which globalization and gender intertwine. As such, it historically contextualizes free

trade by dramatizing how multinational corporations, like Maidenform, began setting up shop in El Salvador as early as the 1960s but more prominently so during the 1970s; and, more significantly, it not only reveals how “the body bears the brunt of neoliberal practice” (Castronovo and Gillman 6), but also its particular impact on gendered bodies. Before proceeding to analyzing the knitty gritty details of Marina González’s *testimonio* to truly understand the sort of intervention Alegria is making, a brief background of Maidenform and a sense of the critical conversations around it are in order.

THE BRA-MAKING BUSINESS

Today Maidenform is a widely recognized brand in women’s undergarments, albeit eclipsed by the popularity of specialty retailer Victoria’s Secret. Maidenform merchandise is readily available from retail outlets, to department stores such as Macy’s and J.C. Penney’s, over the company website and, of course, Amazon. Since it was patented in 1922, Maidenform has had an unusual business history interlinked with race, gender, class, and geopolitics. These facets of social location on an international scale are especially relevant since “[t]he apparel industry is one of the most globalized industries in existence,” (124) according to sociologist Jennifer Bickham Mendez. Maidenform started up as a collaborative effort among first-generation Russian immigrants Ida Rosenthal, her husband William Rosenthal, and their friend Enid Bissett. The bra didn’t become popularized and standardized until Maidenform came along. Bras have long been associated with feminist iconography yet not much thought has gone into considering the women who actually make them. By the way, the “burning bras” of first-wave feminists, misleadingly describe women who protested at a 1968 Miss American Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey: rather than inflame their bras, many women opted to wear no bra at all or discarded

them in “freedom trashcans.” Such sartorial rebellion makes plain the rejection of sexist ideology that treats women as commodities of beauty. Sorely missing from this kind of feminist analysis, however, are considerations of class and geopolitical location of other women also implicated with bras: international employees of the garment industry.

Before the apparel industry went global, historian Vicki Howard, in her essay “At the Curve Exchange”: Postwar Beauty Culture and Working Women at Maidenform,” offers us a contrapuntal view of U.S. women working for Maidenform during the 1940s-1960s. Drawing on multiple mediums of vintage artifacts including the employee magazine *Maiden Forum* featuring monthly Pin-Up profiles, the “I Dream” advertising campaign, beauty pageant ephemera, and staff correspondence, Howard’s essay traces how “beauty culture was work culture” (196). Howard portrays a jovial work environment for mostly middle-class married white women, one that attributes glamor yet at the same time empowerment through successful strikes. Howard indicates how “[t]he ‘model’ Maidenform woman was white and middle class, without visible ethnic identification. Ethnicity was marked only if it appealed to the notion of the exotic Other” (201). What problems I find with Howard’s depiction of Maidenform’s working conditions lie in a few glaring omissions. First, while Howard acknowledges that Puerto Rico was one of the Northeastern locations for the assembly plants, and even mentions the Spanish print materials in the Maidenform archival collection, she fails to address the ambiguous colonial status and translocality of this particular Latin Caribbean geopolitical site.³⁴ What is more, the Maidenform archival collection’s “Historical Note” confirms that, in addition to its first Bayonne-based plant in New Jersey, Maidenform “[eventually] operated plants in West Virginia, Florida, Puerto Rico

³⁴ See Dowdy for an excellent extended analysis of Nuyorican/Puerto-Rican poetics and the restructuring of neoliberalism (155-187).

and the Dominican Republic.”³⁵ Needless to say, both Florida and the Dominican Republic are excluded locales from Howard’s postwar analysis. Further, distinguishing domestic from offshore sourcing, or what “U.S. corporations call their international production facilities” (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 6), is significant. My point of bringing up the marginal treatment of the Latin Caribbean offshore sites—Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic in particular—is that Howard may have found alternative results of women’s working conditions in Maidenform assembly plants there. Ultimately, Howard elides the emergence and eventual expansion of Maidenform’s offshore production and how such multinational corporations shape the lives of women workers.

Echoing the illusion of glamour behind the Maidenform company, Media and Cinema Studies scholar Lilya Kaganovksy, in her recent essay “Maidenform: Masculinity as Masquerade,” studies a recent pop culture reference to Maidenform in the acclaimed television series *Mad Men*. Kaganovsky draws our attention to the psychology behind advertising rivalry by explaining that “[in] contrast to Maidenform’s ‘dreams,’ ‘fantasies,’ and ‘reveries,’ Playtex advertise[d] itself as a ‘living bra’” (242). In other words, Maidenform, during the 1960s, projected a fanciful image while its competitor adopted a more functional appeal. Kaganovsky reminds us that even the handsome principal protagonist Don Draper is clearly aware that ‘Maidenform is a dream,’ whereas ‘Playtex is a bra’” (243). Since Kaganovsky’s essay is limited, though insightful, to a superficial view of the 1960’s advertized Maidenform’s brand, much like Howard’s pre-1960s ‘beauty culture’ analysis, we don’t fully unravel the inner linings of the garment industry, specifically Maidenform’s subsequent labor practices overseas.

³⁵ See <http://amhistory.si.edu/archives/d7585.htm>.

Sociologist Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval's study *Globalization and Cross-Border Labor Solidarity in the Americas* (2005) has shown that prior to the 1970s most garments were produced in the U.S. Nowadays, however, "[a]lmost every single label—Nike, Reebok, Liz Claiborne, Levi's, Bugle Boy, Tommy Hilfiger, Guess, Phillips Van-Heusen, Fruit of the Loom, Maidenform—is produced off-shore" (3). "Off-shore" sites include beyond the factory frontiers of the Mexican/U.S. border and can relate to other parts of world, especially Asia, the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean Basin, Central America, and South America.

Drawing on such global economic parallels, the British editor of Alegria's *They Won't Take Me Alive*, Amanda Hopkinson claims that Salvadoran labor relations bear a striking similarity to "the long hours and low wages in Hong Kong or Taiwan" (25). Within the text itself, Marina González refers to the garment factory as "fábrica" (116) instead of the term *máquila* (often used to denote cross-border assembly plants in the Mexico/U.S. borderlands) yet echoes similar patterns of lax regulations under free trade zones. For instance, the manufacturing processes in El Salvador entail U.S. companies such as Maidenform importing material from the U.S., managing human (usually women's) labor, and then exporting finished products. After learning how to sew the bra labeled 'She,' Marina describes, "They brought the fabric and everything in from the United States. They re-exported the finished products, had them packaged, then they came back into El Salvador again to be sold" ("Traían la tela y todo de Estados Unidos. Levaban los brassieres de regreso, los empaquetaban y después entraban a El Salvador otra vez de venta"; 118; 116). Marina revises the transnational loop of labor by adding the indignity of finished products returning to the very nation it has just exploited. According to Michael Dowdy, "the *máquila* symbolizes the feminization of the global workforce" (219). Marina González's life story, then, shows us a glimpse of the transitional economic globalization

involving U.S.-based corporations moving production overseas during the late 1970s. Off-shore working conditions usually involved impoverishment, malnourishment, and disenfranchisement.

Chicana academic, author, and activist Alicia Gaspar de Alba observes multiple forms of economic abuse rampant in the “sweatshop” industry that include but are not limited to the following:

slave wages; ten-to-twelve-hour shift on their feet; working conditions that include dangerous levels of noise pollution, toxic fumes, and sexual harassment by management; manic production schedules and the constant threat of dismissal for not meeting quotas, for being late, for getting pregnant; demeaning beauty pageants disguised as work incentives and morale boosters; pregnancy testing at the time of hiring; enforced birth control through pill or injection or Norplant implants; and the strict monitoring of their reproductive cycles through monthly menstrual checks. (“Poor Brown Female” 64)

Such policing, disciplining, and punishment of women’s laboring, sexual, and reproductive brown bodies indicate an invisible form of Foucauldian “biopolitics” at play within free trade agreements. Indeed, the modern garment factory can be viewed as a panopticon complete with gun-toting guards behind barbed-wire fences. These dimensions of exploitation have the effect of devaluing and destroying women through perpetual psychic and physical abuse. The title of Gaspar de Alba’s essay “Poor Brown Female” stands in stark contrast to the “beauty pageants disguised as work incentives and morale boosters” in Vikki Howard’s discussion of the garment industry.

“BEHIND THE SEAMS” OVERSEAS

Marina González, in Alegría’s text, exemplifies a *guerrillera* involved in another type of battlefield: the sweatshop. Marina’s employment history spans job titles from candy maker, to cleaner, to seamstress, and finally to food vendor. From the outset, she portrays the harshness of child labor: at age thirteen, Marina used to wrap caramelos at a candy factory. When Marina’s

boss caught her eating potato chips, which were also produced there, he spat venomous verbal abuse. This micro-aggressive moment illustrates Marina's malnourished body and mistreatment even as an adolescent. When Marina later works at Maidenform, she clearly discerns the merging of intimate apparel production and supporting war efforts:

They were even making soldiers' kits to be sent out to Vietnam. These were large, olive-green knapsacks. They sent some special machines over for this and needed to take on extra staff. Those who'd learned most about making bras were transferred to the soldiers' kits. I was assigned to putting the clips on to the elastic. They sent over everything we needed. At first they paid me two and a half pesos a day, and later on three pesos and 20 cents. This was the highest rate I received. Once the war in Vietnam was over, no more knapsacks were produced. Then, to maintain their level of exploitation, they put us on to making girdles. Eventually we were making roll-ons and the whole Maidenform range of goods. (119)

Se estaban haciendo incluso hasta unas mochilas que mandaban al Vietnam – continúa Marina – . Eran unas mochilonas grandes, verde olivo. Habían mandado unas máquinas especiales para hacer eso y necesitaban otro personal. A las que habían aprendido más del brasier las pasan a las mochilas. A mí me tocaba poner los broches en el elástico. Ellos mandaban toditito de allá. Primero me pagaban dos cincuenta al día y después tres veinte. Es el sueldo más grande que recibí. Después termina la Guerra del Vietnam y ya no se producían mochilas. Entonces para seguir explotándonos mandan a hacer fajas. Ya últimamente estaban haciendo blúmeres y todo eso de la línea Maidenform. (117)

This shift in Marina's labor capacity from "skilled seamstress to heavy sewing-machinist manufacturing for the Vietnam war, chillingly point[s] at the overlap between US investment and military policies throughout the world" (Hopkinson 25). In other words, Marina's employment in El Salvador, itself a product of U.S. economic intervention, indirectly impacted militarized imperialism in Vietnam. Maidenform's combination of business and militarism—manufacturing materials for war efforts—however, was not unprecedented. In fact, The Maidenform Collection (1922-1997), housed at the National Museum of American History's Archive Center, has preserved the assemblage of a "pigeon vest." Evidently, "The pigeon vest allowed troopers to carry homing pigeons with them as they parachuted behind enemy lines. During World War II,

Maidenform manufactured these pigeon vests and silk parachutes for the war effort” (“Maidenform Collection”). Just as Alegría’s text interweaves the War in El Salvador with the War in Viet Nam, so too does it demonstrate subsequent colonial affinities between off-shore production in Central America and Asia.

Following this developing account of Marina’s work experience with Maidenform, the text shifts into third person narration to elaborate on her points, filling in factual gaps. For instance, the narrator concretizes the abstract concept of “starvation wages” Marina and her other fellow co-workers earned by informing us that in contrast to a U.S. employee who would have earned \$35 daily, Marina earned \$1 per day (118-119). We are then alerted of how Maidenform’s offshore exploitation of cheap labor source, specifically Marina and her twenty-nine other Salvadoran co-workers, allowed Maidenform to save an estimated \$320,000 per year. Unsurprisingly, the “factory expanded,” and relocated to Boulevard del Ejército, an urban space—a “production corridor”—that would come to be known for its congregation of *fábricas* and related pollutants (119).

Marina’s living conditions demonstrate another facet of neoliberalism’s reality: deplorable living conditions. Even though Marina and her husband bring in a dual income as workers in the garment industry and aluminum factory respectively, they can only find affordable housing for a small hovel, a tiny plot of land in the outskirts of Soyapango, in the Plan del Pino. Describing her impermanent housing, Marina states:

We had to fall back on the idea of a smallholding and start building a shack, a sort of barn made only of mud and corrugated iron, coated inside with cardboard and dried shrubbery. That’s how we started, and we continued adding the bits of brushwood, lashed with rope. My husband would have to go out at four in the afternoon to make the mud-daub out of earth and water and use it for plastering the walls. So we arrived at making our little house; it’s anyone’s guess if it’s still there. (121)

Nos tocó todavía ir a residir en un cantón. No alcanzábamos a pagar eso, entonces agarramos un lotecito afuera, en el Plan del Pino. Retrocedimos, nos fuimos a fundir al campo. Fuimos hacienda una casita, que es un rancho sólo de lodo y lamina, pero antes de eso nosotros lo habíamos tapados con cartón y con matas de huerta seca. Así empezamos. Las matitas de huerta las íbamos metiendo y las amarrábamos con unos lazos. Él salía a las cuatro de la tarde y decía a hacer lodo y a pegar para hacer la pared. Llegamos a hacer la casita, a saber si estará todovía. (119)

Marina's unlivable living conditions, which do not include electricity or running water, reveal to us the consequences of global capitalism – the dire poverty behind the making of commodities most of us casually consume. Marina demonstrates how, with or without the war, it is a daily crisis to survive. In so doing, Marina's *testimonio* illuminates the stark contrast of the economic inequalities between the global North and South, the shadowy truths of free trade in the Americas. In *Neoliberalism at Its Limits* (2009), Ileana Rodríguez explains that garment factories “produce migrations, demographic saturation, urban restructuring, reordering of gender relations, sociocultural segregations and overall disorder” (167). The war, of course, compounded “the overall disorder” of the garment factories. Alegría's depiction of depilated dwellings resembles present-day labor camps.

Even transportation intensifies the daily struggle of economic survival. Like other protocol arrangements, Marina relates relying on a bus to take her work in the factory: “From this little hovel we had to go on foot over some fields and along some paths to Soyapango to catch the bus, the number 13 to the factory. This meant we had to leave home at six a.m. to be at work by eight o'clock” (“de nuestra casita nos toca venimos a pie por unos canals y veredas para Soyapango y tomar el bus, la ruta 13 para la fábrica. O sea que nos otros salíamos a las seis de la mañana para llegar al trabajo a las ocho”; 121; 119). By showing readers these points of quotidian cruelty, *They Won't Take Me Alive* teaches us the extent to which the garment industry controls the body beyond the walls of work.

Once Marina gains a working-class consciousness, however, she begins to challenge the dehumanizing practices of the global assembly line. After working for five years at Maidenform, without the luxury of joining the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ironically a privilege exclusively available to U.S. Maidenform employees), Marina requests a raise explaining that as a mother of three she does not have the basic means to support her family. At first, the management beats around the bush but then requests that she increase her output—the quota standard—to eight or nine garments per day. Marina complies without compensation. When management increases the expected production to ten, Marina states, “That’s also when I learned how they’d be getting me to turn out twenty and again I’d get the same weekly wage. That’s when I became annoyed” (“Entonces yo todavía como sabía que me hacía veinte, le sacó diez paquetes y vuelvo a recibir otra vez el mismo sueldo. Entonces ya me enoje”; 119; 118). Marina’s frustration at work prompts her to consider unionizing to demand better pay and work conditions. From that confrontation on, the authorial voice in the text tells us: “The management viewed Marina as a ‘subversive’ for not being satisfied with her wages. They threatened to suspend any employee found talking with her. There were other threats doled out by the management” (“La gerencia consideraba a Marina como ‘subversiva’ por no estar satisfecha con su sueldo. Amenazaban con suspender a cualquier empleada que conversara con ella”; 119; 118). Merely questioning unfair low wages was perceived as a menace. The prohibiting of the right to assemble and organize was meant to prevent the spread of awareness and advocacy. Initial signs of unionizing were immediately blocked, especially with the extreme punitive form: dismissal. With a fourth child on the way, no additional compensation, and ostracism, Marina finally quits Maidenform after wasting seven years. Although one may read Marina’s departure

from Maidenform as a forfeiting finality, the fact that she chose to terminate her employment and share her *testimonio* demonstrates agency.

Marina González's story, further, reflects realistic "double shifts" many women had and continue to have on the assembly line and at home, yet, unlike the many single working mothers, González does share some responsibilities, albeit limitedly, with her husband. While her husband goes on strike, at one point in the text, the financial responsibility falls entirely on Marina to provide for her family of six. Marina's husband eventually becomes a labor activist joining the United Confederation of Salvadoran Trade Unionists (CUSS) while working at the Alcoa aluminum factory. Even so, he too faces the ultimate weaponry: unemployment. Once Marina's husband finds out he has been blacklisted as a unionist and is thereby financially obstructed, he migrates to Canada. Thus, whether Marina's husband is economically indisposed on strike or abroad, Marina is still in charge of providing for her family and responsible for childcare. Marina much later explains that such financial desperation led her to join the guerrilla movement. "I'm in the struggle," Marina concludes, "so that my children won't have to be, or if they do it'll be in defense of what we've handed on to them" ("Yo lucho," concluye Marina, "para que mis hijos no tengan que hacerlo, o que si luchan que sea para defender lo que nosotros les vamos a heredar"; 127; 126). After a phase of joining armed resistance out of financial necessity, Marina eventually establishes economic stability elsewhere in Nicaragua.

Marina Gonzalez's *testimonio* resonates with what Argentine sociologist Barbara Sutton refers to as "bodily scars of neoliberal globalization" in her book *Bodies in Crisis* (2010). Alegría's testimonial text reflects "women [who] confront the oppressive features of the global expansion of capitalism and the neoliberal policies that support it" (Naples and Desai vii). Testimonial narratives of this kind have been and continue to be instrumental to raising

consciousness about the “out of sight, out of mind” free trade zones—“production corridors”—in which women from the global South engage in labor struggles and resistance. Such narratives bring to light the economic abuse and ideological underpinnings behind global and gender inequalities.

In sum, then, Marina’s life narrative details the back stories of “the human cost of our purchases” (Witness for Peace 4) and war but also gives us a glimpse of resistance strategies through union organizing, terminating employment, relocation, and storytelling. Equally important, is the reframing of economic hardship as a mixed blessing, discovering “in crisis opportunities for personal and social change” (Sutton 63). What is at stake here is acknowledging the material consequences of free trade found in transhemispheric historic patterns between the U.S. and El Salvador from the 1930s coffee industry to the manufacturing of “sweaty” lingerie in the late 1970s. Just as the text traces the strands of economic imperialism, so too does it elucidate the rationales behind repression and revolution.

Taken together, *Ashes of Izalco* and *They Won’t Take Me Alive* grapple with the implications of women reexamining violent histories, records of the past that have often marginalized or excluded them. A key question that arises, then, is: Why look back? Joan Didion speculates why some people of Salvadoran descent would rather not: “One reason no one looks back is that the view could only dispirit: this is a national history peculiarly resistant to heroic interpretation. There is no *liberator* to particularly remember” (72). It goes without saying, however, that not having “liberator” may actually be a good thing: that means there isn’t a dependence on secular saviors, like Anglo-American characters Virgil or Frank Wolff. This absence paves the way for self-determination and leaves room for sovereignty. That said, *Ashes* is a complicated text, because it does not simply malign the U.S., but rather shows possible

romantic partnerships between Frank and Isabel and Paul and Carmen. Echoing similar sentiments to Didion, Thomas Anderson writes: “It has been that happy countries have no history. It is equally true that chronically unhappy countries have a monotonous history of strife and turmoil, and El Salvador is a chronically unhappy land” (2). While it may be true that Salvadoran history is entrenched in histories of suffering, disregarding it would only perpetuate pain and give way to cultural imperialism. Moreover, realities don’t have to fit into facile binaries of happy/unhappy, ahistorical/historical, and so forth. The “chronic unhappiness” that Anderson speaks of is deeply connected to social injustice and human rights violations. Remembering the past teaches us how to prevent such miseries from reoccurring and lessens future sufferings. Remembering the past, further, forms an heirloom.

Alegría’s nonlinear storytelling, in which “memory is active and it is situated in the present” (Bal viii), speaks to the oscillation between forgetting and remembering. Yet, in so doing, Alegría’s testimonial narratives demonstrate that recording instead of ignoring historic atrocities is linked to restoring cultural memory, ethnic identity, and gender equity. As Agosín puts it: “To rethink memory is then to remake history” (*Inhabiting Memory* xvi).

Alegría’s testimonial texts, *Ashes of Izalco* and *They Won’t Take Me Alive*, reimagine repositories of the past. Nevertheless, Alegría’s experimentations with reconstructing the past are linked to an optimistic future. Accordingly, they each “analyz[e] the past, including the symbolic heritage, in order to open up the possibilities of the future” (Harlow 82). As a testimonial novel, *Ashes* fictionalizes the romance between Salvadoran Isabel Rojas and ‘American’ Frank Wolff against the backdrop of the harrowing historical moment, *La Matanza*. Similarly, *They Won’t Take Me Alive* situates itself in the early stage of the U.S.-sponsored Salvadoran civil war while reinventing Eugenia’s final moments as a FMLN guerrillera. Yet, as we have seen, Alegría’s

testimonio historicizes more than just one “ordinary” heroine. It interweaves other revolutionary women such as Marina González in a collective tapestry, illustrating the inner workings of and resistance to intersecting U.S. economic and military interventions. Alegría’s testimonial texts draw critical attention to how History is a discursive repository of privileged memories. Literature, conversely, is an alternative archive that allows for the preservation of recollections that have been hitherto denied.

One can approach Alegría’s testimonial narratives as modes of fleshing the word (Agosín xvii) or what Bakhtin might refer to as fleshing history. In Bakhtin words: “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (84). For Alegría, embodied time encompasses a rewriting of history, embedded in literature, which not only implicates El Salvador, but also the U.S. Keeping in mind the significance of women crafting cultural and creative memories within a Salvadoran setting explored in this chapter, the next chapter turns to an individual woman’s actual and artistic account of serving as a Sandinista within a Nicaraguan context.

LA GIOCONDA'S SMILE: EROTOHISTORIOGRAPHY
IN BELLI'S OPAQUE AND TRANSPARENT *TESTIMONIOS*

*Rivers run through me
Mountains bore into my body
And the geography of this country
Begins forming in me
Turning me into lakes, chasms, ravines,
earth for sowing love
opening like a furrow
filling me with a longing to live
to see it free, beautiful,
full of smiles.*

I want to explode with love . . .

—GIOCONDA BELLI, “THE PASSION OF NICARAGUA ”

When award-winning British Indian writer Salman Rushdie heard “the unfairly beautiful” Gioconda Belli recite the above poem in Managua, Nicaragua, in the ruins of the Grand Hotel, he remarked in his 1987 travelogue *The Jaguar’s Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* that “Her poetry was at once extremely sensual and politically direct” (27). Rushdie’s apt description of Belli’s art is not only fitting of her poetry but also her prose. Referring to an interview Belli had with Margaret Randall after the reading, Rushdie observed her proclaim “to make her work (for the revolution) ‘the best poem I can write’” (28). Thus, Belli’s expressed declaration of intertwining politics and poetics—passion and pleasure, epitomized by the smile—deeply informs all of her work.

Born in Nicaragua's capital in 1948, author and activist Gioconda Belli is regarded as one of the most celebrated Central American writers. Her affluent background afforded her an elite education in her homeland, Spain, and the U.S. At twenty-two, Belli joined the FSLN (the Sandinista National Liberation Front), but, after five years, she was forced to flee the Somoza dictatorship; consequently, she went into exile in neighboring countries México and Costa Rica. In *Harvest of Empire*, Puerto Rican journalist Juan González explains that, "The Somozas' reign, like Trujillo's [in the Dominican Republic] and Batista's [in Cuba], had its origins in an American occupation" (73). For a little over four decades (1936-1979), Anastasio Somoza García and his two sons (Luis Somoza and Anastasio García Debayle) ruled over Nicaragua. 1979 saw the overthrow of their dynasty with the Sandinista victory, a pivotal triumph that Belli writes about extensively. Over her lifetime, Belli has penned a total of six poetry collections, six novels, two children's books, and a memoir. Since 1992, she has lived between Managua, Nicaragua and Santa Monica, California.

As indicated in the opening epigraph, central to Gioconda Belli's writings is the body. Notions of the body appear from the very titles *The Inhabited Woman* and *The Country under My Skin*. This chapter traces how Belli's development of corporeal feminisms relates to nonlinear temporalities. The first half analyzes Belli's opaque pseudo-testimonio *The Inhabited Woman* by attending to its temporal oscillations between two women warriors: the indigenous figure Itzá and the Faguan *guerrillera* Lavinia.³⁶ What interests me most is how issues of time, embodiment

³⁶ Notable archetypes of *guerrilleras* abound and vary across the Américas from las Adelitas of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) to "Ché's" *compañera* Tamara Bunke—the iconic German-Argentine "Tania"—to the Adelitas of Aztlán, a Chicana feminist group spearheaded by ex-member of the Brown Berets Gloria Arellanes, among others. While narratives, including folk songs like Uruguayan Daniel Viglietti's "La Muchacha" or *corridos* (Mexican folk ballads) such as "La Adelita," have certainly shaped our views of women's roles in antiwar movements, many of these previous portrayals have been limited to men's perspectives of women's revolutionary subjectivities. Such limited representations or omissions of female combatants uphold narrow perceptions of women and perpetuate stereotypes such as the fetishized lover-comrade that undergird the subjugation of women.

and queerness converge; to that end, I read Belli's text in light of what Elizabeth Freeman calls "erotohistoriography." During the second half of this chapter, I consider Belli's more overt self-representation in her transparent *testimonio* *The County under My Skin*. There, I am interested in how serpentine time shapes her introspection and how her struggles for self-sovereignty go beyond the body to the authorial arena.

Both revolutionary narratives *The Inhabited Woman* and *The County under My Skin* decenter traditional national narratives by narrating "women-centered liberation narrative[s]" as Ana Patricia Rodríguez puts it. Belli's testimonial narratives bring to focus the individual woman's search for meaning and dignity in all relationships, especially the amorous. Through praise songs for the body and sensory recollections, Belli illuminates how self-ownership of the body is linked to combating what María Lugones refers to as "the coloniality of gender." The opaque and transparent testimonial narratives I survey in this chapter, taken side by side, tell the story of Belli's first-person revolutionary experience through the rethinking of and linkage between somatized histories and experimental asynchronies.

TELLING IT SLANT

This section's subtitle takes its lead from nineteenth-century New England poet Emily Dickinson.

On the politics of truth-telling, Dickinson advises:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind

Yet, feminist activists and authors, including some of those listed above, have made other historic reinterpretations possible.

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind —

Dickinson, here, arguably invites us to play with the shape (“slant,” “circuit,” and so on) of truth, but paradoxically preserve its essence. The fullness of truth connotes a “blind[ing]” force. As such, it is perhaps wise at times to measure truth and disperse it incrementally. Belli’s *The Inhabited Woman* reflects a similar ethos.

When *The Inhabited Woman* first appeared in Spanish in 1988, it “represented a turning point in the affirmation of feminist literature in the region,” according to Arturo Arias (*Taking Their Word* 17). Six years later, it was translated into English by Kathleen March through Curbstone Press, a non-profit publishing house committed to matters of social justice within contemporary U.S. Latina/o and Latin American literature. In brief, the novel hinges on Lavinia’s “coming of age(ncy),” to use Ana Patricia Rodríguez’s turn of phrase, much like the decolonial feminist awakenings we saw in Claribel Alegría’s characters Carmen (in *Ashes of Izalco*) and Eugenia and Marina (in *They Won’t Take Me Alive*). Lavinia is a young attractive well-to-do architect who contends with the pervasive machismo within the armed struggle that she eventually secretly joins in Faguas (a fictional setting, denoting “Fuego y Aguas” [“Fire and Waters”]), which also alludes to Nicaragua’s landscape of volcanoes and lakes). Her romantic relationship with Felipe, in particular, brings issues of women’s liberation to the fore. Lavinia’s emergent feminist subjectivity runs parallel to the past narrative of the indigenous figure, Itzá, whom we are told means “dewdrop.”³⁷ While the succession of events orbits around two *guerrilleras* of past and present, Itzá and Lavinia respectively, the text is focalized through Itzá.

³⁷ Itzá is also thought to originate from the Mayan word meaning “enchanted waters,” which coincides with magical realism, the blending of the marvelous and mundane. In addition, Itzá refers to people of Guatemalan descent which further lends itself to a transisthmian reading.

Her mystical omniscience skews temporality as indigenous struggles against the Spanish conquest unfold and a love story with the chief of Boacs and Caribs, Yarince, unravels. Itzá's first-person perspective, representing the past, alternates with Lavinia's third-person view, representing the present. At the novel's close, both Felipe and Lavinia heroically die separately in battle leaving Itzá alone to articulate poetic meditations on love, revolution, and immortality.

As Linda Craft has succinctly pointed out, “[Lavinia] is not an Everywoman” (163). Likewise, Diana Lucía Ochoa López, in her essay “The Construction of the Feminine Identity in Gioconda Belli's Narrative: *The Inhabited Woman* (1988) and *Sofía de los presagios* (1990),”³⁸ comments that Lavinia's financial independence, sustained class privilege, allows her to live out a glamorous life, relishing luxuries such as owning a room of her own (à la Virginia Woolf). Even so, Lavinia portrays a gendered power struggle that is perhaps more pronounced and rampant in Latin America than in the U.S. On situating the personal and the political elements within Belli's text, López writes,

Her novels are written in a realist style and approach testimonial literature [...] which is to say, narratives that emerge from direct experience. This particular work records historical events that occurred in Nicaragua during the era of Somoza's dictatorship. The narrative presents magical and real elements, which together expose the prevailing realities in Latin American countries: the indigenous past evoked in the resistance against the Spanish in the colonial struggles and the popular rebellions of the 1970s and 1980s against the military dictatorships, the social injustices and the recuperation of women's identity based on feminist liberation theories. (My translation)

Sus novelas están escritas en un estilo realista y se acercan a la literatura testimonial [...] o sea, narraciones que surgen de una experiencia directa. En esta obra se relatan sucesos históricos transcurridos en Nicaragua durante la época del dictador Somoza. La narración presenta elementos mágicos y verídicos, que unidos exponen las realidades vigentes en los países latinoamericanos: el pasado indígena evocado en la resistencia al español en las luchas coloniales, las rebeliones populares en los 70 y 80 contra las dictaduras militares, la injusticias

³⁸ The original Spanish title of this essay reads: “La construcción de la identidad femenina en la narrativa de Gioconda Belli: *La Mujer habitada* (1988) y *Sofía de los presagios* (1990).”

sociales y la recuperación de la identidad de la mujer basada en las teorías de la liberación femenina. (420)

For López, what is particularly valuable about Belli's work is how it functions as "direct experience" which simultaneously "records historical events." Thus, Belli constructs a kind of historical fiction that documents gendered and colonial struggles as a pan-Latin American phenomenon of U.S.-backed military repression and resistance.

The Inhabited Woman uncovers an unusual historical dimension of gendered colonial struggles: the battle over indigenous women's reproductive bodies. While reminiscing on her youth, Itzá describes: "One day I received news from the women of Taguzgalpa. They had decided not to sleep with their men any more. They did not want to give birth to slaves for the Spaniards" ("Yo recibí noticias de las mujeres de Taguzgalpa. Habían decidido no acostarse más con sus hombres. No querían parirle esclavos a los españoles"; 142; 116). Here, Itzá recounts the women of Taguzgalpa's collective action of controlling their fertility, an act of resistance she herself will later emulate.³⁹ The Taguzgalpa women chose to reclaim their bodies through negating possible pregnancies. In doing so, they subverted the locus of social scripts: the valorization of women's bodies based on the biological clock. Their abstinence signifies still more: protest against sexual exploitation and birthing future heirs of slavery. More specifically, these women "did not want to bear children for the encomiendas, children for the constructions, for their ships; children to be torn to pieces by the dogs if they were brave warriors" ("no queríamos hijos para las encomiendas, hijos para las construcciones, para los barcos; hijos para morir despedazados por los perros si eran valientes y guerreros"; 143; 117).

³⁹ Despite the novel's imaginary location of Faguas, like Gabriel García Márquez's Macondo, Taguzgalpa is a real location in Northeastern Honduras; thus, the text deepens its transisthmian motif.

The encomienda, while not officially called slavery, was a legal system that the Spanish Crown institutionalized in the Americas during the 1500s to control native labor. As such, the encomienda engendered a space where Spanish imperialism became what Foucault calls “biopolitics” or, “the management of populations and the control of their bodies through the diffuse micromanagement or governability” (Franco 4). Spanish colonists, additionally, could extract tribute from the native population in the form of gold, precious metals, etc. In return, the indigenous were to receive religious teachings and protection. Unsure of the encomienda’s aftermath, Itzá, earlier on in the novel, had wondered if Lavinia and Felipe were “children of the women in our tribes, dragged into promiscuity and slavery” (“hijos de las mujeres de nuestras tribus arrastradas a la promiscuidad y la servidumbre”) or “children of the terror caused by rape, the insatiable lust of the conquistadors” (“hijos del terror de las violaciones, de la lujuria inagotable de los conquistadores”). Itzá ultimately questions: “[T]o whom does the breath in their bodies belong?” (“¿A quién pertenecerán...el aliento de sus pechos?”; 41; 33) suggesting the prevalence of dispossessed bodies during colonial contact.

Artist-activist Margaret Randall, in *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* (1994), tells us that native Nicaraguan women did in fact participate in a sex strike. Randall states: “At one point in the terrible history of conquest, as in the story of Lysistrata, Nicaraguan women refused to have sex with their husbands” (9). Randall’s invocation of Athenian Aristophanes’ Lysistrata makes evident an atypical strand of women’s antiwar activism. Reverberating Belli’s reinvented past, Randall further writes that “[Women] did not want to continue giving birth to children they knew would be enslaved” (9). Unlike the Lysistrata story, however, the indigenous women of Nicaragua did not abjure sexual privileges for pacifist ends, that is, harmony with their enemies. Instead, they desired a separatist kind of peace. Implicit in the withholding of sexual pleasures is

a denunciation of the historic racialized subjugation of women through sexual transgressions. Feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz has observed that the body is “commonly considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private” (9). For Belli, then, women’s bodies register two interrelated injustices: sexual exploitation and gender violence. During colonial contact, many sexual assaults resulted in what has been referred to as *mestizaje*, racial mixing. Adding to women’s plight, children born from rape were subject to increasing the colonial labor supply. Thus, Belli excavates hidden history and radically alters our understanding of it by illustrating an empowering moment in which “Indigenous women in Nicaragua resisted with tenacity and creativity the Spanish invasion of their lands, their bodies, and their minds” (Randall 9).

QUEER TIMES

The Inhabited Woman explores the interface of corporeality and temporality; the text makes explicit a linkage between temporal dissonance and queer sexual dissidence. From the outset, we readily recognize that time is out of joint. The testimonial novel introduces us to elements of magical realism as it opens:⁴⁰

I emerged at dawn. What has happened since that day in the water when I last saw Yarince is all so strange. The elders announced in the ceremony that I would travel to Tlalocan, the balmy gardens to the East—verdant country, land of flowers caressed by gentle rains—but instead I found myself alone for centuries, enclosed by earth and roots, watching in astonishment while my body dissolved into humus and vegetation. I had been holding onto my memories for so long: the sound of the maracas, the thundering of horses, rebellion, spears, the anguish of defeat. (7)

⁴⁰ According to Shannin Schroeder in her work *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (2004), magical realism is a literary mode that “cannot be confined to one continent, language, or canon” (16). For more on magical realism, including debates over its definition, see Zamora’s and Faris’s excellent collection *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*.

Al amanecer emergí. Extraño es todo lo que ha acontecido desde aquel día en el agua, al última vez que vi a Yarince. Los ancianos decían en la ceremonia que viajaría hacia el Tlalocan, los jardines tibios de oriente – país del verdor y de las flores acariciadas por la lluvia tenue – pero me encontré sola por siglos en una morada de tierra y raíces, observadora asombrada de mi cuerpo deshaciéndose en humus y vegetación. Tanto tiempo sosteniendo recuerdos, viviendo de la memoria de maracas, estruendos de caballos, los motines, las lanzas, la angustia de la pérdida. (7)

Itzá's elongated lifetime, prolonged through an "afterlife," defies normative longevities. The use of preternatural temporality recalls other time-centered narratives like the late Columbian novelist Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985). Allusions to "the maracas, the thundering of horses, rebellion, spears, and the anguish of defeat," of course, reference the bygone era of Spanish conquest. In some ways, Itzá represents the genocide of indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica that pervades the postcolonial present. Such multi-generational embodied memories recall what Trinh T. Minh-Han writes in *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Women* (1989): "The story is older than my body, my mother's, my grandmother's. For years we have been passing it on so that it may live, shift, and circulate. So that it may become larger than its proper measure, always larger than its own in-significance" (137). Bodies tell stories beyond the duration of an individual's life by absorbing an ancestral past. A "hauntological" linkage of this kind signifies survival of historical trauma – namely, colonial and/or patriarchal violence. Belli's narrator alerts us of her corporeal decomposition —"my body dissolved into humus and vegetation"—yet her body receives a rebirth as a citrus tree, a Spanish transplant at that. Such reincarnation and eventual inhabiting of Lavinia suggest metempsychosis, that is, transmigrations of the soul. Evocations of the ethereal affirm and expand spiritual genealogies of hauntings and healings.

Magical realism allows Belli to explore political themes while obscuring her own personal involvement; thus, producing a pseudo-testimonio is possible even during times of unofficial censorship. A pseudo-testimonio, Linda Craft reminds us, is a hybrid narrative, an “invent[ed] eyewitness account that resembles testimony and incorporates testimonial function” (189); and by “testimonial function,” Craft means an “injection of an explosive political message into the novel at a particular historical moment” (188). Creating a pseudo-testimonio, in other words, grants the artist the creative freedom to express what would otherwise be silenced. In 1988, Belli imperiled her life by speaking truth to power at the moment of enunciation – namely, in the midst of the Nicaraguan civil war. Belli’s exilic experiences reveal a real concern for personal safety. Viewed in this way, producing a testimonial novel follows a legacy of protest that is at once subversive yet cautious in its full disclosures. When Belli states “Reality is often more fantastic than the imagination” (“La realidad es, a menudo, más fantástica que la imaginación”; 20; 17), what she is really getting at is challenging distinctions between myth and fact. Belli’s assertion reflects on the aesthetic sensibility of magical realism as a literary mode, adopted by Latin American authors such as Chilean writer Isabel Allende (*House of Spirits*) and Guatemalan Noble Prize winner Miguel Ángel Asturias (*Men of Maize*), illuminating the irony that that the real world may in fact be more supernatural than the imaginary world. The way in which *The Inhabited Woman* blends form and content could also be viewed as another platform of resistance. The blurring of genres, in particular, raises questions about what Linda Craft distinguishes as “Empirical truth (observed and measured phenomenon)” and “poetic truth (metaphor, myth)” (190).

Belli's use of magical realism, moreover, permits her artistic freedom to address issues of dispossession, especially untimely deaths. Itzá's ethereal existence symbolizes dispossession on multiple planes. Relying on Judith Butler's formulation of the term is apt here. For Butler,

[B]eing dispossessed refers to processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers that define cultural intelligibility and that regulate the distribution of vulnerability: loss of land and community; ownership of one's living body by another person, as in histories of slavery; subjection to military, imperial, and economic violence; poverty, securitarian regimes, biopolitical subjectivation, liberal possessive individualism, neoliberal governmentality, and precaritization. (2)

Itzá's dispossessed/disembodied state—reinvented through magical realism—transforms understandings of the past through the trope of reincarnation. Meditating on time itself, Itzá expresses: “Because it is not flowering time, it is time to bear fruit, yet this tree has taken on my seasons, my very life, the cycle of other twilights. It has been born again, inhabited by the blood of a woman” (“Porque no es tiempo de floraciones; es tiempo de frutos. Pero el árbol ha tomado mi propio calendario, mi propia vida; el ciclo de otros atardeceres. Ha vuelto a nacer, habitado con sangre de mujer”; 8; 7-8). Cycles invoke not just the passage of time, but also female reproductive bodies. Indeed, “Cyclically regulated flows” Elizabeth Grosz notes, “emanate from women's bodies” (198).

The ways in which Belli discusses embodying the past brings to mind Elizabeth Freeman's conceptualization of “erotohistoriography.” In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Freeman writes:

Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of

understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations. (95-96)

In Belli's work we clearly see how time itself is split: the body provides the point of contact between past and present. While intergenerational wounds are certainly a part of the "corporeal sensations" of the text, Belli counterbalances the traumatic with the erotic. Just as the body signifies oppression so too does it evoke freedom. In her major essay "Uses of the Erotic," Audre Lorde explains that the erotic personifies "creative energy empowered" (55). Belli uses erotic energy as a curative art: she "reclaim[s] the wounded erotic" (Morales 118) and engages in a "decolonizing act of healing" (Lara 114). In this way, Belli draws linkages between the erotic and future revisionist narratives. The body, for Belli, is a locus of power, pleasure, and, perhaps more importantly, transtemporality.

Critics such as Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, have noted that sexuality, particularly lesbianism, constitutes the ultimate form of women's subversion. The homoeroticism that Belli incorporates into her text heightens her feminist critique. *The Inhabited Woman* intersects the past and the present, as represented by the figures of Itzá and Lavinia, erotically. When Lavinia "drinks" Itzá, the two become one. Describing the unification process, Itzá narrates:

[Lavinia] split us open with a single slice. A dry, almost painless scratch. Then her fingers were grasping the rind and my juice was flowing. Pleasurable. Like breaking the delicate inner tension. Similar to crying. My sections opening. My soft peels freeing the gentle tears they held within their round worlds. And then she was setting us on the table. From within the transparent vase, I watch her. I wait for her to hold me to her lips. I wait for the consummation of the rites, the joining of circles. (53)

Ella nos abrió de un tajo. Un arañazo seco, casi indoloro. Luego los dedos asiendo la cáscara y el fluir del jugo. Placentero. Como romper la delicada tensión interna. Similar al llanto. Los gajos abriéndose. Las delicadas pieles libertando sus cuidadosas lágrimas retenidas en aquel mundo redondo. Y posarnos en la mesa. Desde la vasija transparente la observo. Espero que me lleve a los labios. Espero que se consumen los ritos, se unan los círculos. (42-43)

The process of cutting fruit paradoxically converges with the object pronoun “us.” So too, agony and ecstasy combine as “pleasurable” “[l]ike breaking the delicate inner tension,” “[s]imilar to crying.” That Itzá’s “juice was flowing” obviously expresses a double entendre. The repetition of “waiting” signals a lover’s impatient anticipation for the climax of love through sexual union. The “consummation of the rites” suggests an erotic fusion whereas the “joining of circles” evokes the trope of cycles and perhaps even a ceremonious commitment that a ring signifies. More significantly, the diction used here for the erotic encounter between women echoes Itzá’s other voyeuristic account of Lavinia’s and Felipe’s lovemaking: “They sized each other up like warriors before a combat. Afterward the only barrier between them was their skin. Her skin grew hands to embrace the body of the man lying on top of her; her womb strained forward, as if trying to bring him home to nest, bring him inside her, make him swim within her in order to give birth to him once more” (“Se midieron como guerreros antes del combate. Después entre los dos no medió nada más que la piel. La piel de ella crecía manos para abrazar el cuerpo del hombre sobre ella; se desaforaba su vientre cual si quisiera anidarlo, atraerlo hacia dentro, hacer nadar en su interior para volver a darlo la luz”; 41; 33).

Whereas Arturo Arias interprets Itzá’s and Lavinia’s relationship as evoking “an implicit, unspoken, lesbian desire” (17), I, conversely, read Itzá’s and Lavinia’s female-female bonding as explicit and expressed homoeroticism. Such erotic encounters between Itzá and Lavinia exemplify what Elizabeth Freeman refers to as “queer pleasures” that are “at once matters of the body, matters of timing, and tropes for encountering, witnessing, and transferring history, with a capital H and otherwise” (58). This same-sex attraction is made clear when Itzá describes: “Now I swim in her blood, traverse the wide expanse of her body” (“Ahora nado en su sangre. Recorro este ancho espacio corpóreo”; 57; 46). Notions of swimming in the body resemble the fantasy of

commingling through sexual intercourse. Itzá's immersion is vividly likened to Yarince's transmission of seminal fluid, male sexual flow.

While Lavinia subsumes Itzá to a certain degree, and vice versa, Itzá ultimately determines how much access she has to the past. Itzá's past interferes with Lavinia's present on rare occasions such as when Lavinia converses with comrade Flor and accidentally refers to Yarince instead of Felipe. Flor then offers a peculiar medical excuse for the temporal discordance: paramnesia. Such a condition describes "when something is stored unconsciously in your memory, like when you reach a place and it seems you've been there before" ("lo que se guarda inconscientemente; como cuando llegás a un lugar y te parece haber estado allí antes"; 252; 207). In other words, paramnesia sounds a bit like déjà vu, a sensation and illusion of familiarization, a memory disorder. Lavinia follows that up with "You don't know the strange things that are happening to me; the things I think...I don't think about them much, but now that you mention it, they're always related to the Indians...with bows and arrows, things like that...It's odd, isn't it" ("[N]o sabés las cosas extrañas que me pasan; las cosas que me ocurren... No les doy importancia pero ahora que lo decís, siempre tienen relación con los indios...con arcos y flechas, cosas así...Es extraño, ¿verdad?"; 252; 207). Referring to the indigenous past as "Indians" "with bows and arrows" seems incredibly reductive. It is no wonder then that critics such as Arturo Arias have faulted Belli for reifying essentialist indigenous subjectivities.

Yet, an alternative approach to Belli's reinvented reincarnations would be to consider how it embraces what feminist theorist Stacey Alaimo calls "trans-corporeality." *The Inhabited Woman* moves beyond the discursive debates of feminisms by touching on multiple materialities. For Alaimo, as with Belli, human corporeality can be imagined as trans-corporeal in the sense

that “the human is intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underl[ying] the extent to which corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (238). Put bluntly, “trans-corporeality” signifies a space where the environment and embodiment intersect. Belli’s deployment of soulful transmigrations reinforces this notion of trans-corporeality and underscores this “movement across bodies,” thereby “reveal[ing] the interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human” (238). Seen in this light, then, the body serves as a volatile site for environmental justice issues and feminist debates on materiality.

Lavinia’s simplistic answer here, further, does not accurately reflect her engagement with the past or the complexities of Belli’s narrative technique. After eavesdropping on Flor’s and Lavinia’s conversation, Itzá discloses: “I prevented Lavinia from understanding the comment made by her wise friend with the round eyes. I do not want her to study my past. I want to remember it with her at my own pace, connect with her with this umbilical cord of roots and earth” (“He bloqueado en Lavinia el comentario de su amiga sabia de pelo negro y ojos redondos. No quiero que estudie mi pasado. Quiero recordarlo con ella a mi propio ritmo, conectaría a este cordón umbilical de raíces y tierra”; 254; 209). What could be interpreted as a reductive response could also be reread as a deliberate discussion of the limitations of memory. On a narratological level, Belli is perhaps toying with the stark contrast of restricted/unbounded perspectives. Very strikingly, Itzá not only envisions intentional disseminations of fragmented truth, as discussed with Emily Dickinson, but also sees remembrance as a shared collective act.

Issues of women in historic memory particularly arise when Felipe dies. Up until this point in the story, Felipe had attempted to discourage Lavinia from joining the underground revolutionary movement. He had wanted her instead to play the role of Penelope waiting for

Odysseus's return. When fatally shot, however, he asks her to take his place. The realities of war, nevertheless, change his opinions about women's participation. "Women," Belli writes, "would enter history out of necessity" ("Por necesidad. Las Mujeres entrarían a la historia por necesidad"; 364; 300). Indeed, more than thirty percent of women participated in the Sandinista movement. Belli's narrative is ultimately a narrative of remembrance, a filling in of the lacuna of women's historical absence.

Like her lover, Lavinia dies in a hail of bullets during the Sandinista surprise attack at General Vela's house. Part of the factual basis of Belli's testimonial novel involved her personal participation. As Linda Craft explains: "The historical referent for Operation Eureka, which in the novel takes place on December 20, 1973, is the assault on the José María Castillo home by the Juan José Quezada Commando of the FSLN on December 27, 1974" (162). On that particular evening, Castillo, acting as a bridge between the Somoza dictatorship and the U.S., was hosting a gathering for the U.S. ambassador. This minor success proved significant. "Following a series of discouraging defeats to the insurgents," Craft adds, "this successful Sandinista action added to their credibility, gained national and international attention, and swelled their ranks" (162). Lavinia's sacrifice of her body—her death—further, emblemizes what Judith Butler would consider the ultimate dispossession, that is, the "varied concepts and practices of resistance which involve dispossessing oneself as a way to dispossess coercive powers" (*Dispossession* 146). Lavinia's death illustrates how "the battle lost is worth infinitely more than the battle never fought" (Randall 169). The fact that Itzá outlives the heroine becomes another way of disturbing temporal logic, and, not to mention, a way the author obscures a close autobiographical reading.

Although the heroine dies in the novel, Belli counterbalances any residue of political pessimism with what José Esteban Muñoz calls "utopian feeling," the critical affect of hope. In

his brilliant study, *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz provocatively theorizes that queerness “exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (1). Living beyond the here and now, for Muñoz, does not mean forgetting the past, but rather using it “for the purposes of critiquing the present” (1). With Lavinia’s death, temporality transforms: time reaches full circle, as it were. Itzá expresses: “I have completed my cycle: my destiny of germinated seed, the design of my ancestors” (“He cumplido un ciclo: mi destino de semilla germinada, el designio de mis antepasados”; 412; 342). The trope of cycle speaks to embodied temporalities. The “specificities of the female body” Elizabeth Grosz suggests, convey “bodily cycles—menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, lactation, etc.” (15). With Lavinia’s death, the disparate timescales between Itzá and her reconcile with a singular poetic voice. In a sense, the two become one once again. Itzá continues:

No one will possess this body of lakes and volcanoes,
This mixture of races,
This history of spears;
These people, lovers of maize,
Of the moonlit feasts;
People of songs and multi-colored weavings. (412)

Nadie poseerá este cuerpo de lagos y volcanes,
esta mezcla de razas,
esta historia de lanzas;
este pueblo amante del maíz,
de las fiestas a la luz de la luna;
pueblo de cantos y tejidos de todos los colores. (342)

“This body of lakes and volcanoes” (“este cuerpo de lagos y volcanes”) synthesizes the human and non-human geography (as alluded to in the opening epigraph): once more, we see the personification of nature and recall the fictitious setting of “Faguas.” While this physical referent may very well signify Nicaragua, it may also mean other countries in the Central American region such as Guatemala that just so happens to have volcanoes named after water and fire.

Along the same lines, “These people, lovers of maize” (“este pueblo amante del maíz”) brings to mind Mayans, more generally, especially since the Mayan sacred text the *Popul Vuh* tells the creation story centralizing corn. As such, Belli’s text ends on a transisthmian note.

As we have seen, Itzá’s reincarnations—malleability from natural landscape to female body—evoke dispossession, displacement and diaspora. These intermeshed dislocated topographies signal again a need for decolonial feminisms. Itzá’s spiritual wanderings and habitations read not only as an epic quest for material presence and belonging, but also reterritorializations of land and women’s bodies. By reinventing Itzá’s historical narrative and making her present, Belli addresses issues of women’s historical absence. Itzá’s spiritual pilgrimages, moreover, signify a haunting history of colonial violence against women. Lavinia’s consumption (and, indeed, incorporation) of Itzá’s legacy of woman warriorhood, symbolized by drinking her juice, precipitates practices of remembering. Thus, traversing the spiritual borderlands crosses over to eco-feminist planes and notions of migration and memory.

Ultimately, Itzá envisions a complete decolonization. She concludes: “The gold and the plumes will be ours / The cacao and the mango / the essence of the sacuanjoches / No one who loves will ever die” (“Serán nuestros el oro y las plumas / el cacao y el mango / la esencia de los sacuanjoches / Nadie que ama muere jamás”; 412; 342). In Itzá’s prophetic vision, land, natural resources and bodies return to their former glory. Love is an eternal source, an endless cycle of creation and regeneration. Utopia and dystopia commingle. Although we witness the demise of the heroine, we, as readers, are left with a hope for social change, a restoration of justice.

THE COUNTRY UNDER MY SKIN

As with *The Inhabited Woman*, *El país bajo mi piel: Memorias de amor y guerra* (2001) (*The Country under My Skin: a Memoir of Love and War* [2002]) features a gun-wielding *guerrillera*, yet its rendering recasts a more direct self-portraiture.⁴¹ Belli begins:

With each shot I fired my body shuddered, the impact reverberating through every last joint, leaving an unbearable ringing in my head, sharp and disturbing. Shame kept me from admitting how much I hated firing a gun. I would squeeze my eyes shut as I pulled the trigger, praying that my arm wouldn't tremble during the brief, blinding moment. After every shot I would feel a sudden, overwhelming urge to throw down the weapon as if it were on fire, as if my body could only be whole again once I let go of that lethal appendage gripped in my hand and pressed against my shoulder. (3)

Con cada disparo el cuerpo se me descosía. El estruendo sacudía cada una de mis articulaciones y me dejaba en la cabeza un silbido insoportable, agudo, desconcertante, salido de quién sabe dónde. Vergüenza me habría dado admitir lo mucho que odiaba disparar. Cerraba apretadamente los ojos apenas jalaba el gatillo, rogando que mi brazo no se desviara de la trayectoria en ese instante de ceguera. (17)

Despite vulnerability and aversion to defensive violence (even in case of emergency), Belli demonstrates the know-how of firing arms. What is more, she shows mastery over the pen. The seductive way in which Belli draws attention to her body throughout the text reveals a finely tuned sentience, a sensual awareness that is immediately alluded to in the cover art of Belli's English-translated memoir which displays an anonymous woman in heels holding a long gun.⁴² The woman's face has been truncated, thereby obscuring identification, and leaves the reader to wonder if this may in fact be the author's personal picture. While this faceless beauty evokes mystery, the photographs Belli does include in the memoir's midsection authenticate her heroic

⁴¹ All further Spanish references will originate from the 2001 edition; English citations will be drawn from the 2002 English translation, unless indicated otherwise.

⁴² Conversely, the cover art for Alegría's *They Won't Take Me Alive* consists of a sketched couple, perhaps Eugenia and Javier, loading arms, which not only prefigures a love story but also the pluralism of a composite narrative.

life story.⁴³ Moreover, the mid-placement of pictures, quite common in memoirs, recalls the popular autobiographical *testimonio* Ernesto “Ché” Guevara’s *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (1963).⁴⁴

What’s particularly remarkable about Belli’s life narrative, as she tells it, is how she plays with the double status of object and subject. This pairing is hardly surprising. Belli addresses issues of gender inequality precisely through deconstructing dualities. Embracing masculine and feminine qualities, she writes:

I have been two women and I have lived two lives. One of these women wanted to do everything according to the classic feminine code: get married, have children, be supportive, docile, and nurturing. The other woman yearned for the privileges men enjoyed: independence, self-reliance, a public life, mobility, lovers. I have spent the greater part of my life trying to balance and blend these two identities, to avoid being torn apart by their opposing forces. In the end I believe I have found a way that allows both women to live together beneath the same skin. Without renouncing my femininity, I think I have also managed to live like a man. (x)

He sido dos Mujeres y he vivido dos vidas. Una de mis mujeres quería hacerlo todo según los anales clásicos de la feminidad: casarse, tener hijos, ser complaciente, dócil y nutricia. La otra quería los privilegios masculinos: independencia, valerse por sí misma, tener vida pública, movilidad, amantes. Aprender a balancearlas y a unificar sus fuerzas para que no me desgarran sus luchas a mordiscos y jaladas de pelos me ha tomado gran parte de la vida. Creo que al fin he logrado que ambas coexistan bajo la misma piel. Sin renunciar a ser mujer, creo que he logrado también ser hombre. (12)

Belli traces traditional gendered codes of behavior only to subvert them with an androgynous sensibility. In another sense, Mary Jane Treacy has noted that the idealization of the ‘woman warrior’ created “a symbol of a new woman who could combine traditional feminine beauty with

⁴³ In Belli’s Spanish first edition, the cover art features a sketch of a reclining nude woman, evoking Eve in a lush landscape – flora and fauna. Also, personal photographs are limited to the current author’s image on the book’s sleeve and Belli as a charming little girl on the adjacent title page foreshadowing the retrogressive journey of the memoir.

⁴⁴ For insightful readings of *guerrillera/o* narratives, including “Ché’s,” and Alegría’s, see Ileana Rodríguez’s *Women, Guerrillas and Love* (1996) and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo’s *The Revolutionary Imaginary in the Americas* (2003).

masculine power endowed by her gun” (76).⁴⁵ More significantly, Belli’s unorthodox gender-bending literary representations of *guerrilleras* reflect “new forms of revolutionary femininity” (A. Rodríguez 81).

Time-wise, Belli enacts a backwards turn through relating wistful exilic episodes. As Russian cultural studies critic Svetlana Boym has observed, in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), nostalgia is a “historical emotion” (xvi), a longing for home and lost time (ix). Just as nostalgia plays a critical role in shaping serpentine temporality, so too does it function as a “creative emotion” (Boym 354). While *The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War* is a nonlinear revolutionary narrative, it is vastly different from *The Inhabited Woman* in three fundamental ways: first, it was published in the aftermath of war as opposed to in the height of it; secondly, it is a retelling with the benefit of decades of hindsight, hence stresses the luxury of contemplative time. Equally important is the absence of fiction.

AGAINST TESTIMONIO

Belli’s deployment of the testimonial mode is starkly dissimilar to other conventional writers in part because she is a lettered testimonial narrator whose work contains literary aspirations. That Belli has a literary posturing contrasts with Beverley’s claim that testimonial literature is an “extraliterary or even an antiliterary form of discourse” (“The Margin at the Center” 25). Unlike other *testimonios* that require mediation – namely, an interlocutor, Belli’s *Country* creates unadulterated accounts of her revolutionary experience. Rather than having a polyphonic dimension to her writing, Belli focuses on singularity – granted, her relative power as an upper-class woman and status as a professional writer allow her to bypass any necessary co-authorship.

⁴⁵ Many critics, such as Yajaira Padilla, have pointed out that the gun symbolizes phallic power.

At first glance, *Country* may not seem to fit the testimonial bill.⁴⁶ Reviewers' remarks, present at the front and back of the English translation, signal its multigeneric character. While many reviewers position Belli's text within the self-representational genres of autobiography or memoir (indeed, not only does Belli's subtitle do this but also the top-back of the book classifies it as such), they detect genre-bending. Cuban author Cristina García, for instance, writes, "Gioconda Belli's memoir reads better than a novel." This is "no ordinary memoir," important writer Adrienne Rich, extols. Rich continues, "This book is about American history, North and South; about power and the seeds of revolution . . . If her life seems romantic, she writes with the strength and clarity of a realist." Similarly, Ariel Dorfman refers to it as a "heretic memoir of a woman's sensual and intellectual voyage of self-discovery in Nicaragua." Finally, a critic from *Kirkus Reviews* describes it as "resembl[ing] exuberant historical fiction." In sum, then, *Country* retains its generic identity as a personal narrative, but one with distinct flavorings of a novel, a romance, U.S. history, Central American history, "sensual self-discovery," an "intellectual voyage," and historical fiction. *Testimonio* just happens to be one of its many forms.

Another way in which *Country* deviates from testimonial conventions is that it does not claim to represent all Nicaraguans. As such, it is especially tempting to classify Belli's text as solely an autobiography, or, more precisely, a memoir. After all, "women's autobiographies," Doris Sommer explains, "are accounts of one isolated being speaking for other isolated readers, not for the community" (130). Although Belli's narratives are highly individualized and one could even say "isolated," her diasporic condition speaks to the realities of fragmentation in multiple real and imagined Nicaraguan communities. Belli's personal narrative complicates romanticized revolutionary movements by showing its sexist side. If we were to categorize

⁴⁶ For an extended analysis of Belli's memoir as an anti-testimonio, see Mantero.

Belli's personal account as merely memoir, it would lose its politicized nature, especially around gender issues.

When Belli describes dating U.S. journalist Charles Castaldi, whom she later weds, she likens their dinner conversation to a quasi-interview; in this metacritical way, she addresses broader issues involving testimonial production.⁴⁷ At this stage in their relationship, Belli is determining his trustworthiness. As such, she ponders upon a possible conflict of interest and expresses authorial anxieties:

When one is a 'source,' anything one says can find its way into a story and on several occasions I regretted trusting someone who then turned around and printed personal anecdotes I had told in confidence. On the other hand, there were some fine men and women in the press corps and with them I often felt we could relate as human beings. (307)⁴⁸

Belli's personal qualms speak more broadly to oral history: her romantic reservations carry over to other possible kinds of narrative intercessors. Clearly, Belli prefers full authorial control. Hence, her self-conscious autobiographical agency and subjectivity could be read as anti-testimonial. What is more, Belli diminishes the likelihood of discursive distortions—misrepresentations and misreadings—by penning her own self-story and setting the record straight.⁴⁹ I suggest that Belli's text still integrates elements of *testimonio* even in its meta-criticism or downright disavowal; thus, I read it more along the literary trajectory of an autobiographical *testimonio*.

⁴⁷ Much like Claribel Alegría marries leftist-bent U.S. writer Darwin Flakoll except without the writing partnerships.

⁴⁸ This passage does not appear in the original Spanish. This omission instead accentuates chemistry - how initial reservations melt away: “[E]l tono formal y distante se nos escapaba de las manos. Era un rebozo con el que nos queríamos cubrir pero que se nos resbalaba de los hombros” (60). (Much as we tried to maintain a proper, professional distance, we kept running into the realization that our eyes were doing their own kind of talk. They wanted to say they were really glad we had met again. How was it that we had waited this long to see each other. They were having so much fun exchanging glances) (307-8).

⁴⁹ Belli minimizes misunderstandings one step further by undertaking her own translation. The title page informs us that Kristina Cordero has translated *Country* “with the author.”

I view this text as following the similar narrative tradition of other notable *guerrilleros* such as Guevara's *Motorcycle Diaries* and Omar Cabezas' *Fire from the Mountain: the Making of a Sandinista*. As such, Belli's hybrid text recollects and reconstructs a direct-participant first-person account of guerrilla activism. As a *guerrillera*, Belli's clandestine work included: serving as a courier, "smuggl[ing] weapons, r[unning] roadblocks, form[ing] factions with revolutionary tendencies, argu[ing] strategy with Castro and represent[ing] liberated Nicaragua at Third World conferences from Moscow to Tripoli" ("Country"). Belli describes how she rose in rank:

Marcos would write to me. His letters were sweet, full of determination and purpose. In one of his letters he informed me that because of my courage and perseverance the Organization was promoting me from "collaborator" to "militant" (which meant I had earned my full rights and responsibilities within the Organization). I read it many times. I was deeply moved. I thought it was an honor. To this day I don't recall any prize giving me as much satisfaction as I felt for being promoted in those circumstances. (81)

Marcos me escribía. Sus cartas eran dulces, animosas, solemnes en sus invocaciones de la patria, la historia, la justicia. En una de ellas me comunico que mi valentía y persistencia me habían ganado la militancia en el Frente Sandinista. La leí muchas veces, conmovida, sintiendo que era un gran honor. Ningún premio me ha brindado tanta satisfacción como recibir, en esas circunstancias, la militancia sandinista. (113)

As seen previously with Alegría's *Ashes of Izalco*, letters serve as vital conduits of communication especially in undercover operations. Here, Belli's promotion from "collaborator" to "militant" signifies an unparalleled prestige. Tellingly, Belli's passion for politics and poetry seem interchangeable at times but not so in this case; the former seems slightly more significant. Belli's amorous affair with Marcos undoubtedly intensifies the relaying and reception of the celebratory news. In other moments in the text, Belli describes how politics and poetry converge. For instance, she writes: "My imagination had turned out to be an asset. I was a natural conspirator from the start" ("La imaginación me venía muy a mano y la naturalidad de la conspiración se me dio muy bien desde el principio"; 74; 105). Her poetic sensibility enhances

her subterfuges as a Sandinista spy. Indeed, Belli achieves celebrity status as an acclaimed poet in Nicaragua that shields her as a Sandinista. Having this glamorous identity marker in conjunction with class privilege, maternity, and, not to mention, sex appeal helps her successfully conceal a clandestine lifestyle.

SERPENTINE TIME

Although *Country* spins a nonfiction narrative in hindsight, it does so with a fascinating twist: the opening chapters disrupt the chronological sequence of events. As such, time is arranged anachronistically: chapter 1 begins in 1979 and then flashes forward to 1998 in chapter 2, only to retrogress once more to 1952 by chapter 3 wherein it follows the traditional chronological order extending to the 2002 epilogue. Thus, *Country* commences nonlinearly but stabilizes by the third chapter. (The original Spanish edition, conversely, continues a serpentine structure.) Such nonsequential forms of time not only evoke the fragility of memory but also resemble the unexpected turns of adventure. Despite the initial temporal zigzags, each chapter's headlines—sensational subtitles—secure a kind of steadiness.

That the text is set in Cuba 1979 registers not only a long-held affinity but also underscores 1979 as a historical date of socialist success: the Sandinista victory.⁵⁰ As Arturo Arias has noted, 1979 was salient in that it marked the Salvadoran coup d'état and the Guatemalan indigenous insurrection. Despite gesturing towards the prominence of Cuba—"Back then Cuba was a beacon of revolution for Latin America; the first territory liberated from "America" ("Cuba era entonces el faro de la revolución en América Latina; el primer territorio

⁵⁰ The previous year, 1978, was also a landmark year for Belli but more so on a personal scale. In slender chapter twenty-six, Belli describes how she was awarded the prestigious Cuban-sponsored Casa de las Américas literary prize for her poetry book *Linea de fuego/Line of Fire*. Belli wrote the book in three months during her exile in México. That same year, Claribel Alegría coincidentally received the same literary prize for her poetry collection *Sobrevivo/I Survive*.

libre de America”; my translation 286)—Belli is careful to distinguish Cuban communism from Sandinista socialism. For Belli, acknowledging differences in political ideologies is paramount. She stresses: “for all the Marxism and Leninism we had studied, for all the love or respect we may have felt for Cuba, Fidel, and even the Soviet Union, we had different dreams for Nicaragua, we wanted a new kind of socialism” (“por mucho amor o respeto que le tuviéramos a Cuba, a Fidel y hasta la Unión Soviética, nuestro sueño era hacer algo diferente”; 276; 362). While there is an obvious shared theoretical lineage, Belli imagines a unique political landscape for her homeland. She continues: “We wanted a new kind of revolution that would be original and open, the product of a tropical, irreverent, left-wing movement” (“Un socialismo original, nicaragüense, libertario”; 276; 362).

Returning to *Country's* opening serpentine structure, as evidenced in the English translation, temporal arrangement corresponds to geopolitical shifts—Cuba, the United States, and Nicaragua—and, in so doing, mirrors peregrinations commonly found in travelogues or exilic narratives. In a parallel fashion, Latina scholar Irene Lara, curiously, points out that serpentine *conocimiento* “draws from Mesoamerican worldviews,” suggesting “a nonlinear engagement with knowledge; serpents do not move in straight lines. Serpentine *conocimiento* is knowledge learned through *movimiento*, by moving back and forth, swishing side to side, moving through multidimensional space, spiraling” (116). That Belli deploys a serpentine structure for temporality, therefore, links embodied memory to *movimiento*. Such *movimientos* connote both mobility and political activism. Belli’s globetrotting is not limited to the aforementioned, however, for she journeys to Panamá, Costa Rica, México, Spain, the Soviet Union, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Algeria. Such migratory patterns reflect what Arturo Arias calls “diasporic displacement” (218). Further, these movements mark the routes of a politically

persecuted upper-class woman, not an economic refugee which is a subtle but significant class distinction.⁵¹

The text's division into three sections: "Citizen of a Small Country," "Exile," and "The Return to Nicaragua," indicates an oscillation between spatial intimacy and estrangement with Nicaragua. This thematic loop centralizes nation: inhabiting the homeland, homesickness, and reinventing transisthmian "homes" in Nicaragua and the U.S. Belli's narrative explores the macro-structural phenomena of war driving political and personal instabilities. She grapples with the following complex question posed by transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty: "Is home a geographical space, an historical space, an emotional, sensory space?" (81). Belli's text arrives at the conclusion that "how one understands and defines home" is "a profoundly political one" (Mohanty 81).

Belli's periodic separations from her homeland, strangely enough, produce feelings of national nostalgia that ultimately inspire her writing, and, in this manner, actually draw her closer to her community. In a related way, Belli's nostalgia could very well be understood as "diasporic intimacy" to use Boym's expression: as such, Belli is "haunted by the images of home and homeland," yet "also discloses some of the furtive pleasures of exile" (253). As a writer in exile, Belli remedies nostalgia precisely through "aesthetic therapy" (Boym 252). While in Mexico, she writes:

⁵¹ Of course, Belli's travels are not without complications: when she flies into the United States, she frequently reports experiencing distress during "long waits at the airports," "questioning," and other such "impediments" (329). Belli figures that such "delays and humiliations" are not personal but just "another expression of the Central American conflict" (329). However, she later discovers, through an immigration lawyer, that "the numbers at the bottom of [her] visa identified [her] as an 'excludable alien,' a foreigner not allowed into the United States except if the State Department waived an exclusion" (329). With the Reagan administration, Sandinistas were deemed communists. As such, Belli has to apply for a visa, every single time, to waive the 'ideological exclusion' clause. Nevertheless, Belli's class privilege and personal ties to future husband Charles Castaldi grant her a degree of immunity that is atypical of most Nicaraguan immigrants.

Paradoxically, my geographic exile marked the end of my own personal exile. Living in exile freed me from the disguises and subterfuge I had needed to create a false image of myself, and allowed me to express what until then had been walled within me . . . No longer did I have to worry about disclosing my political beliefs . . . Once I opened the dikes, emotions that I had lost touch with arose again from my very depths. Nostalgia infused the maelstrom of words that poured out of me. Verses turned into buoys to keep my memories afloat without drifting away . . . The love of that landscape bound me to my diminutive country as much as ideas, honor, and the quest for freedom. (128)

Paradójicamente el exilio geográfico significó el fin del exilio de mí misma. Me liberó de tender que falsificarme para despistar y me permitió expresar libremente cuanto estaba amurallado en mí. . . . Ya no tenía que preocuparme por ocultar mis inclinaciones políticas. . . . Abiertos los diques, emociones que creía olvidadas emergían a la superficie desde mi profundidades. Vertí la nostalgia en un torrente de palabras. Mis versos eran las boyas donde anudaba los recuerdos para que el marea no se los llevara. . . . El amor por ese paisaje me comprometía con mi pequeño país tanto como las ideas, el honor, el deseo de libertad. (177)

Once out of the country, Belli no longer feels the need to masquerade: she is liberated from “disguises and subterfuge.” Discovering freedom of expression in this exilic space refreshes her. Even when Belli claims the painful double status of insider/outsider, she is aware of its mixed blessing: “the exilic condition greatly impacts my poetic sensibility” (“el exilio afectó mi sentido poético”; my translation; 239). Distance from her country has a liberatory effect even as she ironically revisits Nicaragua in her imagination. This newfound freedom allows Belli to discover the gift of words. The sacredness of language fuses with landscape once more when Belli writes: “My language, Spanish, is my home when I am abroad. Prose is my refuge, but my poetic breath is inextricably, intimately linked to the Nicaraguan landscape” (“Viviendo fuera, mi idioma, el español, se convierte en mi patria. Me refugio en la prosa para sobrevivir, pero la emanación íntima, el aliento poético, está para mí inextricablemente unido al paisaje nicaragüense”; 183; 239-240). Thus, geopolitical spatiality, language, and self-identity, all interconnect. For Belli, nostalgia is critical to propelling her memoir: it ripens her creativity. Further, possibilities of “home” transcend exteriorities to include interiority, as well as move beyond the individual to

the communal. As Mohanty luminously puts it, home is not “a comfortable stable inherited and familiar space, but instead [i]s an imaginative, politically charged space where the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment [i]e in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation” (83).

Belli’s embodied “homeland,” as signaled in the memoir’s title, *The Country Under My Skin*, recalls Gloria Anzaldúa’s *testimonio Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Back in 1981, Anzaldúa famously analogized the body with the titular phrase *This Bridge Called My Back*. Six years later, Anzaldúa metaphorized the back once more in *Borderlands* by stating: “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back” (43). Both of Anzaldúa’s comparisons yoke together “home” and the body. These instances radically alter the likening of women’s bodies to colonial territories underlying imperialist discourse such as the “virgin land.” Belli’s phrase “the country under my skin,” likewise, demonstrates an embodied subjectivity, an eroticized nationalism. Her body signifies a source of pain and pleasure, enslavement and release. Belli’s and Anzaldúa’s corporeal comparisons, call attention to the meaning and mobility of home: while the material manifestation of “home” may be in flux, for various reasons ranging from displacement to voluntary migration, it remains rooted in the body.

Despite the sense of belonging that “home” generally generates, it may, in fact, be a simultaneous site of uneasiness. Anzaldúa confesses such mixed feelings: “Though ‘home’ permeates every sinew and cartilage of my body, I too am afraid of going home” (110). Belli expresses similar ambivalence after the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and Violeta Chamorro enters into presidency. She admits: “I didn’t want to witness the dissolution of the Revolution I had so passionately upheld. When Charlie proposed that we move to the United States, so that I could fulfill my part of the bargain. . . . I accepted. My primordial instinct was to

flee, close my eyes, not see what would happen to my country” (“Pero yo no quería ver cómo se disolvía la Revolución que tanto me apasionara. Cuando Carlos me propuso que partiéramos hacia Estados Unidos, que cumpliera mi parte del acuerdo puesto que él ya llevaba seis años viviendo en Nicaragua, acepté. Mi instinto primordial era el de huir, cerrar los ojos, no ver lo que sucedería en mi país”; 357; 396). Political instability, exile, and intimate relationships, therefore, each shift Belli’s meanings of “home” and safety.

That Belli spends six months in Santa Monica and the other half of the year in Managua reflects her literal and metaphysical liminality. As a *nepantlera*, to adopt an Anzaldúan term, Belli is one of the “threshold people” that “move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual, group, or belief system” (Keating 6). In *this bridge we call home*, Anzaldúa further explains that:

Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it’s become a sort of “home.” (1)⁵²

Along the same lines, distinguished postcolonial critic Edward Said, in his memoir *Out of Place* (1999), writes “With so many dissonances in my life I have learned to prefer being not quite right, out of place” (295). As an exilic subject, Belli finds her self-identity in constant flux or, again to borrow from Said, “always in motion” (295). This fluidity is reflected in the narrative wanderings of *testimonio*, travelogue, memoir, and the novel: though Belli formally selects the memoir to frame her life story, *Country* reads like a *Bildungsroman* in that we witness her personal transformation as a *guerrillera* alongside the great unfolding of an artist. What is more,

⁵² Anzaldúa clarifies that she employs “nepantla” to “theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds.” For Anzaldúa, “nepantla” is connected with “states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (*this bridge we call home* 1).

Gioconda Belli's chapters resemble sallies of "a heroine on an intrepid quest" ("una heroína de épicas aventuras"; 7; 21), a "female Don Quixote" (una "Quijota"; 366; 407).

Far from homogenizing the experiences of *guerrilleras* through the rewriting of counterhegemonic histories, Gioconda Belli recasts the complexities of their roles through epistemologies of the body, "erotohistoriographies." In *The Inhabited Woman*, Lavinia is an architect taking part in the intellectual authorship and execution of a surprise attack against General Vela; the figure of Itzá illumines emergent liberatory practices of self-autonomy through the body. The case I have made with this particular text is that Belli links transtemporality to the body, and, perhaps even more daringly so, to what José Esteban Muñoz would call "queer relationality." Belli intensifies "queer times" by exploring homoeroticism. With *The Country under My Skin*, the nostalgic autobiographical persona shows us not only a first-person participant account of the Sandinista revolution, but also her personal evolution as a writer. As such, we see the blending of a *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*, the maturation process of an activist artist. "[W]omen's narrative textuality," Arturo Arias observes, "created an alternative revolutionary subjectivity to the masculinist model of personal development" (16). Both Belli's hybrid testimonies discussed here dramatize a feminist "coming of age."

Even if we were to read these testimonial texts in a postwar context, an activist agenda would still remain. These revisionist war stories challenge the violence of women's omission in grand (trans-)national narratives. As Ana Patricia Rodríguez has explained, "testimonial literature dr[a]w[s] critical attention to women's historic roles," to "fill a significant void" in

“women’s historiography, presenting them as heads of households, guerilla fighters, and labor migrants” (81).⁵³

I have suggested viewing Belli’s testimonial narratives in light of (historic/narrative) time, bodies, and sexuality to enrich our understanding of women’s transnational resistance. Taken together, Belli’s revolutionary narratives demystify the *guerrillera* and trace the long continuum of decolonial feminist struggles. Woman combatants, as Belli represents them, were not *objects* but rather *subjects* of history. Remembering the past in this way renews it. Through distinctive forms of storytelling based on true events—transforming *testimonio*—Belli fittingly situates herself in timelessness.

⁵³ While Rodríguez specifically refers here to emergent Salvadoran testimonial literature during the war years, the same principles apply to Gioconda Belli’s Nicaraguan narratives.

PART II:
DESDE LA ENTRAÑAS

TONGUE UNTIED:

DISAPPEARANCE AND DEPRESSION IN DEMETRIA MARTÍNEZ

*Bruta, ciega, sordomuda
torpe, traste, testaruda
es todo lo que he sido
por ti me he convertido
en una cosa que no hace
otra cosa más que amarte
pienso en ti día y noche
y no sé cómo olvidarte*

—SHAKIRA, “CIEGA, SORDOMUDA”⁵⁴

In an attunement to Shakira’s song, Demetria Martínez registers linguistic alienation and the restorative power of speech in her testimonial historiographies of the U.S. Sanctuary Movement, a solidarity network developed during the 1980s to protect Central American refugees. The struggle for self-expression resides at the center of *Mother Tongue* (1994) and *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* (2005). “Ethnic identity,” Gloria Anzaldúa has observed, is “twin skin to linguistic identity” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 81). Along the same vein, Martínez, in the title essay “Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana,” self-identifies with a “tongue-tied generation” (43), a generation that actively attempts to acquire Spanish fluidity by listening to foreign language cassette tapes and other such means. In this way, Martínez reverberates the self-torment

⁵⁴ Shakira’s song, co-authored with Estéfano, was released as the first single in her 1998 second album *¿Dónde Están los Ladrones?* (*Where are the Thieves?*) The English equivalent of the cited chorus reads: “brutish, blind, deaf-mute, / clumsy, odd, stubborn / that’s everything I have been / because of you I’ve converted myself into, / a thing that does / no other thing but love you / I think of you day and night / and I know not how to forget you” (my translation). “Sordomuda” also connotes “deaf and dumb.”

that some U.S. Latinas such as Anzaldúa have expressed concerning a linguistic double bind: feeling inarticulate and consequently judged by both Anglo-Americans on English mastery and U.S. Latinas/os on Spanish fluency. In *Mother Tongue*, Mary changes her name to María, an appellation José Luis chooses for her but one she affirms as a symbol of returning to her roots and politicization as a Chicana. While ‘mother tongue’ certainly refers to the Spanish language, Martínez has pointed out that it also means “the voice of indigenous people[s]” (Ikas 123). Spanish, in other words, is itself a language of colonial power as is English.⁵⁵ Despite linguistic self-reservations, Martínez humbly demonstrates her exceptional handling of both languages—even the in-between language, Spanglish.

Both of Martínez’s texts indicate how violence blunts language. Thus, Martínez elucidates the sequence: state violence, trauma, silence. Vividly foregrounding the mutilated body, specifically the severed tongue, is suggestive of state terrorism. In *Harvest of Empire*, for example, an American observer of the Guatemalan four-decade-long civil war explains that “those who dare ask about ‘disappeared’ loved ones have their tongues cut out” (137). The way in which Martínez thematizes dismemberment—the literal cutting out of the tongue—during Central American military regimes, calls to mind U.S. poet and human rights activist Carolyn Forché’s prose poem “The Colonel” (1978), written while traveling to El Salvador, which features another aspect of the deformed body: the haunting image of excised ears. These corporeal mementos, so described as “dried peach halves,” come alive in a glass of water. A moment that was meant to repress transforms into an occasion to articulate such silencing. Forché concludes: “Some of the ears on the floor caught the scrap of [the colonel’s] voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground” (279). Speaking the unspeakable, then,

⁵⁵ Another interpretation of “tongue” alludes to the Chicana archetypal figure La Malinche (the translator of Hernán Cortés) (Ikas 123).

becomes an act of resistance. Like Martínez, Forché fuses the journalistic with the poetic in the search for justice. Both journalists/poets demonstrate and denounce interlinked political and linguistic oppression under occluded histories of U.S. interventions in the Americas.

Interpreting the key phrase ‘mother tongue’ in another direction, Julia Kristeva, in a different context, reminds us that “The speech of the depressed is to them like an alien skin; melancholy persons are foreigners in their mother tongue” (53). Kristeva refers to the “psychomotor retardation” (34) of depressive speech that is similar to Martínez’s “tongue-tied” Chicananess. This “foreign” feeling in relation to one’s “mother tongue” speaks to both the coloniality of language and a sense of self-alienation that many depressives claim to experience. Martínez complicates this notion of the ‘mother tongue’ by considering Chicana melancholy, a matter to which I will return. For Martínez, understanding the past proves instrumental to regaining voice and moving forward.

When historically-bent fears and future-minded anxieties collide, they preoccupy and paralyze the present moment. Martínez’s *Mother Tongue* addresses such ruptured chronologies—lapses of time—and immobilizations through the deployment of a peculiar recurrent motif: disappearance. Several readings of *Mother Tongue* have focused on the two principal protagonists: the intersection of José Luis’s war trauma and María’s childhood sexual abuse.⁵⁶ A few others, such as Laura Lomas’s critical interpretation, have extensively analyzed the effaced legacies of U.S.-sponsored violence in El Salvador. While I certainly revisit the literal and symbolic meanings of disappearances that previous scholars have traced, I would like to suggest another way of reading Martínez’s novel, however, that both incorporates and goes beyond these criticisms by extensively examining the reconfigurations of disappearance.

⁵⁶ See Ariana Vigil and Ana Patricia Rodríguez.

Through a careful study of how Martínez particularly invokes “self-disappearance” as a metaphor for depression, my purpose is not to reify the stigmatization of illness, but to underscore the ways in which Martínez discovers curative creativity and reaches a recovery that engages in both historical and personal processes of reinvention.⁵⁷

Martínez’s *Mother Tongue* is a semi-autobiographical novel that excavates hidden personal and political truths regarding the psychic effects of U.S. military intervention in El Salvador. I suggest approaching this Chicana novel as a testimonial narrative of antiwar activism. More to the point, Martínez’s testimonial text engages in hybrid dynamism as a politicized fictionalized autobiography focused on consciousness-raising that is at once individual and collective. To fully decode the real-life reverberations within the novel’s implicit self-revelations, I rely on Martínez’s explicit, and mostly unambiguous, self-narratives in *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*.⁵⁸

This present chapter traces patterns of disappearances and reemergences and their relationship to language involving the following triple-braided chord: (1) Martínez’s real-life narrative of triumphing over censorship, (2) preserving cultural memories of *los desaparecidos*, and (3) María’s affective archive advocating mental health. By focusing on these three facets of loss and restitution that engage in historical as well as personal recovery processes, I illumine how language functions in the tropes of disappearances and reappearances. I argue that Martínez’s testimonial literature addresses complex issues related to overcoming multifaceted linguistic terrorism: censorship, historical silencing, and self-repression. Intersecting *Mother*

⁵⁷ Sociologist Arthur Frank has distinguished the terms “disease” from “illness” as follows: the former refers to a “physiological process” whereas the latter has to do with social meanings. See *The Wounded Storyteller*, pg. 187.

⁵⁸ For a recent discussion on mixed genres such as autobiographical fiction, see Sidonie Smith’s and Julia Watson’s *Reading Autobiography* (2010), Phillip Lopate’s *To Show and to Tell* (2013) and Donna M. Kabalen de Bichara’s *Telling Border Life Stories* (2013).

Tongue and *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* speaks on three registers—the personal, historical, and affective—to raise awareness of the long-term effects of war and the vital role that narrative therapy plays.⁵⁹

U.S. LATINA/O LIFE WRITINGS

Originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she still resides, acclaimed author and activist Demetria Martínez first began her writing career as a journalist and poet before undertaking longer poetic prose.⁶⁰ As a journalist, Martínez continues to write for the *National Catholic Reporter*. Her poetry collections include: *The Devil's Workshop* (2002), *Breathing Between the Lines* (1997), and “Turning” within the Chicana anthology *Three Times a Woman* (1989).

Though much scholarly attention has centered on Martínez's first novel, *Mother Tongue*, critics have largely neglected Martínez's post-2005 award-winning literary corpus.⁶¹ In 2005, Demetria Martínez published a collection of fifty-four personal essays titled *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*. This collection of autobiographical essays are for the most part refashioned—they are embellished extracts from previously printed materials submitted to the *National Catholic Reporter*, *World Literature Today*, *Progressive Magazine*, *Arizona Republic*, and *Sojourners Magazine*. Martínez's text is structured into five Spanglish sections showcasing

⁵⁹ I use the term *narrative therapy* as opposed to Cathy Caruth's “talking cure” to expand conversations about healing from trauma limited to verbal articulations. *Narrative therapy* allows us to consider how writing, particularly interior monologues akin to journal entries, might also facilitate wellness as a curative art.

⁶⁰ In addition to Martínez's involvement with the U.S. Sanctuary Movement during the 1980s, her latest activism, according to her personal website, includes working with the Jardines Institute “which is committed food justice and sustainable farming in economically disadvantaged communities.” See <http://www.demetriamartinez.com/>.

⁶¹ Martínez recently co-authored a bi-lingual children's book with Rosalee Montoya-Read called *Grandpa's Magic Tortilla* (2010), which was the 2011 recipient of the Young Reader's Book Award from the New Mexico Book Awards. That same year, Martínez received the Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature. The following year, her subsequent novella called *The Block Captain's Daughter* (2012) won the 2013 International Book Award for Best Latino Focused Fiction.

an exemplary essay—“Columnas Privadas: Birth Day,” “Columnas Culturadas: Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana,” “Columnas Católicas: Hola María,” “Columnas Fronteras: Inherit the Earth,” and “Columnas en Tiempos de Guerra: Hell No”—that cover subjects ranging from bilingualism and pan-Latinidad, to war and spirituality. This is by no means an exhaustive list of topics. Martínez’s *Confessions* is more than just a collection of personal essays, it also contains remnants of poetry and journalism. As such, it resists narrative norms by highlighting hybrid forms of storytelling. Its innovative genre-mixing has paid off rather handsomely for it has gone on to receive the 2006 International Latino Book Award for Best Biography. My literary analysis of Martínez’s testimonial literature will benefit from and be enriched by drawing from select self-revelatory essays that correspond to her involvement with the U.S. Sanctuary Movement as well as her personal struggle with chronic depression. Relying on this body of self-referential essays will provide us with a clear view from which to observe Martínez’s self-reinventions and historical revisions, illuminating how Martínez invokes metaphor to speak to the profound suffering in her inner life, the lingering effects of war.

Evidently, Demetria Martínez is not alone in experimenting with genre-bending self-narrativizations. Other contemporary U.S. Latina/o writers have also been playing with autobiographical hybridizations. Consider Richard Rodríguez. Every decade or so Rodríguez has published extended autobiographical literature: *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodríguez* (1982), *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992), *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002). Ordinarily, autobiographies are related once, but Richard Rodríguez transgresses this limitation by producing an entire series. Rodríguez’s latest book *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography* (2013) is a recent addition to this long-standing legacy of self-stories; *LA Times* book reviewer David L. Ulin points out that the latest title seems a bit

misleading for it is “neither a book about the spirit, strictly, nor an autobiography in any common sense” (“Darling”). Ulin then proceeds to offer a more accurate description of Rodríguez’s work by explaining that it is instead

a collection of [ten] essays—some of which were originally published in *Harper's*, *Kenyon Review* and the *Wilson Quarterly*—that approach the larger questions of faith and character through a broad array of filters, from the [9/11](#) terrorist attacks to the legacy of César Chávez, the collapse of newspapers to the reimagining of public space in a digital age. (“Darling”)

Rodríguez’s autobiographical form—the personal essay—which draws on former fragments resembles Martínez’s *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*. From a panoramic perspective of Rodríguez’s oeuvre, Latino journalist and author Rubén Martínez observes:

Each book is a collection of essays, most of which have been previously published and then rewritten and braided under an overarching theme. *Hunger* = what is won and lost in the process of assimilation. *Days of Obligation* = the contradiction between American optimism and Mexican (Catholic) skepticism. *Brown* = on the subjectivity of race, or on becoming post-race (several years before the appearance of Barack Obama) in America. *Darling* offers variations on all these themes, at the same time that it takes a leap onto the post-9/11 global stage. It is also a book about the desert. To an extent about place, its more profound preoccupation is the metaphysical and mystical desert, the cradle of the spiritual trinity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (“Desert Pilgrimage”)

Rodríguez’s religious syncretism—the “spiritual trinity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,”—correlates with the literary amalgamation at work. In this compendium of personal essays, what we have is the merging of autobiography and what Rodríguez calls “a biography of an idea” (such as meditations on the rhetorical usage of “darling”). Another expressed interest both Richard Rodríguez and Demetria Martínez share, aside from creating literary innovations, is Roman Catholicism. Of course, Rodríguez adds a distinct flare as a homosexual.⁶² Towards the middle-end of the title essay “Darling,” Rodríguez ponders on shifting family structures,

⁶² For a *7th Avenue Project* interview, Rodríguez veered away from the self-identification of “gay,” by responding that he is instead “morose.” He seemed to prefer the term “homosexual.”

especially the rise of single-parents, mostly mothers who are also “fathers,” and controversies coalescing gay marriage. “The desert religions will stand opposed to homosexuality,” Rodríguez notes, “unless the desert religions turn to regard the authority of women. And that will not happen until the desert religions reevaluate the meaning of women” (116). For Rodríguez, the subordination of women and queer communities should be challenged within religious institutions. The narrative space of the personal essay allows room for compact cultural critique.

Conversely, Martínez also tends to fictionalize autobiography; her ventures into historical fiction make us recall the work of early Chicana writer Jovita González. In González’s historical romance titled *Caballero: A Historical Novel*, written in the 1930s but published posthumously in 1996, the author creates a love story using the U.S.-Mexican war, namely, the annexation of Texas, as the historical backdrop. Likewise, Martínez’s 1994 novel is primarily about a romance that develops between María, a Chicana, and José Luis, a Central-American refugee. Hence, it meditates on the processes of falling apart and regaining balance in the aftermath of love gone wrong; that is, between conflicted lovers affected by warring nations, the U.S. and El Salvador. Critical attention to U.S. Latina/o life writings is still slowly emerging.⁶³

POETIC JUSTICE

Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Martínez’s testimonial novel notably historicizes Chicana/o participation in the U.S. Sanctuary Movement, a successful transnational advocacy network which made a significant difference in

⁶³ For noteworthy readings of Chicana/o autobiography, see Ramon Saldívar’s *Chicano Narratives* and Genaro Padilla’s *My History, Not Yours*. For personal essays, see Chon Noriega and Wendy Belcher’s *I am Aztlán*.

changing discriminatory U.S. immigration policies and legal practices that denied Central Americans political asylum by solely treating them as economic migrants.⁶⁴ *A Dream Compels Us* notes that this U.S.-based peace mobilization was “an important force in bringing the plight of Central American refugees to the attention of the North American public” (245). Hamilton and Chinchilla further inform us that Salvadorans (and other Central Americans), unlike many immigrant groups, were

neither strictly economic migrants nor accepted as refugees, but ha[d] the characteristics of both. Although many fled political persecution or, more generally, conditions resulting from war and civil unrest, their applications for asylum were routinely denied during the 1980s, and they lacked access to refugee assistance available to such groups as the Cubans and the Vietnamese. At the same time, in contrast to labor migrants from Mexico and other countries, Guatemalans and Salvadorans often carr[ied] the psychological scars resulting from war and persecution while confronting the social and economic challenges common to all new immigrant groups. (2)⁶⁵

Many Central American life stories continue to reflect physical and psychological dislocations. In addition to U.S.-sponsored violence in Central America under the Reagan Administration, legal discrimination through immigration policies intensified injustices.

The Sanctuary Movement arose from a dire need to shield Central American immigrants from draconian legal practices and ongoing political persecution. “U.S. Latinos/as (especially Chicanos),” Latina literary critic Ana Patricia Rodríguez writes, “began increasingly to support antiwar efforts and to participate in underground networks assisting Central American refugees

⁶⁴ For comprehensive historical and sociological accounts regarding Central American migration and legality, see Hamilton’s and Chinchilla’s *Seeking Community in a Global City* and María Christina García’s *Seeking Refuge*. See also, Leisy J. Abrego’s *Sacrificing Families* (2014).

⁶⁵ “The 1980 Refugee Act,” Ana Patricia Rodríguez further explains, “set up official classifications to identify refugees and political asylum seekers, and the Immigration Reform Act of 1986 [IRCA] granted legal status to Central American immigrants showing evidence of having lived in the United States prior to January 1, 1982. The arrival of an increasing number of undocumented immigrants in the 1980s put into effect new legislation, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Enforced Departure (DED), and the American Baptist Churches (ABC) ruling, which sought to gain permission for temporary and extended stays for immigrants” (129-30).

and immigrants” (130).⁶⁶ The notion of “sanctuary” follows a Judeo-Christian tradition of both “worship” and “refuge,” and, coincides with the historical trajectory of protecting fugitive slaves.⁶⁷ Hamilton and Chinchilla posit that “church protection for Central American refugees was both a religious and political act” (145). Moreover, Hamilton and Chinchilla explain that this anti-interventionist movement, which originated in 1982 in Los Angeles, grew in “response to reports of conditions in INS detention centers and dangers facing those who were being deported back home” (145). U.S. sanctuary workers assisting Central Americans practiced multifaceted peace activism:

In addition to creating a haven and generating social services for immigrants, [the sanctuary concept] stimulated church members to learn about the conditions pushing immigrants out of their countries and the involvement of the United States in Central America. It encouraged them to discuss the relationship of their faith tradition to the welcoming outsiders, particularly those fleeing repression, and to the following or resisting government policies that conflict with those teachings. (Hamilton and Chinchilla 145)

In short, spirituality and political activism combined to radically alter the Central American experience in the U.S.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Referring to Antonio González’s important essay “Chicano Politics and U.S. Policy in Central America, 1979-1990,” Rodríguez informs us that Chicana/o groups such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), “were virtually uninvolved in the Central American conflict debate until late into the decade” (166; quoted in *Dividing the Isthmus* 130).

⁶⁷ Another interesting nexus between Central American refugees and fugitive slaves is a similar narrative lineage. Kimberly Nance indicates that “Outside Latin America, *testimonio* finds close sibling genres in abolitionist testimony and in testimony from the Holocaust, among other literatures of trauma” (*Can Literature Promote Justice?* 167).

⁶⁸ This refugee/asylum movement, through grassroots organizing strategies of humanitarian agencies and groups such as El Rescate, the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN), the Clínica Monseñor Oscar Romero, and the Coalition for Humane Immigrants’ Rights (CHIRLA), provided care and protection to newly arrived Central Americans. Some groups offered legal counsel and effectively advocated for U.S. immigration policy change. See Hamilton and Chinchilla’s (fifth chapter) “Seeking Justice, Challenging Policy,” in *Seeking Community in a Global City*, pgs. 119-151.

On August, 3, 1988, Demetria Martínez and her friend, a Lutheran minister, were released from charges involving the unlawful transporting of undocumented Central American immigrant women. Prior to this release, *LA Times* journalist Victor Valle covering the story “Poet or Smuggler?” described the injustice as follows: “The first journalist to be indicted in a Sanctuary case, [Martínez] is accused of conspiring to smuggle two Salvadoran women across the U.S.-Mexican border under the guise of doing a story about them. Ironically, part of the evidence the U.S. government plans to use against her is the poem she decided to write, in lieu of a story, about her experiences.” The poem that allegedly embodied incriminating evidence was “Nativity: For Two Salvadoran Women, 1986-87.” In this early form of testimonial hybridization, Martínez relates how she had met two Salvadoran women at a train station in Juárez while working as a North American reporter. The refrain “It is impossible to raise a child in that country” punctuates the risks these Central American women have had to take to flee their war-torn country. Christian allusions saturate the poem such as “nativity” (132), “a baby in a manger” (133), and “summoned to Belén to be born” (133). Yet, Martínez calls attention to U.S. hypocrisy of singing the gospel while simultaneously “financ[ing] death squads” (133). Martínez was ultimately found not guilty on first amendment grounds. The jury was convinced she was still working as journalist at that time. The Lutheran minister that had accompanied Martínez was also found not guilty because New Mexico had declared itself a sanctuary state. Needless to say, “[o]ut of this harrowing experience is born Demetria Martínez’s *Mother Tongue*” (315), as interviewer Hector A. Torres has put it.

According to Ellen McCracken, Martínez’s writing trauma resulted in “further semantic reconfigurations” (62). McCracken makes clear that “Against the accusatory narrative of a federal grand jury, Martínez counterposes her professional involvement in journalistic narrative

and the rearticulated version of the biblical narrative. Martínez elaborated various segments of these narratives in published and unpublished poetry in the 1980s, and later in the book *Mother Tongue*” (62). McCracken draws attention to the recycling of Martínez’s personal narratives and unique textures they have acquired as they border-cross genres from poetry to the novel, from journalism to the personal essay.

In the interview recorded in *A Poet’s Truth* (2003) Martínez seems composed in the aftermath of the trial. Acknowledging that ten years had passed since the post-trial trauma, Bruce Allen Dick asks Martínez, “When you write nowadays, are you conscious of self-censoring, or are you even more determined than before to expose the oppression you see around you?” (89). Martínez responds, “I love to connect with people as an activist. It’s in the blood. After the trial, I wanted badly to retreat, but I have this big mouth and a pen to back it up! We’re living in very exciting times. Look at what happened in Seattle with the World Trade Organization and in Washington. These are very dark times, but they’re also hopeful times” (89). Martínez reveals that sharing her art transforms into a political act by using that spoken space to address other worldly concerns. She admits our current world seems dark and despondent at times yet she desires to counterbalance that with a tinge of optimism and a global awareness of interconnectedness.

Conversely, in a 2002 interview with Karen Rosa Ikas, Martínez divulges how she fell apart during and after the trial. She discloses: “It took me a long time to really get over what had happened to me in the trial once, you know, that sense of shame, of guilt, of being violated, that sense that I asked for it. I mean, I must have been a bad girl to do something like this. To be in this position, even though they found me not guilty, is a very powerful mind game” (117). Martínez sums up her trial experience as “being violated” and later blamed for it. She

deconstructs the misogyny and colonial implications of such legal and social acts. Tracing psychological warfare at play allows Martínez to free her mind and make us readers aware of such manipulative tactics.

With the personal essay “Birth Day” in *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*, Martínez relates to us yet another facet of the post-trial repercussions as she allows herself to be utterly vulnerable on the written page. Martínez recalls: “And because I keep looking back, I am turning into a pillar of salt. My mind is exploding” (26). Turning back, as described in the religious allusion to Lot’s wife, demonstrates how retrospective ruminations seem akin to depression. Martínez goes on to place a collect call to her family friend, Norty, who also happens to be a physician, and recounts the following dialogue:

“I don’t know what’s happening to me,” I tell him. ‘I haven’t slept for nights. . . . I’m afraid. The world seems to be going dark.’ My throat constricts. Now is the time to confess my crime, but I’m losing my nerve. I can’t get the word ‘murderer’ out of my mouth. Sleep deprivation. Anxiety attacks. Depression. I toss around clinical-sounding terms to cover up the blood on my hands and the chalk marks on the street outlining the body of the murdered Salvadoran church worker (...) But Norty won’t bite. Instead, he drops a bomb: He thinks that I could be suffering from bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depression. He must have heard the desperate rasp in my voice, the death rattle. For a blessed moment I forget I’m on trial and remember previous waves of elation sweeping over me only to give way to sadness so black I could paint with it, my mind racing through the night with ideas for books to write, countries to visit, causes to embrace—only to detour down a dark alley of paranoia, dead-ending in paralysis. (COB-TC 27)

Martínez’s body—her constricted throat—alerts her that something is awry: the physical and psychic overlap in resistance. The self-recriminations that plague her compel her to believe that she is a “murderer”; however, the falsehood proves to be a distortion. In effect, it’s the psychological impact of armed conflict compounded by a subsequent unjust trial. This scene illustrates the persistent postwar battlefield of the mind. When Martínez “toss[es] around clinical-sounding terms,” she seems to rest on “[d]epression” as a probable cause of her inner

torment. Her suspicions are confirmed when Norty “drops a bomb” and suggests that “bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depression” may be to blame for her private agony. Thus, Martínez twists the military metaphor to signify the exposure of buried truths. Here, as with *Mother Tongue*, Martínez sets off on a quest for wholeness, voice, and self-visibility.

At a recent talk I attended in May 2013, I had the chance to listen to Martínez elaborate upon the testimonial elements of *Mother Tongue*. UCLA Spanish professor Hector Calderon had invited Demetria Martínez to give a guest lecture for his course on “Chicana and Chicano Narratives.” A Spanish graduate student asked, “What has been the most surprising or remarkable question you have ever received?” Martínez responded, “Is María you?” Then after a brief pause, Martínez smiled and continued, “I take the fifth” (“Writing Chicana Faith”).⁶⁹ Martínez’s response illustrates what I perceive to be an authorial license, that is, the power to disclose or withhold delicate details. Her reply made me wonder about how she manages privacy within her writing. In addition, since Calderon and Martínez discussed the fact that Manlio Argueta, the Salvadoran writer of *One Day of Life*, had invited Martínez to visit El Salvador as a participant of a Postwar Testimonial Literature panel, I directly asked Martínez to expand on how *Mother Tongue* might be read as a testimonial narrative. Martínez clarified that if *Mother Tongue* is testimonial it is only unintentionally so. She explained that she had initially intended to write a good love story but that it “absolutely” ended up being a testimonial narrative (“Writing Chicana Faith”).

Martínez’s testimonial narratives could be considered works of meta-historical fiction in that they raise awareness of vulnerability and visibility within the writing process. Because Martínez partially cultivates the Latin American literary tradition and grounds her literary art in

⁶⁹ For the full digital recording of this guest lecture, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAc-TnvKg5I>.

history, her heterogeneous narrative form could be seen as testimonial historiography. Classifying her work as a semi-autobiographical novel, in particular, allows Martínez the flexibility of truth by partly revealing and partly concealing reality yet all the while flexing freedom of expression. By contrast, writing a publicly proclaimed autobiography permits full emotional exposure though it's still up to the author to decide which version of truth to tell.

“TO THE MEMORY OF THE DISAPPEARED”⁷⁰

Thus far, we have seen how the U.S. government attempted to suppress Martínez's political expression by threatening to criminalize her for sharing her life experience embedded within her protest poetry. While this act of political terror and constitutional abuse did disturb Martínez, the publication of *Mother Tongue*, nearly ten years later, exemplifies—even amplifies—her triumphant return as a public figure. In this segment, I now turn our attention towards how Martínez goes beyond transgressing authorial censorship to expose other silent secret state crimes—namely, U.S.-sponsored state terrorism in Latin America and the phenomenon of *los desaparecidos*, specifically in El Salvador. I first discuss recent U.S. dissociations of political terror before contextualizing the 1980s political climate. By expanding her personal narrative to elaborate upon the political, Martínez radically reappropriates history involving the U.S., Central Americans, and Chicanas/os.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 remain freshly etched in U.S. historic memory. 9/11 was indeed a traumatic moment: unexpected violence claimed the lives of 3,000 in New York and Washington D.C. Just three weeks after this national tragedy, Chilean writer and

⁷⁰ For a luminous study on women's disappearances, in particular, see Fregoso and Bejarano's *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*. The dedicatory epigraph of this collection of critical essays, like Martínez's *Mother Tongue*, reads: "In memory of the women and girls who have been murdered and disappeared."

human rights activist Ariel Dorfman compared what he referred to as a “date of mourning” with the 1973 Chilean military coup in a *LA Times* piece titled “America’s No Longer Unique.”

Dorfman observes:

Its most extraordinary incarnation – I still cannot believe what I have been witnessing – is that on the screen in the weeks past I have seen hundreds of relatives wandering the streets of New York, clutching the photos of their sons, fathers, wives, lovers, daughters, begging for information, asking if they are alive or dead. The whole United States has been forced to look into the abyss of what it means to be *desaparecido*, with no certainty or funeral possible for those beloved men and women who are missing.⁷¹

And yet, as many trauma scholars have noted, the mourning over the *desaparecidos* (the “disappeared”) in the U.S., reached some sense of closure weeks later when authorities revealed identifications of the deceased, whereas innumerable loved ones remain “lost” in Latin America. Indeed, the 1980s was the so-called “lost decade of Latin America.” What is more, the sudden social calamity *within* the U.S. was *speokable*—which is to say, that one could publicly grieve; records remained intact, neither buried nor destroyed. In other words, the U.S. government was compassionate towards the victims and did not exercise state repression by silencing loss: a stark contrast to the Latin American terrorist regimes that were “complici[t] with the perpetrators of the crime,” (*When I Look* 95) as Margaret Randall has aptly put it. Criminal justice scholar Cynthia L. Bejarano adds that “disappearance,” or what Randall calls “a new word in the lexicon of horror” (95), continues today and sometimes includes “the abduction and kidnapping of men, women, and children who are electrocuted with cattle prods, starved, and physically and mentally tortured” (406).⁷² What is most alarming is that “disappearance” has been a terrorist

⁷¹ For the rest of the article, go to <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2001/10/03/america-s-no-longer-unique/print>>.

⁷² The “disappearances” of the forty-three students from Southern Mexico, Ayotzinapa, in September 2014 illustrate a recent case in point.

tactic learned in the U.S. at the School of the Americas (SOA), which has recently changed its name, though not its practices, to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.⁷³

Like Dorfman, a few other cultural critics have linked highly charged terms like “genocide” and “holocaust” within a U.S.-Latin American context. In what Diana Taylor has called a “global drama of human rights violations,” 9/11 is just one of many geopolitical catastrophes. As Randall reflects, “In a number of Latin American countries, from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, this new type of holocaust called disappearance evolved and was highly refined. Rounding up of innocent citizens, massive and selective imprisonment, torture, rape, and murder. New strategies of terror” (95). Countless persecutions were based on arbitrary prejudices such as ethnicity, sexuality, political ideology, and so forth. In the Central American isthmus, the interplay of anti-communism and racism were salient biases. The only two Central American countries that avoided state terrorism were Belize and Costa Rica.⁷⁴ In *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (2004), Greg Grandin observes that “Security forces, supported by the United States with money, training, political cover, and, at times, moral justification, tortured hundreds of thousands of citizens, many of whom were disappeared without a trace. Many people in South and Central America were driven into exile – including more than a million people in Central America alone” (xi). Much of Latin America, in other words, morphed into state terrorism with traceable roots to the U.S.

Returning to *Mother Tongue*, Martínez tellingly dedicates her novel to “the memory of the disappeared” and thanks the Franciscan friar and iconographer Robert Lentz for the image of

⁷³ See Leslie Gil’s essential study *School of the Americas*. See also Juan González’s *Harvest of Empire*.

⁷⁴ Belize, however, is now known for its high homicide rates placing it among the most violent countries in the world.

the “Mother of the Disappeared” (see figure 1.1).⁷⁵ As such, disappearances foreground the text, calling attention to the grand narrative of political repression. Hence, those who are absent are prominently present. “Between 1979 and 1992,” Cynthia Bejarano informs us, “more than eighty thousand Salvadorans died and seven-thousand more were disappeared during the U.S.-backed civil war” (405). Indeed, Martínez provides a prefatory disclaimer to discern fact from fiction: “The characters in this novel are fictional but the context is not. . . . Declassified State Department documents indicate that officials at the highest levels of the U.S. government knew of El Salvador’s policy of targeting civilians, including Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated in 1980. Those in power chose to look the other way.” While there may be minor discrepancies in quantifying deaths, disappearances, and dollars, Martínez makes an undeniable claim that the U.S. played a pivotal role in devastating El Salvador. She also signals another form of violence: impunity, “look[ing] the other way.”

What Martínez does not state directly here, however, is her own personal involvement in the U.S. Sanctuary movement. As readers, we discover this autobiographical aspect behind the novel’s conclusion in the “About the Author” section. Though the civil war in El Salvador officially ended in 1992, its memories haunt those deeply affected by the U.S.-sponsored violence. Writing, for Martínez, as with many other authors, is a form of remembering, of preserving cultural memories of an effaced colonial past. Martínez explains in the personal essay “Tongues” that: “We flatten people, assume they have no stories, and in doing so inflict a thousand psychic injuries upon one another. Or we simply bomb whole nations” (*COB-TC* 159).

⁷⁵ The image of Archbishop Oscar Romero is also mentioned.



Fig.1.1 Brother Robert Lentz's "Mother of the Disappeared" icon, 1986.

Silencing and murder go hand in hand. Martínez further elaborates that

If the military wanted to send a message to the people who were trying to work for change and who were speaking out (...) and thus protect their privileges with death squads, oftentimes the military would cut out your tongue as a sort of a warning to the village. Therefore, this process of how a community finds its voice under state terrorism is alluded to in the title of (...) *Mother Tongue*. (Ikas 123).

As discussed previously, terrorist tactics such as “cutting out your tongue” is emblematic of tortured bodies meant to silence entire countries. To paraphrase Kelli Lyon-Johnson, Martínez documents the undocumented – which is to say, ‘undocumented’ in terms of the immigrant status that many Central Americans held upon arrival to the U.S. and ‘undocumented’ in the sense of the arbitrarily abducted and disappeared.

One of the complications arising from depicting others’ disappearances concerns the politics of representation. In the back-cover blurb, acclaimed African-American writer Alice Walker states: “I am so proud of Demetria Martínez for standing with and for the disappeared.” As Central Americanists such as Ana Patricia Rodríguez and Arturo Arias have pointed out, however, representation has a lot to do with agency. Although *Mother Tongue* seems to commemorate Central American refugees, critics, like Rodríguez, have noted a distinct “Othering” of the Central American. For example, María, speaking to her son, recalls: “Your father was as dark as you, very handsome. He had found extra work tarring roofs; the autumn sun got under his skin and stayed there” (156). She then exalts his racial difference: “José Luis was handsome as a god” with “eyes squinted into blades” (159). My own view is that the romanticized indigeneity, a prevalent phenomenon during the Chicana/o *movimiento*, gets curiously redirected to Central American subjectivity. Though the text depicts José Luis as a sexy dark “Indian,” a racial alterity that makes him all the more alluring to María, as postcolonial scholars have noted, more generally, to fetishize is still to dehumanize.

Ana Patricia Rodríguez offers a trenchant critique of the “fiction of solidarity” in her book chapter “War at Home: Latina/o Solidarity and Central American Immigration.” There, she acknowledges that while there was strong and plain anti-interventionism along with “declared affinity and solidarity with Central Americans in the 1980s, many Chicano and some Chicana texts placed Chicana/o histories, subjects, and protagonists at the center of solidarity fiction” (154). Rodríguez also points out that *Mother Tongue* “gives insights into the *affective* self-construction of one fictional sanctuary worker” (156). María’s ‘heart of kindness’ (Rodríguez 156) in Martínez’s revisionist text sharply contrasts Joan Didion’s allusion to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in *Salvador* we saw in chapter 1. For Rodríguez, María’s care capacity seems to have its limitations for she explains:

By loving him and loving the war out of him, she wants above all to *reinvent* him and make him forget the Salvadoran history that has violated and expelled him. As evinced by María and José Luis’s relationship in the novel, María’s act of solidarity is really an act of making fiction, that is, of (re)constructing the other and each other according to Sanctuary symbolic tropes and narratives. (156-157)

Rodríguez is right that María wishes to rescue Jose Luis in troubling ways, yet I disagree with the part about making him forget Salvadoran history. I view María as preserving Salvadoran cultural memories and honoring the Central American literary tradition, though I grant that José Luis’s past does “recede into the historic background” (Rodríguez 155). Though Martínez considers disappearances at large within the novel, the main spotlight is still on María’s figurative self-disappearance, self-repression. Unlike real *desparecidos*, María can choose when she is ready to reemerge, a marked difference to bear in mind. I suggest that Martínez recreates a testimonial historiography whereby she writes *with* the disappeared not *for* the disappeared.

Following the oral tradition of *testimonio*, as María continues her journey of self-integration, María’s son’s “voice” contributes to the U.S.-Salvadoran symphonic storytelling.

This last narrative segment, in the final fifth section, opens mid-air as José Luis Jr. and María are about to land in Central America. It is José Luis Jr.'s "strongest emotion"—"curiosity"—that compels the search for his missing father (183). His search sets in motion the possibilities of a family reunion. Although the Salvadoran civil war is officially over now, José Luis Jr. explains that some of the surreptitious governmental operations are still in effect: "Even though the peace accords were signed years ago, the San Salvador archdiocese is still trying to figure what happened to everyone; they keep all the photographs of the dead and disappeared under lock and key" (178). Palpable oppression is felt through the policing and silencing of state crimes. José Luis Jr. schedules a visit the archdiocese's office to investigate which type of photograph they might have of his father's body: whether he is alive, dead, or "disappeared." He then juxtaposes the image of a paternal figure who is "alive and smiling" (179) with the possibility of one that is not so and grows concerned about the impact that this newly acquired discovery may have on his mother.

Namesakes themselves come to reframe loss in an intimate and cherished manner, signifying deeper "struggles of naming and narration" (141), as Claudia Milian has put it. For instance, José Luis Jr. adopts Alegría as his middle name, a surname rich in meaning. On the one hand, it metabolizes the loss of his father in this renaming process, especially when he claims: "Dad was always disappeared to me. But now he's come back and given me another name" (184). The transference from surname to middle name marks permanence and centrality. On the other hand, Alegría evokes the Central American literary legend Claribel Alegría (the subject of my first chapter). Two of Alegría's poems—"Mortally Wounded" (45-46) and portions of "The Return"—from the 1989 collection *Woman of the River* are incorporated in *Mother Tongue*, inviting intertextual readings. José Luis's "jottings" (44) of poetry by Roque Dalton and Claribel

Alegría set up didactic tools for María's politicization. Additionally, María treats these poems as "subversive valentines" (44) through José Luis's personalized penmanship. María comes to realize that her love for José Luis must encompass his origins also reflected in this Central American protest poetry when she expresses: "I would not understand the sentiments actually expressed in those words until much later when I understood love could not be divorced from history, that his war had to become my own" (44). At a later point José Luis Jr. reads a fragment of Alegría's poem "The Return" (177-178), prefiguring his father's reemergence at the novel's close. Alegría's poem has been scribbled as a memento and is kept as a personal souvenir in María's purse. Like his mother, José Luis Jr. notices an intimate engagement with the text in describing how his father had underlined parts of it. This poem is left unread as a fragment due to interrupted motion while in flight to El Salvador. Thus, Alegría's namesake, denoting "joy" in Spanish, has a unique presence in *Mother Tongue*, forging Central American-U.S. politics and poetics.

Similar to the enduring nature of namesakes, iconography preserves personal and historic memory. José Luis Jr. relates how a Salvadoran archbishop hands his mother dedicatory iconography (referring again to figure 1.1): [I]t's a poster. A poster of a dark lady wearing a white scarf and holding a crown of thorns. Behind her is what looks like a human figure outlined in chalk on pavement. At the bottom of the poster are the words, madre de los desaparecidos, Mother of the Disappeared. . . . It's María the mother of Jesus (185). Here, the iconography of the *Mater Dolorosa*—the Sorrowful Mother—unifies individual memorial with collective tribute, drawing a transnational linkage. During the dirty wars of military dictatorship in Latin America, mothers and widows of missing relatives assembled to peacefully protest acts of state terror that tore their families apart. For instance, in El Salvador, women activists formed CoMADRES

(Committee of the Mothers Monsignor Romero).⁷⁶ On the origins of this human rights group, anthropologist Jennifer Schirmer explains: “Every woman in CoMadres ha[d] a disappeared, assassinated, or jailed relative. The search by these mothers for their relatives in the morgues, the military barracks, the jails, the dumps, began in April 1975, and by December 1977 a committee was formed under the direct auspices of the Archdiocese” (32). A similar phenomenon of women’s resistance occurred in Chile.⁷⁷ The white headscarf evokes sartorial solidarity with *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina. In an interview featured in *Viva: Women and Popular Protest in Latin America* (1993), a member of CoMadres Alicia elucidates the meaning of the women’s activist attire further: “Black signifies the condolences and affliction we carry for each person killed. And the white headscarf represents the peace we are seeking – but it must be a peace with justice, not a peace with impunity! We also carry a red and white carnation: the red for spilled blood, the white for the detained-disappeared and the green leaves, the hope for life” (33-34). Additionally, the CoMadres “used photos and banners of their loved ones with strong messages against state-sponsored violence as did Las Madres in Argentina” (Bejarano 416).

The *Mater Dolorosa* figure, as depicted in *Mother Tongue*, coincides with other Chicana narratives displaying Central American solidarity like Helena María Viramontes’s “Cariboo Café” (1985). In Helena Viramontes’s short story “Cariboo Café,” a mother laments the loss of her son, Geraldo. Drawing connections between the religious representation of the *Mater Dolorosa* and the Chicana/o-Mexicana/o folkloric figure La Llorona, Viramontes writes: “It is the night of La Llorona. The women come up from the depths of sorrow to search for her

⁷⁶ U2’s protest song “Mothers of the Disappeared,” in their *The Joshua Tree* (1987) album, was inspired by and specifically centers on CoMADRES.

⁷⁷ English artist Sting pays tribute to Chilean mourning and mobilizing mothers in the song “They Dance Alone (Cueca Solo)” in the album ...*Nothing Like the Sun* (1987).

children. I join them, frantic, desperate, and our eyes are scrutinizers, our bodies opiated with the scent of smiles. . . . I hear the wailing of the women and know it to be my own. Geraldo is nowhere to be found” (72-73). In her interdisciplinary study, *There Was a Woman* (2008), Domino Pérez traces the transformative figurations of La Llorona, a provocative icon of Mexican oral and literary traditions. Although there are many permutations of the legendary La Llorona, according to the most popularized version, her narrative begins with a desolate woman whose lover has forsaken her, leaving her alone to raise their children. Grief and desire for revenge compel her to murder her children and throw their bodies into a river. Despair then drives her to her death. In the afterlife, she is condemned to wander for all of eternity until the bodies of her children are recovered (Pérez 2).

Following that pattern, Graciela Limón’s novel *In Search of Bernabé* (1993), also portrays a mother, Luz Delcano, searching for her son who got lost during the tragic turmoil of Archbishop Oscar Romero’s assassination. For our purposes, what is particularly interesting is how the figure of the Sorrowful Mother can be viewed as partaking in resistance narratives. As Pérez has insightfully suggested, “La Llorona is a figure tied to cultural, social, and political movements, demonstrat[ing] the need for transnational comparative analyses in, and throughout, Latin America to determine, for instance, how the stories operate in different national contexts or how the lore is expressed across genres” (208).

On the one hand, I agree that it would be fruitful to engage in a transhemispheric study of the sorrowful mother, such as La Llorona, “in, and throughout, Latin America,” and be attendant to the ways in which said subject mobilizes around mourning. On the other hand, we need to be mindful of the ways in which this folkloric female figure may operate under other names “in different national contexts.” Ana Patricia Rodríguez makes a similiar point when she argues that

Chicana solidarity narratives, like Viramontes's and Limón's, "clearly represen[t] the plight of Central Americans during the civil wars in the 1980s and its diasporic aftermath," but ultimately "foreground[d] Chicana/o agencies, subjectivities, histories, and cultural mythologies (e.g., La Llorona and La Malinche, as opposed to La Siguanaba, La Segua, and Los Cadejos of Central American traditions)" (155).⁷⁸ Relying on solely a Mexican-based model, while valuable in its own right, severely limits conversations about this archetype in the Americas.

Returning to *Mother Tongue*, photography, like iconography and namesakes, captures personal and historical moments in time. Upon returning back to the U.S., María develops the photographs of José Luis despite the uncertainty of his presence now:

When we got home, she had me put a nail in the wall above her bedroom altar and we hung the poster—she calls it an icon—of the Mother of the Disappeared. Then, she got a photograph of herself when she was seven and the photo of the picture of Dad and she stuck them the bottom corners of the frame. She lit a candle and sat quietly for a long, long time. She didn't say a word about why she hung the poster, which is weird because she's always running around trying to analyze things, to put things in words. It drives me crazy. But finally I couldn't stand it anymore, and I asked her what she was thinking. She smiled and said that the Mother of the Disappeared is forever remembering, forever waiting for everyone to return. (*MT* 186)

María self-identifies with the "Mother of the Disappeared" and does so in a noteworthy way: she registers her childhood loss of innocence at age seven with *los desaparecidos*, like José Luis. On the one hand, María expresses maternal affection towards a lost self. On the other hand, she symbolically subsumes a larger political cause as a transamerican "Super madre."⁷⁹ Indeed, in an

⁷⁸ Of the examples Rodríguez lists that are based on a Central American imaginary, I am most familiar with La Siguanaba. According to urban legend, La Siguanaba, refers to a woman who appears by moonlight by a river (or other water source) often in the guise of a sexy temptress or, less occasionally, in the semblance of a sweetheart (for the loyal lover), but her back is notably turned. When she reveals her face, she suddenly converts into a horse or a haggard woman. In these instances, La Sigunaba seems to function as a fallen woman targeting and punishing lustful men. In this sense, she could be viewed as a feminist figure of sorts, critiquing the sexual privilege of men.

⁷⁹ I take this phrase from Cynthia Bejarano's essential essay "Las Super Madres de Latino America: Transforming Motherhood and Houseskirts by Challenging Violence in Juárez, México, Argentina, and El Salvador."

interview with Karen Ikas, Martínez states that the maternal figure that she had wanted to create (without romanticization) was one that “combined motherhood and political activism” (119). In short, Martínez wanted to depict “the symbol of [which] would be a woman marching against war with a baby in the knapsack” (119).

Ellen McCracken offers us another way of reading this altar scene. In her view, the “Mother of the Disappeared” draws a religious allusion to María, the Mother of Jesus, especially when she went out searching for her missing son. In other words, the names of the prominent protagonists María and José resemble holy appellations. This noteworthy scene signifies still more. Ariana Vigil tells us, “María’s altar lies within her home, the same space in which her abuse took place; but rather than reclaiming only this space, María becomes involved in local activism, echoing Soledad’s admonishment to ‘leave the house.’ She thus claims the domestic sphere in the service of a global project” (71). The “global” that Vigil is referring to, and as other critics have observed, alludes to the collision of the Vietnam War imagery playing in the television background while María’s neighbor sexually violates her. But it also goes beyond that. This home altar for “the disappeared,” speaks to María’s domestic space shifting from a private site of violence to transborder kinship.

By the time José Luis mysteriously reemerges, María’s mourning has long ceased. He implores: “I pray you have not forgotten me” (194). So again, the tension between remembering and forgetting arises, but by then María has already reached her own sense of resolution, her own sense of closure, independent of his return.

“THE WAR IS STILL INSIDE”

Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, “Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of Red and Black Ink”

Continuing the discussion of loss and restitution, I now close with an analysis of Martínez’s fictional strand featuring María’s self-disappearance and reintegration in connection with Martínez’s testimonial account of depression in *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*. In *The Will to Heal* (2007), Felicia Lynne Fahey examines the blending of autobiography and fiction to better understand psychological and political trauma in Latina literature. Fahey claims that “In willfully writing about herself and her past wounds, the fictional protagonist enters into a difficult personal struggle and works to repair her wounded identity. Although the struggle is personal, the social and political implications of the autobiographical act remain in focus” (xii).⁸⁰ As a thirty-nine-year-old Chicana protagonist, María, embarks on a retrospective quest to investigate her profound hidden grief and trace back the genesis of her unresolved loss. As such, writing becomes a way of “making sense of ruins” (206), as Kelli Lyon-Johnson has put it. Revisiting past self-narratives seems somehow more coherent when approached retrospectively and panoramically. We soon discover that her depression is engulfed in multiple losses: her mother to cancer, her father to infidelity, and her godmother Soledad to heart failure.⁸¹ But the two voids most critical to this narrative involve the mystery over her lover’s abandonment and

⁸⁰ While Fahey does not expressly include Martínez’s *Mother Tongue* within her study of women’s fictional autobiographies, the following self-narrative pattern applies here too.

⁸¹ We learn of Soledad’s sudden death when Mary states: “One day, Soledad’s heart gave out. She had given so much to everyone but herself. When I went to the mortuary to view her body, I started to grieve all over again” (117).

her own self-estrangement. María, looking back from the vantage point of twenty years, explores her “psyche’s perishability” and indeed discovers that “the seeds of [depressive] illness t[ook] strong root in childhood.”⁸² María’s melancholia metamorphoses into mourning through the self-narration of secret sorrows.⁸³ Assessing losses and gains, María discovers that lacunas—extended empty spaces—such as silence coalesce into voluptuous material for untold stories.

In her recent book *Depression: a Public Feeling* (2012), which uniquely fuses autobiography and critical inquiry, Cvetkovich refers to the affective process of “going down,” “swimming,” and “return[ing]” within her “Depression Journals (A Memoir).”⁸⁴ This psychic process of submersion, hidden activity, and resurfacing reflects recovery, particularly the transformation from speechlessness to “resuscitat[ing] language.”⁸⁵ In psychoanalytic terms, we witness the transition from the unconscious to the conscious rendered possible through articulation. Moreover, this private process is made public through publication.

Depression remains a mysterious malady even as we progress further along the twenty-first century. Depression’s indefinable nature frequently spurs those afflicted to lapse into figurative language in order to describe their experience. Susan Sontag opens *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1988) by reminding us of Aristotle’s classic definition of metaphor as “consist[ing]

⁸² See *Darkness Visible*, pg. 36.

⁸³ For a brilliant discussion that elaborates upon Sigmund Freud’s distinction between melancholy and mourning, see David Eng’s essay in *Loss*.

⁸⁴ Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*, which insightfully examines the politics and aesthetics of negative affects, refers to “ugly feelings” as the non-cathartic envy, anxiety, paranoia, irritation, “stuplimity” (the admixture of shock and boredom), and disgust. “Ugly feelings” are certainly not limited to that list (as Ngai readily concedes). Expanding on the social significance of negative affects, Anne Cvetochich urges us to depathologize the dysphoric affect: depression.

⁸⁵ Demetria Martinez refers to the concept of “resuscitating language” (19) in her most recent work *The Block Captain’s Daughter* (2012).

in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else” (5).⁸⁶ In this sequel to *Illness as Metaphor* published nearly a decade before, Sontag enhances her deconstruction of the stigmatizing rhetoric surrounding illnesses such as tuberculosis and cancer to consider AIDS. She argues that public attitudes displayed through the use of military metaphors actually serve to shame and silence. The public’s metaphorization of illness as war, plague, or divine retribution distorts and (de)moralizes certain physical frailties. Thus, in Sontag’s view, we should refrain from using metaphor to describe illness. But, Sontag is mostly speaking to imposed meanings that do undeniably operate in a punitive manner. There is an important distinction to be made here, however, between public and self-use of metaphors for describing illness. Depending on the positive, neutral, or negative nuances of the terms, metaphors help us grasp meaning especially when there is a failure of language.

“Metaphors,” the sociologist Arthur W. Frank tells us, “can be powerful means to healing” (136). But, Frank continues, “generalized metaphors,” that are “offered as story-lines for others’ self-stories” are, by contrast, “dangerous” (136). Martínez does not generalize “disappearances” for all who have been arbitrarily abducted and/or suffer from depression; rather, she attempts to connect seemingly disparate experiences of suffering to forge a possible fellowship, or one could even say solidarity. Indeed, for some survivors of *real* “disappearance” (political captivity), depression can also be a lived reality as a direct consequence of state terror, a topic I will consider at length in the following chapter.

On the inadequacy of language to self-describe depression, in particular, William Styron in his autobiography *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* notes that this “ancient affliction” (17) is a “disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to

⁸⁶ Susan Sontag is quoting from Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

the self—to the mediating intellect—as to verge close to being beyond description” (7). Nevertheless, Styron goes on to admit that, at least for himself, “the pain is most closely connected to drowning or suffocation—but even these images are off the mark” (17). While there seems to be a struggle if not absolute failure of language when experiencing a depressive episode, there appears to be a common account of a dark descent: a downward spiral.

Depression is not only known for its decline, but also its recurrent pattern or what William Styron calls the “Sisyphian torment.” Depression occurs in intervals of destruction and (re)making, barrenness and fruitfulness. “Suffering,” Audre Lorde writes, “is the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain” (“Eye to Eye” 171-72). Lorde continues, “I condemn myself to reliving that pain over and over and over whenever something close triggers it. And that is suffering, a seemingly inescapable cycle” (172). Self-naiveté, in other words, can prolong repeated instances of silent suffering. Conversely, self-inquiry can lead to self-knowledge and self-compassion, an uncensoring of self-silencing.

Rafael Pérez-Torres, in his important study *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (2006), provides useful reflections on melancholy from a Chicana/o critical framework. According to Pérez-Torres, melancholy, in its most distilled form, is in fact “sorrow over a displaced sense of loss” (199). In his chapter “Narrative and Loss,” he elucidates how “Melancholy lies heavy at the heart of Chicano literary production” (204). The mestiza/o subject seems to acquire a melancholic sensibility—akin to Martínez’s autobiographical persona—in the oscillation between presence and absence, endurance and demise.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ By mestiza/o, I mean mixed blood, a racial mixing (usually between indigenous and European bloodlines, though it may be much more complex to include African ancestry, for instance). This racial mixing involves a grand narrative of colonial violence and trauma. See Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

In keeping with Rafael Pérez-Torres's meditations on mestiza/o melancholy, José Esteban Muñoz's essay "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position," published that same year, traces how "depression itself is formed and organized around various historical and material contingencies that include race, gender, and sex" (675). Muñoz deviates from general and clinical understandings of depression to instead "theorize affective particularity and belonging" (676-77), demonstrating how "the depressive position is a site of potentiality and not simply a breakdown of the self or the social fabric. Reparation is part of the depressive position; it signals a certain kind of hope" (687). Not only does Muñoz reshift our notions of depression by gendering and racializing it from a performance studies lens, but he also untaps the "breakdown of the self or the social fabric" as a potential site for "reparation" and "hope."

More to the point, depression is likened to disappearance in that it involves a missing self-identity.⁸⁸ "Major depression," author Andrew Solomon in his National Book Award-winning *The Noonday Demon* (2001) observes, "is a birth and a death: it's both the presence of something and the total disappearance of something" (17). Feeling "lifeless," in this case, is a complete disappearance. Others have described depression as a partial loss of self-identity: dormancy. For example, in *Mother Tongue*, María self-narrates:

You could say I fell asleep. There was no mystery to it. Quite simply, it was easier to sleep and pretend to be awake than to stay awake and pretend to be strong. Twenty years later I can say this without shame. They had words for women like me. Insane fell out of favor as did nervous breakdown. Clinically depressed was, I believe, in vogue. But ask any woman who has had times in her life when she was not all there. She will say that she was asleep. (*MT* 26-27)

⁸⁸ See Susan Bost's *Encarnación: Illness and Body Politics in Chicana Feminist Literature* (2010) for more on Chicana disability memoirs. See also AnaLouise Keating's *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009).

Here, falling “asleep” is an in-between space of feeling dead and feeling alive. Lethargy and inertia are commonly affiliated symptoms of depression. Along those same lines, in *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*, Martínez relates:

More than shame, grief was my companion in the wake of my diagnosis. This was good. I needed to grieve. Large portions of my life, it seemed, had disappeared. I wept for the aborted relationships and projects, for the deadness I often felt in the face of beauty. Too I grieved for the great stretches of my life that I could not recall, because I had been sleepwalking instead of truly living. I grieved that I had been unable to turn to my own family for help because I didn't know that what I was experiencing had a name. (31)

The negative affects, shame and grief, are personified here to stress a profound bonding with suffering, a deep understanding of pain. Julia Kristeva might even say that suffering is a precondition to gaining consciousness. Very strikingly, years of private agony, like the religious allusion to the years of the locusts, devastate memory—such that “[l]arge portions” of personal history are obliterated.

Martínez goes so far as to address the gendering of depression, observing the ordinary self-erasure of women behind men. In the personal essay “Sweet Revenge,” Martínez advises high-school young ladies to stay career-oriented. She provides them with the following cautionary tale: “We see it everywhere: Women’s identities “disappeared” when they fall in love, even if a man doesn’t want this kind of false sacrifice” (*COAB-TC* 61). Indeed, French feminist Simone de Beauvoir’s critique of gender inequalities in romantic relationships distinguishes how “Love for the woman” is “a total abdication for the benefit of a master,” whereas the man, no matter how violent his passions, remains a ‘sovereign subject’” (*The Second Sex* 683). Women’s “total abdication”—or what I am terming self-disappearance—in the face of idolatrous love is expected, even normalized, behavior. Deferring to a male partner’s provision and neglecting one’s own ambitions is seen as a gendered way of slow self-extinction. Not only do some women

subordinate themselves to lovers and husbands but also to their sons (or other male family figures). Martínez deconstructs internalized patriarchal expectations of de-selfing that women assume in caretaking roles.

In *Mother Tongue*, as María retrieves her lost Chicana self-identity, she wades through an affective archaeological project. “Melancholia,” Julia Kristeva lucidly claims, “asserts itself in times of crisis; it is spoken of, establishes its archeology, generates its representations and its knowledges” (8). *Mother Tongue* does something unusual with trauma: it intersects a Central-American man’s wartime violence with a Chicana’s intimate aggression – domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse. “María recover[s] her voice” Martínez informs us “after reclaiming her memories of her affair with José Luis. It is really critical that she recovers her voice after all these years, and after finding out—through that process—how she had been silenced through abuse as a child” (Ikas 123). In an epiphanic moment, María confesses: “War is a god that feasts on body parts. It deforms everything it touches, even love. It got to me, too. It cut out my tongue” (161). María personifies war as a destructive deity deforming bodies and words.

Mother Tongue evidences how transnational state violence performed on the male body reenacts trauma in the domestic space, producing a rippling effect. According to Chicana scholar and Latina/o mental health expert Yvette Flores-Ortíz: “Many recent immigrants from Central America are suffering from war-related trauma; such experiences may predispose individuals to family violence” (177). It is the mere mention of the name “Ana,” a past lover José Luis had lost in war, which triggers domestic violence. Hesitating at this point in the narrative, María, in a rather startling gesture, romanticizes violence in describing, “A blow to the face is the color of blueberries . . .” (154). Likening bruises to blueberries—beautifying an ugly act—may even be read as eroticizing suffering. In a disoriented state, María desperately attempts to empathize with

her abuser by visualizing and replaying his psychological state: “*We found Ana’s body in the ravine near the airport. I saw what you did to her hands and her tongue. You hunted her down like an animal. We were going to get married. All we wanted was an ordinary life*” (160). María absorbs José Luis’s psychic ruptures, risking self-forgetting; she subsumes the war as a comforter and shock absorber of the soul. Paralyzed in bed—a quite vulnerable site for a nude woman—María bears his flagellations: “I opened my mouth to ask, who’s Ana? but nothing came out because José Luis’s hands turned into fists, one for each friend whose life had been torn like a page out of history (...) Because somehow I managed to leave my body, to float away from the basement bedroom and the hammer of fists on flesh” (160). Comparing Salvadoran deaths to torn pages of history underscores the violence of brutalized bodies and historical silencing. This poignant scene illustrates the long-term realities of surviving torture; or, to put it in Cynthia Enloe’s words: “wars don’t just end” (*The Morning After 2*). Most significantly, this scene reveals the intimate ways in which wars implode and poison interpersonal relationships.

Even though María experiences compounded bodily pain, her suffering strangely unifies with other social justice crusaders. Martínez’s testimonial novel reflects a commitment to social change among women’s circles. María’s friendship with Soledad illustrates transnational feminist networking between El Salvador and the U.S. At one point, the text describes Soledad as a motherist activist of sorts: “[h]aving no children of her own, she adopted El Salvador” (115). As María’s godmother and mentor, Soledad at times mirrors similar experiences much like a doppelganger and emphasizes the predominance of Chicana feminisms. For instance, she reveals that she too is a survivor of sexual abuse. Concerned about María’s susceptibility to depression, Soledad advises: “It’s the inner bruises I worry about most. . . . It’s not easy but you’re on your way. The worst thing is not remembering. That’s the devil’s tool. As I told you, it happened to

me too. I was about five. So you're not alone. I'm beginning to believe all those ladies who carry on about 'the patriarchy'" (169). Soledad illuminates the invisible wounds that rob memory. By confessing her experience too, Soledad conveys compassion, a *shared* suffering with María. She continues to warn María against depression's symptoms of withdrawal: "Life is a risky business but the alternative is to dig a hole and bury yourself. You may not know it, but I have my share of scars. And I would have them even if I had never come out of the house. Better to have scars from living than from hiding. So don't beat yourself up, miiijta, you've got enough bruises as it is" (*MT* 170). The dangers of "self-disappearance" are here described as burying yourself alive. Hiding has to do with shame. While life may be "risky business," Soledad advises that an occasional dare is worthwhile.

The narrative framing underscores the testimonial form in that multiple characters (María, Soledad, José Luis Jr., and José Luis) participate in and are yoked together through shared storytelling. This plurality of voices contests the unitary grand narrative of History. In her article "Acts of War," Kelli-Johnson notes that: "The structure that Martínez uses in telling María's story reflects not the fragmentation of the body but the fragmentation of memory" (217). Fragmentation in Martínez's text, in other words, is suggestive of María's embodied memories. Kelli-Johnson continues: "Martínez dismembers the text, simultaneously creating gaps in María's memory and a polyvocal, multi-genre novel, that emphasizes the importance of multiple voices and versions in the creation of collective memory" (217).

Tellingly, *Mother Tongue's* patchy narrative structure reflects the thematics of illness and wellness. On the one hand, its episodic nature resembles traumatic ruptures. On the other hand, journaling is a means of self-observing moods and thoughts: an important aspect of self-care. The stream-of-consciousness narrative technique inherent in this form of intimate self-writing

lends itself to uninhibited self-study. Through journaling, a depressive can detect episodic patterns: more specifically, assess their length, intensity, and intervals. Personal narratives of this kind can be proactive; they can help recognize and predict early signs and rhythms of (dys)function. “If there are triggers for breakdowns” Andrew Solomon observes, “there are also triggers for turning around” (74). Along those same lines, Martínez admits in the vignette “The Birth Day”: “Writing is no cure for mental illness, but keeping a journal was a way to step outside the violent whirlwind of my emotions so that I could watch. The observer in me—that is to say, my spirit—broke off from my manic-depressive mind, and it is to that observer that I owe my life” (30). Journaling, then, is a kind of narrative therapy that facilitates self-witnessing, as we explored in chapter 1. Arthur W. Frank argues that self-story restores health and claims that “Restitution stories can be told prospectively, retrospectively, and institutionally” (77). In *Mother Tongue*, María’s restitution narrative consists of revisiting her previous “chaotic stories”—her “language of survival” (Frank 96)—that were immediately recorded in journals to relate a different sequence of events – a larger narrative of personal and social recovery.

Interviewers and audience members in Q & A sessions have frequently inquired about the narrative structure of *Mother Tongue*. For instance, in *A Poet’s Truth* (2003), Bruce Allen Dick asks Martínez to confirm that she had conceptualized her novel as a “long poem in disguise,” to which she responds affirmatively. The interviewer elaborates: “At the same time, in *Mother Tongue*, you experiment with poetry, journal entries, letters, recipes, grocery lists, newspaper articles, prayers, and conventional narrative technique to help convey the story...And political fliers” (87). Martínez modestly confesses she was inexperienced in this regard; she had approached the writing process as piecing together “assembly blocks” and used Ana Castillo’s [*Mixquiahuala*] “letters” as a formatting model. “I was intrigued,” Martínez admits, “by

[Castillo] saying to the reader that you can read the books in a different order” (87). Because there is this amalgamation of factual and fictionalized remains of José Luis’s correspondence, press articles, and printed ephemera such as political fliers, *Mother Tongue* in many ways engages in an archival processing of Central American history and absorption of multiple genres. Re-membering her Central American lover and father of her child prompts María to reconsider the arrangement of her own personal life.

On a broader scale, Martínez’s novel reflects on the multivalent patterns of violence, trauma, and silencing. In so doing, it models what Kelli Lyon-Johnson calls “act[s] of narrative recovery” (207). In *A Poet’s Truth*, Martínez shares her insight on observing others, as well as herself, to survive an invisible inner war:

I’ve always been interested in what people do in response to trauma, how they deal with posttraumatic stress syndrome. The way I translated that metaphorically was to reflect on how we carry the conflict, the war, inside of us. You cross borders, and the war might be years behind you. But war is like a ticking bomb that can go off anytime. Just talking to refugees, I became profoundly aware of the human cost of war. Wars don’t end. Nobody wins. They go into remission at best. . . . We have to stop all wars in order for anyone to really heal. (86)

Wars “go[ing] into remission at best” correlates arm conflict with illness. According to Arthur Frank, a “remission society” refers to people who are “effectively well but c[an]not be considered cured” (8). In other words, once you’re in recovery from certain dis-eases, like depression, you’re always in recovery. This is of course not to say complete healing is not ever possible, for it surely is. What I am getting at is the frequent reporting of cyclical recurrence.⁸⁹

For Martínez, wars are perpetual. Such “[p]sychic unrest” (95), Gloria Anzaldúa informs us, can

⁸⁹ Treating depression is diverse and complex. Some treatments rely on pharmacology or therapy or some combination of the two.

originate from colonial violence. War ruins psychological borderlands by turning destruction inwards, affecting not only combatants but also those in close contact.

Letting go of her son, José Luis Jr, proves to be the final phase of María's transformation from self-sacrificial mother to a self-possessed woman. María writes:

My baby, my son, beloved stranger, disappearing into a new language and landscape, leaving me to look inside myself for the magic I love in you. I am forty years old. I have melted down sadness and joy into a single blade with which to carve out a life. And I am just beginning to discern the shape that was there all along, just beginning to become me. (*MT* 190)

José Luis Jr. inhabits the migratory margins as a mixed Latino: he is half Chicano and half Salvadoran. Claudia Milian asserts that “Latino is comprised as an unseen, internal hyphenation status” (147), yet, curiously, Central Americans have been considered to have “off-the-hyphen status” (150). Even so, “Central Americans have been parenthetically integrated into Chicano/a canon” (150). As a Latino hybrid, José Luis Jr. complicates notions of fragmentation further: he embodies the tangible fusion and rupture between a Chicana activist and a Salvadoran revolutionary. Moving from the margins—the liminal space between Chicanoness and Salvadoranness—to finding his center, José Luis Jr. acquires the Spanish language and visits his father's country of origin to embrace his Latinidad. His “disappearance” into a new language, Spanish, and landscape, El Salvador, inspires María to further “look inside [her]self.” Now, at forty, María has processed the vicissitudes of affect (“melted down sadness and joy into a single blade with which to carve out a life”). Language itself has transformed into a sharp tool to shape life's meaning.

The fact that María's son José Luis Jr. is the primary audience of this family history narrative attests to future-oriented hope. In other words, the past is recounted with posterity in mind. As the Mexican proverb says, “El pueblo que pierde su memoria pierde su destino / The

community that loses its memory loses its destiny.” Thus, the way we understand the past can greatly impact one’s future expectations. In *Border Women* (2002), Debra Castillo adds that: “And while the story is ostensibly for her son, the mother realizes that in recreating it for him, she is also curing herself of accumulated poisons” (186-87). Not only does María’s personal narrative become an archive for the next generation but also serves as a self-curative art. The focus on the stories left for one’s children demonstrates a recuperation of the depressive in that in illness one cannot think of the future, but here, the protagonist clearly constructs a coherent timeless memory.

While *Mother Tongue* certainly captures a specific moment in history—Chicana participation in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s—it still resonates with the present psychological side effects of war. Indeed, as María describes: “The war is still inside” (4). Yet, José Luis Jr. represents a generation of critical consciousness: social awareness. Towards the end of the novel, María recalls:

Before history happens—a land takeover, a nuclear waste accident, the death of another species—José Luis knows about it. His is a generation of psychics, not because they can peer into the future but because the sins of earlier generations have forced them to look deeply into the here and now and thereby alter fate. It is a frightful balancing act, attending to the moment in order to create the future. (MT 141)

“History happen[ing]” is equivalent to colonial catastrophes such as dispossession, environmental havoc, and human extinction. Yet the key to “alter[ing] fate” lies in the deep knowledge of understanding the “sins of earlier generations”; or, put differently, knowing the past is a gateway to changing the future. In sum, Martínez solves the despondency of colliding temporalities in stating that “it is a frightful balancing act,” this “attending to the moment in order to create the future.” On retrospective self-telling, Arthur Frank suggests that

The teller of chaos stories is, preeminently, the wounded storyteller, but those who are truly living the chaos cannot tell in words. To turn the chaos into a verbal story is to have some reflective grasp of it. The chaos that can be told in story is already taking place at a distance and is being reflected on retrospectively. For a person to gain such a reflective grasp of her own life, distance is a prerequisite. In telling the events of one's life, events are mediated by the telling. But in the lived chaos there is no mediation, only immediacy. The body is imprisoned in the frustrated needs of the moment. The person living the chaos story has no distance from her life and no reflective grasp on it. Lived chaos makes reflection, and consequently storytelling, impossible. (98)

María metamorphoses into a wounded healer through the process of storytelling. The initial narrative of chaotic past regains a “map and destination” (Frank 1), a sense of order in the course of storytelling.

María, through the passage of time, ultimately spins a narrative of wellness. She eventually breaks away from verbal paralysis to express surviving physical violence and sexual abuse performed on her body. Through narrative therapy, María traces her own self-definition, achieving lyricism, dignity, and personal freedom. Hence, *Mother Tongue* demonstrates how “the real healers [a]re seclusion and time” (Styron 69). Andrew Solomon also stresses the trite saying “time heals all wounds,” when he writes: “Rebuilding of the self in and after depression requires love, insight, work, and most of all, time” (19). María revisits her past to reappraise her nascent self-worth.

I have argued that Martínez's *Mother Tongue*, together with *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana*, makes three significant re-interventions in exposing taboos regarding law, history, and disability. In so doing, Martínez investigates the psychological implications of violence and restricted language yet counterbalances that by exploring potentialities of restoring voice and promoting holistic wellness. Analogizing “disappearances” and depression in no way suggests that they are of equal weight, or that they do not interconnect, but rather reveals the importance of reclamation. By reimagining the presence of the absent—herself included to a

certain degree—Martínez crafts cultural memories of Chicanas/os, Central Americans, and the U.S. The final chapter deepens our dialogue of “disappearances” by looking at Ana Castillo’s performative *testimonio* about a formerly “disappeared” Chicana nun in Guatemala and global torture abolition.

**“¿QUÉ LINDO HABLA LA INDIA!?”: NO BODIES AND QUEER SUBALTERNITIES IN
ANA CASTILLO’S PERFORMATIVE *TESTIMONIO***

Recomposing the disappeared, rather than documenting their destruction, is what matters.

—DIANA TAYLOR, *DISAPPEARING ACTS*

[D]isappearance is real only when it is apparitional.

—AVERY GORDON, *GHOSTLY MATTERS*

Rarely has the Latin American testimonial tradition and Chicana/o political theatre been studied together. I offer an intertextual reading of Ana Castillo’s 2005 play *Psst: I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor* and Sister Dianna Ortiz’s *testimonio The Blindfold’s Eye: My Journey From Torture to Truth* (2002) to suggest that Castillo bridges apparently discrete genres in the Americas to reinforce her activist agenda: ending torture. Originally from Chicago, the renowned Chicana writer Ana Castillo has created a corpus covering poetry, essays, short stories, novels, and plays. Some of her noteworthy works include: *Give it to Me* (2014), *Peel My Love Like an Onion* (1999), *My Father Was a Toltec* (1995), *The Massacre of the Dreamers* (1994), *So Far From God* (1993), *Sapogonia* (1990), and *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1988). This current chapter asks: How might the body itself function as a text of remembrance? What role does temporality play in articulating healing from traumatic events? To what extent does Castillo fictionalize Ortiz’s *testimonio* and why? How does Castillo use *testimonio* to critique present-day U.S. interventions beyond the American hemisphere?

Sister Dianna Ortiz's *testimonio* presents a harrowing account of surviving sexual assault during the Guatemalan civil war. On November 2, 1989, a U.S.-sponsored death squad in Guatemala abducted Ortiz from a convent while she was serving abroad as a missionary. During the next twenty-four hours, her captors led her to a clandestine prison where she was interrogated, gang-raped, and tortured. Ortiz miraculously escaped by jumping out of a Grey Suzuki jeep. Upon returning to the U.S., she attempted to file a legal report on the human rights atrocities she had experienced. Much to her dismay, however, she was re-traumatized through the retelling falling upon deaf ears: U.S. officials invalidated her words by first neglecting her case and then later dismissing it. A few investigators acknowledged that Ortiz had endured some kind of "horrific abuse," but many more openly held her account suspect, insinuating that her injuries were self-inflicted. What is more, a few officials "othered" her as a "hysterical lesbian nun."

Despite U.S. and Guatemalan repressive forces, Sister Dianna Ortiz has published her story more than once. In this way, she has demonstrated multiple modes of narrative resistance. Three years after the release of her memoir, Ortiz collaborated with the critically acclaimed Chicana writer Ana Castillo to dramatize her *testimonio* in two short plays called *Psst: I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor*. The first version is a One-Act, One-Woman play that was performed during the Latino Theatre Festival in summer 2003 at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago. The second adaptation is a play in two acts which was presented a year earlier, December 2002, in Mexico City. That Castillo had audiences in Chicago and Mexico City attests to a real and imagined transhemispheric readership and spectatorship. Through the compilation process of embedding Ortiz's true account within drama, Ana Castillo deliberately blurs history and literature, drawing our attention to the ways in which we ordinarily discern truth as we go about

filtering and distinguishing fact from fiction. Castillo's text begins with an epigraph that reads: "These plays are fictionalized accounts of a true story, truth often being the most illusive of realities" (vii). As with Demetria Martínez's opening disclaimer in *Mother Tongue* from the preceding chapter, Castillo's epigraph sets the context for grounding literature within occluded transhemispheric histories. Castillo's drama is indeed "trans" – which is to say, it traverses various borderlands of illusion/reality, the physical/psychic, Spanish/English, homo-/heterosexuality, female/male, and local/global contact zones. By challenging these preconceived dichotomies, Castillo's text calls into question arbitrary borders.

Like Gloria Anzaldúa's *autohistoria Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Castillo intermixes English with Spanish without translation. In doing so, she recreates the linguistic terrain that many U.S. Latinas/os experience. Anzaldúa observes that, "Chicana language is a mestizaje as well: it breaks down all dualisms" (8). The predominant use of English reflects the anglicized nature of Sister Dianna Ortiz, much like Demetria Martínez's character Mary, who actively learns Spanish in addition to the Guatemalan indigenous language k'anjobal while in Central America.

What is particularly unusual about Castillo's adaptation of the testimonial form is that no translation is initially required. For most *testimonios*, such as Rigoberta Menchú's, Esteban Montejo's, and so forth, an interlocutor is present to interpret and translate non-English language into English. Such mediation has raised concerns about power relations in the past. This is not the case, however, with Ortiz and Castillo. Instead both Chicana writers collaborate with each other without a discursive need, but a mutual desire. As such, Ortiz and Castillo solidarity-it-up, as it were, to spread awareness about a shared political cause. Additionally, Castillo frames Sister Dianna's *testimonio* using technologies that some performance studies scholars would

term “decolonial performativity.” Editors Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García of *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (2012) refer to this method, or “antics,” to mean “a micro/macro apparatus that allows scholars to self-consciously identify performance practices when these are deployed specifically to intervene in cruel social and psychic realities” (6). In other words, by deploying “decolonial performativity,” Castillo’s text acts creatively *and* critically.

Building upon the previous chapters of women’s testimonial historiographies as cultural memories and consciousness-raising tools, this closing chapter draws mostly from a trauma studies framework to outline the transformative process of adapting Ortiz’s “no body” memoir to performative *testimonio* with close attention to the textualities and materialities of tortured subjects. I suggest that Castillo bridges the Latin American *testimonio* form and Chicana/o political theatre to reinforce its radicalism with an eye towards abolishing torture practices worldwide; the consciousness-raising aspect of *testimonio*, when combined with performance, creates a critical space to politicize spectators. The compelling character The Friend, I argue, not only invokes the Rigoberta Menchú controversy but also functions as an allegorical figuration of queerness and subalternity. As a specter, The Friend problematizes language, materiality, sexuality, gender, race, and global status. By employing a distinctly Latin American genre, Castillo’s text situates itself as a transhemispheric critique and yet defies expectations of genre and geopolitics in considering U.S. militarism beyond the Americas.

SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS, SCHOOL OF THE ASSASSINS

From the very visuals on the book cover, Ana Castillo sets the stage for witnessing “spectacles of hegemonic terror,” foregrounding literature as a social project. A glimpse of a machete towards

the bottom edge of the front image suggests the threat of pain etched on the body. A multi-colored Guatemalan textile design and a hangman's noose foreshadow the transnationality of U.S. imperial violence, that is, U.S.-state-sponsored torture practices in Central America, primarily learned through the School of the Americas (SOA). The School of the Americas not only played a major role in U.S. empire-building but also facilitated the spread of state-sponsored terror and repression. Originally founded in 1946, the SOA has trained more than 60,000 soldiers and police, mostly from Latin America in counterinsurgency and combat-related skills, torture, murder, and political repression. This U.S.-supported schooling, of course, raises issues of accountability and legal redress for neocolonial war crimes. Patriarchal abuse has been most apparent through the brute force such as militaries, paramilitary death squads, militarized police forces, etc. U.S. military intervention has led to human rights atrocities and internationalized state-sponsored violence in the Americas, among other regions of the world. As Diana Taylor has shown in *Theatre of Crisis*, public executions are correlates of social spectacle. Sexualized violence in public spaces intensifies the shame and humiliation of those fortunate to survive.

The noose, from Castillo's cover art, registers the United States' dark histories of racialized violence—"gloomy festival[s] of punishment"⁹⁰—such as the lynching of African-Americans during the early twentieth century. As historian Clare Corbould has demonstrated in her study of African-American women playwrights and "lynching plays," "regimes of racialized violence" often included an additional level of suffering for women: rape.⁹¹ Drawing on marginalized women's narratives of sexual violence in the contexts of torture, Ana Castillo's text

⁹⁰ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.9.

⁹¹ See Clare Corbould, "Fighting Terror with Words: African American Women Playwrights, Lynching and Rape in the Jim Crow American South," in *Feminism and the Body: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*.

expands on domestic terrorism to consider the intersection of local and global human rights abuses.

Within the Guatemalan context, bodily harm such as death and disappearance reached staggering statistics during the civil war. For nearly four decades (1960-1996), Guatemalans “suffered from government terror without equal in the modern history of Latin America” (González 137). Deaths were estimated at 200,000 and disappearances at 50,000. According to Juan González, author of *Harvest of Empire*, “the tragedy of modern Guatemala owes its origins to U.S. foreign policy” with traceable roots “back to an almost-forgotten CIA-sponsored coup in 1954, which overthrew a democratically elected president” (135). Ortiz, at one point in her *testimonio*, mentions that her disappeared experience was, in fact, a daily occurrence during that time period. Directly addressing the role that race played during wartime violence, Ortiz comments, “Most of the violations were visited upon the Mayan population. Some 440 Mayan villages were wiped off the map” (350). Such Mayan mass murders prompt Ortiz to ask, “When will the truth be exhumed?” (350). Ortiz’s *testimonio* performs these very kinds of exhumations, highlighting historical consciousness. By collaborating with Ana Castillo, Ortiz, further presses this demand to unearth repressed truths.

In *Ghostly Matters*, sociologist and cultural studies critic Avery Gordon discusses the haunting of horrific history. The way in which Sister Dianna Ortiz writes about her invisibility vis á vis the U.S. after she returns from Guatemala is tantamount to writing what Gordon terms a “ghost story” (17), that is, a narrative of exclusion. In this way, Ortiz conjures those who were *desaparecidos* under the auspices of state-sponsored terror. Gordon elaborates upon the relationship between haunting and time:

[Y]ou cannot encounter this kind of disappearance as a grand historical fact, as a mass of data adding up to an event, marking itself in straight empty time, settling

the ground for a future cleansed of its spirit. In these matters, you can only experience a haunting, confirming in such an experience the nature of the thing itself: a disappearance is real only when it is apparitional. A disappearance is real only when its apparitional because the ghost or the apparition is the principal form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known to us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition. Haunting recognition is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening. (63)

For Gordon, one cannot confront this particular brand of political repression—“disappearance”—by merely placing facts in neat chronologies. Rather, there is an affective aspect, a “structure of feeling,” to grasping the meaning of these absences, a “[h]aunting recognition.” Gordon goes on to contextualize “disappearance” within a transhemispheric frame:

Illegal abduction by the police, military and paramilitary squads, detention in secret centers, torture, usually death and improper burial, and denial by the authorities—these are the horrifying characteristics of the organized system of repression known as disappearance. Disappearance is a widespread form of repression, used in many countries and in varied political situations. Although the term disappearance initially arose to describe political repression in Guatemala ‘after 1966, in Chile since late 1973, and in Argentina after 1976 . . . The practice itself . . . is probably not such a recent development’ (Amnesty International 1981: I). (72)

Gordon is right to point out that the term “disappearance” is a bit of a misnomer because prevalent forms of repression are subject to impunity through the obscuring of accountability. Similar to the way in which Gordon traces the term “disappearance” to Guatemala, Diana Taylor notes that “the term *desparecido* was used in the Latin American press for the first time in conjunction with U.S. counterinsurgency in Guatemala” (45). Ortiz’s *testimonio* of surviving torture, as with Argentine author Alicia Partnoy’s *The Little School*, calls attention to the unmaking of the body and efforts to repair it along with the mind and soul. Such personal narratives speak to broader historical moments of destruction and rebuilding.

The twentieth century saw the consolidation of U.S. international preeminence materialize in numerous military, economic and political interventions.⁹² Ortiz succinctly summarizes U.S. involvement in Guatemala in her *testimonio* that resonates with the previous descriptions of U.S. imperialism when she writes: “The U.S. government funded, trained, and equipped the Guatemalan death squads – my torturers themselves. The United States was the Guatemalan army’s partner in a covert war against a small opposition force [...] I am answerable for what my country has done and is doing and is likely to do, as the world’s only ‘superpower’” (x). The issue of geopolitics becomes all the more problematic by the fact that Ortiz is a U.S. citizen who is tortured by U.S.-funded death squads supervised by a mysterious North American “Alejandro.” Ortiz acknowledges that perhaps it was her U.S. citizenship that allowed her to survive. She points out that many others who were tortured did not have the same privileges of fleeing the war-torn Central American country and voicing their injustices before the White House. Nevertheless, with great “privilege,” Ortiz writes, comes “huge responsibility” (x).

Issues of sexual violence are often implicated in true tales specific to women’s “disappearances.” The haunting image of raped and mutilated bodies brings to mind femicides in Ciudad Juárez, along the U.S./Mexico border, as well as in Guatemala. Between 2001 and 2010, approximately 5,300 women were murdered in Guatemala alone. Tracing the aftermath of war, Jean Franco in *Cruel Modernity* (2013), claims that “the dirty wars turned the degradation of women into a routine occurrence” (224). Moreover, in their essay featured in Rosa Linda Fregoso’s edited collection *Terrorizing Women* (2010), Adriana Carmona López, Alma Gómez Caballero, and Lucha Castro Rodríguez argue that “Such cases of disappearance, femicide, scapegoating, and torture indicate a criminal justice system that is plagued with inconsistencies,

⁹² See Mabel Morana et al, *Coloniality at Large*.

impunity, apathy, and corruption... [T]his sexual violence is rooted in structural systems and laws that must be changed” (173). In other words, a flawed legal system functions as another lethal weapon used against women. In the words of Franco, “The brutality of war has been succeeded by a ‘peace’ that guarantees impunity” (225).

ORTIZ’S NO BODY NARRATIVE

Ortiz’s testimonial text could very well be understood as a “nobody” memoir⁹³ in more than one sense: it is life writing written by someone obscure *and* formerly “disappeared.” Thomas Couser, in his work *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (2009), traces the term “nobody memoir” to Lorraine Adams’ 2002 review-essay titled “Almost Famous: The Rise of the ‘Nobody Memoir’” featured in the *Washington Monthly*. For Adams, the difference between a “Somebody Memoir” and a “Nobody Memoir” hinges on the level of public recognition of the writer prior to publication. This classification of a memoir, in other words, depends on whether the author was known before its publication (e.g., Hillary Clinton’s *Living History*), or becomes known through its publication (e.g., Lucy Grealy’s *Autobiography of a Face*) (Couser 1). According to Couser, “Only in the last quarter of a century or so have memoirs by anonymous individuals with anomalous bodies been widely read and critically acclaimed” (3). On the peculiar anomaly of disappeared bodies, in particular, Diana Taylor comments: “Not representing real political violence and atrocity only contributes to its legitimization and perpetuation. Rather than whether we should attempt such an undertaking, the question is how to represent this violence, how to think and write about these bodies? What do these invisible bodies mean? Who determines that meaning?” (*Disappearing Acts* 147). Ortiz’s *testimonio*

⁹³ See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*.

grapples with some of these very issues through a nonlinear first-person rendering of a torture survivor and abolitionist.

From the outset, we get the sense that Ortiz's book is a *testimonio* from a feminist standpoint. For instance, Ortiz concludes her Acknowledgements by referring to God with a feminine pronoun "her" when she writes, "Lastly, I thank my GOD for always being there, even when I doubted her presence" (xii). From the very beginning, in other words, the text braces us for a feminist posture vis-à-vis institutional patriarchal structures such as the Catholic Church or the U.S. defense industry resembling the gendered rhetoric of Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz.⁹⁴ The title of Ortiz's memoir, *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey From Torture to Truth*, establishes the tropes of blindness and sight, darkness and light. The image of the blindfold, moreover, connects Ortiz's life story to other Southern Cone testimonial narratives involving torture such as Alicia Partnoy's short story collection *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986), Argentine Omar Rivabella's novel *Requiem for a Woman's Soul* (1986), and Chilean Ariel Dorfman's play (and later film adaptation) *Death and the Maiden* (1990). Towards the end of her Preface, Ortiz writes, "A black blindfold holds every wave length in the spectrum of light—holds it and keeps it pressed against the head, as if to say, *Don't forget. Even if you can't see the light, it's there*" (x). Put differently, Ortiz's personal story speaks truth to power in such a way that it is meant to console other survivors of violent suffering. Remembering, then, can be a comforting gesture, a way of telling certain readers "you are not alone." Here, light metaphorizes hope in contrast to the darkness of despair. Ortiz, at a later point, explains, "If by speaking I could help save one life, then I would speak. Lives were far more important than my pride" (277). Therapeutic writings can create curative spaces for the self and others scarred by similar wounds.

⁹⁴ Sor Juana was a renowned 17th-century Mexican Hieronymite nun, poet, and playwright. She is regarded as "the first great Latin American poet" according to contemporary Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, among many others.

Though full recovery may not be quite attainable for certainly “The damage torture does can never be undone” (Ortiz 476), trauma survivors have the possibility to revise self and social scripts of oppression through freedom of expression and communal sharing.

The opening of Ortiz’s *testimonio* signals a disability narrative with time jarringly out of joint, reflecting a wounded state of mind. Chapter 1, “The Dark,” opens *in medias res* with “The man with the Rambo T-shirt and the gun and grenade in his jacket grabs my arm. The dark cloth the men tied over my eyes after putting me in the car has left me blind” (3). As readers we plunge into the “dark” with Ortiz as she grapples to make sense of her disoriented state, her abduction. In chapter 2, “Coming Home,” we realize that Ortiz’s opening was really a flashback, in effect. “You’re home, now, Dianna” Sister Fran, her acquaintance and flight passenger alongside her says, “nudging [her] out of [her] daze. ‘You’re safe’” (9). But, it is precisely this loss of safety Ortiz experiences when she expresses: “I keep my eyes on the black shapes growing larger outside my window as the plane dips down for the descent. This could be Guatemala—the dark mountains and, below then, lights like swollen stars, constellations burning on the ground” (9). The descent of the plane and blurring of Guatemalan and U.S. landscapes exemplify the extreme senses of temporal and spatial displacements. Time and space are equally ruptured. Despite these visceral states of precarity that run throughout the text, at the *testimonio*’s end, we witness Ortiz’s resolve to live courageously, “fight back” by writing back, and educate the public on torture and its effects.

Ana Castillo’s performative *testimonio*, in a related way, captures this extreme loss of time and space. For example, in the One-Act play, the stage directions regarding the setting indicate that: “Sister Dianna addresses the audience from the nether space of the perpetual torture

chamber of her mind” (3). What is more, the play ends anachronistically with the beginning of Sister Dianna’s abduction from the convent garden:

(In this scene, Sister Dianna looks healthy. She is dressed in a “native” style dress and wears the shawl. She is in the garden. She peeks through the gate. Lots of church bells. The way of the Cross procession is going on outside the garden. She walks over to a bench, picks up a Bible, and begins to read. Suddenly she looks around as if she hears something, maybe in the bushes.) The disembodied voice of a man – the ambassador’s – speaks:
Psst . . . I have something to tell you, mi amor.” (16)

That Ortiz collapses “the Guate-man,” her literal tormentor, with the ambassador speaks to the sense of betrayal, loss of safety and trust, in the U.S. Although the play originally tells us the “Time” is “The Present (3),” by ending in the past, in a cyclical fashion, Castillo vividly portrays the destabilizing and damaging effects of torture. Security is but an illusion.

Like many life narratives dealing with survivorship, Sister Dianna’s *testimonio* addresses the interrelated nature of somatic and psychological pain. In Scene 1 of Act II, Sister Dianna Ortiz asks her perpetrator: “Did I deserve what you did to me, José? Did I deserve the . . .” The stage directions then describe: “(She folds her arms over her chest, she reaches for her back. She dares not say or remember what was done to her.)” (43). Sister Dianna’s elliptical questioning and body language signal speechlessness at the painful past left imprinted on her body. Her body transforms into a kind of text though it is neither an “empty parchment” nor one with fixed coding. It is an embodied memory displayed, at times, as a public narrative Ortiz would rather hide and keep private. The Friend encourages Ortiz to “show him the burns!” and asks José to count the cigarette burns left on Ortiz’s back. José pleads illiteracy. Ortiz answers for him by enumerating “One hundred and eleven” (44). Not only does Ortiz’s body function as an embodied past but also a source of criminal evidence, albeit discounted.

In a pivotal moment towards the end of the One-Act play, Ortiz describes an intensification of her torture involving the deployment of what Malini Johar Schueller calls “techno-dominance.” Security forces strip her naked and lower her into a pool-size pit. Ortiz vividly recounts:

Instead of water, it is filled with people, like purgatory, how I have imagined it! The souls of purgatory waving their arms in the air! The ones that are still alive or barely. Many are dead. We fall on them and the stench. . . .! And then something else, horrid to think of, scurrying everywhere, rats, eating, feasting! And above, the police and soldiers or who are they? Are laughing! And one says, “Smile, muchachas! We are videotaping all of this!” And I think, of course, that can’t be true but yes, there is one with a large camera. (14)

This infernal scene captures absolute abjection, that is, the waste of those half-alive, “many...dead,” and “rats.” This pit of “purgatory” signifies corporeal decomposition and burial. It reveals how punishment does not shift from the prisoner’s body and soul in the Foucauldian sense, but rather penetrates both. Here, technological surveillance magnifies spectatorship, enacting a terrorist strategy that intensifies dehumanization through political spectacle and shaming. One of Sister Dianna’s captors subsequently forces her to use a machete to murder a woman while filming it. The security forces then use this videotaped “evidence” to intimidate and torment Ortiz through the possibility of blackmail. Together these terrorist tactics—being buried alive, forced murder, videotaping, and silencing—mark the pinnacle of Sister Dianna’s abject terror.

These vicious enactments of torture bear a striking resemblance to the prison scandal at Abu Graib whereby military personnel forced captives to perform perverse sexual acts while infamously memorializing such deeds in photographs. In a 2005 interview, Margaret Montoya had asked Sister Dianna Ortiz if she had seen the Abu Ghraib photos and if so, what had been her reaction. Ortiz replied that she “could not even stand to look at those photographs (...) because

so many of the things in the photographs had also been done to me” (“Sister Dianna”). Her response reveals an uncanny pattern of torture methods taught by the U.S. that destroy the inner worlds of civilians across the globe from the Middle East to Latin America. “Techno-dominance,” in both geopolitical contexts, increases the severity of psychological abuse through spectatorship and the possible use of manipulating evidence to reverse criminalization.

The aftermath of torture produces a multiplicity of devastating consequences such as speechlessness, isolation, mistrust, psychic fragmentation, and loss of personal safety. In the words of Jean Franco, “Cruelty leaves long-lasting memory traces” (9). When it comes to violence against women such as torture and rape, these atrocious acts often do not get reported and, most catastrophically, produce irreparable damage. On how rape and torture interrelate, Ortiz explains, “Rape is a form of torture that is used by governments to punish women who may be viewed as a threat. In many instances women find themselves carrying the offspring of their torturers and like me they are forced to make a decision that haunts them for life” (463). Here trauma literalizes itself again on the body, most explicitly through an unwanted pregnancy, impacting somatic memory. In *“Foreign Bodies”: Trauma, Corporeality, and Textuality in Contemporary American Culture* (2006), Laura di Prete demonstrates that the body remembers that which the mind forgets. When a repressed memory has dwelt in the body and is ready to surface, a re-enactment of trauma often occurs, a Freudian “return of the repressed.” Trauma takes time to articulate, due to the belatedness of shock, as scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Elaine Scarry have pointed out. As aforementioned, Ortiz’s body documents destruction, particularly through the scars of one-hundred and eleven cigarette burns on the back, a bodily text that the authorities view as illegible proof of gender violence. By taking into account others’

feigned illiteracies or misreadings, Ortiz's *testimonio* adds nuance to notions of autosomatography.

In the chapter titled "Torn Secrets, Torn Skin" (315), Ortiz discusses other bodily maladies such as "loss of appetite, sleeping, paranoia, negative thinking, withdrawal, depression" (313). Ortiz's reparation of the body coincides with the slow process of rearticulating her pain. She describes the recovery process as conditions involving multiple layers: "My skin was as thin as an onion or a snake. The smallest things hurt me. I wanted to be able to shed the past, to leave it coiled behind me" (315). The body is indissolubly linked to language for Elaine Scarry argues that "the body is the locus of pain; [whereas] the voice is the locus of power" (51). Sister Dianna's *testimonio* reveals not only a scarred soma but also the emotional and social disfigurements that remain after torture.

The conscious recapitulation of a buried memory is likened to "a second wounding" and forms an essential aspect of Ortiz's reparation process. On her self-transformation, Ortiz poetically writes: "I still have the horrible past with me – I carry it in my memory and in my skin and I always will – but laid over it, like new skin over a wound, is a newer past, a past of caring and love" (475). Ortiz's language, as represented in flashback form, reflects the violent interruption of a peaceful, somewhat predictable, daily life. As we have seen, trauma distorts forms of speech and recollection. Ortiz's "true story," detailing the diabolical side of human nature, is ultimately a narrative of faith healing and hope. Paradoxically, through articulating her "no body" narrative, Sister Dianna Ortiz becomes "Somebody."

FROM THE BODY IN PAIN TO MOBILIZING AROUND MOURNING

As discussed throughout this project, *testimonio* is intimately interlinked with social justice. Similarly, Chicana/o drama has been associated with political movements. Combining both explicit strands of activist writings as a testimonial drama, then, takes radicalism to a whole other level. Indeed, Araceli Esparza notes that “Castillo’s decision to write about Sister Dianna’s disappearance is from the start a political act” (153). Ortiz’s choice to collaborate with Castillo to tell her story is likewise a political act. Performing *testimonio* enlivens its original message. Diana Taylor has observed that, “No doubt there is such a thing as crisis. And there are crisis theatres; theatre of the absurd, theatre of the Holocaust, and protest theatre owe their very existence to sociopolitical crisis” (*Theatre of Crisis* 221). Through the medium of political theatre, Castillo’s text informs the public about ongoing globalized human rights violations. Spreading awareness of torture practices and its roots to the U.S. sets the stage for further action as a transhemispheric cause, crossing the geopolitical boundaries of the U.S., Mexico, and Guatemala.⁹⁵ The peripatetic world of theatre, tellingly, parallels the migratory condition of those displaced by war.

Choosing drama as a literary genre in which to recast Ortiz’s story amplifies affect and prompts an immediate audience response. In *Xicana Codex*, Cherríe Moraga (also a Chicana playwright) tells us: “[T]heater requires the body to make testimony and requires other bodies to bear witness to it” (35). For Moraga, *testimonio* and theater are closely intertwined: central to both are bodies giving “testimony” and “bear[ing] witness.” French critic Jacque Raciére, in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), brilliantly distills the purpose of theater in positing that: “Drama

⁹⁵ If indeed the actual writing of a play can be considered the “blueprint” and the actual performance of it can be viewed as a cultural text, it is worth taking into account the U.S./Latin American transnational contexts of the Chicago and Mexico sites of performance. This geopolitical difference, of course, raises questions about translation - another form of mediation that could alter original meaning.

means action” (3). For Raciére, the stage sets up a possible transformative space where social change can occur from passive voyeurism to active participation, converting spectator to actor. Seen in this way, the theatre-going space is an optimal site for community formation. Indeed, Raciére asserts that, “‘theatre’ is an exemplary communal form” (5). Intellectual emancipation, for Raciére, entails shifting our viewpoint to impact behavior. Following the kind of ethos Raciére outlines, Castillo’s text models a didactic drama that displays and invites a collective process of political awareness.

Like other works of Chicana/o political theatre such as Luis Valdez’s Teatro Campesino or even *Zoot Suit* (1979), Castillo’s text depicts the failure of the U.S. legal system.⁹⁶ With *Zoot Suit*, in particular, theatre critic Jorge Huerta locates an “anti-Mexican sentiment that most historians have chosen to ignore” during the 1940s Sleepy Lagoon case, a sentiment that still lingers today and affects all who are, or resemble those, of Latin American descent living in the U.S. (*Chicano Theatre* 160). *Psst: I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor* works in line with this Chicana/o theatre tradition and especially with what Huerta calls a “docu-drama.” As Huerta has shown in *Necessary Theatre*, “docu-drama,” unlike the brevity of the former format the *acto*, or short skit, “present[s] rounder characters,” “in situations that expres[s] the people’s historical condition within a documentary framework” (210).⁹⁷ Castillo’s text concerns itself not only with uncovering the elided history of U.S. military intervention in Guatemala but also advocating for present-day anti-torture policies.

⁹⁶ El Teatro Campesino emerged in 1965 from Delano, California alongside the agricultural labor struggles and influential leader Cesar Chavez. For more background on this legendary San Juan Bautista-based theatre group and current show listings, see their webpage: <http://www.elteatrocampesino.com>.

⁹⁷ Notable *actos* include El Teatro Campesino’s *Los Vendidos* and *I Don’t Have to Show You Any Stinking Badges!* An important example of “docu-drama” is El Teatro de la Esperanza’s *Guadalupe*.

Ana Castillo's drama consists of a plurality of textualities, many mediums of meaning. For starters, like Demetria Martínez's poetic origins of *Mother Tongue, Psst* evolved from an earlier poem titled "Like the people of Guatemala, I too want to be free of these memories," which opens the play. This poetic preamble coincides with the literary tradition of *teatro poesía* which was a Chicana protest vein of theatrical writing. Araceli Esparza observes that, "Castillo wrote the poem in 1996, the same year that Sister Dianna held a six-week candlelight vigil outside the White House demanding, as Sister Dianna wrote in a letter to President Bill Clinton, the 'declassification of US documents pertaining to my case and all human rights violations in Guatemala'" (163). Castillo's play experiments with modes of life writing: producing a recycled copy of Ortiz's original text marks a move from self to other, from autobiography to biography. As Doris Sommer has put it: "Unlike the private and even lonely moment of autobiographical writing, testimonies are public events" ("No Secrets" 151). Ortiz's switch from memoir to performative *testimonio* reflects a shift from the private to the public, though it goes without saying that the publication of "the private and even lonely moment of autobiographical writing" renders that public too. In *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (2001), Marvin Carlson relates this element of recyclability to performance. Referencing another theatre critic, Eric Bentley, Carlson retraces the rudiments of drama: an actor (A) "impersonates" a "preexisting dramatic text" (that is "ghosted") (B) before an audience (C) (52). What is complicated about applying this theatrical formulation to Ana Castillo's case is that what we actually have *two* "ghosted" texts here: Castillo's recycled play and Ortiz's original *testimonio*. Such textual underpinnings implore intertextual investigation – one that I am presently taking to task.

Complementing “ghosted” textualities, the specter of the anonymous Guatemalan female friend in Castillo’s play, as with Gioconda Belli’s character Itzá in *The Inhabited Woman*, is a haunting presence of genocide. The fact that The Friend is a nameless Guatemalan further evokes anonymity perhaps so as a cipher for the countless “disappeared.” As anthropologist Victoria Sanford has shown in *Buried Secrets* (2004), a deficit of language relates to the recent Mayan genocide: silence maintains erasure while speaking out resists repression.⁹⁸ In fact, while I served as a human rights delegate in Guatemala this past August 2014, I found out that some current political officials continue to engage in a nationwide campaign of historical amnesia: the denial of Mayan genocide. In 2012, the former dictator responsible for the murderous indigenous removal during the Guatemalan civil war, General Efraín Ríos Montt, was formally charged and found guilty for genocide and crimes against humanity in the Guatemalan courts; however, a few days after the ruling, the case was overturned and has been set to resume in January 2015. Remembering historic memory, then, is clearly a profoundly political act.

Sanford makes evident how assailing one’s credibility (consider David Stoll’s attack of Rigoberta Menchú), in effect, silences and is tantamount to discursive violence. “If the intent of the repressor is to silence, then speaking out is a defiance, a small victory,” as Alicia Partnoy reminds us. At the heart of Sister Dianna’s testimonial drama we have the quest for articulating pain and the inversion of privatized grief to public mourning. Ana Castillo reaffirms Sister Dianna’s experience in ways that male authorities did not do so. In this way, Castillo gives her another forum to verbalize her counter-narrative to the official story, a record that claims there was no shred of evidence that anything ever happened.

⁹⁸ Sanford’s study focuses on the effects of “La Violencia,” a period of extreme state terror during the late 1970s to 1980s based on four-hundred *testimonios* of survivors.

If pain and oppression produce a silencing effect as the legal-literary scholar Theresa Godwin Phelps suggests in *Shattering Voices*, the spoken word is a doubly resistant form of self-expression: textually and verbally. It follows, then, that articulation within a theatrical context is explicitly expressive, especially with regards to body language. In short, dramatic performance is arguably the most radical genre precisely because of its connective capacity. The space of theatre widens the possibility of community formation through the theatre-going experience itself, lending itself to a politicizing opportunity. This critical space has the potential to “politiciz[e] the spectators,” in Augusto Boal’s words. The intimacy of the space has the power to stir solidarity in guests even in tacit silence.

While listening, if by Castillo’s play, or reading, if by printed text, to Ortiz’s life story, the audience may perhaps feel captive. The colloquial phrase “Psst,” present in the title, is suggestive of secrets. Performance anticipates the confession of covert crimes. The irony of the phrase “Psst...I Have Something to Tell You, Mi Amor” – a haunting statement that slips from the ambassador and José – is that it contradicts “[t]he official report” that “nothing happened” (ix). Part of the function and purpose of Castillo’s testimonial play is to set straight the disavowal of truth and ultimately write wrongs. As Diana Taylor has shown, the space of theatre can serve as “a vehicle for social change, albeit the slow and difficult-to-measure change of educating an audience” (18). On an affective level, theatre can agitate the audience to action.

Castillo’s plays exemplify Sister Dianna Ortiz’s empowerment through language and community. Early on in the text, one of Sister Dianna Ortiz’s tormentors had threatened her with: “*No one will ever believe you*” (5), to discourage her from truth-telling. Despite what French philosopher Louis Althusser would call the “repressive state apparatus” in full effect, Sister

Dianna Ortiz publicly records her phantomatic memories of captivity, rape, and political torture, in memoir and drama, in direct opposition to the pull to keep silent.

CASTILLO'S QUEER SUBALTERNITIES

Ana Castillo takes liberties with Sister Dianna Ortiz's *testimonio* in a few key ways. First, Castillo troubles notions of subalternity by presenting an eloquent Guatemalan indigenous woman, The Friend. In so doing, Castillo evokes Gayatri Spivak's debate "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and the Rigoberta Menchú controversy.⁹⁹ Secondly, Castillo reinvents the subaltern speaking subject as a postcolonial queer figure.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Castillo puts a new spin to postcolonial feminist debates through the creation of an erudite 'Indian.'

As mentioned elsewhere, the term *testimonio* conveys interrelated religious-judicial valences. Put more precisely, "the word *testimonio* in Spanish carries the connotation of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense—*dar testimonio* means to testify, to bear truthful witness" (Beverley *Testimonio* 3). So, in a sense, *testimonio* signifies a "bearing witness" as in

⁹⁹ Various Latin American critics such as John Beverley have grappled with the definition of the critical term "subaltern" since it originated from a South Asian context but it basically means a subordinated state on the basis of multivalent power relations related to colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and so forth. "Subaltern" has been used in the past to denote "the defeated," "the oppressed," etc. As such, while I use this term in my analysis to allude to postcolonial debates, I am wary of perpetuating coloniality discursively and openly recognize a need for better critical language.

¹⁰⁰ The formulation of the term "subaltern" has been credited to Antonio Gramsci. Jose David Saldívar in his recent work *Trans-Americanity*, offers the following response to Mónica González García's interview that is useful in considering the evolution of this critical conversation and its manifold postcolonial contexts: "As far as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's and Amy Kaplan's works are concerned, all I can say is that I have found their deconstructive feminist readings on the 'archives' of the cultures of British and U.S. imperialism extremely important for my own work on the general question of the subaltern and U.S. Latino/a studies. I often teach their celebrated work in my graduate seminars on the cross-genealogical roots and routes of subaltern studies, from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* to a survey of the emergent schools of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group (founded by the brilliant historian Ranajit Guha and including Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Partha Chatterjee) and the equally monumental—but short-lived—Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (founded by the energetic and sharp Latinamericanist literary and cultural critics John Beverley, Ileana Rodríguez, and Jose Rabasa, and including Walter D. Mignolo, Alberto Moreiras, and Gabriela Nouzeilles). All of their work on the Global South, nepantla, and subalternity helped me think through a variety of core issues of power and race in my book" (193).

“giving testimony” to encountering God’s presence, for instance. In another sense, *testimonio* implies a legal component of “testifying,” as in relaying an eyewitness account for the purposes of compiling evidence in court proceedings. Perhaps because of these religious and juridical attached meanings, approaches to testimonial storytelling have been strictly bound to truth-telling.

Unsurprisingly, when the Ur-*testimonio* *I, Rigoberto Menchú* was published, the public scrutinized it for its truth claims. Yet while there was an unspoken understanding that Menchú would tell “truth,” Menchú later reflects, “In my book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, I said that there were secrets I would not divulge, and I kept some parts of our culture very secret. I still stick to that decision” (*Crossing Borders* 81-82).¹⁰¹ Here, Menchú displays herself as openly secretive, articulating the limits of storytelling and freedom of expression. Menchú then explains why she withholds certain parts of her story:

Many people have changed our history. Many people have written about us, theorized about us and analysed us. They study us over and over again. They have studied us for centuries. And many of them have even usurped our knowledge. I think it is humiliating when they use us as experiments for their research. I didn’t want to reveal any secrets, since some people might like to make fun of what we say, but I will tell just one. (81-82)

Menchú’s reservations, in other words, have to do, in part, with the resistance to cultural imperialism – namely, the commodification of culture through processes of knowledge production. Put another way, researchers, such as anthropologists and the like, may objectify their ‘live specimen,’ “usurp[ing]” native modes of understanding. Academic knowledge, as Beverley among others have noted, can have the effect of subalternizing.

¹⁰¹ In *Crossing Borders* (1998), Menchú’s sequel to *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) written fifteen years later, Menchú unravels a different personal narrative as an exile venturing into publication and global politics. At the time Menchú was living in Mexico from 1980-1988, she had “spent several of those years lobbying at the United Nations in Geneva and in different parts of the world, crossing every border except those into Guatemala” (51) due to various criminalizations the state had against her. It is also worth mentioning that another medium of Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonial narrative has been the 1983 film *When the Mountains Tremble*.

As postcolonial critics have shown, Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* may exemplify a speaking subaltern, but the fact that countless people were compelled to listen, for scholars like Spivak, no longer makes that so. In 1998, anthologist David Stoll spurred a hullabaloo over the accuracy of Menchú's real-life account. In brief, Stoll's infamous biography *Rigoberto Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* posited that most of Menchú's narrative was "mythic inflation," thus fraudulent, yet he conceded that "[t]here is no doubt about the most important points [in her story]: that a dictatorship massacred thousands of indigenous peasants, that the victims included half of Rigoberta's immediate family, that she fled to Mexico to save her life, and that she joined a revolutionary movement to liberate her country" (viii; quoted in Beverley *Subalternity and Representation* 73). For Beverley, the debate was not so much about "truth" as the threat of political mobilization. Beverley explains: "That issue – 'how outsiders were using Rigoberta's story to justify continuing a war at the expense of peasants who did not support it' (241) is the main problem for Stoll, rather than the inaccuracies or omissions themselves" (66). As Beverley has shown, Stoll's accusations sought to disqualify Menchú's credentials to tell history, enacting a resubalternization.¹⁰² For Beverley, the subaltern stands for a subordinated status within an asymmetrical power relationship. "Power," Beverley argues, "is related to representation: which representations have cognitive authority or can secure hegemony, which do not have authority or are not hegemonic" (*Subalternity and Representation* 1). Now that the subaltern had spoken, to put it in Spivak's terms, Stoll had endeavored to silence her by discrediting her, reinscribing subjugation. Although Stoll's attack undoubtedly raised suspicions about the testimonial form in general, it prompted telling theorizations about the nature of said

¹⁰² A Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, following the South Asian Collective of the 1980s, emerged during the 1990s. For more, see their signature volume *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (2001) edited by Ileana Rodríguez.

literature. Yet, it bears noting that “[t]he controversies surrounding [Rigoberta’s] name, including all the questions raised by David Stoll, cannot erase what she has accomplished” (Zimmerman 126), including winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

Contrary to the notion of the silent subaltern, The Friend, not only speaks but does so eloquently.¹⁰³ As an apparition, as noted, The Friend is ambiguous in that she is both the speaking subaltern and vanishing ‘Indian,’ a present participant and relic of the past. In the first version of the play, The Friend emphatically declares “At least I speak for myself” (13) which deliberately conjures postcolonial debates around subalternity and representation. This declaration however seems a bit ironic because her narrative has been mediated and reinvented. According to Esparza, “Notably, while The Friend speaks in plural for herself and Sister Dianna at the end of this passage she qualifies her story by stating that she is speaking for herself. In contrast, Sister Dianna makes a conscious decision to speak out for all victims and survivors of torture if she survives” (175). Esparza is right to point out the plurality of representation that Ortiz seems to embrace. I would claim that the same could be said of The Friend: as an apparition she speaks for the plural presence of the disappeared and departed. In short, I suggest that Ortiz and The Friend are each singular speakers who invite a deeper solidarity with particular people.

By alluding to the Rigoberta Menchú controversy and Spivakian notions of subalternity, Castillo advances decolonial feminisms. Araceli Esparza comments that, “The case of Rigoberta Menchú reminds readers that Sister Dianna is not the first *testimoniadora* whose authenticity and truthfulness have been questioned in order to minimize the political impact of their narrative and the narrative interventions made by nonwhite women” (157). When Esparza mentions Menchú in

¹⁰³ In Spivak’s famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” she answers her own query with a resounding “no.”

her analysis, she tends to draw elaborate connections to Ortiz, in this case the common encounters of delegitimizing adversaries; yet, Esparza usually glosses over affinities between Menchú and The Friend. What is at stake with such unsustained attention is the failure to understand how Castillo's drama reanimates the deceased to test our listening capacities. As the Latin Americanist scholar Jean Franco has shown, while the answer to "can the subaltern speak" is negative in a traditional sense, we must instead dare to inquire: "How can we learn to listen? remains radically open" (16).

Perhaps the best example of how Castillo critiques subalternity is through an argument The Friend has with José. In Act II, Scene I, Castillo writes:

THE FRIEND

Let's talk about the case, shall we?

JOSÉ

What case?

THE FRIEND

Which.

JOSÉ:

Ay, ¡Qué lindo habla la india! ¿Eh?

THE FRIEND:

One of the few advantages I have now. Or better put, among the many. Perfect speech, in any language you prefer. And you? Do you think because they suited you with boots and a weapon you were no longer a condemned Indian like the rest of us?

JOSÉ:

Of course not. I was born with this skin – the Mark of Cain or so the missionaries who went to my village said. But at least becoming a soldier put food in my children's mouths. It commanded respect.

THE FRIEND

(Gives a snort or something like it as a retort.) Respect. Here is your respect. *(She parts the back of her hair and shows him her skull. He grimaces and evidently forces himself to not look away. He is a soldier, after all. The friend resumes the topic.)* Of course you knew they would never believe her.

(*SISTER DIANNA seems to have returned. She gets up and begins to listening in on the dialogue.*)(41-42)

Here, José points out what he deems an anomaly: an articulate ‘Indian.’¹⁰⁴ His derisive remark, “Ay, ¡Qué lindo habla la india! ¿Eh?” conveys the stereotype of the quiet ‘Indian.’ Rigoberta Menchú gets at this very discrimination in her *testimonio* when she expresses, “Our experience in Guatemala has always been to be told: ‘Ah, poor Indians, they can’t speak’” (228). The Friend fires back by affirming that languages are indeed her strong suit. By casting The Friend in this fashion, Castillo ruptures the oppressive confines of language: the female Guatemalan character masters the English language in ways that complicate the binaries of subaltern/hegemonic and disrupt the global status quo. In this imaginative rendition, we have an educated and hyper-literate subaltern subject who verbally defends herself in ways that the masses of Guatemalans did not have realistic accessibility. As an apparition, The Friend perpetually torments José, the perpetrator, and constantly comforts the survivor, Sister Dianna. While The Friend certainly destabilizes the subaltern to a certain degree, her social circuit, is ultimately undermined by her murder, reflecting the tragic truth of Guatemalan femicides during armed conflict and present postwar context.

Subalternities (namely, race and class) are indeed strangely salient. *Psst* romanticizes indigeneity and does something peculiar with it: it indigenizes Central American representation. Central Americans are prominently portrayed as “global mestizas/os,” to borrow from Sonia Salvádar-Hull, yet, at times, depicted more specifically as ‘Indian.’ For the Chicana/o subject,

¹⁰⁴ Unlike The Friend’s mastery of language(s), Ortiz confesses a linguistic ineptitude. In the opening act, Ortiz confides that “Language” is not her “gift” and goes on to illustrate that deficit with a funny story: she had once told a bus driver in Guatemala that she had the hots for him instead of saying that she was hot. Her grammatical error, in other words, was based on a diphthong. Ortiz then adds, “Like I said, between shyness and language shortcomings words have never been my strongest suit for expressing myself” (5). Here Castillo engages in word play to shrewdly show erroneous slippages, losses in translation, between English and Spanish.

however, there isn't a movement *toward* the 'Indian' but rather *away* from it. By extension, Central Americans are viewed as darker indigenous subjects in contrast to Europeanized-Americanized Chicanas/os. Although Chicanas/os are racially mixed themselves, that is, mestizas/os too, Central Americans, in Castillo's text, are radically marked by race and class. Such representations puzzle and perplex me considering how Ana Castillo, in other works, glorifies indigeneity within a Mexican-American context, particularly through the use of "Xicana" instead of "Chicana" to signal a recuperation of the Aztec language Nahuatl.

Consider the character listing page of Castillo's play in two acts. There, characters are notably described in terms of race and age (and, occasionally, other identity markers): Sister Dianna Ortiz is "Hispana, around late thirties," José is "Ladino or indigenous male," and The Friend is "Ladina or indigenous female" (19). This line-up brings to focus how bodies are ethnicized, classed, gendered, and classified by age and occupation. I am not suggesting that Ortiz necessarily remains a "Hispana" throughout the play for I believe that the text may, in fact, be drawing attention to an implicitly politicized Chicana all along. My point is that the emphasis of mestizaje seems more attached to Central American representation. In stark contrast to the "Hispana" (Spanish for "Hispanic"), stressing European lineage, Central Americans (e.g., José, the Guatemalan prison-keeper and The Friend, the anonymous Guatemalan woman) are marked by interlinked, though not to be conflated, racial and class differences in much more complex ways that I will now begin to unpack.

Chicana/o cultural critics such as María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo have analyzed the trope of mestizaje (race mixing) and its conflation with nationality. In the key essay "Who's the Indian in Aztlan?," Saldaña-Portillo deconstructs "the biological metaphor of mestizaje, a metaphor that formally excludes the Indian subaltern" (403). As Saldaña-Portillo makes evident, there is a

“radical difference between Third World rural subaltern and First World marginal subject” (404). The subaltern/hegemonic formulations ask us to reflect upon global power relations. Moreover, it demands that we interrogate the ways in which representations of the subaltern are remembered and reconstructed; we must distinguish between “speaking about” and “speaking for.” For Beverley, “subaltern studies must return to the issue of class inequality and exploitation, because class is the form of subalternity that structures the others” (166).

To be sure, the majority of Guatemalans, especially those who migrate to the U.S., are indeed indigenous and impoverished. After all, over 65% of the Guatemalan populace is indigenous. Yet, that indigeneity is diverse for there are at least twenty-two ethnic groups in Guatemala. Thus, race is still vexed, as is the case for other Latin Americans and Chicanas/os. What is more, *mestizaje* sometimes involves the racial mixing of indigenous peoples with African ancestry (e.g., the Garifunas) or European colonial lineage; or; perhaps both. Although *Psst* does grant some fluidity in representing The Friend as a mestiza—either “indigenous or a Ladina, mixed,” I suggest it raises important issues of race and class. This particular ethnic slippage, indigenous or *ladina*, is significant for certainly race and class are interrelated but not always so. As an illustration, the second version of Castillo’s play conspicuously sets The Friend apart through her clothing, her class. The text presents her as, “either indigenous or Ladina, mixed, she wears a huipil and skirt and caites (huaraches) or is barefoot” (28). Even if The Friend may seem to easily flow between indigenous or *ladina*, she is still perceived as a ‘poor Indian.’ The Friend’s racial ambiguity boils down to her “caites” or bare feet indicating rural poverty in either case. Indigenous Guatemalans, by and large, are considered landless (or proletariat, to use Marxist terminology), whereas a great majority of *Ladinas/os* are regarded as land-owners (or bourgeois). A *ladino*, according to ethnographer Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, is

“Today, any Guatemalan – whatever his economic position – who rejects, either individually or through his cultural heritage, Indian values of Mayan origin. It also implies mixed blood” (249). A *ladina/o*, in other words, is someone of mixed race, who, in most cases, exhibits signs of internalized colonialism. At the same time there is a certain degree of idealized indigeneity, as it relates to Central Americans, the text addresses anti-indigeneity.

That The Friend and Jose are either Indian or *Ladina/o*, indicates a world of a difference in global status. Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio* offers a more nuanced explanation of these social hierarchies. Menchú makes evident that Guatemala tends to separate Indians and *ladinos* in demeaning ways:

Ladinos are mestizos, the children of Spaniards and Indians who speak Spanish. But they are in the minority. There is a larger percentage of Indians. Some say it is 60 per cent, other that it’s 80 per cent. We don’t know the exact number for a very good reason – there are Indians who wear Indian clothes and have forgotten their languages, so they are not considered Indians. And there are middle-class Indians who have abandoned their traditions. They aren’t considered Indians either. However, this *ladino* minority thinks its blood is superior, a higher quality, and they think of Indians as a sort of animal. That’s the mark of discrimination. The *ladinos* try to tear off this shell which imprisons them – being children of Indians and Spaniards. They want to be something different, they don’t want to be a mixture. They never mention this mixed blood now. At the same time, there are differences between *ladinos* too; between rich *ladinos*, and poor *ladinos*...But between these poor *ladinos* and Indians there is still that big barrier. No matter how bad their conditions are, they feel *ladino*, and being *ladino* is something important in itself: it’s not being an Indian. (167)

So, the indigenous or ‘Indians,’ then, represent the lowest status on the totem pole, yet, they, like the Quiché Indian Menchú, have challenged this social organization based on classism and internalized racism (and I would add classism: the preferential treatment based on skin color). Notwithstanding these racial and class distinctions, Menchú asserts that, “To bring change we had to unite, Indians and *ladinos*” (168). For Menchú, the more serious issue is the dismantling of the “divide and conquer” mindset that ultimately serves imperial interests in a global capitalist

world. For all of these sketched out reasons, Castillo's romantic depiction of Guatemalans warrants a closer examination of "the representational problems of indigenous subjectivity" (Arias *Taking Their Word* ix).

A significant revision Castillo makes to Ortiz's *testimonio*, in addition to exoticizing The Friend, is slightly eroticizing her as a queer character. In doing so, as seen with Gioconda Belli in chapter 2, Castillo calls into question heterosexist norms that are meant to depoliticize women activists.¹⁰⁵ In Ortiz's original *testimonio*, we get the sense that The Friend is indeed distinct since the book is dedicated to her memory. With the performative *testimonio*, Castillo takes liberties to slip in subtle homoerotic undertones. In this way, The Friend's apparitional presence speaks to another unspeakable subject. For instance, at the beginning of Scene 2 of Act I, the first conversation The Friend has with Sister Dianna Ortiz is over sleeping arrangements. The Friend inquires: "Madre Dianna. . . Do you want me to get into the bed with you? Would you be able to rest then? I've never slept in a bed. Is it soft? It looks soft – so soft as the clouds filled with rain-stars!" (29). The Friend suggests climbing into bed with Ortiz to assuage her fears, a bed she has never had the privilege of possessing. The subsequent stage directions tell us that "(SISTER DIANNA shrinks back away from THE FRIEND)" (29). That Ortiz recoils in response conveys distrust and aversion. Towards the end of Act I, Scene 2, right after the Friend and José exchange a hostile encounter, the text describes:

(THE FRIEND wraps her bloodied body around SISTER DIANNA. She begins to hum a lullaby.)

THE FRIEND

Roo, roo, roo, mi nina, roo, roo, roo, mi amor. Ya subio la luna. Ya bajo el sol.
(SISTER DIANNA lets herself be rocked while resuming that same blank, unfocused, wide-eyed stare in front of her.) (39)

¹⁰⁵ Breaking the taboo of same-sex relationships is not new for Castillo. See, for instance, her poem "What Only Lovers" featured in Trujillo's *Chicana Lesbians*, pp. 60-1. See also Castillo's latest book *Give it to Me* (2014).

Again, we see The Friend attempting to offer solace to Ortiz but this time Ortiz is slightly more receptive. What is unusual is how the text describes The Friend's materiality as a "bloodied body," underscoring the macabre and ghostly matter: she is emblematic of *La Muerte* (Death). In this instance, the two women display emotional and physical intimacy. More pointedly, in Act II, Scene 2, the stage directions state: "(*SISTER DIANNA stretches a hand out and in cavalier fashion helps THE FRIEND down from the bed. They caress each other.*)" (57). The "cavalier" gesture and "caress" suggest an overt lesbianesque bonding that is meant to enhance the solidarity between the two women and heighten the contempt towards the tormentor. Ultimately, *Psst* remakes The Friend as a subaltern subject with marked differences of language, materiality, sexuality, race, class, and gender.

Perhaps most effectively, *Psst* denounces the additional marginalization of women based on (homo)sexuality. Hence, the text confronts the U.S. government's attacks on Ortiz's sexuality and stigmatization as a "hysterical lesbian nun." In the past, the two labels that have most discredited women in political arenas have been "sluts" and "nuts." The double condemnation "hysterical lesbian" reverses criminalization and censorship by charging that the female plaintiff has stepped outside the cultural norms of sanity and sexuality. Such rationalization maintains impunity and serves hetero-patriarchal state interests. Hence, Sister Dianna's double condemnation delegitimizes her claims. Ortiz notes that the onus of exposing certain crimes often falls on the plaintiffs: "The legal system is experienced, not as an advocate for victims, but as an adversary" (151). Ortiz's narrative shows the failure of legal retribution and the retraumatization of formally seeking justice. Describing similar juridical storytelling, Guatemalan attorney Hilda Morales Trujillo, in her essay "Femicide and Sexual Violence in

Guatemala,” shows how a “re-victimization” of surviving subjects occurs when they “approach the justice system and confront its negligence, indifference, and irresponsibility” (134).

The psychoanalytically loaded term “hysterical,” of course, conjures notions of gendered madness related to hysteria, which according to Sigmund Freud and others was symptomatic of a “wandering womb,” or, put differently, a woman’s repressed sexuality. The fact that an attractive maiden has decided to take a public vow of celibacy for her profession as a nun, and is thereby asexual, disrupts hetero-patriarchal control of her body. Castillo’s text makes plain that even if homosexuality were to come into play, there should be a recognition and removal of the hetero-patriarchal denigration of a woman’s sexual agency. Interpreted this way, Castillo and Ortiz challenge hetero-patriarchal repressive tactics involved in sexual slandering as a way of preventing women from exercising political agency.

FROM HEMISPHERIC TO GLOBAL

As we have seen, Castillo’s cross-border collaborative project reconstructs personal history with a queer subaltern twist. It elucidates Chicana feminist Emma Pérez’s theory that, “There is no pure, authentic, original history. There are only stories – many stories” (xv). Implicit in the very nature of creating this play, Castillo and Ortiz affirm and expand the longstanding tradition of Chicanas involved in organized struggles of social justice. Women, in Ana Castillo’s drama, quite literally, move from the shadows to center stage.

As artists-activists, Castillo and Ortiz engage in a global movement to end torture. Ana Castillo enlarges Sister Dianna Ortiz’s original memoir-reading audience by dramatizing her testimony, inspiring theater-goers and readers alike to take action. Araceli Esparza comments that:

When Castillo was commissioned to write a play by the Goodman Theatre's 2003 Latino Theatre Festival she opted to retell Sister Dianna's story. By converting the poem into a play, Castillo sought to constitute a broader audience for Sister Dianna's story in order to make people conscious of past and present US torture practices and to inspire people to action. Castillo's consideration of the differences in consumption and dissemination of poetry and drama underscore the diverse political capacities different genres follow. (193-94)

The counter-narrative of U.S. imperialism in Guatemala works in tandem with the reconstruction of Sister Dianna Ortiz's "story," and, as aforementioned, is not only presented across multiple genres but is also intended for wider audiences. Sister Dianna Ortiz not only advocates for herself as a formerly "disappeared" survivor, but also vindicates for the rights of countless worldwide silent survivors of human rights abuses. Moreover, the fact that Sister Dianna Ortiz establishes the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC) places her collaborative work with Castillo on a global plane. While the plays themselves do not explicitly name the official international coalition for torture abolition within the text, they still operate with that mission in mind: to spread the word about abolishing torture, regardless of geopolitical location. Even though Sister Dianna's "story" was not written in the critical moment of crisis and urgent action, it still elicits a political response. The issue of torture, particularly the increased femicides in Guatemala, is neither mute nor moot.

Sister Dianna Ortiz's "story," like the other women's narratives in this study, counters the silencing of women from dominant discourse. Ann Cvetkovich insists that, "Because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all" (7). Writing a *testimonio* creates a counter-archive of cultural memories. Sister Dianna Ortiz challenges her own discursive "disappearance" as a torture survivor through the process of recording and remembering.

Contemporary narratives of U.S. interventions and re-interventions continue to be relevant. Indeed, at the time of this writing, the U.S. has been in a perpetual War on Terror. Recently, President Obama has increased militarism in Syria and Iraq to combat the violent extremism of Islamic State militants. “Now under the presidency of Barack Obama,” historian Keith Camacho comments, “the United States continues its war on terror in ways that violate the rights of peoples to due process, free speech, and privacy” (685). Along similar lines, anthropologist Gustavo Lins Ribeiro comments that, “After 9/11, imperialism has resurged in Afghanistan and Iraq, a fact that shows, once again, that history does not move in a straight line and that the conservative military-industrial complex has known very well how to maintain its power and take advantage of certain political opportunities in the United States” (288). Since 9/11, stigmatized refugees continue to be racially profiled as “terrorists.” Camacho elaborates:

The U.S. racial profiling and detaining of immigrants along the U.S.-Canada and U.S. Mexico borders reflects these extralegal measures of surveillance and warfare. Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians have been especially marked as ‘target communities’ in the continental United States, a process that has occluded the historical circumstances of their oppression in ways that have likewise overshadowed the experiences of racism shared by these and related groups. (685)

This arbitrary branding of “target communities” seems to recycle the Cold War threat of “communist.” The War on Terror and the Cold War have much in common, particularly the “occluded” “historical circumstances” of “oppression” and the protection of U.S. corporate interests—from free trade involving agriculture to oil—at the cost of human rights and often human lives. In recent years, there has been a worldwide proliferation of U.S. military bases in sites such as Puerto Rico, Bulgaria, Spain, Guantanamo Bay, Kosovo, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Kuwait, and Greenland. U.S. expansive militarism is an extension of empire as feminist critics such as Cynthia Enloe and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have shown in their works

Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link (2007) and *Feminism and War: Confronting U.S. Imperialism* (2008), respectively.

By contrast, John Beverley holds the view that “After 9/11, [U.S.] hegemony began to fade” (*Latinamericanism* 6). Although it may be true that U.S. military supremacy in Latin America has diminished since aggression has been more focused in the Middle East, I maintain that legacies of U.S. interventions are palpable through global capitalism (e.g., policies such as NAFTA and CAFTA), cultural imperialism, intellectual colonialism, and, not to mention, increased militarization at the border yet impunity for femicides. Indeed, scholars such as Jean Franco and Ariana Vigil have argued that U.S. influence continues to primarily operate as a “hard power.”¹⁰⁶ Historian Greg Grandin’s distinction between “hard power” and “soft power” is useful here. He views the former as military might and the latter as domination through non-military means. For Grandin, U.S. influence in Latin America during the twenty-first century manifests itself as “soft power” – which is to say, “the spread of America’s authority through nonmilitary means, through commerce, cultural exchange, and multilateral cooperation” (*Empire’s Workshop* 3).

Castillo’s testimonial drama moves beyond the hemispheric to the global by drawing connections between U.S. militarism in Central America during the Cold War to contemporary U.S. interventions in the Middle East; thus, Castillo adumbrates a relevant living history. In the preface to Castillo’s text, Ortiz reflects on this recent history of torture and reveals to us that the United States is one of the 150 governments in the world that inflicts such inhumanity. Ortiz muses, “Today’s audiences, perhaps, might by far less shocked than those of earlier times, given the recent revelations of U.S. activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo and elsewhere” (xvii).

¹⁰⁶ For current connections to U.S. militarism and the War on Drugs, particularly in México and Columbia, see Franco’s *Cruel Modernity* (2013) and Vigil’s *War Echoes* (2014).

Although Castillo specifically situates the text in Guatemala, she states early on that “The specific country accused of violating human rights here is not the most important issue” (3). Such flexible geopolitical space brings to mind the metaphorical country set in either Central or South America in Castillo’s other text, *Sapogonia* (1990), which also thematizes U.S. intervention in Latin America.¹⁰⁷ By creating an ambiguous setting, such transhemispheric literary texts call into question U.S. foreign policies that result in alliances with repressive military regimes that perpetuate war, poverty, and trauma. Not surprisingly, U.S. foreign relations implicate U.S. citizens at home and abroad. Increasing awareness of power relationships in the Americas as evidenced in the politics of remembering and forgetting—listening for songs or silences—draws us nearer to imagining greater decolonial possibilities.

¹⁰⁷ The translocality of a country set in the Americas, as noted with Gioconda Belli’s fictional setting Faguas, also echoes Ariel Dorfman’s political play published the same year *Death and the Maiden* (1990) wherein the cast and setting page states: “The time is the present and the place, a country that is probably Chile, but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship.”

AFTERWORD

TESTIMONIAL AFTERLIVES

While we may no longer debate whether or not Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* should be required reading in universities as we did in the 1980s, we still see vestiges of censoring ethnic literatures and histories.¹⁰⁸ Arizona's recent ban on ethnic studies is a case in point. In 2012, Arizona law removed ethnic and cultural studies courses, particularly the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson. Books like Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* (1984); Ana Castillo's *So Far From God* (1993), Junot Diaz's *Drown* (1996) and even William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623) could no longer be studied in the classroom. They were outlawed.

It can be seen then, that, the real threat to structural regimes, such as Arizona's educational institutions, is the methodology of critical consciousness, that is, the unmasking of multiple forms of oppression. Awareness of global inequalities catalyzes the challenging of the status quo. What is perhaps most subversive about this alternative way of seeing things as they really are is not the alleged divisiveness, sedition, or "Anti-Americaness," as opponents have argued, but rather how it prompts new modes of relating and engaging in the world. As Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire has shown, true understanding is simultaneously reflective and dynamic:

¹⁰⁸ In 1988, Stanford University included *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in their curriculum much to the chagrin of certain conservative critics such as Dinesh D'Souza. In brief, D'Souza claimed that Menchú was a "Marxist terrorist," among other things, who did not create a great work of art, but rather produced leftist propaganda. A few years later, in 1991, D'Souza complained that Menchú had morphed into "a fetish object onto which 'minority students' could affirm their 'victim status' and professors could project their 'Marxist and feminist views into South American Indian culture' (Grandin "It was Heaven").

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (53). What is more, Freire teaches us that while there may be an affect of oppression, there also exists an affect of hope.

Suppressing processes of critical inquiry and free speech, curiously, not only makes the material itself of greater import, but also makes the conversations around it revelatory. More specifically, intersections between race and class, among other social axes, come to the fore. In the words of Sherman Alexie:

Let’s get one thing out of the way: Mexican immigration is an oxymoron. Mexicans are indigenous. So, in a strange way, I’m pleased that the racist folks of Arizona have officially declared, in banning me alongside Urrea, Baca, and Castillo, that their anti-immigration laws are also anti-Indian. I’m also strangely pleased that the folks of Arizona have officially announced their fear of an educated underclass. You give those brown kids some books about brown folks and what happens? Those brown kids change the world. In the effort to vanish our books, Arizona has actually given them enormous power. Arizona has made our books sacred documents now. (*The Progressive*)

Alexie here points out that the denigrating prohibition of such literary texts paradoxically elevates them to “sacred documents.”¹⁰⁹ He is also right in rectifying the ignorance of failing to recognize Chicanas and Chicanos as indigenous.

Canonical debates in Arizona and the former controversies around Rigoberta Menchú make increasingly plain the need to render visible the invisible struggles of discourse itself. Put differently, where there is silencing, there is an even greater demand to understand why. These sites of struggle raise broader questions about the nature of History and the role that Literature plays in producing counter-narratives with imaginative license or otherwise.

¹⁰⁹ In fact, book-banning practices in the Americas date as far back as to Bishop Diego de Landa’s burning of Mayan Codices in 1562. Book removals signify discursive violence, historical disavowal, erasure of collective memory.

History is fundamentally discursive. More to the point, history is often interlinked with colonial enterprise. The way that history is told, that is, historiography, frequently involves the unfolding of a “master narrative” that privileges the voice of the “victor” and, in so doing, silences the “vanquished.”¹¹⁰ Viewing history in this light makes evident the colonial, and often patriarchal, perspectives that have by and large influenced most of the “stories” we have come to know. Biases, in other words, contribute to a subjective rendering of History even if veiled as objectivity. Consequently, the majority of U.S. historical narratives, and the same might be said of literary discourse, has the effect of reinforcing white hegemony and what Edward Said calls “cultural imperialism.” As Said elegantly articulates, “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (xiii).

As this study has shown, gender plays a critical role in the ways in which history gets (re)told. Women’s testimonial narratives critique first of all that there isn’t a singular History, but rather a pluralization of the past. As the historian Hayden White has memorably put it: “All stories are fictions” (Doran xiii). In a parallel fashion, John Beverley opens his work *Testimonio: The Politics of Truth* (2004) with an epigraph that reads: “There is no history, there are only historians.”¹¹⁰ Secondly, the unmistakable pun imbedded within the term *history*, reveals an implicit masculinist vantage point, a preference for *his story*. This is particularly the case with the Ur-masculine narrative: war. Phallogentric discourse of this kind obscures women’s wartime experiences, especially the lives of U.S. women of color and, not to mention, women from the global South. As Emma Pérez has demonstrated, women have resisted their historical erasure by

¹¹⁰ John Beverley credits Peter Greenway for this quotation.

writing themselves into existence. In short, women have written back and produced counter-hegemonic narratives that require a closer examination of their buried histories.

A missing history is an untold “story.” As the postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabba has pointed out in *The Location of Culture*, to be dehistoricized is to be depoliticized. So too has Michel Foucault demonstrated that storytelling, whether historical or literary, is a discourse of power. The next passage for the historically excluded, after coming to consciousness, is to fill in the gap by telling their story.

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