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PRESENTACIÓN DEL NÚMERO ESPECIAL

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REFLEXIONES SOBRE UNA CENTROAMÉRICA DE CONFLICTOS A POSTCRISIS

Centroamérica tiene ricas y variadas tradiciones culturales que contrastan con una historia reciente convulsionada por los conflictos internos y el neocolonialismo. Compenetrarse con las culturas centroamericanas es encontrarse con una compleja variedad de herencias étnicas e idiosincrasias particulares. Obsérvese, por ejemplo, el compartido mestizaje producto de la confluencia de sangres indígena, europea y africana —de más legado indígena en el norte con un enclave de tradición británica, de gran influencia colonial y afrocaribeña a lo largo del istmo y un atavismo más europeo hacia el sur. Su gastronomía también es testimonio de esta diversidad: veamos por ejemplo la exquisitez culinaria del arroz con frijoles o casamiento o gallopinto o rice and beans; mismo plato, diferentes nombres y sazones según el área y la influencia. Asimismo, internarse en los anales históricos de esta región permite descubrir una línea temporal que en lugar de una cronología se asemeja más a un electrocardiograma, con intervalos altos y bajos, en especial en los últimos cincuenta años, en los que la región ha experimentado tanto cambios en su geografía como también permutas mucho más drásticas en su historia.

Durante el siglo XX, a los originales cinco países que por legado colonial e histórico conformaban espacialmente la región —Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y Nicaragua—, se añadieron dos nuevas naciones. Es cierto que Panamá, a pesar de haberse independizado de Colombia en 1903 con ayuda militar estadounidense por el deseo de construir el canal, permaneció aislado regionalmente por intereses neocoloniales. No fue sino hasta los años 90 cuando se verifica la integración total de Panamá, especialmente en el sector económico —como miembro fundador del Sistema de Integración Centroamericana. Por otro lado, literal y geográficamente, a principios de los años 80 vimos el surgimiento de Belice como una nueva nación cuyo yugo colonial respondía a los intereses británicos por tener una presencia en la región. Guatemala siempre reclamó el territorio beliceño como propio, pero aceptó la independencia de Belice en 1992. Este conflicto fronterizo sigue vigente y se encuentra ventilándose en cortes de derecho internacional, al igual que otras disputas limítrofes en otras fronteras centroamericanas.

La historia de Centroamérica también ha estado marcada por numerosos conflictos de corte económico, político, social y de soberanía nacional. Especial atención merecen los enfrentamientos armados internos en El Salvador, Guatemala y Nicaragua durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX —más específicamente en el periodo de 1970 a 1995, conocido como la crisis centroamericana— y la invasión estadounidense a Panamá en 1989. La presencia y las intromisiones de intereses neocoloniales de los Estados Unidos desde principios del siglo fueron las causas que llevaron a la región a una crisis que se exacerbó en los años ochenta, época que constituyó lo que he llegado a llamar la *década álgida*; término discutido ampliamente con mi colega Manuel A. Ramírez. Es de esperarse que, dentro de un territorio tan pequeño donde coexisten siete naciones independientes, los conflictos de unas afecten a las otras. Además de agravarse las luchas armadas de los países mencionados, se debe entender que, durante el decenio de 1980, inmiscuidos en las luchas nicaragüenses entre sandinistas y contras estaban Honduras y Costa Rica. Este último país estaba a favor de la autonomía política nicaragüense mientras que el otro mostraba su apoyo por los contras. Por su parte, Belice, que estaba lidiando con su establecimiento como nueva nación, también recibió olas de refugiados de los países aledaños. Panamá, que se encontraba bajo una dictadura, se vio afectado en su economía y sus finanzas por los problemas comerciales centroamericanos y, por esa razón, promovió los procesos regionales de paz que iniciaron con reuniones en territorio panameño.

La *década álgida* terminó con la invasión estadounidense a Panamá para deponer al dictador con el pretexto principal, entre muchos otros, de proteger el canal. El último decenio del siglo XX vería el desenlace de

los grandes conflictos armados en la región y una transición hacia un estado de paz relativa. Los sandinistas perderían el control de Nicaragua en las votaciones de 1990, terminándose también la guerra interna con los contras. El gobierno y la unificación guerrillera en El Salvador llegarían a los acuerdos de paz de 1992 y firmarían una supeditada ley de reconciliación nacional para poner fin a una guerra civil que se quedó en impasse. En Guatemala, las facciones guerrilleras unidas firmarían la paz “firme y duradera” con el gobierno de turno en 1996, con lo cual se puso fin a un conflicto armado de 36 años. Ese periodo transitorio vio a los otrora grupos guerrilleros convertirse en partidos políticos, encaminó a estos países en una labor dirigida a poner en marcha lo acordado y, en el camino, dejó impunes muchos crímenes de lesa humanidad ocurridos durante estos conflictos. El cambio de siglo encontró a las siete naciones de la América Central sintiendo el rigor del neoliberalismo en sus economías y sociedades.

Dentro de ese contexto histórico presentado a grandes rasgos, los mencionados conflictos armados internos no solo han caracterizado históricamente al Istmo centroamericano sino que también lo han hecho con sus producciones culturales, como la literatura y la historia literaria. De ahí que, como ocurre en varias publicaciones sobre estos temas, se hable de una literatura regional de conflicto, generalmente enmarcada durante los años setenta, ochenta y noventa, y una literatura de postconflicto en esa última década y en el nuevo milenio. Esto ocurre aun cuando se estudian producciones culturales de aquellos países en los que no hubo tales beligerancias, como en los casos de Belice, Costa Rica, Honduras y Panamá.¹ Como los estudiosos centroamericanos hemos insistido tanto en esta periodización sin distinguir entre naciones, otros académicos no versados en la materia han sido llevados a pensar equivocadamente que ocurrió una guerra extendida a lo largo de toda la región. He aquí el doble mensaje que se desea dar desde el título de esta introducción: 1) Quizás deberíamos llamar literaturas de conflicto/postconflicto a aquellas que pertenecen a los países que sí tuvieron un conflicto interno armado hacia finales del siglo XX, y 2) cuando nos refiramos a un corpus que abarque naciones con o sin pugnas internas recientes e incluso a todas las literaturas del istmo, tal vez también podríamos empezar a llamarlas en conjunto literaturas de crisis y postcrisis, para así diferenciarlas de aquellas de conflicto/postconflicto.

A treinta años de la última firma de la paz en Centroamérica, con este mensaje se desea dar una primera mirada a ese cambio de paradigma que consideramos no solo más apropiado, sino también más exacto cuando hablamos sobre la región desde cualquier perspectiva, especialmente en nuestro campo de los estudios artísticos, culturales y literarios. Este número especial de *Ciberletras* sobre la América Central intenta ver la historia de conflictos y postcrisis a través de cinco artículos sobre producciones culturales de intelectuales de El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua y Panamá. Aunque el deseo era incluir a todos los países del istmo, esto no fue posible por diversas razones que obstaculizaron y alargaron el proceso de producción de esta colección de artículos. A pesar de esas dificultades y gracias a la ayuda de muchas personas, hemos logrado llegar a este punto final.

Presentamos a continuación una corta versión de los resúmenes de los artículos incluidos en este número especial sobre Centroamérica a manera de guía de lectura. El orden en el que se presentan los artículos es cronológico según las fechas de publicación de las producciones culturales que cada uno estudia y no refleja el orden alfabético en el que está organizado el número especial. En el artículo “Sacred Cells, Divine Forces and the Sandinista Revolution in Ernesto Cardenal’s *Cántico cósmico*”, Adriana Kolijn estudia el poema épico escrito por el sacerdote nicaragüense y publicado en 1989. Kolijn indica que el cántico, inspirado en las ideas del fraile jesuita Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, utiliza una amplia gama de discursos (científico, histórico,

1. Véanse, por ejemplo, *Estética del cinismo: Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra* (2010) de Beatriz Cortez; *Pot-Conflict Central American Literature. Searching for Home and Longing to Belong* (2014) de Yvette Aparicio; *Literatura y compromiso político: Prácticas político-culturales y estéticas de la revolución* (2018) Tomo IV de *Hacia una Historia de las Literaturas Centroamericanas* editado por Héctor M. Leyva, Werner Mackenbach y Claudia Ferman; y *Specters of War: The Battle of Mourning in Postconflict Central America* (2025) de Ignacio Sarmiento.

teológico) para describir desde el Big Bang hasta la evolución de la humanidad y celebrar el triunfo de la Revolución sandinista que se enlaza con el proceso evolutivo de un universo en constante expansión. Kolijn plantea que la poesía de Cardenal está inundada de una ecología espiritual que considera lo divino como una fuerza presente en todos los niveles de la existencia y nos implora a reconsiderar nuestro lugar en el planeta. Este estudio encaja de lleno en la literatura de conflicto en Nicaragua puesto que, a pesar del éxito revolucionario y todo lo que el mismo conllevó, el país tuvo que repeler a lo largo de la década álgida a las fuerzas de la contrarrevolución (los contras) que, con el aval y financiamiento estadounidense, tenían como objetivo el derrocamiento del gobierno del Frente Sandinista.

El siguiente artículo también se inserta en la literatura de conflicto y transición en El Salvador, donde en los años 80 ocurrió una larga y sangrienta guerra civil que enfrentó al gobierno y sus fuerzas armadas contra el frente unido guerrillero Farabundo Martí. Manuel Ramírez, en “De la guerra a la paz en El Salvador: Dos cuentos del conflicto armado y dos cuentos de transición de Rafael Francisco Góchez Fernández”, muestra la representación de dos momentos históricos —el periodo de guerra interna (1980-1992) y la firma de la paz (1992)— en la cuentística del escritor salvadoreño. Ramírez analiza en los cuentos de guerra la representación de la violencia generada por el aparato armado del Estado y la forma en que se le aplicaba a la población civil durante el conflicto. Luego aborda los cuentos de postguerra para examinar la manera en que ve reflejada la preocupación, tanto individual como colectiva, sobre qué se debía hacer con el pasado reciente cuando El Salvador pasaba de la guerra a la paz.

Upasana Thakkar, en “Parody and Testimonio in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *Insensatez* and *El Asco*”, estudia dos novelas de los postconflictos salvadoreño y guatemalteco. Thakkar analiza *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en El Salvador* (1997), novela de cinismo durante la transición salvadoreña, e *Insensatez* (2004), sobre los maltratos a las poblaciones indígenas en Guatemala durante el conflicto armado. Ambas novelas se observan como parodias posmodernas del testimonio clásico, género literario que surgió en las décadas de los años setenta y ochenta para reflexionar sobre la lucha del pueblo por sus derechos. Thakkar afirma que, a pesar de pensarse como género agotado, el testimonio como forma de leer literatura muestra dejes de su presencia en las ficciones contemporáneas centroamericanas que parodian el testimonio al utilizar y subvertir los aspectos clave del género para describir narrativas del postconflicto en los países representados.

El siguiente artículo de Sara Escobar-Wiercinski, “El Arquetipo del Dictador Latinoamericano en Panamá: Noriega en la literatura de Mauro Zúñiga Araúz”, enmarca la novela *El chacal del general* (2007) dentro del espacio literario representado por la novela del dictador, subgénero reconocido durante el Boom y Post-Boom latinoamericanos. Escobar-Wiercinski indica que la novela yuxtapone ficción y realidad para describir la memoria histórica y denunciar la política de terror en Panamá durante los años de dictadura de Manuel Noriega (1983-1989) en la primera década del siglo XXI; periodo en el que se consideraba que las novelas sobre el dictador habían desaparecido. Escobar-Wiercinski se centra en el análisis literario del discurso memoria, violencia y poder para observar qué dice la memoria histórica sobre Noriega, cómo prevalece el patriarcado salvaje en estas novelas de dictadura y el uso autorial de la pluralidad de voces para denunciar la figura del implacable dictador latinoamericano y su necesidad de aferrarse al poder. Aunque trate de dictadura y a pesar de sus problemas internos, esta producción literaria pertenece al propuesto periodo de poscrisis centroamericana debido a que Panamá no tuvo las mismas beligerancias armadas internas que los países representados en las obras analizadas en los tres artículos anteriores.

Para concluir con la presentación de este número especial, se incluye otro estudio de la producción cultural de poscrisis que se enfoca en Honduras. En "Parasitism in Praxis: Shock Doctrine Schooling and the Decolonial Pedagogy of *Garifuna en peligro*", Verónica Brownstone presenta un encuentro con los límites y las implicaciones de la pedagogía decolonial en la educación transnacional de idiomas. Brownstone afirma que, luego del golpe de estado en el 2009, las escuelas hondureñas se convirtieron en sitios clave de resistencia contra las huestes golpistas, al mismo tiempo que se mercantilizaba la educación pública. Brownstone argumenta que el experimento en Honduras de la educación con base a la doctrina del shock importó un modelo estadounidense de educación contractual para avanzar una agenda de libre mercado predicada en un renovado desapoderamiento de las comunidades de color. En el documental *Garifuna en peligro* (2012) de Allí Allié y Rubén Reyes, Brownstone examina el trabajo requerido para socavar la educación neoliberal mediante una praxis que favorece la representación, la ciudadanía, la soberanía y los derechos, todo lo cual favorece la inclusión al Estado, pero no necesariamente logra la descolonización.

Cerramos esta pequeña presentación con un sincero agradecimiento por su trabajo y paciencia a cada uno/a de lo/as colaboradores/as de este número dedicado a Centroamérica: Sin ustedes este proyecto no hubiera sido posible. Muchas gracias también a todo/as lo/as revisore/as anónimo/as: Su apoyo incondicional y puntualidad han sido clave para la producción de este volumen colectivo. Asimismo, queremos expresar nuestra gratitud al Dr. Marco Ramírez Rojas, editor de *Ciberletras*, por permitirnos este espacio de difusión académica para engrosar el conocimiento sobre la América Central, su historia y sus producciones culturales, y en especial las naciones representadas en cada uno de los artículos.

SACRED CELLS, DIVINE FORCES AND THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION IN ERNESTO CARDENAL'S *CÁNTICO CÓSMICO*¹

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Abstract: Beginning at the very beginning with the Big Bang, *Cántico cósmico* (1989) written by Nicaraguan priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal, celebrates the universe. This ambitious work, encompassing cosmic time uses a wide range of discourses, from scientific to historical and theological, in its description of the coming into being of the universe, the shaping of planet Earth and the evolution of humanity until its inevitable end. Throughout the text, Cardenal also celebrates the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution which he links to the process of evolution in an ever-expanding universe. Inspired by the ideas of Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), Cardenal believed the divine infused all elements of the cosmos, from natural forces to the composition of cells. I therefore posit that spiritual ecology permeates Cardenal's poetry in its consideration of the divine as a present force in all levels of existence and implores us to reconsider our place on the planet. In this article, I analyze how the poem explores the interrelationships between parts forming a harmonious whole, how the verses consider consciousness to be present in all elements of existence and, finally, I focus on the representation of cosmogenesis where God is a force pulling creation into the future towards its inevitable but harmonious end. Through this Utopic conceptualization of existence, the verses give readers an alternative and hopeful vision of a joyous future; one much needed in this current moment of crisis.

Key Words: *Cántico cósmico*, Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaragua, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Sandinista Revolution, Spiritual Ecology

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Spiritual atoms and sacred cells perform a celestial dance in Ernesto Cardenal's epic poem *Cántico cósmico* (1989), expanding outwards to create the universe and life on earth. This scientific and spiritual conceptualization of existence arises from the text composed of forty-three *cantigas* or canticles by the Nicaraguan revolutionary priest and poet (1925-2020), who sought to celebrate the victory of the 1979 Sandinista Revolution which followed decades of oppression by the Somoza dictatorship. The poem constructs a space where the Revolution acquires cosmological dimensions, connecting material processes to social and spiritual ones. In this article, I argue that Cardenal, fascinated by physics and heavily influenced by thinkers such as French Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), created a text suffused with spiritual ecology. This movement, only recently named by scholars such as Leslie Sponsel and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, stems from the idea that all of creation, both human and nonhuman, is sacred. Bringing together science and spirituality in the broadest sense, the movement implores us to reconsider our relationship with nature and each other in light of the deepening climate crisis. While *Cántico cósmico* was published at a time before the broader public was aware of the looming climate crisis, it condemns the contamination of the planet and the disrespect shown to the natural world specifically by capitalist systems and authoritarian governments. The *cantigas* seek to uncover what unites all of creation from the most minute molecule to the awesome expansive galaxies, thus constructing a holistic picture of the cosmos where each individual component contributes to a magnificent whole. Although the hopeful period during which the poem was written came to a dramatic end shortly after its publication and Nicaragua today continues to be a troubled country oppressed by another authoritarian government, *Cántico cósmico* continues to inspire in its grandiose vision of the universe and encourages readers to create their own Utopian imaginary of a better world. My reading is guided by Teilhard de Chardin's influence on Cardenal's poetry and delves into how the text presents ecological themes and imagery in order to explore the poet's conception of the Sandinista Revolution as an important event in a constantly evolving and expanding universe.

In the Beginning: Methodology and Historical Overview

In this article, I will analyze the poem through an ecocritical lens, with a focus on spiritual ecology. My analysis will underscore how the text is suffused with an ecological spirituality which highlights all interconnected elements of creation. Accordingly, the poem brings to bear how a revolution in a country as small as Nicaragua plays an important role in the cosmological processes of an ever-expanding universe. I posit that this exploration of the universe reveals ecological ideologies, highlighting the interrelated nature of creation spun through a web of interdisciplinary discourses including science, theology and the human everyday experience. First, I explore how the poem depicts the linkages between the various parts that make up the whole, eliminating distances and hierarchies between all forms of existence. The imagery developed in this aspect contains an ecological understanding of the world, since ecology focuses on the interconnected web of life. This holistic view of the world also positions Cardenal to expand physical processes to include social ones like the Sandinista Revolution. Secondly, I examine how Cardenal incorporates the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin and British chemist James Lovelock to theorize on the existence of a conscience in each level of creation. I observe that the poem converts all objects into subjects deserving of respect and transforms the earth into a space actively commemorating the fallen martyrs of the Sandinista Revolution. Finally, I focus on the representation of forces in the poem as Cardenal reflects on how creation continues to be pulled into the future. Through a combined reading with the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin concerning love and cosmogenesis, I explore how Cardenal brings together scientific and social discourses to show how the forces of gravity and love unite the cosmos from the humble atom to human

1. To my Opa, Danker L.N. Vink, whose lengthy and passionate discussions on the Big Bang at the dinner table still circle in my mind and whose fascination with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin unexpectedly resurfaced in my own research.

bodies, ultimately reuniting all of existence in the love of God. In the end, all these ideas coalesce in the Sandinista Revolution, portrayed as a crucial moment in this slow process towards the final reunion with God, also known as the Omega Point.

Split by rugged mountain chains, dotted by volcanos and great lakes, the nation known today as Nicaragua was a land divided for centuries, its Atlantic coast practically cut off from the Pacific coast. Given the challenging geography, a series of foreign powers occupied different regions at different times. While the Pacific coast remained a Spanish colony until Nicaragua's independence in 1838, the Atlantic coast traded hands until finally the Miskito, a new ethnic group formed by escaped slaves who intermarried with the local Indigenous people, became the dominant power. Nicaragua eventually received the formal support of England, which was interested in the country's primary resources and its location on the Caribbean coast. In this complex sociopolitical context with so many competing political interests, the country was far from united when it gained independence. In *Sandino's Nation* (2018), Stephen Henighan describes the situation as follows:

Nicaraguan independence in 1838 occurred in an atmosphere of economic crisis and continuing violence between the Liberals, based in León, and Conservatives, based in Granada. Both groups saw an opportunity for profit and prosperity in building a maritime transportation route across the country, extending the thoroughfare offered by the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua to the Pacific Ocean. (24)

The divisions between political parties, both geographic and ideological, made it easy for foreign powers to play opposing factions against one another and press their own agendas. In need of foreign investment to make the idea of an intercontinental channel viable, the Nicaraguan elite looked abroad for investors. European nations in turn saw the opportunity for great financial return and increased control over Nicaragua. At first, Britain was the most serious contender as an investor, but when it became occupied with the Crimean War (1853-1856), it was forced to leave Nicaragua. The United States of America (US) saw this as an opportunity to step into the power vacuum. From that moment on, the US gained increasing political and economical power over the country. Cornelius Vanderbilt, an American business magnate, secured the backing of the conservative Nicaraguan government to develop the cross-continental route which proved so lucrative that other American financiers took note and tried to secure their share of the gains by supporting the liberals. This led to further tensions between the Liberals and the Conservatives and caused a string of conflicts with a series of American governments supporting either one or the other.

As the US tightened its grip on the country in the early decades of the 20th century, forcing increasing concessions on land use and gaining influence in national politics, Nicaraguans began to protest. The most prominent among them was Augusto César Sandino (1895-1934) who organized an uprising in the Segovia mountains in the 1920s and successfully held this territory for a decade, creating a self-sustaining society where people worked the land communally. Sandino also developed his own ideas about a new Nicaraguan identity. Henighan explains that the "Sandinista ideology was nationalist, Panamerican, and egalitarian... Influenced by the Mexican Revolution's resuscitation of the indigenous past, Sandino, the illegitimate son of a minor landowner and his Indigenous servant, became the first prominent Nicaraguan in centuries to acknowledge with pride his indigenous heritage" (31). Although Sandino was brutally murdered in 1934 by the head of the National Guard Anastasio Somoza García (1896-1956), his legacy would live on and resurface in the 1960s with the formation of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de

Liberación Nacional, FSLN). For his part, Somoza would come to power in 1937, beginning a US supported dictatorial dynasty marked by increasing levels of corruption, socioeconomic inequality and environmental degradation which lasted until the Sandinista Revolution in 1979.

Frustrated by decades of corrupt rule, Carlos Fonseca founded the FSLN in the 1960s. This movement, inspired by Sandino's earlier resistance and ideas, drew on Marxism, the Cuban Revolution, and Liberation Theology (Chomsky 100). Furthermore, the Sandinistas considered themselves a unifying force in a historically divided nation, bringing together the conservative and liberal elite as well as the rural poor with the common goal of deposing Somoza. Consequently, the Sandinista movement created an opportunity for Nicaraguans to envision and create a new unified national identity. As the resistance spread and the situation in Nicaragua grew more desperate, more people joined the ranks, including priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal. Hesitant at first, Cardenal became increasingly convinced of the need for radical change. In his memoirs, *Las islas extrañas* (2002), he describes the founding of Solentiname, his commune on an island in the vast inland Lake Nicaragua. He writes that over the course of many years,

la preocupación social y política había sido una inclinación natural mía, y una especie de vocación. Y el contacto con la pobreza de los campesinos en Solentiname, y la realidad nacional cada vez peor, también contribuyeron a que yo y nuestra pequeña comunidad nos fuéramos politizando y radicalizando. Nos íbamos haciendo más de izquierda, pues (206)

[I was naturally inclined to be concerned with society and politics, it was a kind of vocation. The contact with poverty and the campesinos in Solentiname, and the worsening national reality, also contributed to the increased politicization and radicalization of myself and our small community. We began to lean increasingly towards the left].²

Gradually, as the situation worsened and the oppression increased, Cardenal witnessed the suffering of the rural poor and decided it was time to act. He openly joined the Sandinista movement in 1977 when the Somoza regime destroyed Solentiname.

Born in 1925, Cardenal grew up in the elite circles of Granada, Nicaragua. Family connections enabled him to study in Mexico City and at Columbia University in New York. Always drawn to the Christian faith, he decided to become a priest in 1956. He began his training at a Trappist monastery in Kentucky under the tutelage of Thomas Merton and later completed it in Mexico and Colombia. Upon his return to Nicaragua, he was ordained and founded Solentiname in 1966. This commune, an idea Cardenal had often discussed with Merton and now put into practice, was a self-sustaining community growing its own food and selling its own artisanal crafts and paintings. Inspired by liberation theology, which encourages community involvement in the reading of the Gospel, Cardenal had all congregants participate in the sermon, commenting on the Bible as they were learning to read it. With the destruction of the commune, Cardenal was forced into exile in Costa Rica. After the Sandinista victory on July 19, 1979, he returned and was appointed Minister of Culture. In this position, while he frequently traveled all over the world, he also helped organize literacy campaigns where teachers visited remote areas of rural Nicaragua with the goal of teaching people how to read. As part of this literacy campaign, Cardenal organized poetry workshops where people were encouraged to write. He also continued to develop a poetic style he had already been working on in Solentiname called *exteriorismo*. Below, I will expand on how this style influenced the thematic development in Cardenal's

2. All the translations from Spanish into English are mine except for the excerpts from *Cántico cósmico* which are from the edition translated by John Lyons.

poetry. *Cántico Cósmico*, written over the course of several decades, represents a good example of this style. When Cardenal's position as Minister of Culture was dissolved in 1988, he unexpectedly had more time to write, and he completed the work in 1989.

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***Cántico cósmico*, Exteriorismo and the Critic's Response**

All-encompassing in scale, the epic poem *Cántico cósmico* endeavours to embrace all of creation from beginning to end, becoming a textual representation of the universe folded around the events of the Sandinista Revolution. Consisting of forty-three canticles, the epic engages in a multitude of discourses, including theology, history, anthropology, politics, and science. This broad approach reflects Cardenal's personal interests, his revolutionary ideology, and his literary style which he called *exteriorismo*. Initially inspired by the poetic style of Ezra Pound, who wrote his verse in a narrative style combining political and historical discourses, Cardenal adapted this literary approach to the Nicaraguan context. For him it was paramount that his poetry could be understood by a large public with varying levels of education. This is why *exteriorismo* has a narrative character. In "*Cántico cósmico* de Cardenal: un texto interdisciplinario," Ivan Carrasco explains that the style includes "los elementos de la vida cotidiana ... una escritura abierta a todos los temas y tipos de discurso" (3), [elements of daily life ... a writing style open to all themes and types of discourse]. By including elements of daily life in his work, the poet seeks to produce poetry accessible to the masses while also contributing to the shaping of a new Nicaraguan cultural identity in the wake of the Revolution's triumph and efforts to rebuild the country. In his memoirs, Cardenal describes *exteriorismo* as an authentically Nicaraguan style. He writes, "[n]osotros hemos tenido en Nicaragua una poesía, que hemos llamado exteriorista —de la realidad concreta, exterior, objetiva, y con un lenguaje claro y directo, a menudo conversacional" (IE 331). [In Nicaragua we have poetry that we call exteriorist —of a concrete reality, exterior, objective, and with a clear and direct language, often conversational]. Poetry written in the exteriorist style strives to portray the everyday reality in Nicaragua, becoming a voice for the poor from the poor. Furthermore, it seeks to unify readers and writers in its interdisciplinary approach.

The inclusive and flexible form of *exteriorismo* provided Cardenal with the space necessary to develop his holistic perspective of the universe. Combining and interweaving interdisciplinary ideas, the poem highlights how all disciplines, scientific, political and theological, ultimately concern themselves with the same big questions regarding beginnings, endings, and everything that occurs in between. Inherently ecological, this interconnectedness and convergence of disciplines in the poem naturally lends itself to an ecocritical framework of analysis. Carrasco comments on the predominantly scientific tone of the poem but goes on to describe the aesthetic elements of the poem with its "ritmo característico, el del verso libre: cada línea es una unidad rítmica y no siempre de sentido, es decir; un verso" (5), [characteristic rhythm of free verse: every line is a rhythmic unit and doesn't always make sense, in other words; a verse]. The poem harnesses the rhythm and aesthetics of verse on the page to translate cosmic processes into planetary ones, which the poet then connects to human and social processes. This web enables the poet to connect the social processes of revolution with the developing forces of evolution.

Critics frequently remark on the ecological component of Cardenal's work either in passing or in connection with politics. In "The Poetic Politics of Ecological Inhabitation in Neruda's *Canto General* and Cardenal's *Cosmic Canticle*," Patrick Murphy undertakes a comparative reading of Neruda and Cardenal's respective texts from an ecological and postcolonial perspective. He explains that Cardenal displays a

“scientific based ecological perspective at the same time that he is spiritually driven in his quest for environmental justice. And he places his perspective on ecology within a much larger cosmology of universal matter” (215). While this description encompasses the scope of Cardenal’s work, Murphy’s analysis focuses mainly on his anti-imperial message and his ideas on communism. In “Landscapes of Hope and Destruction: Ecological Poetry in Spanish America,” Nial Binns observes that *Cosmic Canticle* is a “vast work which combines physics, politics, biology and religion [which] returns to the idea of a new world announced at the end of ‘Apocalipsis’” (115). Both Murphy and Binns underscore the interplay between disciplines, drawing attention to the combined presence of ecology and politics in Cardenal’s verse. They acknowledge the ecological and spiritual elements in the text but do not bring the two into direct conversation with one another in their analysis. Yet, both spiritual and ecological energies pulse at the heart of the poem and, when taken together, they urge the reader to reconsider humanity’s position on the earth and the place of our planet within the greater forces of the cosmos. In their focus on interactions and interdependencies between terrestrial and cosmic forces, the verses weave a web of wonder and inspire awe in the reader, thus presenting a view that is both spiritual and ecological.

Spiritual Ecology

Spiritual ecology is a concept both old and new. In *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*, Leslie Sponsel explains that spiritual ecology has existed for thousands of years (xix) and is only more recently known under the formal designation of spiritual ecology.³ According to Sponsel, advocates of the contemporary movement see the climate crisis as resulting,

from human alienation from nature combined with the disenchantment, objectification, and commodification of nature. Increasingly nature is considered as simply a warehouse of resources to be extracted in order to not only meet basic human needs, but also to try to satisfy the apparently unlimited greed for profit of rampant predatory capitalism coupled with the associated modern fixation of many people and societies on materialism and consumerism. (xv-xvi)

Spiritual ecology arises out of a concern for environmental degradation and how it will affect future generations as the crisis continues to escalate. The movement proposes a rethinking of humanity’s place on the planet, urging a greater focus on the human spiritual experience and development instead of the current models of thinking focused on market forces and economic growth (xvi). Along the same lines, in the foreword to *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, editor Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee describes it as the study of the “spiritual dimension of life—the connection between our soul and the soul of the world, the knowing that we are all part of one living, spiritual being” (vi). Vaughan-Lee directly invites the reader to listen to

this wholeness that is calling to us now, that needs our response. It needs us to return to our own root and rootedness: our relationship to the sacred within creation. Only from the place of sacred wholeness and reverence can we begin the work of healing, of bringing the world back into balance. (vi)

Spiritual ecology calls for empathy, reverence, and wholeness, encouraging people to respect the planet and recognize it as a living entity. The movement seeks to foster an increasing awareness in the general public of the linkages between planetary and social wellbeing, highlighting the spiritual ruptures caused by modern structures and

3. There are a series of terms used to describe the same concept such as ecospirituality, green religion, green spirituality, nature mysticism, religious environmentalism, etc. (Sponsel xiv).

positivist thinking which consider the planet and nature as objects to be used by humanity. Cardenal's work contains these ideas as well, critiquing the damaging affects of capitalism on humanity and by extension the planet, while also endeavouring to awaken a sense of wonder in the reader.

In its holistic description of creation, from the most minute to the utmost grandiose, *Cántico cósmico* expresses awe at the complexity of life. From the poem's opening lines onward, a reverence for creation radiates off the page, describing the Big Bang and how a single particle explodes into a multitude of atoms blasted through space:

En el principio no había nada
ni espacio
ni tiempo.
El universo entero concentrado
en el espacio del núcleo de un átomo,
y antes aún menos, mucho menor que un protón,
y aun menos todavía, un infinitamente denso punto
matemático.
Y fue el Big Bang. (9)

[In the beginning there was nothing
neither space
nor time.
The entire universe concentrated
in the space of the nucleus of an atom,
and before that even less, much less, than a proton,
and even less still, an infinitely dense mathematical point.
And that was the Big Bang.]
(Lyons 1)

The first words, "en el principio no había nada," recall the opening lines of the Book of Genesis and then go on to describe how the "denso punto matemático" explodes in what we know as the Big Bang. The verse harmonically combines religious and scientific thought to create a more comprehensive understanding of existence and show that both discourses seek to explain the defining moment when the universe came into being. There is also a source of underlying tension as the biblical line poses that there was "nada," but physics posits that all of existence was contained in the single "denso punto," thus rendering nothingness impossible. The poem does not try to resolve these contradictions, establishing instead that nothing, not even God or science, is perfect in this ever-changing cosmos. Perfection can only be achieved at the end of creation when everything converges into the Omega Point. However, in the opening lines the poem concerns itself with how the first tiny particle of the stuff of the universe, or matter, exists unified at a zero-dimensional point. This isolated point breaks apart to become a multitude of dust particles with The Big Bang or "La Gran Explosión," (9) pushing neutrons, protons, and electrons outward and forward. From this point onwards, unity has burst asunder into a series of tiny particles which will reunite at different points in the expanding universe to form planets, and eventually life. The poem circles around these ongoing transformations, contemplating how the parts interact with the whole and vice versa.

Some critics find the interweaving of scientific and religious ideas in the poem both unconvincing and uncomfortable. Steven White, for example, observes tensions between Cardenal's Christian beliefs and his ideas derived from materialists Darwin and Marx. He posits that it is "preferible leer el *Cántico* como la representación de todo lo que nos rodea escrita por un poeta con una conciencia ecológica muy desarrollada y también como un vivo reflejo de las ideas materialistas de Darwin y Marx" (357), ["preferable to the read of Canticle as a representation of all that

surrounds us written by a poet with a deeply developed ecological conscious and also a vivid reflection of the materialist ideas of Darwin and Marx”]. For White, it is better to read the text as a poetic reflection on Darwin and Marx because the connections that it establishes between science, particularly the concept of evolution, with theological discourses are problematic (356). Yet these conclusions ignore the fact that Cardenal did not consider the theory of evolution to be incompatible with theology. Rather, by adopting the thinking and ideas proposed by Teilhard de Chardin, among others, *Cántico cósmico* brings to light how the two discourses connect in trying to answer life’s big questions.

Biographically and theologically, Teilhard de Chardin and Cardenal have many things in common. Both came from well-to-do families and were ordained as priests, interested in science among a wide range of topics, and both tested the patience of the senior levels of the Roman Catholic Church. As an ordained priest of the Jesuit order, Teilhard de Chardin was deeply committed to his faith, but he also lectured on geology at the Catholic University of Paris, was fascinated by Darwin’s theory of evolution and worked as a paleontologist. Over the course of his lifetime, he endeavoured to persuade the Catholic Church that the theory of evolution did not pose a threat to religion but was a strong indication of the presence of a divine force, pulling creation along in the ongoing processes of an expanding universe. He called this concept cosmogenesis, an idea I will return to later in the article. His essay *The Human Phenomenon* is a thought experiment where he brings the theory of evolution into direct conversation with theology, reflecting on science’s capacity to measure the material elements of the cosmos and its shortcomings in being able to explain the “inside” or the consciousness in things. Appalled by Teilhard de Chardin’s ideas, both the Jesuit order and the Catholic Church denied him the right to publish his work and exiled him to China in the 1920s. As a result, Teilhard de Chardin’s essays only became available to the general public after his death in 1955 when they were received to wide acclaim. Similarly, Cardenal would also rouse the ire of the Catholic Church for his continuing role in the Sandinista government. In 1985, Pope John Paul II suspended Cardenal’s right to administer the sacraments during mass. This ban would not be lifted until shortly before his death in 2020.

Through his writings, Cardenal, like Teilhard de Chardin, sought to connect themes and ideas across disciplines through his use of *exteriorismo* and as a politically active spiritual leader. While Teilhard de Chardin marries physics, chemistry, biology, and theology in his text, Cardenal, as shown above, linked many disciplines together in his poem *Cántico cósmico*. In doing so, he emulates ideas proposed by Teilhard de Chardin whose life’s work consisted of joining the supposedly antagonist discourses of science and theology together to create a new conceptualization of the universe. Additionally, both texts anticipate the concerns of the spiritual ecologist movement in upholding the place of the spiritual in an age marked by increasingly materialistic and positivist perspectives on life. I explore how these ideas are represented in *Cántico cósmico* where the poem interweaves cosmological processes with historical and social developments, namely the Sandinista Revolution, creating the sense that these forces pull creation along to meet at the eventual point of convergence, Omega or God. From this perspective the reader can appreciate how a seemingly local event, such as the Sandinista Revolution, acquires cosmological proportions.

Unity/Plurality and Interconnection

From the moment the Big Bang blasts unity asunder, forces seek to consolidate the loose particles into new formations to regain the harmony that was lost by the explosion. *Cántico cósmico* follows these oscillations, philosophizing on how parts make up a collective whole

and vice versa, thus bringing to bear the interconnected nature of existence. The text reminds the reader that isolation and independence are illusions in this interdependent web of life. The poem incorporates the principles of physics and the composition of matter to explore the interconnections of the physical world. In *The Human Phenomenon*, Teilhard de Chardin writes that “plurality, unity, and energy are the three aspects of matter” (12), explaining how atoms, and its components of protons, neutrons and electrons, appear to be random when studied up close but form a cohesive whole when considered on a larger scale. Cardenal’s cantigas echo these movements in its description of the coming into being of the universe where

El espacio lleno de electrones
que no dejaban pasar la luz.
Hasta que los electrones se unieron con los protones
y el espacio se volvió transparente
y corrió la luz. (10)

[Space full of electrons
which let no light through.
Until electrons united with protons
and space became transparent
and light flowed] (Lyon 2)

The isolated electrons block out the light until they unite with the protons and light can shine into the cosmos. This depiction connects with a recurring thematic imagery where darkness, found in isolation and chaos, is defeated by unity and the resulting light. As the poem unfolds, the verses also explore how mechanical processes influence spiritual developments and vice versa. Thus, for Cardenal, the gathering of elements to form more sophisticated celestial bodies, organisms or revolutions, enable the ongoing expansion of the universe towards a moment of perfection or the Omega Point.

Just as the text harnesses principles of physics to explore the separation and ultimate unification of the universe, it also brings supposedly incompatible discourses into dialogue with one another to demonstrate that a more holistic understanding of existence can only become a reality when different voices interact. The text shows the power of poetry in creating an imaginary around material processes such as the melding of electrons and protons otherwise invisible to the naked eye. In this way, the reader can experience aspects of existence not accessible in everyday life. Furthermore, by fusing scientific and theological discourses, the poet strives to depict a profound and comprehensive vision of the cosmos and its inner workings. For example, in “Cantiga 15”, “Nostalgia del paraíso,” the lines read:

La unidad en la diversidad
Es porque toda la creación es de un solo creador.
La teoría de la relatividad de Einstein es
que distintos observadores ven una cosa distinta
pero que la cosa es la misma
y la ley que gobierna esa cosa es universal.
...
De todos modos, hay un propósito.
En el universo, una energía
dirigida a una concentración progresiva. (104)

[The unity in the diversity
is because the whole creation stems from a single creator.
Einstein’s theory of relativity is
that different observers see a different thing
but the thing is the same
and the law which governs that thing is universal.

...
In any case, there's a purpose.
In the universe, an energy
directed towards a progressive concentration.]
(Lyons 113)

The verses liken God to the theory of relativity, arguing that although reality can seem relative depending on the observer, universals ultimately guide creation to converge towards a common point and its end. This unifying energy is God. Here, Cardenal's view coincides with that of Teilhard de Chardin who theorizes about the presence of God in the cosmos in *The Human Phenomenon*. He concludes that God is an evolving force pulling along the expanding universe and through its increasing power it will draw all of existence into one unifying moment. Passages like these reveal a spiritual ecological awareness because they depict a universe consolidated by a divine power, where scientific and sacred laws dictate ever evolving processes that drive cosmological and earthly evolution onward. In the ongoing dialogue between all the disciplines, a non-hierarchical web emerges where the knowledge of one discipline complements the other, demonstrating that a holistic understanding of creation requires a consolidation of all areas of human knowledge.

The sweeping cosmological images that unfold throughout the poem all unite in the singular event of the Sandinista Revolution. In my view the poem compares the divine force unifying the cosmos and the gathering of cells to create life with the Revolution bringing everyone together to form a new society:

La multiplicación de la vida por división
y de pronto al revés: la unión. No sabemos
cuándo ni cómo, en qué microscópico, casi invisible
paraíso
se unieron dos células cualquiera
entre miles de millones de otras.
La revolución más grande ocurrida en la tierra. (105)

[The multiplication of life by division
and suddenly in reverse: union. We don't know
when or how, in which microscopic, nigh invisible
paradise
two ordinary cells came together
amid thousands of millions of others.
Greatest revolution the earth has seen.]
(Lyons 115)

These verses begin by describing the multiplication of cells which then rejoin to create new life forms and express wonder at an event in cosmological history that we still do not completely understand. The poet calls this minute scene a paradise where the union of two cells made the rest of life possible, comparing this decisive moment in the evolution of the planet to a human revolution, a moment of ground-breaking change facilitated by the blending of several separate parts into a harmonious whole.

The images analyzed above, among many others found in the text, establish a connection between cosmological and social processes, thus eliminating any distance between the evolving universe and the Sandinista Revolution. The poem considers the Sandinista Revolution as the ultimate example of multiple separate entities coalescing to form a cohesive whole. With the common goal shared by everyone and everything, social hierarchies collapse, and people come together in harmony to overthrow their oppressor. What is more, the cosmos joins the people in their demands for change. In "Cantiga 8," "la creación

entera / pedía, pedía a gritos / Revolución" (61). ["The whole of creation/was clamoring, clamoring in full cry for/the Revolution"] (Lyon 65). All of creation clamors for the Revolution and the poem traces the long evolutionary line that culminates in Revolution. As life flourishes on earth, organisms become increasingly complex, evolving from single-celled to multicellular organisms such as plants and animals. These evolving levels of complexity lead to more sophisticated levels of organization, and according to the poem ultimately result in biological and social revolutions. The poem documents all these steps and tells the reader in Cantiga 13, "El árbol de la vida," that it all began millions of years ago:

Parte de un proceso que empezó en algún charco arcaico...
En el umbral de una nueva evolución
como cuando de la materia surgió la vida.
De lo más simple a lo más complejo,
de menor a mayor organización.
Las leyes de la evolución social son las mismas del cosmos. (96)

[Part of a process that began in some archaic pool...
On the threshold of a new evolution
like when life emerged for matter.
From the most simple to the most complex,
from lesser to greater organization.
The laws of evolution are the same as the cosmic ones.]
(Lyons 103)

The verses portray the evolution of life, illustrating that the increasing levels of organization accompanied the higher levels of sophistication in organisms. The text then connects these concrete processes to the social realm, claiming that the laws of social evolution mirror those of the cosmos. This natural progression leads to the Revolution which is celebrated in the last stanza, where "este amanecer del 19 de Julio, ... con la Plaza 19 de Julio repleta de pueblo bajo el sol / todos los colores en ella como repleta de flores" (96). ["this daybreak of July 19...with the July 19 Square crammed with people under the sun/all the colors in it as though teeming with flowers"] (Lyon 103). As atoms and cells gather, their sum total giving birth to life, people gather to celebrate the victory of the Revolution and unite to bring about a new beginning for their country. In this holistic representation of existence, the spiritual ecological piece gains clarity: the poem depicts a universe with agency participating in our social processes. It thereby follows that an active cosmos is both composed of material elements and contains an inside or a consciousness, a spirit.

Conscious Cells

A spiritual conceptualization of the universe is not only visible in the interdependent web of discourses and themes created in Cardenal's verses but also in the exploration of the presence of a consciousness at all levels of creation. The poem relates how all beings, sentient and non-sentient, contain a psyche, thus opening the conversation to participants located outside of humanity. This inclusive approach connects the microscopic with the cosmic and biological processes with social ones such as the Sandinista Revolution. These meditations on the consciousness are reminiscent of the preoccupations and school of thought developed by Teilhard de Chardin. In "Ecological Spirituality in Teilhard de Chardin," Evelyn Tucker explains that:

One of Teilhard's greatest contributions to modern religious thought is his conception of reality as composed of both spirit and matter. This is what he called the psychic and the physical components of reality, the within and the without of things. To demonstrate that the numinous dimension of life was present

from the beginning was Teilhard's aim in the early chapters of *The Human Phenomenon*. This radically alters our perspective of matter itself. No longer is matter seen as dead and inert. Consequently, the divine is no longer to be sought only in a transcendent union with a merciful God. (8)

Teilhard de Chardin was convinced that science lacked the tools to adequately explain the spiritual element present in life. He noted that while science is very good at measuring exterior elements, the "without" or the exterior of existence, it fails in its ability to calculate the "within." This is where a spiritual conception of the universe can fill the void, creating a sense of purpose in the cosmos where matter is not simply an inert series of particles, but contains a spiritual essence. Teilhard de Chardin argues that the spirit is expressed in consciousness and posited that all matter from the single atom to the Earth as a whole has a certain level of consciousness. He understands consciousness "in its broadest sense to designate every kind of psyche, from the most rudimentary forms of interior perception conceivable to the human phenomenon of reflective consciousness" (25). According to Teilhard de Chardin, all levels of existence contain a consciousness that aids in binding creation together. He expands on this idea to include the merging of individual human thought into a collective which he calls the superconscious and the beginning of the noosphere. The evolutionary development of the planet led to the formation of the biosphere, a "living membrane formed by the plant and animal matter of the globe" (123), making way for the noosphere or thinking layer to envelop the earth.

Cántico cósmico follows similar currents of thought in that it raises questions concerning the place of the soul and the divine within creation. The text demonstrates poetry's capacity to be inclusive, exploring not only the human soul, but the soul of the world, lending a voice to both human and nonhuman beings. Cantiga 13, "El árbol de la vida," illustrates this idea, proclaiming:

Colectividad armonizada de conciencias,
o superconciencia de Chardin.
El planeta con una sola envoltura pensante.
la pluralidad de reflexiones individuales,
en una sola reflexión unánime a escala sideral (94)

[Harmonized collectivity of consciousnesses,
or Chardin's super-consciousness.
The planet with a single thinking envelope.
The plurality of individual reflections
in a single unanimous reflection on a sidereal scale.] (Lyon 100-101)

In this formulation where Cardenal cites Teilhard de Chardin, the collective consciousness creates a harmonious whole, visible from space. This movement towards a merging of disparate elements hints at the inevitable reunion at the end of the universe, when all of creation will be fused together into a harmonic unit.⁴ For Cardenal, the representation of the planet as a superorganism becomes a dominant poetic image.

Through this exploration of the relationship between molecular and cosmic components, *Cántico cósmico* presents both the outside and the inside of things. In this way, Cardenal builds on Teilhard de Chardin's essay in its connection between disciplines, establishing unorthodox interrelations while also resorting to theology and poetry respectively to imagine what the "inside," the consciousness or the soul, looks like. In addition, the poem links Teilhard de Chardin's ideas to those of British chemist James Lovelock who developed the Gaia Hypothesis in the 1960s, using the name of Gaia the Greek earth goddess.⁵ In *Dazzle*

4. This stanza echoes Teilhard de Chardin's words in poetic form. De Chardin writes: "A harmonized collectivity of consciousness, equivalent to a kind of superconsciousness. With the Earth not only covered by myriads of grains of thought, but wrapped in a single thinking envelope until it functionally forms but a single vast grain of thought on the sidereal scale. The plurality of individual reflections being grouped and reinforced in a single unanimous act of reflection" (178).

Gradually (2007), Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan explain the hypothesis as follows: “the Gaia hypothesis in its most general form states that the temperature and composites of Earth’s atmosphere are actively regulated by the sum of life on the planet” (172). According to this hypothesis, the planet is a living being maintaining stable conditions through the regulation and interaction of gasses and micro-organisms. The interactions between microbes and solar energy create a negative feedback loop enabling the planet to maintain its homeostatic state. Margulis adds that the idea of a system united in maintaining life implies that “there may be a strong biogeological precedent for the time-honored political and mystical goal of peaceful existence and world unity” (182). I suggest that these ideas connect with ecological spirituality in that they strive to recognize the earth as a living organism, which should be respected. *Cántico cósmico* extends the conceptualization of a living earth to encompass the Sandinista Revolution, positing that a conscious earth can preserve the memory of the Revolution.

Cantiga 11, “Gaia,” describes the hypothesis and the formation of the planet in this way:

se hizo redondo para girar.
Ser vivo que no necesitaba piernas ni brazos ni boca ni ano
sino sólo ser redondo y girar y girar en derredor del sol...
Se creó a si mismo condiciones para tener organismos
y después organismos con conciencia, personas; y después
un organismo que es a la vez comunidad y personas. (78)

[it became round in order to spin.
Living being that needed neither legs nor arms nor mouth nor
anus
but merely to be round and spin and spin around the sun...
By itself it created conditions for supporting organisms
and later organisms with consciousness, people; and later
an organism which is both community and individuals.]

(Lyon 82-83)

The poem describes the planet as a community, signaling the interwoven connections between humanity and the Earth. At the same time, it suggests that the Earth is a living being:

Es una Tierra viva toda ella, palpitante.
La piedra también vibra aunque lentamente.
El planeta late en su interior.
Un cuerpo vivo el que camina por el cielo entre las estrellas.
(79)

[It is a living Earth, all of it, palpitating.
Stone also vibrates although slowly.
In its core the plant palpates.
A living body which wanders through the sky among the stars.]
(Lyon 84)

The words “palpitante” and “late” evoke the heart with its regular and calming beat. The poem repositions humanity, making it an integral part of earthly processes when it postulates that “somos, como especie, su sistema nervioso” (81) and that the planet is an “extensión de nuestro cuerpo” (79). The earth, as an active participant in the Sandinista Revolution, transmits energy from its core to all living things. Concurrently, these processes nourish the collective memory since Cantiga 11 ends recalling the young men who died in the Revolution, recording their names for posterity and recognizing their sacrifices.

The poem emphasizes that the memory of the Revolution is both a human and a terrestrial act. Repeatedly, the verses reflect on both the

5. James Lovelock himself affirms that “para mí, Gaia es un concepto religioso y científico a la vez, y es manejable en ambas esferas” (Pou 129), [“for me, Gaia was simultaneously a religious and scientific concept, manipulated in and can be both spheres”]. Analogously, Cardenal states that “Lovelock, el inventor de la teoría de Gaia se pregunta / si otro nombre de Gaia no podría ser María” (82) [“Lovelock, the inventor of the Gaia theory wonders/whether another name for Gaia might not be Mary”] (Lyon 88).

human and earthly experience of remembering. Cantiga 18, “Vuelos de victoria,” refers to the Revolution itself, beginning with stories about the individuals who took part in the conflict. The poem reads:

Fue una tarea de todos.
Los que se fueron sin besar a su mamá
para que no supiera que se iban.
El que besó por última vez a su novia. (133)

[It was a task for everyone.
Those who left without kissing their mother
so she wouldn't know they were going.
He who kissed his girlfriend for the last time.]
(Lyon 148-149)

This passage recognizes the sacrifices made by the participants and emphasizes the collective nature of the conflict. *Cántico cósmico* converts into a testimony of the Revolution, documenting a multitude of voices and memories of the Nicaraguan people. In particular, it commemorates the martyrs of the Revolution. A close bond developed between Cardenal and the martyrs, a group of young men who joined the commune in Solentiname and went on to fight with the FSLN. Henighan writes that

Cardenal's impassioned description of these young men arises in part from the legitimacy that his association with them lends his poetry in the context of the revolutionary nation, and partly, one may hypothesize, from a sense of guilt or obligation towards his young companions whom he indoctrinated as future guerrillas in the knowledge they would die. (421)

The text, in its detailed description of the men and by documenting their individual names, seeks to immortalize them. Henighan explains that the dead “are not a mere phantasmagoric memory: they are ugly, brutalized corpses. The symmetry of the lines urging the reader to remember the dead” (424). The verses remind the reader that the dead are not an abstract force, but real flesh and blood individuals who sacrificed everything in their fight against the dictatorship. The poetic voice reflects on the human cost, thinking about

nuestros muertos,
en las montañas, en zanjas comunes, en tumba solitaria,
en cementerio, a la vera de caminos,
cerca de este aeropuerto, por todo el territorio nacional,
con monumentos, anónimos sin ningún monumento,
todos hechos esta tierra, haciendo más sagrada esta tierra,
(150-151)

[our dead,
in the mountains, in common ditches, in lonely graves,
in cemeteries, at the side of the road,
close to this airport, throughout the national territory,
with monuments, anonymous without any monument,
all transformed into this earth, making this earth more sacred.]
(Lyon 170)

Here, memory acquires a materialistic component, smelling of mud, while the martyrs return to the earth, nourishing it just like their sacrifice feeds collective memory. The cantiga ends with a list of names of the guerrillas who perished in the conflict, forming a solid block of text, affirming that victory is achieved thanks to the sacrifices of all those involved. Simultaneously, the text echoes the processes of the Gaia hypothesis: just as gasses and microbes interact to create a harmonious life, the guerrillas united to bring justice and peace to Nicaragua.

Cantiga 36, "La tumba del guerrillero," broadens the connections established between collective memory, the planet and outer space. It portrays the Revolution as a cosmic event never to be forgotten. The canticle imagines how the events of the Revolution will reverberate into the future, uniting the martyr with the earth and the cosmos.

Pienso en tu cuerpo que se ha ido desbaratando bajo la tierra
 haciéndose suave tierra, humus otra vez
 junto con el humus de todos los demás humanos
 que han existido y existirán en la bolita del mundo
 haciéndose todo juntos tierra fértil del planeta Tierra.
 y cuando los cosmonautas miren esta bola azul y rosa
 en la noche negra
 lo que estarán mirando, lejos, es tu luminosa tumba (321).

[I think of your body which has been decomposing
 under the earth
 becoming soft earth, humus once again
 together with the humus of all the other human beings
 that have existed and will exist on the tiny globe of the world
 all of us together producing fertile earth on planet Earth.
 And when cosmonauts gaze at this blue and pink globe
 in the black night
 what they are gazing at, from afar, is your luminous grave]
 (Lyon 373)

The martyr's love for his homeland transforms into a light visible from outer space. Even astronauts will be able to see this "luminosa tumba." Later the poem describes the decomposition of the bodies and how, in accordance with the first law of metaphysics, the decomposed bodies once again form part of the chemical processes which will eventually ripple out into space. In this way, it perpetuates the memory of the Revolution in social and ecological terms. Within these processes, the text has its own role to play, feeding the collective memory and ensuring the future of the Revolution, inspiring future generations to remember the past and to continue the fight in the present.

Cosmological and Divine Forces

From contemplating interrelationships between the whole and its individual parts to musing on the possibilities of a conscious planet and the cosmos, *Cántico cósmico* ultimately reflects on how forces both cosmological and divine unify all elements of existence. Through evolutionary processes, these forces will eventually converge in what Teilhard de Chardin calls the Omega Point. The poem dances around this concept, exploring the nature of forces from the physical force of gravity to forces of attraction and love. The text oscillates between the laws of physics and the raw emotion of love to explain how celestial bodies, terrestrial cells, and flora and fauna fuse to form the universe and earthly life. In these meditations, the poet wonders what keeps life from drifting apart into nothingness, marrying concepts of astrophysics, physics, and affect. All these elements are brought into play in Cantiga 41, "El cántico de los cánticos:"

El sex-appeal ya estaba en las estrellas.
 La implacable atracción de la materia hacia otra materia,
 o GRAVEDAD que mantiene unido al universo.
 La gravedad era una inclinación natural, encontró Copérnico.
 En nuestros cuerpos y en el sol y los planetas.
 La gravedad que solo actúa para juntar.
 No conocemos gravedad que separe. (372)

[Sex-appeal was already in the stars.
 The implacable attraction of matter to other matter,
 or GRAVITY which sustains the unity of the universe.
 Gravity was a natural inclination, Copernicus discovered.
 In our bodies and in the sun and the planets.
 Gravity which acts solely to bring together.
 A gravity which separates the unknown.] (Lyon 433)

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Gravity is the overarching unifying force. The poem considers the role of gravity in holding all elements together from abstract and chemical processes to emotional states. Playfully describing the stars as having sex-appeal, the stanza metaphorically closes the gap between outer space and the human everyday experience. The verse also plays with aesthetics, writing the word GRAVEDAD in capital letters, thus drawing the eye of the reader to the single word, mimicking the function the word represents. Moreover, the text implies that just as gravity is part of the natural order of things, so is sex, rejecting any notion that it might be a taboo subject. Over the course of the cantiga, this idea is reinforced by a myriad of images of molecules and multi-celled organisms copulating and propagating life. Ultimately, the poem tells us that “[l]a gravedad es el amor” (376). In other words, they are inseparable.

With these images, the poem asserts that gravity and love coalesce to unify creation. For example, in Cantiga 8, “Condensaciones y visión de San José de Costa Rica,” the text reads, “[E]l universo está hecho de unión. / El universo es condensación. / Condensación es unión, y es calor. (Amor) / El universo es amor” (57). [“The universe is made of union. / The universe is condensation. / Condensation is union, and it is heat. (Love.) / The universe is love.”] (Lyon 60). The canticle, replete with scientific imagery accompanied by the poet’s memories and his visions of a revolutionary future, postulates that processes of condensation helped form the planets, a concept which can be extended to include the unifying power of love. Expanding on this idea, the verse concludes that the cosmos, in its eventual unification, is love aligning with Teilhard de Chardin. In *The Cosmic Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*, John Haught explains the priest’s thinking as follows:

Since the cosmos is always subject to drifting back toward the past state of physical dispersal, its emerging unity can be sustained only if it allows itself to be further created, that is, brought into deeper communion with God, the Center and goal of all things. Theologically, Infinite Love is the vital energy of this movement toward a new future for the universe. Love is the means by which the Power of the Future holds all things together even now, opening up for each person, for each living community, and for the whole cosmos, the prospect of deeper consistence and richer coherence up ahead. (13)

Viewed through this lens, love is more than a personal emotion, it is elevated to the divine and cosmological planes of existence, transforming into the force unifying all of creation. Teilhard de Chardin emphasizes that love is “not unique to the human being. It represents a general property of all life, and as such it embraces all the varieties and degrees of every form successively taken by organized matter” (188). The priest proposes that love, not restricted to the human experience, is in fact the key to the continuing formation of the universe. He reinforces this idea by reasoning that “[i]f some internal propensity to unite did not exist, even in the molecule, in probably some incredibly rudimentary yet already nascent state, it would be physically impossible for love to appear higher up, in ourselves, in the hominized state” (188). According to Teilhard de Chardin, love can only exist in more complex beings and organisms because of its presence at the molecular level.

Furthermore, in his view, this overarching presence of love is a manifestation of divine love ultimately pulling along the cosmos. Teilhard de Chardin calls this force cosmogenesis, "the process by which the universe is still coming into being... We live in an always nascent, always ongoing process of cosmic movement. God is creating, therefore, not from "up above" but from "up ahead" (Haught 16). In an ever-evolving universe where change is constant, forces are the only element keeping the universe from dispersing until everything eventually converges at what Teilhard de Chardin calls the Omega Point or the end of existence. Cardenal plays with this idea in his poem, connecting it with the Nicaraguan Revolution. In the last cantiga, "Omega," he writes:

¡Centro de convergencia del universo,
 no me excluyas de tus besos y tus abrazos!
 Misterio de ser más el otro mientras más el mismo.
 Centro de centros, irradiando desde el centro de un sistema
 de centros
 Como un punto solo. Punto Omega. (409)

[Center of convergence of the universe,
 do not exclude me from your kisses and your embraces!
 Mystery of being more the other while more the same.
 Center of centers, irradiating from the center of a system of
 centers
 like a single point. Omega point.] (Lyon 480)

The poet calls for the eventual reunion with God in the Omega Point, where the universe will converge and fully enfold upon itself. Filled with desire, the text yearns for this moment when all will be resolved and all of creation will be reduced to a single point, similar to the place where the universe began. This conceptualization of the cosmos as a space in constant flux enables the Sandinista Revolution to become the social manifestation of an evolving universe. Through these developing connections the poet reasons that the forces of gravity transcend into the attracting forces of love which help unite societies to rise up against oppression. Revolutions thus become a metaphor for creation evolving toward ultimate perfection.

From the beginning, *Cántico cósmico* uses metaphors comparing cosmological forces with social processes. For example, Cantiga 8 likens the increasing force of condensation, drawing together more cosmic components to form the first celestial bodies, to "los fenómenos que llamamos socializaciones, y así es/la Revolución" (59) ["Such are the phenomena that we call/ socializations, and such is/ the Revolution"] (Lyon 63). Placing "la Revolución" on its own at the bottom of the stanza draws attention to how evolutionary processes will culminate in the Revolution. In this context, where the Revolution becomes the social manifestation of an evolving universe, Cardenal described martyrdom as: "el martirio: es evolucionario" (355) ["Martyrdom: is evolutionary"] (Lyon 414). This simple phrase brings the concept of evolution together with the theological idea of the resurrection of Christ, reminding the reader of the sacrifice of the revolutionary martyrs while also pointing to the important role played by these men in bringing people together for a common cause. The poem elevates the Revolution, considering it a social manifestation of cosmological processes. Thus, in the concluding Cantiga, "Omega," Cardenal envisions the end of the universe, where all of creation is reunited,

interwoven with a speech by Sandino calling for unity:
 Todas las cosas tienden ardorosas hacia un centro común.
 ¡Punto Omega!
 "Aquí nos ha reunido esa voluntad suprema
 Para conseguir la Libertad de Nicaragua." (405)

[All things tend ardently towards a common center.
Omega Point!
"That supreme will has brought us together here
to obtain the freedom of Nicaragua."] (Lyon 474)

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The Revolution evolves towards a shared centre based in love and rallying under a common goal. Yet, the poem ends by returning to "Cuando no había nada. / En el principio..." (410) ["When there was nothing./ In the beginning..."] (Lyon 481) hinting at the possibility of resurrection, that out of the ashes of the old galaxy a new one will rise to begin the processes anew. Thus, no end is ever final, there is always the possibility of rebirth and new beginnings. There is always hope.

In conclusion, the holistic representation of existence portrayed in *Cántico cósmico* provides the reader with an ecologically spiritual image of creation where every particle and every being are sacred, gathering in the spirit of love. This vision, inspired by contemporary scientific developments and the theological thought of religious figures such as Teilhard de Chardin, offers a utopian conceptualization of the universe. The harmonic nature of the interrelationships between multiple parts and the whole, the idea of conscious cells and planet, and finally the sacred force of God pulling creation along with the expansion of the universe, converge to celebrate the power of cooperation and eventual unity between all human and nonhuman beings. One might wonder if this vision of a revolutionary utopia remains pertinent given the failure of the Sandinista experiment with their electoral loss in 1990, barely a year after the publication of *Cántico cósmico*. However, it is often said that utopias are needed in times of crisis. Given the current moment where crises abound, utopian imaginaries provide humanity with a space where alternative better futures can be constructed. I suggest that *Cántico cósmico* occupies this space and that its pages give the reader a place to reflect on how to construct and strive for a better tomorrow.

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Parody and *Testimonio* in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez* and *El Asco*

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Abstract: This article explores two post-war Central American fictional works, *Insensatez* (2004) and *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador* (1997) by Horacio Castellanos Moya, to see them as a sort of postmodern parody (as argued by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody*) of the classic *testimonio*. In Latin America, the *testimonio* emerged as a genre in the seventies and eighties during the civil wars, reflecting on the injustices suffered by Indigenous people, the struggles of campesinos, and the working class to attain their rights. Nevertheless, with the end of civil wars and dictatorships, we have also allegedly witnessed the end of *testimonio* as a genre; John Beverley stated: "the moment of *testimonio* is over." ("The Real Thing" 77). However, *testimonio* as a mode of reading literature (that existed even before it was classified as a genre in the North), which was thought to be over, shows sparks of its presence in contemporary Central American fiction. Thus, these fictional works parody the *testimonio* as a genre – which means they subvert the genre's key aspects while drawing on them to describe post-war narratives from the region.

Key Words: *Testimonio*, parody, post-modernism, Central America, post-civil-war fiction.

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Introduction

This article explores post-Civil War¹ Central American literature to interpret it as a sort of postmodern parody of classic *testimonio*. The texts studied in this article —*El asco: Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador* and *Insensatez*— reveal the reality of post-war disillusion in the Central American Society. These two contemporary texts discussed here were published at different times. *El asco*, published in 1997, describes almost the immediate consequences of the end of the civil war in El Salvador. *Insensatez*, published in 2004, not only depicts the post-war violence in Guatemalan society in the twenty-first century but also documents the traumatic experiences generated by the civil war within the indigenous community. We can see then a general transition from State oppression to new forms of everyday violence under neoliberalism.

In Central America, *testimonio* emerged during the period of civil war and insurgency in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of reflecting on the injustices suffered by Indigenous people and the struggles of campesinos and the working class to attain their rights. In this struggle for equality, they aimed to achieve a better, more just society. Moreover, *testimonio* came to be associated with revolutionary movements, leftist politics, and the resistance of marginalized groups against oppressive dictatorships. In North American academic circles, it emerged as a prominent subject of discussion originating from the South, gaining recognition, and often being valued above conventional literary forms. Scholars frequently compare *testimonio* with traditional literature, aiming not only to highlight their differences but also to critique established literary norms while elevating *testimonio* as an alternative. For example, George Yúdice argued that testimonial writing challenges the very idea of literature, which can no longer be seen as an independent cultural practice shaped solely by social and political contexts. According to Yúdice, *testimonio*, as an expression from marginalized voices, not only introduces new narrative forms but also questions the foundations of literary studies as a discipline.²

North American critic John Beverley seems to locate the similarity between *testimonio* and the novel largely in their length. He puts forward his own definition of *testimonio* as

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience (Te Margin at the Centre" 24).

According to this view, a *testimonio* may resemble a novel in its structure, but it must be told in the first person and grounded in the narrator's actual lived experiences. John Beverley also emphasizes that it should exist in written form rather than remain purely oral, which further narrows its connection to traditional ideas of "literature," rooted in the Latin *littera*, meaning written text or script. However, with the peace agreements that put an end to the civil wars (and with the end of their Cold War frame), it was then claimed that the genre had come to an end. John Beverley, for instance, asserted that the "moment of *testimonio* is over" ("The Real Thing," 77). Georg M. Gugelberger adds in his "Introduction" to the collection of essays *The Real Thing*, devoted to the genre, that "The publication of this collection clearly comes at a time when the initial interest in the genre has begun to fade, perhaps due to the developments since 1989 that took down the wall between an outdated binary" (7) Nevertheless, here I ask whether this "moment" is really behind us or whether we can re-read Central American fiction today—at least in part—as a repetition or a return to the testimonial impulse from a post-war era.

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1. Here, I am referring to the civil wars that began in most of the Central American countries during the early 1970s (except Guatemala) and continued till the late 1990s. In Guatemala, the war began around the 1960s, and the peace agreement was signed in the year 1996. In El Salvador, the peace agreement was signed in 1992. However, many critics such as Alexandra Ortiz Wallner and Arturo Arias (in *El arte de fictionar* and *Taking Their Word*, respectively) note that, effectively, the peace process in the region began in the late eighties and accelerated after the electoral defeat of the Sandinista Government in 1990.

2. George Yúdice states: "testimonial writing thus fits into and contributes to the ongoing challenge to the literary, which is no longer understood simply as an autonomous cultural activity conditioned by social and political factors" ("Testimonio and Postmodernism" 47).

I propose that *testimonio* is, above all, a perspective from which to read a literary work; it is one way (among many) to understand or interpret a particular narrative. Thus, a text approached as *testimonio* contains literary elements as much as literature contains testimonial elements. *Testimonio* can function as a reading approach across different historical moments, continuing to serve as a means of expressing resistance to injustice in contemporary Central American society. Scholars like John Beverley have argued that works predating their formal recognition in Latin America can still be interpreted as *testimonios*. This suggests that what makes a text a testimonial lies less in its inherent form than in how critics choose to interpret it. For instance, Beverley considers works such as colonial chronicles, national essays like *Facundo* and *Os sertões*, and even wartime diaries by figures such as Simón Bolívar and José Martí as *testimonios* ("The Margin at the Center" 31). Similarly, *Biografía de un cimarrón* is often classified as *testimonio* despite being labeled as a biography in Spanish and an autobiography in English. This raises the question of how *testimonio* can be distinguished from related forms such as biography, autobiography, chronicle, or diary. Ultimately, it was the critics' emphasis on political struggle in their interpretations that shaped the concept of *testimonio*. Rather than having a single, fixed definition, the genre has been understood differently by various scholars. What remains central, however, is the interpretive lens—the mode of reading—which has consistently defined *testimonio* from its early conceptualizations through the postwar period. Reading *testimonio* is a phenomenon that has always existed and shares similarities with other literary and non-literary genres.³ Thus, reading literary accounts as *testimonio* not only bridges many dichotomies (like fact and fiction, truth and falsity) but also links the past and the present Central American social situation. *Testimonio* is a way to revisit the past and connect it to the present. Narratives read as *testimonio* have also served as an alternative voice to official history. Hence, they are important sources that should not be overlooked because the genre is allegedly over; instead, they should be further explored.

Testimonial perception allows us to critically review the past and respond appropriately in the present. The definition of reading *testimonio* I am presenting maintains a connection and continuity with earlier definitions of *testimonio* and with earlier testimonial texts. One common element is the injustice we observe in both the past and the present. Although the causes of injustices have shifted from authoritarian governments to post-war peace agreements, the core issue remains the same. For example, even if there is no civil war in Central America now, we see its repercussions through migration to the North. As long as Central American narratives highlight societal injustices and the struggles to overcome them, *testimonio* will continue to give voice to the voiceless and shed light on these stories. Therefore, we cannot dismiss previous definitions (though we must expand our understanding of *testimonio* as an approach to narratives), the context from which *testimonio* emerged, or ignore earlier testimonials (the *testimonios* of the eighties, which I refer here as classic *testimonio*), since they help us better understand both current narratives as *testimonio* and the contemporary Central American situation. Naturally, there are differences between the periods (the seventies and eighties versus the post-war period) and their related texts. Contemporary fiction does not merely imitate earlier forms; it offers critique while emphasizing continuity with the past. I interpret this coexistence of critique and continuity as postmodern parody, which Linda Hutcheon defines as

a contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of the representations of history. This paradoxical conviction of the remoteness of the past and the need to deal with it in the present has been called the 'allegorical impulse' of postmodernism ... I would simply

3. Beverley explains: "*Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novela-*testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic' literature" (31).

Based on this, I see contemporary fiction as parody and suggest that it (still) calls for a reading in terms of *testimonio*.

Unlike the testimonial accounts upon which it draws, post-war fiction tends to be more disillusioned. The novels I will be examining question the hope of building a just society in the wake of a violent civil war. Violence, oppression, and injustice are still featured in today's Central American countries, and this is reflected in their literature. But it is also for this reason that these works of fiction can still be approached as *testimonio*: they share the denunciatory and critical impulse of classical *testimonio*, if not their faith in the potential power of social struggle. However, not only does the content of contemporary narratives demonstrate the persistence of the testimonial impulse in these texts, but also their form. Many formal elements, characteristic of the *testimonio* genre —such as first-person narration reflecting a larger community or the dialogue between the narrator and a compiler— are common in earlier works and remain evident in contemporary fiction. However, while this literature echoes its predecessors, it also differs in various ways. This blend of similarity and reconfiguration challenges key aspects of the definition of *testimonio* offered by most North American scholars at the genre's peak. Thus, on the one hand, reading contemporary fiction as *testimonio* raises questions about earlier definitions, and on the other, it prompts us to reconsider classic *testimonios* and their effectiveness. To what extent did *testimonio*, as previously conceived, contribute to peace and equality in Central American countries? Did those aspects that seemed to distinguish *testimonio* in opposition to hitherto hegemonic forms of literature succeed, or did they perhaps close off other possible avenues of political and aesthetic expression? Reading contemporary fiction as *testimonio* offers an alternative way of approaching Central American literature today; limiting our appreciation of it to its literary qualities would mean restricting its potential, much as happened (if in reverse) to the testimonial genre.

The texts *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador* and *Insensatez* not only reveal the reality of post-war disillusionment but bring *testimonio* to life and insist that the testimonial strategy can still address oppression, violence, and injustice. These texts have elements that defined classic *testimonio* —the key factors that not only separated the genre from other literary forms but also provoked controversy and debate— and they prompt us to reconsider whether *testimonio* (now understood above all as a reading strategy) is really over or still has purchase today. They emphasize the importance of past struggles, dreams, and failures. However, they also reflect on ongoing problems and issues that thwart the desire to create such a society, and therefore, they can be seen as a parody of the classic *testimonio*. The question that arises here is not simply how *testimonio*, as a reading strategy thought to be over with the end of the civil war, allows us insight into these recent texts and how they address contemporary social issues. Are these texts not also trying to tell us about the readings of classic *testimonio*, the problems that such narratives raised, and the connections that can be drawn between the earlier readings and current ones?

Indeed, contemporary stories can also be read as fiction by readers unaware of their testimonial aspects; however, this may limit the content's potential for heterogeneous interpretation. Reading Central American fiction as *testimonio* is not simply a matter of recognizing the testimonial techniques the authors have used to tell these stories but also of gaining a deeper understanding of the palimpsestic complexity of these texts. For if we see *testimonio* to be over and contemporary fiction as a new beginning, we obscure these novels' relationship with a past that, as Hutcheon points out in her discussion of parody, "is not

something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled ... the past is something with which we must come to terms" (55). Parody is one way of navigating the past. The post-war fiction that I discuss here, therefore, shows continuity with the past —acknowledges it— and at the same time examines it, perhaps to make readers aware of how things once were, its consequences, and how that history is repeated in the present. Mackenbach observes that: "Todas estas novelas utilizan la historia como pretexto/pre-texto para la literatura y se valen de la memoria como recurso ficcional" [All these novels use history as a pretext/pre-text for literature and use memory as a formal resource] ("Narrativas de la memoria en Centroamérica" 248). Contemporary works parody the testimonial tradition, yet this parody is lost if readers are unaware of the critical discussion on classic *testimonios* against which the new readings are set; if so, these narratives are just limited to fiction, much as earlier texts (like I, *Rigoberta Menchú*, *Miguel Mármol*, and *Si me permiten hablar*) were just limited to *testimonio*. For parody does not only critiques the earlier form but also pays homage to it. Parody emphasizes the ongoing importance of *testimonio* in the present and questions its definitions and critical aspects.

My reading of the post-war narratives will, then, suggest new ways to approach Central American literature as *testimonio*. In the following sections, I highlight the resemblance between contemporary texts and *testimonio*, note their differences from the earlier works, and discuss how Central American fiction can be interpreted as a postmodern parody of classic *testimonio*. I have divided my analysis of *testimonio* into two subthemes: the treatment of fact and fiction, and the hierarchical relationship between the compiler and the witness.

Fact Versus Fiction

John Beverley proposes that the testimonial genre is concerned more with fact than fiction ("the real thing")⁴. This is what differentiates *testimonio* from literature. However, it was precisely because such authenticity was defined as what was at stake in *testimonio* that so much controversy erupted around Rigoberta Menchú's story *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*. After all, this had been read very much as a valid, factual story whose truthfulness and representativity could not be questioned, only to be then challenged by anthropologist David Stoll in his book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. Arturo Arias states:

Stoll launched a campaign against the cultural representation in Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* that was successful largely because American critics, not Menchú, claimed that her text sought to represent all the poor people of Guatemala and all Indigenous peoples on the continent. (*Taking their Word* xxi)

Contemporary fiction avoids this trap. Though it does indeed claim a form of referentiality, insisting on specific facts of post-Civil War society, it also questions whether a text can be only factual or only fictional and makes us doubt how we read *testimonio* and literature differently. Since these stories are notionally works of fiction and presented as such, even as they continually introduce specific moments of precise referentiality, they make us wonder whether a fictional text can or should be read as *testimonio* (or a testimonial text be read as fiction).

For instance, Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez* (2004) presents many true incidents with a fictional coating. This is the tale of a man whose job is to read through testimonial texts in the aftermath of a civil war. Told in the first person, the nameless narrator in a nameless country is a reporter from El Salvador who had to leave his country after writing a controversial article about its president. He is offered a job by his friend Erick, whom he had met in Mexico during his exile, where Erick was completing his postgraduate studies. Erick offers him

4. Beverley states in 'The Margin at the Center': "Unlike the novel, *testimonio* promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness." (26)

the job of compiling and editing *testimonios* written by Indigenous people as part of a project conducted by the Catholic Church. Now, though the name of the country where the narrative is set is not mentioned in the text, there are ample clues to show that it is Guatemala. For instance, the narrator discusses the Kaqchikel indigenous people; he mentions the Mam ethnic group and refers to General Otto Pérez Molina, though disguised as Octavio Pérez Mena. About this reference, Castellanos Moya would later say:

Octavio Pérez Mena, nombre de ficción que remite a otro real: Otto Pérez Molina, actual presidente de Guatemala, signado durante el juicio como coordinador de la represión en aquellos años, a partir de varios testimonios e investigaciones.

(Castellanos Moya Quoted by Ángel Berlanga, n.p.)

[Octavio Pérez Mena, a fictional name that refers to a real one: Otto Pérez Molina, the current president of Guatemala, who during the trial was identified as a coordinator of the repression in those years, according to various testimonies and investigations.]

Further, the novel mentions the name of Ríos Montt, Guatemalan President in the early 1980s and subsequently indicted for human rights abuses and crimes against humanity, when the army brutally kills the civil registrar of a village called Tototicapán for refusing to hand them over a list of the village's dead. The state needed such a list to "revivirlos y que pudieran votar a favor del partido del general Ríos Montt" [bring them back to life so that they could vote in favor of General Ríos Montt's party] (*Insensatez* 72). When asked in an interview about the connection between the names in the book and real life, Castellanos Moya adds:

También ahí hay una referencia a otro, Francisco Ortega Menaldo. Eran los dos jefes de inteligencia más famosos, formados en Israel y en Estados Unidos. Son tipos muy listos, no son los típicos matarifes. Es una sociedad muy jodida la guatemalteca.

(Castellanos Moya Quoted by Ángel Berlanga, n.p.)

[There's also a reference there to another person, Francisco Ortega Menaldo. They were the two most famous intelligence chiefs, trained in Israel and the United States. They're very smart guys —not the typical slaughterers. Guatemalan society is really messed up.]

Indeed, the *testimonio* of the Indigenous people that the protagonist is compiling in the text is set against the report *Guatemala nunca más*, as Ortiz Wallner reveals:

El informe *Guatemala nunca más* (1998), que recopila testimonios de los sobrevivientes de las masacres sufridas por los pueblos indígenas en Guatemala, fue presentado oficialmente al público en Guatemala el 24 de abril de 1998 en una ceremonia presidida por monseñor Juan Gerardi ... Este informe ha sido identificado como el intertexto más importante de la novela de Castellanos Moya.

(*El arte de ficcionar* 152)

[The report *Guatemala nunca más* (1998), which compiles testimonies from survivors of the massacres suffered by Indigenous peoples in Guatemala, was officially presented to the public in Guatemala on April 24, 1998, in a ceremony presided over by Juan Gerardi. ... This report has been identified as the most important intertext of Horacio Castellanos Moya's novel.]

Insensatez can thus be read as *testimonio* because it invokes the names and actions of those who led the repression in Guatemala.

Castellanos Moya's *El asco* consists of an uninterrupted monologue (without even paragraph breaks) by a character named Edgardo Vega, who conveys his frustration and hatred toward El Salvador to his friend Moya, who is also the text's compiler. Vega is now a Canadian citizen living in Montreal and a Professor of Art History at McGill University. He travels to San Salvador to attend his mother's funeral and to claim his part of the property that she has bequeathed. During the visit, he meets Moya in a bar and complains about the country. In *El asco*, the conflict between fact and fiction is demonstrated through the similarities between the character and compiler Moya, on the one hand, and the author Horacio Castellanos Moya, on the other. The relationship between the compiler and the author raises an important question —whether Moya, the compiler, and Castellanos Moya, the author, are the same person— that focuses on the role of the witness and the compiler in a reading of *testimonio*. *El asco*, a fictional work, subverts the concepts of authenticity and the "truth value" of the testimonial genre, which critics often claim are key factors in distinguishing it from other genres. The primary resemblance between the Moyas is that they are both writers. The other similarity is that the compiler, Moya, is from Tegucigalpa (Honduras), like the actual writer. For instance, Vega comments to his friend Moya: "Vos naciste en Tegucigalpa, Moya, y te pasaste los diez años de la Guerra en México, por eso no entiendo qué haces aquí" [You were born in Tegucigalpa, Moya, and you spent the ten years of the war in Mexico, so I don't understand what you're doing here] (*El asco* 25-26). This relation between the Moyas brings the link between fact and fiction to the fore. The facts about the writer Moya relate to the fictional character in the text. It forces the reader to ask whether reading *testimonio* differs from reading fiction and vice versa. It makes us rethink the rigid line drawn between fact and fiction in testimonial reading as much as in what is notionally fiction. It also makes us reconsider the concepts such as truth and authenticity that dominated the reception of texts read as *testimonio* in the eighties. Can these contemporary works of fiction be categorized as unreal or inauthentic? Can we not verify the factual evidence mentioned in these narratives? How can we, then, distinguish them from *testimonio*?

Another example from the same text concerns its subtitle, *Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador*, which addresses the narrator, the protagonist, or witness Edgardo Vega. The identification of this narrator is ambivalent, as the text makes clear from the start, in a brief preface that states:

Edgardo —Vega, el personaje central de este relato, existe: reside en Montreal bajo un nombre distinto— un nombre sajón que tampoco es Thomas Bernhard. Me comunicó sus opiniones seguramente con mayor énfasis y descarno del que contienen en este texto. Quise suavizar aquellos puntos de vista que hubieran escandalizado a ciertos lectores.

(*El asco* 11).

[Edgardo —Vega, the central character of this story, exists: he lives in Montreal under a different name— a Saxon name that is also not Thomas Bernhard. He shared his opinions with me, probably with more emphasis and boldness than they are contained in this text. I wanted to soften those points of view that might have scandalized certain readers.]

So Vega is and is not the real writer Thomas Bernhard, just as he both is and is not another, unnamed but real resident of Montreal.⁵ *El asco* plays with the distinction between truth and fiction, so that, on the one hand, it can be read as a fictional text, but, on the other, it claims to be

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5. Thomas Bernhard was an Austrian author known for his stinging social critique. Castellanos Moya explains, in an authorial postscript, the reason behind choosing this writer and his stylistic approach to denounce post-war El Salvador. He says that he has adapted the style from Bernhard "tanto en su prosa, basada en la cadencia y la repetición, como en su temática, que contiene una crítica acerba a Austria y su cultura" (*El asco* 136). He adds that "yo me había divertido durante la escritura de este libro, en el que quise hacer una demolición cultural y política de San Salvador, al igual que Bernhard la había hecho de Salzburgo, con el placer de la diatriba y el remedo" (136).

a “truthful” story narrated and compiled by real people. Ortiz Wallner observes that the Preface “ironiza la situación narrador/testimoniante-autor/recopilador al prevenir al lector” [The narrator/testimony author/collector humorously comments on the situation by warning the reader] (*El arte de ficcionar* 138-139).⁶ She further adds that “de esta manera queda planteada la ambigüedad de la narración en tanto que declarar la ‘verdad’ sobre lo que el lector está a punto de leer es, a la vez, un desenmascaramiento de la confección ficcional-literaria” [in this manner, the ambiguity of the narration is established as it declares that the ‘truth’ of what will be read is, at the same time, an unmasking of the fictional-literary artifice] (*El arte de ficcionar* 139).

In *Insensatez*, too, one can notice similarities with previous testimonial readings, as it is based on many accurate and factual events. Yet, it creates a hybrid discourse between the narrative told by the principal protagonist, which is “fiction” (though it mentions the names of some people and ethnic groups that exist in reality), and the narratives of the *testimonio*, which should be read as “fact.” *Insensatez* juxtaposes the traditional and contemporary narrative forms, thereby challenging the understanding of *testimonio* within the Western canon. This story is narrated mainly in the first person, but readers are also aware that the phrases from the *testimonios* the protagonist is reading have affected him throughout. These phrases occasionally interrupt the narration, especially as the plot develops. Gradually, a connection evolves between the protagonist and his work: it does not matter whether the voice is the narrator’s or from the *testimonios* that he is compiling, and thus the line between fact and fiction gets blurred. As Ileana Rodríguez describes it: “A medida que el narrador-editor avanza en las correcciones del texto de la verdad para lo cual lo han empleado, el poder literario del texto va fomentando el terror en él mismo, que ya no es capaz de distinguir entre texto y contexto, ficción y realidad” [As the narrator-editor progresses in correcting the text of the truth for which he has been employed, the literary power of the text begins to foster terror within himself, to the point that he can no longer distinguish between text and context, fiction and reality.] (“Estéticas de esperanza, memoria y desencanto” 34). The act of compiling *testimonios* in a fictional context is itself a challenge to earlier readings.

Contemporary texts not only repeat familiar literary devices but also, in turn, challenge the idea of literature and *testimonio* as separate categories that cannot be connected. *Insensatez* challenges the definition of the *testimonio* genre, which subordinates literary value to purported truth. According to Beverley, “unlike the novel, *testimonio* promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness” (“The Margin at the Center”). However, throughout Castellanos Moya’s novel, the narrator collects snippets from the *testimonios* he is reading, comparing them to literature rather than being overly preoccupied with their “sincerity.” For instance, he reads aloud lines that he has noted down from the *testimonios* to his friend Toto, a poet, and describes them as “cápsulas concentradas de dolor ... cuyas frases tenían tal sonoridad, fuerza y profundidad que yo había apuntado ya algunas de ellas en mi libreta personal” [Concentrated capsules of pain ... whose phrases had such resonance, force, and depth that I had already written some of them down in my personal notebook] (*Insensatez* 30). He further addresses Toto as a poet who will be interested in these poetic phrases: “Escucha esta lindura, vos que sos poeta.” [Listen to this beauty, as you are a poet.] Yet at some point he realizes that Toto is not interested in the poetic lines as he sadly notes: “Y lo observé de nuevo, porque ahora sí tenía que haber encajado esos versos que para mí expresaban toda la desolación después de la masacre, pero no para mi compadre Toto, más agricultor que poeta, como descubrí con pena” [And I looked at him again, because by then those verses, which for me expressed all the desolation after the massacre. But not for my compadre/colleague Toto, who was more farmer than poet, as I painfully discovered.] (*Insensatez* 31).

6. According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodern parody “is fundamentally ironic and critical” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 94). She further states in *Irony’s Edge* that “irony’s edge gives parody its ‘critical’ dimension in its marking of difference at the heart of similarity” (3). Irony and Parody, therefore, seem to be interrelated. As Hutcheon explains that the parodic approach towards a creative work has an ironic critical aspect.

Another example that again proves the narrator's appreciation of the *testimonios* more as literature than in terms of their sincerity is when he compares their style with that of the Peruvian poet César Vallejo: "esas intensas figuras de lenguaje y en la curiosa construcción sintáctica que me recordaba a poetas como el peruano César Vallejo" [those intense figures of speech and the curious syntactic construction that reminded me of poets like the Peruvian César Vallejo] (Insensatez 32). Elsewhere, he defines the reading of *testimonio* as literary: "aquellas frases que me parecían estupendas literariamente, que jamás volvería a compartir con poetas insensibles como mi compadre Toto y que con suerte podría utilizar posteriormente en algún tipo de collage literario" [those phrases that I thought were literary wonderful, that I would never share again with insensitive poets like my colleague/pal Toto, and that I might, at best, use later in some kind of literary collage] (Insensatez 43). Rodríguez notes that:

La tentación de novelar los datos, de convertir la historia en ficción, es lo que promueve la substracción de las frases poéticas, pero a la vez el narrador-editor se da cuenta de que lo que está haciendo es leer el testimonio del sufrimiento histórico como ficción, no como represión política sino como creación estética.

(Insensatez 36).

[The temptation to fictionalize the data, to turn history into fiction, is what promotes the subtraction of poetic phrases, but at the same time, the narrator-editor realizes that what he is doing is reading the testimony of historical suffering as fiction, not as political repression but as aesthetic creation.]

These examples thus raise questions about the definitions invoked in the past in the stark comparison between literature and *testimonio*. They also demonstrate that novels like *El asco* and *Insensatez* should be open to readers' interpretations—they can be read as fiction as well as *testimonio* (just as the classic *testimonios*). Approaching these texts as fiction and *testimonio* demonstrates that literature and *testimonio* can coexist in a single narrative without erasing or dominating the other. Instead, it retains the content's complexity.

Insensatez subverts the testimonial genre from the perspective of a compiler who "no está completo de la mente" [not all there mentally] (13), and is more interested in appreciating the literariness of the texts he reads than in seeking their truth value, sincerity, or authenticity. The novel also shows tension between the protagonist, who enjoys reading the *testimonios*, and his colleagues, who do not. For instance, his colleague Pilar, who seems very serious and dedicated to her job, loses interest when the narrator reads a fragment from a *testimonio*; his friend Toto, a poet, also loses interest when he recites the fragments. Moreover, the Monsignor and the church director, Mynor, react strangely when the narrator relates a phrase from his notebook:

Monseñor se me quedó viendo con una mirada indescifrable tras sus gafas de cristales ahumados y montura de carey, una mirada que me hizo temer que él me considerara un literato alucinado en busca de versos donde lo que había era una brutal denuncia de los crímenes de lesa humanidad perpetrados por el ejército contra las comunidades indígenas de su país, que él pensara que yo era un mero estilista que pasaba por alto el contenido del informe, por lo que me abstuve de leer frase y más bien comencé a hablar de la estructura y del capitulado, del enfoque psico-social y de la clasificación de las afecciones mentales de las víctimas.

(Insensatez 68-69)

[The Monsignor looked at me with an inscrutable gaze behind his smoked glasses and tortoiseshell frame, a look that made me fear he considered me a deluded writer searching for verses when what there was instead was a brutal denunciation of the crimes against humanity committed by the army against the indigenous communities of his country, that he thought I was just a stylist overlooking the content of the report, so I refrained from reading the sentence and instead began to talk about the structure and the chapter, about the psycho-social approach and the classification of the mental conditions of the victims.]

The restrictions that framed the testimonial genre during the eighties and nineties continue to impose on contemporary readings, in the form of injunctions against exploring literary aspects of the *testimonio* genre or testimonial aspects of literature. This quote further divides how we approach literary works and other fields of social sciences. It makes us wonder why there is a need to ignore the stylistic approach in traumatic *testimonios*. Why can we not appreciate and focus on the literary aspects and the traumatic events in the same text? Ortiz Wallner states that “el narrador va a vivir en aislamiento esta admiración y fascinación, pues no encontrará interlocutores con quienes compartir la forma en que estas frases le afectan. Nadie le escucha, nadie se interesa” [The narrator will live in isolation with this admiration and fascination, for he will not find anyone to share how these phrases affect him. No one listens to him, no one is interested.] (*El arte de ficcionar*, 154). Yet these factors (literary versus *testimonio*, fact versus fiction) are questioned and subverted here, as the novel’s narrator critiques the perception of reading a text as *testimonio* within the canon and, therefore, juxtaposes his interest in the literary aspects of the account and others’ reaction to it in the plot.

The Compiler and the Witness

Like classic *testimonios*, contemporary fictional works establish a relationship between a compiler and a witness, making the text a dialogue between two or more people rather than a monologue. However, these works also challenge the role of the compiler as an intellectual and, therefore, his or her supposedly “superior” position from which to judge and organize the witness’s account. The notion of the intellectual in *testimonio* is meant to provide a platform for the subaltern voice. Still, it marks off the intellectuals from the marginalized and the unlettered. It suggests that, though the subaltern perspective is essential, scholars must monitor, mediate, and even correct it.

El asco has aspects that defined the reading of *testimonio* in the eighties and nineties. The text is narrated in the first person by Vega to his friend and compiler, Moya. Alongside his narrative, Vega talks about El Salvador and comments on the country’s post-war situation. Characteristics of *testimonio* as a genre found in this text include orality—evidenced by long, sometimes repetitious sentences as in classic *testimonio*—a first-person narrative, and a preoccupation with the country’s socio-political condition. Further, we can observe the presence of a compiler and a witness, with the witness narrating the story to the compiler, who compiles it for the readers. In *El asco*, the act of re-telling and shaping the witness’s story is brought to the fore, and the novel draws our attention to the complexity of the narrative style involved in reading *testimonio*. Here, the reader knows from the beginning that the text is mediated. For the compiler’s voice is more active in Castellanos Moya’s novel than it is elsewhere: he is narrating to the reader the story that Vega has told him. Though the tale he tells is narrated in the first person, readers realize from the outset that this is a mediated text and that they are not receiving the narration directly from the narrator or witness but only from another person interpreting it. Moreover, in this case, the compiler is another character in the book:

Moya is Vega's childhood friend. In most classic testimonial accounts, the compiler only comes to know and understand the witness from the story he or she narrates (as he or she compiles it). Here, however, the opening sentence of the book makes readers aware of the narrative complexity: "Suerte que viniste, Moya, tenía mis dudas que vinieras, porque este lugar no le gusta a mucha gente en esta ciudad, hay gente a la que no le gusta nada este lugar, Moya, por eso no estaba seguro de si vos ibas a venir, me dijo Vega" [Good thing you came, Moya. I had my doubts that you would, because a lot of people in this city don't like this place —there are people who can't stand this place at all, Moya. That's why I wasn't sure whether you were going to come, Vega told me] (*El asco* 15). As critic Megan Thornton notes, the repeated use of the phrase "me dijo Vega" "Vega told me" throughout the text makes the reader conscious of the compiler's presence: "Adding 'me dijo Vega' at the end explicitly marks Moya's presence in the conversation and makes clear his role as the transcriber of Vega's story, a presence that a traditional editor of the *testimonio* may hide" ("A Postwar Perversion" 209). *El asco* thus compels its readers to rethink the relationship between narrators and compilers. Do they have to get to know each other and build their friendship over time, or can there be an informal, friendly relationship even before the narrator tells their story to the compiler?

This question leads us to another: must there be a hierarchy between compiler and narrator in testimonial readings? Beverley and Zimmerman explain that:

Since in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer or intellectual, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the recording and/or transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist (*Literature and Politics* 173).

The principal characteristic defining *testimonio* in the eighties and nineties was that the witness should be an (effectively) illiterate person who narrated his or her story to a compiler who was literate, generally an intellectual, who edited, arranged, and organized the story so that it could be read worldwide.⁷ However, in *El asco*, both characters studied at the same school; both were educated and well-qualified. Thus, the text questions if there is any need for a hierarchy between a witness and an intellectual. Edgardo Vega is a professor at McGill University in Canada, while his compiler is a struggling writer in El Salvador. If anything, then the hierarchy is reversed. The book questions the subalternity of the voice brought to our attention through the intellectual's intervention. All this again forces us to re-read *testimonio* in a new way. We should not restrict ourselves to the assumption that we will hear only subaltern voices or factual events in a text treated as *testimonio*, or an unauthentic story in a text treated as fiction. (In fact, there is always more than this.) Our readings should always open up new possibilities of exploring testimonial elements in literature and literary elements in *testimonio*.

In *Insensatez*, the narrator's habit of collecting key phrases from the *testimonios* he reads highlights both similarity and difference. As mentioned before, he keeps a notebook where he writes down sentences from the *testimonios* he compiles. The opening lines introduce this habit: "Yo no estoy completo de la mente, decía la frase que subrayé con el marcado amarillo y que hasta pasé en limpio en mi libreta personal" (*Insensatez* 13). [I am not complete sound of mind, stated the sentence I highlighted and rewrote on my personal notebook]. This annotation practice is similar to the classic *testimonio*, where the ethnographer, intellectual, or compiler records, edits, and organizes oral accounts that are later written down. It also highlights

7. Of course, there are exceptions or complications to this rule, such as *The Little School* and *La noche de Tlatelolco*. The latter features a variety of informants, including students, administrators, army officers, and professors. In *The Little School*, the narrator is not Indigenous or a factory worker but a university student, and it is a compilation of testimonial short stories, that is, a hybrid genre.

the presence of the compiler's voice in *testimonio*, foregrounding the fact that there is a medium between the witness and the readers. Thus, contemporary fiction demonstrates that witnesses' testimony never reaches its readers without some intervention; instead, such stories are mediated at various levels. Moreover, the narrator challenges the relationship between compiler and witness in this book by linking the phrase "yo no estoy completo de la mente" to himself. He identifies with this phrase and therefore warns readers to be cautious, as his compilation may not be entirely trustworthy.

The notion that first-person narrative should be one of *testimonio's* defining factors (as it is, for instance, for Beverley) is also problematized in *Insensatez*. For instance, the narrator comes across the *testimonio* of a man who, literally speechless, dumb, was nonetheless tortured by the army to confess the names of other collaborators of the guerrilla, and was beaten for his silence in front of others:

el sargento comenzará a infringirle incisiones en el cuerpo con el yatagan, a los gritos de «¡habla, indio hijo de la gran puta, antes de que me calientes los huevos!», pero el mudito nada más abría desorbitadamente los ojos de tal forma que parecía que saldrían de sus cuencas a causa del terror

(*Insensatez* 28).

[The sergeant would begin inflicting cuts on his body with the yatagan, shouting, 'Talk, you indian son of a bitch, before you really piss me off!', but the mute would only open his eyes wildly, so much so that it seemed they would pop out of their sockets from sheer terror.]

This *testimonio* was not told by the dumb man but by someone who must have witnessed the event and relayed his expressions. Subsequently, the compiler tells the story to his friend and, in turn, to the readers since it is through his narration that we learn about the incident. He adds that this was "un sargento bastante bruto si consideramos que destazó al mudito sin darse cuenta de que esos gritos no eran solo de dolor, sino de un mudito para quien esa era su única forma de expresión" [a pretty rough sergeant considering he slaughtered the mute without realizing that those screams weren't just of pain, but from a mute whose only form of expression was those screams] (29). *Insensatez*, therefore, makes us think twice, not only about what is said in *testimonio* (expressions through words or sounds) but also how it questions both content and form as it makes us reassess how we approach such narratives. John Beverley notes that

as *testimonio* implies a new kind of relation between narrator and reader, the contradictions of sex, class, race, and age that frame the narrative's production can also reproduce themselves in the relation of narrator to this direct interlocutor ("The Margin at the Center" 30).

However, in case of *Insensatez*, we observe that in the form, the book shows that these narratives do not reach readers directly; they traverse other layers before reaching an interlocutor. Thus, the relation between the narrator and the interlocutor is not 'direct', but mediated.

Further, it raises the question of whether the compiler's work can be fully trusted. The content compels us to think about how we can analyze and approach such works without dividing them between fact and fiction or literature and *testimonio*. Contemporary narratives such as *Insensatez* address the complexity of the testimonial form (as well as the fictional form) and ask the reader to consider whether texts like *Insensatez* might also be read as *testimonio*. Castellanos Moya's narrator clarifies, moreover, through his repeated quotation and appreciation of phrases taken from indigenous testimonies, that there is little need to edit or

organize these *testimonios*, even if their authors are uneducated or even illiterate. They have a power of their own. Asked by the director of the Archbishopric about the quality of the texts he has found, the narrator answers that: “la calidad no era el problema sino la cantidad” [The quality is not a problem rather the quantity] (38). Indeed, the narrator repeatedly challenges the hierarchical division between witness and compiler. As he puts it on one occasion:

Lo que pienso es que pienso yo ... carajo, o esta otra, Tanto en sufrimiento que hemos sufrido tanto con ellos ... cuya musicalidad me dejó perplejo desde el primer momento, cuya calidad poética era demasiada como para no sospechar que procedía de un gran poeta y no de una anciana indígena que con ese verso finalizaba su desgarrador testimonio que ahora no viene al caso.

(*Insensatez* 43).

[What I think is that I think ... damn it, or this other one, ‘So much in suffering that we have suffered so much with them ... whose musicality left me perplexed from the very first moment, whose poetic quality was so great that it can be suspected that it came from a great poet and not from an Indigenous old woman who ended her harrowing testimony with that line, which is not relevant here now.]

Here, the narrator appreciates the literariness of the testimonial genre and, at the same time, is stunned by the way these indigenous people have described their trauma. The narrator focuses both on the horrific events that occurred in the indigenous communities and on their capability to narrate such incidents poetically.

Parody and Postmodernism

El asco and *Insensatez* are contemporary works of fiction that can also be read as *testimonio*. But at the same time, they critique and question fundamental aspects of the testimonial genre. I propose this (questioning and critiquing) strategy as a parody: they parody the *testimonio* genre. As Linda Hutcheon explains, parody is a means of ridicule and a way to critique the background text against which contemporary fiction has been set. However, parody does not simply set two works of art against each other that interrelate in a certain way; instead, the kind of parody Hutcheon is talking about is “an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting and ‘trans-contextualizing’ previous works of art” (*A Theory of Parody* 11). It is not an imitation of the past but the creation of a new model; it gives the later text a new meaning; it is complex and incorporates critical reflection. Hutcheon states that “the auto-reflexivity of modern art forms often takes the form of parody and, when it does so, it provides a new model for artistic process” (*A Theory of Parody* 5). Difference and “distanciation” (10) are the two essential characteristics of parody, as it establishes the past as a model while simultaneously critiquing and subverting it. As Hutcheon says, “parody is doubly coded in political terms: it legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies. This kind of authorized transgression is what makes it a ready vehicle for the political contradictions of postmodernism at large” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 97). It questions the past and its representation as we know it in the present through fiction and other genres, but simultaneously demonstrates continuity with the past.

Reading contemporary fiction as *testimonio*, then, can challenge the concept of the genre as it emerged in the seventies on the one hand and, on the other, can show how the testimonial impulse has been adapted to address the region’s current social and political situation; it insists on bringing back to life a genre or an approach (to narrative)

once considered dead. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, citing architect Robert Stern:

in search for a wider base for form, the classical tradition offers a set of references that remain meaningful to the public and continue to demonstrate their compositional usefulness In recognizing this, we do not necessarily argue for a return to or revival of the past, but rather for recognition of the continuity of the past in the present. (*A Theory of Parody* 113).

These fictional works demonstrate the continuity with the past when we read and compare them to the classic *testimonio*.

El asco and *Insensatez* can be termed postmodern in that they use “the reappropriated forms of the past to speak to society, while still questioning it” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 12); according to Hutcheon, this is a characteristic of postmodern fiction, which she says “often thematizes this process of turning events into facts through the filtering and interpreting of archival documents” (54). Hutcheon adds that:

There are important parallels between the processes of history-writing and fiction-writing and among the most problematic of these are their common assumptions about narrative and about the nature of mimetic representation. The postmodern situation is that a “truth is being told, with ‘facts’ to back it up, but a teller constructs that truth and chooses those facts” (Foley 1986: 67). In fact, that teller —of story or history— also constructs those very facts by giving a particular meaning to events. Facts do not speak for themselves in either form of narrative: the tellers speak for them, making these fragments of the past into a discursive whole. (56)

We can then say that classic *testimonios*, defined as factual and authentic, can be termed “truth” constructed and supported by the facts carefully chosen by the narrator, as in contemporary fiction. Where *Insensatez*, for example, demonstrates such a “process of turning events into facts through the filtering and interpreting of archival documents” by building upon the report *Guatemala nunca más*, *El asco* shifts between fact, truth, and fiction “by making these fragments of the past into a discursive whole.” This relation between earlier *testimonios* and post-war fiction demonstrates not only the complexity of classic *testimonios*, with their inclusion of literary elements, but also that of contemporary fiction, with its incorporation of testimonial elements.

Hutcheon further argues that no single definition can encompass postmodernism, and she cites Brian McHale in so far as he “points out that every critic ‘constructs’ postmodernism in his or her own way from different perspectives, none more right or wrong than the others” (10).⁸ Hence, contemporary Central American fiction can also be interpreted in various ways: it not only shows similarities with the testimonial genre but also (say) with mystery novels. They challenge the limitation of these texts, read only under the fictional banner. These literary works raise important social issues, often through humor and an appreciation of the absurd. Rodríguez states about *Insensatez*:

Por medio de esa primera frase de entrada [yo no estoy completo de la mente], el narrador-editor llega a la conclusión de que la totalidad de los habitantes de esa región no está completa de la mente; él mismo tampoco lo está. El estado mental general de locura y perturbación mental aterrizó este texto justo en la psicosis postmoderna.

(35)

8. In turn, Fredric Jameson argues that “As for Postmodernism itself, I have not tried to systematize a usage or to impose any conveniently coherent thumbnail meaning, for the concept is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory. I will argue that, for good or ill, we cannot not use it. But my argument should also be taken to imply that every time it is used, we are under the obligation to rehearse those inner contradictions and to stage those representational inconsistencies and dilemmas; we have to work all that through every time around. Postmodernism is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience. The concept, if there is one, has to come at the end, and not at the beginning, of our discussions of it. Those are the conditions—the only ones, I think, that prevent the mischief of premature clarification—under which this term can productively continue to be used” (*Postmodernism* xxi).

[Through that opening phrase [I am not completely sane], the narrator-editor concludes that none of the inhabitants of that region are of sound mind; he himself is not either. The overall mental state of madness and mental disturbance grounds this text right in postmodern psychosis.]

She further argues that the object of postmodernism “es repensar el proyecto de la modernidad desde la heterogeneidad. Su deber es preguntarse qué tipo y proporción de ella es necesario para convivir y qué hacer con lo que no podemos tolerar” [it is about rethinking the project of modernity from the perspective of heterogeneity. Its task is to ask what kind and proportion of it is necessary for coexistence, and what to do with what we cannot tolerate] (43). Fredric Jameson offers his own understanding of postmodernism, but his ideas resonate with Hutcheon’s when he states that “Postmodernism is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience” (xxi). This is precisely what we have seen in these texts and also what Hutcheon and Rodríguez are arguing. We notice that contemporary Central American fiction cannot be categorized definitively as “settle[d] once and for all” (as we shall further see in the arguments of Hutcheon and Jameson). These texts continue to provoke their readers to further reading and discussion.

When Hutcheon relates postmodernism to parody, she points out that we can understand the past only through its various representations and, therefore, that the representation of history becomes the history of representation: “the history of representation cannot be escaped, but it can be both exploited and commented on critically through irony and parody” (55). For that reason, parody is one such way in which these texts become subversive. It challenges the defining characteristics of the testimonial genre. In that way, it also challenges the manipulation of the market to capitalize on *testimonio* as the “authentic” voice of the subaltern, a voice against literature, and a voice that promotes solidarity and resistance. Parody offers other ways to read *testimonio* —it addresses the issues Central America continues to face and maintains *testimonio* as a reading strategy.

Hutcheon affirms that “there is continuum, but there is also ironic difference, difference induced by that very history” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 90). Yet, Fredric Jameson differs:

we are now, in other words, in ‘intertextuality’ as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of ‘pastness’ and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history. (*Postmodernism* 20)

Contemporary Central American fiction questions “real history”: not just “official” history, but also the (oppositional) history narrated and understood as *testimonio* during the civil wars. They question the narrator’s perspective in *testimonio*, the text’s structure, and the issues it raises. They reread “history” to challenge its status as the only form of understanding the region’s socio-political situation. Contemporary fiction destabilizes the “history” narrated as *testimonio*, as the only source of understanding the past struggle. They explore other possibilities for understanding the past and the legacy that it leaves in today’s post-war epoch. Jameson also questions whether postmodernism may “imply any more fundamental change or break than the periodic style and fashion changes determined by an older high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation?” (1). I argue that a “fundamental change” could not revive the reading strategy of *testimonio* that was once considered dead. A “fundamental change or break” could have led to different strategies for exploring art and literature, but would have passed over the ongoing potential of

testimonio. Since contemporary fiction emphasizes a connection with the past, it keeps the testimonial impulse alive. Nevertheless, it critiques that past to ask: have past issues been resolved? Are we at peace with the past? Can we bury the past and look toward the future? These fictional works focus on the continued presence of *testimonio*, but they also compel us to go beyond previous definitions and debates to explore other possibilities in the genre.

Conclusion

Literary texts such as *Insensatez* and *El asco* consist of a plurality of narrative voices to evidence perhaps what Jameson describes as “the disappearance of the individual subject,” which has, he argues, “along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche” (*Postmodernism* 16). These fictional stories reflect Jameson’s argument: *El asco* has no single principal character but rather a conversation between two friends; it provides no comprehensive background for Moya or Vega, nor does it describe their physical appearance for the reader to imagine the characters. There are just fragments of the past for readers to get to know the characters, but no concrete image can be formed; instead, a sense of mystery or suspense is attached to them. Likewise, the narrator of *Insensatez* is nameless and shadowy.

The other aspect associated with the “disappearance of individual subject” and “the increasing unavailability of the personal style” can be seen here in the narrator’s death and the demise of a generic style. Both works of fiction feature many narrative voices and a combination of genres (testimonial, thriller, and autobiography). However, the “unavailability of the personal style” simultaneously contributes to the text’s complexity, leaving the reader uneasy because he or she cannot identify with it. This forces us to be active participants rather than passive observers. Limiting them to the characteristics of *testimonio* as a reading style of the eighties and nineties—with a focus on truth and authenticity, facts versus fiction, literature versus *testimonio*, and resistance and solidarity—will strip these texts of their nuances. At the same time, reading them only as fiction, thrillers, or autobiographies will make us overlook the testimonial elements they contain. Thus, they can be read in multiple ways; they defy categorization. They suggest that insisting on such generic divisions in literary or cultural studies can sometimes rule out a potential creative medium (*testimonio* in this case). They make us question how these narratives have been canonized according to rigid criteria and ask us to test further the limits of our understanding of a work of art. For example, here, parody is a literary tool to read contemporary fiction as *testimonio*. I call it parody rather than pastiche for its double-voiced character: the way in which it poses challenges and raises questions about the past. These texts are not the simple imitation of an earlier style. They repeat that style with a certain intention and yet maintain their differences.

One of the criteria for interpreting fiction as a parody of the past literary form is that it can only be understood as a parody if the reader recognizes it. As Hutcheon says,

while parody offers a much more limited and controlled version of this activation of the past by giving it a new and often ironic context, it makes similar demands upon the reader, but these demands are more on his or her knowledge and recollection than on his or her openness to play. (*A Theory of Parody* 5)

The reader needs to be familiar with the background text that has been parodied and to decode the author’s codes to interpret the contemporary work as a parody. *El asco* and *Insensatez* can be decoded

as parodies only when we can set them against the earlier narratives defined as *testimonios* and observe the various changes, negotiations, and challenges that contemporary texts pose to them. Thus, present-day fiction emphasizes the need to know and acknowledge the past by adopting a former model —not nostalgically, but through critical reflection.

These contemporary fictional narratives are in dialogue with the past: they relate to and reflect on a past that seems to be their source of information or point of interest. But that does not mean that they have “immortalized” the past form; through their dialogic structure, they challenge and question the canonization of the genre. They reinvent the past form of storytelling in a new way. As Hutcheon points out, quoting Burden on the “historical consciousness” of parody, it is this “that gives it the potential power both to bury the dead, so to speak, and also to give it new life” (*A Theory of Parody* 101). Nevertheless, beyond a knowledge of the past, these works of fiction also insist on the present condition of Central America. If anything, the social situation, as portrayed in present-day novels, is worse now than ever — the danger, the violence, the fear of being killed without reason or cause. Contemporary narratives, such as *El asco* and *Insensatez*, address these issues while reminding readers of a time when such violence was considered exceptional and when people believed they could, together, put an end to it and create a better Central American society. Thus, we see here the role of parody as a re-creation or construction of a new meaning whose base still holds elements from the past a past as the only reference in these texts to compare the present and a past that cannot be ignored in Central American literature as it keeps haunting the present.

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DE LA GUERRA A LA PAZ EN EL SALVADOR: DOS CUENTOS DEL CONFLICTO ARMADO Y DOS CUENTOS DE TRANSICIÓN DE RAFAEL FRANCISCO GÓCHEZ FERNÁNDEZ

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Resumen: La guerra civil en El Salvador (1980-1992) y la firma de los Acuerdos de Paz que dieron fin al conflicto militar el 16 de enero de 1992 son dos momentos históricos que se encuentran representados en la mayor parte de la producción cuentística del escritor salvadoreño Rafael Francisco Góchez Fernández. Este trabajo discutirá, primero, dos cuentos relacionados con la guerra civil: "Así como en las películas" y "Destreza," de la colección *¿Guerrita, no?* (1992). En ellos se analizará la representación de la violencia generada por el aparato armado del Estado y la forma en que esta se aplicaba a la población civil durante el conflicto. Luego, se estudiarán dos cuentos que tratan sobre el período de transición: "Desnudos en una capilla" de la colección del mismo título, publicada en 1993; y "El cadáver" de *Del asfalto* (1994). En estos textos se observará la preocupación, tanto individual como colectiva, sobre qué se debía hacer con el pasado reciente en el momento de transición nacional de una situación de guerra a una de paz. Se espera que el análisis de estos cuatro cuentos contribuya al estudio literario y cultural de esos dos momentos fundamentales de la sociedad salvadoreña.

Palabras clave: Rafael Góchez, cuentos, violencia, El Salvador, guerra civil, transición

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Mucho se ha escrito sobre los textos literarios producidos tanto durante la guerra civil salvadoreña como en los años posteriores a esta. Sin embargo, la producción cuentística de Rafael Francisco Góchez Fernández no ha recibido mucha atención por parte de la crítica literaria. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar dos cuentos considerados textos de guerra, “Así como en las películas” y “Destreza” con el fin de discutir la forma en que el autor representa la violencia ejercida por el aparato armado del estado hacia la población civil. Ambos cuentos forman parte de la colección *¿Guerrita, no?* publicada en 1992.

Estaría por demás afirmar que algunas de las principales causas que originaron el conflicto de El Salvador en la década de los años ochenta fueron las injusticias sociales y económicas creadas por el sistema oligárquico-militar vigente desde 1932. El golpe de Estado del 15 de octubre de 1979, que intentó ponerle fin a dicha situación, y que derrocó al presidente de la república Carlos Humberto Romero, buscaba frenar la ola de violencia desatada por el gobierno de Romero y, a la vez, implementar algunas reformas con el fin de apaciguar a los distintos grupos sociales que exigían el mejoramiento de las condiciones de vida de los sectores pobres del país. La proclama de la nueva Junta de Gobierno, por lo tanto, incluía un programa de reforma agraria, la disolución de los grupos paramilitares, el respeto a los derechos humanos y una mayor participación política para las organizaciones populares (Keen and Wasserman 500). Sin embargo, la historiadora Tommie Sue Montgomery señala que el motivo principal de ese golpe de estado pudo deberse a que los militares involucrados habían visto cómo la Guardia de Somoza había sido eliminada por los sandinistas en Nicaragua y temían que lo mismo pudiera ocurrirle a la institución militar si la revolución triunfaba en El Salvador (10). Esa situación podría ayudar a explicar la falta de compromiso por parte del gobierno a la hora de implementar cambios significativos. Como resultado, las organizaciones de masas consideraban que las reformas planteadas por el nuevo gobierno no eran lo suficientemente profundas. Por otro lado, debe tenerse en cuenta también que la oligarquía consideraba que los pequeños cambios políticos y económicos propuestos por la Junta amenazaban demasiado sus intereses y privilegios.

A todo lo anterior se sumaba la inhabilidad del gobierno para ejercer su autoridad sobre el ejército, pues el sector conservador del Alto Mando de la Fuerza Armada, representado por el coronel Abdul Gutiérrez, había logrado obtener el control del Ministerio de Defensa. De ahí que, aunque se proclamara una nueva apertura política para la izquierda organizada, los cuerpos de seguridad continuaran reprimiendo a la población civil. De hecho, más personas murieron a manos del aparato de seguridad en las tres semanas posteriores al golpe que durante el gobierno de Humberto Romero (Keen and Wasserman 501). Como consecuencia, los miembros civiles de la Junta comprendieron que dentro del marco político existente era prácticamente imposible implementar las reformas enunciadas en la plataforma de la Junta Revolucionaria. El tres de enero de 1980 todos los miembros del gabinete de gobierno, con la excepción del ministro de defensa, renunciaron a sus cargos, reflejando así, en gran medida, la frustración de estos dirigentes. Nuevamente el sector más conservador del ejército —esta vez avalado por José Napoleón Duarte, el PDC (Partido Democratacristiano) y la embajada estadounidense— había tomado el control del gobierno con la firme decisión de eliminar por completo cualquier oposición. El asesinato de Monseñor Oscar Romero en marzo de 1980 y el de los seis líderes del Frente Democrático Revolucionario en noviembre del mismo año, fueron solamente muestras de la ola de represión que abatiría al país. Para finales de esa década cerca de setenta y cinco mil personas, la mayoría civiles, habían perdido la vida y decenas de miles se encontraban desplazadas o habían emigrado.

Dado el estado de violencia en que se sumergía la nación salvadoreña en los años ochenta, no era de extrañar que muchos escritores nacionales reflejaran en sus escritos su preocupación por ese estado de cosas. Uno de ellos fue Rafael Francisco Góchez Fernández, escritor salvadoreño nacido en la ciudad de Santa Tecla, El Salvador, en 1967. Obtuvo una licenciatura en letras por la Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” (UCA). Actualmente es docente de escuela secundaria y músico. Durante la década de los noventa obtuvo cinco premios nacionales de literatura: Wang (1990), Alfonso Hernández (1991), Expo Familia (1993), Carta a mi padre (1995) y los Juegos Florales de San Salvador (1997). Desde 2023 participa como analista político en diferentes medios de comunicación social. La primera colección de cuentos de este escritor se titula *¿Guerrita, no?* (1992) y consta de veintiséis cuentos. Tres de ellos tratan directamente sobre la violencia que proviene de grupos armados del gobierno, como lo son el caso de dos cuentos analizados en este trabajo y “Te juro que no estaba bolo.” Los otros cuentos tratan sobre la forma en que la violencia producida por la guerra civil había permeado a la sociedad, tanto en las relaciones afectuosas, amorosas y sexuales entre individuos, como en la interacción cotidiana que podría ocurrir al tomar un autobús o realizar las compras en un supermercado. El crítico literario Rafael Rodríguez, al comentar sobre la referida colección observa que los cuentos de Góchez “se centran en la más estricta y crasa dimensión de la realidad” (9). Dicha realidad, añade el académico, es representada por una violencia caracterizada por torturas, violaciones, desapariciones, capturas forzadas y asesinatos (9). Estas afirmaciones son sumamente importantes porque, como observaremos en los dos primeros cuentos, lo que nos ofrece Góchez Fernández es la utilización de la violencia producida por la guerra civil con el fin de recrear historias que, para los desconocedores de la realidad centroamericana de los años ochenta, pudieran parecer, de acuerdo con Rafael Rodríguez, completamente desquiciadas (9). A lo anteriormente expuesto, podemos añadir que, de acuerdo con Allan Armando Barrera Galdámez, el tema de la violencia política se puede encontrar implícita o explícitamente en una gran parte de la producción literaria que surge entre las décadas de 1960 y 1980. De igual manera, el académico agrega que: “Los autores de este periodo expresaron las transformaciones culturales y la violencia política acaecida en la región en su forma literaria, identificando al Estado como el agresor y al pueblo como la víctima” (n.p). Esta violencia política, por tanto, podría ser definida, según Philippe Bourgois como “violence directly and purposefully administered in the name of a political ideology, movement, or state such as the physical repression of dissent by the army or the police” (8). Tomando en cuenta lo anterior, podremos entender que, en el caso de Rafael Góchez, la violencia política generada por el Estado sirve de materia prima para recrear una situación donde uno o varios individuos, generalmente pertenecientes a los cuerpos policiales y del ejército salvadoreño, son capaces de cometer inimaginables actos de violencia en contra de la población civil. Al aproximarnos a la lectura de los cuentos notaremos que, en el caso de “Así como en las películas,” la violencia es generada por el brazo armado del Estado y dirigida indiscriminadamente a los habitantes del área rural, sin que los miembros del ejército traten de ocultar sus actos de salvajismo. En el Segundo cuento, “Destreza”, la violencia adquiere una dimensión todavía más macabra dado que los victimarios, pertenecientes a los cuerpos de seguridad del gobierno, se encargan de “eliminar” a sus adversarios bajo el manto del anonimato.

“Así como en las películas” es una historia que nos muestra cómo un adolescente campesino tímido, que necesitaba la ayuda de bebidas alcohólicas para tomar valor y así poder hablarles a las jóvenes de su comunidad, se convierte en un soldado capaz de cometer actos bárbaros contra la gente de su mismo pueblo. La historia es contada por el propio protagonista, del que se desconoce su nombre. El narrador en primera persona establece que ha sido reclutado por el

ejército y revela las impresiones y sensaciones de su primera noche como recluta. Luego de recibir el adoctrinamiento militar y aprender el uso de las armas, el nuevo soldado, aunque no entiende el por qué de la guerra, afirma que, "Lo importante es que ahora soy importante; tengo huevos ... es decir, valor, pues" (59). Estas declaraciones son significativas dado que nos revelan su manera de pensar e indican que ha decidido permanecer en el ejército no por convicciones ideológicas, sino debido a que el uniforme militar y las armas le confieren autoridad, poder y valor. Esta situación difiere, en gran medida, de lo que el crítico Barrera Galdámez ha examinado en textos literarios que tratan sobre violencia, especialmente en el caso de la novela *Un día en la vida* de Manlio Argueta. En esta obra la represión ejercida por las Fuerzas Armadas respondía a una ideología "anticomunista" que impelía a los elementos represivos a matar "por el ideal de una 'patria grande', libre de comunistas enemigos del Estado y del capital". Por otro lado, podríamos igualmente agregar que, según Werner Mackenbach y Alexandra Ortiz, "se reflejan más los rasgos del militarismo influenciados por el culto a la muerte tan arraigados en las instituciones castrenses latinoamericanas" (84). Se puede afirmar, por lo tanto, que el accionar del protagonista del cuento no se ve regido por conceptos ideológicos, sino por el afán de sobresalir y ser reconocido por sus superiores, lo cual le permite "experimentar" con nuevos métodos de tortura.

A medida que transcurre su relato, el personaje-narrador nos va dando a conocer la manera en que evoluciona el proceso que lo lleva a convertirse en un experto torturador, al comentar que

Poco a poco fui agarrando más práctica. Se me ocurrían buenas ideas para interrogar a los prisioneros. A uno le fuimos quitando de a poquito el pellejo, y cuando lo veíamos desmayarse, lo dejábamos descansar, para seguir después (60).

En otra ocasión, el joven personaje añade que sigue "mejorando" su capacidad de generar dolor al asegurar que, "A otro lo estiramos entre cuatro, y uno en medio comenzaba a darle de patadas en la columna hasta tronar: '¡Crack!'"(60). Como podemos observar en las citas anteriores, Rafael Góchez representa una realidad violenta y cruda, donde prevalece la tortura como forma de ejercer control e infundir terror sobre la población. Esto es significativo puesto que, a lo largo del conflicto militar salvadoreño, los cuerpos de seguridad hicieron uso de distintos métodos de tortura para extraer información a "los enemigos del Estado." Elaine Scarry establece que el dolor causado por la tortura representa un dolor físico real que le confiere una cualidad de "incontestable reality on that power that has brought it into being" (27). Esto podría ilustrar la capacidad que los diferentes gobiernos que ostentaron el poder durante la guerra civil poseían para infligir dolor a sus oponentes políticos. El Estado, por lo tanto, se convierte en generador de violencia, cuyos objetivos eran castigar a quienes consideraba revolucionarios y disuadir a todo aquel que pretendiera apoyar cualquier forma de activismo político contra el gobierno.

Los actos de violencia representados en el cuento no se limitaban a la tortura, dado que la población no beligerante también era víctima de numerosos abusos y atrocidades perpetradas por la Fuerza Amada. Un ejemplo claro de ese tipo de barbarie es el episodio de la violación de Lupe, una joven campesina que había rechazado los avances amorosos del narrador. Es el mismo joven soldado quien nos dice que, después de un combate armado con un grupo guerrillero en las cercanías del pueblo de Lupe, decide ir con otros dos soldados a la casa de la joven, donde proceden a sacarla forzosamente de su vivienda. El personaje-narrador agrega que, "Los otros dos me entendieron el plan: primero yo; después, ahí que vieran ... pero me tenían que ayudar" (61). Este miembro del ejército prosigue describiendo en detalle la violación de la

joven, lo cual produce un fuerte choque en el lector y una reacción de repudio hacia los soldados. De igual forma, por medio de la utilización de un discurso castrense el autor describe simultáneamente el ataque sexual de la joven y el combate armado hacia la población civil. Góchez Fernández logra yuxtaponer dos acciones violentas, presentando la escena así: "Alcancé a oír los planes para atacar por dos frentes simultáneos. Empezando estaban, cuando se reanudó el combate, el de las balas, había que tomar posiciones, es decir, otras posiciones, y ya ni acabaron a gusto" (61). Tenemos, por consiguiente, que el uso del discurso castrense contribuye a darle un realce a la imagen metafórica que representa una nación mancillada por su propio ejército a través del ataque sexual al que es sometida la joven campesina. El concepto de violación resulta importante porque el cuento no recrea solamente la violencia ejercida por los cuerpos militares hacia la población rural, sino también la forma en que la nación resiste las agresiones brutales del ejército. Esa resistencia toma forma en la escena con la que termina el cuento, donde el soldado, tres meses después de haber violado a Lupe, se encuentra con Pedro, novio de la joven, y se enfrentan a cuchilladas. El soldado manifiesta que ha sido capaz de hundirle el arma blanca a su oponente y lo da por muerto. Sin embargo, el militar termina expresando que "comencé a celebrar demasiado pronto. No sé de dónde se me ocurrió querer orinarlo en la boca, pues todavía, cuando estaba apuntando el chorrito... ¡el hijuesesentamil!... pudo estirar la mano ... con todo y puñal..." (62). El final del cuento sugiere, por consiguiente, que la manera de frenar la violencia perpetrada por los "violadores" de la nación es por medio de la castración. Esta acción de "castrar" podría mostrar la justificación de una respuesta violenta a un acto de agresión. De igual manera, podría entenderse desde un punto metafórico con el propósito de desvirtuar el discurso oficial pues mantenía que las fuerzas de seguridad estaban para proteger a la ciudadanía del comunismo internacional. Es decir, ese discurso oficial contrasta con el del personaje, dado que él mismo ha manifestado las atrocidades cometidas por el ejército salvadoreño en el área rural.

Si "Así como en las películas" representa la violencia generada por el brazo armado del Estado, de la cual toda una comunidad es testigo, en "Destreza" la represión se realiza en secreto. La historia es protagonizada por un joven que trabaja vendiendo cocos. Su destreza y habilidad para partir dicha fruta es reconocida y admirada por sus clientes. Desafortunadamente, llega el momento en que el joven ya no puede seguir ejerciendo su oficio y se ve obligado a buscar otra forma de ganarse la vida. Luego de tratar infructuosamente de obtener empleo, logra finalmente encontrar trabajo en una organización paramilitar, donde podrá volver a poner en práctica sus habilidades de coquero. Encontramos entonces que en el comienzo de la historia se realza la forma en que el vendedor de cocos realiza su trabajo, describiéndosela de la siguiente manera:

fijaban la vista en tu mano derecha, la cual empuñaba el corvo hábilmente y daba en el lugar exacto, con el característico ruidito de "chak", y sin derramar ni una sola gota de agua [...] Una vez sacada toda el agua, depositabas el coco en la base yunque-no-metálica [...] y descargabas el golpe, surcando el aire con un "zinggg", para dar justo en el medio del casco, obteniendo dos mitades asombrosamente simétricas, de las cuales extraías, con el mismo cuchillito arqueado, la comidita blanquita (33).

El proceso de partir el coco culmina con una demostración de admiración por parte de quienes presencian el trabajo del vendedor. En ese momento, el narrador expresa que "Las caras de los clientes siempre mostraban síntomas de alegría en ese instante, pues el ritual se aproximaba a su final y pronto verían su sed saciada" (33). Indudablemente lo que Góchez Fernández nos presenta aquí es un "ritual" caracterizado por la experiencia y la forma esmerada en que el

personaje realizaba constantemente esa tarea que podría considerarse, por así decirlo, de poca trascendencia. El relato transcurre sin muchos problemas para el vendedor de cocos hasta que su negocio deja de ser rentable y se ve obligado a buscar una nueva forma de ganarse la vida. Es en ese momento cuando el narrador se dirige directamente al personaje y le lanza la interrogante: "Y vos, ¿qué trabajo ibas a hallar? La única cosa que podías hacer bien era vender cocos, y el refrán de 'a cada santo se le llega su fiestecita' no parecía caminar bien en tu favor" (34). Podemos observar que la cita aparenta ser un diálogo entre el narrador y el personaje. Sin embargo, lo que tenemos es un discurso unilateral controlado por la voz narrativa y que lleva el propósito, en apariencia, de recriminar al personaje, de manera burlona, por las pocas opciones laborales con las que este individuo cuenta. Esa situación se torna más evidente cuando el narrador nos deja saber los problemas que enfrenta el coquero para encontrar otra ocupación, pues se dirige nuevamente al personaje diciéndole:

Te ofrecieron puesto de cobrador de buses, pero vos no estabas para eso: sos patas aguadas [...] y ni el timbre de voz te ayuda; además no podés silbar. De mecapalero, peor [...] ¿Verdad que es jodido no tener estudios y solo saber ser coquero? (34).

En esa supuesta conversación se observa un tono burlesco que se evidencia al llamar al personaje "patas aguadas" y afirmar que no podría ser cobrador de autobuses porque "no sabe silbar" ni tener un timbre de voz adecuado para lo que exige dicho empleo. El estudioso Rafael Rodríguez manifiesta que el aparente uso del humor o "postura lúdica" frente a la realidad en algunos de los cuentos de Góchez Fernández, es utilizado como "un arma defensiva, muy natural y explicable en situaciones de extrema tensión. Es como una descarga necesaria de los nervios [...] es un 'truco' para asegurarse un mínimo espacio de paz y de tranquilidad" (12). En efecto, el autor le imprime ese tono lúdico a su relato para plantear una situación que puede considerarse sin mucha relevancia, la de un vendedor de cocos cuyo negocio dejar de ser rentable, a otra completamente siniestra y macabra.

El joven coquero, prosigue la narración, logra finalmente encontrar otro empleo en un cuerpo paramilitar, donde se le permitirá utilizar la misma "destreza" que utilizaba para partir cocos, pero realizando una tarea radicalmente distinta: en lugar de la fruta, estaría decapitando las cabezas de los enemigos del Estado. El ritual seguirá siendo el mismo, el personaje hará su trabajo con el mismo esmero y sus "clientes" quedarán satisfechos con el resultado. El narrador vuelve a describir dicho ritual así:

El corvo bien afilado, en combinación con tu pulso, peló la superficie como siempre, quitando pelillos, hebras, el cuero mismo. Así, a la luz de la luna llena, hasta brillantito se miraba. Golpecito a golpecito, "chak-chak-chak" iban cayendo los pedacitos a una distancia regular. Luego el corte a manera de secante en una circunferencia, pero aplicado a la semiesfera. Lo depositaste en una improvisada base-yunque-no-metálica y, surcando el aire con el poderoso "zinggg", obtuviste las dos mitades perfectamente simétricas, dignas de un especialista en la materia. Cualquiera pensaría que habías ocupado sierra eléctrica. Con tu cuchillito arqueado extrajiste el contenido; la "comidita" esta vez serviría de alimento a chuchos y zopes. (34)

Este hecho tan macabro y espeluznante, relatado con toda crudeza, podría "constituir algo increíble, algo salido de la imaginación calenturienta de un loco" (Rafael Rodríguez 11). Sin embargo, prosigue Rodríguez, "para nosotros los salvadoreños es la mera realidad" (11). Es

decir, Rafael Góchez se nutre de la realidad nacional para representar hechos tan grotescos, como fueron las capturas de activistas y opositores al gobierno, cuyos cuerpos aparecían decapitados o, en la mayoría de los casos, nunca serían encontrados.

A diferencia de “Así como en las películas”, “Destreza” muestra un tipo de violencia perpetrado en el anonimato, representando la manera en que actuaban los temidos Escuadrones de la Muerte.¹ Esto se hace evidente al final del relato luego de revelarse la manera en que el personaje termina la tarea de decapitar a sus víctimas, cuando el narrador expresa: “Dejaste las dos mitades embrocada al as del camino. Eso sí, el rotulito de ‘Por traidor a la patria, UGB’ que lo ponga el otro, el chero que sí puede escribir. Vos ya cumpliste” (34). La cita lleva dos objetivos. El primero, incorporar en la narración un ente real, llamado precisamente Unión Guerrera Blanca (UGB) o Mano Blanca, y de esa manera recrear la violencia generada por dicha organización. Valdría agregar que, según lo expuesto por Lucrecia Molinari, los escuadrones de la muerte

desplegaban un mecanismo represivo que era a la vez, constante e impredecible. Su metodología más característica era el secuestro seguido por el abandono del cadáver horas después, mutilado o con diferentes huellas de brutales torturas, en zanjas y plazas (97).

Esto serviría para explicar y también entender la naturaleza del accionar de estas organizaciones que, según Molinari, operaban mediante una especie de juego macabro, “un juego enloquecedor de secreto/visibilidad que lograba aterrorizar y paralizar” (97). El segundo objetivo, por consiguiente, tendría la meta de extraer del anonimato a ese miembro de la UGB, dado que el narrador se ha encargado de presentarnos la historia de esta persona que pasa de ser un inofensivo vendedor de cocos, a convertirse en miembro de un grupo de exterminio.

Para concluir con los cuentos “Así como en las películas” y “Destreza” valga decir que estos presentan un intent, por parte de Góchez Fernández, de reflejar la violencia a la que fue sometida la sociedad salvadoreña durante la guerra civil. Es importante también recalcar que el mérito de estos escritos se debe a que la colección *¿Guerrita, no?*, se encuentra impregnada de la realidad de ese momento histórico nacional, con toda la crudeza, desesperanza y violencia vividas tanto por el autor como por la sociedad en general. Por último, parece pertinente añadir lo expresado por Góchez Fernández sobre esta colección: “expreso mi ferviente deseo de seguir escribiendo cuentos, pero ya no cuentos de guerra, sino de paz, y quizá mi próxima obra la titule *¿Pacita, no? A ver*” (17).

Los Acuerdos de Paz firmados el 16 de enero de 1992 en México por las partes beligerantes del conflicto militar en El Salvador marcan un hito en la historia del país, pues vienen a poner fin a uno de los episodios más traumáticos y sangrientos que experimentó la sociedad salvadoreña en las postrimerías del siglo XX. Para el entonces secretario general de las Naciones Unidas, Boutros Boutros Ghali, el propósito de las negociaciones de paz era el de terminar con el conflicto armado por medio de una concertación política que garantizara el respeto ilimitado de los derechos humanos y reunificara al pueblo salvadoreño (Frente FMLN-150). Desde la perspectiva de un proceso de pacificación negociado entre el gobierno del presidente Alfredo Cristiani, el ejército salvadoreño y el FMLN, se puede hablar, por consiguiente, de una transición de un estado de guerra a uno de paz.

Y ahora que ha terminado la guerra, ¿qué hacemos? Esta era la pregunta que surgía de manera espontánea en todos los sectores sociales del país, ya que se iniciaba un proceso de apertura sin

1. Para un mayor análisis sobre los escuadrones de la muerte se recomienda el artículo de Lucrecia Molinari “Escuadrones de la Muerte: Grupos Paramilitares, Violencia y Muerte en Argentina (’73-’75) y El Salvador (’80)”.

precedentes. En su artículo “Víctimas y victimarios. Perdonar y dejarse perdonar”, el pensador jesuita Jon Sobrino argumenta que no solamente era necesario recordar las experiencias del conflicto sino que se debía reflexionar sobre el impacto que dichas experiencias tuvieron en la sociedad (n.p.). Por otro lado, el escritor Horacio Castellanos Moya afirma que el escritor debía reformular su posición ante la sociedad tomando en consideración que el discurso de choque que había prevalecido hasta antes de finalizada la guerra civil comenzaba a caducar debido al surgimiento de nuevos espacios políticos, pero que no por ello debía negarse la herencia de la guerra (57). Desafortunadamente, la clase dominante de la época, comandada por el partido político en el poder, ARENA,² pensaba que la tragedia nacional debía quedar relegada al olvido y había que tratarla como una pesadilla, la cual era mejor no recordar. Otros sectores sociales conservadores también planteaban que la incipiente democracia que comenzaba a gestarse se vería mejor servida si no se hurgaba la herida de la guerra que aún no había terminado de cicatrizar. Es decir, olvidar resultaba más saludable que una catarsis nacional. De hecho, estos dos elementos, perdón y olvido, constituyeron la base ideológica en la que se sustentaría la nueva derecha salvadoreña.

Antes de proseguir con los dos últimos cuentos, se debe subrayar que una gran parte de la crítica que analiza textos literarios escritos por autores centroamericanos en momentos posteriores a guerras civiles, revoluciones o conflictos armados, observa que en dichas producciones prevalece una especie de desilusión o desencanto. Es necesario también recalcar que el propósito de este trabajo no es establecer si los cuentos de Rafael Francisco Góchez Fernández que se analizan a continuación pueden considerarse de posguerra o no, sino que se pretende abordarlos dentro el contexto histórico reciente propiciado por la firma de los Acuerdos de Paz de 1992. Se considera importante hacer esta salvedad si se toma en cuenta que Beatriz Cortez señala que se produce una especie de desilusión respecto a los procesos revolucionarios que surgen antes de los años noventa ya que se observa allí “un momento de desencanto, de pérdida de liderazgo y de pérdida de fe en los proyectos utópicos que formaban parte del momento revolucionario en Nicaragua, El Salvador y Guatemala, así como en el resto de los países centroamericanos” (25). Indudablemente, las afirmaciones de Cortez suponen que ese desencanto no ocurrió inmediatamente después de la Firma de los Acuerdos de Paz, en el caso de El Salvador, sino que debió haber transcurrido un lapso durante el cual los escritores, pensadores y académicos pudieran haber tenido tiempo de experimentar que los acuerdos no habían traído los cambios sociales, políticos y económicos necesarios para mejorar las condiciones de vida de la población.

El cuento “Desnudos en una capilla”, que se encuentra en la colección publicada en 1993,³ y que lleva el mismo título, presenta la disyuntiva entre olvidar o enfrentar el legado de violencia, muerte, tortura y vejaciones dejado por la guerra civil. En este caso, tenemos una historia narrada en primera persona por un joven universitario sin nombre, quien debe decidir si ignorar o confrontar el pasado reciente de su país. Esta historia aparece, pues, como el símbolo de una sociedad en estado de confusión y entusiasmo a causa de la efervescencia producida por el recién terminado conflicto bélico. El personaje-narrador entra en una crisis dado que, para él, resulta sumamente doloroso revivir las experiencias de la guerra. Por otro lado, no obstante, experimenta una especie de culpa al saber que no puede ignorar el dolor que la guerra les produjo a muchos de sus compatriotas. La estudiosa Nanci Buiza, al analizar la manera en que el impacto creado por guerras o eventos traumáticos es representado en la literatura, sostiene que no es que el individuo reprima el recuerdo del evento ni niegue que dicho evento haya ocurrido, sino que:

2. El partido político de derecha Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) fue fundado en diciembre de 1981 por el mayor Roberto d'Aubuisson, quien fue también promotor de los temidos escuadrones de la muerte.

3. La colección consta de siete cuentos. Entre los más destacados se encuentran “La terapia” y “Satanismo”. El primero narra la historia de un exitoso empresario agobiado por la violencia heredada de la guerra, por lo que busca la ayuda de un psicólogo. Luego de varias sesiones, el empresario se siente curado después de leer una historia en un periódico sobre la violación de una joven, quien, por casualidad también ha empezado a visitar a ese mismo psicólogo. El segundo representa, de igual manera, la violencia, pues la noticia periodística trata sobre el asesinato de un niño a manos de su propio padre. El comienzo de la narración se presenta a manera de la historia de Abraham, quien lleva a su hijo Isaac a ser sacrificado para complacer a Jehová, con la diferencia de que Isaac no es asesinado; mientras que el padre en “Satanismo” sí.

it's that the self ceases to feel anything at all, not just toward the event but also toward itself and its involvement in the community. Overwhelmed by a vicious or troubling event, and seeking to protect itself from further trauma, the mind cuts off its ability to feel. It may know and be aware of what has happened, but that knowledge and awareness has been severed from any emotion. (103)

En el caso del narrador-personaje de "Desnudos en una capilla", sin embargo, observaremos que es precisamente la retención de cierto grado de emoción en el actante lo que permite mantener algo de la empatía que le servirá posteriormente para decidir que el olvido no es opción para él ni su sociedad.

El joven estudiante universitario, nos dice la historia, se encuentra en una iglesia observando los lienzos y cuadros relacionados con escenas religiosas y bíblicas. El narrador, hablando en primera persona, expresa que: "Encontrarme con cuerpos desnudos en las paredes de una iglesia no era nuevo para mí, ni me pareció herético aun para mi conservadora visión del mundo" (55). Resulta interesante que el protagonista se considere así mismo de "visión conservadora" pues deja entrever que es capaz de adaptarse a circunstancias que no le pudieran ser del todo aceptables. Es decir, el personaje muestra que tiene la posibilidad de cambiar su manera de pensar. Esto se evidencia cuando decide visitar otra iglesia, la capilla de la UPEPA (Universidad Pedro Pablo Castillo). Allí se lamenta de que dicho lugar no le puede proveer la paz espiritual que busca, porque esta vez no lo impactaron los cuadros religiosos característicos de figuras de desnudos bíblicos sino otras escenas, pero en lugar se marcharse, decide quedarse y reflexionar sobre lo que ha visto. Manifiesta que, al disponerse a abandonar el recinto, observa un grupo de mujeres y hombres desnudos, lo cual le produce un gran estremecimiento. Incrédulo ante tal visión, decide cerciorarse que sus ojos no lo engañan y procede a leer los títulos de los referidos cuadros, para luego describirlos de la siguiente manera:

Los protagonistas de semejantes escenas –anónimos seres contorsionados y suplicantes, exhaustos y apoltronados en su misma sangre coagulada– no eran simples ficciones de su autor [...] No. Ellos no eran otros que las representaciones de los miles de opositores o sospechosos de ser opositores de nuestras "democracias de fachada" de antaño. Esas eran las que fueron escenas típicas de las mazmorras oficiales durante los gobiernos democráticos que tuvimos en el país. (57-58)

El personaje, al verse confrontado con ese retrato de la violencia vivida por la sociedad, entra en un estado de choque psicológico, lo cual lo lleva a cuestionarse y a reflexionar si debe olvidar o aceptar que el trauma causado por doce años de guerra civil no podrá ser superado con la firma de un documento que puso fin a esa guerra.

A lo anterior podríamos añadir que el joven narrador, si se tomara en cuenta lo planteado por Nanci Buiza, habría tenido la posibilidad de desconectarse de la realidad que le presentaba la coyuntura nacional en ese momento; es decir, no mostrar ninguna emoción ante ese pasado cruel representado en esos cuadros de "cuerpos desnudos". Sin embargo, el personaje, a pesar de haber experimentado décadas de violencia, ha sido capaz de retener cierto grado de empatía hacia sus semejantes. Esa empatía crea en él la posibilidad de entablar un doloroso debate interno. Tal situación la podremos notar cuando el narrador menciona que:

no era en modo alguno recomendable mirar siquiera de reojo hacia esa pared, porque mi apesadumbrado espíritu no dejaría ya de pensar –siquiera por un instante– en la posibilidad de que tales torturas bien pudieran haberme sido aplicadas a mí

[...] Tampoco podría aducir sordera para ignorar ese pegajoso grito emanado de sus vísceras y esparcido en mis entrañas, ese grito que de tan fuerte se volvió inaudito en cuanto abandoné el lugar [...] El caso es que ahora ya no puedo pasar inmutable de largo por la capilla de la UPEPA, ni seguir poniendo las manos sobre mis ojos. (58)

Es importante recalcar el hecho de que el joven es capaz de ponerse en la situación que estuvieron los cuerpos mutilados que ha visto representados en la capilla, pues piensa que bien podría ser su cuerpo sin vida el que estaría también allí. Además, esa empatía que mencionamos previamente se manifiesta en la medida que el narrador deja de ver esos cuerpos desnudos únicamente como objetos o representaciones, sino como seres humanos, personas que ofrendaron su vida para que él pueda disfrutar la “paz” imperante en el país.

El concepto de devolverle la humanidad a ese amontonado grupo de cuerpos anónimos es lo que, de alguna manera, permite al personaje comprender que el sacrificio de las víctimas del conflicto no puede ser simplemente olvidado. Esto no necesariamente implica que él tenga una solución concreta a su dilema, dado que, en su lugar, lo inunda la incertidumbre. Así nos lo expresa el joven:

Yo no sé [...] a veces me siento un poco culpable por mi impotencia para borrar su dolor, para que ya no griten tanto. No sé el motivo de su presencia tras esos pergaminos de cristal. No sé por qué no puedo lavarlos de mis retinas. No sé nada. Acaso estén – y esto solo puedo intuirlo – para ahuyentar la nefasta amnesia, para mantener vivo su recuerdo en mi memoria, para que no los archive en la gaveta del tiempo pasado. (59)

Resulta claro que olvidar no puede ser una opción para el narrador ni tampoco relegar al olvido la memoria del pasado. Eso implica que el individuo como tal necesita de forma desinteresada despojarse del caparazón que le permitió mantenerse inmune a la crueldad generada por la violencia de la guerra.⁴ Solamente así se podrá dar el primer paso hacia una catarsis que haría posible el comienzo de una verdadera reconstrucción y reconciliación nacional.

Si “Desnudos en una capilla” representa una manera individual de entender el fin del conflicto militar y la memoria reciente del pasado reciente nacional, “El cadáver”, de la colección *Del asfalto*,⁵ presenta una un acercamiento colectivo a la historia reciente del país. En ella, el personaje principal es la sociedad salvadoreña. La narración inicia a las cinco de la mañana y tiene lugar en una calle cualquiera de la ciudad de San Salvador, donde se encuentra el cuerpo sin vida de un hombre. La gente que transita por el lugar en que yace el cadáver lo ignora y continúa su camino sin inmutarse. Las horas pasan y el difunto sigue sin ser notado y es solamente al final del día que una anciana se acerca al occiso para cubrirlo con una manta y dedicarle una plegaria. El desarrollo de esta situación se observa por medio de la recreación de la cotidianidad, representada durante el transcurso de un día cualquiera y teniendo en cuenta el paso de las horas, que va desde las 0500 hasta las 0000. De igual manera, es posible identificar a los diferentes sectores sociales que generalmente transitan a esas horas del día. De ahí que la narración tenga inicio con el día laboral que, para unos comienza a las 5:00 de la mañana. El narrador nos describe el comienzo de la jornada de la siguiente manera:

Aún el sol no ingresa en la adormitada ciudad. [É]l está tirado en la acera, a pocos metros de un depósito de basura y de cara al piso. Se pueden advertir sus brazos colocados de cualquier manera, sus pies torcidos, como testimoniando que fue arrastrado al menos por media cuadra, su cabello ya

4. Hemos tomado este término con base a lo analizado por Nanci Buiza en su artículo “On Aesthetic Experience and Trauma in Postwar Central American: The Case of Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El asco* and Claudia Hernández *De fronteras*”.

5. La colección se encuentra dividida en cinco partes y un anexo, cada parte consta de cinco o seis cuentos. Los temas tratados incluyen experiencias sobre situaciones propias de la guerra civil, como el caso de “La voz”, mientras que otros representan el período de transición, como “La cantada” y “El anónimo”.

endurecido por la sangre coagulada que lo baña y hace un río inmóvil hasta la cantarilla más cercana, su cráneo perforado y su piel pálida como papel periódico. Debió haber sido asesinado al caer la noche anterior. (101)

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De inmediato notamos la forma mimética en que se describe la condición de la víctima, a manera de una fotografía que servirá de mudo testigo de su brutal asesinato. De igual manera, nos muestra la forma en que esta persona ha sido completamente despojada de todo rastro de humanidad, dado que sus victimarios lo han lazado cerca de un promontorio de basura. A medida que transcurre la historia, el mismo cuerpo sin vida nos irá revelando la crueldad con que fue asesinado y el deseo de no ser ignorado por su comunidad. Es tal su deseo, que el narrador aparenta adjudicarle una condición de ser viviente al observar que, “Parece dar rígidos buenos días a los madrugadores que comienzan a circular con los primeros destellos de la aurora” (101). El narrador, de esa manera, desea con vehemencia que los transeúntes se den cuenta de la presencia del cadáver, al indicar que “espera el grito de una mujer muy observadora, que se dé cuenta del error de su primera impresión al comprobar que, en efecto, no se trata de un ebrio consuetudinario fondeado” (101). Desafortunadamente, muchos, entre vendedores ambulantes, visitantes médicos e —irónicamente— socorristas de la Cruz Roja, pasan frente a él sin que lo tomen en cuenta. Lo anterior invita a preguntarse si sería posible que una sociedad fuera capaz de ignorar la presencia de un cadáver en medio de una calle de la ciudad, especialmente si dicha sociedad se encuentra ya dentro de un contexto de paz. Indudablemente que la respuesta sería negativa. Sin embargo, lo que se observa en “El cadáver” es la representación de la normalización de la violencia experimentada por un país a lo largo de doce años de guerra civil, donde la mayor parte de la población tuvo que desarrollar mecanismos para mantener un cierto grado de distanciamiento de los horrores que un conflicto militar produce. Nanci Buiza opina que el trauma colectivo experimentado por causa de la guerra y la violencia también es un factor que genera ansiedad e incertidumbre. Además, añade que: “Unable to rationalize events of such magnitude, the collective’s self understanding breaks down, and intense feelings of helplessness, fear, and threat take hold” (102). Se podría añadir que el mencionado trauma le impide a la sociedad actuar ante el acto de violencia representado en el cadáver, dado que le recuerda los tiempos de guerra; por lo que la negación de ese evento significaría el rechazo a recordar tal conflicto.

Las horas transcurren y la claridad del día no logra que alguien se detenga para observarlo y avisar a las autoridades sobre este individuo que ha sido asesinado. El narrador lo describe magistralmente al afirmar que es “una presencia dramáticamente ausente” (103). El fin del día laboral se aproxima, pues se nos informa que son las 1730. Y los peatones todavía no se dan cuenta de que:

él está sin camisa, pantalones ni zapatos. Sus piernas y abdomen dan cuenta de incontables quemaduras de cigarrillos apagados allí. Las ampollas se confunden con el color papel periódico de su piel y se disputan el espacio con los moretones de otros tantos golpes de culata de fusil y alguna cicatriz de arma blanca. Solo tiene unos calzoncillos de color desconocido, ensangrentados. Los marchantes prefieren pasar sobre de él. (105)

Las marcas de tortura son evidentes, pero eso no parece tener importancia para todos aquellos que lo vieron. Para los peatones ese cuerpo sin vida no pertenecía a la nueva realidad de “paz”, porque formaba parte de una herida que todavía no había cicatrizado. Esto podría verse reflejado en lo expuesto por Castellanos Moya cuando afirma que los salvadoreños experimentaron la violencia en su forma

más extrema, la de crímenes crueles y violentos (Only 34). Además, el escritor sostiene que dicha violencia es causada por un grupo de salvadoreños que también se ha encargado de matar a otro grupo de salvadoreños, en lo que ha denominado, “a long and constant carnage, generation after generation. The dominant stereotype is that El Salvador is a country of victims and of aggressors” (34).

Casi para finalizar el cuento, a las 2345, aparece una anciana que lleva consigo una manta blanca, un rosario y cuatro velas, quien luego procede a cubrir el cuerpo, a encender las velas y a dedicarle una plegaria. Luego, a las 0000, el narrador concluye el día con la siguiente descripción:

La anciana iba retirándose con la misma lentitud con la que llegó, cuando escuchó un lacónico y espectral ¡“Gracias! a sus espaldas. Se detuvo y volvió la vista. No había nadie más, excepto él. Regresó y se arrodilló a su lado. Le descubrió la cara y, con voz sacada a duras penas de sus pulmones dijo:

- “¡Ay, hijo!: has aparecido en un tiempo equivocado. Tu época ya pasó. Estos son tiempos de paz”. (105)

Lo que podemos resaltar es el aspecto fantástico que nos ofrece la cita anterior, por el hecho de que deja al lector con la idea de encontrarse ante la situación inverosímil de un cadáver hablante. Sin embargo, detrás de ese evento sobrenatural, se encuentra algo todavía más increíble, como lo pudiera ser encontrar un cuerpo sin vida, mutilado y torturado, en el centro de una ciudad, sin que nadie se percate de su presencia. Por consiguiente, podríamos concluir que la normalización de la violencia que imperó durante la guerra civil se encuentra trágicamente plasmada en “El cadáver”, donde parte la sociedad ha optado por dejar su pasado reciente en los más recóndito de su memoria.

Para concluir, los cuatro cuentos analizados en este trabajo han tenido como propósito reflejar, en el caso de “Así como en las películas” y “Destreza”, la utilización de la realidad que El Salvador vivió durante la guerra civil para recrear la violencia producida por dicho evento histórico; mientras que “Desnudos en una capilla” y “El cadáver”, representan la incertidumbre y la ansiedad que produjo ese periodo de transición en la sociedad al firmarse los Acuerdos de Paz. Es de recalcar que en ninguno de los cuatro cuentos analizados se observa que Rafael Góchez adopte una postura que pudiese interpretarse como una validación ideológica de la izquierda salvadoreña, lo cual era muy prevalente en mucha de la producción literaria salvadoreña en la década de los ochenta. Un ejemplo claro podría ser la novela *Un día en la vida* (1980) de Manlio Argueta, dado que ha sido considerado un texto de denuncia que apoyaba el accionar ideológico de los movimientos sociales de izquierda. Probablemente sería de mucho beneficio comparar algunos textos de Manlio Argueta y los de Rafael Góchez para determinar si algunos de los cuentos de la colección *¿Guerrita, no?* pudieran considerarse de denuncia. Este podría ser un buen tema de investigación. Lo mismo podría argumentarse sobre las colecciones *Desnudos en una capilla* y *Del asfalto*, donde la preocupación principal de Góchez es entender cómo la sociedad lidiaría con su pasado reciente, no en representar la euforia experimentada por la izquierda política del país al darse por concluida la guerra. Por último, esperamos que este trabajo motive a otros estudiosos a que conozcan el trabajo literario de Rafael Francisco Góchez Fernández, pues, sin ánimos de equivocarnos, la crítica literaria aún lo desconoce.

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RACE, PLACE, AND PRAXIS: SHOCK DOCTRINE SCHOOLING IN HONDURAS AND THE DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGY OF *GARIFUNA EN PELIGRO*

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Abstract: In Honduras and across Central America, education has long played a decisive role in both reactionary and revolutionary moments where new ideologies, social relations, and apparatuses destabilize older ones. In the aftermath of 2009 ousting of left-wing President Manuel Zelaya, Honduran schools became a key site of resistance in the anti-coup movement. Meanwhile, the increasing marketization of public education was entirely unprecedented. This article argues that Honduras's experiment in shock doctrine schooling imported the American charter model to advance a free-market agenda predicated on the renewed disempowerment of racialized and poor communities. It then turns to Allí Allié and Rubén Reyes' *Garifuna en peligro* (2012), a Honduran-American film produced at the height of these postcoup reforms, to examine the labor required to undermine neoliberal education. The pedagogical model depicted in the film strives towards an analytic and a praxis that refuses the modern-Western reason of neoliberal education structures and curricula. The article concludes by expanding discussions on decolonial pedagogy to account for its strategic proximity to racial capitalist logics that favor representation, citizenship, sovereignty, and rights, which achieve inclusion in the state, but not necessarily decolonization.

Key Words: Education and neoliberalism, decolonial pedagogy, Blackness and Indigeneity, postcoup Honduras, Honduran cinema

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In June 2009, the Honduran military staged a coup d'état that forced President Manuel Zelaya out of his home in Tegucigalpa and into exile in San José, Costa Rica. Still in his pajamas, the ousted president called for peaceful resistance while business and church leaders mobilized right-wing supporters to take to the streets wearing white shirts in support of "national salvation" (Fasquelle 17). Within two hours, Roberto Micheletti was named the nation's constitutional president and by September the United States declared its support of a "transition" via election, which brought Porfirio Lobo Sosa into power. After waiting months to condemn the coup—still refusing to call it a "military" coup and sustaining all aid to Honduras—Barack Obama officially recognized Lobo's government and invited the postcoup president to the United States. He made stops in New Orleans and Miami.

Lobo returned to New Orleans five months later to meet with business leaders, security companies, and representatives of seven Louisiana universities. Sitting in the home of former Tulane University President, Scott Cowen, alongside then-Mayor Mitch Landrieu, President Lobo signed a memorandum of understanding to partner with Tulane, Xavier University, Louisiana State University, and other schools on reforming healthcare and education in Honduras. The bilateral agreement promised to bring Honduran exchange students to Louisiana, "trade curricula" with the Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana in Tegucigalpa, and send US-based faculty and staff to Honduras to "provide guidance on rebuilding public education and healthcare systems." Lobo celebrated this formal commitment as being "very important to Honduran students." University of New Orleans Chancellor Tim Ryan was equally enthusiastic, adding that for Louisianans to be "exposed to Latin Americans in their classes provides a tremendous learning experience" ("Universities Partner" 2010; Geglia 2016; Louisiana Justice Institute 2010). Sold under the guise of cultural diversity, expanding access, improving quality, and mutual exchange, education policy quickly became one of several avenues through which external forces could shape and control Honduran life in the aftermath of the 2009 military coup.

The ousting of President Manuel Zelaya laid the groundwork for the erosion of public education. While neoliberal education reforms began in the 1990s under the conservative government of Rafael Callejas, the coup unleashed the first serious attempts to marketize an entire school system (Levy, "Reforming Schools" 174; Altschuler et al. 2013; Edwards Jr. et al. 2023; Edwards Jr. et al. 2024). However, the postcoup school finance reforms were entirely unprecedented in the history of Honduran education (Levy, "Reforming Schools" 171).¹ New laws were implemented to ensure the rapid decentralization of national public education and the privatization of its funding. These reforms should be read as a part of a global pattern of "shock doctrine" education restructuring, alongside cases such as Puerto Rico after the debt default and hurricanes Irma and Maria, New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, Chicago and Philadelphia in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, and much earlier, in Chile under Pinochet (Brusi 2021; Bonilla and LeBrón 2019; Klein 2008; Lipman 2017, 2011; Saltman 2014; Vallas et al. 2010).²

As Honduran education reforms became increasingly attractive to US policymakers, national business elites, and libertarian interest groups, working Hondurans also made education a battleground for economic and racial justice in the greater anti-coup resistance movement. In fact, within Honduras's long history of land and labor struggles, mestizo, indigenous, and Afro-Indigenous communities have consistently invented spaces and relationships of education capable of uncovering and overcoming multiple forms of oppression. This essay interrogates schooling's decisive role in both reactionary and revolutionary change.

In the first two sections, I examine how the marketization of public

1. The exploitation of post-conflict or post-disaster instability has a long history across the region. In Honduras, the recovery period following Hurricane Mitch in 1998 brought a series of structural adjustment programs aimed to increase foreign investment in energy, mining, agro-industrial production, Export Processing Zones (EPZs), and tourism. Hurricane Mitch left ten percent of the population homeless, over six thousand dead, and over 60 percent of the country's infrastructure destroyed. In response, damaged fruit crops were replanted with privately-owned African palms and devastated Caribbean coastlines were developed into tourist havens (Phillips 110, 124). Christopher Loperena maintains that this experiment in disaster capitalism formed the blueprint for Lobo's postcoup recovery plan (619).

2. Naomi Klein's concept of the "shock doctrine" describes the process by which capitalists seek to profit from calamity, such as natural disasters, health epidemics, and political unrest. When applied to schooling, this typically involves austerity measures, school closures and privatization, decentralization of funding and governance, and appealing to parents by selling the idea of autonomy and choice.

education was essential to the postcoup regime's restoration of class and racial dominance. I argue that these neoliberal reforms imported the American charter school model. This "charterization" does not imply the transformation of public schools into private schools, but rather the introduction of comparable funding schemes and arrangements. In other words, the importation of ideas, techniques, and practices from the private sector to commercialize public education and increase the involvement of private non-state agents in the making of education policy.

The subsequent four sections offer a critique of Alí Allié and Rubén Reyes's *Garifuna en peligro* (2012), a Honduran-American film that portrays the school as a site of postcoup political struggle. Released at the height of the education reforms, it imagines a model of schooling that thinks with and from the lived experience of coloniality and its matrix of power. I define the resurgent and insurgent teaching strategies advanced in the film's depiction of engaged language pedagogy and discuss their capacity to undermine capitalist and colonial structures of power. The model depicted in the film strives towards an analytic and a praxis that refuses the modern-Western reason of neoliberal education structures and curricula, a place-making process I theorize in dialogue with the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore. However, *Garifuna en peligro* also wrestles with the limitations of implementing decolonial pedagogy through colonial structures. I conclude by expanding discussions on decolonial pedagogy to account for its strategic proximity to racial capitalist logics that favor the political instruments of representation, citizenship, sovereignty, and rights, which can achieve inclusion in the state but reach an impasse, remaining stuck in their foundational colonial order.

From Charter Schools to Charter Cities

Postcoup shock doctrine politics in Honduras are often associated with the development of Zones for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDEs), which have been fiercely contested by the FNRP (Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular), OFRANEH (Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña), and other groups as the ultimate expression of modern-day neocolonialism. Less discussed, however, is the connection between these highly privatized, largely autonomously governed "charter cities" and the country's school finance reforms. The outsourcing of the American charter school model remains understudied and underspecified, as does its deep imbrication in a hemispheric chain of education privatization.

Charter schools are publicly funded but privately-run and subsidized models of choice that claim to promote local freedom and control. They are touted by their proponents as solutions to class- and race-based violence, and as elixirs of innovation capable of combating the "achievement gap" (Stern et al. 62, 66). The charter school agenda is characterized by closing public schools, particularly "failing schools" in poor communities, and turning them over to private for-profit management organizations that are legally allowed to take control of administrative decisions for schools and students. "Steering education at a distance" through testing regimes and standards, they tie competitive teacher pay to student test scores, radically undermining the integrity and power of educators. Charter schools also replace democratically elected Local School Councils —key governing bodies made up of parents and community members— with appointed experts and elites, who are seen to provide a more politically stable environment in which to implement market mechanisms (Lipman, "Contesting the City" 7; Harvey 2007). Pauline Lipman identifies this shift to managerialism in education as symptomatic of a larger move in the neoliberal state from government to governance. Governance here describes leadership as synonymous with efficient management, where democracy and public participation are weakened in civic life and

decision making is increasingly carried out by public-private partnership, behind closed doors, and by appointed commissions and unelected bodies (“Contesting the City” 4, 14). In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, 90 percent of public schools in New Orleans were converted into charter schools, and it was precisely this kind of shock doctrine schooling that the Micheletti and Lobo administrations introduced after the coup.

Several new education laws were enacted in Honduras between 2009 and 2013, including the *Ley Fundamental de Educación*. This law mirrored the privatization scheme of charter schools insofar as its funds for academic programs and facility maintenance were decentralized from federal to municipal governments. This process of *municipalization* was first implemented in Chile in 1979, during a military dictatorship that was not only the preeminent experiment in monetarist and public choice theory principles, but also a laboratory for education privatization. Across the hemisphere, the decentralization of public school management has increased inequalities between public schools located in the poorest and richest neighborhoods (Verger et al. 41). Under the *Ley Fundamental*, money no longer came from the central Ministry of Education of Tegucigalpa, but from each school’s corresponding mayoral government, who tasked teachers and parents with soliciting funds from regional businesses, NGOs, and philanthropists. Facing significantly reduced school resources, the burden of fundraising fell on these teachers and parents (Levy, “Reforming Schools” 174, 184). Since the ousting of Zelaya, private sectors have become increasingly influential in the process of education policy formulation and implementation, including international cooperation agencies and multilateral banks like the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, as well as corporations, nongovernmental organizations, business chambers, think-tanks, and domestic and international philanthropic organizations (Edwards et al. 2023, 639, 642-643, 648).³

Another new law, the *Ley de Participación Comunitaria*, passed by Micheletti’s government shortly after the coup, established local auditing committees to monitor teachers’ work and facilitate the process of rewarding or punishing those who did not conform to the new guidelines. Unlike the PROHECO community-run schools in rural Honduras during the 1990s, these laws did not give parents authority to hire, fire, or monitor teachers, nor to have input on their salaries. Rather, it bunched teachers and parents together under the shared responsibility of soliciting private sponsorship. In fact, receiving state sponsorship was conditional upon teachers and administrators securing funding and increasing the school’s enrollment and retention numbers (Altschuler et al. 2013; Levy, “Reforming Schools” 173-174, 180). Under the *Ley de Participación Comunitaria*, the livelihoods of educators depended on their entrepreneurial servitude to the state. With these changes in place, attention to the care and education of children and youth became compromised both at home and in the classroom, as social reproduction efforts were redistributed to reproduce the educational capacity of the system.

“When the shock doctrine is applied to schooling, it has the effect of both profiteering off children and denying them access to the knowledge that could help them escape subjugation” (2018). Organizer and teacher Jesse Hagopian of Black Lives Matter in Schools made this observation in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake. Haiti’s previous decentralization of school management after the 1985 earthquake was modeled after the even earlier free-market educational restructuring in Pinochet’s Chile, as were the school reforms in post-Katrina New Orleans. American charter school architect Paul Vallas was an advisor to all three reform programs. He preempts critiques of decentralization by insisting on the “importance of creating an organizational structure to ensure that critical partners (including, with regard to Haiti, foreign

3. Brent Edwards, Mauro Moschetti, and Alejandro Caravaca provide valuable research on the impacts of globalization and privatization on education in Honduras, making critical insights on the role of international actors. See their book *Globalization, Privatization, and The State: Contemporary Education Reform in Post-Colonial Contexts* (Routledge, 2023). See also *Education and Development in Central America and the Latin Caribbean: Global Forces and Local Responses*, edited by Brent Edwards, Mauro Moschetti, Pauline Martin and Ricardo Morales-Ulloa (Routledge, 2024).

governments and NGOs) subordinate their own priorities and expenditures to the [...] reform plan, and not vice-versa" (Vallas et al. 28). Despite attempts to conceal the extractive nature of the charter model, the facade of corporate sacrifice is a weak one.

The decentralization and privatization of the Honduran public school system allowed the state to recede into a managerial role and propagate a new market for capital accumulation on the backs of disenfranchised Hondurans. When the Ministry of Education transferred funds to regional governments, they were made responsible for formulating and operating their own budgets for school infrastructure. Cash-strapped or even in debt, these municipalities struggled to handle yet another economic infrastructure project and resorted to contracting out public services to private companies, resulting in more unequal access to education. A key example is the *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* (SAT), a widely attended middle- and high-school program designed for rural students and autonomously managed by the NGO, Asociación Bayán. The primary innovations of SAT echo the Chilean charter school reforms —flexible teacher contracts, an alternative teacher recruitment model, and school-based management by NGOs or parent associations (Murphy-Graham et al. 115-116). In 2012, the first full academic year of the postcoup education reforms, Honduran teachers declared that these changes benefited the rich and further marginalized the poor (Levy, "Schoolteachers" 140-141). Although scholars consistently emphasize the reforms' promotion of structural inequality, few studies examine their racial character and racializing function.

Race and Coloniality in Honduran Postcoup Education

While existing hemispheric critiques of neoliberal education help us understand capital's grip on teaching and learning (Levy 2017, 2019; Altschuler et al. 2013; Geglia 2019), they underplay the centrality of race and coloniality within the very logic of neoliberalism, and within education's marketization specifically. Across the Americas, the schooling of working class students and students of color has become not only a commodity of corporate capital, but also an apparatus of control that serves to reproduce racial and class disparities.

In Honduras, school dropout rates affect 50% of young people and disproportionately impact rural students. The Norwegian Refugee Council cites economic problems as being the primary cause for low rates of student retention, followed by lack of food assistance and insufficient support at home (Lázaro Lorente et al. 232-233). Among rural Hondurans, the rate of child labor is among the highest in Latin America, contributing significantly to low school attendance and high repetition rates (Urquiola et al. 577). Many Garifuna youth leave school between the third and sixth grade, leading to a widespread crisis of under-prepared primary school graduates in rural and coastal areas (Kleyn 220; Murphy-Graham et al. 114). I provide these statistics to emphasize that after 2009, it was precisely these racialized "achievement gaps" in "failing schools" that both literally and figuratively formed the ground upon which to expand charter-like non-traditional schools operated by public and private actors. Indeed, writing on the US charter school system, Lisa Leigh Patel theorizes the conversion of public-school buildings into private and semi-private institutions as a process that acts in keeping with the settler colonial genealogy of land grabs, animated by the pursuit of property and ownership (362).

Policies like the *Ley de Participación Comunitaria* and *Ley Fundamental de Educación* allowed the postcoup regime to double down on its managerial role and facilitate alternative forms of jurisdiction over Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities while retaining some degree of control over them. In their Black Marxist and Black nationalist

critique, Mark Stern and Khuram Hussain liken charter schools to post-colonies precisely because they allow external organizations to legally take control over administrative decisions for schools and students (Stern et al. 2015). Similarly, in Honduras, public education's dependence on non-state actors ensures the continual domination of global hegemonic powers. Managed by local elites under the tutelage of the United States, transnational capital functionally determines the marketization of Honduras' education. Understood through a postcolonial lens, this implies the continued influence of imperial economic and political powers.

Stern and Hussain appeal to the insights of Kwame Nkrumah (1965) to describe the colonial relationship between a publicly funded school and its private managerial powers, hence the charter's defining structure: "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from the outside" (70). Following this line of argument, the settler logic of Honduran postcoup education operates at the point of the privately-run nonprofit and for-profit education management organizations that, as a result of the decentralization of state funding, are tasked with managing schools, teachers, and students at a distance.

Whereas the colonality of power of charter-like models hides behind the mask of being a great equalizer that improves teacher capacity, wins the consent of parents, and retains student enrollment, the settler dream of the charter city is plainly visible. The Honduran "Law of Special Development Regions," passed in 2012, explicitly facilitated the selling of indigenous land and water described as open and uninhabited or unused, including Garifuna coastal fronts (Phillips 111). The laws of free, prior, and informed consent were not applied because the territories were described as vacant. The Frente Común Contra las ZEDES en La Ceiba explained: "por lógica no es necesaria la consulta previa porque son zonas vacías y no tienen a nadie con quien consultar, aunque alrededor si haya población" [logically, previous consultation is not necessary because they are vacant zones and there is nobody with whom to consult, even though the surrounding area is populated] ("Honduras no se ZEDE" 2021). Pockets of the Cortés, Colón, and Islas de la Bahía departments became "new frontiers" of development that renewed a foreign-run enclave economy far too similar to the former "Banana Republic," as Beth Gaglia has argued (2016). The city-scale territories introduced elements of international oversight and intervention that allowed foreign actors from influential neoliberal institutions to partake directly in the governance of Honduras. In terms of modes of governance, ZEDES have their own laws, policing structures, and currency, and the administration of justice is outsourced to other countries in order to appeal to investors (Gaglia 2016, 53-354).

Given their structural similarities, it should come as no surprise that the first ZEDE was itself enmeshed in the commercial sphere of American charter schools. The original charter city was built in 2012 in Trujillo, a region that includes some of the largest Garifuna land titles. The plan to build it was signed by the real estate development corporation, Grupo MKG, owned by Michael Strong, an American education entrepreneur and famed advocate of charter schools.⁴ Strong founded the think tanks FLOW (2005) and the Free Cities Institute (2011), both of which promote full corporate governance and privatization of education, healthcare, and public services. The funding structure of the charter school model was arguably a pretext for the ZEDE. It offered a prototype for alternative forms of corporate governance where public entities are run by external organizations, under a highly decentralized and deregulated funding arrangement that draws in outside capital, with new laws in place to control the local population.

4. Beth Gaglia points to Michael Strong's role in the development of ZEDES in "Honduras: Reinventing the Enclave" (2016).

I have argued that Honduras's experiment in shock doctrine schooling imports an American education reform model to advance a free-market agenda predicated on the renewed disempowerment of Black and Indigenous communities. These policies restore a colonial relationship between the school and their external managerial powers while entrepreneurializing teachers and surveilling their adherence to new guidelines and curricula. Alí Allié and Rubén Reyes' *Garifuna en peligro* (2012) follows a Garifuna language teacher in Los Angeles, California, Ricardo Seyer, as he works to preserve the language transnationally in the face of an increasingly extractive global market.

The fictional film is structured around place-based praxis from the perspective of experiences both lived and imagined, threaded together to provide a social commentary on cultural preservation. It combines fictional and factual elements, and features primarily non-professional actors and on-location shooting. The protagonist, Ricardo, is played by co-director and co-producer Rubén Reyes, a real-life Garifuna language teacher, founder and president of the Garifuna Museum of Los Angeles (GAMOLA) and the Garifuna Hope Foundation, and author of *Garüdia: Garifuna Trilingual Dictionary* (2012). In *Garifuna en peligro*, the scenes of teaching and theater practice are filmed in the very spaces where Reyes offers his language classes in Los Angeles —the Clifford J. Palacio Garifuna Language & Culture Academy, an extension of Garifuna American Heritage Foundation United (GAHFU), and the Garifuna Hope Foundation ("How to Properly Read in Garifuna Language," 00:06-18:00; "Garifuna Hope Foundation Videos," 00:00-00:38). Similarly, William Flores, the actor who depicts the playwright in the film, is also one of its co-writers and the author of "Garinagu in Peril," the play upon which the film is based ("Producers").

Moving between representation and documentation, directors Allié and Reyes incorporate into the film's fictional plot the factual storyline of building a small schoolhouse on a real plot of land in Triunfo de la Cruz. Although "a lack of funds [...] made construction elusive," the completed project was intended to house Honduras' first trilingual (English, Spanish, Garifuna) elementary school.⁵ As a government pilot program, the school's construction was only nominally supported by the state. Therefore, the film functioned both to document the construction of the building's foundation as well as finance and supervise the \$12,000 endeavor. Alongside an architectural model, its production website states that "an investment in the film is not only an investment in the preservation of Garifuna culture via an audiovisual work, but it is a direct, tangible investment in the community and the education of its children" ("School").

In the film, Ricardo endeavors to build a Garifuna language school in his coastal hometown of El Triunfo de la Cruz while he also teaches and creates spaces to practice Garifuna in Los Angeles. An integral subplot is the production of a Garifuna-language play about the chief and abolitionist hero of Saint Vincent, Joseph Satuyé, written and directed by another community member, Hillbuck (William Flores) and starring Ricardo's son, Elijah (E.J. Mejia, Jr.). Meanwhile, Ricardo launches Seyer Vacations, a small business that brings American tourists to the Garifuna coast. The earnings go towards the school, which his younger brother, Miguel (Julian Castillo), begins building. The plan fails when Miguel is seduced into selling the lot to a British-owned hotel company. Upon returning to Honduras and meeting with members of his community, Ricardo comes to understand his own role in the land grab and proceeds to fight for its repossession. The film ends with Ricardo and the community building the school on contested land, as his son, students, and other community members in Los Angeles reenact Satuyé and his army's final battle against the British.

5. At the time of the film's production, trilingual classes were being "held in a borrowed space (a nearby house)" but availability of the space was erratic. The teachers and students were already conducting classes, but they did not yet have a dedicated facility ("School").

The film opens with a flashback of Ricardo's mother speaking in Garifuna to him and his younger brother as children. Sitting on a log facing the water, the young boys listen to their mother as she affectionately reminds them, in Garifuna, that they are Garinagu and that they must speak their language wherever they are. "I love you both so much," she says with her arms opened wide as if to show an incalculable quantity, "that's why I want you to speak your language wherever you go" (00:01:20-00:01:26). In equating the preservation of their language with the love of a mother, she adds context to the value of the mother tongue. Language is what binds one to their mothers, to their pasts, to the brokenness and suffering it contains, but also to its legacies of endurance, care, and survival. As bell hooks proclaims: "We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle" (146). Borrowing hooks' framing, we might say that Ricardo's mother urges him to speak from the margins. That is, to speak not from a marginality one wishes to lose, but from "a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist" (149-150). In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Paulo Freire speaks similarly of the need for the colonized and oppressed to take distance from the colonizer-oppressor, "to locate themselves 'outside' as Fanon would say."⁶

In the same breath, Ricardo's mother tells him to "guide [his] brother," in this sense identifying him as a pedagogue, a *pedo-* (boy, child) - *agôgos* (guide) (*Garifuna* 00:01:10). His mother lays the foundation for his future commitment to Garifuna language teaching. Shortly after this scene, we are introduced to Ricardo as a professional teacher in front of a classroom of child, youth, and adult students. He is giving a lesson on basic Garifuna vocabulary, such as greetings and family figures. His grammar teaching practice consists of rote memorization and repetition, a pedagogical technique that follows the traditional methods of language instruction in Honduran schools (Kleyn 228). However, beyond this similarity, his modalities of language teaching deviate. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that Ricardo's revitalization efforts go beyond direct actions to increase the number of new speakers. He repositions indigenous language as central to the transnational Garifuna community's resilience and resistance. In what follows, I demonstrate that Ricardo's teaching framework shares traits in common with Miami nation linguist Wesley Y. Leonard's conception of *language reclamation*, which seeks to not only create new speakers (*language revitalization*) but to incorporate into language teaching the needs and visions of Indigenous communities (Leonard 15).⁷ At the same time, other practices of Ricardo's deviate from this vision.

In an informal teaching moment, Ricardo crosses paths with a group of children in his hometown on the coast of Honduras. He speaks to them in Garifuna, but they respond in Spanish. When he asks them, rhetorically, why they should really be speaking Garifuna, they answer: "Because we are Garifuna." Echoing his mother's words, Ricardo tells them to let go of their Spanish and start speaking only Garifuna (*Garifuna* 00:57:49). This scenario of children responding in Spanish, English, or Kriol to their Garifuna-speaking elders is not uncommon along the Central American coast. In their study of Seine Bight, Belize, Jennifer Carolina Gómez Menjívar and William Noel Salmon report that Garifuna is an "artifact of the elderly," with little indication of intergenerational transmission. However, they also point to drawbacks in their quantitative survey method, primarily because participants' perceptions of their own attitudes and usage tendencies do not always match their observed behavior (62-63). In fact, based on research in Honduras, Santiago Jaime Ruiz maintains that the Garifuna language does not actually seem to be undergoing language endangerment. Rather, over the last two centuries, the number of speakers has been increasing steadily across Garifuna communities in both Honduras and the diaspora (145-146).

6. Cited in Walsh, "Decolonial pedagogies walking and asking. Notes to Paulo Freire from Abya Yala," p. 19. For Walsh's more detailed discussion on Fanon's influence on Freire, see "Introducción. Lo pedagógico y lo decolonial: Entretejiendo caminos," in Walsh (Ed.), *Pedagogías decoloniales. Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir*, pp. 23-68.

7. Leonard's work is about language reclamation specifically within Native American communities and does not include Indigenous peoples of Latin America or the Caribbean.

The scene with Ricardo and the children in Triunfo de la Cruz suggests that both realities are true: younger generations are gaining proficiency in Garifuna *and* parents and grandparents still feel frustration and regret when their heritage seems to be slipping away, frequently blaming their children and grandchildren for their traditional language falling out of use (Gómez Menjívar et al. 61-62). Ricardo does not ask the children why they do not communicate in Garifuna, he only insists upon the need to do so. This suggests a conception of language reclamation as a project to increase speakers and revendicate ethnic identity, but not necessarily one that prioritizes listening to the community's needs and visions of this process, nor to how they define the language's sociocultural meaning, both of which are central to Leonard's framing of *language reclamation*. This disregard for community input will later prove detrimental to Ricardo's approach to constructing the school.

Where his language work more readily supports community goals and collaboration is in the classroom. Ricardo successfully integrates culturally relevant interactions and content into his grammar instruction by teaching on Garifuna history. He draws his students' attention to both the legacies of colonization and the emancipatory futures that can surface through the remembrance and mourning of tragic loss. In *Roots of Resistance*, Suyapa Portillo Villeda describes a similar effect of collective memory with regard to the defeat of the left in the 1950s and the political impact this mourning has had on Honduras's labor movement since then. She likens it to a process that David Scott, in *Omens of Adversity*, describes as "reparative remembering," where recovering and grieving the past can lead to new passions, new struggles, new movements, and new efforts made by new generations. Scott writes: "In a somewhat paradoxical way [...] political ideas are founded on object loss" (Portillo Villeda 254; Scott 100). The memory that Ricardo calls up in his lesson is the catastrophic loss of life and independence of the Garifuna, who resisted the British for generations before finally being starved into surrender after the decisive death of Satuyé.

As his students listen attentively and take notes, Ricardo uses English, Spanish, and the target language to explain their ethnogenesis in 15th century St. Vincent (Yurumein), where the Garifuna were captured by British settlers and forcefully displaced to Central America (*Garifuna* 00:23:20). He does not yet convey the memory of the Garifuna's long resistance to their colonizers; this lesson is transmitted through the play. For now, Ricardo emphasizes their near total extinction between the very small island of Bequia, the even smaller island of Baliceaux, and their final transport to Roatán, off the coast of Honduras, by which point only half had survived —"It was a genocide," he emphasizes (00:24:30). He then writes the date of Satuyé's death on the chalkboard in Garifuna. They were forced to surrender to the British the next year, he explains. Asking his students why Satuyé fought, Ricardo revives the lost object that he hopes his students will internalize, a beloved ideal "imagined with all the complex associations of hope and disappointment" (Scott 101). He waits a moment and then writes on the chalkboard the word "únguahabuni." In Garifuna, he asks the class what it means. Understanding the question, a student answers: "freedom" (*Garifuna* 00:25:22).

Ricardo's classroom facilitates identity-oriented experiences. This is clear in the inherited histories of emancipatory struggles that he chooses to teach, as well his repeated stress on embracing their Black and Indigenous identity in both his classroom and Hillbuck's play. The pedagogues impart to their students: "We are the result of an African father and a Carib-Arawak mother. That's who we are." "You're Garifuna-American. You're Garifuna first, then you're American" (*Garifuna* 00:16:24, 00:53:36). This claiming and assertion of Black

Indigeneity is reflective of contemporary Garifuna ethnohistory within Honduras' neoliberal multicultural paradigm. Whereas the 1990s multicultural turn across much of Latin America normalized a distinction between the categories of Black and Indigenous and institutionalized them in different ways, in Honduras, Garifuna communities and organizations laid claim to the entangled relations and blurred distinctions of their Black and Indigenous identities (Anderson 2007, 2009; England 1999, 2006). Much has been written about Garifuna identity formation and political projects, but Ricardo's treatment of it stresses two specific historical and cultural implications, both of which respond to sociopolitical values advanced in contemporary Garifuna struggles.

The first is reflected in his content-based language pedagogy, which positions the Garifuna as Black subjects with a history of marronage and resistance to European colonialism, as well as embodied histories of anti-Black racism, violence, and erasure shared with other communities of the African diaspora (López Oro 248). This emphasis also addresses the imposed contradictions and ambiguities of where the Garifuna find themselves within US notions of blackness, *latinidad*, and indigeneity (England 2006; López Oro 2010). The second value attached to Ricardo's identity politics is depicted in the film's treatment of accumulation by dispossession, which I address in more detail below. Inclusion in Indigenous identity affords the Garifuna added negotiating power over land rights vis-à-vis nation-states, international organizations, and development organizations. The assertion of Indigenous ethnicity lends certain structural privileges to collective rights because, as Juliet Hooker argued in 2005, "multicultural citizenship regimes are more amenable to demands made on the basis of cultural difference or ethnic identity than racial difference or discrimination" (299).⁸ As it happens, the claim to Indigeneity was central to OFRANEH's success in gaining land rights for the Honduran Garifuna community in 2015, in partnership with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (see England 2006, Bronco 2009).

By highlighting the rights and belonging afforded by inclusion in both Blackness and Indigeneity, the ethnohistorical focus of Ricardo's teaching offers his students a framework to potentially challenge the colonial matrix of power. In other words, by disrupting Western myths of racial and ethnic dualities, his teaching disrupts processes of race formation that otherwise ensure the ontological and structural superiority of one group against the inferiority of another. As Sylvia Wynter writes, "one cannot 'unsettle' the 'coloniality of power' without a redescription of the human outside the terms of our present descriptive statement of the human" (268). It is not surprising that the film reflects contemporary Garifuna ethnohistory considering the latter's centrality in the emergent multiethnic postcoup resistance movement (La Resistencia), which was at its height during the film's production.

Like many expressions of identity politics, Ricardo's ethnohistorical pedagogy appeals to a rights-based framework. To some extent, his language work—both his teaching and construction of the school—partakes in a settler-colonial mode of politics where representation, citizenship, sovereignty, and rights strive to achieve inclusion in the state, without assurance of redescribing the conditions of power or reshaping human relations. In the following section of this paper, I discuss how Ricardo's pedagogical praxis finds itself tethered to both coloniality and neoliberalism in ways that threaten to undermine its integrity. At the same time, it is also important to understand that the film's depiction of pedagogy is not reducible to the affirmation of identity or demands for recognition. It extends beyond epistemic reconfigurations to an educational praxis of reflection and action. This praxistical emphasis is developed in Ricardo's classroom through his incorporation of theater, and is further substantiated in the lessons he learns in Triunfo de la Cruz.

8. Cited in Anderson, 2007.

Openings of Decolonial Pedagogy

While decolonial pedagogy and its constitutive parts are productive concepts perhaps precisely because their definitions are expansive, key tenets merit naming insofar as they are reflected in the film. The introduction to the *LÁPÍZ* issue on decolonial education in the Americas states that beyond critique of the world-as-is, decolonial thought opens up possibilities for worlds-which-might-be:

It [decolonial thought] calls for an imagination of futures where non-Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies would predominate and it invites the voices from the exteriority to lead the conversation. Education, as the process by which we collectively introduce ourselves and others to critiques of the as-is, in order to give form to what-might-be, is inseparable from decolonization. (Perisic 15-16)⁹

As proposed here and echoed by education philosopher Catherine Walsh, pedagogies are not only ways of teaching content, but are themselves “struggles, practices, processes, and wagers of life.” Pedagogies are “the praxis of decolonial paths that [...] work to regenerate the broken weave of community, territory, ancestral knowledge and memory” (Mignolo et al. 95).

Channeling Freirean notions of pedagogy as method, as praxistal liberation-based thought, Ricardo’s use of theater invites his students to establish alternative views of what the world could be. Education scholars claim that a positive learning outcome of embodied pedagogy is the students’ ability to “feel knowledge, internalize it, and commit it to memory” (Nguyen et al. 332).¹⁰ Writing on the connection between language development and drama, Janet Dutton and Kathy Rushton contend that performing theater in a new language allows students to speculate, experiment, and think critically about language, themselves, and the world (Dutton et al. 162). The transformative capacity of drama-driven language pedagogy resonates through Elijah’s performance of Satuyé. Before beginning to rehearse the character, he showed no interest in Garifuna language and culture. In fact, according to his father, he was becoming a “non-identifiable person” (*Garifuna* 00:12:30). However, once he starts playing Satuyé, Elijah begins speaking the language at home. His commitment to his community also grows exponentially, as Jennifer Goett has described (292). Moreover, it not only grows, but also becomes politicized. While rehearsing with his younger brother in *Garifuna*, Elijah describes the play in oracular terms as an object that speaks to him and guides him. It awakens in him a sense of purpose and resilience that undermines his idleness. He explains that Satuyé and his army did not surrender to despair or adversity: “They fought [...] For freedom. For who you are” (*Garifuna* 01:09:11).

By incorporating into his language work the embodied practice of performing a play, Ricardo assumes the role of a pedagogue as described by Walsh —not as a teacher who transmits or imparts knowledge, but as a facilitator who endeavors to provoke and advance, with others, critical questionings, understandings, knowledges, and actions (Mignolo et al. 83). Ricardo creates a space for his students to grasp their continued relationship to unfreedom and imagine the unfinished work of freedom-making that permeates their history. Like the process of worldmaking that Jose Muñoz described in *Disidentifications*, Elijah’s performance labors to establish alternate views of the world that are not only oppositional perspectives, but oppositional ideologies that reshape reality as they deconstruct it. “Such performances,” Muñoz writes, “transport the performer and the spectator to a vantage point where transformation and politics are imaginable” (196). In the film, this disidentificatory capacity pushes the

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9. *LÁPÍZ* is the journal of the Latin American Philosophy of Education Society (LAPES). The editorial collective of this issue, “Decolonial Education in the Americas: Lessons on Resistance, Pedagogies of Hope,” consisted of Cecilia Diego, Scott Henstrand, Anuar Juraidini, Walter Kohan, Bret Leraul, Tomas Rocha, Sheeva Sabati, Rafael Vizcaino, and Jason T. Wozniak.

10. “Embodied pedagogy” refers to learning that joins body and mind in a physical and mental act of knowledge construction, implying thoughtful awareness of body, space, and social context (Nguyen et al. 332).

play's function beyond the realm of representation to that of praxis and method. By juxtaposing the play's battle with Ricardo's land struggle in Honduras, the directors insist upon a theoretical causality between Elijah's performance and his community's practice of refusal (*Garifuna* 01:24:30-01:27:20). Following Tina Campt, I read refusal here as the "rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation" (83). While Satuyé's army fights their final major offensive against the British in the play, the future of the Garifuna is fortified as they reclaim their land in the film's other storyline of building a school. Theatrical performance is depicted as slicing and disassembling the settler colonial order to offer not only a decolonial critique through the play, but a simultaneous remaking of place in *Triunfo de la Cruz*.

Ricardo's language work operates along the conviction that freedom is a place, as Nick Estes reminds us (2020). Freedom is made in physical space through the human practice of rearranging people, land, social capacity, and other resources to consolidate the ability for people to flourish, to produce the conditions where, as Gilmore often says, "life is precious" (Gilmore 2007, 28-29; Gilmore 2017, 227). In other words, the performance not only transforms Elijah, but also insists that individual political consciousness can resolve into collective liberation. Perhaps, then, in reactivating a legacy of emancipatory struggle, Ricardo's drama-pedagogy extends beyond Muñoz's conception of worldmaking to offer a vision of liberation through place-making. While the former is an anticipatory temporality, marked by a present enactment of a future that is yet-to-come, the latter describes a geographical imperative that materializes liberation into active everyday spatial struggles. In short, Ricardo's drama-based language pedagogy is a praxis because it engenders the quotidian construction of a decolonial otherwise.

Hacer escuela: Praxis and Parasitism

Like place-making, decoloniality is neither a complete nor stable project. It is a nonlinear radical reorientation. Decoloniality is not a singular event of spectacular manifestation, but rather the "ongoing serpentine movement towards possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living" (Mignolo et al. 80). In this sense, it does not imply the absence of racial capitalism and coloniality, which are unlikely to disappear entirely. Rather than waiting for the resolution of a revolutionary telos, decolonial place-making builds ways of sustaining and reproducing life that actively liberate and abolish. Understood this way, decolonization is necessarily provisional and non-static because experimenting and rearranging characterize its process of negation, of "making something into something else" (Gilmore, "Abolition" 477). Gilmore is insistent upon this in her definition of abolition as "how and to what end people make freedom provisionally, imperatively, as they imagine home against the disintegrating grind of partition and reparation through which racial capitalism perpetuates the means of its own valorization" (491). In both decolonial and abolitionist praxis, the qualities of provisionality and nonlinearity are germane to understanding the inconsistencies, cracks, and fissures that arise in their undertakings. *Garifuna en peligro* highlights the presence of such tensions. In what follows I argue that the strategic proximity to capital that Ricardo retains in his decolonial praxis at first compromises the project's integrity, and later strengthens it.

As previously discussed, a second central storyline of *Garifuna en peligro* is Ricardo's endeavor to build a Garifuna language school in his hometown of Triunfo de la Cruz. At stake in this is the protagonist's method of creating the conditions for Garifuna language education to happen. Education philosophy scholar Jason Wozniak's notion of *hacer escuela* is valuable to consider when examining this task in the film. Wozniak describes the process as inventing the spatio-temporalities hospitable to thinking and practicing education otherwise. Whereas the

formal translation would be “to make” or “to produce” school, Wozniak’s emphasis on invention appropriately describes Ricardo’s process of critique and experimentation, where new forms of teaching, learning, and collective liberation are set in motion in order to uncover and overcome dynamics of oppression. This quality of invention also accounts for the unique space offered by the classroom, which allows creative and critical thinking to take place, or as Wozniak describes, “rhythmic ruptures produced in the process of teaching [where] aspects of daily life are suspended temporarily, offering one a chance to contemplate the world we live in, and the world that might be” (8, 12-13).¹¹ In Ricardo’s material undertaking of *hacer escuela*, invention is both necessary and inherent to building a Garifuna language school where it did not exist before, and where it would never exist were it not insisted upon and created by the community. As a practice of decolonial place-making, creating a school requires organizing people, land, labor, and capital in new ways that are experimental, innovative, and potentially contradictory.

To finance building the school, Ricardo creates a start-up tourism venture that brings American tourists to Triunfo de la Cruz and neighboring villages. In doing so, he takes the wealth that produces dispossession and erasure and turns it back on itself by using the profits to create conditions for sovereignty in the face of its negation. In other words, this parasitic tactic depends upon, or is parasitic upon, the financial support of foreign consumers of the capitalist class in order to carry out a project that refuses the totalization of their colonial power. In the context of contemporary art, Michel Serres describes the parasite as a “figure who interrupts an existing circuit, producing disorder but also generating a different order” (Anagnost 2018). In its parasitic capacity, Ricardo’s process of *hacer escuela* does not operate outside the capitalist, extractive violence that devalued and degraded Garifuna culture in the first place. Rather, it comes to fruition in and through intentional, strategic proximity to it, using colonial wealth for purposes that undermine it.

Yet, as the film makes clear, while this paradox aims to exceed the impacts of extraction and exploitation, it cannot in fact be disentangled from them. Some may argue that the vulnerability introduced by such proximity is not inevitable. Perhaps, for instance, if the Garifuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz were to become the primary benefactor of Ricardo’s tourism venture, this financing strategy could successfully usher in a shift in power. This logic is used by tourism developers (and Ricardo) to tout the profits their projects will bring to local communities. Ricardo tells his potential clients that Seyer Vacations is “going to support the people who are entrepreneurs in the area. They’re gonna sell bread, they’re gonna do the laundry, whatever, right? This is helping the economy in the village” (*Garifuna* 00:19:30). However, as Charles Hale and others have argued, while Central American Afro-Indigenous communities participate in enclave tourism, it is mainly as sources of surplus labor, fetishized and eroticized as cultural attractions, or, “at best, as small community-controlled enterprises that operate on the margins” (Hale 192; Loperena 2016; Brondo 2013; Anderson 2013). What, then, comes of the tourism business that Ricardo introduces into his community?

While recruiting clients from Los Angeles, he tasks his brother, Miguel, with managing the tours of Garifuna villages as well as physically building the school. Miguel remarks that his brother is trying to do something noble, but puts all the work on him. “Y yo que hago todo el trabajo, ¿qué consigo de esto? De mis ganancias que consigo de los turistas, tenía que poner a hacer una escuela. Y todas mis ganancias tenían que ayudar a comprar cemento, *bricks*, todo” [And me, who does all the work, what do I get from this? I had to put what I make from tourists towards building a school. And all of my earnings had to

11. For more on this, see also Walter Omar Kohan’s interpretation of Simón Rodríguez’s decolonial dictum, “inventamos o erramos,” in *The Inventive School Master*: Simón Rodríguez (2015).

help buy cement, bricks, everything.] (*Garifuna* 00:37:20). Noticing the burdens that come from working for a new, small enterprise, two mestizo representatives of a nearby British-owned hotel attempt to capitalize on Miguel's precarity. Miguel gradually becomes a crucial conduit in the foreign-owned company's racial capitalist mode of capture. He is first seduced into selling his labor to the hotel, Copán del Mar, and abandoning his commitment to build the school, then persuaded into selling the land intended for it. Afterall, as Aníbal Quijano writes, "beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is seduction" (169). Miguel's experience demonstrates that like white-European culture, the capitalist marketization of land is made seductive because it gives access to power.

The ILO Convention 169 recognizes indigenous peoples' right to land and self-determination within a nation state. It was ratified in Honduras in 1994 thanks in large part to alliances built and mobilized by Garifuna organizations on the basis of a shared autochthonous identity, which allowed them to legally reclaim land. In doing so, the state introduced a legal mechanism for Garifuna communities to contest neoliberal agrarian legislation and committed to "adequate procedures ... within the national legal system to resolve land claims by the peoples concerned" (United Nations 1989; Brondo 44-45). However, across the Global South, the ineffective application of autonomy laws has historically compromised such land titling.

As the film effectively registers, insufficient structures of accountability and transparency enable the swift subversion of legal documentation of a community's possession of lands (Finley-Brook 2007). Since the 1990s, the privatization of beach fronts in Honduras has been achieved in part through the bribing and intimidation of Garifuna individuals, as well as government corruption and corporatism (Daser et al. 119). To this effect, the film's directors draw attention to the cronyism and deregulation that developers thrive off in order to manipulate locals into selling their lands against their best interests. For instance, the hotel's crooked lawyer explains to Miguel that despite agreeing to sell his land for \$50,000, Miguel will only be receiving \$5,000 because the rest was used to pay off local authorities. Furthermore, before completing the land sale, the lawyer strikes from the contract the line stating the ILO 169's declaration that the land cannot be sold to anyone who is not Indigenous. Miguel reluctantly initials the change. In signing the contract he not only loses control over the territory and its economic development, but also surrenders the maintenance of Garifuna cultural identity by foreclosing the possibility of their heritage language education.

Through this lived experience, Miguel glimpses the true intentions of laws purportedly designed to protect people like him. The film conveys the widespread sentiment that, as Lara Montesinos Coleman puts it, "all human rights can provide in such contexts is a diversion, a sedative, a degree of analgesia in an intolerable situation" (1). She continues:

Critics of human rights remind us that they come burdened with the moral-political baggage of liberal individualism. They naturalize a concept of 'the human' (sovereign, self-interested, and ruling over nature) that is inextricably linked to the rise of modern capitalism and shaped through the exploitation and dehumanization of colonized peoples. (2)

In taking up the language of rights in the ethnopolitics of his teaching as well as his struggle to reclaim the land, Ricardo's pedagogy does not only seek inclusion in the state, but also enacts a conception of liberation that is itself, to some degree, contaminated.

When he returns home to find that Copán del Mar has seized the land, he decides to draw on traditional Garifuna knowledge and consults a

buyei. Following the Garifuna tradition, a *buyei* is a spiritual guide that heals and counsels those in the community in need of clarity. In this case, she observes that selling the land and building the school are endeavors that Ricardo has pursued alone. She explains that if the village's language is dying, just as if the village were dying of hunger, the people must come together to talk about it (*Garifuna* 01:02:57). This prompts Ricardo to meet with the villagers about the land. They describe his individualism as "US psychosis," insisting that they would have helped him had he not become so selfish since moving to Los Angeles, and so intent on constructing the school without their input. One of the village men explains: "Even cleaning around the community, the men must come together before doing our community work. This is how we Garifuna do things. We always reach a prior consensus." Ricardo responds by denying accountability and instead disciplining the wage-earner by placing the blame on Miguel, who he claims sold the land (01:05:19-01:07:40). Ricardo embraces the liberal rationality of realizing his own project and freeing himself from all forms of personal dependency (Laval et al. 41, 176).

His tenor finally changes when an elder attributes Miguel's poor decisions to Ricardo's neglect as his older brother. As if flooded by his mother's words, he is reminded of his responsibility to guide Miguel, and not through the episteme of the colonizer-oppressor, but away from it, from the lifeways of the margins. As with all decolonial praxis, his incentive to rearrange the conditions of the present came with inconsistencies and cracks. In his managerial neglect to consult the affected community, Ricardo embraced the very governance practices that his pedagogy sought to subvert. His strategic appropriation of capital led him to not only finance education through private wealth, but also to steer education from the outside, without the community's input and participation, and to outsource fundamental activities away from them. Ricardo comes to understand that he has so far failed to properly involve those most affected by his project, and that if he is to move forward with it, he will need to change his approach.

Occupying Education

A critical intervention of *Garifuna en peligro* is its reflection on the question of doing decolonial pedagogy within colonial structures and logics. Can educators (ourselves included) parasitically co-opt the space of private-public education while meeting the needs of the communities we claim to defend, whose epistemologies and histories we honor in our teaching and learn from in our own struggles? Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Emma Chirix have been critical of how decolonial thinking has been practiced in the United States, in part because it is reduced to a process of thinking (Cusicanqui 2019; Chirix 2022). We teach decoloniality, but do we decolonize? In a way, Ricardo's mistake to represent the community only in theory is relatable to many pedagogues in the US education system and its Global South offshoots. Representation and its sensations of belonging and inclusion are sometimes fraught with avoidance of structural change. Delimited and controlled treatments of difference across institutions and states most often evade material and political questions despite (and sometimes through) the recognition of difference (Da Costa 476-477).

In this vein of critique, the contradictions that unravel themselves in *Garifuna en peligro* convey that decolonizing education is not only a matter of whose voices we bring into the classroom. A decolonial pedagogy is an educational praxis of both reflection and action — pedagogical interventions that are "not just of defense or reaction, but also and more importantly of offense, insurgence and (re)existence" circumscribed in/by building places and relationships that sustain and reproduce life in ways that are less harmful (Walsh 11). The film ends by reflecting on pedagogy's relationship to the struggle for freedom.

When Ricardo meets with the manager of Copán del Mar, they discuss their distinct ideological perspectives on how indigenous lands should be used. The manager talks about the jobs tourism and development bring local communities, how people no longer want communal control but individual property rights, and that going back and reconciling control is next to impossible for the Garifuna because of the myriad of powerful stakeholders now involved, including the Ministry of Tourism, World Bank, ONF, ILO 169, PATH (Land Administration Program Project), and IMF. In response, Ricardo describes the Garifuna's distinct relationship to land as an inalienable extension of the community itself ("I don't have the right to sell another member of my family"). He insists on their commitment to survival, closing the meeting by proclaiming in Garifuna, "We will always fight to ensure our freedom" (*Garifuna* 01:28:45). Early in the film, Ricardo writes "únguahabuni" on the chalkboard, which he defines to his students as "freedom." However, according to Rubén Reyes's own *Garüdia: Garifuna trilingual dictionary*, the word "únguahabuni" means "liberty," while the word "únguani" means "freedom" (143). The variation in Ricardo's definition of the former may well have been rhetorically unremarkable, but given freedom's centrality to the film's script and storyline, it is worth considering his choice of words and its political implications.

In the Western lexicon, the concept of "liberty" refers to modern European political philosophical conceptions of individual rights, progress, private property, and free will. The pursuit of liberalism has not only driven the establishment of sovereign nation states, it has also justified the subjugation of their colonized subjects. As Lisa Lowe argues, throughout Western history, liberty has been intrinsically connected to settler colonialism and liberalism. She explains that alongside the need for "civilization," Liberal myths about the "capacity for liberty" historically served to "subjugate enslaved, indigenous, and colonized peoples [...] '[L]iberty' did not contradict colonial rule but rather accommodated both colonialism as territorial rule, and colonialism as the expansion of imperial trades" (8, 15). Freedom, on the other hand—in not only the Hegelian-Marxist, postcolonial, and Black radical traditions but in historical liberation struggles—is often defined in its dialectical relationship to unfreedom, such as oppression or enslavement. Rather than liberty, it is the concept of freedom that is commonly used to describe liberation as something that is made universal without relying on liberal political enfranchisement or free-market capitalism.

Ricardo's use of "únguahabuni" as "freedom" instead of "liberty" may imply a conception of liberation that is incompatible with the Liberal-colonial project and its frameworks of rights and inclusion. Without linguistic proficiency in Garifuna and an understanding of its etymology, the significance of his linguistic decision remains tenuous to most viewers. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy insofar as it reflects an important political tension that persists after the film ends. Following his conversation with the manager, Ricardo and a large group of community members cut the overgrown grass on the plot of land with machetes and begin constructing the school with cement bricks and mortar. As the structure comes to life, its rooms and entrances already clearly defined, the gate to the property is left open and the sign reading "No traspase" ("No trespassing") is knocked down, yet the wire fencing around the plot remains intact. The community makes use of the land, but within certain limits drawn by the corporate power.

The viewer could infer that the two parties reached a mutual understanding of coexistence, with the land remaining in the hands of Copán del Mar and the Garifuna essentially leasing it—a compromise between the hotel's offer to build the school for them and Ricardo's insistence that the community construct their own school. However, the film offers no indication that a peaceful agreement was ever reached. To the contrary, its final scene revisits the concept of freedom

as a future still in progress, with Ricardo's wife, Becky (Gloria Garnett), comforting him while he sleeps and stressing that their struggle will go on: "We will fight together for freedom. [...] Don't forget, my husband, I will help you" (*Garifuna* 01:32:09). The viewer is left observing, as Angela Davis did, that freedom is a constant struggle. It is an ongoing, nonlinear effort characterized by obstacles, perseverance, and compromises.

Some viewers may assume that the community agreed to coexist with Copán del Mar and become parasitic upon the foreign development project as a necessary lifeline. However, without evidence of such an agreement, we are left to believe that the community repossessed the land insurgently, asserting its sovereignty through extralegal occupation of the plot. In this case, to occupy education would be to claim the right to construct and share alternative forms of knowledge that reflect the struggles and culture of the Garifuna people —akin to the Landless Workers' Movement who strategically occupy schools in rural Brazil.¹² The nature and extent of community control of the land remains undefined in the film. What is clear, however, is that they not only defend their right to the land, but also to redefine its function in society. One of the main goals of the postcoup education reforms in Honduras was to "reform curriculum [...]" so that the system is able to shape students in a business culture" (Edwards Jr. et al., 642). In stark contrast, standing in front of the partially erect school building with the Garifuna flag already raised at its entrance, Ricardo calls upon the community to evoke the strength and generosity of their ancestors in order to transfer their knowledge to their children. This, he insists, is the "mindset to be taught at this school" (*Garifuna* 01:30:20).

By teaching Garifuna language, collective governance, ancestral histories and knowledge, and a genealogically-informed critique of capitalism and colonialism, the community's decolonial pedagogy plants the seeds for a new set of social relations. In so doing, it emphasizes that the concept of rights, to both education and land, is not settled. The policies, laws, and discourses enforced under neoliberalism ontologize these rights, insofar as the right to speak Garifuna, to learn about their culture, to enjoy their land and its resources, are claimed primarily on the basis of being Indigenous. Going beyond this, the pedagogy of *Garifuna en peligro* politicizes the rights to land and education by imbuing them with historical analysis and exposing their sustained tether to the frameworks and objectives of colonialism.¹³ The film leaves viewers with the question of whether neoliberal education, in all its emphasis on choice, in fact allows for teaching that is transformative, or if this capacity —so central to freedom-making— requires seizing control of education and redescribing it outside its given terms. As the charter model continues to penetrate the Global South, and private for-profit management organizations increasingly seize control of administrative decisions for schools and students, we would do well to consider how to occupy education.

12. See Rebecca Tarlau's *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land: How the Landless Workers Movement Transformed Brazilian Education* (2019).

13. For more on the shift from the politicization of rights to their ontologization in the 1970s, see Étienne Balibar "What is a Politics of the Rights of Man?" (1994).

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EL ARQUETIPO DEL DICTADOR LATINOAMERICANO EN PANAMÁ: NORIEGA EN LA LITERATURA DE MAURO ZÚÑIGA ARAÚZ

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Resumen: Enmarcada dentro del espacio literario representado por la novela del dictador, un subgénero ampliamente reconocido durante el Boom y Post-Boom Latinoamericanos, la novela del escritor panameño Mauro Zúñiga Araúz, *El chacal del general*, describe la memoria histórica de la política de terror experimentada en Panamá durante los años de dictadura de Manuel Antonio Noriega, en un período literario en que se consideraba que novelas sobre el dictador —el cual Ángel Rama describe como “un hombre carismático que lo ha conquistado todo y se aferra al poder hasta no ser nada más que eso: poder”— parecían estar desapareciendo, hasta que en 2007 Zúñiga Araúz yuxtapone ficción y realidad en su narrativa para denunciar lo ocurrido en Panamá. Este artículo se centra en el análisis literario del discurso memoria, violencia y poder reflejado en la narrativa, utilizando el marco teórico de Foucault, y el enfoque crítico del proceso hegemónico dictatorial presupuestado por Rama, entre otros. Se apunta a responder cuestionamientos sobre lo que dice la memoria histórica sobre Noriega, el trato dado a las mujeres bajo su dictadura y el uso autorial de la pluralidad de voces para denunciar la figura del implacable dictador latinoamericano.

Palabras clave: Novela del dictador; Manuel A. Noriega; literatura panameña; memoria y poder; Mauro Zúñiga Araúz

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Un número considerable de novelas clásicas que retratan la figura autoritaria del dictador latinoamericano pobló el mundo literario durante el siglo XX, específicamente en los años setenta durante un período considerado —y aún debatido— por muchos como el “Boom Latinoamericano.”¹ La literatura aclamada de reconocidos escritores latinoamericanos como Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Augusto Roa Bastos, Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, entre otros, comenzó a centrarse en la figura del hombre poderoso y controlador y su hegemonía de poder. Muchas otras narrativas de ficción continuaron surgiendo durante el final del siglo XX conocido como el período del “Post Boom”, como es el caso de la publicación de la aclamada novela de Vargas Llosa, *La fiesta del chivo*, publicada en el año 2000, período en que se consideró el fin de la era de novelas del dictador latinoamericano. Sin embargo, de las pocas novelas afines a principios del siglo XXI, se encuentra *El chacal del general* (2007) del panameño Mauro Zúñiga Araúz en la cual, a través de la ficción, denuncia el período dictatorial y los abusos de poder de Manuel Antonio Noriega en Panamá.

A pesar de su misión denunciante, parecía estar empezando a desaparecer lentamente este tipo de literatura centrada en el poderoso dictador que Ángel Rama, en su seminal ensayo *Los dictadores latinoamericanos* (1976), describe como “un hombre carismático que lo ha conquistado todo y se aferra al poder hasta no ser más que eso, poder” (16). De hecho, para muchos latinoamericanos el subgénero literario de la novela del dictador, *per se*, era considerado una cosa del pasado, incluso cuando la dictadura todavía estaba en vigor en el territorio durante el último cuarto del siglo XX —como fue el caso de Fidel Castro en Cuba, y Omar Torrijos en Panamá, entre otros dictadores en América Latina. A este hecho se le puede argumentar que la novela enfocada en la figura del dictador dejó de surgir porque se consideraba que, en comparación con aquellos crueles dictadores del pasado, estos nuevos regímenes autoritarios se llevaron a cabo de una manera menos violenta. El control y la opresión de estos nuevos dictadores empezaron a ser ejecutados al estilo foucaultiano: de una manera más sutil, a través de instituciones y mecanismos de control y de la sociedad civil, pero con efectos represivos similares (Foucault 38). Además, fue una época en la que muchos países de América Latina también se hallaban bajo regímenes “democráticos” y dictaduras menos brutales.

Cuando surge nuevamente la figura del mandatario cruel y despiadado como personaje literario, salen a relucir las memorias del terror político del dictador en Panamá. Zúñiga Araúz utiliza su novela como un arma contestataria para denunciar la violencia, la corrupción, los asesinatos, las torturas y los abusos ocurridos en ese pequeño país centroamericano, los cuales no se habían descrito aún en novelas. Aunque el mensaje se centra directamente, aunque de forma ficticia, en los desmanes de poder, el autor fusiona ficción y realidad —característica significativa de la novela sobre dictadores latinoamericanos— para describir un aspecto importante de la historia panameña y denunciar las relaciones de poder encontradas en diversos hechos reales y casos históricos ocurridos a quienes se atrevieron a desafiar la autoridad, incluyendo el secuestro y la tortura del propio autor.

La representación del poder dictatorial en *El chacal del general* da lugar a las preguntas que constituyen el punto central de este estudio. ¿Qué nos dice la memoria histórica sobre la dictadura en Panamá? ¿Cuál es el trato dado a las mujeres en esta novela panameña de dictadura? ¿Cómo utiliza el autor la pluralidad de voces representadas en la narrativa para denunciar la explotación de poder de la figura del implacable dictador latinoamericano? ¿Es la novela de Zúñiga Araúz una nueva forma de novela de dictadores? ¿En qué se diferencia esta novela contemporánea sobre dictadores de las novelas clásicas sobre

1. José Donoso en *Historia personal del boom* explica todo lo relacionado con el inicio del boom y sus diversas etapas de “estallidos”.

dictaduras? Para contestar estas interrogaciones, es necesario exponer la conceptualización del dictador y la dictadura en América Latina.

Este artículo pretende argumentar que el subgénero literario de la novela de dictadores latinoamericanos no es cosa del pasado. *El chacal del General* se enmarca en este espacio literario debido a que relata las memorias históricas de terror político de Noriega durante la dictadura militar iniciada en 1968. Aunque el autor catalogó su obra literaria como una novela psicológica por los abusos mentales y el terror psicológico y físico que sufren los personajes a manos del dictador, *El chacal del general* contiene la mayor parte de las características distintivas que forman parte del subgénero literario en cuestión. Por ejemplo: 1) el dictador de la novela despliega las mismas características de otros dictadores históricos; 2) el escritor utiliza, de forma simbólica, escenas realistas de persecuciones políticas, desapariciones y torturas de quienes se atrevieron a desafiar la autoridad del dictador; 3) la novela presenta la particular degradación de las mujeres bajo la dictadura; 4) el escritor refiere abiertamente varios acontecimientos históricos importantes que aquejaron a Panamá y otros países latinoamericanos.

El autor en la dictadura

Mauro Zúñiga Araúz² nació en 1943 en la ciudad de Panamá. Fue médico, escritor, y una figura famosa de la oposición durante la Dictadura Militar. Se convirtió en un reconocido personaje por su lucha constante en favor de los derechos sociales, políticos y económicos de los panameños. En 1984 fundó y lideró el primer movimiento cívico masivo contra el régimen militar del dictador Manuel Antonio Noriega y relató los hechos en su libro *Coordinadora Civilista Nacional: (COCINA)*, publicado en 2011. *COCINA* es un proyecto nacional panameño sobre la lucha contra la tiranía dictatorial en Panamá y un ensayo testimonial sobre un movimiento determinante en la lucha por la democracia en el país. Fue escrito, como se expresa en sus páginas, para subsanar el gran vacío en la historia oficial panameña de lo que verdaderamente ocurrió durante los 21 años de dictadura militar —cuya existencia muchos jóvenes menores de treinta años todavía ignoran. La obra invita a las generaciones que afortunadamente no vivieron bajo el régimen norieguista a conocer esta realidad histórica y, asimismo, exhorta a aquellos que sí vivieron ese período a que se enteren de lo que realmente sucedía en estos años.

Debido a las luchas cívicas y políticas en contra de la dictadura en Panamá, el autor fue secuestrado y torturado por la tropa paramilitar F-8 de Noriega el 21 de agosto de 1985, cuando era líder del grupo de oposición nacional Civilista. El Dr. Zúñiga Araúz narra lo ocurrido en forma detallada en *COCINA* y, entre otras cosas, cuenta cómo fue apresado por sicarios armados de Noriega, detallando en forma minuciosa lo sufrido antes y después de la tortura física y psicológica:

Me vendaron los ojos [...] inmediatamente empezaron a golpearme en la espalda, los costados y en la parte posterior de la cabeza de donde emanaba un chorro de sangre [...] pensé que me había fracturado la lámina cribosa del cráneo [...] Posteriormente sentí que me cortaban la espalda con un material filoso [...] me cortaron parte de la oreja derecha. (*COCINA* 198-202).

Esta experiencia será utilizada años más tarde por el autor para ilustrar escenas de secuestro y tortura en la novela que aquí nos ocupa.

Como novelista, escribió otras obras de ficción, de las que destacan *Espejo de miserias* (2010), *El alumno* (2012) y *Fumata negra* (2013). También publicó cuentos, obras de teatro, ensayos diversos, monólogos y obras de crítica literaria. Zúñiga Araúz recibió los premios Ricardo

2. Tuve el honor de conocer al doctor Mauro Zúñiga Araúz y entrevistarlo en el año 2012, y me uní al sentimiento de pesar de miles de panameños que lamentaron su deceso en la ciudad de Panamá el 8 de noviembre de 2023.

Miró y el Anita Villalaz en 2001 por su monólogo en *Vida de otra forma*, la mejor obra nacional de ese año. También ejerció como columnista en diversos periódicos nacionales e internacionales.

El último dictador militar panameño

En *El chacal del general*, el autor yuxtapone la ficción de la novela con la realidad histórica del dictador panameño para dar a conocer su llegada al poder a través del autoritarismo. Al igual que en otras novelas latinoamericanas de dictador, en la obra de Zúñiga Araúz la construcción del personaje del dictador destaca temas como el desamor, el abandono de sus padres, el maltrato, y la pobreza vivida durante la niñez. El autor describe importantes acontecimientos de la infancia del dictador y el paso del niño maltratado, abusado, intimidado y menospreciado, al joven estudiante que busca la forma de convertirse en alguien importante para poder demandar y ejercer poder. La novela revela el primer discurso del dictador en su camino hacia el poder:

Pedí la palabra en una asamblea de estudiantes. Hablé. Recuerdo lo que dije: Oligarquía y militarismo y movimiento estudiantil. Disparé mi furia con palabras gruesas de alto voltaje. Escuché aplausos y vivas. Esa noche pensé que el mundo podía entrar por mi boca. Sólo lo pensé. (80)

La historia panameña revela que ese poder deseado por el dictador empezó con el fin del gobierno democrático en Panamá del presidente Arnulfo Arias Madrid. Este cayó el 11 de octubre de 1968 tras un golpe de estado encabezado por militares. Luego se establecería una dictadura militar que duraría 21 años y terminaría con una invasión estadounidense a Panamá en 1989 para destituir al último dictador militar en el país. Los historiadores Jorge Conte-Porras y Eduardo Castillero describen el inicio de Noriega en el poder como el de un joven oficial militar a cargo de eliminar la oposición:

el teniente Manuel Antonio Noriega, quien colocaba bombas en las casas y en los autos de los familiares de los que peleaban en la guerrilla, encarcelaba a las madres de los combatientes, golpeaba a sus mujeres, hasta que los fue matando uno a uno. (262)

Dos años después, el 31 de julio de 1981, muere misteriosamente en un accidente aéreo el entonces líder del país, el general Omar Torrijos Herrera. Pocos años después de ese momento, Noriega ascendería a general y finalmente se apoderaría del país.

Noriega llegó a convertirse rápidamente en el gobernante de facto de Panamá, el líder máximo. Ocuparía esta posición hasta el momento en que el exjefe del Estado Mayor del ejército panameño y segundo en comando de la Dictadura Militar, el coronel Roberto Díaz Herrera, hiciera declaraciones públicas denunciando a Noriega. En la mañana del lunes 8 de junio de 1987, Díaz Herrera conmocionó al mundo cuando, a través de una rueda de prensa nacional e internacional, acusó a Noriega de corrupción y fraude, así como de ser el autor intelectual de la decapitación del Dr. Hugo Spadafora —un destacado líder de la oposición y abierto crítico tanto de Noriega como del ejército panameño, quien en numerosas ocasiones denunció los vínculos del dictador con asesinatos, grupos de narcotráfico y negocios de tráfico ilegal de armas. Como explica Díaz Herrera en su libro testimonial *Estrellas Clandestinas*, Noriega también participó como doble agente, trabajando tanto para el gobierno de los Estados Unidos como agente de la CIA y en operaciones con los carteles de Colombia. El año de 1987 marcó el comienzo del final de Noriega. Dos años más tarde se pondría fin a la era de la dictadura militar panameña.

Después de las denuncias del coronel Díaz Herrera, miles de

panameños de todas las clases y condiciones sociales salieron nuevamente a las calles en manifestaciones pacíficas de protesta contra el régimen corrupto. Lo hicieron bajo el auspicio de grupos cívicos como La Cruzada Civilista. La noche del 20 de diciembre de 1989, brigadas estadounidenses invadieron Panamá en su operativo llamado Operation Just Cause, con más de veinticuatro mil tropas militares, aviones y unidades navales. Los militares norteamericanos no solo capturaron y derrocaron a Noriega del poder, sino también causaron la muerte y desaparición de cientos de panameños inocentes.³ Si bien las acciones norteamericanas fueron vistas como una invasión ofensiva a Panamá, muchos panameños consideraron que la invasión fue un mal necesario para capturar y sacar del poder al dictador (Rozotto 171). Noriega fue juzgado y sentenciado en los tribunales de Miami por 40 años (de los cuales solo cumplió 17) y en 2010 fue extraditado a Francia.

Marie Desnos de la revista *Paris Match*, en su artículo “La France condamne Noriega à 7 ans de prison”, explica la parte de la historia desconocida por muchos sobre el porqué de la condena de Noriega en Francia y cómo este utilizó al país francés para ocultar el pago que recibió por el narcotráfico: todo el dinero sucio de esas transacciones fue escondido en cuentas bancarias en París y Marsella para la compra de propiedades. El juzgado parisino sentenció a Noriega a pagar una multa de un millón de euros a Panamá por los daños y perjuicios morales a su país de origen y también ordenó la incautación de los 2.3 millones de euros bloqueados en las cuentas francesas del acusado y el secuestro de sus propiedades de bienes y raíces. Noriega se declaró inocente, asegurando que todo el dinero con que compraba mansiones en Francia provenía del patrimonio familiar y de su salario como agente a sueldo de la CIA. En Francia solo cumplió un año de prisión. La corte parisina le dedujo el tiempo pasado bajo el régimen de extradición de los EE. UU. a Francia.

En el año 2011 Noriega fue extraditado por Panamá para hacer frente a los asesinatos, desapariciones y devastaciones cometidas contra su propio país. La justicia nacional ya lo había condenado *in absentia* a 60 años de prisión por su participación en la desaparición y asesinato de opositores entre 1968 y 1989, en particular por la muerte del Dr. Hugo Spadafora. En junio de 2015, Noriega pidió perdón públicamente a todas las personas en Panamá. Noriega no pudo cumplir toda su condena porque en enero de 2017 fue diagnosticado con un tumor cerebral y trasladado a prisión domiciliaria. Falleció el 29 de mayo de 2017 y con su muerte se cierra la era de dictadura militar en Panamá.

La novela del dictador latinoamericano

Rama examina la manera en que la producción literaria latinoamericana funciona como mecanismo de resistencia y cuestiona el poder autoritario a partir de la década de los años 70 (12). Rama indica que los narradores adoptaron una postura contestataria, se distanciaron de las formas narrativas tradicionales y debatieron críticamente las realidades nacionales (14). Dentro de ese contexto, clasifica la novela del dictador latinoamericano como parte de la serie histórica que denuncia regímenes inmisericordes, el ejercicio del poder despótico y la rebelión contra todas las formas del poder (15). Es decir que, esa literatura sobre dictaduras que surge en los setenta aparece como un nuevo medio de criticar y luchar contra el autoritarismo.

La novela del dictador tuvo sus inicios en el siglo XIX con un texto que se considera pionero de este subgénero literario: *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie*, del escritor y político argentino Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. En esa obra, Sarmiento realiza una crítica severa sobre la cultura argentina y se pronuncia duramente contra los caudillos Juan Manuel de Rosas, gobernador de Buenos Aires, y Facundo Quiroga, líder regional de la Provincia de San Juan. A pesar de ese temprano inicio, no fue sino hasta la aparición de varias novelas de dictadores que se han

3. Véase el libro de historia *La verdad sobre la invasión* (1990) del sociólogo panameño Olmedo Beluche; el informe *Operation JUST CAUSE: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama. February 1988 – January 1990* (1995), por el historiador militar Ronald H. Cole; y el libro *Letras de Panamá. Historia compendiada de la literatura panameña* (2013) de Isabel Barragan de Turner.

vuelto clásicas, como lo son *El recurso del método* del cubano Alejo Carpentier, *Yo El Supremo* del paraguayo Augusto Roa Bastos y *El otoño del patriarca* del colombiano Gabriel García Márquez.

Desde la década de 1960, Carlos Fuentes había propuesto un ambicioso proyecto en el que cada escritor aportaría una novela sobre un dictador de sus respectivos países al mismo tiempo en que muchos ejemplos memorables de la historia latinoamericana llegaron a publicarse exitosamente (Lantigua). Según Gerardo Gómez Michel, este tipo de novelas concentradas en las figuras de dictadores latinoamericanos hizo que los críticos prestaran más atención a este tema literario. La popularidad del género hizo que estos entendieran que “la novela del dictador mantiene una relación compleja y discutible con la realidad latinoamericana, no como un simple prototipo social, sino como el intento del escritor de reescribir partes de la historia latinoamericana” (Gómez Michel 215-216).

De igual forma, *El chacal del general* de Zúñiga Araúz refleja en su narrativa el arquetipo del dictador latinoamericano retratado de una forma cruda, misteriosa, poderosa y cruel. En la narrativa es posible notar los rasgos que se encuentran en otras novelas de dictadores que, a pesar de hacer referencia al hombre fuerte que critican, no dan cuenta ni de su nombre ni del lugar exacto donde se desarrolla la trama. Como indica Rama, las novelas de dictadura no hacen referencia a una figura en particular, sino al conjunto de dictadores: “No habrá país de América Latina que no crea que se está contando en el libro la historia de sus dictadores particulares, pues de Perón a Trujillo, de Gómez a Estrada Cabrera, de Machado a Somoza, aquí hay referencias de todos” (60). Asimismo, Robert Boyes señala que

[a] menudo, el dictador de estas novelas es un retrato compuesto modelado según diversos orígenes, con la consecuencia de que el personaje es más grande que la vida misma, tan impresionante en el alcance de sus brutalidades que es menos persona de lo que es: una fuerza de la naturaleza. (180)

Entonces, estas novelas tomaban su inspiración de la figura de un dictador o en varios de ellos en forma misteriosa, surrealista muchas veces, nombrando a unos y no a otros, consolidando en una figura la de muchos dictadores que controlan a sus pueblos. Dicho de otra forma, para obtener un mejor reflejo de las realidades dictatoriales en América Latina, la figura del dictador se personalizaba, pero no se revelaba.

Las novelas contemporáneas sobre dictadores no se ciñen a los límites tradicionales; cruzan fronteras y van un paso más allá al incorporar nuevas características distintivas y claves. Lo más notable es que el dictador ya no es simplemente uno más entre muchos. El hombre poderoso ahora tiene un nombre, o apodo, un rostro, una voz y un país. Mario Vargas Llosa, en *La fiesta del chivo* (2000), llama por su nombre propio al dictador de la República Dominicana, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. Y también se refiere a él por su apodo, “el benefactor.” En la novela de Zúñiga Araúz, se identifica al dictador panameño con su singular apodo, “cara de piña”, pero no se menciona su nombre.

Es importante tener en cuenta la problemática situación de utilizar nombres reales en novelas del dictador mientras la figura histórica que inspira la novela aún vive.⁴ Por esto, aunque Zúñiga Araúz no menciona explícitamente el nombre de Manuel Antonio Noriega, da todas las pistas necesarias y lleva al lector a saber que, sin lugar a duda, la verdadera identidad del cruel dictador de su novela es Noriega. Escribe: “Que muera ‘cara de...’ apodo que expulsaba la gente por sus lenguas silenciadas para referirse al personaje que mandaba” (93). Es bien sabido que los panameños habían apodado a Noriega “cara de piña” en referencia al estado de su rostro cicatrizado por el acné. En este caso el

4. Zúñiga Araúz escribió *El chacal del general* en 2007, diez años antes de la muerte del dictador Noriega en 2017.

autor denuncia el recurso a la alusión, como se explica más adelante. Además, la novela también refleja la pluralidad de voces, técnicas comúnmente utilizadas en este subgénero con el fin de proporcionar una comprensión clara, no sólo de la historia y el ambiguo mundo del dictador, sino del destino de todos aquellos que se opusieron a los regímenes dictatoriales.

Estructura narrativa y técnicas literarias: pluralidad de voces

En *El chacal del general* hay un narrado heterodiegético al que se le conoce generalmente como narrador en tercera persona; es decir, el narrador no participa en la historia que se cuenta y la narra desde un punto focal externo. La novela también contiene una multitud o pluralidad de voces; lo que Mikhail Bakhtin llama heteroglosias. La pluralidad de voces en la historia brinda diferentes perspectivas sobre los acontecimientos. A lo largo de los capítulos, el lector se encuentra con hechos reales ocurridos en Panamá retratados en representaciones imaginarias entre personajes de ficción. El uso de esta técnica literaria permite al lector viajar a través del retorcido paisaje de violencia y terror que viven los personajes.

En la novela se halla también una imagen encontrada en todas las novelas de dictadores: la figura del estudiante idealista político-activista que es secuestrado, torturado, asesinado y finalmente desaparecido. *El chacal del general* concentra su trama en las últimas veinticuatro horas de la vida de una pareja de ancianos que sufre y busca a Chicho, su hijo desaparecido que corre la misma suerte de esos estudiantes activistas. Los padres del chico no llegan a saber de él y asumen el final trágico del muchacho a manos del chacal y su General. El personaje ficticio de Chicho representa el caso de la desaparición, tortura y asesinato del Dr. Hugo Spadafora, panameño opositor a la dictadura de Noriega. Aquellos hechos reales enmascarados por la ficción son descubiertos en los diálogos entre los personajes, como es también el caso de los diálogos perversos entre el General con su matón, el chacal Gilberto, y su confidente personal, Crispín.

La polifonía de voces es plasmada por Zúñiga Araúz en esos diálogos mediante diferentes voces que comparten un ejercicio de poder. Por ejemplo, con su confidente Crispín, el General crea un vínculo semejante a una relación psicólogo-paciente donde yuxtapone dos tipos de animales carnívoros y Cazadores: el lobo y el chacal. Con esto, busca representar una dicotomía de poder que se enmascara detrás de risitas sarcásticas, ironías, silencios intencionales, voces no convencionales y voces no enunciadas. Estas expresiones, como polifonía de voces compartiendo el ejercicio de poder, son las que Bakhtin llama heteroglosias o la multiplicidad de voces que componen un mismo idioma (dialectos sociales o jergas profesionales, por ejemplo) y que, al estar estratificadas, ideológicamente compiten entre sí como prerrequisito indispensable del género de novela (263). A este respecto, Francisco Higuero explica que, dentro de esas heteroglosias, las voces no convencionales —como el silencio, la risa y las palabras entrecortadas— “pueden llevar a socavar el único orden artificial del orden establecido, impuesto por el poder opresor” (163-164). Este es el recurso literario que permite al autor representar indirectamente aquellos acontecimientos de la historia que resultan difíciles de narrar.

Esas voces no convencionales se pueden escuchar en un diálogo en el que participa el perverso General:

¿Conoces los orígenes del perro? ... Creo que es algo poco conocido. Los que proceden del chacal son mansos y obedientes. Los que proceden del lobo son leales, pero irreverentes. A los primeros los mandas, los humillas; se mueren fieles a ti. Los segundos te consideran un congénere, se ubican a tu nivel y careces de autoridad sobre ellos. En el

servicio militar tiene que haber perros con sangre pura de chacal. Los que tienen genes de lobo son pretenciosos, peligrosos. Hay que eliminarlos. (143)

Esta conversación revela el tipo de control y sumisión que exige de sus chacales. Leopoldo Santamaría explica que el chacal es un instrumento útil que suple las deficiencias psicológicas de las que carece el General. Su relación muestra el abuso de poder autoritario versus la sumisión de sus subalternos.

Zúñiga Araúz también utiliza silencios y alusiones en su novela *El alumno* (2012). En esta no solo se denuncia a un dictador militar panameño, sino también a una nueva manifestación de corrupción y opresión: un dictador civil. Con el propósito de que los lectores conozcan el interior del poder, el autor escoge a un presidente discípulo de un dictador militar. Aquel sigue los pasos de este y toma decisiones ambiciosas e inmorales, aunque sin armas, buscando mantener su poder. En *El alumno*, Zúñiga Araúz vuelve a denunciar a través de alusiones y, en esa forma, desafía el poder opresivo existente en ese nuevo período post militar en Panamá. El autor señaló que el personaje del maestro en *El alumno* es el General, por lo que la novela trata sobre todas las perversiones que realiza el alumno antes de llegar al poder, guiado por su maestro, el Dictador. Como lo había hecho en *El chacal del general*, en su novela más reciente el autor no menciona nombres reales, solo utiliza el recurso de la alusión al referirse a un modelo de presidente panameño, haciendo la salvedad de que cualquier semejanza es pura coincidencia.

En *El chacal del general* se presentan metáforas, simbolismos y, en ocasiones, maquiavelismos para describir las torturas y las crueldades del dictador. El autor indica que tuvo que investigar mucho sobre las técnicas militares, los sitios de torturas y hechos reales (Chacal.mov). También utiliza sus propios conocimientos de medicina para retratar las torturas fisiológicas a las que el dictador y su chacal sometían el cuerpo de sus víctimas. La filosofía de Nicolás Maquiavelo se presenta en la narrativa como una expresión metafórica para explicar cómo el dictador racionaliza la tortura como un medio justificable de proteger el poder. Con la técnica de flashback, Zúñiga Araúz pinta el trasfondo de la situación que motiva el secuestro del protagonista y el sufrimiento de su madre. Luego interrumpe la secuencia cronológica de la historia para explicar el idealismo de Chicho, el estudiante, al querer luchar contra la opresión y, sin previo aviso, utiliza *flashforward*. Esta técnica literaria se ejecuta no para confundir al lector, sino más bien para revelar información vital sobre la suerte del protagonista y demás personajes, como es el caso de las mujeres en la novela.

A propósito de la violencia física e intelectual contra la mujer, esta se ha tratado de manera directa e indirecta en las novelas de dictadores latinoamericanos, puesto que a los personajes femeninos se les ha colocado en un espacio abyecto con su propia opresión, generalmente en sitios de prostitución y esclavitud sexual por parte de los dictadores militares. Ellas son frecuentemente victimizadas y encerradas dentro de espacios basados en violencia física, psicológica y emocional, como demostración de poder, dominio y autoridad. Si bien *El chacal del general* no es una excepción en cuanto al tipo de tratamiento dado a los personajes femeninos, es importante reconocer que, en la mayoría de las novelas, estos autores presentan también retratos positivos de personajes femeninos fuertes y dispuestos a luchar a toda costa, a pesar de las circunstancias en que se encuentren: mujeres dispuestas a alterar todas las nociones de debilidad y/o control patriarcal. Pero también representan a personajes femeninos que se hacen cómplices de la violencia física, emocional y psicológica, y de la opresión sufrida sometiéndose, pero por diferentes razones: obediencia y transgresión.

Este trato chauvinista-machista dado a las mujeres se ve claramente plasmado en *El chacal del general*, al demostrar la era de terror del Dictador que usa sus frustraciones y poder contra las mujeres. Se describen las diferentes formas en que estas son explotadas sexualmente y engañadas por el hombre poderoso como medio de opresión en una sociedad patriarcal dictatorial. Sin embargo, a diferencia de la mayoría de las novelas clásicas de dictadores/dictadura, Zúñiga Araúz incluye no solo a personajes femeninos pobres, fácil de manipular y engañar, sino que también demuestran cómo el Dictador victimiza a mujeres pertenecientes a la clase media-alta, algunas esposas e hijas de sus íntimos colaboradores, ministros, diputados, aliados políticos y embajadores.

Helene C. Weldt-Basson, explica que en muchas de las representaciones literarias de mujeres prostitutas se ejemplifica cómo los autores masculinos enfatizan la complicidad de las mujeres con su propia opresión, considerando en cierta forma que, en el momento en que las mujeres escogen ser prostitutas, aceptan la explotación e internalizan la degradación a la que son sometidas (213). Esto revela que, al colocar personajes femeninos en las vidas de los dictadores, la representación de las mujeres en una cultura misógina se realiza en escenarios enmarcados con impotencia, violencia y prostitución. Estos personajes femeninos se sienten incapaces de romper la cadena de opresión; papel que el patriarcado les ha designado, como lo señala Weldt-Basson sobre la novela de Roa Bastos:

No estaba segura de que la mujer pudiera convertirse algún día en un ser humano porque el hombre no le permitiría ganar esa dignidad, mientras él no se convirtiese en un ser humano. Lo cual era casi imposible. Y lo más seguro: totalmente imposible. (227)

Eso mismo ocurre en la novela aquí tratada, que representa una sociedad machista y la distinción y demostración de poder del patriarcado se manifiesta desde el título mismo que se le asigna al mandamás dueño de cuerpos y haciendas. Rama los enumera en las novelas canónicas como el caudillo, el padre, el sabio, el señor presidente, el magistrado, el supremo, el patriarca, el bienhechor, el generalísimo, el conductor, el guía, el jefe, el protector, el comandante (12). Zúñiga Araúz lo denomina el general y lo hace eje de la marginalización y subjetividad de los personajes femeninos; en una forma u otra pareciese que todas las mujeres son propiedad del dictador. El general de la novela panameña toma y deja mujeres a su antojo y las sitúa en espacios abyectos que las hace diferente a los hombres que las violentan y ultrajan. Consecuentemente, la narrativa no solo relega a las mujeres a un nivel de inferioridad, sino que, como bien indica Kathleen Barry al hablar sobre prostitución, esa reducción patriarcal a las mujeres las despliega solamente como “un corpus sexual” (21).

Zúñiga Araúz en *El chacal del general* presenta la opresión patriarcal donde personajes femeninos corren una suerte bastante trágica y demuestra que esa opresión no solamente es procedente del sistema dictatorial, sino que muchas veces viene de la figura paterna, como dobles patriarcales del dictador dentro de la esfera del hogar. Por ejemplo, en *El chacal del general* el personaje femenino de Isis se somete al General por obediencia y se vuelve no solo un objeto sexual del dictador, sino también otro de la manada de sus chacales para poder estar a su lado y sobrevivir. Este personaje se encuentra en un callejón sin salida, incapaz de escapar de la opresión y el abuso y, por lo tanto, queda sin voz propia. Al respecto de la falta de voz en la mujer, Spivak afirma que la mujer subalterna y oprimida no puede hablar, queda muda y, aunque hable, nadie la escucha, no por el simple hecho de que se le prohíba hacerlo, sino porque no se le permite una posición de

enunciación en su posición de subalterna (271-313).

Estos factores reducen a las mujeres a un estado de aparente complicidad con la opresión dictatorial. Gloria Anzaldúa considera que el hablar de las mujeres en las fronteras se ha considerado como una amenaza en una prisión, aunque se refiere primordialmente al caso de la mujer mestiza donde su voz se pierde en referencia al lenguaje, también puede referirse al caso donde el solo hecho de hablar por parte de una mujer se considera como una violación (100-101). Como es el caso de las voces femeninas en *El chacal del general*, ya que, a pesar de que muchas veces ellas hablan el mismo lenguaje de sus opresores, el significado de las palabras que salen de sus bocas es incomprensible para ellos, dando como resultado la pérdida de voz.

El personaje de Isis, en *El chacal del general*, para poder sobrevivir, aparentemente se somete ante el dictador. De manera bastante descriptiva para representar esta forma de abuso, Zúñiga Araúz describe a Isis como un modelo de opresión al destacar las diversas formas de poder en las que el General socava y desintegra su mente y su cuerpo. El autor señala cómo Isis no sólo se convierte en objeto de deseo, sino en otro de los chacales seguidores del Dictador. La narrativa muestra además tanto las formas en que Isis pierde su voz como la forma poco ortodoxa en la que el personaje recupera la subjetividad y agencia, que finalmente la salvan y se convierte en cómplice de su propia opresión y opresor. Isis se somete y concede al abuso del dictador, y se convierte así en partícipe plena de sus propias aflicciones, a pesar de tener muchas oportunidades para buscar escape o ayuda. Si bien es cierto que Zúñiga Araúz podría haber optado por un retrato más desafiante y positivo para frustrar la subyugación femenina en su novela, el autor opta por mantener a los personajes femeninos, física, intelectual y fisiológicamente discapacitados y oprimidos, sin autonomía para reflejar la realidad histórica; realidad de represión, control y poder que afligen a las mujeres bajo una dictadura.

En *El chacal del general*, Zúñiga Araúz también dedica un segmento histórico importante al describir específicamente el movimiento de mujeres panameñas, mujeres valientes que se congregaban en las calles del país y se reunían para protestar contra los asesinatos y el abuso de poder del dictador y de su gobierno y reclamar así justicia, libertad y democracia en Panamá.⁵ En la novela se describen mujeres burladas, atacadas, arrestadas e incluso violadas por los chacales del Dictador. Por ejemplo, en la llamada Rebelión de las abuelitas de 15 mil mujeres, los servidores del General se burlaban de las marchas de mujeres decapitando el espíritu social: “Vi cómo montaron a catorce mujeres en un coche de policía. Catorce mujeres solteras, las últimas. Nadie se enteró... Fueron arrestadas, violadas, avergonzadas” (76).

En *El chacal del general*, el autor hace referencia a mujeres y también a hombres, ahora todos en masas protestando y marchando en las calles panameñas contra el Dictador y sus desmanes: secuestros, torturas y asesinatos. Como ya se señaló, esto se representa en el idealismo del estudiante Chicho como prototipo del estudiante idealista latinoamericano que quiere luchar a toda costa contra gobernantes y gobiernos controladores. Con respecto a esta representación de la figura del arquetipo de oposición a las dictaduras, Gómez Michel comenta que “[e]n el reverso terrible de las dictaduras de esa etapa, fueron precisamente los estudiantes latinoamericanos un blanco común del terrorismo de estado y su infame maquinaria de tortura” (232). En la novela se refleja la suerte del estudiante opositor al dictador panameño para hacer alusión a los secuestros y torturas que sufrían las personas en los estados dictatoriales militares, como es el caso del secuestro y asesinato por decapitación del arriba mencionado Dr. Spadafora y a la propia experiencia sufrida por el autor.

5. Mauro Zúñiga Araúz dedica un capítulo en su libro *COCINA* en el que reporta el trabajo incesante de las mujeres panameñas en contra de la maquinaria de represión y corrupción en Panamá. (150-174).

La historia retratada en *El chacal del general* refleja eventos históricos reales durante la historia de América Latina, en la cual las voces de quienes se oponen a regímenes brutales son silenciadas ya sea por asesinatos o por miles de desapariciones. Los personajes de Virginia y Efraín, los padres de Chicho en la novela panameña, buscan incesantemente ayuda para encontrar a su amado hijo. El autor representa la imagen de sufrimiento como emblema de los padres que se preguntan sobre el paradero de sus hijos desaparecidos:

¿Está pidiendo ayuda? ¿Está él vivo? ¿Está sufriendo? ¿Está muerto? ... ¿Cómo se mide la esperanza? Un día más, más dolor. Cuando sabes dónde está el cuerpo de tu ser querido, cuando todo está hecho, tus ojos llorosos contemplan el cadáver. Tienes la oportunidad de llorar mirándolo. ¿Pero cuando no sabes dónde está? Vivimos en una incertidumbre desgarradora. (48)

Esto es también un reflejo sobre aquellos padres alrededor de la América Latina y del mundo que siguen exigiendo justicia y ejerciendo su derecho internacional para saber el paradero de sus seres queridos. Guillermo Rolla Pimentel comenta que: “El derecho de los familiares a conocer la suerte de sus seres queridos está en el derecho internacional tanto en tiempo de paz o de guerra ... según la norma del Protocolo 1 de 1977 adicional al Convenio de Ginebra de 1949” (244). En Panamá, en los años posteriores a la dictadura de Noriega, se creó una comisión para atender directamente las necesidades de familias desesperadas que buscaban justicia. La Comisión de la Verdad fue creada para brindar respuestas a estas familias, así como el cierre que merecían. Tanto en Panamá como en otros países latinoamericanos, el número oficial ha sido de cientos y miles de desaparecidos.

Como se ha indicado con anterioridad, lo acontecido al Dr. Spadafora por oponerse acérrimamente al régimen de Noriega se describe en la ficción de *El chacal del general* en la representación de la muerte y decapitación del personaje Chicho como ejemplo inequívoco de los secuestros, torturas y asesinatos sufridos por quienes se oponían al Dictador.⁶ En la novela se indica que “Encontraron a un hombre decapitado dentro de un saco de lona... Debe ser el del médico... No sé, no sé, vestía un pantalón color café que le hacía juego con su camisa a rayas del mismo color... Con esa ropa había desaparecido Chicho” (17). Esa descripción le permite al lector transportarse a lo encontrado en los archivos históricos panameños y entender claramente que Zúñiga Araúz está representando intencionalmente la verdadera desaparición y asesinato del Dr. Spadafora.

Zúñiga Araúz utiliza la descripción hiperbólica de torturas como símbolo de aquellas que verdaderamente sufrieron miles de hombres y mujeres que se han opuesto a las dictaduras militares en Latinoamérica y el mundo. En un esfuerzo literario por condenar los trágicos acontecimientos sufridos por Spadafora, el autor describe las espantosas imágenes que correlacionan la terrible experiencia del personaje Chicho en su novela, representando la suerte de desapariciones y muertes de aquellos idealistas y luchadores por la libertad y derechos humanos de los pueblos y que combatieron contra todo tipo de abuso del Dictador en la historia de Panamá, como también en otros países latinoamericanos.

Conclusión

A lo largo de la poderosa narrativa de *El chacal del general*, es posible analizar parte de la era del poder dictatorial, la violencia y el control del dictador Manuel Antonio Noriega en la historia de Panamá. Fue una era en la que el aparato represivo de un estado dictatorial ejerció un control directo y violento sobre la nación. Como se estableció, la novela de Zúñiga Araúz contiene todas las características que forman parte del

6. Leer en *COCINA* la sección: “La decapitación del Dr. Hugo Spadafora Franco” donde Zúñiga Araúz describe lo ocurrido desde que desapareció el 13 de septiembre de 1985 hasta la multitudinaria movilización para exigir el nombramiento de una comisión para que investigara el crimen. (208-234)

importante subgénero literario de la novela de dictador/dictadura en los estudios latinoamericanos. Por tanto, la novela del dictador sigue viva, y sigue denunciando la figura implacable del último dictador militar en Panamá. La realidad histórica enmascarada en un relato ficticio que denuncia los asesinatos y torturas de las masas panameñas que se opusieron al poder absoluto de Noriega y su cúpula militar en el territorio es representada a través del uso de una variedad de técnicas literarias identificadas en la narrativa de Zúñiga Araúz, así como el idealismo y el destino de su personaje ficticio Chicho.

El autor simboliza el prototipo del estudiante idealista latinoamericano para describir la figura del arquetipo de oposición a las dictaduras en su lucha ante diversos hechos históricos reales ocurridos en Panamá durante la dictadura de Noriega. También, el autor en su ficción describe de manera perspicaz el relato realista del secuestro y asesinato del Dr. Hugo Spadafora el 13 de septiembre de 1985 y, su propio secuestro unos meses antes, el 21 de agosto del mismo año; además de la catástrofe que sufrieron miles de civiles panameños que fueron perseguidos, asustados, secuestrados, torturados y asesinados durante los años de terror.

El destino de las mujeres, factor vital en las novelas de dictadores, muestra las formas perversas en las que fueron victimizadas, abusadas psicológicamente y torturadas, todo lo cual se resalta como parte importante de la narrativa. El autor describe esta victimización en el trato físico e intelectual dado a las mujeres en el mundo patriarcal chauvinista del dictador panameño y latinoamericano. El chacal del general hace eco de la violencia contra la mayoría de los personajes femeninos de la novela sobre dictadores, donde las mujeres a menudo son colocadas en entornos abyectos con su propia forma de opresión. A menudo son victimizadas y encerradas en un espacio basado en la violencia donde en su mayoría son prostitutas o esclavas de dictadores lujuriosos.

Lo más importante es que la novela de Zúñiga Araúz utiliza, como herramienta de enseñanza, una historia ficticia para confrontar al lector con una situación real que ha tenido lugar en el país centroamericano durante la última parte del siglo XX. Es un recordatorio de que, si una nación no presta atención a las viejas tradiciones de poder y control, tal como han sido descritas en la literatura, específicamente en novelas clásicas y contemporáneas sobre dictadores, tales tradiciones pueden reciclarse hacia una nueva normalidad. En otras palabras, los pueblos pueden llegar a considerar las viejas formas de gobierno como nuevas y normales. En consecuencia, la maquinaria dictatorial del poder podría regresar como una repetición del pasado.

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REVIEWS / RESEÑAS

RESEÑA

**Sophie Esch, Ed. *Central American Literatures as World Literature.*
Bloomsbury, 2024**

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¡Felicitaciones! to Sophie Esch, editor of *Central American Literatures as World Literature* (2024), for so many reasons: editing by herself a collective volume of such magnitude, trying to include as many Central American literary productions in it, and specially for continuing the difficult endeavor of, as she asserts in her introduction, “bringing together two elusive categories: world literature and Central America” (1). Indeed, leaving those writers who have transcended to the international arena, like Rubén Darío, Miguel Ángel Asturias and Rigoberta Menchú, the path towards making Central American literatures part of the global literary scene has been and still is difficult. Nonetheless, Esch’s edited volume as part of the *Literatures as World Literature Series* (Bloomsbury Publishing) is another great project that exposes the world to Central American literatures of different genres and mostly from the 20th century.

In her editorial introduction, Esch alludes to “the invisibility and marginality of Central American lives and literatures” vis-à-vis “an overabundance of definitions and conceptualizations” of the term world literature (1). After an elucidating historical and theoretical account about the evolution of such term, she indicates that the writers of the thirteen articles included approach “key issues of world literary debates through the lens of Central American literature, meaning the literatures of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize and the Central American diasporas” (4); notwithstanding the lack of representation of Costa Rican, Belizean and Panamanian literatures (only one person from the English-speaking country who identifies as Mayan rather than Belizean). This speaks to the fact that, even when making a case for the regional literature at the world stage, it is a very hard enterprise to have all countries represented thematically, and impossible to get foreign and national specialists on the literature of each country. Esch also adds that “Central American literature is, of course, not a national literature; it is a regional literature” (6). I would argue that, while this is the attempt in the academia, the reality is that most of us in Central America, creative writers included, will be happy to identify ourselves as Central Americans, but not before claiming our nationalities or, in many cases, our ethnicities (e.g., Maya, Miskito and Garifuna).

While the volume’s organization might seem peculiar, I must observe that it is nonconforming to the usual colonial/colonized organizational practices. Such organization seeks to orient the readings in a thematic manner, namely modes, constellations and routes, as a way of thinking Central American literatures. Likewise uncommon, Esch did not direct the volume contributors towards a specified definition of world literature but rather challenged them “to clarify in their individual articles what they meant by world literature or how they engage with the term” (4). Kudos for this as well! I believe this is something that must be observed in each of the chapters written, interestingly, by scholars educated and currently active in the anglophone world: Canada, Jamaica, the United Kingdom and, mostly, the United States.

In the initial section, the articles revolve around modes of reading/writing Central American literatures. In the first chapter, “Reorienting the World: Reading Maya Literatures through *Xocom Balumil*,” Rita M. Palacios and Paul M. Worley indicate that Indigenous literatures are further marginalized than other Central American productions and propose to resituate these texts within the literary production process through the titular Mayan textile design representing the cosmos (19). They describe the design, explain this decolonized approach to Indigenous literatures, do situate four Mayan writers and their literary endeavors within their own worldviews, and conclude that *xocom balumil* helps us move “beyond literary hierarchies ... toward an understanding that all peoples are the ‘center’ of their own lives, stories and literary traditions” (35). In chapter two, Sophie Esch and Ignacio Sarmiento Panez present “World Literature in

Minor Key: The Central American Short Story.” They argue that this is a seldom studied literary genre often eclipsed by the novel. In their words,

[t]his chapter traces how [Augusto] Monterroso [Guatemalan] and [Claudia] Hernández [Salvadorean] employ the minor and small categories to their advantage and use the short story genre and the Central American experience and subject position to create literature of extraordinary appeal. (42)

Both writers, despite limitations in the reception of their stories, “embrace the universal and seemingly leave the isthmus behind, yet Central America is still there” (56). The following chapter shows a decisive aspect of internationalized literatures: translation. In “Central American *Testimonio* as World Literature: English Translation and the Canonization of a Genre,” Tamara de Inés Antón studies the consequences of translation strategies that reframe *testimonios* and the reception of Claribel Alegria’s *They Won’t Take Me Alive* (1987), and Rigoberta Menchú’s *Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman from Guatemala* (1984). The article concludes with the assertion that “the overall canonization of *testimonio* as a world literary genre ha[s] been necessarily mediated by translation” (77). For the last chapter of the first section, Magdalena Perkowska, in “When Does Central American Literature Become Global?: The Extraordinary (or Predictable?) Case of Eduardo Halfon,” starts by establishing that Central American literatures are at the periphery of the periphery, with a few exceptions. Then, Perkowska observes that some of Halfon’s stories in translation made it to international circles because of their Jewish-related topics still relevant in Europe and North America, and because they explore *autoficción* as a genre in vogue in France, Spain and Latin America. Perkowska also indicates that Halfon’s fictions do not challenge the dispositions of the majority in metropolitan centres (95).

The second section “is dedicated entirely to divergent cosmopolitan constellations” (12). In chapter five, “Cosmopolitanism and Disillusion in Rubén Darío,” Carlos F. Grigsby establishes Darío’s *cosmopolita* poetics to theorize “about the place of world literature in [the poet’s] writing and about the place of Darío’s writings in world literature” (104). Grigsby indicates that Darío utilized cosmopolitanism as both an analytical model to classify literature in Spanish and an expressive term in his own poetry (107). Grigsby also delves into Darío’s Parisian disillusion regarding the city’s industrial capitalism and marginalization of Latin American literature in the European continent. Next, Carolyn Fornoff’s “Álvaro Menen Desleal’s Speculative Planetary Imagination” introduces us to a writer whose speculative fiction contrast with the Generación Comprometida’s political and realist literature in El Salvador. Fornoff affirms that Menen Desleal’s science fiction takes a distance from local contexts to respond in a different and innovative manner to political authoritarianism and cultural marginalization, criticizing in the process neo-imperial aspirations and the belief that Salvadorean political interests weren’t related to geopolitical issues of the time. Fornoff asserts that the writer’s aesthetics’ “sardonic disenchantment with literature’s didactic responsibility anticipated trends in contemporary literature from the isthmus” (136). Contrasting with the previous chapter we are presented with “Between Internationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Roque Dalton and World Literature,” written by Yansi Pérez who looks at two works of the Salvadorean writer from the Communist concept of the “international” as “an imaginary affective-communal space that proposes alternative forms to understand, feel and imagine the common” (141). Under that lens, Pérez finds in the poem “Taberna” an imagined locus for everyone without a national or global place, for anyone who didn’t align with the Eastern and Western worlds of the time. Likewise, Pérez sees in Dalton’s *Las historias prohibidas de Pulgarcito* a reconceptualization of the poet’s community outside national constraints and beyond world narratives.

Chapter eight, "Rewriting the Militant Left: Untranslatability and Dissensus in Horacio Castellano Moya," by Tamara L. Mitchell, aims at examining the Honduran-Salvadorean writer's strategic intertextuality with renowned Central European authors as a conduit for placing Central American political views and literatures within international fora, and then demonstrates it through an analysis of the writer's novel *La diáspora* (1989). Mitchell posits that "Castellanos Moya's oeuvre does not just dialogue with authors of world literary status; his works undeniably belong to the world literary canon" (159) as his "corpus has proved cosmopolitan not only in content but also in translation and dissemination" (160). In the next chapter, Gloria Elizabeth Chacón's "Humberto Ak'abal's Pluri-verses: Indigeneity, Cosmolectics, and World Literature" endeavours to read the late Maya K'ich'e' poet's works as artistic creations that converse with the cosmos and as an invitation to think about different forms of connecting to and questioning cosmopolitan, global, literary market, translation and theoretical tenets. Chacón discusses Ak'abal's literary trajectory and asserts that his creative production is a literary system that contributes to world literature and represent relationships that offer and elicit solidarity.

The third section of the volume is titled "Routes," with four chapters. The tenth chapter belongs to Harris Feinsod who, in "Canal Zone Modernism: Cendrars, Walrond, and Stevens at the 'Suction Sea'," takes a different path than other chapters since it designates the Panama Canal "as a key figure in any history of modernist world literature at sea" (192), not to study Panamanian writers but to engage with works by Swiss, Jamaican, Nicaraguan and United States authors. While there are some historical information and an entertaining study on modernists writing, it is regrettably not to see a study on Panamanian literature dedicated to the Panama Canal, such as the *literatura canalera* that has seldom been approached by literary critical circles. Following is Tatiana Argüello's "Creole Poetics of the Ocean: Carlos Rigby, Ecological Thought, and Caribbean Diasporic Consciousness," which approaches an Afro-Nicaraguan author whose poems have gone unpublished due to regional marginalization but are nonetheless deserving of international recognition because of their connection to 1960s-Nicaraguan culture and politics through an "ecological poetry [that] imagines a new Nicaraguan identity and shares realities beyond the country's limits" (208). Argüello contends that Rigby's oceanic poetry belongs to global literary circles because of its multiculturalism, connection to surrealist, Rastafarian and indigenist thought and aesthetics, exchanges with other Caribbean literatures and the cultural realities of the Global South. In the next chapter, "US Central Americans Writing Global South Spaces," Andrew Bentley presents a study of Central America diasporic authors writing in English in the United States whose works "describe Global South spaces ... negatively shaped by military interventions and neoliberal globalization," positing that such "works achieve world literary standing in which a trans- or even postnational Central American canon is possible" (224). Bentley's listing of several of these works from different time periods, albeit specific to the 21st century, is both informative and productive as Bentley argues that "more recent literature points to new trends in US Central American writing that represents an even broader multiplicity of world experiences" (228). For the last chapter, "Caravaneros as Citizens of the World," Robert McKee Irwin makes a case for books like *Caravaneros* (2020) –a testimonial drama by the Honduran Douglas Oviedo detailing the 2018 on-foot migration that started in Honduras and ended in Tijuana– and *Sobrevivientes: ciudadanos del mundo* (2018) –a testimonial migration journey by Haitian Ustil Pascal Dubuisson whose 2016 voyage took him from Haiti to the Mexico-United States border via several Latin American countries. Irwin propounds that, since these authors write about the transnational context of migrating routes while in the migratory process, the abovementioned texts should be read intertextually as contributions to contemporary world literature (255-256).

Central American Literatures as World Literature is an excellent theoretical, thematic and literary criticism resource for educational and research purposes. The quality and breadth of the chapters in this collective volume testify, on the one hand, about the quality of much Central American literature, from canonized authors to recently published ones, in par with world literary productions; even though many canonical writers from Central America have been obviated. On the other hand, the volume attests the quality of already established and currently young literary critics in anglophone North America and the Commonwealth. Let's hope that this great English-written contribution to critical studies on Central American literatures makes such literatures more visible and moves them closer or less peripheral to world literature. As a *centroamericanista* I want to say to each contributor and especially to the editor: ¡Muchas gracias!

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