Mirages of Power: Evaluating Trauma in Literary Depictions of Guatemalan Immigrants to the U.S. during La Violencia (1960-1996)

by

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Introduction

I grew up in a privileged, predominately white neighborhood in Upstate New York, with little knowledge of the realities outside of my protective sphere. In my junior year, I studied in Arica, Chile for three months. I remember the rush of expectation in my stomach as the airplane took off. During the flight I read *Mala Onda* by Alberto Fuguet, and I had watched *Caluga o Menta* before leaving. I had encountered these titles in a Google search for “best Chilean movies and novels.” They were both about life during and after the Pinochet dictatorship of 1973-1990, so I approached Chile with curiosity and concern about that period.

During my final month abroad, I conducted an independent study project on the psychological resilience mechanisms of individuals who had been targeted by the dictatorship. I spoke with eight individuals about their experiences and read numerous accounts of the violence. To be so close to the survivors, to have the words of their story travel only a foot distance from their mouths to my ears, sparked the realization that I could have been in their place and the indignation that anyone had ever been in their place. They were generous and loving people, and I cared about them. Why had anyone tried to hurt them? I felt myself pulled into the nightmare of political violence, the confusion and the indescribable sadness. Strangely, at the same time I felt exhilarated, because I had found a mission. I wanted to honor the victims and survivors of the dictatorship by improving awareness and understanding of state violence.

In the literature review for my project in Chile, I frequently read about political violence in Guatemala. Whereas Chile had become an economically and politically stable country after the restoration of democracy, Guatemala continued to produce immigrants because the violence and poverty there never ended. I discovered that a town only an hour away from my home in South Florida had been a common
destination for Guatemalan refugees since the 1980s. The tragedy of the Guatemalans was literally on my doorstep, and I wanted to dedicate something to my neighbors. I felt that a year of concentrated work would be a decent start.

The aim of this thesis is to describe the thoughts and feelings of Guatemalans who survived *La Violencia* of 1960-1996, a period of military state repression under the guise of a civil war with “terrorists” who had socialist or communist ideas. The thesis employs the psychological theories of Judith Herman and Bessel van der Kolk to analyze the experiences of Guatemalan refugees as they are depicted in two literary works, the novel *The Tattooed Soldier* by Héctor Tobar and the short story “War” by María Isabel Álvarez. My analysis is a response to the need for context-based, individualized descriptions of trauma, in a time when psychological diagnoses are often generalized. Works of literature are a unique repository of internal and external context for a character’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and are therefore an important tool for developing a comprehensive and detailed understanding of traumatic reactions. The field of literary trauma studies is still young, and to date, no one has published an analysis of trauma based on literary works about Guatemalan refugees of *La Violencia* who immigrated to the United States.

In the first chapter, I provide a brief history of *La Violencia* and the resulting migration to the United States. After describing the structural forces which caused and perpetuated the *La Violencia*, including the United States’ involvement in the establishment of a military state, I focus on the elements of repression which directly affected the characters in the case studies discussed in Chapter Four, Fix, and Six: the forcible recruitment of young indigenous men into the military, extrajudicial executions, and massacres of Mayan villages.

In the second chapter, I describe Herman and van der Kolk’s theories of trauma. Employing the analyses of Summerfield, Mollica, Tal, and others, I make the case that broad theories of trauma—such as those proposed by Herman and van der
Kolk—miss key contextual details that shape the trauma response. I argue for the importance of analyzing individual case studies, as well as for the role of literature in the development of trauma theory.

The third chapter analyzes the case of Antonio Bernal in Héctor Tobar’s novel *The Tattooed Soldier.* Antonio is a Guatemalan ladino whose wife and son are murdered by the military. To save his life, he immigrates to Los Angeles, where he encounters the soldier who killed his family, and he plots violent revenge. I identify several sources of powerlessness in Antonio’s life, including the inevitability of his wife’s death in Guatemala and an inferior social status in the United States, and I explain how he views revenge as a compensation for his general feelings of vulnerability.

Chapter Four considers the case of Guillermo Longoria, the soldier who killed Antonio’s family. At age 16, Guillermo was kidnapped from his Mayan town to serve in the Guatemalan military. I show the insidious ways in which the brutal training, ideology, and practices of the military shape Guillermo’s personality and habits. In particular, the military inculcates him with hostile feelings towards the outside world, preventing Guillermo from forming loving, stable relationships.

In Chapter Five, I look at the case of “the stranger,” a nameless woman who travels through the United States after her community is wiped out in a massacre. I specifically consider the ways in which the protagonist’s body represents trauma, and I observe how her interactions in the United States lack the inherent qualities of intimacy and permanency that were present in her family relationships.

Because this thesis focuses on a few case studies, it does not provide a comprehensive discussion of trauma resulting from *La Violencia* and immigrant life in the United States. However, the thesis offers an in-depth and individualized view of each case, and these detailed analyses allow for new insights into how trauma
theory can be expanded. In particular, I suggest further investigation of the emotional components of trauma, the effects of trauma on personality, and mental imagery of the body.

This thesis bears one especially lamentable limitation, which is the lack of Mayan perspectives. In general, Mayans occupy the lowest socioeconomic roles in both Guatemala and the United States, and they are underrepresented in the literary world. The authors of both the works analyzed in this thesis are ladino second-generation immigrants. Therefore, the thesis cannot offer a comprehensive or culturally-informed representation of the victims of La Violencia.

\[\text{Person of mixed European/indigenous ancestry, typically in the Guatemalan middle class.}\]
CHAPTER ONE
A History of the Powerful and the Powerless

This chapter provides the historical context necessary to understand the themes and events in the case studies that will be presented in later chapters. After providing a brief overview of the general issues of power and privilege that brought about *La Violencia*, I will focus on the topics that are explicitly covered in the case studies, including forcible military recruitment, extrajudicial executions, and massacres. But first, I will provide a short overview of Guatemala’s population and history.

Guatemala is 39.3 percent Mayan,¹ descendants of more than 20 groups of ancient Mayans with different dialects. The mountainous countryside has an especially dense population of Mayans, but in recent years many have fled to the cities in search of an income. Guatemala’s population is racially divided as a result of colonization, with Mayans typically at the lowest socioeconomic strata, ladinos (people of mixed indigenous and European blood) occupying the middle class, and whites enjoying the highest status. In 2012, over 75 percent of Guatemalan Mayans were living in poverty.²

Around the year 1960, an armed conflict arose in Guatemala, which ostensibly resulted from the mobilization of several insurgent groups. These groups included the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), and the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR). They denounced the maltreatment of the Mayans and poorly-paid workers, advocating for a socialist or communist revitalization that would reduce socioeconomic inequality in the country. These groups adopted an armed struggle as the only path to change after the country’s socialist president, Jacobo Arbenz, was overthrown in a military coup in 1954. The insurgents, also called guerrilla forces, conceptualized the enemy generally
as the army and representatives of economic and political power, and they gained the support of villagers and new recruits by promising a brighter future in which justice and equality would replace centuries of economic, cultural, social, and political oppression.

The armed conflict between the insurgents and the Guatemalan military state, which lasted from 1960 to 1996, has received many names, but the most common among Guatemalans is *La Violencia*, “the violence.” Media sources such as *The New York Times*,³ *Deutsche Welle*,⁴ and *Los Angeles Times*,⁵ have referred to the conflict as a “civil war,” in reference to the opposition between the military state and the insurgents. However, the term “civil war” is controversial, since the insurgents were never a significant threat to the state. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), Guatemala’s United Nations-sponsored truth commission, has shown that the insurgent groups lacked the forces, training, and material resources to effectively combat the army.⁶ The concept of a “civil war” and “counterinsurgency war” mostly served the army as a justification for its authority, claiming that the “internal enemy” of insurgents and their supporters were disrupting the order of the country and needed to be annihilated for the greater good. In reality, state forces and paramilitary groups were responsible for 93 percent of the human rights violations committed during the conflict, including virtually all the massacres and most cases of torture, rape, disappearance, and killing.⁷ The CEH estimates that over 200,000 deaths occurred as a result of the conflict.

The military initially targeted political protestors and community and union leaders, but as the insurgents moved into the countryside in the late 1970s, the government shifted its focus to rural Mayan villages, claiming that the guerrillas were receiving resources and shelter from the villagers. Therefore, rural Mayans also became “the internal enemy.”⁸ The army adopted a “scorched earth” policy and massacred Mayan communities, often in the absence of evidence that these
communities supported the insurgents. In fact, most villagers were willing to support either side in order to survive. The most commonly targeted regions were Quiché, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, and Alta and Baja Verapaz.

The Commission claimed that, because of the “racial character” of the state’s violence against the Mayans, the conflict took on the characteristics of a genocide rather than a civil war. In the early 1980s, the army killed 15 percent of the population in the Ixil region, 98 percent of whom were Mayan. The Commission observed a similar pattern in other rural regions, such that 83 percent of all victims of La Violencia were Mayan. In total, the state carried out more than 626 massacres, most of which were deliberately planned in an attempt to “drain water from the fish.”

Journalist Victor Perera has conceptualized the violence against the Maya as the “third and potentially final chapter of the conquest and exploitation of Guatemalan’s indigenous population,” the first chapter being the bloody Spanish conquest led by Pedro de Alvarado, and the second being Justo Rufino Barrios’s abolition of Mayan land titles in the late 19th century to create a pool of cheap laborers for coffee plantations. In Perera’s view, the state’s massacres of the Maya during the 1980s served as a tool to reinforce the socioeconomic status quo. In Guatemala’s agriculture-based economy, the most valuable land was concentrated in the hands of a rich minority, and the land was tended by a large number of mostly indigenous workers. These socioeconomic differences reflected a continuation of the colonial caste system, which has criollos (people of pure Spanish blood) in the highest tier of society, followed by ladinos (people of mixed European and

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9 Perera defines “ladino” as a mix of European and indigenous blood. Originally, the Spanish granted ladinos privileges and authority over indigenous communities as principales. They later became mayors, army officers, landowners and business owners. They are the Guatemalan middle class. Perera describes ladino military
indigenous blood), and *naturales* or *indios* (people of pure indigenous blood).

However, political trends in the 1940s and 1950s threatened to disrupt the power of the country’s richest people. Guatemalans had elected two socialist presidents, Juan Jose Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz, who challenged the nation’s elites by establishing a social security system, a minimum wage, labor laws, and agrarian reform. Perera believes that the rich and powerful were willing to incite terror against peasants and workers to prevent support for these policies. The truth commission of the Guatemalan Archbishop’s Office of Human Rights (ODHAG), which was published just before the CEH in 1998, details the intricate ways in which the agricultural elite have used politics to secure their economic interests since the rise of the coffee plantations in the 19th century. The ODHAG indicates that this pattern of political influence formed the antecedent for the abuses against Maya, political dissenters, and community and union leaders during the 1960s-1990s.

In 1954, pressures from the upper classes as well as foreign investors gave way to a US-sponsored military coup against the socialist President Jacobo Arbenz. The United States played a significant role in executing the coup, because the US identified Arbenz’s socialist policies as a leftist threat in the midst of the Cold War. Additionally, Arbenz’s agrarian reform had redistributed unused land belonging to the US-based, enormously profitable United Fruit Company, and the executives of United Fruit had “appealed to the U.S. government for assistance to oppose the officers as “tenacious” and “ruthless,” “tempered by five centuries of subservience to criollo landowning elites.” Anthropologist Diane Nelson has observed that the tensions between Mayans and ladinos are not only sociopolitical and economic but are also based in feelings of cultural inferiority. When Mayan organizing became more popular in the decades after “the Guatemalan tragedy,” ladinos were forced to “think critically about their own identifications, a process that makes many people quite cranky.”
‘communist’ tendencies of the Arbenz regime.”\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, Cold War influences in addition to resistance to social change on the part of the elite were the immediate causes of the rise of the military state and the atrocities of \textit{La Violencia}. Perera and both truth commissions agree on this analysis.

The military state operated under the principles of the National Security Doctrine, which justified authoritarian rule by claiming that a military-run state would ensure economic development and protect “national security threats,” which the state defined as “any organized opposition to dominant social and political interests.”\textsuperscript{13} The state established psychological control of the populace by inciting fear against the guerrillas and touting the military as a protective force, a justification that seems absurd given that the state committed more than 90 percent of the abuses during the conflict.

In the early 1960s, a series of laws and a new constitution granted the military control of all state branches. The new state dissolved the Congress, empowered the military tribunals, and directed an underground punitive system which usurped the normal powers of the judicial system. Still, the official courts were generally partial to the military, tolerating violence and failing to apply the law when this suited the military government’s interests. Impunity became the rule, and petty offenses in opposition to authority, especially those of a supposedly “leftist” character, received disproportionate sentences in the military tribunals. Some punishments included two-year prison sentences for distributing Communist literature, ten years for belonging to the Communist party, and fifteen years for “terrorism.”\textsuperscript{14} The military tribunals used the autonomy granted by the new state laws to legitimize the persecution of individuals who participated in activities of political dissension.

In the 1960s, the number of troops in Guatemala doubled, the police were reorganized under a military structure of command, and a new security agency called the Governmental Office of Telecommunications was formed to arrange military and
police intelligence. Those suspected of collaborating against the army were captured and interrogated in clandestine prisons, where they were tortured and usually executed or disappeared.15

The violence peaked in the early 1980s, when Efraín Ríos Montt took power as president. Most of the violence occurred in Mayan highland villages, where the army spread terror and disrupted normal life. Villagers buried personal items that might make the army suspicious, such as Catholic prayer books and traditional dress.16 Given the principles of the liberation theology movement, the army generally suspected Catholics of leftist sympathies. Similarly, wearing traditional clothing reflected local ethnic loyalties rather than allegiance to the state. Many Mayans developed hostile attitudes towards the army for having disrupted their daily lives, and towards the insurgents for having provoked the army.

Fearing that their villages would be the site of the next massacre, many Mayans moved to the mountains in search of refuge. Others left because the army had destroyed their property. These displaced migrants often struggled to support themselves. In 1982, soldiers began to construct “model villages” for this itinerant population to live and receive basic resources; however, the objective of these sites was to control the internal migrant population and instill nationalistic values. The CEH accuses the army of distributing food in the model villages for the purpose of “[creating] dependency that reinforced their power over the population.”17 People in the villages were constantly under surveillance by the army, as these areas were never far from military installations. “Freedom of movement, actions, and expression were restricted in a completely disproportionate manner.”18 The model villages were a potent example of the state’s will to control the rural indigenous population and maintain authoritarian rule.

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16 Liberation theology incorporates Marxists ideas into Christian theology, supporting social and political equality for the poor.
The civil defense patrols (PACs) were another powerful example of the army’s attempt to control rural regions, particularly the hamlets largely populated by indigenous people, which easily escaped the purview of military. Starting in 1981, all males over age 15 were mandated to participate in the PACs, which typically required 24 military service hours per week. The duties included monitoring the communities as well as participating in massacres, torture, and other acts of violence. The PACs were responsible for 21 percent of all extrajudicial executions.19 The use of local villagers as PACs naturalized violence in rural communities, disrupting social values and social cohesion. The army encouraged indifference towards the violence by rewarding the civil patrollers who complied with the army’s efforts and substituting grief with festivity.

A large percentage of army troops were also Mayan, due largely to forced recruitment. These were typically young men of 18 to 20 years who were illiterate and spoke an indigenous dialect as a mother tongue.20 The army aimed to brainwash recruits and to strip their identities, training them to submit absolutely to authority and to disregard human rights in favor of the army’s system of values. Recruits were indoctrinated with the idea that the army was protecting the country from the violent tactics of the guerrillas and the economic consequences of communism. The army isolated troops to ensure group cohesion, thereby making troops more susceptible to “an affective state preconditioned for aggression towards anything that could be related to the guerrillas.”21 To prepare troops to combat the insurgents, officers often subjected soldiers to ruthlessly violent or degrading exercises. The army forced recruits to perform various human rights violations, including kidnapping, interrogating and torturing, preparing mass graves, and gathering combustible material to burn places.22

The majority of army recruits were indigenous men from poor areas. In rural villages, many served in civil patrols, while in cities recruits were typically enlisted
as full-time soldiers. The army set recruitment quotas, and to meet this quota officers would order raids in public places, such as cinemas, dance halls, soccer fields, churchyards, and markets. The “element of surprise” was essential to prevent evasion. In one documented case, soldiers in civilian clothes stopped two buses on the main highway and loaded men from the buses into trucks because “the military zone headquarters had experienced problems in meeting their January recruitment quota and as a result were forced to resort to the more drastic recruitment method.” Forced recruitment was not only a source of human resources, but also an attempt to destroy ethnic loyalties, as one self-proclaimed “conscientious objector” of Quiché origin writes:

The intention of the military service has been to terminate the culture and worldview of the indigenous peoples. For example, the imposition of the Spanish language and Western culture and the disrespect for nature and life are elements that definitively contrast with indigenous values. Instead, the army inculcated recruits with values and attitudes of a male chauvinist character that were violent, self-serving, arrogant, individualist, and consumerist.

Fundamentally, the army attempted to erase recruits’ identities and to create new identities that centered on military ideals.

The training of recruits, which the CEH claims consisted of acts that constituted human rights violations, was fundamental for inculcating the young men with military ideology and for ensuring obedience to officers’ commands. The tasks of training were physically brutal, and if performed incorrectly, elicited corporal punishment, threats, and moral degradation. Any act seen as disobedient or nonconformist evoked the wrath of the officers. Some punishments included wearing a backpack full of rocks or running for hours in the mud. There are reports that a number of recruits perished during training, while others lost their sight or broke their
bones. As one exercise, officers ordered recruits to hold painful postures, such as the “the thinking devil,” in which recruits would lie with their stomachs facing the ground and sustain themselves with their elbows and their feet. The aim of these practices was to treat the soldiers so badly that they would be willing to exert the same brutality on the enemy with acts “absolutely incompatible with the basic standards of respect for another human being.”

The infamous Kaibiles, a group of elite soldiers, suffered through training that was even more cruel and dehumanizing. Kaibil is a Mayan word that means “he who has the strength and guile of two tigers.” The fictional character Guillermo Longoria, whose case I will discuss in Chapter Five, is a member of the “Jaguar” squad, which is based on the Kaibiles. The soldiers received training from decorated Vietnam War veterans, including the Green Berets and the Rangers, in Panama or at the School of the Americas in Fort Bragg, where they learned techniques of torture and psychological warfare. During training, soldiers “cultivated to the fullest a sense of aggressiveness and courage through inhuman mental and physical pressures. It was essential to kill animals, particularly dogs, and eat them raw or roasted and drink their blood to show their courage.” Like the regular recruits, Kaibiles were subject to daily “abuses, humiliation, and physical and mental punishment, under the philosophy that those who withstood these treatments were in the best condition to combat in more extreme circumstances.” The Decalogue of the Kaibil, a manual outlining the functioning of the Kaibil School, describes the Kaibil as “a killing machine when strange forces or doctrines threaten the homeland or the Army.”

Historian Manolo Castañeda has determined that forcibly recruited soldiers were able to commit atrocities because the army reshaped the soldiers’ identities and lifestyles, from the standardization of the soldiers’ appearance to the rigid control of their daily routine, to the establishment of hierarchical power relations through corporal punishment. When all soldiers conformed to military culture, their units
became “like a machine that moves in a single direction, without any regard to the judgment of its members.”

According to one official cited by Castañeda,

> Once you have integrated into a squadron, you become, let’s not say a number, but a person whose identity has to mold to the personality that the organization takes on. You can be in disagreement with something, but you have to keep it in and act according to how the organization is acting. (...) [The soldiers] were completely regulated, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day.

To sustain the troops’ morale and legitimize the army’s actions, commanders convinced soldiers that they were fighting for a cause that “transcended their existence” in defense of the homeland, inculcating them with a hatred for the “internal enemy.” Though the guerrillas were the primary target of military discourse, this discourse often took on racist tones, describing Mayans as subhuman by nature. However, most troops were Mayan, so the army made a distinction between the “good” Mayans, who participated in the fight against the insurgents, and the “bad” Mayans, who supported the guerrillas. This conceptual distinction allowed Mayan soldiers to see people of their same ethnicity as traitors of the state, thereby justifying violent actions against fellow Mayans. In addition, the bureaucratic structure of the military diffused responsibility for human rights violations throughout the entire military, so that no one individual would have to feel culpable. Soldiers and officers could claim that they had merely followed orders from their commanders, while commanders could distance themselves from the violence by assigning brutal tasks to their inferiors.

In rural communities, some the army’s massacres selectively targeted dissidents, but many were indiscriminate, in which case the army “killed whomever they found, in their homes, on the road, or at places of work, often after surrounding
a location.”

Some of the massacres lasted for days, and some occurred on holidays to take advantage of the gathering of residents in one place. In many cases, the army forced villagers to kill their family members in order to keep their own lives. There were “no limits to the severity of punishment” for those whom the army accused of having collaborated with guerrillas or having participated in community development projects or Catholic Church programs. The following anecdote indicates the brutality of these massacres:

The soldiers entered the community on October 20, 1982 and carried out the massacre on the 22nd. They killed everyone they found there, except for one person who managed to escape and is the only survivor. Before starting the executions, the women were separated from the men and raped. Everyone was denied food for two days. On the day of the massacre the soldiers in the unit woke up the men and forced them to dig a ditch. Once this task was completed all of the members were forced to line up around the ditch and each one was asked where the communists and guerrillas were. When they didn’t respond, a lieutenant gave the order to kill each of the victims with a machete, even the children. After the bodies fell in the ditch, the lieutenant gave the order to finish them off with a burst of a machine gun. Then the troop looted the houses, burning them afterwards and eating all of the animals left behind. Before leaving the place, they hacked up the corn and bean fields with machetes and set them on fire.

The army’s “scorched earth” practices made it impossible for those who managed to escape to return and rebuild their lives after the massacre. In particular, the army “systematically attacked cultural, spiritual, and religious elements of life that held deep meaning for people,” killing the elders in the community and destroying sacred sites. A central objective of these destructive campaigns was to annihilate cultural cohesion, thereby preventing collective action among the Mayans.
The military also had intelligence systems in place to detect subversive actions within the country and annihilate potential threats. Any action or verbalization that hinted at disagreement with the state’s policies was cause for execution. Military authorities order soldiers to carry out these executions without obtaining legal authorization or corroborating charges. The CEH documented 23,761 victims of arbitrary execution and 6,159 victims of forced disappearance.41

Altogether, the ODHAG estimates that more than 400,000 people fled the conflict. Most migrated to Mexico, where they received refugee status and lived in refugee camps. A smaller number went to Honduras, Belize, and the US.42 This thesis focuses on those Guatemalans who sought refuge in the United States during the conflict. Though the US played an important role in the initiation of the Guatemalan conflict, the Reagan administration denied 98 percent of applications for asylum.43 In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act was passed, requiring that applicants for temporary resident status had entered the United States before January 1, 1982 and had resided in the country continuously since arriving. This barred the majority of Guatemalan asylum seekers from gaining temporary resident status, given that the most violent period of the conflict occurred during the years 1981-1983, and migration of Guatemalan asylum seekers peaked in 1989.44

In 1985, a group of religious and refugee advocacy organizations accused the US Immigration and Naturalization Service of discriminatory treatment of Guatemalan and Salvadoran asylum claims in a lawsuit before federal court.45 The court settlement protected Guatemalan and Salvadoran asylum seekers who had entered the United States before 1990 by requiring a de novo asylum interview and decision for these immigrants. Though Guatemalans have petitioned multiple times for temporary protected status (TPS) during and after La Violencia, Guatemalans are still not eligible to receive TPS.46 The ODHAG estimates that there were approximately 200,000 Guatemalan asylum seekers living in the US in the 1990s.47
These people have primarily settled in California, Texas, and Florida. Awareness of the first Guatemalan refugees’ success in the United States spread through their communities of origin, thereby inspiring in some cases entire Mayan villages and towns to migrate to the United State to form so-called “Guatemala towns.” However, many places with a significant Guatemalan Mayan population have residents from both sides of the conflict, creating tensions within these communities. In addition, the terror of the conflict instilled refugees with fear and distrust. Due to Guatemala’s diversity and the sharpness of ethnic divisions, differences in race and dialect present another barrier against the formation of cohesive Guatemalan refugee communities. Therefore, many Guatemalan refugees have found themselves isolated from home communities, especially in cases where home communities were destroyed or family was lost.

Many refugees have faced discrimination in the United States. Mayans have especially suffered due to the color of their skin and their short stature. Many Americans did not understand why Guatemalans began appearing in their communities because the American media did not sufficiently cover the conflict. The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an organization with the mission of ending illegal immigration to the United States, worked to mobilize anti-immigrant sentiment in communities with Guatemalan asylum seekers. For example, FAIR sent representatives to Jupiter, Florida to organize Jupiter Neighbors Against Illegal Labor (JNAIL). After the formation of this organization, “the acts of public intolerance increased; there were insults, racist affirmations in town hall meetings, acts of vandalism, and a poster near the local school saying Slow Illegal Immigrant Children at Play.”

Nevertheless, Guatemalan refugees also received significant support in the 1980s from the Sanctuary Movement, a group of religious organizations and human rights groups that sought to protect Central American refugees by advocating for
legalization, assimilation, and workers’ rights. In the 1980s, a convent of churches publicly declared sanctuary status for refugees fleeing armed conflicts in Central America, assisting with border crossings, transporting refugees to safehouses, and providing legal representation in immigration court.53 These groups also helped organize communities of refugees and encouraged cultural expression.54

Like today, Guatemalan refugees of the armed conflict—primarily Mayans—were among the lowest-paid undocumented immigrants from the southern border. Most took jobs as agricultural and industrial workers. Those who did not have legal status (about 98 percent) had to take sporadic jobs in dangerous working conditions, for pay less than minimum wage. Moreover, the work was extremely tiring. “People go to work much as they would to battle, beginning with a long commute on two or three packed buses and followed by long hours of repetitive tasks in loud and unsafe conditions.”55 Sometimes they could only find work two or three days out of the week. To pay rent, they shared space with ten to fifteen other people.56 57

Anthropologist Allan Burns has noted that Guatemalan refugees of the conflict have developed an American identity that is different from the identity they built in Guatemala. He specifically describes the situation of Guatemalan Mayans, who have developed an “American self” that is shaped by their daily lives in the United States and the social perceptions of their new neighbors.

In the case of the Guatemalan Maya, their identity is shifting from one of culture to one of work. The Maya here in the United States become identified with their jobs, so that they are now “migrant workers,” not indigenous Maya. Failing this, they are identified with their legal status, and become “illegals,” part of that undifferentiated mass of immigrants who have no official status with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. This external sense of identity blends with the internal one for each person (Burns 1989a). Consequently, the Maya of Florida who have been in the
United States for four, five, or six years are quite different from the Maya of Mexico or Guatemala.\textsuperscript{58}

Because many refugees have established two lives for themselves—one in America and one in Guatemala—they must negotiate the tension between the identities established in these two homes. For example, the farming of corn is central to Mayan spirituality and identity, but in the US most Mayans do not work in cornfields. It is difficult to comprehend how living and sensing in America twisted and shaped the thoughts and emotions of the diverse population of Guatemalans. Ethnohistorian W. George Lovell describes one migrant’s experience living in Baton Rouge:

Different sights, different sounds. Different wants, different needs. A different sense of time, a different sense of place. Different premises to wake up to in the morning, different expectations to go to bed with at night. It was all […] just so vastly different, especially the language.\textsuperscript{59}
CHAPTER TWO
Theories of Trauma

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for my analysis. In subsequent chapters, I will consider the theories described here within the context of literary depictions of Guatemalan immigrants. In particular, my later analysis will identify support for and challenges to the ideas of Judith Herman and Bessel van der Kolk, who are currently the most prominent trauma theorists. The other theorists described, such as Michelle Balaev, Kalí Tal, and Lawrence Langer, will inform my method of analysis.

Herman and van der Kolk

Herman describes trauma as an experience of overwhelming powerlessness, which gives rise to the following categories of symptoms: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Hyperarousal is marked by a constant and intense state of alertness, intrusion by a constant reliving of the event, and constriction by “a state of surrender” in which the survivor feels detached from herself and from reality. The character and intensity of these symptoms are based on the survivor’s personal history and the nature of their trauma; therefore, trauma presents differently for each survivor. To Herman, trauma is a spectrum ranging from “simple” (resulting from a single traumatic event) to “complex” (resulting from multiple traumatic events or prolonged trauma, such as captivity or child abuse).

However, all traumas share the same three stages of recovery: empowerment of the survivor, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. In the first stage, the survivor learns how to become “the author and arbiter of her own recovery.”60 In the second, the survivor tells her story “completely, in depth and detail,”61 and in the last stage, the survivor integrates herself into a supportive
community. Support should not only come from the individual’s primary groups, but from society at large. In instances of violence or abuse, recovery must be accompanied by a culture of intolerance. Only once the survivor feels protected by loved ones and by society can they (re)develop trust in the world around them. Herman’s model of trauma and recovery therefore focuses on regaining a sense of personal and social power to surmount the feelings of helplessness induced by the traumatic experience(s).

As part of this model, Herman describes the body as a site of personal autonomy which can be “invaded, injured, and defiled” by traumatic events. Bessel van der Kolk has studied the role of the body more deeply, focusing particularly on the hormone system involved in hyperarousal and the encoding of emotional memories in the viscera. The “fight-or-flight” response which makes our heart race, our palms sweat, and our muscles tense up, is neurologically linked to the memory of the traumatic event(s). Van der Kolk distinguishes the bodily sensations of trauma from the verbal narrative trauma. The body represents “the self in the present moment,” whereas the narrative represents “the self across time,” or “the autobiographical self.” While the “present self” is aware of her physical sensations from moment to moment, the autobiographical self is focused on assembling the traumatic event(s) into a coherent story and expressing that story in words. Van der Kolk suggests that mindfulness exercises, such as yoga and tai chi, are important supplements to psychotherapy because they call attention to the hyperactivity of the body’s stress system. Practicing mindfulness is a way of gaining control over the trauma response and of restoring a loving self-relationship. Both the theories of van der Kolk and Herman are based on the premise that trauma leads to a sense of vulnerability and defenselessness. Their suggestions for recovery are intended to restore a sense of power and to prevent survivors from engaging in destructive self-protection strategies.
Support from meaningful relationships is another essential component of treatment in both theories. Receiving a nonjudgmental reaction to their trauma story or symptoms reassures the survivor that she is a valuable member of the human race, providing a sense of belonging and expanding her self-perception beyond the role of “victim” or “perpetrator.” This may provide the confidence to restore the individual’s imagination. Van der Kolk describes imagination as “an essential launchpad for making our hopes come true. It fires our creativity, relieves boredom, alleviates our pain, enhances our pleasure, and enriches our most intimate relationships.” Many survivors suffer from loss of imagination, in which “there is no hope, no chance to envision a better future, no place to go, no goal to reach.” With the support of their imagination and the relationships which sustain it, the survivor is better positioned to regain a sense of purpose and of power.

Literary trauma theorist Michelle Balaev has accused van der Kolk of overemphasizing evidence from neurobiology and universalizing posttraumatic reactions based on the idea that all human bodies respond similarly to trauma. Like Herman, Balaev believes that every experience of trauma is unique based on the multiple internal and external factors which influence an individual’s sensation and perception of trauma. As a result, she has conceptualized a pluralistic model based on evidence from fictionalized trauma narratives. In this model, trauma is viewed within the rich internal and external contexts in which the original event(s) occurred, as well as the contexts in which characters manage the memory of these events. In contrast to the conceptions of trauma which currently prevail in Western society, the pluralistic model considers the personal implications of trauma comprehensively, rather than focusing merely on pathological effects. In addition, Balaev’s model challenges the traditional emphasis on communicating a static, literal trauma narrative as a necessary step of recovery. Instead, she defines remembering as “a fluid and selective process of interpretation” influenced by “individual personality traits, family history, culture,
geographic location, place, and historical period,” among other factors. These influences interact to shape the response to trauma; therefore, as the individual develops and her surroundings change, so does the reaction to trauma.

Balaev illustrates this point through the concept of place, which she sees as not only a location of experience, but also an entity that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning for the individual and for groups. … The representation of place in narrative descriptions of trauma carries individual and social values that direct the understanding and remembrance of trauma.

Place refers to both the context in which trauma occurs and that in which identity is formed. Her pluralistic model is therefore informed by the concept of “relational identity,” which accounts for the influences of both individual character traits and external pressures on posttraumatic reactions.

Literary trauma theorist Kalí Tal has also emphasized the unique quality of individual traumas, arguing that broad definitions of trauma fail to recognize the complex web of contextual factors that make people’s trauma real. Tal believes that readers of trauma literature can achieve accurate interpretations of survivors’ narratives only by eliminating generalizations and assumptions based on personal experience and exposure to cultural representations of trauma, and instead focusing on the details of the narrative. Readers must immerse themselves in the world of the survivor by concentrating on context and by “[letting] nothing go without saying.”

Anthropologist Patricia Foxen, who wrote about the aftermath of La Violencia in Quiché Mayan communities, noted variations in posttraumatic reactions even among neighboring towns, due to differences in how the war was lived and how it continues to pervade daily life. Whereas the town of Chiché has continued to embrace the empowering ideas of social organization and justice proposed by the guerrillas, the neighboring town of Chinique must deal with feelings of guilt and shame that have resulted from being manipulated by the army. Foxen concludes that
psychosocial interventions “must be careful not to assign a monolithic victimhood or vulnerability to those who have lived through violence, or to impose outside diagnoses without taking into serious account the complexity of local histories and social relations.”

One of the central debates in psychology has focused on whether culturally-specific diagnoses are necessary, or generalized definitions of mental states" apply universally. Psychiatrist Derek Summerfield has strongly voiced support for culturally-specific studies and has criticized the underrepresentation of local ideas in global mental health research, which relies heavily on standard diagnoses from the American Psychological Association (APA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to quantify and interpret issues of mental health. Summerfield argues that Western definitions of mental disorder themselves have developed based on trends in Western culture, and he laments the tendency to pathologize and universalize these conceptions of mental health, especially since this practice deflects attention from the problems identified by local societies themselves, such as poverty and lack of rights. Psychiatrist and philosopher Bracken similarly notes that Western discourses of mental health are “strongly individualistic” due to the nature of Western culture. Although many proponents of Western diagnoses note that the symptoms described in the DSM and ICD can be found in all cultures, Bracken argues that these symptoms do not have the same meaning in all cultures and are therefore experienced differently.

Psychiatrist Richard Mollica, who has worked primarily with victims of political violence, has argued that standardized diagnostic criteria encourage health workers to approach trauma stories with expectations and assumptions instead of attending to the survivor’s words. When survivors speak with few interruptions or
inferences from the listener, the stories reveal their own “internal logic and essential structure.” In general, trauma survivors’ perspectives differ from popular expectations. Particularly, the non-traumatized public tends to focus on the most violent and exciting aspects of the trauma story, while ignoring the aspects which are most meaningful or most troubling to survivors. Inattentive listeners fail to recognize the wisdom and insight that survivors have gained from their experiences, and they do not see complex ways in which daily life and cultural trends have been changed by society-wide traumatic events.

Central to Mollica’s descriptions of trauma has been the issue of humiliation, which is similar to the “powerlessness” and “vulnerability” that Herman and van der Kolk describe. Mollica defines humiliation as “not a clear-cut emotion, but rather a state of being, characterized by feelings of physical and mental inferiority, of uncleanliness and shame, of spiritual worthlessness and guilt, and of moral repulsiveness to others, including a god or higher being.” Humiliation is fundamentally determined by the survivor’s perception of how the world sees him/her. Under the gaze of the perpetrator, survivors see themselves as violable and “fundamentally worthless,” because “during acts of violence there is a complete absence of love, affection, and empathy.” Perpetrators destroy the ordinary reality in which victims live and make themselves, shattering the victim’s values and well-accepted beliefs and replacing them with new rules. Whereas some survivors resist the degradation of their worldview, fighting against the perpetrator’s belief system with the strength and logic of their own ideas, others succumb to the efforts of the perpetrator and come to see their former lives as “artificial creations without value.”

Victims respond to humiliation with sadness and anger, and often do not know how to direct these impulses, because “there appears to be no acceptable, socially

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I am referring to the generalized definitions of trauma in the American Psychological Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the World Health Organization’s
sanctioned middle ground that can serve as a therapeutic alternative to depression or revenge.”

Literary trauma theorist Lawrence Langer argues that for events of political violence, there is no therapeutic alternative to traumatic reactions, because the trauma has become embedded in the survivor’s life. Many survivors of acts of political violence feel they have “missed their intended destiny,” or the life that “should have been,” and that would have been if violence had not intruded. Survivors experience time as “durational” rather than “chronological,” meaning that near-death experiences and/or the violent deaths of loved ones continue to live with the survivor, because these events are too abrupt, arbitrary, and incomprehensible to reach a meaningful conclusion. Though the narrative of a happy recovery from atrocity is attractive, it is often not the case. The past—which is really the “durational present,” as it always exists in some form with the survivor—is “both unforgotten and unforgettable.”

Traumatic experiences in the durational present “define” the survivor, though they are not necessarily disabling. Langer insists on the need for a language and space where the memories and experience of atrocities can be communicated, as a first step for dealing with human misery. Finding this language should be an interdisciplinary exercise. Although the modern Western world sees trauma as a psychological phenomenon, Balaev reminds us that psychology only provides a limited interpretation of trauma. As a result, Balaev recommends the integration of literary texts into trauma analysis, since of literature offers “an artistic interpretation of consciousness that draws attention to areas of human experience that might be overlooked or denied in society.” The novel in particular invites readers into the minds and bodies of its narrators and characters, presenting personal worlds filled with scenery, thought, and feeling.

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International Classification of Diseases (ICD).
Authors can bring a character’s “durational past” to life with literary devices such as flashback, imagery, symbolism, and repetition. These devices encourage an appreciation of the multidimensional, undefinable nature of trauma while taking readers deeper into the interpretative worlds of the characters.

As author David Morris has noted, the novel allows suffering to be represented not as a state of being, but as “an event within the context of a larger, surrounding plot.” At the same time, Morris has observed that the novel reflects the Western individualistic mindset. Novels, as well as tragedies, treat suffering as an individual, mainly internal matter.

We see but in another sense do not see—do not truly experience—the suffering of the multitudes … even in novels that describe immense casts and huge catastrophes—such as War and Peace— the affliction of entire groups appears mostly as a vague background against which we view in sharp detail the lives of a few main characters.

Therefore, novels are useful for understanding how trauma is experienced in an individual, Western mind; however, they are often less effective at capturing the magnitude and collective nature of society-wide traumas.

At the same time, the stories of individuals are more manageable and relatable for the reader. Langer has remarked that trauma narratives are useful because they evoke “the sympathetic power of imagination.” Even though readers may not have direct experience with the traumatic event(s) to guide their appreciation of a narrative, they can use the texts to access what Langer calls “deep memory,” the details of memory which are not commonly shared because they deviate from the social rules regulating the nature of trauma narratives.

Langer is also concerned with the difficulty of using common, non-literary language to express suffering. Citing Charlotte Delbo, he remarks that the words “cold,” “filthy,” and “gaunt” have different meanings for a Holocaust survivor than for someone who has never suffered in inhuman conditions. Langer calls the recent
history of human suffering a “spectacle of atrocity (…) that no past traditions have prepared us to absorb.”\(^{89}\) Similarly, Tal has noted that “traumatic experience catalyzes a transformation of meaning in the signs individuals use to represent their experiences. Words such as blood, terror, agony and madness gain new meaning, within the context of trauma, and survivors emerge from the traumatic environment with a new set of definitions.”\(^{90}\) Although literary devices enrichen representations of trauma, there is naturally an unbridgeable gap in understanding between the survivor and the reader, because interpretation of a trauma narrative is always based on the reader’s own perceptions and experience. Morris has also argued that reducing suffering to words is impossible, since “suffering encompasses an irreducible nonverbal dimension that we cannot know—not at least in any normal mode of knowing—because it happens in a realm beyond language.”\(^{91}\) However, trauma becomes more expressible through literature than through ordinary communication, since literature opens up different possibilities for expression.

However, literature can also be used to romanticize suffering, expressing common memory in common language rather than tapping into the more obscure, deep memory of trauma. Superficial and exotic accounts of trauma risk spreading inaccurate conceptions of what trauma means. However, Tal has argued that all accounts of trauma are fundamentally inaccurate since they cannot bring the listener into the physical experience of the event.

Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of “normal” conception. Textual representations—literary, visual, oral—are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience. … There is no substitute for experience—only being is believing.\(^{92}\)

For van der Kolk, “being” includes the corporeal experience of trauma, and this is the most difficult aspect of trauma to communicate with verbal language. The bodies of
traumatized individuals “reexperience terror, rage, and helplessness, as well as the impulse to fight or flee, but these feelings are almost impossible to articulate. Trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable past.”

In her studies of immigrant art, sociologist Cecilia Menjívar has found that “a focus on the artistic expressions of an immigrant group that is legally excluded or positioned only marginally opens up a window into immigrant worlds and meanings that sometimes elude our analytical gaze, worlds that often remain clandestine.” Similarly, Langer calls literary devices merely “familiar” and “comforting” methods of “easing us into the unfamiliar world [of trauma survivors].” Attempts at portraying reality inherently refine and distort it; “the literary transforms the real in a way that obscures even as it seeks to enlighten” (his emphasis). Modern philosophy has characterized consciousness as an irreducible “mystery.” Attempts to understand another person’s consciousness inherently involve interpretation on the part of the researcher or observer; therefore, even supposedly objective scientific studies of the brain’s consciousness cannot be considered definitive.

In the chapters that follow, I will endeavor to reduce my assumptions by taking an integrative approach that marries historical fact, trauma theory, and textual details. Rooting my reasoning in the texts, I will immerse myself in the worlds of the characters while using trauma theory as a guide for my analysis. By straddling the views of Western trauma experts and the literary depictions of Guatemalan immigrants, I hope to reach a space where the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of immigrants can be richly described and at least partially understood.
CHAPTER THREE

Antonio Bernal in The Tattooed Soldier

This chapter and the next will analyze the case studies of two characters from the 312-page novel The Tattooed Soldier by Héctor Tobar. Tobar was born in 1963 in Los Angeles, the son of Guatemalan immigrants. As an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, he majored in Latin American Studies and participated in student political actions against the US interventions in Central America. After graduating he became a reporter for El Tecolote, a local newspaper servicing the Latino communities of the Mission District of San Francisco. In 1988, he began working as a metro reporter at the Los Angeles Times, focusing on issues of immigration, trauma, and displacement in Central American immigrant communities. This work allowed him to cultivate a deep understanding of the socio-economic and racial tensions in Los Angeles communities, which later informed his Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the Rodney King riots in 1992. In personal correspondence to family and friends, he described experiencing episodes of depression related to the twentieth-century history of Central America and migration. In addition to The Tattooed Soldier, he has published the novels Translation Nation and The Barbarian Nurseries, which tell the stories of Latino immigrants and address class and ethnic differences in the United States. In recent years, he has published editorials in The New York Times criticizing the Trump administration’s migration policy and advocating for interracial empathy.

In customer reviews of The Tattooed Soldier, many readers comment on Tobar’s ability to evoke imagery and to transport the reader into the realities of the protagonists. Tobar has described writing as an act of empathy, so that “in a certain sense, you become the people you write about. … My career as a writer has been learning all the different ways that you approach this huge problem about trying to
capture as much as you can about the human condition on one page, in one paragraph, in one chapter, in one book.”

The book has never been translated into Spanish and has had little distribution outside of the US. Newspaper reviews located the novel’s value in the sheer fact that it “shed an honest and even light” on the “invisible world” of Guatemalan refugees, whose stories had seldom received attention in the American media. *Publishers Weekly* praised Tobar’s “liberal use of Spanish phrases” which “authentically colored” the text.

*The Tattooed Soldier* tells the story of Antonio Bernal, a ladino from Guatemala City whose wife and two-year-old son were killed by the military in the 1980s. Upon hearing of his family’s death, Antonio flees to the United States to save himself from the same fate. The novel takes place seven years after he illegally crossed the border into the United States. At the beginning of the novel, Antonio is evicted from the run-down apartment in Los Angeles that he shares with José Juan, a Mexican immigrant who also lacks papers. The two men are unemployed and settle into a homeless community. One day, Antonio recognizes the murderer of his family in a city park, and he begins to plot his revenge, eventually killing the ex-soldier in the chaos of the 1992 Rodney King riots. In what follows, I will describe the progression of Antonio’s sense of self and sense of normality, beginning with his life in Guatemala. The details of his past in Guatemala are supplied by Antonio’s memory, as well as by flashbacks in which an omniscient narrator follows the perspective of Antonio or his wife.

In the 1980s, Antonio is a university student in Guatemala City. He falls in love with his fellow student, Elena, who is committed to the revolutionary cause. During their courtship, they watch violence descend on the capital. They see soldiers arrest and shoot at protesting workers, and they stand by helplessly as their revolutionary friends are kidnapped and disappeared. In the midst of the chaos, Elena becomes pregnant, and they marry and move to the countryside. However, after Elena
discovers that the water source of the poor neighboring village is contaminated with waste which is killing the population, the state targets her as a troublesome revolutionary and the mayor sends soldiers to murder her and her husband. Antonio is away at work when the soldiers arrive, and he comes home to see the villagers gathered around the corpses of his wife and two-year-old son.

Antonio calls the murder “the beginning of his descent.” While other immigrants dream of the future, Antonio romanticizes the past, remembering his time as a husband and father as the pinnacle of his life. After ending up in the homeless camp, he fantasizes about how Elena had cleaned up his wardrobe in college. She is the sparkling antithesis of his lackluster existence, the bright and illusory dream which comforts him and fills him with hope.

How many times had Elena appeared to him in his dreams, caressing him in his sleep? How many times had he seen Elena’s face in the features of a passing stranger, his heart racing with impossible hope, all the pain lifted for an instant, until the mirage dissolved?

She is a faraway light in a dark tunnel, the promise of a solution which can never truly be reached, because the reality that she is gone cannot be disputed. Here is the first, and most important, evidence of Antonio’s impotence: he is helpless against death. He cannot resuscitate Elena. The final sentences of the novel are conditional clauses: “If only Elena were here…,” exposing the fact that Elena can only exist as an illusion in Antonio’s head, and he can only guess at the kind of comfort and advice that she would supply him if she were present. As Herman has stated, “psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. …. Traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail.” Antonio’s inability to revive Elena is at the core of his traumatic experience, because it is the central feature of his powerlessness.
After Elena’s death, every conversation Antonio has with her takes place in his head; in other words, he is only confirming his own assumptions and idealizations of her. Even though the book takes place seven years after his departure from Guatemala, and he only knew Elena for three years, he believes that he has deciphered and can still remember exactly who Elena was. For example, he firmly states, “Elena was reckless. She marched in demonstrations without covering her face, she made love without taking precautions.” However, when the third-person narration shifts to Elena’s point of view, the reader finds that her behaviors were not purely reckless. It is true that when she first made love with Antonio, they did not use protection; however, Elena had had several boyfriends in the past and had always used protection with them. What made this time different was that hours before, she had been told that her ex-boyfriend had been murdered by the government and his corpse had been found on the side of the road. In the wake of this horrifying news, touching Antonio made her feel “released, saved, and sheltered from harm.” In this case, her actions did not necessarily reflect her personality, but the immediate need for safety and even the basic impulse to pass on one’s genes in a moment of danger. As for having her face uncovered in the middle of a protest, the third-person narration reveals that this had been an oversight. After realizing that she and Antonio were exposed, she immediately drew him out of the crowd.

Antonio is relying on an inaccurate representation of Elena, and therefore his imagination cannot effectively replace her. In fact, the continual evocation of a near-perfect, imaginary Elena only perpetuates an endless cycle of idealization and augments his grief. Nevertheless, Antonio uses Elena’s illusion as a guide for his thoughts and actions, and he measures himself against what he believes to be her standards. He feels ashamed about taking low-skilled jobs in the United States because “Elena was ambitious, she aspired to something more. She thought a man with an education should put it to good use.” As he sleeps in a rainy homeless
camp, he thinks, “Elena would be horrified to see what I’ve become,” and looking at his dirt-covered body, he tells himself that if she saw him like that “she would turn away in disgust,” “she would not make love to the grime-caked man Antonio had become.” He judges himself according to how he expects that Elena would judge him. These thoughts both depress and motivate Antonio, reminding him of his downfall while encouraging him to improve himself, to return to the Antonio who is untainted by misfortune and still has dignity and purpose.

Like many Guatemalan refugees, Antonio lacks a sense of purpose in his current reality. Father Frank O’Loughlin, a priest who founded a center for Guatemalan refugees in Lake Worth, Florida, has described these refugees as “people with absolutely no goal, no place to go, but just simply something to be running from.” In Antonio’s case, Elena and his son had been an intrinsic part of his life purpose. In her absence, his mind envisions her as his guardian angel, thereby keeping her entwined in his destiny. He believes that his wife has sent him “the black angel” named Frank, a homeless man who helps Antonio plot his revenge against the tattooed soldier. Imagining Elena as a divine presence in his life is an attempt to recuperate the sense of purpose which guided his life in Guatemala.

Can Elena’s illusion provide a legitimate sense of purpose and thus fulfill van der Kolk’s condition that encountering a life purpose is necessary for recovery from trauma? At the very least, the illusion is strong enough to serve as a vague guide for Antonio’s life. However, imaginary Elena is a figment of Antonio’s mind and is therefore susceptible to the depressive mental forces impeding Antonio’s motivation and self-confidence. Whenever Antonio evokes Elena’s standards, it is to remind himself that he does not fit them, allowing him to spiral into a deeper state of depression and guilt. He has already failed to prevent her death, so how could he hope to achieve her more basic standards? Moreover, his idealization of Elena inherently makes her supposed standards lofty and unattainable. Only the presence of
real Elena can assuage his guilt and disappointment with loving, reassuring words. The true Elena’s absence allows Antonio’s doubt and guilt to stagnate, preventing him from moving forward and attaining his goals. Clinging to idealized memories of dead loved ones can be destructive to survivors’ sense of future purpose.

However, forgetting can also be a source of intense guilt. When Antonio forgets the date of his family’s death, he feels as if he has failed them. To remember the date is “a measure of his loyalty and devotion,” even though his memory has been compromised by the fact that he was disoriented when the event occurred and has been ever since, and that his family’s death is not directly relevant in his new social context. Since he endured the traumatic experience alone and no one in Los Angeles has a connection to his past, there is nothing around him to remind him of his family’s death. Another source of guilt is his failure to make burial arrangements. He thinks, “I didn’t bury them properly. Even after they were dead I failed them.”

This differs from the ODHAG’s description of altered grief, which focuses on the “rage” and “indignation” of the families of people who were executed by the army. The ODHAG only briefly acknowledges the crushing guilt that survivors can feel due to their impotence against state violence. Herman also fails to address the guilt of family members, because she focuses on the direct victims of violent acts rather than on the family members of victims. More specifically, these sources do not address the tension between remembering and forgetting, in which distorted remembering degrades sense of purpose, but guilt prevents survivors from embracing a healthier form of remembering.

It is especially important to recognize the remembering-forgetting tension since feelings of guilt can have radial, damaging effects on an individual’s emotions and relationships. When Antonio receives a letter from his mother saying that she made the burial arrangements, his guilt morphs into anger, as “he would never forgive his mother for taking upon herself a duty that should have been left to
Both the guilt and anger are rooted in his “impotence in the face of the tattooed soldier, his mother, and so many other things.” In the turbulence of his emotions, Antonio is unable to see the bigger picture, the convergence of contextual factors that led to his wife and son’s inevitable deaths. However, taking the blame may also be a protective mechanism. By continuing to claim responsibility for his family, Antonio can cling to his position as father and husband, which are themselves roles of power. By contrast, if he gave up his guilt, he would have to confront his impotence in a more real and direct sense, that is, he would have to admit that history and politics had more control over his family’s lives than his own will and actions did. Therefore, Antonio’s guilt is not only the cause of his helplessness feelings, but also a response to them, making guilt a very effective factor for perpetuating his sense of impotence.

However, Antonio’s desire to revive his life as a husband and father is not only conditioned by a need for power, but also by the context in which his family died. The abruptness of their deaths and of his departure from Guatemala have prevented Antonio from bringing the past to a manageable conclusion. If he had stayed long enough to bury his family, Antonio would have been killed. There was no time for a ceremony for the bullet-ridden bodies, nor was there an opportunity to pursue justice. Antonio’s survival was only a matter of timing; if he had arrived home an hour earlier, he would have been killed with his loved ones. Trauma theorist Lawrence Langer has suggested that survivors of political trauma “miss their intended destiny” by living through what was supposed to have been their demise. Langer gives the example of a Holocaust survivor who was permanently separated from her baby. Applying this example to Antonio’s case, “The death of [Elena and his son] is [his] own death too, not in fantasy but in reality, a permanent intrusion on [his post-Guatemala] existence.” Antonio’s illusions of Elena and his unresolved guilt are manifestations of this “permanent intrusion,” as the past still continues to consume
his life. In attempt to recuperate his “intended destiny,” Antonio likes to fall into a “fantasy free of loss and regret” by “[imagining] himself a father again” while he watches children play in the park.  

Antonio appears to designate his life before his family’s death as a time of happiness, and his life afterwards as a time of sadness. His emotions are a condition of the presence or absence of his family. In the homeless camp, he is surprised to hear happy laughter coming from another tent, since he believes joy should be reserved for celebrations of family:

Vicki and the men in the tent laughed together, a rich, human laughter. They sounded happy. But no. What a silly thing to say. How could they be happy? That was a word for birthdays and weddings. *The bride and groom looked happy when they left the church.*

Antonio’s unwillingness to access happiness is another consequence of his guilt and grief. He sequesters himself from positive emotions, sinking into a depression so deep that it consumes his whole body:

He could feel it covering him, a somber rain, those leaden moments when even the breeze had too much weight, when it seemed his skin would collapse under the burden of so many thoughts, so much sadness.

Tobar’s description of Antonio’s sadness vividly depicts the emotional consequences of helplessness. Such a visceral illustration of the emotional experience of helplessness is missing from most accounts of trauma, including Herman’s book. Although there are many quotes from survivors in the book, they are mostly anecdotal. Survivors say that they feel “paralyzed” or “helpless,” but they do not describe those feelings. As van der Kolk suggests, this could be due to a lack of self- and body-awareness as a direct result of the traumatic event(s). However, it is likely
also a reflection of generally limited attention to the affective components of the officially designated “psychiatric disorders.” Antonio’s emotions cannot simply be labelled as “sadness” or “depression” because they are layered by his cumulative experience. For example, his feelings of guilt for his family’s death underpin the guilt of subsequent failures, building up to a more complex sensation of depression.

His Guatemalan memories were a bloodstained cloth that hung over him now, threatening to collapse and inundate him: the inescapable sense of having failed Elena, his first and only love; of having failed Carlos, his son; of having allowed them to die alone. The feeling of being responsible for their deaths had only grown stronger over the years, with each new Los Angeles failure.120

The valence of tragic “sadness” is another important nuance to consider. For Antonio, every happy memory of life as a husband and father is inevitably wrapped in a veil of loss, making happiness and sadness inextricable from each other. When he digs up a photograph of his wife and son, he thinks, “This picture is the sadness of me, the tragedy of me,” even as he raises the photograph to his lips.121 Happiness resides in sadness, making the latter not a wholly negative emotion.

In addition, the renegotiation of Antonio’s identity in the United States substantially layers his emotional experience. In Guatemala, Antonio was a well-off ladino earning a college education in literature. His race and family background gave him automatic privilege, especially in Guatemalan society, where ladinos have historically occupied a higher status.122 123 After reaching the United States, Antonio learns that “it was a fact of life that when you came to the United States you moved down in social station and professional responsibilities. Women with medical degrees became laboratory assistants, accountants became ditch diggers. Los Angeles made
you less than you were back home.”¹²⁴ This diminishment also has an element of racism, making Antonio’s ascribed status in the US the opposite of his ascribed status in Guatemala. He observes, “There were certain employers who looked at men like Antonio and José Juan, saw the Mayan and Aztec in their eyes or heard the Spanish handicap in their speech, and took them for defenseless bumpkins.”¹²⁵ In Los Angeles, Antonio must deal with the emotional effects of this reverse in privilege.

Antonio is so attached to his Guatemalan status that he would risk his small income in the United States for the sake of maintaining his pride. He jeopardizes his job as a bus boy by scoffing at his haughty and oblivious patrons:

He could not hide his indignation when people spat out orders for coffee and called him Pepe or Jose or Pedro just because he was wearing the bus boy’s uniform. He pushed his glasses up on his nose and gave his meanest I-spit-in-your-face stare.¹²⁶

This attitude leads him into homelessness, and only then does he become more critical of himself, thinking, “I have too much pride. A bus boy with too much pride is a contradiction in terms. An illegal immigrant with too much pride is doomed to unemployment.”¹²⁷ He is trapped within a social system which relegates him to only a few social roles, and in order to survive he must eliminate his pride. However, this “pride” is also the simple desire to be valued as an equal member of society.

This does not mean that Antonio’s Guatemalan self-concept submits completely to his role in the US, or that his Guatemalan and American selves fuse into a coherent transnational identity. Rather, there seems to be an uncomfortable disjunction between his identities in the home and host countries, which Antonio is

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¹ Perera (1995) defines “ladino” as a mix of European and indigenous blood. In Guatemala’s racialized class system, ladinos are typically middle or upper-middle class.
fully aware of. Antonio’s Guatemalan self regards his homeless American self with a strong feeling of indignance:

\[Voy a ser uno de los “homeless”\] [I’m going to be one of the homeless]. It did not seem right to him that a man who loved to read, a man with *Crimen y Castigo* and *El Idiota* and countless other works of real literature scattered on the floor of his apartment, would be called this ugly word. And at the same time it made perfect sense, the logical conclusion to years of living in this cold, alien country. No Spanish equivalent captured the shame and sooty desperation of the condition and so this compound, borrowed word would have to do: homeless.\(^{128}\)

By reminding himself of his status as a university student in Guatemala, Antonio resists embodying the “ugly word” of homelessness. He finds evidence of his worth and humanity in his love of reading. In particular, he cites notoriously long works of “real literature,” *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, perhaps in an attempt to demonstrate that his reading capabilities surpass the majority and therefore he is important and special. Years of humiliation in the United States cannot take away his literary passion or accomplishments. In fact, Antonio seems to perceive homelessness as an injustice or a violation of reality: “It did not seem right to him that a man who loved to read … would be called this ugly word.” Focusing on his own assets, Antonio takes a situational approach, attributing his problems to the injustice inherent in the “cold, alien country” in which he is living. By labeling the US with the word “alien,” he flips the term “illegal alien” onto the host country.

Antonio’s process of self-affirmation is almost entirely internal. In America, he is “used to being unseen. There was the invisibility of being a bus boy, of walking between the tables unnoticed, a shadow rolling the cart, clearing the dishes.”\(^{129}\) Antonio’s patrons appear ignorant of and disinterested in his intellect and even his
tragic story, reflecting the country’s policies towards Guatemala at the time. As stated in Chapter One, the United States only approved a small percentage of Guatemalan applications for asylum during the civil conflict. This is indicative not only of the government’s refusal to recognize the gravity of the situation in Guatemala, but more importantly, of the reluctance to formally assume responsibility for the role of the U.S. in precipitating the conflict. Antonio’s invisibility is largely a result of the government’s unwillingness to recognize his humanity and that of Central Americans. This is an important reason why, when his patrons look at Antonio, they see only a bus boy uniform; just like their government, they only acknowledge Antonio insomuch as he can serve their needs.

When Antonio descends into homelessness, he discovers “another kind of invisibility. People made a point of turning away from him, just as Antonio had turned away from the hopeless men he saw in the same condition. … Antonio was living on the streets, carrying everything he owned in a plastic bag, and no one would look him in the eye.”130 Even though he is visibly in a vulnerable state, the people around him choose to avert their gaze. This is the antithesis of the attention and care which are characteristic of a “home” environment. The indifference and aversion of the people around him is therefore a critical element of his “homelessness.” The “cold, alien” nature of this indifferent environment augments the sense of impotence and helplessness that is already inherent in poverty, making Antonio feel as vulnerable as a lost child, unprotected and in need of care.

Antonio had not felt so lost and alone for many, many years. He wanted to weep too, but he held it in. He felt like a child out here on his own, a boy wandering about in his pajamas, pining for his pillow and his bed.131

Such imagery evokes melancholic memories of childhood for the reader, feelings which are not easily conveyed with such general words as “vulnerable” or
“defenseless.” Rather, Antonio’s helplessness is so piercing that it causes him to regress into the pajamas of his childhood. Evicted from his apartment and unloved by the people around him, he can no longer maintain the illusion of fortitude around which adulthood coheres, reveals to him the quivering boy that he feels in his chest. This is indicative of a specific, particularly devastating type of “helplessness” conditioned by homelessness. Interestingly, neither Herman nor van der Kolk addresses homelessness as a traumatic experience, though it is clearly a state of extreme vulnerability for Antonio.

In Antonio’s case, his homelessness is multidimensional and cumulative. Not only is he without a literal home, a material shelter affording comfort and stability, he is without the figurative “home” embodied by family relationships. In addition, he is distant from his home country and culture, a distance which manifests itself in linguistic differences. Although in Los Angeles’s large Latino community he can “let his Central American ches and erres roll off his tongue to his heart’s delight,”132 when he must speak English he struggles, “twisting and bending his lips and mouth to make those exotic English sounds, the hard edge of the consonants, the flat schwa.”133 His difficulty with English is an inevitable mark of his origins, and to US nationals, it is a sign of his foreignness and sometimes confused with incompetence. Antonio realizes that “in Spanish, I sound like the intelligent person I really am. In English, I am a bus boy.”134 Because he does not have the grammar, vocabulary, or accent to match American cultural definitions of intelligence, and because most US nationals cannot understand the language in which he can express his intelligence, in the United States it is difficult for Antonio to experience the sense of belonging that comes with being understood and appreciated by society.

As a result, English embodies the void of acknowledgement and affection that he has experienced in the United States. It is the “cold, alien” language of the “cold, alien country.” Even the phonemes of English are inimical to Antonio. The unfamiliar
sounds make him physically uncomfortable, forcing him to “twist” and “bend” his lips to make the “hard” and “flat” sounds of the language. Just as he thinks of his homelessness as “the logical conclusion to years of living in this cold, alien country,” he also thinks of the word “homelessness” as belonging to the English language. “No Spanish equivalent captured the shame and sooty desperation of the condition, and so this compound, borrowed word would have to do: home-less.”

Here, he comes to see the very language of the United States as enabling the lack of a home, perhaps as a comment on the normalization of homelessness in American society or on his figurative homelessness as a man without papers who cannot return to his country. Later, when he becomes depressed about his situation, he deliberately chooses “a word the Americanos used when they were angry, a word Antonio liked because it sounded so harsh and mean and ugly. ‘Fucking bag,’ he said in English. ‘Fuck it’.”

His use of English as a tool to express his distress and contempt indicates the state of grief and depression in which he learned the language. English is not the language of home; in fact, it is the language of losing home.

Scholarship on Latinx trauma narratives has mostly focused on the responsibility of Latinx immigrant communities in the United States to supply a sense of home and to collectively bear witness to common experiences of trauma. However, English PhD candidate Crystine Miller has pointed out that Tobar’s novel portrays this view as idealistic. Antonio does not belong to any Guatemalan or Central American community in Los Angeles that can reaffirm his experiences. Moreover, as Arturo Arias has noted, any discussion of “the Latino community” automatically homogenizes a group with diverse origins, histories, and individualities. Talking about “the Central American community” is not much better; even though the countries of Central America have similar histories, their histories are not the same, nor are their populations uniform. There are 22 different Maya groups in Guatemala.
alone, and the indigenous populations of other Central American countries are not even of Mayan descent.\textsuperscript{138}

Since Antonio has no family or home community in the United States, he relies mostly on his friend and former roommate, José Juan, for support. As they endure homelessness together, they alternate between the roles of “parent” and “child,” confident defender and vulnerable victim of circumstance. When Antonio falls into depressive thoughts of his past, José Juan tries to shake him awake, saying, “Hey, listen to me. Snap out of it. \textit{No te agüites}. I hate it when you get like this.”\textsuperscript{139} Likewise, when José Juan becomes anxious about his family in Mexico, “Antonio realized it was his turn to take charge,” putting his arm around his friend’s shoulder and providing reassurance.\textsuperscript{140} After José Juan has found a job and an apartment, he invites Antonio to live with him: “You and me, Antonio. There’s room for both of us.”\textsuperscript{141}

There was a brief silence as Antonio wondered if it could be true. \textit{I must not be such a bad person if this friend has come back to rescue me. Jose Juan knows I don’t deserve to live in this tunnel [the second homeless camp].}\textsuperscript{142}

José Juan’s friendship reassures Antonio of his worth and his humanity; he is “not such a bad person,” simply because he is good enough to be cared about by José Juan. In accordance with Herman’s theory, Antonio’s relationship with José Juan is a source of power because it is based on love and care.

Such a relationship is especially important in the harsh environment of the homeless camp, where Antonio is “sleeping on dirt, exposed to everything, protected by nothing. … When he rolled over, trying to sleep, his lips touched the soil, grains of earth sticking to his tongue until he spat them out.”\textsuperscript{143} Antonio is surrounded by dirt, and as his body becomes covered in a “layer of sweat and grime,”\textsuperscript{144} he begins to embody dirt. “Now the scent from each day had seeped into fabric and skin: the long
walks to the food bank, the tossing and turning at night, his body in bitter communion with the wind and soil. His fingernails were black, and the itching in his crotch was becoming unbearable.”145 When he is homeless, Antonio is vulnerable to the power of the elements, which cover his body in a form of possession. Consumed by the dirt, “in bitter communion with the wind and soil,” he drifts farther from the standards of society, becoming a “caveman.”146 This is another example of how Antonio is made vulnerable by the context in which he lives. He has little control over the state of his body, because he cannot surpass or subdue the effects of nature.

These conditions have serious consequences for his health. His vulnerability becomes more evident when nature turns more extreme, and a rainstorm inundates the flimsy roof of Antonio and José Juan’s tent: “After an hour of steady rain, the plastic roof began to leak. … Water soon soaked Antonio’s hair and dripped down his neck, covering his back and chest with lines of icy wetness. First he shivered, then he began to sneeze”147. Because Antonio’s material resources are so limited—he has no stable shelter and no heat source—he has little power against the cold, allowing the icy conditions to “cover” his body. This exposure to the environment also affects his mind:

He had been out here in the open air too long and was suffering some sort of psychological reaction. If he had a medical dictionary he would look up the symptoms. Hallucinations, delusions. If he stayed here he might lose his mind completely.

It was important not to lose control.148

Interestingly, Antonio is determined “not to lose control,” even though the cords keeping him intact are few and they are mostly internal. Besides the material and emotional support he receives from José Juan, to maintain his sense of worth and purpose Antonio relies on the dignity which lingers in his self-concept. In particular, Antonio maintains a bodily sense of importance by wearing what he calls his
“intellectual glasses,” which allow him to recall what his life was before he spiraled downward:

They were circle glasses, and when he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror he would sometimes remember the day he first put them on, a decade ago, when he was a student at the university in Guatemala. “These are my intellectual glasses,” he told a friend once. “I can’t decide if they make me look like a chemist or a Maoist. What do you think?” He had kept his circle glasses through all his travels, all the way to Los Angeles, and had worn them at his last job, as a bus boy at a now defunct diner on the Westside. One of the cooks made fun of him and called him “professor.”

The glasses allow him to see himself as an intellectual, reminding him of the reality that existed before he became a bus boy, and thereby buffering the degrading effects of his role in American society. With his glasses on his face, his intelligence becomes an obvious part of his appearance, and he begins to embody the dignity and composure of an intellectual. Antonio pushes the glasses up on his nose to remain cool-headed “at moments when he [feels] close to violence.”

However, the conditions of homelessness are so degrading that he can no longer sustain the role of the cool-headed intellectual. When he sees an elderly homeless man stealing his few remaining possessions, he loses his composure and beats the old man mercilessly. However, there is an important similarity between Antonio’s glasses and his outburst against the old man: both help him to maintain a sense of control over the effects of the outside world on his body and mind. By debilitating the old man, he asserts control of the possessions which are his only remaining symbols of home. Amidst the grisly images of the old man’s “nose cartilage snapping under [Antonio’s] knuckles” and punches so strong they are like “hammering nails into the ground,” Antonio feels “strong and free”: 
It felt good to hit this man, to feel his own arms doped with adrenaline, to feel his wrists cut through the air as he pummeled the man’s face. Antonio stopped when his knuckles began to throb. For a moment he felt strong and free; fury was a much better drug than self-pity.151

In contrast to the image of Antonio shivering under the inundated tent, in this passage he is wielding a sense of bodily control.

The struggle of navigating between feelings of power and impotence largely occurs in or on Antonio’s body. In particular, the book uses height as a metaphor in which tallness is a sign of power and shortness of weakness. In Guatemala, Antonio “feels tall” because of his social status, and because he is actually physically tall in comparison to the rest of the population in Guatemala, namely the indigenous Mayans. In the US, however, his lowly social status makes him “feel short”:

Antonio was used to being tall. In Guatemala he towered above family and friends. But Los Angeles made him short. It made him stoop and it cast him out with its untouchables, the lifters of dirty dishes, the silent sweepers of bathroom floors, the men and women who placed their hands in the city’s toilets and urinals, scrubbing everything anti-septic clean.152

The height metaphor runs parallel with the dirt metaphor. To be short is to “stoop” to the bottom of the social order, to the level of the “untouchables,” the most powerless status of all society. This is the level of the dirtiest, smelliest, most degrading jobs. The influence of Antonio’s social status on his mental representation of height indicates that, as van der Kolk suggests, there is an emotional connection between mind and body. However, van der Kolk mainly focuses on the physiology and neurology of the body’s stress system, and does not address the connection between self-concept and perception of the body. The fact that Antonio appears to embody the
“dirtiness” and inferiority of his social roles in the U.S. indicates that this new social context profoundly affects his self-concept.

In this state of grief and weakness, Antonio unexpectedly spots the soldier who killed his family playing chess in the park. Soon he becomes set on killing the soldier not only to avenge his wife and son, but also as revenge “for the many, for the anonymous dead.” In his powerless, unstable condition, the idea of killing the tattooed soldier makes Antonio feel in control of his past and present. The soldier stands for the unstoppable authority which claimed the fate of his wife and son, and to kill him would demonstrate Antonio’s authority over their fate. Herman sees the desire for revenge as a manifestation of the desire for healing and for power:

The revenge fantasy is one form of the wish for catharsis. The victim imagines that she can get rid of the terror, shame, and pain of the trauma by retaliating against the perpetrator. The desire for revenge also arises out of the experience of complete helplessness. In her humiliated fury, the victim imagines that revenge is the only way to restore her own sense of power.

In Antonio’s case, he feels humiliated not only by the soldier’s crime, but also by his inferior social status and degrading living conditions.

Just as he is about to beat the soldier on the head with a pipe, Antonio “[realizes] for the first time that he [is] almost a foot taller than his enemy. The soldier was a pipsqueak.” Standing over the soldier with the pipe, with a clear physical advantage, Antonio feels powerful. Although this first attempt to kill the soldier fails, it allows Antonio to see himself as “tall” and “strong”:

*I am homeless.* The phrase had definitely lost its weight and stigma. He had been following the tattooed soldier, and this new mission had cleansed him of sorrow and guilt. *I am so much taller than the soldier, stronger than him.*

Using the force of his body to execute this pseudo-solution makes for instant gratification. Planning revenge even goes so far as to “[cleanse] him of sorrow and
guilt.” Killing the soldier is a mission that only he can complete, since there is no system and no other individual to hold the soldier accountable for the atrocities the soldier committed in Guatemala. This bloody mission makes Antonio feel like a heroic agent of justice, not to mention a competent husband, as he is finally confronting the aggressor who harmed his family.

These powerful roles not only dissolve the sense of impotence he feels in regard to his family’s deaths, but also his feeling of powerlessness as a bus boy. After buying the gun he will use to kill the soldier, Antonio thinks, “I was a bus boy once, but today I am an armed man. Antonio of the dirty plates is a warrior today.”

Holding the physical instrument of his revenge in his hand, the sense of power is sweeping and overwhelming, making him feel “tall again”:

What a beautiful thing this gun was. It fit neatly in the palm of his hand, a small chunk of metal and oiled mechanisms, and yet it equalized everything. When the orange-haired girl in the projects sold him the gun, she gave Antonio the power to take the tattooed soldier’s life. The advantages of his military training and muscular physique would be erased by this palm-sized chunk of metal. Antonio felt tall again. He remembered that the tattooed soldier was a small man, a pipsqueak. Killing him would be child’s play.

The gun “equalizes” the power differences that allowed the soldier to kill Antonio’s family in Guatemala and prevented Antonio from confronting him.

Antonio sees the gun as the factor that will flip the binary which he has recognized between himself and the soldier:

There is a balance between us. We are opposites balancing a scale, we are mathematics. I am tall, he is short. I live under the sky, he lives under a roof. He has a girlfriend, I am alone. He has a job, I do not. He is the killer, I am his victim.
He describes their binary opposition as a natural and absolute situation of “mathematics.” This is because the inequalities between the two men stem from the same source, the conflict in Guatemala, which made the soldier a killer and Antonio a victim. Antonio considers this binary opposition with the soldier to be part of the natural order, and by overturning the binary, he can assert his power over this natural order that has thus far consumed his destiny. In the reversed binary, Antonio can become a “free man”:

To accomplish the act and go unpunished, to live afterward like a normal person, that itself was the real act of defiance against the crimes of the tattooed soldier. Antonio would kill him, and then walk and breathe in the open city as a free man. He would go back to work, find a woman to love, start a family again and grow in old age with them. While the soldier rotted underground, Antonio would stand in the sunlight and welcome the coming decades, the new generations. He would watch his children stand tall and prosper: they would go to school, do all the things Carlitos [his son with Elena] never could.”

This reversal of roles must result from overturning the source of the binary: now Antonio is the killer, and the soldier is the victim. Antonio acquires the power that comes from being the agent rather than the object.

Even though Antonio justifies this revenge by calling it “justice” for all those who have suffered at the tattooed soldier’s hands, it is much more personal than he admits. The soldier’s death signifies power and freedom for Antonio. It is only Antonio’s assumption that the other victims would want him to avenge them with the soldier’s blood, yet he considers himself to be an unequivocal hero, believing that “right is on [his] side.” As he practices his aim in an abandoned tunnel, his sense of heroism takes on cinematic dimensions:
The crackle of the fire, the abandoned tunnel, even the layer of grime that covered their clothes bespoke heroic themes of vengeance and redemption. *Everything is against me, but right is on my side. I will prevail.* Antonio imagined himself deep in the plot of a wartime drama, Frank and the tunnel walls in flickering black and white.161

As Antonio’s imagination takes over, murder turns romantic. The real implications of taking a life succumb to a black-and-white, simplistic binary of good versus evil and right versus wrong. This type of thinking allows Antonio to believe that killing the soldier will be an easy solution, as if he were vanquishing all of the pain in his life with the death of one man. By imagining himself as the objective hero and the audience favorite, Antonio can ignore the potential arguments against his logic.

Antonio allows himself to slip into romanticism not only because he has “an overactive imagination,” as Elena always used to tell him,162 but also because it is the most emotionally satisfying way to regain a sense of power. The following passage hints at the intensity of his rage:

Bullets seemed to be the only instrument capable of transmitting Antonio’s will. They were projectiles of rage. He thought he might be scared once he actually had a gun, but instead the .22 was fueling waking visions of spinning blades and blunt instruments, flamethrowers and avalanches of falling boulders. Obstacles would be crushed, smashed and destroyed … There would be an evenness to the world again, land empty for a new beginning.163

Antonio has fully embraced violence, his mind infused with “waking visions of spinning blades and blunt instruments.” The goal of his violence, it appears, is to bring “an evenness to the world again, land empty for a new beginning,” initiating an entirely new world that is “even” or just. To Antonio, murder is justice, and to enact justice is to exert the power of explosions and avalanches.
It is important to keep in mind that Antonio has always had a “famous, uncontrollable temper,” which he claims to have inherited from his father’s family. However, he never committed a violent act before plotting the soldier’s death. He originally considers murdering the soldier “only in the abstract. He could not yet imagine killing another human being, even a man with so much blood on his hands.” There are a few immediate causes which appear to change his mind. First, his mother’s letter informing him of his family’s burial enrages and emasculates him, inciting him to prove himself as a man and as a husband. Avenging his family appears to be another way of resuming his roles as father and husband. In addition, physically confronting the soldier allows Antonio to regain his sense of masculinity by proving to imaginary Elena that he is “a brave fighter.” The idea of adopting the powerful roles of warrior and patriarch makes Antonio feel “as if he had been washed in the coldest, clearest mountain water, shocked into wakefulness. For the first time in weeks the morning sun came into focus, the lines of the skyscrapers and bridges sharp in the distance.”

The other immediate cause of Antonio’s commitment to violent revenge is the environment in which he lives. In the homeless camp, “the exposed lots and the dirt and the hunger seemed to demand violence of him.” Because he lives in a context of normalized violence, Antonio can kill the soldier “without feeling like an animal.” Antonio eventually commits the deed during the 1992 Rodney King riots. The riots, which primarily took place in South Central L.A. and lasted for five days, were an explosion of racial and socioeconomic tensions. Racial minorities living in resource-poor communities set fires and looted stores, and in some cases, the rioters committed violent acts against whites. Fifty people died in the chaos, including ten who were shot and killed by LAPD and National Guardsmen. Observing the disorder around him, Antonio feels that he is witnessing “the municipal day of
vendettas … There was nothing to stop a man from settling a dispute with a gunshot to the belly.”

In this chapter, I have detailed the experiences and perceptions which make Antonio feel powerless and defenseless. As Herman has emphasized, traumatic experiences challenge the survivor’s sense of power and importance. Herman has suggested healing through social integration; however, Antonio has particular difficulty making social connections. His family is dead, he has no home community in Los Angeles, and his homelessness makes him “untouchable.” His only friend is José Juan, but Antonio rarely shares his feelings with José Juan. Herman’s theory of recovery also requires the presence of a psychiatrist to urge the survivor to develop self-confidence and forge social connections, but Antonio’s low income and his haughty attitude towards getting psychiatrist help prevent him from seeking therapy. In the absence of a psychological method of healing, Antonio turns to violence as a source of power and dignity. Killing the tattooed soldier allows him to feel like an agent of justice when the possibility of structurally-enforced justice is unattainable. During the novel’s timeframe, Antonio primarily occupies roles of vulnerability—a widowed father, a bus boy, a homeless person—but once Antonio feels the gun in his hand, these powerless roles give way to the image of a heroic warrior who fights “for the anonymous dead,” and of a strong husband and father who fulfills his duty to his family.

The book ends just after Antonio has killed the tattooed soldier, so the consequences of his actions remain unknown. However, the final paragraph of the novel suggests that the rush of power will soon recede to disappointment, since killing the soldier did not solve the fundamental issue compelling Antonio’s actions. Antonio may have wielded the power to kill, but he is still incapable of reviving the dead. He did not bring back Elena. As Antonio contemplates the morality of the Rodney King riots, he wonders what Elena would have thought about them. “If only
Elena were here,” he thinks repeatedly. But she is not there, and she will never again provide the sense of home and protection which was such an important aspect of his love for her. Because there is no way of recovering the past, there is likely no true recovery. Once lost, Antonio’s “intended destiny” as a husband to Elena and a father to his two-year-old son cannot be recuperated.
CHAPTER FOUR

Guillermo Longoria in The Tattooed Soldier

As part of the practice of forced recruitment, from the time of their capture the soldiers were trained in a system of identity dispossession, based on absolute submission, the isolation of their social context and their training in a system of values and practices removed from any consideration of human rights.173

This chapter will discuss the case of the soldier who killed Antonio’s family and moved to Los Angeles after his service. The soldier, whose name is Guillermo Longoria, did not join the army by choice. He was watching *ET the Extra-Terrestrial* at a movie theater in Huehuetenango when the army stormed in and took all the men as recruits. At that time, Guillermo was only “seventeen years old and still filled with youthful innocence, the son of a peasant woman who grew corn on two acres of hillside. His life revolved around the soil, the cycles of rain and harvest. He did not yet know the world.”174 Guillermo’s youth and humble upbringing make him easily susceptible to the military’s “system of identity dispossession.” By the time Guillermo leaves the army, he has been promoted to sergeant. He has adopted the military’s one-sided vision of good and bad, right and wrong, and has changed his identity to fit military standards. Although from Antonio’s point of view Guillermo is the oppressor, Guillermo is also oppressed by the military state that forced him into recruitment. I return again to Herman’s quote: “psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless.”175 Just as the military took away Antonio’s “intended destiny,” the military also subjected Guillermo to humiliating exercises and commanded the direction of his life and his personality. The military stole Guillermo’s “intended destiny” as a son and Mayan peasant.
In the novel, Guillermo refers to himself by his last name, Longoria. This is his army name, and therefore indicates the pre- and post-army split in his identity. The fact that he chooses to retain the name “Longoria” in Los Angeles indicates a permanent switch to his post-childhood, army self. It is not until Guillermo is dying that he imagines himself back in the cornfields, “[smiling] at his dirty toes, mud caked in the nails. So strange and happy, after all these years, to be wearing his peasant clothes again.” 176 What makes him suppress the desire to return to his “Guillermo” self?

In attempt to abolish sympathy and establish dominance, the Guatemalan military taught recruits to blame peasants for the rise of the guerrillas and for the “backwardness” of the country.

When the officers said these things, Longoria couldn’t help looking at the ground in shame, remembering his own family. (…) He was ashamed of his former self: stooped over the soil, fingernails black with dirt, frayed sandals on his feet. 177

The army teaches him to believe that he has been saved from the “poor” and “desperate” fate of peasant life, giving him “new boots and a new way of walking to go with them: proud and erect, the soldier’s gait, the posture you learn in basic training.” 178 His nails are clean, and his head is shaved, ridding him of lice.

The army becomes his guardian and teacher, replacing his mother, whom he never sees again after his capture. He comes to love his lieutenant colonel “even more than his own father.” 179 By isolating Guillermo from his family and the outside world, the military becomes his oppressor. In accordance with Herman’s theory, the military “destroys [Guillermo’s] fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation.” 180 Although Herman’s book focuses on more traditional victims of trauma, the same concepts apply to Guillermo. The army “destroys [Guillermo’s] fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world” by teaching him that evil exists in the form of the
guerrillas, and that the military can only prevail by using violence and terror. The
army destroys his “fundamental assumptions about the positive value of self” by
teaching him to reject his origins and to adopt a personality that is positive in the
military’s view. Lastly, the army destroys his “fundamental assumptions about the
meaningful order of creation” by brainwashing him with a one-sided worldview in
which violence is the only means to an end. These tactics are all the more sinister
because they are so surreptitious. Underneath the blanket of military ideology,
Guillermo is unable to discover his own desires until his death, when he can finally
dream himself back into the cornfield with his mother.

However, Guillermo’s story deviates from Herman and van der Kolk’s
descriptions of trauma in that Guillermo acquires a clear sense of purpose during his
oppression in the military. He believes that he is serving the “forces of good,” building a “new Guatemala, a country of warriors and strong men, an empire like the
one the Mayans had.” At the same time, the military offers him prizes to acquire.
Earning his chevrons gives him a sense of pride, and becoming a sergeant gives him a
sense of power. Guillermo becomes entranced by the military’s incentives of glory
and hierarchy, which allow him to attain a sense of personal satisfaction; however, in
the end, his feeling of achievement is still a design of the army to serve the army. The
army also makes power more attractive to Guillermo. Officers ridicule soldiers who
demonstrate weakness or fail to carry out orders such as setting fire to villages or
killing peasants. The threat of derision makes Guillermo eager to prove himself and
to gain a higher rank.

However, Guillermo never truly feels appreciated. Even as he is dying,
Guillermo thinks, “People had no idea what he had been through, and they were
always underestimating him. They did not know who Longoria really was.”
Soldiering provides him with a profession and a sense of pride, but the army does not
allow him to fulfill the goals of proving himself and saving Guatemala. Watching
gangs run rampant in the supposedly immaculate USA, Guillermo realizes that the Guatemala he hoped to create on the model of the United States will never come to be, because its basis is flawed. He becomes aware that the army propaganda was a lie, and that he was merely used as a pawn. This leads him to question the value of his life, which had been centered around the army’s deceptive illusions. Thinking about the children he killed, he asks himself, “How many children would have to die before the infection [of poverty and crime] went away?”

The degrading effects of Guillermo’s sense of purpose in the military are evidence for establishing an amendment to Herman and van der Kolk’s comments on the theme of purpose. “Purpose” can be not only curative but can also lead people deeper into the potential for traumatic outcomes. Those who are traumatized by brainwashing, autocratic entities may have been instilled with a false, maleficent life purpose which permeates their identity and sense of meaning. When the deceptiveness and malevolence of this purpose are exposed, the victim begins to question his/her own existence. Therefore, a constructive life purpose must not only direct one’s “movements” and “emotions,” as van der Kolk suggests, nor is it merely the initiative to become an actor in the world, as Herman believes. It is more specifically the intention to pursue a fruitful, beneficent project of the individual’s own choosing. Guillermo does not realize that he has been deceived until just before his death, so the book only begins to explore the psychological effects of this realization. However, readers see his growing disillusionment and disgust with the army start to morph into similar feelings for himself. He begins to feel as if everything he has stood for is “futile.” Guillermo has so deeply absorbed the ways of the army that the values and habits he learned in the military continue to dictate his life even after his service is over and he is living in Los Angeles.

Most prominently, the army has taught Guillermo to feel superior over others, and both the brutality and racism of the army have contributed to Guillermo’s interest
in power. His skin color and short stature make him the subject of racial slurs, but with power, he feels “taller and smarter.”

In particular, the army inculcates him with a one-sided, black-and-white view of himself in comparison to others. In his estimation, he is always right, and “the enemy” is always wrong. In Guatemala, the enemy are the guerrillas and the indigenous peasants; army propaganda describes this groups as “filth.” In Los Angeles, Guillermo similarly identifies “filthy” people as inferior, and to some extent, as his enemies. These include the homeless, drug addicts, and immigrants who work in low-level jobs. By contrast, Guillermo strives to keep himself “clean” by sanitizing his body and his apartment obsessively, believing that his “self-imposed discipline and Spartan lifestyle set him apart from the rabble that lived around him.”

The military has inculcated him with disgust for the world outside his private sphere and personal allies, as well as for habits that deviate from his own. Just as the army described the guerrillas as an infection spreading across the country, he fears that the “filthy” people of Los Angeles will contaminate his body. For example, he imagines one of the hypodermic needles on the street will poke him and make his “muscles and bones corrode.”

While Herman’s recovery plan is centered on deriving a sense of power and stability from trustful relationships, the army encourages hatefulness and distrust. Guillermo is taught to assume that all peasants are deceitful supporters of the insurgents. Even Guillermo’s comrades are not his friends, as he is commonly the subject of jealousy and hate speech. Being separated from his family also deprives him of a primary source of love and affection. These are all causes for Guillermo to retreat from the world and turn inward. He never confesses his crimes to anyone outside of the military. He only comes close to telling Reginalda, the first and only woman he has ever loved. She is the only semblance of family that he has, the only person whom he believes “would not push him away” for the atrocities he committed.

Consistent with Herman’s theory, Guillermo’s trust in Reginalda’s
acceptance and protection is the fundamental condition for making his acts “speakable.” However, this trust is in battle with Guillermo’s instinct to “not lose control” and to never show weakness, which were central learning points in the military curriculum. His domineering, military mentality hinders the development of his relationship with Reginalda, thereby reducing his capacity to recover from trauma.

Guillermo is so removed from affection that he is “deeply confused” by his feelings for Reginalda. Military-sponsored field trips to the brothels made him accustomed to treat women as revolving doors, but “he was becoming attached to her.” He has no experience with the selflessness, respect, or care that love entails. Years of establishing his dominance and power have turned him into an egotistical and violent lover, concerned with securing Reginalda’s “loyalty” but inattentive to her needs. When Reginalda asks for more respect, he only nods in agreement because it seems to “appease” her. His primary instinct is to control her. One night when she does not answer the phone at her apartment, he becomes so enraged that he wants to “kill her. At the very least, slap her.” This violent thinking recalls a previous scene in which he slaps an elderly woman who is a client at the package store where he works. The woman had recognized him as the killer of her son and begun screaming. The instinct to hit the elderly woman and Reginalda derived from his life as a soldier, in which he was encouraged to be violent under conditions of autonomy and impunity. “If he were still in the army, Longoria wouldn’t have any qualms about hitting someone, even an old woman.”

The central theme of Guillermo’s story is that he is not inherently a violent or selfish person; rather, he is adaptive. He absorbs military ideology in order to thrive in the military environment, but later he regulates his violent impulses to conform to social expectations in the United States. When he sees people’s disgusted reactions to his aforementioned assault of the elderly woman, he thinks, “The rules are different here [in the United States]. I must learn to obey the rules, just like I did in the
army.” In the army he simply “carried out his orders,” trying to forget the names of the people he was sent to execute.

Guillermo’s insidious actions are made possible by the bureaucratic structure of the military. As the ODHAG writes, bureaucratization of state violence encouraged individuals in lower echelons of the military to carry out tasks submissively, without awareness of the personal thirst for power and privilege that drove the orders from the upper ranks. At the same time, the bureaucratization of violence allows Guillermo to deflect the shame he feels for having killed the elderly woman’s son.

“Where is my son’s body?” the old woman had said. How was Longoria supposed to know? Am I their father, am I responsible for them after they’re dead? Am I supposed to bury them too? No, of course not. I am a soldier, a sergeant in the Guatemalan army, not a gravedigger. The funerals weren’t his responsibility. As far as Longoria knew, the Department of Public Sanitation handled the corpses.

Because the military enforces a hierarchical worldview, Guillermo believes that his only responsibility is to please his commanders. Even though “many things in the army didn’t seem to make sense at first,” he assumes that his officers, “who after all were more experienced soldiers, had access to some other information” that he did not possess.

There is also an element of historical trauma contributing to Guillermo’s subservience to his ladino commanders and officers. Historical trauma is “a constellation of characteristics associated with massive cumulative group trauma across generations.” Guillermo’s submission to the army is likely the continuation of centuries of indigenous subservience to ladinos, criollos and peninsulares. Though Guillermo does not directly address the possibility of historical trauma, the sections
written in Antonio’s point of view indicate that sociohistorical expectations have conditioned Guillermo’s obedient nature. Antonio, a ladino, understands that people of European descent “were supposed to feel superior when they heard a [Mayan] peasant speak (…) you were supposed to feel a sort of paternalistic sympathy.”

Antonio notices that Guillermo says the word *jefe* (boss, chief) in a “submissive” way that seems inherent to his provincial accent. Even though Guillermo views himself as powerful and dominate as a result of his military experiences, relics of indigenous deference continue to permeate his language and are detected by the people who possess social authority.

Guillermo’s ability to “find [him]self still walking and breathing when [he] left a village that would soon disappear into a smoky sky” likely convinces him that he is powerful enough to control his own life. He is obsessed with self-help books that teach him to control his mind like “a machine.” He does not realize how the army controlled him or how powerless he is against the outside world. He derives a sense of power from an action as small as cleaning his apartment, but even cleaning reveals how ineffectual he is. “No matter how hard he cleaned, no matter that his palms were wrinkled and white from scrubbing, the floor always seemed to be dirty again an hour later.”

Still, he does not seem to recognize his impotence, and it is precisely this ignorance that makes him vulnerable.

Guillermo has a fundamental desire to be weak and child-like, and he is tired of denying this desire to maintain a soldier’s authoritative façade. He is all the weaker for having to conceal “the biggest sacrifice” he has made as a soldier, which is “to live forever with the voices of boy and girls, their last words, the calling out of their mothers. ... It took a lot out of a soldier to see this and hear this and live with it.”

What Longoria really wants is for Reginalda to hold him “like a baby against [her] stomach.” However, because Guillermo fights this desire in an effort to “not lose
control.” He ends up losing Reginalda, the one person capable of mitigating his pain. The army’s influence has made him incapable of admitting his weakness, and he has suffered as a result. Remembering that Herman has defined psychological trauma as “an affliction of the powerless,” Guillermo’s imperiousness can be seen as a symptom of his psychological trauma, since this quality prevents him from reaching out to people and healing through relationships.

Guillermo is insecure, because he has been dealing privately with a past full of terror and humiliation—terror because of the atrocities he saw himself commit, and humiliation because of the army’s derisive attitude towards recruits, especially those of his ethnicity. His need for control comes, in large part, from the desire to suppress the weakness that terror and humiliation invoke. In the army, he is taught to manage his personal insecurities by ignoring them, and to annihilate his fear of being killed by the guerrillas by shooting them down. In Los Angeles, Guillermo continues to seek security by arming himself:

Longoria began to see that the [street] gangs were a threat to his physical safety in the same way the old woman [who screamed that he was a murder in the package delivery store] was a threat to his mind. Both could destroy him if he wasn’t careful. The answer was to buy a gun. With a gun he could scare off the chulos and the next old woman who came to blame him for things he wasn’t responsible for. With a gun he would stop feeling this confusion in his head. He would be armed again, just like he was with the Jaguars.

Though a gun may allow Guillermo to defend himself against the gangs, it is no defense against the shame of his past. The fact that Guillermo has no other strategy or resource for dealing with his menagerie of horrors is a disturbing consequence of being severely deprived of affection and of having lived in a context where murder is a profession and an accomplishment.
The army redefines Guillermo’s vocabulary of positive emotions. Love, compassion, and empathy become nonentities. In their place, brotherhood, pride, and exhilaration are the only sources of “happiness.” Although Guillermo’s self-centeredness and narrow-mindedness may be a source of apathy among readers, it is important to remember that pride is one of the few positive emotions available to Guillermo in the hostile, degrading environment of the military. In addition, Guillermo is seventeen when he joins the military, and prior to his conscription he may not have developed a strong sense of empathy. During his military training, his experience of corporal punishment teaches him that others do not sympathize with his pain:

[Guillermo’s point of view] If you slipped in the mud or fell behind in the line of joggers, the soldiers struck you on the shoulders or the back with their batons, or they kicked you with their boots. They were skilled at kicking and striking you without actually fracturing bones. Sometimes, for variety, they elbowed you in the stomach.211

Lacking compassion from others, Guillermo does not learn how to be compassionate., which prevents him from loving or caring for anyone else. “All this sympathy for the corpses [of the military’s victims] irritate[s] [Longoria]. (…) What about Sergeant Longoria? If he hadn’t killed, he might be dead himself.”212 Because empathy does not exist in Guillermo’s emotional vocabulary, he can defend himself in his mind for the atrocities he committed.

This is one of the army’s greatest crimes against Guillermo: he is deprived of the opportunity to experience affection and develop compassion, instead experiencing pain and developing a scornful attitude. As Herman writes, “the tolerance, compassion, and love [the trauma survivor] grants to others … rebound upon [the survivor] herself.”213 There is a direct relationship between the compassion one
provides and the care one receives in return. As a result, because Guillermo is not compassionate and respectful towards Reginalda, she is unwilling to show him tenderness and empathy. Guillermo lacks the skills necessary to take responsibility for his actions and to build caring relationships, and for this reason, Guillermo has difficulty recovering from trauma.

Analyzing Guillermo’s narrative provides a new dimension to Herman and van der Kolk’s discussion of trauma. These theorists have conceptualized trauma as a prolonged activation of the fight-or-flight response. In Herman’s words, “each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state” in a traumatized individual. However, trauma does not have to present as an affective manifestation of fear. Trauma can also become an embedded, and even central part of one’s personality. Namely, damaging thoughts and beliefs which originally serve as adaptations can become normalized after living and acting in a traumatic context for a prolonged time. For instance, Guillermo becomes scornful, prideful, and apathetic because these are the traits that help him advance in the military. These traits are destructive to society, as they allow him to be violent and prevent him from making positive contributions. They are also destructive to himself, as they inhibit him from making meaningful relationships. It is because of Guillermo’s experience in the military that he is murdered in the first place, but it is also because of the military that he dies unhappy. At the time of his death, he has lost Reginalda to his egoism, he has started to feel guilty for his crimes, and he has begun to understand the deception in the army’s lessons. He has never been reunited with his family, who were likely killed in the violence of the 1980s. At seventeen years old, the military took Longoria’s life.
CHAPTER FIVE
The Stranger in “War”

María Isabel Álvarez, the author of the short story “War,” was born in Guatemala City in 1989. She was raised in Arizona from a young age and she has received her MFA from Arizona State University. Álvarez has described her life as “one of duality where I am neither fully American nor fully Guatemalan, but a melding of the two.”

In 2018, Álvarez received a grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts to pursue a novel depicting the experience of an indigenous Guatemalan woman who has immigrated to United States. Her reasons for writing “War” likely mirror those for writing the novel: “I want to call more attention to the indigenous people of Guatemala. I want it to allow readers to gain empathy and compassion for immigrants.”

“War” has been published in the journal Arts & Letters and the anthology The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the United States. It is the first work to appear in The Wandering Song, and fills only two and a half pages, which is hardly enough space to share the narrator-protagonist’s background. The narrator does not even reveal her name, so I refer to her as “the stranger.” She likely originates from a rural community in Guatemalan, but it is not clear whether she is indigenous or ladina. She claims that Spanish is her native language rather than a Mayan dialect, but the army attacked her town during the conflict, and all of her family members perished in the massacre, events which were common in Mayan villages. Now she is traveling through North America, finding shelter in the homes of generous strangers, with no apparent objective other than to stay out of Guatemala. Because the story is so short and the narrator so mysterious, much of this chapter will suggest potential reasons for the narrator’s actions based on the details provided in the text.
In the first half of the story, the narrator lists the dozens of places where she has stayed in the US, from Texas to Massachusetts. She appears to have chosen her nomadic lifestyle because “through the continual exchange of strangers she has learned to overcome the residual madness of grief.” She does not clarify exactly why “the continual exchange of strangers” is curative. Perhaps the change in context distracts her and enables her “(re)create [herself],” as Hiller et al. have suggested in a study of Guatemalan Mayan immigrants. Álvarez’s story seems to imply that the narrator feels a sense of unity with the strangers she meets in the United States. The narrator rarely details her interactions with her hosts, but when she does, she specifically mentions a shared feeling of grief.

In Massachusetts, I sleep on the twin bed of a little girl who never reached the age of ten. Her mother receives me in her arms. … I ask this question of every one of my hosts and each time I receive a vastly different response: What compels you to open your home to strangers? The mother’s answer echoes how I feel about the home I’ve left in Guatemala, that through the continual exchange of strangers she has learned to overcome the residual madness of grief.

In Louisiana, I never sleep. I lay immobile among the cotton sheets, my forehead pressed flat against the cool plaster as I attempt to decipher the language in which my host is weeping. And though I never discover what heartaches ail her, or what tragedy visits her dreams, once dawn casts its nuanced indigo light, I conclude that her sorrowful crying sounds as haunting as harried as mine once had.

The narrator’s attention to the similarity of her hosts’ suffering to her own indicates that the exchanges provide what Herman calls “commonality,” the assurance that one is not suffering alone. According to Herman’s theory, the narrator’s violent
experiences in Guatemala should have “[shattered] the sense of connection between [the narrator] and the community, creating a crisis of faith.”220 By realizing that others sympathize with her experience, the narrator is able to redevelop “a sense of belonging” and “a feeling of connection to others.”221

However, it is apparent that the narrator’s connection to her hosts is feeble. If part of the narrator’s goal is to compensate for the family that she lost by connecting with strangers, then she has failed. A primary feature of family is permanency, the safety of knowing that the other person will always be available to provide help and comfort. However, the narrator is living nomadically, going from host to host. Herman stresses that “a sense of belonging” allows trauma survivors to feel safe and protected, in contrast to the terror and despair which characterize the trauma response; however, Herman does not recognize the difference between feeling safe because of “commonality” and feeling safe because of permanency. In Álvarez’s story, the narrator establishes a sense of commonality with many of her hosts, but not permanency.

Another feature of close relationships is intimacy, the ability to communicate about personal issues and to be understood. Though the narrator seems to understand the sorrow of her hosts, she does not communicate her empathy to them directly. She identifies with the “haunting” and “harried” sobs of her host in Louisiana, but she does so from behind a wall. It seems unlikely that the narrator has shared her own emotions with her hosts. In the story, the reader does not learn about the narrator’s past until she is in the bathtub, indicating that she is only willing to describe her past once she is completely alone. The narrator considers her hosts to be “strangers” rather than new friends or new acquaintances, suggesting that she maintains a low level of intimacy with her hosts. In fact, the story’s brevity simulates the transience of the narrator’s relationships and accentuates her silence.
Though “the continual exchange of strangers” has supposedly allowed her to “overcome the residual madness of grief,” the narrator faces the same issue as Antonio from *The Tattooed Soldier*: she is unable to revive the family she lost in Guatemala. She may find a sense of commonality with her hosts, but this experience does not replace the permanency or intimacy of family relationships. By contrast, the narrator’s memory of bathing with her siblings as a child is a portrait of intimacy:

During the summer, she’d [her mother] boil a stockpot of water and wait for it to cool before draining it over our mosquito-bitten backs. Then she’d leave us to play and we would splash each other and poke each other and huddle against one another after the leaf-laden water had lost its appeal, oblivious to the fact that half of us were girls and the other half were boys and we were all naked.

The nakedness of the siblings, and the proximity of their bodies, represents the absence of personal barriers and an immediate willingness to be intimate. Similarly, the narrator’s mother would wash the children by “taking a kitchen cloth to our baby skin and scrubbing the dirt between our toes, the sweat from under our chins.”

These are the few family memories that the narrator provides, and the inherent intimacy of these images suggests that she remembers them because they are so intimate. No living person can take the place of her mother or siblings in the memory of these bathing rituals.

Still, the narrator’s transient connections with strangers may be an attempt to recover a Mayan sense of community. Though the narrator’s ethnicity is not clear, she appears to have lived in proximity to the Ixil, K’iche, and Q’anjob’al Mayans. She likely became familiar with Mayan worldviews and may have come to associate Mayan culture with home. Mayans traditionally see themselves as part of “a transcendent reality that existed before the individual and that will survive beyond the individual’s temporal condition.” They consider the individual, community, and
nature as a single, integral being that transcends any one person. Therefore, losing one’s community may be perceived as a threat to the continuous cycle of being. It is possible that the narrator is attempting to recuperate a sense of eternity and integrity by constantly making new social connections.

However, the distinction between “commonality” and “permanency”/“intimacy” still applies. Rural communities develop a collective sense of identity due to the permanency and intimacy of village relationships.\(^\text{225}\) Because the narrator’s interactions with her American hosts are brief and spread out across the country, she is unlikely to develop a communal sense of identity in the United States, but instead an individual one. However, the reader receives little indication of how this individual identity is developing, since the narrator does not expose her thoughts to the reader until she is alone in the bathroom of an indigenous Ojibwe woman’s house in Minnesota. One Mayan organization in Indiantown, Florida distributed an educational bulletin identifying the North American Indian Nations as “brothers and sisters … Just as the eagle is sacred to the people of the United States, the multicolored Quetzal is sacred to us,”\(^\text{226}\) suggesting that some Mayans feel a connection to North American Indians. Though the narrator does not tell her Ojibwe host about her experiences, but rather thinks them to herself, perhaps just staying in an indigenous woman’s home provides a sense of belonging that allows her to express her internal experience to the reader.

If the narrator generally feels a lack of connection to her hosts, then the curative element of her sojourns may merely be the awareness that nearly everyone’s past contains an element of tragedy. The narrator’s choice of words when she says that she has “learned to overcome the residual madness of grief,”\(^\text{227}\) as well as her focus on the suffering of her hosts, indicate that she has come to view her pain as unextraordinary. She sees little difference between losing family in a genocide and having a daughter never reach age ten. Though she never knows “what heartaches
ail” her Louisiana host, she recognizes her host’s “sorrowful crying” as similar to her own weeping.\textsuperscript{228} The realization that \textit{loss is loss, and everyone has lost someone} has likely been the central feature of her recovery process. Nevertheless, it is also evident that her recovery is still ongoing. Though she claims to no longer cry about the past, she admits that “each night the dead haunt me for having survived; each night their cries strangle me in my sleep.”\textsuperscript{229}

The way in which the narrator presents her own trauma story indicates the bodily nature of her traumatic memories. She reveals her past to the reader while she is bathing, washing the deepest crevices of her body:

\begin{quote}
I rub the bar of soap under my breasts, lather the crevices between my thighs, scoop water into the cavities of my collarbone, rinse oil from my roots with baby shampoo, my brown skin pruning like dehydrated fruit as the minutes turn into hours and the hours turn into sleep.\textsuperscript{230}
\end{quote}

Her body is a site of memory, because her skin is embedded with the physical feeling of violent times. She presents the Guatemalan conflict as a “dirty” time, not only in the figurative sense, but also in reference to the physical grime covering her body during the conflict. Because her family was poor, she and her siblings “were left to wander outside the city and into the lush countryside for fresh river water, only to discover that the rivers had become bloodied with bodiless limbs.”\textsuperscript{231} Later, they “stopped bathing altogether” because “the rivers could no longer sustain the sins of our country, could no longer dilute the transgressions of war.”\textsuperscript{232} The very act of bathing reminds the narrator of those “dirty” times, supporting van der Kolk’s theory that the memory of trauma is encoded in the body. However, van der Kolk does not specifically explore the implications of associating dirtiness with traumatic events.

Dirt on the body is a very particular feature of the narrator’s traumatic experience, because it represents the imposition of the narrator’s environment on her body due to the narrator’s vulnerability. Her relationship with dirt in Guatemala
recalls Antonio’s experience sleeping on dirt in the homeless camp, where he is “exposed to everything, protected by nothing.” Dirt signifies that the body is not being cared for. The Guatemalan conflict causes the narrator to neglect her own wellbeing, and she can feel that neglect in the grime covering her body. She remembers her mother saying, as she washed the siblings, that “my children are clean children, because my children are God’s children.” The fact that the narrator remembers this detail suggests that she has grappled with her mother’s correlation between cleanliness and godliness. If she is not clean, then is she no longer a child of God? Herman has said that “traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. The body is invaded, injured, defiled.” The inability to bathe is an instance of violated autonomy. Imposed dirtiness is an “invasion” and “defilement” of the body because it raises disturbing questions about the body’s worth.

The expendability of the body becomes starkly apparent in the narrator’s description of her brothers’ deaths:

My brothers were the first to succumb to the bloodshed, one after the other they were slaughtered like pigs with corroded machetes, dropping to their knees into the wet earth, their carcasses devoured by ravenous white maggots.

In these images, her brothers’ bodies are savagely consumed by outside forces, machetes and maggots. They are not even worth being killed by a proper weapon, but rather by a “corroded” machete. The CEH found that machetes were often the weapon of choice for soldiers because they “[caused] great pain before [the victim’s] eventual death.” There is no dignity for the brothers’ bodies or for their lives, and the narrator has no choice but to be a witness. The imagery of the narrator’s memories reveals the utter powerlessness of her brothers, but having to witness their carcasses “devoured by ravenous white maggots” is perhaps still a stronger image of
powerlessness. The narrator’s experiences of not being able to control the state of her body or preserve her family’s lives are indicative of a deep feeling of impotence, similar to the impotence Antonio feels when he becomes disgusted with the state of his body in the homeless camp.

Powerlessness deriving from bodily experiences has profound implications for an individual’s sense of dignity. The body is an individual’s most personal possession, the vessel of a person’s life. There is no escape from the body, and if the body is filthy, then the person inside is likely to feel filthy as well. The interconnection between body and being makes the defilement of the body a threat to one’s being. This analysis supports van der Kolk’s theory of the body’s role in trauma, while revealing the need for detailed examinations of the relationships between specific conditions of the body and the feelings and thoughts associated with trauma. For Antonio and the stranger, the body serves as an important representation of the complex connections between self and context. By contrast, van der Kolk’s analysis of the body’s role in trauma has focused on the malfunctioning of the neurobiological stress system. Greater attention should be paid to the power of mental representations of the body.

Considering the narrator’s nomadism in terms of the body, is her wandering a source of strength or a sign of weakness? Since she is roaming autonomously, directing her body’s movement and orientation, she seems the epitome of independence and self-determination. However, this pristine image of empowerment becomes flawed after considering the reason for the narrator’s migratory behavior. She is nomadic out of necessity, not out of choice. She roams because she has no home. Control continues to rest in the hands of the structural powers that forced her journey to begin, the indifferent drivers of her destiny. The narrator will never recover the power that the conflict took from her, the power to live with her family and make her life in Guatemala. Returning to Langer’s words, she has “missed her
intended destiny.” On the first page of “War,” the narrator gives a paragraph-length list the places she has slept on her travels, indicating her exhaustion on the never-ending journey from non-home to non-home, knowing that there is no real home to return to in the end. The conclusion of the story seems to admit the eternal, tormenting nature of the narrator’s journey: “I dream [about the violence in Guatemala] each night. Each night the dead haunt me for having survived; each night their cries strangle me in their sleep.”

Safety, protection, and social integration are key elements to recovery in Herman’s theory, but the itinerant nature of the narrator’s life seems to prevent her from establishing safe, intimate relationships.

In this analysis, my hope is not to express that it is impossible for the narrator to build loving connections in the United States; rather, I wish to appreciate the difficulty of finding a community and creating a strong sense of self in the narrator’s current state. This state is not permanent, but it seems to feel eternal to the narrator. It is true that her family and home community are gone, but this does not rule out the opportunity of creating new connections. These connections will never be the same as the relationships with the deceased, but they can still strengthen and satisfy the narrator. A central message of the narrator’s story, and of Antonio and Guillermo’s stories, is that trauma is irreversible. The power dynamics permitting state violence during the Guatemala conflict are invulnerable, and justice is idealistic. However, all three case studies have in common the opportunity to take responsibility for recovery. In Herman’s words:

Though the survivor is not responsible for the injury that was done to her, she is responsible for her recovery. Paradoxically, acceptance of this apparent injustice is the beginning of empowerment. The only way that the survivor can take full control of her recovery is to take responsibility for it.
However, no character of the three discussed has assumed the obligation of recovery, and as a result they continue to suffer. For Antonio’s part, he is too consumed with grief and the fantasy of revenge. In Longoria’s case, he does not recognize that he is traumatized in the first place. As for the narrator, she is simply focused on finding a place to stay and managing her grief alone. All three are absorbed in their own thoughts and feelings, ignorant to the idea that building a strong sense of self-confidence and maintaining personal connections may be the path to a meaningful future in the United States. Based on Herman’s theory, the characters fail to recover because they do not understand how to care for themselves and/or for others.
Concluding Thoughts

In this analysis, two common themes have become apparent. The first is simply that death is irreversible. The loss of loved ones can alter an individual’s identity because this individual can no longer occupy social roles in relation to the deceased. Antonio is no longer a husband or father, and even if he does remarry, he will never recuperate the experience of being specifically Elena’s husband. Though Antonio idealizes Elena, it is true that no other woman will possess her exact characteristics, and that no future relationship can occur in the same context or produce the same sensations. Antonio’s destiny as Elena’s husband has passed. Similarly, Guillermo’s life as a peasant with his mother is irrecuperable. The brutality of military training, ideology, and practices has molded Guillermo into a militant, unloving man whose own personality is a barrier to encountering love and happiness. The stranger, after losing her family, must deal with the loss of permanency and intimacy which family provides; by contrast, in the United States she lives itinerantly and does not appear to make intimate connections.

In all three narratives, the loss of loving relationships results in a long-term state of deprivation from affection. Forging new affectionate relationships does not seem to be an immediate option in the texts, as the characters lack the resources or will to create new bonds. Antonio’s friendship with José Juan cannot match the loss of his wife and son, Guillermo is completely incompetent in romantic relationships, and the stranger appears reluctant to form lasting relationships. This may represent a period of altered mourning, but even when the mourning ends, it will ultimately have changed the way the characters view the world, relationships, and themselves. As Langer states, the survivor’s pre-traumatic past is a “missed intended destiny.”

The second common theme in the case studies is a multidimensional state of vulnerability and powerlessness. The inability to prevent the deaths of loved ones or
to control the direction of one’s life causes the survivor to sink into a state of depression or to employ destructive methods to regain power. Antonio feels an intense sensation of guilt and emasculating shame for having failed to confront the soldier who took his family’s lives, in addition to a fierce indignation for his inferior social status in the United States. There is no structural mechanism available for holding the soldier accountable, and Antonio’s illegal status, poor English, and lack of an education in the United States prevent him from moving up the social ladder. Therefore, Antonio sees no other source of power available than to subdue the soldier through violent, vengeful means. By the same token, when Guillermo begins to feel insecure, he buys a gun to feel an instant sensation of power. When he becomes attached to his girlfriend and fears that she will leave him, he becomes obsessively controlling. Because Guillermo was the object of his commanders’ wishes, he never learned to take control of his life through independent reasoning, and because he was indoctrinated with an ideology of fear and violence, he never learned to love. The army deprived Guillermo of the power to love and to think independently. In the stranger’s case, the loss of her family removes the power of having a home to return to, causing her to wander in an endless void of her lonely thoughts.

Though these themes are common among the case studies, the themes present differently for each of the characters as a result of their diverse backgrounds and specific traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, it is common for trauma theorists to group the abuses suffered in an authoritarian state under the single category of “political trauma,” or worse, under the broad concept of “post-traumatic stress disorder.” Though these ambiguous designations may capture the general themes linking traumatic experiences, they fail to depict the subtleties which make each case real and personal. By exposing the nuances of three case studies, this thesis has shown that various individual differences can add up to diverse manifestations of
trauma. In particular, the contextual specificity of literary texts allows for detailed
case studies that are rooted in the survivors’ points of view.

However, the field of psychology often prefers generalization over
individualization of diagnoses. The American Psychological Association Diagnostic
and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) presents general definitions of
supposedly dysfunctional mental states. These definitions have mainly evolved from
observations made by Western psychologists working in Western populations. By
contrast, works of literature provide an especially thorough and personal perspective
on an individual’s experience of trauma. These literary accounts typically include rich
descriptions of the characters’ interactions with setting, context and other characters,
details which are difficult to capture within a clinical setting. Literature uniquely
contributes contextual information and direct contact with characters’ experiences,
providing support for the idea that discussions of political violence and trauma should
incorporate a variety of disciplines.

At the same time, works of literature do not provide adequate representations
of indigenous perspectives for several reasons. First of all, Mayan communities
typically communicate stories orally and not as written texts. Second, writing is an
activity that requires a variety of resources. According to one study of Guatemalan
Mayans in Indiantown, Florida, only 60.5 percent could read and write.242 One can
assume that of those 60.5 percent, a much smaller percentage will have had exposure
to creative writing and have taken interest in the activity. In addition, most
Guatemalan Mayan immigrants lack the time and energy necessary to produce
creative writing. Many employers exploit Guatemalan Mayans who lack legal status
or a work contract, so poor work conditions and long hours leave Mayans exhausted
when they return home. Many have obligations to family at home and/or live in tight
quarters with other immigrants, a poor space for doing concentrated work. In addition,
they make very little money, and much of what they make is sent home as remittances.
For these reasons, very few Guatemalan Mayan immigrants have emerged as writers or academics in the Western tradition.

Generally, direct immigrants from the Guatemalan conflict have left the telling of their story to their descendants, who often have a better understanding of how to connect to a Western audience, and some of whom are in greater positions of privilege than their parents. Notably, the authors of _The Tattooed Soldier_ and “War” are second-generation immigrants. Tobar dedicated _The Tattooed Soldier_ “to my mother and father, two travelers among thousands in the Guatemalan diaspora.”

However, much of what Tobar writes is not based on personal experience or family anecdotes, but rather on extensive research. Because he did not experience the traumatic events himself, he relies on empathy to illustrate the emotions and experiences of his characters. On the one hand, this research-based approach suggests historical accuracy, but on the other, the lack of personal experience may exclude details which could have enriched the characters’ narratives and provided a more profound depiction of their internal experience. In addition, empathy can be an inaccurate tool.

As another example, the relative privilege of second-generation immigrants who can afford to pursue a career in writing means that these authors are not necessarily exposed to the hardships of immigrants who are materially less fortunate. Most Guatemalan refugees of the conflict living in Los Angeles inhabited rooms of six to eight people, whereas Antonio and Guillermo from _The Tattooed Soldier_ live in a double and single room. Tobar may have decided to reduce the number of roommates for the sake of focusing the novel on a few characters; if this is the case, then this represents a limitation of widely-distributed fictional accounts of trauma. They must engage the reader, and this may require sacrificing important contextual elements or facts of the survivor’s story.
In addition, the fact that the case studies align well with individualistic descriptions of trauma likely reflects the authors’ own familiarity with Western approaches to mental health. Though many Guatemalan Mayan immigrants did travel alone to the United States, many ended up in ethnic enclaves with other Guatemalan Mayans, ladinos, and Central Americans. However, in all of the case studies, the characters are relatively isolated from an ethnic community. There seems to be an important divide between sociological or anthropological studies of Guatemalan refugees of La Violencia and psychological representations of trauma, indicating an urgent need for interdisciplinary discussion.

Today’s Guatemala is a continuation and a consequence of the 1960-1996 conflict. Perpetrators of La Violencia remain unpunished, violence permeates Guatemalan communities, the government suppresses freedom of speech, and refugees continue to arrive and lead uncertain lives in the United States. In this thesis, I have endeavored to provide a model for interdisciplinary analyses of trauma by engaging historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, and literary perspectives and evidence. To have a chance at curbing the trends of violence and misfortune, experts and students from different fields must come together to understand the narratives of Guatemala’s people and pursue possibilities for national recovery.

However, these narratives must first be representative of Guatemala’s diversity. In particular, the people who have absorbed the greatest abuses throughout Guatemalan history, the Mayans, must have the opportunity to tell their stories in their own words, in their own spaces, on their own time. According to Herman, telling the trauma story is a crucial step in the path to recovery, and therefore the continuous silencing of Mayan voices is a threat to individual and collective healing. Following La Violencia, Mayans began to organize, and their voices have become stronger. However, if the Guatemalan state reverts to repressive measures, this will
result in traumatic outcomes that current theory is unequipped to handle. The need for Mayan narratives is urgent.
Abstract

This thesis aims to expand definitions of trauma for Guatemalan refugees of La Violencia (1960-1996) who immigrated to the United States. Traditionally, theorists of psychological trauma have created one-size-fits-all diagnoses which fail to capture the contextual details that shape and differentiate individual cases of trauma. There is little existing literature that specifically considers the psychology of Guatemalan refugees of La Violencia in the United States. Therefore, this thesis looks to works of literature for a rich perspective on Guatemalan immigrants’ inner lives and their interactions with the world. I analyze three case studies from a novel (The Tattooed Soldier by Héctor Tobar) and a short story (“War” by María Isabel Álvarez), basing my identification of trauma on evidence of extreme vulnerability resulting from the direct or indirect pressure of social or political forces. In my analysis, I identify support for and challenges to the work of Judith Herman and Bessel van der Kolk, two of the most prominent theorists of psychological trauma. The case studies reveal a need for a deeper discussion of the emotional experience of trauma, greater focus on mental representations of the body, and investigation of how traumatic experiences can become embedded in personality. At the heart of each case study is a profound sense of powerlessness and a loss of self, a sense that the pre-traumatic identity can never be recuperated.
Notes


6 Rothenberg, Memory of silence, xxxi.

7 Ibid., xxi-xxii.

8 Ibid., 76.

9 Ibid., 76.

10 Ibid., xxx.


12 Rothenberg, Memory of Silence, xxvii.

13 Ibid., xxi.


15 Ibid.


17 Rothenberg, Memory of Silence, 41.

18 Ibid., 42.

19 Ibid., 9.


22 Ibid.


24 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). 1994. Guatemala: Information on whether military service is compulsory, and whether there is an alternative to serving in the Civil Defense Patrols (PACs).

25 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. 1990. Guatemala: How widespread is forced recruitment of under-age men into the Guatemalan army, are recruitment raids publicized in local communities prior to the arrival of the army and are young men picked up from high schools? Does this happen only in rural or less populated areas? 1985-1990.


Ibid., 59.

Ibid., 56.


Ibid.

Rothenberg, Memory of Silence, 46.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 9-19.


Ibid.


Ibid., 72.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 68.

Ibid., 81.


Ibid., 60.

Ibid., 58.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, xix.


Ibid., 39.


Ibid., 8.

Ibid.


Van der Kolk, *The body keeps the score*, 43.


Ibid.


Ibid., 81.

Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
Tobar, *The Tattooed Soldier*, 56.

Ibid., 108.

Ibid., 96.

Ibid., 53.

Ibid., 54.

Ibid., 74.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Langer, *Social Suffering*.


Ibid., 14.

Ibid., 40.

Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 7.

Perera, *Unfinished Conquest*.

Nelson, *Finger in the Wound*.


Ibid.

Ibid., 53.

Ibid.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 10.

Ibid.

Ibid., 12.

Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 10.


Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 268.

Ibid.

Ibid., 14.

Ibid., 73.

Ibid., 74.

Ibid.


Ibid., 43.

Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 44.

Ibid., 54.

Ibid., 187.
Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 189.


Ibid, p. 233

Ibid, p. 271

Ibid, p. 274

Ibid, p. 243

Ibid, p. 263

Ibid, p. 244

Ibid, p. 16

Ibid, p. 271

Ibid, p. 45

Ibid, p. 181

Ibid, p. 187

Ibid, p. 187

Ibid, p. 45

Ibid, p. 188


Thinking about his mother’s suggestion to get psychological treatment: “Poor little Antonio, small man lost in an alien city, so pathetic he should see a psychologist.” Ibid, pp. 186-187.


Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.

Ibid., 306.


Ibid., 306.

Ibid., 22.

Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51.


Ibid., 247.

Ibid., 302.

Ibid., 297.

Ibid., 297.

Ibid., 246.

Ibid., 21.

Ibid., 23.

Ibid., 218.

Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 8.


Ibid., 33.

Ibid., 33.

Ibid., 223.

Ibid., 282.

Ibid., 165.

Ibid., 166.

Ibid., 172.

Ibid., 172-173.
20. Ibid., 251.
23. See note 60.
24. Ibid., 138.
25. Ibid., 23.
26. Ibid., 21.
27. Ibid, 66.
28. Ibid., 218.
29. Ibid., 222.
30. Ibid., 206.
31. Ibid., 61-62.
32. Ibid., 174.
33. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 216.
39. Ibid., 17.
40. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 55.
41. Ibid., 214.
42. Álvarez, “War,” 18.
43. Ibid., 18.
45. Ibid.
47. Álvarez, “War,” 17.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 19.
50. Ibid., 18.
51. Ibid., 19.
52. Ibid.
55. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 53.

Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 192.


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