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# The Literary Representations And Interpretations Of La Matanza

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**THE LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF *LA MATANZA***

by

**ROXANA GUADALUPE ZUNIGA**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2015

MAJOR: MODERN LANGUAGES (Spanish)

Approved by:

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Advisor

Date

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## **DEDICATION**

*In memory of my younger brothers, Fredy and Toño, who were killed in El Salvador.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *LA MATANZA*

*La Matanza* was a massacre that shook western El Salvador in 1932. In late January several sectors of the Salvadoran population rose up in rebellion. Many of the participants were peasants who were dissatisfied with their working conditions of the time. During the Great Depression, many Salvadoran coffee producers slashed wages in half and reduced the amount of workers in their coffee farms to cut costs. In response, workers organized and led a revolt against the landed elites, the government, the military and the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> The repressive government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez responded by sending the military to the areas that had revolted and within weeks of the first killings thousands were dead. According to Michael McClintock, “the revolt was crushed within 48 hours. In the following days 30,000 of a population then of less than one million Salvadorans were massacred” (99).

The government repressed and censored these events, wiping them away from Salvadoran history. Newspapers covering the massacre were altered or taken from the national archives of El Salvador. According to Barbara Harlow, “the attempted effacement of the year 1932 from the official record of Salvadoran history is, then, a massacre of another sort: the annihilation of the historical memory” (Harlow 97). How could the murder of thousands of peasants not be recorded and taught in schools throughout the country for several decades? Clearly it was not in the best interest of the military regime to discuss the massacre. Military

forces, following direct orders from General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, committed the majority of crimes against Salvadoran civilians.<sup>2</sup>

General Martínez's disregard for human life was unsurprising, considering his illegitimate rise to power. According to Juan Mario Castellanos, he rose to power via a military coup d'état on December 2, 1931. "Un golpe de Estado instaura un gobierno militar encabezado por el general Maximiliano Hernández Martínez" (18). He overthrew the nation's first democratically elected president, Arturo Araujo. General Martinez was Araujo's Vice President and defense minister. Although the coup consisted of junior officers, Martínez is believed to have orchestrated the coup. After he toppled Araujo's government, he held seat for thirteen years. For a more detailed historical background Juan Mario Castellano's book, *El Salvador 1930-1960: antecedentes históricos de la guerra civil* (2001) is a contemporary source that covers this period of Salvadoran history. Another contemporary source about Salvadoran politics and history from the late nineteenth—twentieth century is *Landscapes of Struggle: Politics, Society, and Community in El Salvador* (2003), a collection of essays edited by Aldo Lauria-Santiago and Leigh Binford. In addition, the newspapers of the time tend to be an excellent source regarding the coup and the massacre, but the issue is that hardly any exist today because the government censored and "disappeared" them from the national archives.

*Diario del Salvador*, the national newspaper, gave a detailed account of the coup<sup>3</sup> on December 4, 1931. According to this article, a military regiment attacked President Araujo while he was in the capital. That night President Araujo fled the Presidential House to take refuge in the National Palace. The next morning he left the country, and was exiled in Guatemala. A ceasefire was reached between the military and the police once they both agreed that it was General Martínez's "constitutional right" to assume the Executive power. The article continues to state that President Araujo sent a telegram to Vice President Martínez on December fourth, explicitly saying that he had designated José Maximiliano Olano, the third in command to take the Presidency. Araujo also said to General Martínez that he regretted not ceding power to him, or the second in command, Coronel López, but that he should understand the reasons behind his decision.

A couple of days after the coup, Rodolfo Mayorca Rivas wrote an article called "*El golpe de la juventud militar*," which praised the military directorate. In this article, the military leadership is revered and seen as an example of a "good" government versus a "bad" one. "El golpe militar es mucho más que un golpe militar. Despojado de la vulgaridad de la soberbia y la ambición, representa la reacción de la juventud ante lo decrepito. Es como el brote nuevo que empuja y desaloja a la rama reseca. Lo sano ante lo cariado. [...] Lo bueno ante lo malo" (Mayorca Rivas). The young military men are regarded as brave heroes who saved the nation

from an inept and archaic government. It is interesting to see the choice of words in this article, “lo bueno ante lo malo” (the good versus the bad). In this binary Araujo’s former government represents the “bad” and the military dictatorship the “good.”

Mayorca Rivas embellished and romanticized the military government. Its “fresh” and “hip” leadership is supposed to resolve the country’s political and economic problems. “El golpe militar es a semejanza de la rompedura por donde revienta la montaña. El país entero respira aliviado a través del boquete. Y la República se halla, de la noche a la mañana, en manos de una decena de muchachos cuyo temple está formado con la estofa de la idealidad y la juventud” (Mayorca Rivas). This article’s main emphasis was the glorification of the young officers and their directorate, and as a side note, it criticized certain aspects of the army. Mayorca Rivas took issue with the economic crisis and the exuberant military budget. Rivas said “el primer desperdicio trágico de la nación lo constituye el ejército mismo en su estructura actual. [...] el crudo y simple hecho de que la Cartera de Guerra consume más dinero que cualquier otro departamento del gobierno, hacen de nuestra aseveración acerca del ejército una verdad evidente” (Mayorca Rivas). He also criticized the size of the military and believed that it was too large. Mayorca Riva’s solution “se limita a la reducción de hombres y a la producción de una calidad mejor de hombres en el ejército—menos gastos de guerra, por un lado, y formación de cada soldado en un tipo de oficial equivalente a los que ahora constituyen el Directorio

Militar” (Mayorca Rivas). He proposed cutting the war budget and reducing the size of the army. Mayorca Riva’s second solution is the most interesting one; it emphasized the indoctrination of soldiers into an army that was ideologically aligned with the young military directorate. This article raised another important issue, and that is the unpopular government of Araujo. How did a democratically elected president lose his appeal?

### **1.1 Araujo’s Rise and Fall to Power**

Araujo lost popularity partly because his government did not fulfill all of the political promises he made. The economic situation of the nation and the world as a whole did not facilitate his leadership either. He took over as President during the Great Depression, a time of political and economic turmoil. Initially, he was a very popular candidate among the masses. He differed from the majority of his predecessors because he was a reformer, and the former President did not appoint him. Prior to his presidency El Salvador was governed by a family dynasty. According to Michael McClintock, the first President of this dynasty was Carlos Meléndez (1913-18) and later his brother, Jorge Meléndez (1919-23) followed by Carlos Meléndez’s brother-in-law Dr. Alfonso Quiñónez Molina, who had been the Vice President to the Meléndez brothers (McClintock 103). All three of these men were civilians, but they governed by force during their fifteen-year dynasty. Initially, the elites and the military did not favor the family dynasty, but eventually they gained their support. According to Jeffrey L.

Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, they gained political support through “a combination of repression, electoral manipulation, cooptation, and patronage; the clan managed to garner support from local political bosses, provincial agrarian bourgeois, and urban entrepreneurs, including artisans, and thereby thwart the opposition from urban middle sectors and workers” (34).

The supporters of the Meléndez-Quiñónez dynasty created an organization called Ligas Rojas, “an organization which combined paramilitary, political, and patronage functions” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 34). The Ligas Rojas facilitated negotiations with local indigenous leaders and built patronage networks, but they also perpetuated regime violence. “The ligas certainly enshrined regime violence as an effective form of repression: their members would beat up and even kill opposition members” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 35). Despite the repressive government of the Meléndez-Quiñónez brothers, public protests continued. The Meléndez-Quiñónez ruled during a time of economic growth for El Salvador due to the peak of the coffee boom and an increase in sugar and cotton production. According to McClintock, coffee exports rose in value “from \$7,372,000 in 1915 to \$22,741,000 in 1928” and “the land dedicated to coffee culture” doubled in size “between 1918 and 1928” (103). By the mid 1920s, El Salvador became the leading coffee exporter in Central America. The coffee revenue helped built highways and port facilities as well as the telegraph system. The doubling of the land dedicated

to coffee cultivation created a major crisis for the indigenous and peasant population. They were basically displaced from their land. The government sold former communal land, known as *ejidos*, which originally belonged to numerous indigenous communities. Additionally, most peasants and indigenous people could not afford to buy back their land with their meager salaries.

Some families that had the capital to acquire more land expanded their estates and joined the landed elite. An example of such families is that of the Guirolas who “acquired many new farms that had originally been ejidal plots” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 7). They went from owning three farms in 1914 to owning twenty by 1929. This placed more land in the hands of a few and created a greater economic gap between the very wealthy and the poor. “The upper echelons of the planter class and agro-export élite thus achieved astounding levels of wealth, only magnified by the contrast of the poverty that ringed their domains” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 8). The elites lived in luxury homes, and sent their children to study in Europe, while the poor starved and did not have access to schools, healthcare or their own land. A report by the governor of San Salvador in 1931 “castigated large-scale landowners for their failure to provide schooling of any sort for the families of thousands of [...] workers. Another official report underscored the meager food rations, the miserable housing, and the lack of any medical attention to workers” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 21). Most of the land suitable for coffee

cultivation was located in the western part of the country and by the 1920s almost all of this land was used for coffee. “Land also became more valuable because it facilitated access to cheap labor from the growing ranks of the landless who sought subsistence plots within the farms” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 7). Not only were peasants unable to acquire land during the coffee boom, but also as sources of cheap labor they were exploited and did not benefit from the economic growth.

On the other hand, while the country progressed economically, politically the same families ruled the nation. “Following carefully orchestrated elections in 1927 the presidency passed from Dr. Quiñónez to his relative by marriage and former Minister of War, Don Pío Romero Bosque” (McClintock 104). Even though Romero Bosque was loyal to the family dynasty, his government differed from the previous governments because he was a reformer and allowed more freedom of expression. For example, “The nearly permanent state of siege was lifted, press censorship ended, the national university was granted autonomy, and an amnesty granted to political prisoners and exiles of the past six administrations” (McClintock 104). Romero Bosque unlike his predecessors, did not appoint his successor, but rather had an open election in 1931. This election facilitated the participation of various political candidates. One of the candidates was Arturo Araujo whose candidacy “was seen with great hope by the people at the bottom, supported by a sector of the urban professional classes, and rejected by the great



landowners” (McClintock 105). He was the favorite candidate of the masses, but not of the elites including Romero Bosque and the Melendez-Quiñónez brothers.

According to Gould and Lauria-Santiago, “The political climate of the 1920s, compounded by the post-1929 economic crisis, contributed to popular support for the presidential campaign of Arturo Araujo, a wealthy entrepreneur and reformist from Sonsonate” (57). Araujo was a sugar and coffee producer who owned various farms including the Hacienda El Sunza, “Izalco’s largest hacienda, which contained the country’s second-largest coffee and sugar mills” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 57). He was educated in Britain and was influenced by the British Labor Party and throughout the 1920s he had opposed the family dynasty of the Melendez-Quiñónez. According to Gould and Lauria-Santiago, he ran against the Melendez-Quiñónez clan in the 1919 elections, but lost because the election was allegedly stolen. Araujo was popular among the rural poor, artisans and the urban workers because he supported land and economic reform. Gould and Lauria-Santiago argue that although he was for land reform at the local level, he did not support it nationally, a move that would eventually hurt his government. The peasants expected and demanded land reform nationally, but he could not fulfill this promise because there was not enough land available for redistribution without taking it from the great landlords.

Another major hurdle was the state of the national economy. Araujo “faced an élite that would not pay taxes; a middle class that would not allow more foreign loans; foreign banks that would not loan money easily; a US customs receivership; and an ineffective public service infrastructure with a long tradition of graft and corruption” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 91-92). Additionally, the effects of the Great Depression were global and El Salvador’s economy was not immune to the market crash. It affected El Salvador’s mono-crop economy negatively since at the time it depended solely on profits from coffee exports. Once the world market stopped buying coffee, the economy crashed. At that time, “Coffee, virtually the sole export crop, was worthless, the 1929-30 crop left to rot in the fields” (McClintock 106). This caused unemployment figures to rise and resulted in treacherous working conditions for workers. The great landowners and coffee growers slashed wages in half if not more. McClintock states that by 1931 the average worker on a coffee plantation was making 15 cents a day in contrast to 75 cents in previous years (106). Gould and Lauria-Santiago argue that during the coffee boom of the 1920s workers could make even more than 75 cents. “In some parts of the country coffee pickers could make two colones (\$1) a day” (18). However, this began to change by 1929 as the price of coffee plunged, and by the end of 1931 it was common for coffee pickers to make as low as 15 cents a day. Their food was also rationed; they only received two tortillas and one ration of beans daily.

The rural working conditions of the time affected two important social groups, the peasant laborers and the *colonos*. Gould and Lauria-Santiago define the peasant laborers as semi-proletarians “with inadequate land to support their families” and who had “gradually increased their commitment to hacienda and plantation labor beyond seasonal coffee picking” (3). The second group was the *colonos* or resident laborers who belong to the *Colonato* system. The “*Colonato* generally involved incorporating peasants into a farm or estate in exchange for access to any combination of meals, housing, land, wages, water, and firewood, perhaps with rent payments in labor, a share of the colono’s crop, or cash payments” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 18). These writers also state that in the 1930s 18 percent of the western rural population were *colonos* who lived on coffee farms. *Colonos* were greatly affected by the decline in coffee prices which began in late 1927 because “owners cut back on cash expenditures and eventually turned *colonos* into a captive labor force: under miserable living conditions, they were forced to work more for access to land, but without any of the customary benefits in terms of steady wages” (19).

The west also suffered from food shortages in the late 1920s and by 1931, they were even made worse due to the volcanic eruption of Izalco. “This time the crisis was worse in the west, where an eruption of the Izalco volcano sent heavy ash, while rain damaged crops throughout Ahuachapán and Santa Ana, wiping out entire cornfields” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 24). The

landowners aggravated the economic situation on peasants and laborers because in some cases they did not pay their workers and expected them to work only for the food. “In the absence of systematic, effective practices of wage bargaining and given the state’s failure to respond to the growing needs of the rural poor, many workers and peasants in western El Salvador turned to unions and eventually to revolutionary politics” (24).

In response to their working conditions and the high unemployment, peasants, artisans, and the urban working class organized themselves nationally into political organizations and the national labor movement.<sup>4</sup> Some of the political organizations that emerged are the Central American Workers Federation (*Confederación Obrera Centroamericana* (COCA)) and El Salvador’s Labor Federation (*Federación Regional de Trabajadores de El Salvador* (FRTS)). “By 1930 the Salvadoran branch (*Federación Regional de Trabajadores de El Salvador* (FRTS)) had some 1,500 members, mostly among shoemakers, carpenters and bakers in the departments of San Salvador, Santa Ana and La Libertad” (McClintock 104). Furthermore, “After January 1930, FRTS and the Communist Party made a combined effort to organize in rural areas” (McClintock 105). Although Araujo was a labor candidate, he did not always favor political protests. In fact, he declared martial law in July of 1931. Araujo relied heavily on General Martínez to suppress political protests with the military and the police.

Araujo eventually lost popularity among the military perhaps because in August 1931, he reduced their budget, and his government was unable to pay the military officers from September-November of 1931.<sup>5</sup> The army quickly took up arms against the government in the December 2 coup. “By 2 December 1931, Martínez, backed by the coffee growers, had multifarious reasons to wish to oust Araujo in order to deal with the impending crisis on the land on his own terms” (McClintock 107). The country’s elite quickly offered their financial support to the military regime. The elites “offered new loans within a day of their seizure of power” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 139).

Once Martínez gained control of the presidency, he strategically removed from their positions the young officers who participated in the coup. According to McClintock, within a year they were fired from their positions and replaced with an old guard, loyal to Martínez. After taking over as President, “One of the first measures Martínez took was to postpone the 15 December municipal elections to 3 January” (McClintock 107). The elections did not take place on January 3 and were postponed indefinitely. This led to further protests and revolts in the coffee regions. Gould and Lauria-Santiago state that from December ninth to the nineteenth (the peak of the coffee harvest) strikes continued in various parts of the country in both the west and the central region. The strikers demanded better working conditions and higher wages.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately after the coup, the newly formed communist party did not condemn the military regime perhaps because it could not foresee its anti-communist agenda. “During the first weeks of December the PCS and Martínez’s regime shared a sense of mutual wariness and ambivalence, but not hostility” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 140). Their ambivalent relationship was soon to change because during the massacre of 1932 the communist leaders and their followers were among the first targets of the military regime. During *La Matanza*, the areas that were greatly affected were located in western El Salvador and some municipalities of the central region. In January of 1932, several sectors of the Salvadoran population rose up in rebellion. According to Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez, “The uprising of 1932 was the culmination of a rapid increase in social and political discord throughout western El Salvador in late 1931 and early 1932. As the impact of the Great Depression took hold, workers mobilized in response to landowner’s attempts to cut costs by lowering wages, eliminating jobs, or asking remaining workers to produce more” (81). The rebels targeted the Salvadoran government, the military, the bourgeoisie and the landed elites.

According to Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, et al. the rebellion began in late January in western El Salvador with the uprising of thousands of peasants. “Armed mostly with machetes and a few guns, they attacked roughly one dozen municipalities, including direct assaults on army garrisons in the provincial capitals of Sonsonate and Ahuachapán. The rebels failed to seize the two cities,

but they gained control of more than half a dozen smaller, but still populous townships” (1). The government responded by sending troops to the areas that had revolted, and they in turn began the massive killings of thousands of Salvadorans, who for the most part were poor peasants and indigenous people. The exact number of those murdered remains a topic of debate among different scholars. For example, the historian Thomas P. Anderson believes that eight to ten thousand were murdered by the military (10), but Michael McClintock, disagrees and puts the number at 30,000 (99). The literary critic, John Beverly also states that 30,000 people were murdered. Similarly, a key survivor and organizer during the massacre, Miguel Mármol narrates in *Miguel Mármol: Los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador* (1972) that more than thirty thousand were killed. Why such discrepancy? According to Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez, “The wide discrepancy in estimated figures is the result of no one having bothered or dared to count the bodies strewn throughout the countryside, lying exposed along roadsides, or buried in mass graves” (2). In addition, it depends on who is telling the story because most government officials and military members, who represent the official historical discourse surrounding the massacre, tend to down play the number of those who were murdered.

Why did some sectors of the population decide to rebel and who led them if anyone? The reasons for the rebellion and its leadership are also controversial. According to Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, the interpretations of the massacre in the past seventy years have

been dominated by four themes, “political crisis, economic collapse, communist agency, and indigenous participation. Despite the richness of decades of discussion around these four axes, the question of how to characterize the revolt and its agents has remained unresolved” (xviii-xix). Since the question of how to characterize the revolt or the agents of it has remained unresolved, there are several interpretations of the massacre ranging from literary to non-literary texts. These interpretations sometimes contradict one another because they represent different points of view about the same subject. This has led to the publication of several books, documentary films, magazines and articles that narrate different accounts of the massacre. For example, Gould’s and Lauria-Santiago’s text “attempts to weave into a coherent narrative individual memories, as described in over two hundred interviews, and a myriad of documentary sources from archives in El Salvador, Washington, London, and Moscow” (xiv). Therefore, it is an account that relies heavily on testimonial memories of the massacre and insurgent and counterinsurgent documents. These authors acknowledge the limitations of relying on a reconstructed memory of the massacre: “there are severe limitations to a narrative history written against the grain not only of counterinsurgent and insurgent documents but of memories recreated in a society that suppressed the events with particularly noxious forms of amnesia and distortion” (xiv).



Prior to publishing *To Rise in Darkness*, Gould also directed a documentary film about the massacre. The film is called *1932: Scar of the Memory*, and it was produced with the help of Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, a museum director. This is a 57-minute film focused on reconstructing the memory of 1932 based on photos from the period and interviews from survivors of the massacre as well as other research.

In the fall of 2000 Santiago and I created a forty-five minute rough cut, weaving together photos from the early 1930s and a narrative of the insurrection and massacre, based on preliminary research and on selections from interviews mostly from the municipalities of Nahuizalco and Izalco. We presented this preliminary version to different audiences ranging from a secondary school social studies class to various community groups. (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 282)

Initially, the film only focused on the municipalities of Nahuizalco and Izalco, but later on it was revised to include other areas. The film, like the book, attempts to contest two predominantly separate discourses, which labeled the insurrection either as communist or indigenous. In the afterword section of the book Gould states, “we show that the mobilization was in fact led by a relatively large cadre of revolutionaries, of different subaltern backgrounds, many of whom were informed by communist and socialist utopias, ideologies, and strategies” (284). His point is that the leadership of the massacre was not homogenous, as some previous scholars have argued.

Another text, that was recently published, is *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory* (2007). This book was written by the historians Héctor Lindo-Fuentes and Erik Ching and by the foreign language

scholar Rafael A. Lara-Martínez. In this book, the authors study Salvadoran and international memories about the massacre as well as a text written by Roque Dalton, *Miguel Mármol* (1971), which has been considered a testimonial account of the massacre because it narrates the testimony of a survivor and leader during the massacre, Miguel Mármol. Nonetheless, some scholars like Lindo-Fuentes et al. do not consider this text a testimonial account, but rather a “narrative reconfiguration,” in part because they believe that Roque Dalton added or subtracted elements from Mármol’s account. They take issue with the communist label of the massacre because according to them, it was a peasant-led uprising that had nothing to do with communism. These scholars seem to believe that it was labeled “communist” because at the time the government and the elites commonly used this term to refer to indigenous people, peasants, and the poor.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, “Another reason to question the validity of communist causality is that the leadership of El Salvador’s Communist Party did not believe that El Salvador was ready for revolution; therefore, it had not been preparing for an armed insurgency” (47).

The historian, Thomas P. Anderson will disagree with the non communist leadership or element of the massacre in his historical book, *Matanza: El Salvador’s Communist Revolt of 1932* (1971) and his second edition of the same book, *Matanza: The 1932 “Slaughter” that Traumatized a Nation, Shaping US-Salvadoran Policy to this Day* (1992). As can be noted, the first book clearly labels the uprising a “Communist Revolt.” However, in his second edition, he

changed the subtitle; he no longer calls it a Communist Revolt. Perhaps this is due in part to the criticism that Anderson received from other scholars who questioned the communist label (he remarks on this in the preface to his second edition p. 9). In his second edition Anderson clearly makes an effort to clarify that the uprising had three elements: “indigenous resentment of the *ladinos*, more generalized peasant resistance to oppression, and communist leadership” (9). As stated before, Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago will also take issue with the denial of the communist element or influence in the revolt. “The discursive struggle to rescue indigenous agency from decades of trauma and neglect should not lead us to deny communist agency in all its dimensions, all its creative potential, and all of its flaws” (xxiv). In other words, Gould and Lauria-Santiago remain critical of an essentialist interpretation of the massacre. Their text recognizes different components of the revolt including, but not limited to the indigenous and the communist element. What is missing from the historical and anthropological debates is the role that literature played in portraying this historical event.

## **1.2 The Literary Analysis of the Massacre**

Although the massacre has generated many conflicting interpretations among various historical texts and other recently published books about this event, I have found that little is written about how Salvadoran literature has interpreted this historical period. It is within this area of study that this dissertation will make its biggest contribution because it analyzes the

literary representations of the 1932 massacre. It is important to mention that not many writers from the 1930s wrote about the massacre, this generation was the first to bear witness to the atrocities of the time, and in some way or another, it was emotionally and psychologically traumatized by the events. In addition, it was taboo to write about the revolt due to the government censorship surrounding this topic.

In spite of this, three writers from the 1930s wrote either one or more texts about the massacre. These writers are Francisco Machón Vilanova, Salarrué, and Gustavo Alemán Bolaños. There are only two novels written in this period, but they were not published until the 1940s. The first chronologically novel is *El oso ruso* (1944) by the Nicaraguan Gustavo Alemán Bolaños, followed by *Ola roja* (1948) by the Salvadoran Francisco Machón Vilanova. According to Rafael Lara-Martínez, Machón Vilanova was a member of Martínez's government and his novel "nos revela el pensamiento de la derecha salvadoreña que nace del martinato" (Lara-Martínez "La verdad de la ficción" 48). In other words, it represents the official story about the massacre because it is written from the perspective of a former government official. The novel was written in San Francisco and it was published in Mexico, four years after the fall of the Martínez regime. In *Ola roja* "los indígenas son ignorantes y sumisos. Su docilidad es tal que no se percatan de su propia miseria, a menos que un agente extranjero se lo pregone y los convenza de su penuria. Toda acción política indigenista la dirigen forasteros que desconocen la

realidad nacional y regional del occidente salvadoreño” (Lara Martínez "La verdad de la ficción" 48). Lara Martínez takes issue with the representation of indigenous people in the novel because they are denied any type of agency in the revolt. They remain followers and not leaders. According to Lara-Martínez in the novel, “el ‘comunismo ruso’ controla por completo la organización del movimiento” ("La verdad de la ficción" 49). Machón Vilanova’s text does not represent Salvadoran leaders of the revolt, only foreign “Russian Communists” who infiltrate the country and lead the uprising.<sup>8</sup> This argument gives Martínez’s government more legitimacy because he is seen as the national leader who restored order after a communist inspired uprising.

On the other hand, Alemán Bolaños was a Nicaraguan reporter staying in a hotel in San Salvador at the time of the revolt. Twelve years later, he published in a novel his own interpretation of the revolt and the massacre that followed. A common thread between Vilanova’s novel and Alemán Bolaños’ text is the indigenous representation. In Alemán Bolaños’ novel “la masa indígena se caracteriza por su falta de iniciativa y voluntad propia [...]” (Lara-Martínez “La verdad de la ficción” 52). They are not self-led, but rather foreign led. However, instead of blaming the Salvadoran Communist Party for spreading communism throughout the region with the help of foreign leadership, Alemán Bolaños signals the International Red Aid as the organization responsible for the communist indoctrination of the masses in Western El Salvador: “El organismo político que ‘maquiavélicamente’ sedujo, ‘regó’

la ‘semilla’ del comunismo y, al pie de la letra ‘(pre)escribió’ las ‘instrucciones’ del levantamiento no es la del Partido Comunista Salvadoreño. En cambio, le corresponde al Socorro Rojo Internacional” (“La verdad de la ficción” 52). How does the International Red Aid (*Socorro Rojo Internacional*) spread the seed that led to the revolt in the text? By sending a Soviet citizen, who goes by the name of “*el oso ruso*” whose job is to indoctrinate the masses and to incite them to revolt. His first victim is an indigenous woman with whom he has a sexual relationship, and after her indoctrination, he convinces members of her family to join his cause. Once again, the rural masses are not seen as subjects, but rather objects that follow foreign doctrines. This dissertation will not focus on the previous writers because they tend to represent the official story surrounding the massacre, and this project challenges the official discourse, which tends to oversimplify the revolt to a communist uprising.<sup>9</sup> While there were communist elements in the revolt, they were not the only participants in the uprising.

Another writer from the 1930s who also wrote about the massacre is Salvador Efraín Salazar Arrué, commonly known as Salarrué. He was born in 1899 and at the time of the massacre, he was already a nationally recognized author. Regarding the year 1932, he has several references in various texts including “Mi respuesta a los patriotas” (1932), “Cuentos de barro. Balsamera” (1935), “El espantajo” (1954), *Catleya luna* (1974). The first one is an essay written a day before the uprising of 1932, the second is a short story that later on became a

section/ chapter of the novel *Catleya luna* and the third is a short story. The critic Rafael Lara-Martínez believes that Salarrué's personal opinion and critical representation of 1932 is that of the autobiographical novel *Catleya luna*, which was published forty-two years after the massacre. "Con timidez, su opinión la esconde en el medio de una novela autobiográfica, *Catleya luna* (1974). Que el indígena reclame un *Minimum Vital* destruye el romanticismo utópico; el que percibe la sociedad de poetas como modelo de un mundo salvadoreño original y porvenir" ("Salarrué, los patriotas" 76).

Lara-Martínez criticizes the other texts because they tend to idealize and even objectify the indigenous people. This dissertation analyzes two of the above texts, "Mi respuesta a los patriotas" and "El espantajo" which have been criticized for not denouncing the atrocities of 1932, and for denying any type of indigenous agency. It will be argued that in these two texts, while at times Salarrué romanticizes the native people, at others he does give them some type of agency, as is the case in the short story "El Espantajo." While Salarrué might not give the "best" representation of the indigenous people in "Mi respuesta a los patriotas," he is still very critical of those in power and the patriots who blindly follow unjust laws in the name of patriotism. This short essay was written on January 21, 1932 a day before the revolt, which means that it would have been impossible to denounce a massacre that had not occurred. The first lines of the essay state that it is a direct response to Salarrué's patriotic friends who inquired his opinion

regarding the political situation of the country. The names of the *patriotas* are not provided. The title of this essay can literally be translated as “A response to the patriots.” Lara-Martínez says that “Estos ‘patriotas’ son los interlocutores a quienes se dirige el ensayo. La situación de escritura es la de un diálogo, o la de una ponencia que Salarrué prepara para un público selecto” (“Salarrué, los patriotas” 70). The structure of the essay indeed resembles that of a dialogue or a conference paper addressed to the patriots. His overall tone in the essay is idealistic, but also critical. It is idealistic in regards to the indigenous representation, and critical of two groups: the patriots and the communists.

For example, Salarrué does not identify with the patriots because he is not a “patriotic” citizen. In the essay, he creates a dichotomy between two different nouns in Spanish: *patria* (motherland/fatherland) and *terruño* (land). He questions the meaning of the word “patriotic” and “motherland” because he does not believe in those terms, finds them isolationist, and narrow:

Yo no tengo patria, yo no sé qué es patria: ¿A qué llamáis patria vosotros los hombres entendidos por prácticos? Sé que entendéis por patria un conjunto de leyes, una maquinaria de administración, un parche en un mapa de colores chillones [...] Yo el iluso no tengo patria, no tengo patria pero tengo terruño (de tierra, cosa palpable). No tengo El Salvador (catorce secciones en un trozo de papel satinado); tengo Cuscatlán, una región del mundo y no una nación (cosa vaga). Yo amo a Cuscatlán. (Salarrué)



In the previous quote, Salarrué does not identify with the word “patria” (*motherland*) because it is something that he cannot define. He is skeptical of those “enlightened” and “practical” men who presume to know what this term implies. Salarrué sarcastically gives their definition of the term and mocks it because for them the motherland is merely a combination of a system of laws and the administration that governs those laws, as well as the geographical space designating a specific country on a map. Salarrué finds this definition of motherland problematic because it is not tangible and that is one reason why he refuses to identify with it or claim it as his country. He does not belong to El Salvador, a country on a map divided into fourteen departments; however, he does find affinity for his native land, something tangible. While he is not part of El Salvador, he is part of Cuscatlán, the indigenous name given to that region before colonization. This is very interesting because he identifies with the indigenous name, but not with the independent country after colonization. In addition, his use of the informal subject pronoun “*vosotros*” which means “you all” to refer to the patriots is key here because he immediately associates his patriotic friends with the colonial discourse since this is a subject pronoun that is not used in Latin America, but it is commonly used in Spain. He creates a divide between the native and the foreign not only with the subject pronoun, but also with the Spanish name of the country versus the indigenous name.

Throughout the essay, there is a disconnection between the patriots and their laws on one side and the native peoples of Cuscatlán and their land on the other. Lara-Martínez supports this view and finds it extremely idealistic because it romanticizes the indigenous people. “Por una parte, se halla la administración estatal y el ‘conjunto de leyes’ que regulan el quehacer cotidiano en un territorio; por la otra, la tierra misma y sus moradores naturales” (“Salarrué, los patriotas” 70). The issue with this dichotomy is that it assumes that the indigenous people are happy with their lives, as farmers and caretakers of the land. Since they have no complaints, they are seen as passive people who do not demand social change. In other words, their representation is superficial and picturesque because it refuses to acknowledge their exploitation and their desire for a better life. However, while it is apparent that Salarrué tends to romanticize the indigenous people, in his essay he is very skeptical and critical of patriotic beliefs, which also tend to marginalize the indigenous people. This essay is further discussed in chapter two.

My current research specifically focuses on accounts from the following Salvadoran writers: Salarrué, Roque Dalton, Claribel Alegría and Manlio Argueta. These authors have written short stories, essays, novels, testimonial texts and poems that explore the massacre. I analyze the aspects and elements of the massacre they chose to portray and those that they left out, as well as the ideological, political and ethical issues at stake in their literary representations of this historical event. These writers all use different literary genres to present their

interpretation of this event. For example, Salarrué uses an essay, a short story and a novel in his representations. Dalton uses conversational and documentary poetry as well as testimonial literature in his interpretations. Argueta uses testimonial novels and Alegría interprets the massacre within the structure of a historical novel. All of these genres are defined in the following chapters with reference to critics Robert Pring-Mill, John Beverly, Miguel Barnet and others. The literary texts that this dissertation analyzes are: Salarrué's "Mi Respuesta a los patriotas" (1932), "El espantajo" (1954), Dalton's *Miguel Mármol: Los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador* (1972), "Todos," "Viejue mierda," "Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932," Alegría's *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966) and Argueta's *Un día en la vida* (1980) and *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* (1986).

Of the previous texts, *Cenizas de Izalco* by Claribel Alegría and *Miguel Mármol* by Roque Dalton have received the most scholarly attention for their treatment of the massacre. The former is a historical novel and the latter is a testimonial text that resulted from Dalton's interviews with Miguel Mármol in Prague in 1966. There is some debate regarding the genre of this book. For example, some scholars like Barbara Harlow consider it a testimonial text. Others like Lindo-Fuentes, et al. consider this book to be an example of what they previously called a "narrative re-configuration." Although Lindo-Fuentes, et al. quote and have analyzed Dalton's work, they do not see it as an autobiographical testimonial: "Instead, *Miguel Mármol*

should be seen as an interpretive history that came about through a process of what we identify as ‘narrative reconfiguration,’ in which Roque Dalton turned a few dozen pages of hand-written notes into a published book of more than five hundred pages during a five-year period between 1966 and 1971” (Lindo-Fuentes, et al. 138). Since it is not seen as a testimonial account of the massacre, these scholars tend to dismiss its historical relevance. Some scholars may take issue with this conclusion since fiction often captures historical perspectives, just as historical accounts are not absolved from including fictional elements and structures. Gould and Lauria-Santiago believe that “despite its constructedness and distortions, *Miguel Mármol* remains a fascinating and invaluable source for understanding the period” (xix-xx). Gould and Lauria-Santiago do not dismiss the text’s contributions to understanding the time period, but their analysis is not focused on this text.

Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, and Lara-Martínez challenge the testimonial “accuracy” of *Miguel Mármol* because according to them, Dalton played a significant role in editing Mármol’s life story. In other words, Dalton’s testimonial account is not “historical” enough. This view is problematic since it assumes that history is objective and fiction has no historical context. However, critics like Hayden White may take issue with this perspective since he has theorized about the fictionalization of history. In his book *Metahistory* (1973), White says:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by “finding,” “identifying,” or “uncovering” the “stories” that lie buried in

chronicles; and that the difference between “history” and “fiction” resides in the fact that the historian “finds” his stories, whereas the fiction writer “invents” his. This conception of the historian’s task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian’s operations. (6)

According to White, historical accounts are not as unbiased or objective as we would like to believe. They too are modes of emplotment about the past. In chapter two, I refer to White’s theories when arguing against the conclusion that Dalton’s testimonial representation is not historical enough, and that consequently it should be discounted as a historical account. I will also use Miguel Barnet’s concept of *novela-testimonial* (testimonial-novel) and John Beverly’s definitions of what constitutes a *testimonio* to argue that Dalton’s text lends itself to being categorized as a type of testimonial representation of the massacre, giving it important historical relevance. Chapters two and five will define the terms “*testimonio*” and “*novela-testimonial*” by referencing Beverly and Barnet’s explanations of both terms.

This literary analysis of *La Matanza* draws upon subaltern, postcolonial, feminist, and other theories in order to highlight the particular position of each author. For example, Edward Said’s notion of *orientalism*, conceptualized in his book *Orientalism* (1978) is helpful in the examination of the internalized hegemonic discourse of the military soldiers who have been indoctrinated by their superiors and international advisors to hate themselves and their fellow compatriots. Although the concept of *orientalism* does not refer specifically to Latin America, but rather to the Orient and its relationship with the West, it can be useful in the Latin American

context when studying the relationship of power between Europe and Latin America. Said uses the concept of *orientalism* to describe a type of a stereotypical discourse created by the West in order to describe the Orient, which for many Europeans was considered an object to be studied and analyzed. The concept is based on an unbalanced power relationship, where the Orient is “inferior” and the West is “superior” in everything. Consequently, the Orient that Western discourse has created is imaginary. The fictional world does not correspond to the “real” Orient. In *Un día*, the military discourse echoes the same type of discursive characteristics applied by Europeans when describing the Orient. However, it is not the Europeans describing El Salvador or its people in a pejorative way, but the Salvadoran soldiers, who during the civil war internalized a colonial discourse. Other concepts that will be useful are Homi Bhabha’s notions of *fixity* and the ambivalence of the colonial discourse. Bhabha defines the notion of *fixity* in *The Location of Culture* (1994):

Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. (66)

Since colonial discourse depends on the concept of fixity, it always reinforces stereotypes about the Other. These stereotypes must be anxiously repeated because the identity of the colonizer is not stable. Bhabha questions Said’s assumption that the identity of the colonial subject is stable.

The concept of *fixity* is used to discuss the construction and repetition of the stereotypes rooted in colonization and constructed by the military power in Argueta's novel *Un día*.

Furthermore, I will use Said's concept of the intellectual responsibility described in *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. In this text, Said references Gramsci's *organic intellectual* and *traditional intellectual*, two notions that are developed in *The Prison Notebooks*. According to Gramsci, "The traditional intellectual works out of an already existing institutional matrix and mode of social organization, while the organic intellectual emerges from new, oppositional ones" (Shapiro 139). Said's committed intellectual resembles Gramsci's organic intellectual because he is someone whose main role is to speak truth to power and denounce any type of atrocity:

And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (11)

Said's notion of the role of the intellectual is helpful in the analysis of a poem by Roque Dalton, "Viejuemierda," which is dedicated to Alberto Masferrer, a well-respected Salvadoran intellectual whom Dalton criticizes for not denouncing the atrocities of the 1932 massacre.

In this study I also reference Gayatri Spivak's *subaltern* in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

This essay is instrumental in the deconstruction of the supposed transparency of the intellectual.

The notion of *subaltern* is used in the analysis of Dalton's testimonial text, *Miguel Mármol*.

Spivak gives a brief definition of the term *subaltern* in an interview published in 1990 in the US journal *Polygraph*:

It is truly situational. 'Subaltern' began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism 'monoism,' and was obliged to call the proletarian 'subaltern.' That word used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. (Morton 46)

Since the subaltern does not "fall under strict class analysis," it is a flexible term that can include a variety of different subject positions such as those of women, peasants and natives, which have been positioned by dominant powers in positions of inaccessibility to that circuit. For Spivak the subaltern is characterized by an inability to speak because someone always speaks for them. In a society, subjects are constructed by social, political and economic structures of power. If there is an unequal social or power structure, there are different or unequal subjects. Some subjects are positioned with a lack of access to the possibility of speaking. For Spivak the subaltern is not an identity, but rather a subject position within the unequal power structure. I will argue that people as well as fictional characters can have different levels of subalternity and agency, making the relationship between the informant and the transcriber far more complex.

Spivak also states that there are two different meanings of "representation," distinguished in German as "vertretung" (representation) and "darstellung" (represent) (71). If one describes



the conditions of the subaltern, one is *re-presenting* them. On the other hand, if one is speaking for the subaltern, one is engaged in the process of *representation*. According to Spivak, intellectuals tend to do both things when they ignore their own position of privilege and pretend to know what the oppressed need. This is problematic because the subaltern cannot speak since intellectuals tend to speak for them. The concept of the *subaltern* will be used in the analysis of the actions and testimonial account of the main character in *Miguel Mármol: Los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador*. The main protagonist of the text is a subaltern that speaks about what happened to him during the massacre. It will be argued that Dalton is not an objective transcriber of the testimony; however, Mármol is not just a marginalized character without agency, but rather an active participant and co-author of his own testimony. For example, at times Mármol refuses to tell Dalton everything. Marmol's silence will be interpreted as an act of agency because he is not easily manipulated into answering every question. He decides the depth of his testimony. Marmol's strategy brings to mind Doris Sommer's article "No Secrets" (1991) regarding the biography of Rigoberta Menchú, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983). In this article, Sommer analyses Menchú's insistence on knowing indigenous secrets that she will not share with the rest of the world. "The refusals say, in effect, this document is a screen, in the double sense that Henri Lefebvre (1988, 78) uses the term: something that shows and that also covers up" (134-35). In other words, one cannot presume to

know the Other in his or her entirety. Sommer continues this critical debate in her book *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (1999), which will be consulted in the analysis of Dalton's testimonial text, *Miguel Mármol*.

Mikhail Bakhtin is another theorist who will be instrumental in my theoretical approach. For example, his notions of *dialogism* and *double-voiced discourse* in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* will be used in the analysis of the different voices and discourses that are present in Dalton's documentary poem, "Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932." In this poem a multiplicity of voices, repeat different discourses of power and subalternity that enter into a dialogic relationship. Bakhtin explains the process of dialogism as:

Two discourses equally and directly oriented toward a referential object within the limits of a single context cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically, regardless of whether they confirm, mutually supplement, or (conversely) contradict one another or find themselves in some other dialogic relationship (that of question and answer, for example). (188-89)

In the case of Dalton's poem, there is a collage of multiple narrators, who give their own account of the massacre. For example, one can hear the voice of General Martínez, who directed the massacre, anonymous people who represent the marginalized, and a military officer who acknowledges killing many peasants due to their "subversive" actions. This dissertation will argue that Dalton uses intertextuality and multiple narrators to narrate conflicting perspectives of the massacre. According to Bakhtin, a *double-voiced discourse* "is directed both toward the

referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another's discourse*, toward *someone else's speech*" (185). The different discourses of the poem enter into a dialogic relationship of power where they either affirm or contradict one another.

Julia Kristeva's notions of the *abject* and *abjection* in *Powers of Horror* (1982) will be helpful in chapter five. This chapter will analyze Argueta's testimonial novels *Cuzcatlán* and *Un día*. Kristeva's concepts will be instrumental especially in the sections describing the military killings and purging of the *abject* bodies that lay exposed after the massacre. According to Kristeva, "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Also, for Kristeva "the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (4). Argueta's novels reference the resurfacing of the cadavers when pigs unearth and then eat the bodies. This ultimately contaminates the food chain. In *Cuzcatlán*, one of the narrators remembers how the pigs ate the dead bodies: "Los cuerpos medio se enterraban. Quedaban a flor de tierra. Nadie quería carne de chanco. Los animales habían sido vistos con un pedazo de pierna o un brazo de gente, colgados del hocico" (50). Here these abject cadavers are destabilizing the military power by resurfacing and transgressing the boundaries of power and control. They refuse annihilation

and come back to center stage to haunt the living, those who killed them. It is also the past, erased (abject) memory, coming to “infect” the present.

Despite the silence imposed by the government, Salvadoran writers found a way to resist government censorship by telling their own account of the 1932 revolt. This dissertation makes its biggest contribution in the area of literary representation of the massacre, which has not been sufficiently explored. In this study I will synthesize how literature has represented and interpreted the massacre in different types of literary genres –poetry, essay, short story, testimonial, testimonial novel and the historical novel—in an effort to challenge the obliteration of this important historical event from the Salvadoran history. To conclude I will connect the themes that run through all of my chapters by summarizing the most important arguments.

In addition, I will answer critical questions about each text. For example, whose voices prevail in each account? Furthermore, what groups are excluded from the literary interpretation of the massacre? Are the authors and narrators purposely avoiding specific topics? That is to say, are the silences of each account intentional or at least significant? This dissertation will also propose to take apart the traditional historical discourses surrounding the massacre, which tend to be mainly concerned with finding the ultimate “truth” about what happened. Those approaches are important, as it is essential to find and uncover as much factual information on an event that was repressed from Salvadoran history for decades. My literary analysis complements those

historical approaches by highlighting that the “truth” is always complex and never singular, and that different historical actors and social groups may provide important, albeit frequently divergent insights into the events of 1932. My literary analysis exemplifies several counter interpretations of the massacre that emphasize the plurality of perspectives concerning the massacre from diverse positions. In this way, I highlight the historical contributions that literature has made with its accounts of that important historical event.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTELLECTUAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SALARRUÉ AND DALTON

This chapter will compare Roque Dalton and Salarrué's representations of the 1932 massacre in three different types of literary genres: essay, short story and poetry. These writers' representations of the massacre are different from one another, and so is their message. For example, Dalton's poetry takes issue with those in power who did not denounce the massacre. In addition, his ultimate message calls for a Marxist revolution. It is important to keep in mind that Dalton is one generation removed from the atrocities of 1932, which allows him privilege to reflect and criticize those who, according to him, did nothing to prevent this unfortunate event. He can afford to be nostalgic about a revolution that ultimately would reverse the binary relationships of power and that he believes would bring justice to those who died in 1932. Dalton's poetry also brings to center stage marginalized voices to give their own account of the massacre. This is demonstrated in "Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932." In this poem there is a dialogue between the various narrators about the massacre.

Salarrué, on the other hand, is a writer and intellectual who lived through *La Matanza*. His eldest daughter Olga was nearly hit by a bullet that landed on her bedroom dresser, "allí estaba cuando una bala pasó cerca, me pasó así, quién sabe de dónde, y cayó en el armario. Y el gran susto de mi papá corriendo y viendo que no me habían agredido, y casi lloró abrazándome [...]" (Henríquez Consalvi 12). Salarrué's personal experience with this unfortunate historical

event led him to represent a type of revolutionary thinking that calls for a change in human values. Salarrué was a committed intellectual who tried to warn both the right and the left against hegemonic discourses that later on were responsible for the massacre.

Salvador Efraín Salazar Arrué is commonly known as Salarrué (1899-1975). Besides being a poet, novelist and short story writer, Salarrué was also a painter known as the precursor of abstract painting in El Salvador.<sup>10</sup> Salarrué studied art at Corcoran School of Art, Washington D.C. from 1916-1920, and throughout his life he considered himself primarily a painter. Salarrué made his living mostly from selling his paintings at inexpensive prices, and at times, he gave them as gifts to people who supported him with materials. According to the artist Ricardo Aguilar Humano, Salarrué's paintings show the precolombian epoch and the conquest: "registra la época precolombina, la época de la conquista en unos grandes tapices, saca unos anuncios en los periódicos en los que pedía pinturas, materiales y pinceles para poder pintar y a cambio de eso él les regalaba las pinturas a la gente que le daba materiales" ("El último nahual" 7). However, during his life he was not a very famous artist. Salarrué is also known for his short stories: "Salarrué es el más valioso narrador salvadoreño [...] sobre todo, cuando se habla de sus cuentos, los regionales y los fantásticos. En esta rama del arte logró sus mejores frutos" (Martínez Orantes 38). Among his literary works are: *El cristo negro* (1926), *O'yarkandal*

(1929), *Retomando el Uluán* (1932), *Cuentos de barro* (1934), *Cuentos de cipotes* (1945), *Trasmallo* (1954), and *Catleya luna* (1974).

According to Sheila Candelario, Salarrué's literature has been described as regionalist or folkloric, "La obra de Salarrué ha sido descrita como costumbrismo escapista por Jorge Arias, o vinculada a un localismo folklórico como escribiera Hugo Lindo en su introducción a Obras Escogidas" (64). Contreras continues to say that critics like Lara-Martínez describe Salarrué's writing as "la culminación del regionalismo y naturalismo centroamericano" (64). According to Ángel Rama, regionalist narrative in Latin America began around 1910, "como trasmutación del costumbrismo—naturalismo (el caso de Mariano Azuela) regía en la mayoría de las áreas del continente, tanto las de mediano o escaso desarrollo educativo como las más avanzadas, gracias a los éxitos de los títulos dados a conocer en los años veinte—*La Vorágine* en 1924 y *Doña Bárbara* en 1929" (Rama 21). This type of writing is characterized by the use of vernacular language and it tends to describe rural environments and their cultural traditions; "el regionalismo venía elaborando asuntos rurales y por eso mantenía estrecho contacto con componentes tradicionales e incluso arcaicos de la vida latinoamericana, muchos procedentes del folklore [...]" (Rama 25). Rama states that regionalist literature conserves various traditional elements that contributed to the cultural uniqueness of a nation (26).



The current analysis focuses on Salarrué's essay "Mi respuesta a los patriotas" and his short story "El espantajo." The essay has been categorized by Lara-Martínez as a type of regionalist writing that represents the natural surroundings and its inhabitants: "Situado por fuera de todo utilitarismo, a Salarrué el romántico le corresponde restituir la naturaleza en su plena expression. Funda su arte en los sentidos y en la materialidad misma del entorno" ("Salarrué, los patriotas" 72). Lara-Martínez criticizes Salarrué's pacifism and his denial of indigenous agency ("Salarrué, los patriotas" 71). According to Lara-Martínez, the essay is too idealistic, and it depicts a theatrical representation of the universe and a stereotypical description of the land as well as the indigenous people ("Salarrué los patriotas" 72). Such depiction of "Mi respuesta a los patriotas" does not take into consideration the social context in which it was written. The essay was originally published in the *Repertorio Americano* of Costa Rica February 27, 1932.<sup>11</sup> However, it is dated January 21, 1932, which means that it was written a day before the 1932 uprising and massacre, a time of great political and economic instability in El Salvador.

## **2.1 A Challenge to Hegemonic Discourses: "Mi respuesta a los patriotas"**

"Mi respuesta a los patriotas" is a literary work that deconstructs and challenges the hegemonic discourses of the time. In this essay, Salarrué takes issue with the political leadership of the right and the left because they manipulated many Salvadorans into internalizing established political agendas. For example, in the name of "patriotism" capitalists such as

landlords and coffee growers helped to convince citizens that communism was an evil that had to be destroyed, even if doing so meant taking human lives. Those advocating for human rights were seen as threatening the interests of the elite class and, therefore, disregarded as communist ideologues. General Martínez's regime used fear and dehumanizing rhetoric to marginalize and control the masses. His essay also challenges the political left's discourse, which called for an armed revolution as a pathway to a communist society. Salarrué believed that the leftist leadership was responsible for indoctrinating sectors of the population. This led to many taking up arms during the massacre. Rebel forces led many revolts throughout the western part of the country against their enemy. However, the insurgents were no match against the military soldiers, who outnumbered them and had superior weapons. Salarrué's essay is prophetic because it warns Salvadorans against the hegemonic thinking that led to the massacre. During the massacre, patriotic allegiance to the military government was far more important than respect for human life and the environment, which resulted in the dehumanization of every individual and their natural surroundings. Salarrué's literary work sheds light on El Salvador's political climate days before the 1932 massacre. He represents a perspective that is not tied to the dominant political ideologies of the time.

Aguilar Humano says that in this essay Salarrué:

Deja claro su posición ante la izquierda comunista y el capital cafetalero de la época y se identifica con la raza indígena [...] Asumir esta posición y mantenerla

durante toda su vida explica su marginación y desprecio de la intelectualidad de izquierda que dominó la crítica en el país y siempre pensaron de él como un viejo loco que se la pasaba volando [...] y la derecha complementaria de esa estrechez mental también lo marginó por haberlos insultado en ese escrito. (Aguilar Humano "E-mail interview")

According to Ricardo Aguilar Humano, Salarrué isolates himself from the economic, political and intellectual powers since he criticizes both the political left and right and identifies himself with the perspective of the indigenous people. Salarrué's solidarity with the indigenous people is a political stance aimed at those in power. Salarrué resembles the *real intellectual* that Said describes in his *Representations of the Intellectual* (1996). According to Said, "Real intellectuals are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority" (6). Salarrué sacrificed artistic and intellectual fame as well as admiration from elites, and instead he sided with the marginalized. According to Said, "The intellectual always has a choice either to side with the weaker, the less represented, the forgotten or ignored, or to side with the more powerful" (32-33). Salarrué chose to identify with the indigenous people, the less represented and not the status quo. Fame was not important for Salarrué, and despite his artistic talents, throughout his life he remained in poverty. He resembles Said's intellectual, who is characterized as marginal.

Lara-Martínez acknowledges Salarrué's criticism of the left and the right; he takes issue with his idealization of the indigenous people. Lara-Martínez's main criticism is that Salarrué envisions a utopian society that does not give a viable solution for the political chaos of the time. "Ante ese callejón sin salida de la política, el escritor imagina una solución *romántica*, a saber: la vivencia del terruño. Se vuelca sobre la religión del arte. Propone una sociedad de poetas. Lo ideal sustituye lo práctico; el ensueño, la administración pública y la vindicación social; el arte, la política" (71). Though it has been argued that Salarrué's work romanticized native people and their environment, his main criticism is aimed at those who fail to understand the indigenous people. His essay is a social protest against the status quo and a challenge to binary thinking. Salarrué is revolutionary in his thinking because he refuses to be defined by the binaries of "communism" and "capitalism" that were pervasive during his time. This binary thinking overlooks the complexities of human relationships. Salarrué emphasizes the interconnections that individuals have with each other, the planet, and the universe. He challenges nationalism/patriotism because it is divisive, repressive and devoid of any respect for humanity and the earth. Salarrué makes this clear when he cannot grasp the ambiguous notion of being a patriot and insists that he is not a patriot nor does he want to be one. Mockingly, he tells the patriots that he has a better concept of a "patriotic banana" than of a "patriotic man." He deconstructs the patriarchal world of the governing elite and tells them that he cannot set foot on their land

because everywhere he looks he finds quicksand: “Me pedís que descienda a vuestra realidad y no sé donde poner el pie; por todos lados encuentro arena movediza. [...] En esa vuestra patria yo sólo respiro odio, cobardía, incomprensión” (“Mi respuesta”). For Salarrué, the patriots are intolerant and hateful and he wants no part of their world. He ends his essay by contrasting his ideal world with that of the patriots, “Mi campo es más amplio que esa tajadita de absurdo que queréis darme. Mucho más amplio. Ni siquiera el mundo. Ni siquiera el cosmos...” (“Mi respuesta”). In contrast, his world is guided by the principles of love, empathy and creativity. For this reason, he refuses to be confined or defined by any geographical borders imposed by “patriotic” men, and that is why he wishes they would instead join him in his version of a more humane society.

The fact that Salarrué writes “Mi respuesta a los patriotas” as a letter addressed to the Salvadoran patriots is in itself a statement against the political ideologies of the time. The names of the “patriots” are not provided, but the structure of the essay resembles that of a dialogue. The essay’s tone is very critical of four groups: the coffee growers, sugar-cane planters, capitalists and communists. Salarrué juxtaposes the patriarchal society of his time with the poetic world he creates. From the start, he objects to patriotic values, which are represented by anonymous voices. “Hazlo por patriotismo, dignate pisar con tus plantas la tierra firme, siquiera por una vez...Y se han echado a reír” (Salarrué “Mi respuesta”). The voices mock his personal beliefs.

They treat him as a poet who is out of touch with “reality.” The “patriots” are under the assumption that writers like him live in their own “imaginary” world. Salarrué disputes such a statement and implies that patriotic thinking is equally removed from reality.

Salarrué echoes Said’s intellectual when he challenges patriotism. According to Said, “intellectuals should be the ones to question patriotic nationalism” (xiii). Salarrué is critical of both citizens and rulers who blindly follow unjust laws in the name of patriotism. He separates himself from them by saying that he does not identify himself as a “patriotic” citizen. He creates a dichotomy between two different nouns in Spanish: *patria* (motherland/fatherland) and *terruño* (land). He questions the meaning of the word “patriotic” and “motherland” because he does not believe in those terms and finds them isolating and narrow:

Yo no tengo patria, yo no sé qué es patria: ¿A qué llamáis patria vosotros los hombres entendidos por prácticos? Sé que entendéis por patria un conjunto de leyes, una maquinaria de administración, un parche en un mapa de colores chillones [...] Yo el iluso no tengo patria, no tengo patria pero tengo terruño (de tierra, cosa palpable). No tengo El Salvador (catorce secciones en un trozo de papel satinado); tengo Cuscatlán, una región del mundo y no una nación (cosa vaga). (Salarrué "Mi respuesta")

In this passage, Salarrué does not identify with the word “patria” (*motherland*) because it is something that he cannot define. He is skeptical of those “enlightened” and “practical” men who presume to know what this term implies. Salarrué gives a mocking definition of the term. For them, the motherland is merely a combination of a system of laws and the administration that

governs those laws, as well as the geographical space designating a country on a map. Salarrué finds their definition of motherland problematic. For this reason, he does not consider himself as part of El Salvador, although he does identify with Cuscatlán, the indigenous name given to his home region before colonization. He identifies with the indigenous name of Cuscatlán, but not with El Salvador, the independent country after colonization. Furthermore, he immediately separates himself from the patriots when he addresses them with the informal subject pronoun “*vosotros*” which means “you all.” This subject pronoun is not used in Latin America, but is commonly used in Spain. In other words, he associates his patriotic friends with the colonial discourse. Salarrué creates a divide between the native and the foreign not only with the subject pronoun, but also with how the region itself is named.

One of the main criticisms of “*Mi Respuesta*” is the disconnection between the patriots and their laws and the native peoples of Cuscatlán and their land. In “*Salarrué, los patriotas y la idealización artística de lo indígena*” Lara-Martínez supports this view and finds it idealistic because it romanticizes indigenous people: “Por una parte, se halla la administración estatal y el conjunto de leyes que regulan el quehacer cotidiano en un territorio; por la otra, la tierra misma y sus moradores naturales” (70). His issue with this dichotomy is that it assumes that the indigenous people are content with their lives, as farmers and caretakers of the land. Since they

have no complaints, they are viewed as passive people who do not demand social change. They are represented as superficial and picturesque with no desire for a better life:

El indio del arado y la cuma que hace el paisaje agrario bajo el sol crudo, está satisfecho de hacer vivir con sus manos toscas y renegridas, manos de Dios, a un pueblo entero que se entrega a una locura llamada política; que no sólo es infructuosa sino dañina. Este indio vive la tierra, es la tierra y no habla nunca de patriotismo. (Salarrué)

In the previous passage, Salarrué idealizes the indigenous man when he describes him as possessing the hands of God. In other words, he is an instrument used by God to provide food for all of his people regardless of their political agendas. However, he also puts emphasis on taking care of the whole and not just a section of the population. The notion of providing for all is opposed to a patriotic system, which only advocated for the rights of the selective few.

Salarrué, moreover, deconstructs the dichotomy of communists and capitalist ideologues who he believes mirror each other. Salarrué places both, which represent the two hegemonic discourses of the time, in the same category and contrasts their actions with that of poets like him and the indigenous people: “Capitalistas embrutecidos, perezosos y bribones muestran sus caras abotagadas y crueles a no menos crueles comunistas, pedigüeños, sórdidos y rapaces. Mientras estos dos bandos en todos sus grados de intensidad se gruñen unos a otros, nosotros los soñadores no pedimos nada porque todo lo tenemos” (Salarrué). The greedy actions of the capitalists are just as destructive for the country and its people as the vengeance of the



communists. Both want to control the material wealth of El Salvador. In a way, Salarrué predicts the massacre, which is the result of the power struggle he describes. The materialistic exploitation of the capitalist and the communist is contrasted with the compassionate actions of the farmer and the poets like Salarrué. The former feeds an entire population with his cultivation of the land and receives very little in return, while the latter engages in poetic creativity about the beautiful land and its people. In other words, Salarrué views the selfless work of farmers and poets as exemplary conduct for a more humane society that is guided by principles of love, creativity and empathy instead of indifference, greed and hate.

According to Lara-Martínez, the issue with Salarrué's representation of the native people and their land is that he tends to equate the greed of the capitalist and the vengeance of the communists with the right to a better salary, medicine, school, and housing for the poor: "De ahí que la vindicación por los derechos sociales—mejores salarios, atención médica, escolaridad, vivienda, en dos palabras el *Minimum Vital* de Masferrer se equipare a la avaricia de los propietarios y a la 'venganza' de los comunistas" ("Salarrué, los patriotas" 71). A different interpretation of Salarrué's essay emphasizes asking indigenous farmers what they really want or need, instead of assuming their answers. Salarrué's main issue with the capitalists, patriots and communists is that they have all denied the native farmer his/her agency by not including him/her in the political dialogue of the time. Salarrué was a pacifist,<sup>12</sup> and he opposed the

exploitation of people. Furthermore, Salarrué was not affiliated with any political party of his time.<sup>13</sup> Since he distanced himself from a particular political party or group, he could criticize them as an outsider.

Salarrué attacks the greed of the coffee and sugar cane growers when he says:

El cafetalero es un pedante que habla del mercado, de la baja, del alza, cuenta pisto agachado sobre las mesas, husmea costales y no ha estado nunca tirado al fondo de un cafetal, en el misterio de las noches de luna; no nota la belleza del grano sangriento cuando resbala entre los dedos de las cortadoras cantarinas, no conoce el aroma y la leyenda de la flor del cafeto. El azucarero no ha oído nunca el susurro consolador de los cañaverales, [...]. Todos ellos giran alrededor de una sola cosa: el dinero. (Salarrué)

Salarrué describes the coffee grower's profit-seeking exchange. His conversations are always about the market and its impact on coffee prices. The coffee elites are motivated only by monetary gains and show no compassion for the land or its people. The sugar grower is also removed from the fields and driven by profit. In other words, Landowners are portrayed as alienated from the land and the people. The profit seeking capitalist market has made them apathetic to the world around them.

Salarrué feels alone with the natives and the land because his friends, the intellectual writers of the time, have abandoned him. "Solo con el indio contemplativo y la mujer soñadora. Ya no hay Miranda Ruano que escriba *Las Voces del Terruño*, libro que ya nadie lee; Ambrogi habla constantemente de Quiñónez; los Andino escriben 'Política'; Bustamante es empleado de

juzgado; Castellano Rivas se hace Secretario Particular; [...]” (Salarrué). His contemporary intellectual colleagues have decided to either work for the government or write about politics, leaving him all alone. His intellectual contemporaries, who have now joined mainstream society, betray Salarrué. He is nostalgic for the past and wishes that more artists would join him in the construction of his version of a utopian society. Salarrué criticizes his colleagues for wasting their time and talents in supporting an oppressive government.

Aguilar Humano believes that Salarrué in “Mi respuesta a los patriotas” isolates himself from the dominant powers of his time because he rejects the ideologies of mainstream intellectuals, communists and capitalists. In so doing, he aligns himself with indigenous people and his native land:

Salarrué opta por el barro, opta por los Izalcos, opta por los Nonualcos y desecha la intelectualidad sin acción, sin consecuencia, desecha la izquierda comunista naciente en esa época y desecha el poder económico. Lo cual nos viene a corroborar por qué Salarrué a pesar de ser un gran artista, un gran pintor, un gran escritor, vive pobre, muere pobre. (“El último nahual” 8)

Salarrué wrote about the plight of indigenous people at a time when other writers would not. In 1934, he published *Cuentos de barro* a collection of short stories about rural life in El Salvador. Aguilar Humano believes this was “una osadía tremenda cuando nadie hablaba de los indios, porque hablar de los indios era ser comunista, tonto, bruto, de todo” (“El último nahual” 8). This is significant because during the massacre General Martínez tried to exterminate the indigenous

population as a measure to eradicate communism. Martínez's genocide against the indigenous people reflects his binary perspective, which Salarrué would have opposed. The relevance of this essay to the massacre lies on the deconstruction of said binary thinking, which was influential during the massacre. Salarrué warns the entire nation in this essay against the exploitive and divisive nature of a patriarchal society, which ultimately led to the massacre. His later work continues his attention to the native struggle. He acknowledges their agency by making them the main protagonists of his short stories. Salarrué celebrates their traditional folklore and rural customs. In his writings, indigenous people are treated as subjects that use their own vernacular language to describe customs, traditions and their own political situation. For example, the next short story "El espantajo" is a perfect example of social protest in the colloquial language of rural El Salvador.

## **2.2 The Social & Literary Context of "El espantajo"**

"El espantajo" was written in 1933 a year after the massacre. However, it was not published until 1954 in *Trasmallo*, a collection of short stories. According to Candelario, "el retraso de publicación de *Trasmallo* pudiera haber sido el estado de represión y terror institucional en el país durante la dictadura del General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1931-1944) lo que dificultara su edición" (70). "El espantajo" is a direct denunciation of the military atrocities of 1932. Salarrué likely waited until General Martínez was no longer in power to

publish his story. *Trasmallo* is considered the second part of *Cuentos de barro* (1933), also a collection of short stories that depicts the life of rural El Salvador. According to Ítalo López Vallecillos, these two books share many similarities. “Ambos libros tienen en común la temática nativista, el colorido, la prosa poética inconfundible de quien más allá de cómo hablan, piensan y sienten los pobres trabajadores rurales, embellece el relato con imágenes y metáforas de calidad estética”(López Vallecillos 5). In the previous books, Salarrué used the Salvadoran vernacular to describe the life of the rural peasants. This depiction is unique, making Salarrué one of the first national authors to write about those voices that at the time remained outside of literary representation. Colloquial speech takes center stage in Salarrué's short stories. Salarrué had contact with fishermen, corn farmers, peasant women, landlords, teachers and rural priests, all of whom are rural peasants:

Él oye, ve, convive con pescadores, sembradores de maíz, molenderas, acarreadoras de agua, jornaleros y patronos, miqueros, maestros de escuela, curas de aldea, filarmónicos, barberos, farmacéuticos e idóneos. De la conversación con estos hombres sencillos extrae los relatos, asumiendo en muchos casos hasta el habla misma de los personajes. (7)

According to the previous quote, his narratives give voice to their voice. His characters describe their living conditions in their colloquial speech.

His daughter, Olga Salarrué, recalls that Salarrué spent a lot of time during his childhood on a big farm with his uncle: “cuando él creció pasaba mucho tiempo en la hacienda, con su tío,

al que le decía papá. Y ahí pues, se hacía amigo de todos los indios, habían unos niños que él quería muchísimo, tanto que usó los nombres de esos niños en los cuentos, en *Cuentos de barro*” (“Conversación” 11-12). Since he lived with indigenous people and their children on a farm, not only did he hear their dialect, but he also humanized them and they became inspiration for his short stories. This experience had such an impact that he even used the names of the children he met on that farm in his collection of short stories, *Cuentos de barro*. Throughout Salarrué’s life he connected with the rural poor; Olga Salarrué recalls that her father would take his daughters to visit small rural villages: “Papá nos llevaba de madrugada a la terminal de buses y nos íbamos a los pueblitos. Nos bajábamos y caminábamos por donde fuera, compraba semitas o algo así y el montón de *chuchos* detrás de nosotros porque le íbamos dando semita a los *chuchos*” (“Conversación” 12). In the previous quote, she uses the word “*chucho*,” which in Salvadoran vernacular means dog. In Salarrué’s short stories, the animals are often called by their colloquial name. According to Sheila Candelario, “La narrativa de Salarrué [...] forma parte de la corriente literaria que se vuelve a lo autóctono en reacción al avance de la modernidad en El Salvador” (Candelario 65).

Angel Rama states that in this type of regionalist literature there is a separation and distance between the standard language and the regional dialects. This distinction represents different levels of linguistic and social power. In the text, the colloquial speech is written in

quotation marks to distinguish it from standard Spanish. It is also common to use “glosarios en el apéndice de las novelas, debido a que eran términos que no registraba, el Diccionario de la Real Academia Española” (40-41). This type of writing juxtaposes the national standard language to the vernacular, highlighting the linguistic and social differences of the characters and the author. Since most peasants speak a dialect that is not accepted as “proper” Spanish, their speech reflects their position of marginality. Rama says this linguistic ambiguity “es reflejo fiel de la estructura social y del lugar superior que dentro de ella ocupa el escritor. Si éste se aproxima a los estratos inferiores, no deja de confirmar lingüísticamente su lugar más elevado, debido a su educación y a su conocimiento de las normas idiomáticas, que lo distancia del bajo pueblo” (41). Telling stories in this way exposes an author’s privileged social position because he or she uses both the standard and the colloquial language. Authors often emphasize their linguistic distinctions by using a dictionary or glossary at the end of the novel, or by using italics in their writings to differentiate vernacular from standard Spanish. In the case of Salarrué, he used either italics or bold letters to distinguish the Salvadoran colloquial speech. He implemented this technique in the short story “El espantajo.”

According to López Vallecillos, the vernacular and folklore are enhanced in Salarrué’s writing with “un realismo que captaba el modo de ser de los peones rurales, a la vez que mostraba lo telúrico y lo mágico que preside el pensamiento y la acción de los hombres de la

zona” (6). For example, “El espantajo” begins with a description of the landscape by personifying the sunset from the perspective of a third person narrator, “Un Yagual de cerros y al fondo los maizales de fresco y amarejado verdor. Más abajo, la charca circular y más abajo aún la tarde oro y rosa, sin sol, desteñida, cogida, caída en el fondo de aquel verdor oscuro, pudorosa y friolenta en su desnudez de durazno” (Salarrué "El espantajo" 65). The landscape is described as a beautiful garden, unaltered by modern development or contamination. The air itself is brought to life, “Venía la brisa despeinando la milpa con sus manos de expulgadora, con ágiles dedos buscando el piojo de la piedra” (“El espantajo” 65). This description of nature helps to foreshadow what will happen to the villagers, once the military soldiers invade.

### **2.3 Annihilation of the Men of Corn**

This story describes a small village torn by military persecution and the random slaughtering of young men, who the government believed were involved in the 1932 peasant uprising. It represents an account of the massacre from the villagers’ perspective, which is not part of the dominant discourse recounting the events of 1932. The story takes place at night in a small rural village, where a peasant family lives in a hut in the middle of a cornfield. The main character is a cognitively impaired young man, named Lalo, who manages to survive the killings by disguising himself as a scarecrow. From the beginning Salarrué describes the soldiers as animals: “Las sombras de la noche venían por varios rumbos acorralando otros rumores lejanos.



Eran (entre balidos lúgubres) el croar de los sapos de hierro, las ametralladoras intermitentes” (“El espantajo” 65). The previous quote compares the soldiers to iron frogs with machine guns, which come to wreak havoc on the local population. The soldiers have lost their humanity because they have become killing machines for the government. They no longer remember their peasant and indigenous origins, and turn against their neighbors and fellow human beings. On the other hand, the indigenous villagers are compared to dried corn and rice fields that are cut down by a steel blade: “Los indios se doblaban cortados por la hoja acerada, como gavillas de arroz o como milpas secas. La guardia batía inmisericorde los cantones y escondrijos montañosos” (65). It is very interesting how Salarrué compares the act of harvesting corn and rice to that of killing humans. The guards’ strategy to kill their target, the indigenous man, is to hunt for him as if he were hiding in the maize.

The image of men cut down one by one like harvesting dry corn and sheaves of rice is powerful because it shows how thorough the government forces were in annihilating the indigenous peasants. It also brings to mind Miguel Ángel Asturias’ famous novel, *Men of Maiz* (1949). This is a novel based on the Mayan legend, which states that men were created from maize. This legend has its origins in the Mayan sacred book, the *Popol Vuh*. Given the authors’ geographical proximity, Asturias might have been familiar with Salarrué’s short story, which was written before *Men of Maiz*. In any case, both authors allude to the Mayan legend about the

origins of mankind. This Mayan legend is very relevant in “El espantajo” because the military soldiers come to destroy the indigenous creation, the men of corn. Once again, the native man is caught in the “patriotic” battle against “communism.” This story does an outstanding job at describing the 1932 human casualties and dehumanization of the men of corn. Salarrué warned both the left and the right in his previous essay against the hegemonic discourse of patriotism, which was not only divisive, but also treacherous for all Salvadorans. During the massacre, the soldiers were deemed “patriotic” in their defense against “communism.” In the process, they killed thousands of their fellow countrymen. In this story, Salarrué sheds light on the state’s sponsored violence against the native population. The government forces quickly turn to ashes the peasant males and their scenic and peaceful village.

#### 2.4 Linguistic Hybridity

While describing the devastation of the village, Salarrué also acknowledges the Spanish linguistic hybridity by using the Salvadoran vernacular: “En el cantón Casamaluco, al **jaz** del **tunalmil**, se alzaba el rancho **chacho** de Idalecio Cune, yerno de Chico Sánchez, el jefe indio. Allí se quedaron solas las mujeres, el anciano Ulogio Ceya y el **dundito** Lalo Chután [...]” (65). The story mixes colloquial and standard Spanish. Colloquial Spanish is distinguished from standard Spanish by bolded words like **jaz**, **tunalmil**, **chacho** and **dundito**.<sup>14</sup> In this passage the women beg Lalo to leave, so that he can avoid death: “—Te **jueras**, Laló, **onde** el **señor**, Brido,

¿**arrecordás?**, en el pueblo, en la tienda” (65) and Lalo answers, “¿Qué a yo también, **pue?**— preguntaba— ¿qué me **enjusilan** a yo?” (66). Instead of spelling **fueras** with an “f,” the standard way, it is spelled with a “j.” Salarrué also omits the “d” in the word **donde** (where), and the “s” in the conjunction **pues**. He adds the prefix “ar” to the informal *vos* conjugation **arrecordás** (you remember?). Salarrué gives colloquial speech literary representation at a time when there hardly was any among the national literature. Perhaps he deliberately chose to write in this manner, to give credibility to his indigenous characters’ account of the massacre since they were the most affected by this horrific event.

This story also describes a world turned upside down because those characters that are supposed to “protect” the people end up killing them at random. Lalo, the most rational character, is portrayed as cognitively impaired. His actions contrast with those of the military, who act irrationally by killing for the sake of killing. The elderly gentleman tells Lalo, “—Te **enjusilan** mientras **siaverigua** [...] **andatiyendo** hijo, la Virgen te proteja” (66). He can be killed while they “find out,” so he must leave. Salarrué has taken the Spanish verb “fusilar,” which means to execute by a firing squad and turned it into a vernacular verb with the preposition “en” (on) attached to the last syllable, “enjusilar.” He does a similar thing with the Spanish verb “averiguar” where he uses the impersonal “se” and misspells it with an “i” instead of an “e.” Similarly, he does not separate the “se;” he attaches it to the beginning of the word

**siaverigua** and not “se averigua,” which means, “one finds out.” In this manner, he rescues the Salvadoran vernacular from the margins and brings it to the center. Salarrué challenges the assumption that standard Spanish is better than colloquial speech by juxtaposing them next to each other in “El espantajo.”

According to López Vallecillos, this type of writing is difficult for the reader, who is not familiar with the Salvadoran vernacular. However, “no hay duda que la palabra del personaje traslada un pensamiento mágico, un modo de ver y entender los hechos reales dentro de una totalidad que difiere enormemente de cómo ven el mundo las clases cultas, europeizadas o norteamericanizadas” (9). The dialect spoken by each character differs greatly from the national standard spoken by the educated. These characters represent a hybrid world that depicts the indigenous cultural heritage and the Spanish. This world is juxtaposed against the world occupied by the upper classes, who are Europeanized or Americanized.

The indigenous cultural heritage is seen in the use of Spanish words with Nahuatl origins. This is exemplified in the description of the story’s scarecrow: “Era un muñeco **zacatón** desvencijado ya, en su estructura de paja de arroz y **mecate**, que tenía de cabeza una gran bola de **tarro** con dos hoyos de ojos y la boca colorada, pintada con **achiote**. Piltrafas del petate podrido por el sereno y unas hilachas de camisa” (67). The highlighted words are used in colloquial speech and three of these words, *zacatón*, *mecate* and *achiote* are words that come from the

Nahuatl words *zacatl*, *mecatl* and *achiyotl*.<sup>15</sup> *Zacatón* is another way of saying “grass,” while *mecate* is a type of string made from banana trees, and the word *achiote* is a type of red spice. The use of these words emphasizes an indigenous cultural heritage, and acknowledges the hybridization of Spanish in rural El Salvador. At the same time, it challenges the standard Spanish spoken by the upper classes. The Salvadoran vernacular in Salarrué’s literature, which has many Nahuatl words, gives power to this indigenous language. It also immortalizes it as written word and an important part of indigenous tradition.

## **2.5 The Role of Women**

Not only does this story incorporate indigenous language, but it also highlights the role of women during the time of the massacre. Women are oral historians who denounce the military killings in their village. Their role is important because the government tried to “erase” the historical record of the massacre, but in this short story, the women are the porters of the collective memory of the massacre. Women characters condemn the soldiers’ rampant killings, and they are the messengers, who spread the news about the military atrocities. A young woman named Nicolasa Tule embodies this role when she tells the other characters that the soldiers are killing all men who are fifteen years and older (67-68).<sup>16</sup> Nicolasa discusses the impact of the military assassinations in their village:

Dicen que colgaron al Ama, el que manda. Mataron al de la Lola Shupte, al de la María Gaitán, al Calistro, que apenas andaba en los catorce, al Trine Monte, a los

Ceyas, a los Avila y al Juan de la Nemesia ¡Virgen de los Dolores; nos van a dejar sin hombres esos **dianches** del Gobierno! (68)

The women list the names of the men, who have died. Among the dead are Indian Chief, Ama, and a fourteen-year-old boy. They fear that the government soldiers will kill all of their men. They describe the soldiers as *dianches*, a colloquial Spanish word for demons. Again, the soldiers are deprived of their humanity in their depiction. They are described as possessed demons who are there to annihilate the indigenous male population. The women are also protectors of life when they try to save Lalo.

## **2.6 Dehumanization & Survival**

The dehumanization of soldiers is an indirect protest against the psychology of war and conflict that leads to the destruction of human life. During the massacre, the war against the peasants transformed soldiers into killing machines and savage animals without any regard or respect for life. The soldiers' actions bring to mind Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *the underground man*. According to Bakhtin, "The underground Man hates his own face because in it he senses the power of another person over him, the power of that other's evaluations and opinions. He himself looks on his own face with another's eyes, with the eyes of the other. And this alien glance interruptedly merges with his own glance and creates in him a peculiar hatred toward his own face" (235). The soldiers hate their fellow indigenous peasants because Martínez has indoctrinated them to believe they are inferior. The soldiers use a pejorative language when they

communicate with the peasants, whom they see as an “other.” They even mistake a scarecrow for an indigenous peasant:

- Era un muñeco espantajo el indio **jodido**.
- ¡Qué tirada llevamos, hermano!
- Tiene uno que andar alerta, compañero, cuando menos **sintás** te rajan el coco con el corvo esos endiablados. (69)

The description of the scarecrow shows that the soldiers view the indigenous people as “demons,” out to attack them, so they must kill them first. The soldiers try to distance themselves from the indigenous peasant. However, the soldiers also have indigenous roots, so their disdain for the peasants is partly directed at their own identity. The soldiers are so paranoid that they shoot at anything that resembles a human being. The most chilling effect of this episode is when they injure Lalo, and he has to conceal his pain, to protect his life: “Los tiros pasaron al tarro pero no me tocaron la cabeza. Un bausán me metió la bayoneta, diciendo: ‘**¡Espantajuemilpa infeliz, miadado un susto!...**’ Yo aguanté **lestocada** sin encogerme mucho ni gritar y **diay se jueron** riendo” (69). Lalo’s actions and lack of emotion reveals that in order to survive, he has to renounce his own humanity and he turns into a mindless scarecrow. “El espantajo” is an excellent literary source about the massacre because it describes the chilling rural atmosphere of the time, and it gives voice to the people most affected by the atrocities of 1932, the indigenous peasants.

## 2.7 Documentary Poetry of the Massacre

Roque Dalton wrote three documentary poems that reference *La Matanza*: “Viejuemierda,” “Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932,” and “Todos.” Robert Pring-Mill defines this type of poetry in “The Redemption of Reality Through Documentary Poetry,” an introductory essay to *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems* (1980). He says:

[...] *Documentary Poems* set out to ‘document’ reality (and so redeem it) in a more dialectically visual way: picturing things, peoples, and events in the light of a clear-cut sociopolitical commitment; selecting, shaping, and imposing interpretive patterns on the world, with liberal use of such filmic ‘editing’ techniques as crosscutting, accelerated montage, or flash frames; and pursuing ‘the redemption of physical reality’ by bringing us ‘back into communication’ with its harshness and its beauty.’ (Pring-Mill ix-x)<sup>17</sup>

Although Pring-Mill is discussing Cardenal’s documentary poetry, his definition of this genre is useful in the analysis of Dalton’s poems. According to Pring-Mill, documentary poetry is much more visual in its documentation and redemption of reality. Dalton’s poems are dialectically visual in their documentation of 1932. Dalton uses the filmic techniques of crosscutting, accelerated montage, and flash frames that Pring-Mill believes are essential elements to documentary poems. Dalton’s poetry is highly sociopolitical and it is a call for political action. Dalton’s poem, “Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932” is a strong example of documentary poetry.



## 2.8 Voicing the Other

The style of “Hechos” is closer to prose than to verse since the poem does not follow a traditional meter or rhyme. Additionally, “Hechos” emphasizes an ethical purpose, over poetic aesthetics. This poem is structurally divided into various sections that highlight different aspects of the time. The first segments provide a montage of political facts, which give a historical background. This is typical of documentary poems: “They are strictly ‘factual,’ but facts can be double-edged, and their juxtapositions can also set up further meanings” (Pring-Mill x). The poetic element engages the reader because “he has to visualize sequences of disparate images (each one a snatched glimpse of reality), noting their pairings and progressions, matching them both with each other and with what is left unsaid—and thereby sharing in the extraction of their fuller ‘meaning’” (x).

An example of this is found in the passage called *Close Up*, which is a flash frame of the first Salvadoran democratic election: “Arturo Araujo fue electo Presidente en las únicas elecciones libres de este siglo en El Salvador” (Dalton 114). The next flash frame references General Martínez’s coup d’état, which ousted Araujo’s government. These two passages juxtapose the persecution of communists with their electoral victories. What is left unsaid is that the Salvadoran government did not recognize the political gains of the Communist Party, which created further tensions between them. In a fragment called *Plano medio*, the poem gives a

snapshot of the Communists' diplomatic efforts to avoid an armed-revolt. The poem implies that the communists did not initially endorse armed struggle. They took up arms after other nonviolent efforts failed, and when they were persecuted and assassinated. In these opening scenes, Dalton sheds light on the political chaos of the time.

Dalton's poem first sets the political climate of life under a military dictatorship, and later incorporates specific voices to give their account of the massacre. His poem challenges the official discourse of *La Matanza*. Polyphonic narrators and characters demand to be heard. In a collage of multiple voices, different narrators give their own account of *La Matanza*. For example, discourses of power emerge through the voices and actions of General Martínez, members of the military, the landlords and institutions like the Catholic Church. In contrast, anonymous narrators who give their own account of the events of 1932 represent the people's voice. These two contrasting voices share a dialogic relationship of contradiction or affirmation. Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of *dialogic relationships* and *double-voiced discourse* in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* provide an analytic lens for "Hechos." According to Bakhtin, a *double-voiced discourse* "is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another's discourse*, toward *someone else's speech*" (Bakhtin 185). "Hechos" is polyphonic in its use of multiple narrators and intertextual references that narrate

conflicting perspectives of *La Matanza*. The different discourses of *Hechos* enter into a dialogic relationship of power where they either affirm or contradict one another.

According to Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

Two discourses equally and directly oriented toward a referential object within the limits of a single context cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically, regardless of whether they confirm, mutually supplement, or (conversely) contradict one another or find themselves in some other dialogic relationship (that of question and answer, for example). (188-89)

Bakhtin's notions of *dialogic relationships* are applied in a section of the poem called *Vox Populi*, a Latin phrase that means the people's voice. In this scene, two poetic voices intersect dialogically and contradict each other regarding the topic of torture. A third- person narrator, who represents the military discourse of power, denies the use of torture, "En 1932 no se torturó a nadie" (119). The narrator provides evidence of the absence of torture: "Ya sólo con fusilar aquellas tanatadas de gente teníamos más trabajo del que podíamos atender con seriedad" (119). The voice is a collective "we," that represents the perpetrators, those who enforced the military discourse of power against the marginalized.

A different anonymous narrator, meant to represent the people's voice, enters into a dialogic relationship of contradiction with the military discourse when it asks the question: "¿Qué no se torturó? Eso es falso. Se torturaba diaria y constantemente" (119-20). The people's voice questions the military's denial of torture and presents its own account of the

different methods of torture used by the authorities: “Toda persona que era capturada era muerta después de horribles palizas, macheteadas, sacaduras de ojos, colgaduras” (120). Hangings, beatings, stabbings and dismembering were all used to torture peasants. The people’s voice describes deadly consequences if a peasant resisted arrest: “Cuando se capturaba a un campesino que hubiera hecho resistencia se le cogía entre cuatro por brazos y piernas, se le lanzaba al aire y se le enganchaba en la caída con las bayonetas. La única garantía de no ser torturado era ser muerto desde lejos” (120). This voice contradicts the military’s torture discourse.

“Hechos” engages in several dialogic relationships, which at times involve whole or partial utterances. Bakhtin describes the different kinds of dialogic relationships:

Dialogic relationships are possible not only among whole (relatively whole) utterances; a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else’s semantic position, as the representative of another person’s utterance, that is if we hear in it someone else’s voice. (184)

Individuals can echo the words or ideas of someone else, in a conscious or unconscious manner. In “Hechos” when the poetic voice declares that only a revolution can defend a country’s sovereignty, the narrator is repeating someone else’s revolutionary discourse. This is made clear when the poetic voice quotes the Nicaraguan revolutionary Augusto César Sandino, “La soberanía de un pueblo no se discute: se defiende con las armas en la mano” (115). In Sandino’s

quote, one can also hear Dalton's Marxist ideology because when an individual repeats someone else's words the utterance can also encode their own semantic position.

Bakhtin argues that not only whole utterances, but also words can be "a sign of someone else's semantic position" (184). In the poem, the previous notion is applied to the semantics of the word "sovereignty," which changes depending on the speaker. The poetic voice quotes Sandino the first time the word is used, as a way of echoing a revolutionary discourse. The second time "sovereignty" is used the word alludes to General Martínez's semantic position. During the revolt the Americans and English offered their military aid to suppress the uprising; however, "El General Martínez dijo que eso no era bueno/para la soberanía nacional" (116). Martínez used the term sovereignty to dissuade a foreign military invasion that could have cost him his power. He wanted to be the only authority over the nation, thus his actions were motivated by self-interest. The poetic voice later mocks Martínez's semantic position regarding the country's sovereignty: "Martínez se pasó trece años defendiendo así la soberanía nacional" (116). "Hechos" repeats, and ridicules the general's narrow notion of the word sovereignty. The tyrant's semantic position is juxtaposed with that of Sandino's, who spoke about the sovereignty of a people and not a dictator. These two opposing discourses enter into a dialogic relationship of contradiction regarding the notion of sovereignty.

On the contrary, a military telegram sent to the dictator by the general of the counterinsurgency movement depicts a dialogic relationship. This dialogic relationship confirms the anti-communist attitude of the time. Martínez shared the message with the American and English admirals, who sympathized with his anti-communist agenda:

EN SALUDO A HONORABLES COMANDANTES DECLARAMOS SITUACIÓN ABSOLUTAMENTE DOMINADA FUERZAS GOBIERNO EL SALVADOR. GARANTIZADAS VIDAS PROPIEDADES CIUDADANOS EXTRANJEROS ACOGIDOS Y RESPETUOSOS LEYES DE LA REPÚBLICA. LA PAZ ESTÁ ESTABLECIDA EN EL SALVADOR. OFENSIVA COMUNISTA DESHECHA SUS FORMIDABLES NUCLEOS DISPERSOS. HASTA HOY CUARTO DÍA DE OPERACIONES ESTÁN LIQUIDADOS CUATRO MIL OCHOCIENTOS COMUNISTAS (116).

The anti-communist military discourse of the times is apparent in this telegram. The collective narrator even brags about the counterinsurgency measures of violence, which killed 4,800 communists in just a matter of days. The narrator knows that the report will impress the dictator, who in turn expects the same from the American and English admirals. The poetic voice questions the actions of the Americans and English, who offered their military aid to an unscrupulous dictator simply because he was fighting “communism.” The fascist dictator continued to enjoy the diplomatic support of the US government even after the massacre: “Los Estados Unidos reconocieron al Gobierno de Martínez en 1933” (124). The military telegram resonates and confirms the anti-communist discourse of General Martínez and his allies.

Dalton uses the technique of intertextuality to represent multiple perspectives of the atrocities of 1932. At times, these intertextualities affirm or contradict each other. In addition to the incorporation of Martínez's telegram, there is also a testimony given by Colonel Gregorio Bustamante Maceo.<sup>18</sup> The Colonel's conflictive perspective of the massacre enters into a dialogic relationship with the military discourse. His testimony represents a type of micro dialogue. According to Bakhtin, in a micro dialogue "dialogic relationships can permeate inside the utterance, even inside the individual word, as long as two voices collide within it dialogically" (Bakhtin 184). Bustamante Maceo's testimony reflects two voices, which collide with each other dialogically. His personal opinion of the military strategies used during the massacre collides with the military discourse of power. For example, during the capture and assassination of the communist leadership, the military confiscated lists of communist supporters. The government then used these lists to persecute and assassinate its opponents:

[...] habiéndoles cogido varias listas de adeptos en que figuraban los nombres de obreros residentes en la capital, todos fueron perseguidos y fusilados a medida que iban siendo atrapados, inclusive obreros inocentes que fueron denunciados por inquinas personales, pues bastaba el chisme de una vieja cualquiera para llevar a la muerte a muchos hombres honrados y cargados de familia. (117)

He confirms and speaks against the military's homogenization of the local population, in which everyone was a potential "enemy." Colonel Bustamante Maceo takes issue with the flawed military strategy to kill "communist's sympathizers." Many innocent people were killed because

gossip and personal grudges were enough to land an individual in military hands. There is guilt and outrage in his testimony since he struggles to cope with the military's counterinsurgency strategies. The Colonel's testimony shows that the executioners were also victims of the dictator. His testimony reveals a complex relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Colonel Bustamante Maceo's testimony also depicts the dehumanizing tactics used by the authorities. The authorities stripped victims of their names, and treated them as if they were disposable waste. The Colonel describes how the police took every night truckloads of people to a riverbank where they were shot and buried in "grandes zanjas abiertas de antemano. Ni los nombres de esos mártires tomaron los bárbaros ejecutores" (117). This passage sheds light on the military strategies of alienation. The perpetrators erased any possible human connection they shared with their victims. In addition, since the assassinations occurred at night, it was more difficult for the perpetrators to recognize those that they were killing. The executioners' actions reflect their military training by the government. The police were following the dictator's orders. They too were victims of his dehumanizing discourse. According to Bustamante Maceo, General Martínez had ordered the military leaders to take drastic measures to crush the rebellion, which meant that they had license to kill all of his opponents.

The Colonel expresses his personal outrage against the military's random assassinations. He narrates two incidences in which innocent bystanders were killed. In the first case, a group of



men who volunteered their services to the military were shot to death: “un grupo de hombres ingenuos que se presentó voluntariamente a las autoridades ofreciendo sus servicios, fue llevado al interior del Cuartel de la Guardia Nacional, donde puestos en fila fueron ametrallados sin quedar uno” (117). The Colonel describes the victims as “naïve” because they thought that the military men would spare their lives for offering their services. However, the military’s actions could not be predicted since they were illogical and chaotic. The Colonel recalls another incidence in the town of Juayúa that left all present dead:

En Juayúa se ordenó que se presentaran al Cabildo Municipal todos los hombres honrados que no fueran comunistas, para darles un salvoconducto, y cuando la plaza pública estaba repleta de hombres, niños y mujeres, pusieron tapadas en las calles de salida de la plaza y ametrallaron a aquellas multitudes inocentes, no dejando vivos ni a los pobres perros que siguen fielmente a sus amos indígenas (118).

This quote reflects the military’s ethnocide of the indigenous population. The indigenous peasants were tricked into believing that if they claimed they were not communist, their lives would be spared. In the end, this did not matter; the armed forces killed them and even murdered their pets. The Colonel is disgusted by these acts of violence. He is also appalled at the braggadocio attitude of the leader of this massacre. “El jefe que dirigió aquella terrible masacre, pocos días después, refería con lujo de detalles aquel hecho macabro en los parques y paseos de San Salvador, jactándose de ser el héroe de tal acción” (118). The leader’s words are subject to the Colonel’s own evaluation of them, and in this manner, they become *double-voiced*.

According to Bakhtin, “Someone else’s words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume a new (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them, that is, they become double-voiced” (195). In Colonel Bustamante Maceo’s words, one can hear two separate voices. The military leader’s voice is one of self-glorification, whereas the Colonel’s is one of scrutiny and condemnation.

The Colonel denounces the military’s heinous crimes against a civilian population they were supposed to “protect.” Unable to reconcile the military’s role in the assassination of thousands of innocent people, and troubled by his own role in these events, the Colonel is experiencing a metaphysical crisis. He wonders how military leaders can call themselves “heroes” after such gruesome acts of violence against their own fellow citizens. Throughout his testimony, his inability to cope with the military atrocities of the massacre is clear. The Colonel cannot find peace because the dead victims haunt his guilty conscience. At a time when he is experiencing postwar trauma, testifying against the military and revealing their crimes during the massacre provides Colonel Bustamante Maceo with mental relief. His testimony highlights the complicated relationship of victims and perpetrators.

A different narrator affirms the dictator’s counter-insurgency discourse, which empowers the authorities’ to kill, “Las Guardias Cívicas tenían carta libre para matar a cualquiera [...] Los grupos de la Guardia Cívica competían entre sí para ver quién podía matar o localizar más

comunistas en un día” (119). According to Bakhtin, “The relationships of agreement/disagreement, affirmation/supplementation, question/answer, etc. are purely dialogic relationships” (Bakhtin, 188). The guards engage in a dialogic relationship of agreement with Martínez’s military strategies. The dictator trained the civic guards, transforming them into professional killers. Now they killed for sport. The authorities became pawns of the dictator as they fought his anti-communist war. Moreover, Martínez had no respect for the judicial process. Prisoners were denied hearings and instead were immediately killed: “Las autoridades judiciales y militares, por el contrario, estimulaban a los miembros de tales cuerpos para que hicieran los menos prisioneros posibles y de una vez fueran haciendo justicia directa, a tiro limpio” (119).

Another voice in the poem enters into a dialogic relationship of disagreement with the Catholic Church’s discourse, which supported the use of excessive force against civilians: “Desde varios púlpitos de San Salvador los sacerdotes absolvieron previamente cualquier pecado que por exceso pudieran cometer los miembros de las Guardias Cívicas en el desempeño de sus labores anticomunistas” (119). This voice attacks the church for collaborating with the civic authorities and questions the morality of priests who supported the guards’ tactics of torture and death. The church allowed itself to become a tool of General Martínez and his armed forces. The Catholic Church was not the only entity that the poem criticizes for aiding General Martínez.

Members of the health care system also cooperated with the government and its allies. They too had internalized the military's discourse of annihilation and intimidation. According to Bakhtin, "All understanding is dialogical. Understanding is opposed to another within a dialogue. Understanding is in search of a counter-discourse to the discourse of the utterer" (Todorov 22). Hospital workers understood that they had to enforce the laws of the dictator, or face the consequences of disobeying the government. Many hospitals cooperated with the authorities, aligning themselves with the discourse of power and turning against their patients. Hospitals became morgues of the regime: "En todos los hospitales había orden de avisar a la Guardia o a la Policía sobre los heridos que llegaran a pedir curación. Así se capturó y se remató a muchos que habían sobrevivido a los ametrallamientos en las zonas rurales" (120). The discourse of power infiltrated the public health system and took away the institution's autonomy.

In a different passage, another voice speaks against the horrific actions of a group of civic guards who raided a brothel. The guards repeat the military's discourse of power when they accuse the prostitutes of communism and threaten to kill them: "Un destacamento de la Guardia Cívica en San Salvador allanó un conocido prostíbulo y venta de aguardiente. Con la amenaza de que si no aceptaban complacerlos, las acusarían de comunistas y las matarían, obligaron a las prostitutas a participar en una orgía que duró una semana, hasta que se agotaron las existencias del licor" (120). According to Bakhtin, "No utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker

exclusively; it is the product of the interaction of the interlocutors, and, broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred” (Todorov, 30). The interactions between the guards and brothel workers convey the dehumanizing aspect of the military discourse. The guards treat the brothel employees as if they are property and do with them as they please, with utter disregard for their humanity. They even beat one of their victims to death. This passage highlights the brothel workers’ sexual, physical and psychological violence, and it denounces the guards’ misogynistic actions.

The discourse of power is also clear in the anti-peasant legislation of the time. These laws protected the interests of landlords. The poem quotes several laws that were enforced by the National Guard, who worked closely with the landed elites. For example, article 71 states, “Los agentes de la Guardia Nacional, al primer requerimiento de cualquier hacendado o agricultor, capturarán a la persona o personas que éste les indique como sospechosas, bajo su responsabilidad...” (122). The article does not specify why someone would be considered a suspect, and instead gives landlords moral power to judge their employee’s motives and behaviors. The legal fate of peasants was at the mercy of their bosses. Article 75 made it legal to detain peasants traveling at night if the authorities suspected they transported stolen cargo:

Todas las personas que en despoblado fueran encontradas de noche por los agentes de la autoridad deberán ser requeridas, si fueren sospechosas, para que manifiesten lo que conduzcan, y si llevan bestias u otros animales, se les preguntará de quién son los semovientes y los efectos que conduzcan [...] y si

efectivamente resultaren sospechosos, según las explicaciones, podrán ser detenidos hasta mejor averiguación de semovientes, carga y vehículos...” (123).

The previous law discriminated against the peasant population because it stereotyped them as thieves. Since the legislation singled out peasants as criminals, they could not prove their innocence when confronted by authorities. According to Dalton, these laws increased rural repression and led to “la expulsión de los pequeños propietarios de sus parcelas” and subjugated the “proletariado rural a condiciones esclavistas de trabajo” (123). The landlords’ discourse went unchecked because the constitution protected them. The narrator states that these oppressive laws subjugated the peasant population decades after the massacre. This implies a call for revolutionary action to dismantle the oppressive system of the massacre. Dalton revolutionary message will be clearer in his poem called “Todos.”

As has been demonstrated, the narrators of “Hechos” enter in to a dialogue about the massacre. Some voices affirm the discourse of power, while others challenge it.

## **2.9 A Call for Radical Change**

As the title implies, “Todos” is a poem addressed to the Salvadoran masses. According to Dalton the 1932 massacre left every Salvadoran, including those who were not born yet, half dead because it killed their spirit and will to fight against the oppressive powers of the time.

Dalton describes a broken and demoralized society when he says:

Todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932  
sobrevivimos pero medio vivos

cada uno con una cuenta de treinta mil muertos enteros  
 que se puso a engordar sus intereses  
 sus réditos  
 y que hoy alcanza para untar de muerte a los que siguen  
 naciendo. (128)

He depicts a type of hybrid zombie society with only half of its humanity: “eso que se mueve/es la mitad de la vida que nos dejaron” (128). *La Matanza* took away people’s sense of wholeness. When he speaks of the number being higher than thirty thousand deaths due to “interest,” he alludes to the military persecution of the opposition after the massacre. “Todos” unveils the scars and wounds of the past, which have not yet healed. They remain open wounds of the collective memory, and occupy a place in the Salvadoran subconscious. According to Carlos Roberto Paz Manzano in *La teoría literaria de Roque Dalton* (2009) “Todos” is a call for raising awareness about 1932: “El juego sintáctico establece un motivo filosófico que invita a la toma de conciencia” (255).

However, the poem’s turning point highlights the mortality of the perpetrators: “los asesinos presumen no solamente de estar totalmente vivos/sino también de ser inmortales” (128). This is a strategy to empower the demoralized masses, who have been made to believe that their oppressors cannot be defeated. In the midst of death and collective suffering, the poetic voice proposes a solution:

Unámonos medio muertos que somos la patria  
 para *hijos suyos podernos llamar*

en nombre de los asesinados  
 unámonos contra los asesinos de todos  
 contra los asesinos de los muertos y de los medio muertos (128).

“Todos” calls for unity of the masses, who were victims of the military regime. They are to avenge the dead and defeat their enemy and oppressors. The poem is a call to revolutionary action. One of the characteristics of documentary poetry is that it demands further action from the reader. A poet in this genre “wishes to prod us beyond thought and into action,” his/her “texts are never just concerned to document and understand reality, but also to help change it” (Pring-Mill x). According to Pring-Mill the poet must record the data first, “before reality can be reshaped, and the reshaping lies beyond the poems themselves: the changes for which the poet yearns lie in the future” (x). “Todos” first references the psychological impact of the massacre in all Salvadorans, and it ends with a call to arms struggle. Dalton does not deviate from his revolutionary agenda in this poem.

### **2.10 Masferrer and the Vital Minimum**

Dalton is very critical of different individuals and sectors of the population for not condemning the status quo or the dominant discourse about the massacre. For example, Dalton’s poem “Viejuemierda” is especially skeptical of one Salvadoran intellectual and writer, Alberto Masferrer (1868-1932). He takes issue with Masferrer’s thinking, and he criticizes Masferrer for not denouncing the atrocities of 1932. According to Paz Manzano, Dalton believes that the



writer's political commitment should be “en función del proyecto revolucionario,” such an idea “genera inflexibilidad hacia quienes rechazan dicho compromiso” (25). For Dalton, the only role of the intellectual is a revolutionary one. Since Masferrer is not a Marxist revolutionary, Dalton has no respect for his social theories.

Masferrer was one of the most nationally celebrated Salvadoran thinkers, essayists and fictional authors of the time. Paz Manzano describes him as a “ferviente denunciador de las injusticias y de los Estados Unidos” (257). Masferrer is best known for his concept of *vitalismo*, which is defined in *El minimum vital* (1928-29), a series of articles that appeared in his newspaper *La Patria*. According to Karen Racine:

Masferrer's doctrine of the vital minimum captured the imagination of reform-minded humanitarians across the isthmus. In it he complained about the many evils and vices which plagued his beloved country: truancy, lack of access to education in rural areas, drunkenness, malnutrition, a corrupt justice system, usury, prostitution, insufficient medical care, impassible roads, the presence of foreign companies, and the availability of obscenities at local bookstores<sup>19</sup>. (225)

However, his doctrine did not mention the abuses of political power—probably because he did not call for political reforms.<sup>20</sup> He advocated moderate elite-sponsored reforms that would be more empathetic to the lower classes. Masferrer “intended to change the prevailing attitudes among El Salvador's governing elite” (Racine 225). His measures were only preventive, designed to fulfill the basic necessities of life.

## 2.11 Poetic Mockery

Edward Said's notion of the role of the intellectual in his *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (1996) provides a critical lens in the analysis of Masferrer's philosophy of *vitalismo*. One of the main points of Said's lectures is to "speak about intellectuals as precisely those figures whose public performances can neither be predicted nor compelled into some slogan, orthodox party line, or fixed dogma" (Said xii). Masferrer's philosophy of *vitalismo* at times appears a bit fixed and orthodox<sup>21</sup>. Masferrer echoes Said's notion of the "insider," who works for the selective few. In *Representations of the Intellectual* he says, "Insiders promote special interests, but intellectuals should be the ones to question [...], corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege" (xiii). Masferrer resembles the *insider* because he did not have an issue with the rule of the privileged few.

Said says that the "insiders" and "experts" are a problem that the intellectual has to confront: "the insiders, experts, coteries, professionals who in the modes defined earlier this century by pundit Walter Lippmann mold public opinion, make it conformist, encourage a reliance on a superior little band of all-knowing men in power" (xiii). For Said, intellectuals have the responsibility to speak against the concentration of power in the hands of a few "all-knowing men," so he would dispute Masferrer's elitist philosophy. Although Masferrer was not wealthy, he can be seen as part of the "all-knowing men in power" because his opinions were

very influential in maintaining the status quo. He advocated moderate social and economic reforms from within the existing governing structure. In this way, he echoes the “insider” that Said describes because he promoted the interests of the powerful by not advocating political reforms that would challenge the existing power structure.

According to Said, “All of us live in a society, and are members of a nationality with its own language, tradition, historical situation. To what extent are intellectuals servants of these actualities, to what extent enemies?” (xv). Masferrer was mainly a servant of his actualities because primarily he was not seen as an enemy of the state. It was not until after General Martínez took power in December 1931 that Masferrer was seen as an “enemy” of the government. In Said’s view, “the principal intellectual duty is the search for relative independence from such pressures. Hence my characterizations of the intellectual as exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power” (xvi). Based on the above characterizations, Masferrer falls short of the role of the intellectual since he only moderately spoke the truth to power.<sup>22</sup> Masferrer was not a marginal figure during his time; he enjoyed fame, and was well liked by most governments. Masferrer’s fame among the elites would be problematic for Said because this does not show the intellectual as an exile and marginal figure. According to Said, intellectuals should be in direct opposition and not accommodation of the status quo: “the challenge of intellectual life is to be found in dissent

against the status quo at a time when the struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them” (xvii).

Dalton takes issue with Masferrer’s thinking and philosophy of *vitalismo* because it did not call for a dismantling of the power structure of the time, which was responsible for the horrific living conditions of those who rebelled in 1932. In “Viejuemierda” Dalton finds his philosophy of life hypocritical, since Masferrer does not specify how one is to fulfill the basic necessities that he describes in his writings. The title of this poem is very telling of Dalton’s view of Masferrer because it literally means “An old man full of shit.” The poem begins with a flashback of Masferrer’s professional life, philosophy and birth.<sup>23</sup> The poetic voice is initially in the third person singular, but quickly changes into a collective we. This shift occurs when the poetic voice explains the purpose of the poem. “En este poema trataremos de explicar algunas razones por las que un hombre así ha sido santificado y oficializado como filósofo-sociólogo-profeta nacional por las sucesivas dictaduras que ha sufrido el país, hecho que no ha dejado de extrañar a algunas almas cándidas” (103). The poem’s purpose is to demystify the glorification of Masferrer by the various Salvadoran dictatorships, which put Masferrer on a pedestal and sanctified him as a national philosopher, sociologist and prophet. The poet takes issue with this view when he says that some *almas cándidas* (“candid souls”) have been puzzled by this praise of Masferrer.

The poetic voice explains how these *almas cándidas* question the exaltation of Masferrer: “Dichas almas cándidas se preguntan por qué se exalta tanto a este hombre llamado ‘un ala contra el huracán,’ ‘el terrible San Juan Salvadoreño,’ ‘el gran demoledor de mentiras,’ ‘el formidable agitador de la patria,’ precisamente en un país tan esencialmente injusto como es El Salvador” (103). Dalton uses irony in this poem to mock the veneration of Masferrer because despite his fame as the “great agitator” (103), and his pleas for a more just society, El Salvador remained the same. The poem criticizes Masferrer’s philosophy and equates his thinking to that of Argentine writer Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) since both, according to Dalton, confused “a cada rato los pobres con los bárbaros” (104). Dalton has little respect for intellectuals who in their efforts to improve the lot of the poor degenerate their human condition by comparing them with barbarians who lack civilization. For Dalton, someone who believed in the stereotypes of the rural villagers does not deserve to be called their great national agitator. Said’s intellectual would also denounce such stereotypes because “One task of the intellectual is the effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication” (xi).

Dalton criticizes and mocks some principles of Masferrer’s philosophy of the vital minimum:

Del cristianismo aprendió la paciencia de la otra mejilla. Y contra la violencia  
alzó la lechuga del vegetarianismo. Predicó la castidad, el antialcoholismo y la

alfabetización, el derecho del hombre al aire y al agua pura, a la alimentación suficiente, variada, nutritiva y saludable, el derecho a la habitación, amplia, seca, soleada y aireada, a la Justicia (con mayúscula), pronta, fácil, igualmente accesible a todos, a la educación primaria y complementaria eficaz, que formara hombres cordiales, trabajadores expertos y jefes de familia conscientes. (104-105)

In this quote, the poem continues with its ironic tone. For example, the poetic voice explains that Masferrer's Christian doctrine taught him patience and to offer the other cheek when confronted with violence. One of the distinctions between these two writers is that Masferrer was a pacifist, who truly believed in reforming the existing governing structure for the betterment of society as a whole. He thought that the wealthy could be persuaded to improve the lot of the poor. The latter was highly unlikely considering that 90 percent of the nation's wealth was controlled by less than one percent of the population (McClintock 101). Unfortunately, Masferrer did not foresee the great evils of a capitalist society, which thrives on the exploitation of the poorest sectors of the population.

Dalton, on the other hand, was a trained and devoted Marxist. According to Paz Manzano, "el poeta ingresa al partido comunista y viaja en 1957 a Moscú para asistir a un congreso de la Juventud Comunista" (13). Dalton also lived in communist societies during his years of exile: "Entre 1962 y 1973, después de experimentar el cautiverio en El Salvador, reside en varios países: Cuba y Checoslovaquia, y se moviliza por otras regiones del mundo" (Paz Manzano 14). A revolutionary Dalton had internalized the communist ideology of his time,

which led him to believe that social change was only possible through armed struggle. Dalton's solution has its own limitations as it endorses a shift in the binary relationships of power, without specifying how his classless society will actually function. Furthermore, Dalton fails to theorize about the role of the intellectual in his utopia. Said would criticize Dalton because the intellectual is an important figure, who must always question the status quo, regardless of who is in power.

Nevertheless, both Dalton and Masferrer believed in the right to literacy, education, health care, food, shelter, etc. Their differences resided in the process of how to obtain those human needs. Dalton promoted a communist revolution that would guarantee basic human rights for everyone. Masferrer was a reformist, who endorsed the implementation of his social program, the vital minimum, to satisfy the necessities of the marginalized. Dalton did not view the vital minimum as a viable solution, and accused Masferrer of not having a concrete and realistic plan to fulfill all of one's basic needs: "se cuidó mucho de explicarnos cómo es que se podrían conseguir esas maravillas, en forma equitativa para todos. Lo más que hizo fue remitirnos a la responsabilidad del Gobierno y a la majestad de la Ley, a la voluntad de Dios y a la buena disposición de los ricos" (105). Masferrer's strategic plan was to let the government decide how they would implement his social plan. As the previous quote emphasizes, he relied too heavily on the "buena disposición de los ricos" (the good will of the rich).

Masferrer falls short of the concept of *real intellectual* that Said describes in his lectures<sup>24</sup>. Said explains, “Real intellectuals are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority” (6). The issue with Masferrer is that he did not go far enough in his denunciations. He listed some of the main problems facing the poor. However, he failed to attack the root causes of poverty, which largely had to do with the tremendous unequal distribution of wealth, and the labor exploitation in the great coffee and sugar cane plantations. He naively believed that the wealthy would ultimately want to help the poor since he thought it was in their best interest.<sup>25</sup> This said, Paz Manzano believes that Masferrer’s theories “dejan una enseñanza que invita a reflexionar acerca de los problemas sociales” (257).

One of Dalton’s main criticisms is Masferrer’s utopian idealism without an effective plan to achieve that perfect society. “Si la utopía es la codificación del mayor número de aspiraciones humanas sin que se adjunte un método concreto y efectivo para su realización, don Alberto Masferrer fue un utopista típico” (106). Dalton does not believe Masferrer’s thinking and doctrine of *vitalismo* was enough to achieve a more just society. The poet gets frustrated with the faith that Masferrer had in the upper classes, the government and their moral obligation to help those in need:



Que tuvo su política de cuadros, tuvo su política de cuadros: dejó dicho que el fervor para conseguir todo aquello que llamaba el ‘mínimum vital’ debía provenir de hombres sujetos a la Nueva Fe que además aceptaran como mandamientos individuales los de ser trabajadores asiduos, los de ayudar a sus hijos y a sus padres (siempre que fueran ancianos necesitados), contribuir al sostenimiento de orfanatorios, hospitales y asilos de indigentes de su comuna o provincia (106).

For Dalton, it was not enough to be a good worker, parent, offspring or citizen contributing to various charities such as orphanages and hospitals. These good deeds were not sufficient for the leveling of society that Dalton ultimately believed in. Masferrer on the other hand, saw these social attitudes as part of his *Nueva Fe* (“New Faith”), which, if implemented nationally, would alleviate the suffering of the marginalized.

Dalton sees Masferrer’s philosophy of vitalism as a bandage on a bleeding wound and not a cure. In the poem, he quotes some of his essays and argues with Masferrer’s solutions to the various social ills. For example, he quotes Masferrer’s essay “Leer y escribir” (1915) in which he says, “nosotros no somos todavía una patria. Porque este país—agrega luego, profundizando la expresión—tal como se halla ahora constituido, es un monstruo” (108-109). In this quote, Masferrer calls El Salvador a “monster” and not a country or nation because at the time it was mainly rural. Masferrer associates civilization with urban cities. In the next passage, Dalton quotes Masferrer’s article “La cultura por medio del libro,” where he gives specific reasons for denying statehood to El Salvador:

‘Nos consta que la tercera parte de nuestras 48 ciudades [...] no tienen, como instrumentos de cultura (fuera de la iglesia y el ayuntamiento, telarañosos y

destartalados), más que el patio de gallos y el estanco. Todavía peor: hay muchas de esas ciudades que no tienen agua ni excusados en las casas.’ Y concluye gritando (‘el terrible San Juan’):

‘¿Cómo es posible que se permita edificar una casa sin excusados? ¿Cómo es posible que se confiera el honor de llamarse ciudad a un puñado de bárbaros que todavía no sienten la necesidad de tener excusados?’

Ésa es la palabra tramposa: la que denuncia la generalidad infinita del mal y propone soluciones de hormiga. El actual régimen social es injusto: construyamos letrinas. (109)

Masferrer criticizes the living conditions of many urban residents. He calls “barbarians” those citizens who lacked bathrooms, and did not consider their place of living a city. Dalton takes issue with Masferrer’s perspective and calls his thinking “deceitful rhetoric” (*palabra tramposa*) because it condemns the living conditions of many urban residents, but it does not propose adequate solutions. Dalton mocks Masferrer’s plan when he says “El actual régimen social es injusto: construyamos letrinas” (109). According to Dalton, building more bathrooms cannot solve social injustices. Dalton criticizes Masferrer because he does not address the root causes of poverty and therefore his solutions were superficial.

For example, Masferrer was against prostitution, but his solution was prayer and basic literacy skills (Dalton 110). Dalton on the other hand, saw prostitution as a type of human exploitation, which had become the norm in many other sectors of the population, and this could not be fixed by simply praying and teaching basic literacy. Dalton disapproves of Masferrer because his philosophy negatively affected many Salvadorans who believed in his “fantastic

solutions” (110) and were thus unable to see their reality. He calls Masferrer’s principles a type of “idiotic thinking,” which was employed by government officials, the military, educators, political parties and others to maintain the status quo:

Ésta es una de las trampas caza-bobos que nos dejó montadas ese viejo de mierda, la bomba de idiotez que hoy los gobiernos y los coroneles y los maestros de escuela más pícaros y descargados y los venerables guías de la juventud de manos sudorosas y las Agencias de Publicidad y los partidos políticos que presumen de nacionalistas y demócratas [...] lanzan al fondo de su alma de nuestra juventud para hogar su rebeldía. (110)

According to Dalton, those in power had used Masferrer’s philosophy to pacify the youth and kill their rebellious spirit. For Dalton, this is perhaps the most harmful thing that Masferrer could have done to the nation without even knowing. Dalton says that Masferrer did not realize that he would be remembered in the “true” history of his people as an accomplice to the deadly regimes. “Ni siquiera se dio cuenta que él iba a pasar a la historia de nuestra cultura (cuando se escriba la verdadera historia de nuestra cultura) como un cómplice objetivo de los asesinos del pueblo, a quienes les había ofrecido instrumentos más finos y tranquilizantes de explotación y dominación” (111). Dalton believes that Masferrer’s thinking was very influential in creating a dormant society that was at the will of the governing-elite. Masferrer’s *vital minimum* became a type of frozen creed that was used by the upper classes to appease those at the margins.

Said warns intellectuals against the freezing of ideas:

The intellectual’s representations—what he or she represents and how those ideas are represented to an audience—are always tied to and ought to remain an organic

part of an ongoing experience in society: of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless. These are equally concrete and ongoing; they cannot survive being transfigured and then frozen into creeds, religious declarations, professional methods. (113)

The people and the ideas that an intellectual represents are in a constant state of change and, once they are fixed, he argues, they cannot survive. This was one of Masferrer's flaws since he thought that if the government implemented his philosophy of the *vital minimum*, all of society's ills would be cured. The latter was far from the truth given that new social ills would have arisen even after his philosophy took effect. Said believes that "The hardest aspect of being an intellectual is to represent what you profess through your work and interventions, without hardening into an institution or a kind of automaton acting at the behest of a system or method" (121). Said declares it is dangerous to view one's own positions as "all important" (121). Intellectuals have to be open to new views, but they must always speak the truth to power.

For Said, "Speaking the truth to power is not Panglossian idealism: it is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change" (102). Unfortunately, Masferrer's thinking did not cause the right change that Said describes because, according to Dalton, it was not influential in preventing the massacre of 1932. Dalton finds it absurd that Masferrer was called a "communist," and that he did not deny such an accusation. Masferrer felt responsible for indoctrinating many of the peasants who were killed during *La Matanza*: "don Beto fue sin

embargo en vida acusado hasta de comunista. Y para colmo de males él mismo se lo creyó después de la matanza del 1932 y se fue a morir de flato a Guatemala creyéndose culpable de haber engañado a tanto muerto” (111).<sup>26</sup> Dalton mocks Masferrer’s feelings towards the massacre and accuses him of not being radical enough during this crucial period. He shows no compassion for Masferrer’s emotions and dismisses his depression.

According to the scholar Marta Elena Casaús Arzú, who has studied Masferrer’s letters in her book *El libro de la vida de Alberto Masferrer y otros escritos vitalistas* (2012) Masferrer did denounce the atrocities of *La Matanza* in a private letter to his sister, Teresa Masferrer that was written from his exile in Honduras on February 2, 1932. In this letter, Masferrer expresses his feelings of great sadness regarding the massive assassinations of *campesinos*, and he is very critical of the capitalist system. In addition, he criticizes the ruling classes for failing to implement his social reforms that might have avoided the horrors of the massacre:

“Ya sabrán de la matanza de campesinos habida en El Salvador con inmenso regocijo naturalmente, de curas, banqueros, terratenientes y todos esos gremios subordinados a los capitalistas que siguen a estos como los chacales a los tigres. Es algo horrendo y que despierta el deseo de no volver nunca a ese país. Lo que soy yo, me considero con esto desterrado para mucho tiempo, quizá para siempre. No me haría ninguna gracia estar ahí de mudo espectador, ante las represalias, la insolencia de los asesinos. (86)

Contrary to Dalton’s beliefs Masferrer clearly felt horrified by the government genocide against the peasant population, and he did denounce the atrocities in this private letter to his

sister. In addition, he died six months after *La Matanza*; perhaps it was too soon for him to write publically about such horrific event. Like many Salvadorans of his time, he was severely traumatized by the genocide of 1932. He was depressed because he could not believe the national army had killed an estimated 30,000 citizens: “To him this gruesome event represented the Salvadoran establishment’s unequivocal response to popular pressure for social change, and effectively removed the possibility of peaceful reform in his beloved country” (Racine 236). The massacre symbolized for Masferrer the ultimate failure of his philosophy of *vitalismo* because the government did not listen to the demands of the oppressed. Instead, it persecuted and slaughtered the masses. Unfortunately, no one will ever know what he would have done had he lived longer. Regardless of Masferrer’s ultimate regret over the failure of *vitalismo*, Dalton’s poem takes issue with Masferrer’s political role before and during *La Matanza*, and views him as a promoter of the existing oppressive power structure. The poetic voice harshly condemns Masferrer’s silence during the massacre and shows no sympathy for his actions. Dalton’s harsh criticism of Masferrer reflects his own Marxist ideology.

This chapter demonstrates that Dalton and Salarrué share some differences and similarities in their representation of the massacre. Their texts represent marginalized voices that give their account of *La Matanza*. Dalton was greatly influenced by Salarrué’s literary work. Salarrué’s influence can be seen in Dalton’s “monólogos coloquiales” and “otras estructuras que

implican una intención comunicativa, con acierto en lo cultural y lo histórico salvadoreño” (Paz Manzano 34). Nevertheless, there are differences in their social message concerning this period. As Paz Manzano argues, Dalton viewed *La Matanza* and the social inequalities of the time as legitimate reasons for an armed revolution: “la dictadura, el terrorismo de estado y la extrema pobreza de la población estarían legitimando la lucha armada de liberación promulgada por el poeta” (25).

On the contrary, Salarrué warned against divisive hegemonic discourses of the left and right, which led to the massacre. Salarrué proposed instead a change in human values, so that every individual could coexist peacefully in a more humane society. He was a pacifist, and not a Marxist revolutionary. Although Dalton and Salarrué’s solutions to the social issues of the time are different, their texts challenge the official discourse of the massacre. In this manner, they are defiant writers who chose to write about a taboo subject.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ***MIGUEL MÁRMOL: A SUBALTERN'S CONTESTATORY REPRESENTATION OF LA MATANZA***

This chapter deals with the representation of the massacre in Roque Dalton's testimonial text, *Miguel Mármol: los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador* (1971). Although there is some debate regarding the genre of *Miguel Mármol*, this analysis considers it a testimonial text because it has many of the characteristics of this literary mode. For example, the narrator is a real person, Miguel Mármol, who is also the main character of the book. He not only narrates his life story, but also provides some important historical developments and events in the history of El Salvador. These events vary from the spread of the labor movement, to the creation of the Communist Party, the social and working conditions of the working class and the poor, the unconstitutional government of General Martínez, the reasons for the failure of the 1932 revolt, and to his involvement in the planning of the revolt and his survival after being shot several times by government soldiers and then pronounced dead.

In this chapter, I will first examine the relation of *Miguel Mármol* with the testimonial genre, followed by some observations about the role of the subaltern in the text using the theoretical ideas of Gayatri Spivak. I will then develop Mármol's narrative of the massacre. Finally, I will highlight Mármol's contestatory response to the official discourse of the massacre and illuminate Dalton's reasons for writing and publishing this testimonial account more than



thirty years after *La Matanza*. Why was it important for Dalton, a poet, intellectual, activist and revolutionary to transcribe a subaltern's perspective concerning the massacre?

The literary critic Barbara Harlow supports the categorization of *Miguel Mármol* as an important testimonial account about the massacre in her article "Testimonio and Survival: Roque Dalton's Miguel Mármol" (1996). However, academics like Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching and Rafael Lara Martínez consider this book to be an example of what they call a *narrative re-configuration*:

Miguel *Mármol* should be seen as an interpretive history that came about through a process of what we identify as 'narrative reconfiguration,' in which Roque Dalton turned a few dozen pages of hand-written notes into a published book of more than five hundred pages during a five-year period between 1966 and 1971.<sup>27</sup> (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching and Lara Martínez 138)

Since it is not seen as a testimonial account of the massacre, these scholars dismiss its historical relevance. Their perception is limited, for it does not take into account that fiction often captures historical perspectives, just as historical accounts are not absolved from including fiction. One critic who has theorized about the fictionalization of history is Hayden White. In his book *Metahistory* (1973), White says:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and "fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds" his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part in the historian's operations. (White 6)

According to White, historical accounts are not as unbiased or objective as we would like to believe. They too are modes of emplotment about the past. White's theories are useful when arguing against the idea that Dalton's testimonial representation is not historical, and consequently that it should be discounted as a viable account of the events of 1932. John Beverly is also critical of intellectuals who view testimonial narrators like Rigoberta Menchú or, in this case, Miguel Mármol as a version of the "native informant." In Beverly's book, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (1999) he states:

It would be yet another version of the "native informant" to grant testimonial narrators like Rigoberta Menchú only the possibility of being witnesses, but not the power to create their own narrative authority and negotiate its conditions of truth and representativity. This amounts to saying that the subaltern can of course speak, but only through *us*, through our institutionally sanctioned authority and pretended objectivity as intellectuals, which give us the power to decide what counts in the narrator's raw material. (Beverley 79)

Despite the controversy surrounding the genre of *Miguel Mármol*, my analysis will consider this text an important testimonial book that sheds light on the non-official story about the massacre. Miguel Barnet's concept of *novela-testimonial* (testimonial-novel) and John Beverly's definition of what constitutes a *testimonio* provide an analytic lens to argue that Dalton's text lends itself to being categorized as a type of testimonial representation of the massacre, giving it important historical relevance.

### 3.1 On Testimonial Literature

What is a *testimonio*? According to John Beverly, it is a printed text narrated by a real person who bears witness to the events that he/she describes. A more thorough definition can be found in his article “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio:”

By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a “life” or a significant life experience. Testimonio may include, but it is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novella-testimonio*, non-fiction novel, or “factographic literature.” (Beverly 24-25)

This style of writing became very popular in Latin America during the mid to late sixties. According to Beverly, “it was sanctioned as a genre or mode by two related developments: the 1970 decision of Cuba’s Casa de las Américas to begin awarding a prize in this category in their annual literary contest, and the reception in the late 1960s of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Miguel Barnet’s *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave (Biografía de un cimarrón)* (1966)” (25). Miguel Barnet was not only a writer of the genre, but also one of the first Latin American writers who theorized about its definition.

This analysis references both Barnet’s and Beverly’s definitions of a *testimonio* because at times they contradict one another. For example, Barnet does not make a distinction between a

*testimonio* and a *novela testimonio*, but Beverly does. In Barnet's article *La novela testimonio*.

*Socio-Literatura* he provides four main characteristics of this genre:

1. la novela-testimonio debía ser un documento a la manera de un fresco, reproduciendo o recreando [...] aquellos hechos sociales que marcaran verdaderos hitos en la cultura de un país.
2. Debe proponerse un desentrañamiento de la realidad, tomando los hechos principales, los que más han afectado la sensibilidad de un pueblo y describiéndolos por boca de uno de los protagonistas más idóneos [...] Debe contribuir a la memoria colectiva, el *nosotros* y no el *yo*.
3. la supresión del *yo*, del *ego* del escritor o del sociólogo; o si no la supresión, para ser más justos, la discreción en el uso del *yo*, en la presencia del autor y su *ego* en las obras. Y no una desaparición [...] sino dejando que sea el protagonista quien con sus propias valoraciones enjuicie.
4. Contribuir al conocimiento de la realidad, imprimirle a ésta un sentido histórico, es otro rasgo indispensable de la novela-testimonio. [...] El gestor de la novela-testimonio tiene una sagrada misión y es la de revelar la otra cara de la medalla. (Barnet 287-94)

*Miguel Mármol* has the four main characteristics that Barnet believes are essential to the testimonial genre. It narrates important social and historical developments such as the creation of the first labor unions in El Salvador, the working conditions of coffee workers, the unsuccessful revolt of 1932 and the government atrocities that followed. This testimonial text also contributes to the collective memory of the massacre because it is the account of a subaltern, whose testimony gives voice to the people, who have been erased from the historical discourse about the massacre. In this manner, *Miguel Mármol* represents a counter-narrative that

challenges the official discourse about *La Matanza*. Furthermore, a third-person narrator, Miguel Mármol, camouflages Dalton's voice in the text.

Dalton's voice, however, does not disappear completely once the narration begins. He is still the final editor of the text. According to Barnet, the authors of testimonial literature use their imagination and creativity when transcribing the text. For example, for Barnet the language of the testimonial novel needs to resemble the spoken language of the time, but the transcriber can choose his/her own style:

lo fundamental del lenguaje en la novela-testimonio es que se apoye en la lengua hablada. Sólo así posee vida. Pero una lengua hablada decantada. [...] Yo jamás escribiría ningún libro reproduciendo fidedignamente lo que la grabadora me dicte. De la grabadora tomaría el tono del lenguaje y la anécdota; lo demás, el estilo y los matices, serían siempre mi contribución. (292)

On the contrary, Beverly clearly distinguishes between a *testimonio* and a *testimonial novel*. In a *testimonio*, the informant is usually an illiterate person or someone who is not a skilled writer. The testimonial subject is someone who has borne witness to a specific historical period or a social injustice and feels the need to tell his/her story to a broader community with the help of an intellectual who transcribes the usually tape-recorded testimony into a written text. "The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself" ("The Margin at the Center" 26). By telling their life story, the

narrator is able to represent a different voice that otherwise would not be heard in the official discourse. This is precisely the case with Mármol; he feels the need to tell his account of the massacre to Dalton, the intellectual who transcribes his testimony. Mármol's story not only recounts the events of the massacre, but it also highlights the human rights abuses and the social injustices committed under General Martínez's thirteen-year dictatorship.

The narrator Mármol goes from telling his own life story to telling the story of the Salvadoran masses. He is a subaltern who speaks for the people because the problems that he has faced are also issues representative of a much larger group. Mármol's testimony follows Beverley's argument about the need to communicate a marginalized perspective: "This presence of the voice, which is meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire to not be silenced or defeated, to impose oneself on an institution of power like literature from the position of the excluded or the marginal" (28). The narrator of a testimonial is a real person or, as Miguel Barnet says, "un ser humano, de carne y hueso" (*La novela testimonio* 296). By being able to tell their side of the story, the narrators of testimonials are able to gain access to an otherwise inaccessible power structure. According to Beverly, narrators of testimonial literature are subjects that take advantage of their interlocutor: "In order to have" their "story reach and influence an international audience" ("The Margin at the Center" 33). In this sense, Miguel Mármol is a subject who uses Dalton to communicate his subaltern

perspective about the massacre. Despite the narrator's ability to illuminate these perspectives, one has to keep in mind that if it were not for the transcriber as a conduit, the stories of marginalized voices would likely go unheard and unwritten. However, the intellectual is not an objective recorder, but exercises subjectivity as a participant in constructing what is considered the final account. For example, the very act of choosing what to include or leave out is a subjective judgment based on what the transcriber holds as relevant. Dalton confirms his subjective transcription of *Miguel Mármol* when he says:

No soy el testigo frío e imparcial de un testimonio que hay que ubicar en un mundo de comportamientos estancos, de casillas clasificatorias. Soy un militante revolucionario inmerso en la historia que Mármol nos ha comenzado a narrar y comparto en absoluto la pasión vital del narrador por llevar esa historia en su fase actual al cauce de las masas populares. (20)

Dalton has a revolutionary and ethical responsibility in the transcription of Mármol's testimony. As a Salvadoran Marxist intellectual, he empathizes with Mármol's urgency to communicate to the Salvadoran people and the international community his marginalized perspective on the massacre.<sup>28</sup> Dalton's subjective interpretation of the uprising is further confirmed when he decides to add background information that he thinks is relevant to the testimony.<sup>29</sup> His choice of trying to fill in the gaps in Mármol's life story reflects his editorial and intellectual power. He determines how much to alter and change in the final account. This makes Dalton an influential contributor to Mármol's testimony.

John Beverly acknowledges that the intellectuals who transcribe testimonial literature are also editors of this genre, but he does not go into detail as to how this process influences the representations of these marginalized historical narratives. This analysis argues that one cannot assume the transparency of the intellectual because he/she directly and indirectly influences the narrator. Barnett recognizes that the transcriber can alter the style and structure of testimonial texts. For example, during the organization of his book *Biografía de un cimarrón* he says “En la medida que iba organizando los datos, producto de mis entrevistas con él—que duraban de cinco a seis horas diarias--, me iba dando cuenta de lo que quería hacer, y de la estructura que le daría” (287). Barnett implies a powerful transforming agent when he says “lo que quería hacer” (What “I” wanted to do).

In the case of *Miguel Mármol*, Dalton initially thought he was going to write an article about Mármol’s life and his involvement in the 1932 uprising. He soon realized the depth of this topic called for a book, partly because he had too many unanswered questions about the massacre. Their official interviews began on May 14, 1966 in a hotel room in Prague:

La entrevista propiamente dicha se prolongó durante casi tres semanas, a través de sesiones diarias de trabajo que oscilaban entre seis y ocho horas de duración. En alguna ocasión extraordinaria la sesión llegó a consumir diez horas. Hubo asimismo “sesiones espontáneas” surgidas de conversaciones en restaurantes o paseos públicos. (Dalton 18)



Dalton did not tape record the interviews, but instead wrote the testimony in a notebook. This allowed Mármol to read and edit the documentation before leaving Prague. Dalton later finished his book in Havana, Cuba, and finally published it in 1971, about five years after the initial interviews. As with any interpretation of history, there are limitations to Dalton's testimonial text, and he acknowledges this when he says: "Tal vez en el futuro se den las condiciones para que Mármol y yo, o más bien probablemente Mármol y otros compañeros puedan llenar las lagunas, las reticencias, las ausencias y los enfoques apresurados que puedan aparecer en el texto actual" (19). This quote emphasizes the absences within the text, which are very important because often it is during these silences that Mármol exercises his subjectivity. There are two types of silences in the text: the first refers to Mármol's refusal to share with Dalton everything that he knows about the massacre or the time period, and the second silence concerns Mármol's withholding of information from the authorities when he is arrested. Although they are different, what is similar in both cases is Mármol's decision to withhold information. Mármol's silences may be interpreted as an act of agency given that he is not easily manipulated into answering every question.

In the first type of silence, Mármol creates a distance between him and Dalton by only sharing with him what Mármol thinks is appropriate. Thus regardless of Dalton's power as an

editor, intellectual and transcriber, Mármol decides the depth of his testimony. Dalton states that

Mármol only agreed to speak about some events prior to 1954:

A partir de entonces, Mármol se abstuvo de seguir testimoniando, por considerar, muy justamente a mi entender, que los hechos y las personas a que tendría que referirse necesariamente, podrían dar algún margen de información confidencial y aprovechable al enemigo de clase, a los organismos de la represión anticomunista de las clases dominantes criollas y del imperialismo. (Dalton 19)

Dalton and the reader are made to believe that Mármol is withholding important information that could be used by those in power to target the resistance movement. Some of this information may be related to the massacre, but the readers cannot know this fact. Although Mármol could simply omit the information from his testimony, the fact that he openly states that he is withholding information is a textual device that incites the reader's curiosity. Mármol's strategy brings to mind Doris Sommer's article "No Secrets" (1991) regarding the biography of Rigoberta Menchú, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983). In this article, Sommer analyses Menchú's insistence on knowing indigenous secrets that she will not share with the rest of the world. "The refusals say, in effect, this document is a screen, in the double sense that Henri Lefebvre (1988, 78) uses the term: something that shows and that also covers up" (Sommer "No Secrets" 134-35). In other words, one cannot fully know the Other.

Sommer continues this critical debate in her book *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (1999). In this text, Sommer warns readers against

essentialist notions that would turn “the Other” into an easily commodifiable product, which is a risk with testimonial writing. In referring to gestures like Menchú’s explicit statement that there are secrets she will not reveal, Sommer comments, “The unyielding tropes add up to a rhetoric of particularism that cautions privileged readers against easy appropriations of Otherness into manageable universal categories” (133). Her argument is useful in my analysis of *Miguel Mármol* because instead of trying to prove the “authenticity” or “truth” value of the text, this analysis focuses on its contributions to the representation of the massacre. An important aspect of the reader’s appreciation of that representation is the respectful acknowledgment of what Mármol refuses to share with the modern reader and with Roque Dalton himself, the intellectual writer.

The careful balance between what is revealed and what is kept secret was also part of Marmol’s political activity in 1932. This refers to Mármol’s second type of silence, in which he withholds information from the police both to protect his comrades and to save his own life. Mármol’s refusal to confess any details of the uprising during his interrogations by the police are strategic acts of subaltern agency. Even after the police officers move Mármol into a torture chamber to force a confession, he refuses to speak about the subject of the revolt. During the interrogations, Mármol manipulates language to his advantage when he denies his communist affiliations: “Me preguntaron si era comunista y con dolor de mi alma –y aunque lo había

aceptado antes, frente a Osmín—dije que no, que simplemente era un dirigente obrero de la Regional” (194). The decision to lie about his communist activities is a result of his noticing a notary who is writing down his answers. He knows that his written confession can be used against him and other activists, so for this reason he chooses to deny his political affiliation to the Communist Party. In addition, by changing his verbal answers, Mármol grants more authority to the oral confession than to the written one.

In a previous interrogation, Mármol acknowledges his communist affiliation, but refuses to share with a policeman information about the uprising. Instead, Mármol decides to challenge the capitalist and military discourse when he speaks about the social disparities in the Salvadoran society of 1932. In the following passage, he carefully uses his words to contradict his interrogator: “Yo lo conozco a usted—le dije—y sé que siempre ha sido pobre, como nosotros los comunistas, como yo. Si en estos momentos le pido que me preste dos pesos, seguro que no los tiene. Esta es la lucha de los pobres contra los ricos y es terrible que sean pobres como ustedes los que los ricos usan para reprimir a los demás pobres” (192). Upon recognizing the police officer, Mármol challenges him when he calls him a victim of those in power. Mármol deconstructs the policeman’s perceived notion of power, when he explains to him that he is also an oppressed victim of the elites. According to Mármol, the policeman has been trained by General Martínez’s military advisors to hate his own class, and that is why he has become a tool

of the oppressor. He challenges the officer's false sense of superiority over his fellow countrymen. Mármol reveals to the policeman that the dissimilarities among him and the peasant rebels are just an illusion created by the regime.

Mármol has a similar word exchange with his second interrogator, Colonel Osmín Aguirre, the Police Chief. At one point, the Colonel tells him that there are no social classes in El Salvador, to which Mármol responds: "Incluso en esta habitación hay clases sociales. Entre usted que no trabaja y vive como un rey y el secretario que trabaja como una mula y vive con el culo roto, hay la diferencia de pertenecer a distintas clases sociales" (193). Mármol deconstructs the capitalist system of the time by explaining to the Police Chief that his position of power allows him the privilege to live a lavish life style, while his secretary is overworked and exploited because of his lower class status. According to Mármol, their economic disparities are reflective of the national inequalities among social classes.

Mármol's words upset the chief, who gets so angry that he insults and threatens him with death. During Mármol's interrogations, he is not a powerless victim, but rather a subject who demands to be heard or, as Edward Said has stated, someone who dares to speak "the truth to power."<sup>30</sup> It is also interesting to notice the absence of the secretary's voice, which Mármol references in his class analysis. The secretary's silence reinforces his subaltern position within the capitalist system that Mármol is criticizing. This brings to mind Spivak's article "Can the

Subaltern Speak?” She responds to her question with a firm “no” because someone always speaks for them. In this instance, Mármol is speaking for the secretary, but from a position of subalternity. Mármol’s subalternity, however, is ambiguous (at least as defined by Spivak) because he moves in and out of power as he becomes more aware of his marginalized condition. Beverly states that “Testimonio represents an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle” (35). Throughout Mármol’s testimony, he becomes more aware of his subaltern status and it is from this position of marginality that he speaks against the military and capitalist power.

Mármol’s resistance against the military and civil authorities is formed during his adolescent years, when he was an assistant at the National Guard. His time with the guards was very formative for Mármol because he learned a lot about their indoctrination and abuses of power. He began to question the guards’ ideology, their loyalty for rules and regulations and especially, their methods of torture: “en unos cuartos interiores, oscuros y húmedos, los guardias flagelaban bárbaramente a los reos para que estos confesaran los delitos de que les acusaban. Vi que a varios los colgaban del techo, por los dedos pulgares, con las manos atadas a la espalda, y en esas condiciones los azotaban con vergas de toro” (47). Mármol is disturbed by these acts of

torture and violence against prisoners, especially because inmates were denied a fair trial. For Mármol, their imprisonment and torture was unjustified and barbaric.

There was one particular incident, which outraged Mármol to the point of resignation. Some young men from his neighborhood were accused of stealing cattle. He knew them personally and thought this accusation was unfounded, but the guards tortured them anyway:

Los colgaron por los brazos colocados a la espalda y un guardia se colgaba de cada uno de ellos para aumentar el dolor con el peso de su cuerpo. Todavía me acuerdo de los alaridos que daban mis paisanos. Todos aquellos actos bárbaros me indignaron de una manera violenta y más al tratarse de gente que yo conocía como honrada. Cuando no soporté seguir presenciando aquel terrible cuadro, salí al patio y estallé en puteadas contra los torturadores, mientras me brotaban las lágrimas. (47)

During this torture scene, a young Mármol decides to speak against the guards' abuses of power. This is the first time Mármol, a subaltern subject, becomes aware of his oppression within the social power structure. His conscientization<sup>31</sup> makes him realize that he does not want to turn into an accomplice (like the other guards) to the political and economic system that exploits him. He decides, instead, to rebel against the social power structure by criticizing the guards' abuses of power and resigning from his job. Despite this moment of awareness, Mármol will continue to be a subaltern character who will experience different levels of subalternity as he gains or loses power. The process of becoming more aware of his marginalized position is developed throughout his testimony as he experiences more abuses of power. Mármol will eventually

decide that in order to change the system, one has to transform it into a more inclusive structure of power. For Mármol and Dalton, this means having a communist revolution against the capitalist system. Regardless of its outcome, the 1932 revolt is the first attempt to transform the system, which will be discussed later on.

This interpretation of Mármol's testimony and his need to communicate his subaltern position challenges Gayatri Spivak's notion of the *subaltern* described in her critical essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). For Spivak, the subaltern is characterized by an inability to speak because someone always speaks for them. Spivak sees speaking as an act of communication that implies: a speaker with a message (with a code that makes it intelligible), a means of transmitting that message, and a listener. If one does not have access to any of these elements, one cannot really speak. She clarifies this point in a 1993 interview that was published in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (1995). In the interview she says "when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act" (Spivak "Interview" 292).

In the case of Mármol, it is true that at times Dalton speaks for him when he says he needs to "clarify" some of Mármol's ideas by providing background information that he thinks is relevant to his story; however, it is also important to realize that Mármol is not just a marginalized character without agency, but rather an active participant and co-author of his own



testimony. As we saw above, at times he refuses to reveal everything that he knows about the time period. During these acknowledged measures of silences, Mármol becomes a subject and editor of his own testimony. He rejects full intimacy with Dalton and the reader. This analysis suggests that people as well as fictional characters can have different levels of subalternity and agency, making the relationship between the informant and the transcriber far more complex.

Sommer criticizes Spivak's notion that the subaltern cannot speak when she says:

Spivak denounced Foucault and Deleuze for simplifying subaltern subjectivity in order to speak for it, yet she concluded, as simply, that "The subaltern cannot speak." Only the privileged classes can; for the insurgents' acts exceed language. A disappointing deduction, to be sure. Language seems so heavy with established meaning, so securely in elite control, that others cannot affect the master codes, as James Scoot argued. (Sommer "A Rhetoric" 20-21)

Mármol's testimony reveals that the subaltern can speak about their marginalized condition and that they in fact use intellectuals like Dalton to communicate their message to the rest of the world. According to Sommer "Subalterns write creative literature as well as active history" ("A Rhetoric" 21). Mármol's testimonial account of the massacre is a subaltern's representation of this important historical event.

Spivak's subaltern theory, however, is useful when analyzing the erasure of female agency in Mármol's testimonial account of the massacre. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak uses the term *subaltern* when referring to subject positions of the disenfranchised or marginalized of society, those who have been denied access to the power structure by members

of that circuit. The subaltern may include peasants, the colonized, indigenous groups, workers, and women (particularly those of the lowest economic groups). According to Stephen Morton:

In this essay, Spivak juxtaposes the radical claims of twentieth-century French intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to speak for the disenfranchised and the self-righteous claims of British colonialism to rescue native women from the practice of Hindu window sacrifice in nineteenth-century India. The point of this juxtaposition is to emphasize how the benevolent, radical western intellectual can paradoxically silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience, in the same way that the benevolent colonialist silenced the voice of the widow, who ‘chooses’ to die on her husband’s funeral pyre. (Morton 56)

Spivak believes that by ignoring their own position as privileged European intellectuals when they represent what the oppressed want, Foucault and Deleuze are effectively speaking for the oppressed. She criticizes their “transparent” and “objective” claims in their representation of the subaltern (Spivak 70).

### **3.2 Denial of Female Agency**

Spivak’s analysis of the subaltern women is useful in the critique of Mármol’s representation of female characters. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak states that women tend to be “doubly effaced” from historical and colonial discourses that tend to favor men:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is ‘evidence.’ It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. (Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 82)

Mármol's testimony about the insurgent subject "keeps the male dominant," for he does not grant female agency when he discusses the role of women in the political resistance movement of the time. He tends to describe female actions as secondary to the male's revolutionary activism: "Nuestras mujeres vendían fruta por la mañana y por la tarde hacían tamales también para vender a fin de sobrellevar la situación y a fin de que los hombres nos pudiéramos dedicar por completo al trabajo organizativo y revolucionario" (117). By objectifying women as "property" ("nuestras mujeres"), and subordinating their revolutionary role to that of males, Mármol is in fact silencing them from the historical discourse about the massacre. He is repeating a patriarchal discourse that views women as inferior to their male counterparts. For example, he spends a lot of time discussing the males' involvement in the uprising, the labor movement, and the Communist Party, but there is hardly any mention of the women who also participated in the same political struggles for liberation and resistance. Despite the female activism during and before the massacre, Mármol views the work of women as secondary to the male's revolutionary roles. Ironically, in his patriarchal representation of female characters, the main providers of the family tend to be women. Nevertheless, the role of women was instrumental in the 1932 revolt, and Mármol was aware of their contributions, as will be demonstrated later on.

Spivak insists on the silencing of female voices when she says, “The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 104) because even when she speaks, no one listens. Although she is referring to Indian women and their erasure from the colonial discourse and the history of national independence, her theory of the subaltern female is useful when describing the effacement of women in the official and non-official discourse of the massacre. In *Mármol*, the subjectivity of women is denied because their actions are subordinate to that of men. Most of the female characters do not speak for themselves; Mármol speaks for them when he interprets their revolutionary contributions. Perhaps Mármol does not mean to diminish female agency, but he does so when he describes their activism as secondary to that of males. For example, he says that the Secretary General of the Communist Party had to send his wife to work as a cook for a wealthy family: “El Secretario General del Partido tuvo que meter de cocinera a su mujer en una casa de gente rica y como él no tenía ni para comer diariamente, con frecuencia iba a esperarla cerca de la casa a fin de que ella le diera las sobras de comida que hubiera podido recoger en la cocina” (117). Although it is the wife who is supporting the husband, the way the sentence is structured makes her the object who is placed at a job by her husband’s request. She is viewed as her husband’s possession, who follows his decisions and not her own. In this instance, Mármol silences the voice of this particular woman because all one gets is a patriarchal interpretation of her subordinate role.

However, there are examples where Mármol's sisters not only oppose the military dictatorship, but they also question the communist orthodoxy of the time, which forbade the use of ties and nice clothing because they were not considered part of the "proletarian wardrobe." His sisters cannot understand why so many men including their brother became subservients of such absurd rules: "La presión de mis hermanas (que por cierto nos ayudaban económicamente para medio comer y para pagar la renta del cuartucho del mesón) era la más insistente: ellas no comprendían por qué, siendo nosotros obreros jóvenes, fuertes y hábiles pasábamos tanta miseria" (118). Although Mármol agrees that some of the party's rules about their dress code are overly strict, he does not listen to his sisters' criticism of them because in the end he still follows them. Despite Mármol's efforts at times to highlight the important work of women during the massacre, he ends up interpreting their revolutionary roles as secondary to that of males like himself.

During the massacre, Mármol's support system is predominantly female. Among the women who help Mármol during those horrific days are his sister, his partner and a former nurse. These women provide food, financial assistance, medical care and a resting/hiding place for Mármol. For instance, he arrives at his sister's and partner's home in San Salvador after leaving his rural hideout. Upon arriving at their home, he notices that they are hosting a novena for his soul. Ironically, he attends his postmortem novena. He asks them to proceed with their prayers

and to extend them, so that people can continue to believe that he has passed away. The women choose to help him in his efforts to confuse government forces, who were once again seeking to kill him: “Detrás del altar, que tenía unos cortinajes que les había prestado un amigo sacristán, me improvisaron un lecho para descansar, allí me quedé incluso cuando llegaron los vecinos a rezarme” (208).

With the financial help of his sister and partner, Mármol rents a room from a woman named Lucía, a former nurse. Lucía, basically, saves his life because she provides medical care for his wounds, which are infected. She is one of the few women who speaks in his testimony. She refuses to help him and threatens to report him to the authorities if he is not honest with her: “Yo le puedo salvar, porque soy enfermera graduada, pero me tiene que decir la verdad de lo que le ha pasado, porque, si no, lo entregaré a las autoridades” (210). Lucía demands to be heard. Mármol has no choice but to listen to her if he wants her to save his life. He tells her a version of his story about how government troops tried to kill him because they accused him of being a communist. Lucía is moved by his story and decides to help him. According to Mármol, he is not the only rebel that Lucía cares for: “La señora Lucía me contó una vez que en una casita cercana de la nuestra se encontraba refugiado otro comunista herido y que ella lo estaba atendiendo también” (210).

From this quote, it appears evident that Lucía's courageous actions saved at least two lives and maybe even more, but the reader is not totally sure because Mármol barely discusses her contributions. She only occupies a couple of pages of his testimony. In this regard, the female characters in the text are subject to a "double effacement" from the official and non-official representation of the massacre. Dalton and Mármol are both Marxist, so they interpret the massacre within the frameworks of Marxism. Spivak is critical of leftist Marxist intellectuals because they fail to recognize the role of women in the struggles for national independence and resistance movements: "An exclusive focus on class and economic location overlooks the material practices and historical role of women" (Morton, 60).

During the uprising Mármol describes an incident where middle class women were made to make *tortillas* for the rebels: "Habr a se oritangas para las cuales ayudar a echar un par de tortillas de ma z para un ej rcito de campesinos descalzos debe haber supuesto un ultraje mayor que la muerte" (252). His class analysis in this quote patronizes women because he does not take issue with the fact that these women were made to cook for the rebels, in the name of a revolution that was supposed to bring equality for everyone. M rmol's words imply that even if the rebels had been successful in their overthrow of the military regime, their communist society was still going to have traditional roles for women. Once again, the female subaltern voice is marginalized and not heard.

### 3.3 The Power of Ideology

Spivak's subaltern theory argues that in a capitalist society, subjects are constructed by social, political and economic structures of power. If there are unequal power structures, there are also differences in subject positions. As we saw above, some subjects are positioned and constructed with a lack of access to the possibility of speaking. These subjects are labeled the *subaltern*. Spivak takes issue with Foucault's and Deleuze's theories and their representation of the subaltern because, first, they believe that "the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous, that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive—a persistent critique is needed; and second, that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 66). In other words, all they see is how society in many ways *represses* the "desires" of subjects. Their thinking reintroduces "coherent" subjects that resist power. Spivak finds their views problematic because they ignore "the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history" (66). Spivak believes that structures of power like capitalism use ideology to make subjects desire something against their own interests. She finds Foucault and Deleuze's theories too simplistic because they tend to focus on how the state represses the subject's desires.

For Spivak the structure of capitalism fosters unlimited desire for commodities that individuals do not really need. Her interpretation of international capitalism is useful in the



analysis of how General Martínez used a capitalist ideology to reward with money, gifts, objects, etc., his closest allies among members of the military and national authorities. Martínez was successful in creating competition among his followers because he rewarded his most loyal supporters. Mármol takes issue with the government bribes to the national guards and he criticizes them for accepting Martínez's subornation: "Los guardias recibieron de inmediato dádivas y prebendas del régimen. Comenzaron a mostrar dientes de oro, leontinas y desentonaban sobre el uniforme, anillos, relojes finos, etc." (214). The guards view their gifts from the general, as a sign of a higher social status, which made them want them even more. They become so blinded by their desire to gain material wealth and favoritism from the dictator that they did not question their gruesome acts of violence against other members of society. In this regard, the guards' desire betrayed them because it kept them subordinate to Martínez's regime. The guards thought they possessed power, when in reality they, too, were victims of General Martínez and the capitalist system.

Throughout Mármol's testimony, he criticizes the capitalist system and the elites for exploiting the poor. He begins to resist capitalism during his work as a shoemaker, when he gets involved in the Salvadoran labor movement. Mármol helps to unionize carpenters, plumbers, bakers, mechanics, tailors, etc. All of these workers joined the newly founded *Federación Regional de Trabajadores de El Salvador*. At the time, he became a leading labor activist who

denounced the exploitation of many Salvadoran workers. He even owned his own egalitarian shoe shop: “En aquel taller todos éramos iguales, había trabajo abundante y el dinero alcanzaba para todos” (74). However, his ultimate goal was to revolutionize the capitalist system, so that all workers could have equal rights. Those in power fear him because he presents a threat to their interests, and this is why they want to silence him.

Regarding his personal formal education, Mármol did not complete the fourth grade, but he was an autodidact, with a like for Latin American writers who wrote about social injustices and political tyranny.<sup>32</sup> Although he never went to college, he did attend the *Universidad Popular* (People’s University) which came out of the Salvadoran Workers’ Association of the time<sup>33</sup>. He describes the education of the People’s University as: “Antimperialista, clasista y, de acuerdo con las inquietudes de la época, pro-Sandinista” (80). Mármol’s teachers at the People’s University spread a message of anti-US interventionism in Latin America. Their message resonated with Mármol’s political ideologies of the time. Furthermore, Mármol met Farabundo Martí, a key communist leader of the 1932 uprising at the People’s University. The political leadership of the left decided that Martí should go and join Sandino’s rebels in Nicaragua, who were fighting against the United States’ military occupation<sup>34</sup>.

Mármol, on the other hand, stayed in El Salvador and organized the masses in his hometown of Ilopango. He was one of the founders of the *Sociedad de Obreros, Campesinos y*

*Pescadores de Ilopango*. This organization offered loans to struggling fisherwomen of Ilopango and it sponsored an anti-alcohol campaign. Mármol was also a founder of the *Departamento de Beneficencia General*, which aided the sick in their needs. In addition, he helped create a cultural center where many speakers gave lectures on topics such as history, science, the arts and trades. The people of Ilopango, especially the poor, supported Mármol's activism because they felt empowered by him and his comrades. Mármol notes that in the past many "progressive men" had tried to organize the masses of Ilopango, but they had failed due to their own arrogance: "ellos habían actuado siempre fuera de la realidad, que no habían planteado la organización a partir de los verdaderos problemas del pueblo y que por el contrario habían creado una barrera infranqueable entre su calidad de 'instruidos' y la de 'brutos' que le adjudicaban a los vecinos" (85). These intellectuals or "progressive" men that Mármol speaks of resemble the intellectuals Spivak criticizes in her subaltern theory, for they presume to know and speak for the Other. Mármol, however, tries to understand that he cannot assume to know and resolve the needs of the marginalized, if he does not allow them to speak about their problems. This is why Mármol and his comrades had to open their political dialogues to the masses, so that together they could propose adequate solutions to their concerns.

In the late 1920s, Mármol and others organized the fishermen into advocating for access to fishing water. This is a direct protest against the great landlords who blocked their access to

the beaches and also burnt the fishermen's huts: "Cercaban las playas lacustres correspondientes a sus terrenos y mandaban a sus trabajadores a destruir y quemar las casas de los pescadores construidas en ellos con los materiales más rudimentarios" (91). Many of the fishermen later on were involved in the 1932 revolt and remained active against Martínez's regime. Mármol and his comrades also organized the workers on the great coffee plantations. They demanded better working and living conditions and increases in wages:

en el año de 1932 la chispa insurreccional por el agudo descontento y furor de las masas prendió tan violentamente tanto en el centro del país como en Aguachapán o en Sonsonate. Podían encontrarse diferencias superficiales entre la situación de unos y otros lugares, pero el uniforme era siempre el alto nivel de la miseria: los salarios en el campo eran de treinta centavos diarios como promedio, para dar un dato simple (catorce centavos de dólar). (100)

The government repression against all organizers and leftist leaders intensified. For this reason, they had to meet in remote rural areas. The workers were powerless and many of the political parties of the time used them as pawns, so they had to create their own party that would represent their interests. This party was the Salvadoran Communist Party, which was formed in 1930. An interesting fact about the Communist Party of El Salvador is that in its foundation it did not stem from intellectuals, but rather from the workers: "Nuestro PC salió de las entrañas mismas de nuestra clase obrera, de nuestro movimiento sindical" (111). However, the leftist intellectuals did play a role in spreading their communist ideologies to the workers, who later on formed the

party. Mármol along with his fellow activists wanted political power in the hands of the people and they thought that their Communist Party would be a vehicle towards that end.

Initially, members of the Party lead various workers strikes at coffee plantations demanding better salaries and working conditions, and in some cases, the workers did receive better salaries, but for the most part their demands went unheard. They decided that it would be better to gain political power via the electoral process, so they chose to participate in the December local elections of 1931. The communists believed they could enact their revolutionary plan if they won political control of the local government, since this meant greater autonomy. Mármol did not support having local elections because he believed they would not be recognized, and this could lead to massive public unrest. Mármol's thoughts about the elections proved to be true, when the electoral process was dismantled in a military coup that ousted President Araujo and placed General Martínez in control of the government. As expected by Mármol, General Martínez did not recognize the communists' electoral victories of early January, 1932: "Los trucos del aparato oficial contra los comunistas comenzaron a funcionar desde el principio: nos anulaban votos con cualquier pretexto, retardaban la votación de nuestros compañeros y trataban de confundirlos, ya que entonces el voto no era secreto, sino que se hacía de viva voz" (179). The military regime used terror to dissuade communist voters from voting, and the Catholic Church supported Martínez in his anti-communist efforts: "En esta actividad, el

clero, a pesar de sus reservas con Martínez, jugó un papel verdaderamente nefasto” (178).

Mármol denounces the Catholic Church’s involvement in the communist purge.

After the regime suspended the local elections due to the gains of the Communist Party, the people decided to go on strike to protest the actions taken by the military regime and the state of the local economy. The protest begins at a coffee plantation called *La Montañita*, where the owners bribe and intoxicate the national guards, so the latter can kill some of the protesters including women and children. In response, the protesters try to defend themselves by killing some of the guards. The government decides to intensify their retaliation against the people with the use of torture, death and imprisonment. The communist leadership attempts to put an end to the military repression with diplomatic talks, but Martínez does not show up for the dialogue. He sent his minister of war in his place, and this individual refused to negotiate with the leftist leaders. The communists chose to rebel after the failure of their diplomatic and electoral efforts. Since the communist failed to gain access to the political and economic structures of power, they are one of the subaltern groups that were victimized during the massacre.

### **The Failure of the Revolt**

The 1932 revolt is the last attempt on the part of various subaltern groups to speak against their marginalized positions, to gain access to the unequal power structure and most importantly, to transform that system of power. They advocated for a structure of power that was more

inclusive and representative of the different social and ethnic groups. Since the uprising was not successful, the elites and the military government silenced the voices of the dispossessed by refusing to let them have a voice. In addition, the hierarchical power structure remained the same. Mármol blames the communist leadership for the failure of the revolt because they changed the date on several occasions, which allowed the government to investigate their plans. Initially, the uprising was scheduled for January 16, 1932. Mármol agrees with the initial call for rebellion and insists on not postponing the date:

Yo propuse que dada la madurez de la situación revolucionaria, se agotaran todos los preparativos en ocho días, al cabo de los cuales debería abrirse el fuego: ese tiempo bastaba para preparar toda la labor y permitía guardar la sorpresa que Lenin exigía en este caso. Pensando en la exactitud cronológica que Lenin también reclamaba, yo dije que la insurrección debía hacerse no el 15 de enero ni el 17, sino precisamente el 16 a las cero horas. (184)

In this quote, Mármol is following the advice that Lenin gives about always having an element of surprise in a revolution. However, the revolt was postponed until the 22 of January. This, according to Mármol, was one of their mistakes because the government found out about their planned revolt and captured their key leaders. Among those captured was Farabundo Martí, the mastermind behind the communist planning of the rebellion. He was arrested on January 19, along with two student aids. Martí's arrest was a great blow to the communists because he was responsible for many critical elements of the uprising. He was to recruit communist

sympathizers among social, political and military sectors, and he was in charge of raising monetary funds and writing a communist manifesto.

Mármol regrets not having someone that could have replaced Martí in the aftermath of an arrest. He also criticizes the leftist intellectuals who abandoned the party and their revolutionary efforts because they disagreed with Martí's predominant role: "La insustituibilidad del Negro fue de seguro una de nuestras mayores debilidades. Lo cual hace más grave la actitud de varios de los camaradas intelectuales que hallaron en la hegemonía de Martí el pretexto para enojarse, para alejarse de la labor revolucionaria y negarse a prestar cualquier colaboración" (186). Mármol sheds light on the errors of the communist leadership regarding the planning and execution of the rebellion. It is also apparent in his testimony that the communist leadership was divided regarding the issue of the rebellion, especially after the arrest of Martí. Mármol, however, chose to continue with their plan to rebel because the workers were ready for a rebellion and they could not stop them. Also, the government was going to try to kill whomever it saw as its enemy: "La mayoría insistimos en que la vacilación era la muerte prematura de la insurrección, que ya era demasiado tarde, que si nos frenábamos íbamos a perder hasta la capacidad de defendernos frente a la terrible represión gubernativa que iba a ser desatada con insurrección o sin insurrección" (188).



By January 20, two days prior to the revolt, their planning had turned into chaos. The communists had almost no information about their manpower, weapons, money and materials for the rebellion. They had lost all of that information with Martí. Despite their disorganization, the communists proceeded with their plans to revolt because they believed the people were ready for a revolution. The people were emotionally ready for an uprising, but they were not armed properly to fight the government troops. The masses lacked the necessary revolutionary strategy for a successful insurrection and the Communist Party was in shambles:

Ya para ese terrible 22 de enero, el enemigo nos había cogido la iniciativa: en lugar de un partido que estaba a punto de iniciar una gran insurrección [...] dábamos el aspecto de un grupo de desesperados, perseguidos y acosados revolucionarios. De un momento a otro se abandonó prácticamente el trabajo y todo el mundo trató de ponerse a salvo de la represión desatada. (189)

According to Mármol, many communists decided to focus their attention on avoiding the military repression instead of joining the people in their uprising. In other words, they abandon the masses.

Despite the lack of military support from the Communist Party, the people in western El Salvador answered their revolutionary call and rose up in rebellion on the 22 of January 1932. It is evident that the people were more organized and disciplined than the communists, who had incited them to revolt. Nevertheless, most of the rebels were only armed with machetes, which

proved to be inadequate against the military weapons. One of the first areas to rise up in rebellion was Sonsonate, but the government responded by sending troops to crush the rebellion:

El Gobierno despachó una gruesa columna punitiva al mando del General José Tomás Calderón, siniestro asesino, apodado “chaquetilla.” Desde el primer momento se supo que la sangre corría a ríos y que la lucha era completamente desigual y desfavorable para el pueblo, a causa de la mayor organización y el total dominio de volumen de fuego de las fuerzas del Gobierno. (190)

Mármol criticizes himself and the rest of the communist leaders for not preparing their members and the people adequately: “los comunistas éramos tan idiotas que ni siquiera garantizamos que cada cuadro tuviera en las manos por lo menos una pistola desde el momento en que se decidió ir a la insurrección” (192). Many revolutionaries were ill prepared to fight against government troops, for they lacked the most rudimentary weapons and they did not follow a strategic plan of battle. This was the case with Mármol, when the authorities arrested him on the day of the insurrection. Although Mármol was unarmed, he was courageous and loyal to the revolutionary cause by withholding information that could aid the government and harm other rebels.

### **3.4 Narratives of Fear**

During his time in jail, Mármol describes prison as a place where fear, death and decay are omnipresent. The living conditions of prisoners are horrific: “El hacinamiento era terrible: uno defecaba y comía en un espacio reducidísimo. El olor de la pequeña letrina de hoyo era

espantoso. Y frente a la puerta de la celda estaba emplazada, apuntando hacia nosotros, una ametralladora de trípode, cuyos manipuladores nos amenazaban a cada rato con disparar” (195).

The prisoners are overtaken by fear of dying since there is a machinegun present at all times, which the guards use to threaten them with death. The guards intensify the experience of powerlessness by bringing in newspapers to spread the government’s anti-communist message.

One day, Mármol receives a newspaper with a front-page story about the assassination of a man named Dr. Jacinto Colocho<sup>35</sup>. The authorities blame his murder on the “communists:” “Los titulares de prensa eran enormes decían: ASESINADO POR LOS COMUNISTAS, como si aquella muerte hubiera sido la primera de todo aquel proceso y el Gobierno no hubiera ya asesinado a aquellas alturas a centenares de campesinos” (196). This newspaper article because of its political bias disturbs Mármol. The article demonizes the “communists” and victimizes the government. It is also important to mention that, in this instance, both Mármol and the government use the term “communist” synonymously with the word *campesino* (peasant) even though not all of the *campesinos* were communist or vice versa. In this case, it appears that the people who killed Dr. Jacinto were former workers of Dr. Jacinto who had been exploited by him. They may not have been communist rebels. In this manner, the government and at times Mármol repeat a colonial stereotypical discourse about the Other. This type of discourse portrays the indigenous and peasant population as homogenous and easily manipulated by

members of the Communist Party. In addition, by labeling the revolt a “communist” uprising, the government and at times Mármol refuse to acknowledge the heterogeneous element of the rebellion. After all, as Mármol has stated above, the main communist leaders of the revolt had been arrested and assassinated by the time the rebellion took place. Those who were still alive, like Mármol, did not actually fight. In other words, most of the fighting was done by different sectors of the indigenous and peasant population, some of whom may have been members of the Communist Party, but others were subaltern groups who were demanding an end to their exploitation and disenfranchisement.<sup>36</sup>

The government used the death of Dr. Colococho to justify the massive assassinations of *rural peasants* and indigenous people, which is the reason why Mármol takes issue with this particular story. For example, in the article there is no mention of the military regime’s assassinations or their methods of torture. Its only focus is to blame the communists for the brutalities of the massacre. This is important because Mármol sheds light on how the mainstream media was used by General Martínez to create a narrative of fear of communism among the masses and the more affluent sectors of the population. For example, many urban residents and property holders feared the rebels because the newspapers claimed that the communists would kill them: “Ese crimen de terror iba a servir para justificar el real crimen del Gobierno y las fuerzas armadas contra el pueblo Salvadoreño” (196).

Mármol continues to discuss the prisoners' petrifying fears when he says "nadie dormía en la celda. Ni por la aglomeración, ni por el calor, ni por el nerviosismo" (197). The greatest of their fears is death because it is omnipresent, especially at night when prisoners are called by their names to face a firing squad. One night, Mármol hears his name: "Como a eso de las diez de la noche retumbó un grito en medio del silencio: "¡Miguel Mármol, al recinto!" (197). Mármol is taken to the patio to join eighteen other prisoners: "Me sacaron a empujones, tomándome del pelo y pegándome hasta con las pistolas. No me dejaron ni ponerme la camisa, me la amarraron a un brazo después de atarme fuertemente las muñecas a la espalda" (198). He recognizes most of the other inmates. Some of them were communists like Mármol, but others were wrongfully accused. Mármol recognizes a Russian traveling merchant who never had any dealings with the Salvadoran Communist Party, but was there because some people accused him of being a "communist soviet."

The policemen put the prisoners in a truck and take them to the outskirts of the city where they are to be killed. They arrive at a small town called *El Matazano*, a foreshadowing name because it literally means "that which kills the healthy." The policemen align the first two prisoners against a wall and begin to shoot at them: "Pero la tropa estaba muy nerviosa también y de la primera descarga sólo hirieron levemente a nuestros dos compañeros. Con la segunda descarga los hirieron bien, pero los compañeros no cayeron" (200). In this quote, Mármol

alludes to the policemen's fear of killing when he says that they are nervous and their aim is off. In addition, later on he says they are sweating even though the temperature was cold. Their sweat and nervousness is an indication of their fear of killing their fellow countrymen, but they are more afraid of disobeying their captain. In other words, the policemen are also victims of the military regime. Mármol, however, defies the captain when he asks: "A ver, ¿quién es el que quiere morir ahora?" Mármol steps forward and answers that he will die next. In this instant, Mármol takes control of his life and acts like a heroic martyr who is not afraid of dying for his political beliefs.

His bravery inspires the solidarity of the Russian prisoner, who joins Mármol in his courageous decision to face death. Mármol, however, does not die during his execution despite several gunshot wounds to his chest and head. He does lose conscious momentarily:

Los tiros me atravesaron la tetilla y el brazo izquierdo...Vino otra descarga. Aquí sí me dieron bien. Sentí varios golpes en el cuerpo y un como timbrazo, un como golpe eléctrico en toda la cabeza. Después vi una luz intensa y perdí el sentido. Al despertar estaba de bruces, manando sangre de la cabeza. Mi pensamiento estaba claro. El cuerpo del ruso estaba sobre el mío y todavía goteaba sangre caliente. (201)

During the shooting, the Russian's body falls on top of his and serves as a type of human shield that saves his life. His rising among the dead prisoners resembles the resurrection of Jesus Christ because Mármol was pronounced dead by his executioners. In addition, the first to see him after his awakening are other communist rebels who treat his wounds and hide him from the

authorities. Although Mármol or Dalton does not make this specific comparison, there are instances in the text when Mármol does compare himself to Jesus Christ. In the first page of his testimony when he speaks of his birth, Mármol mentions that his friends tell him that he came to this world to create conflict, but that he is a follower of Christ: “inmediatamente tienen que agregar que soy del bando de Jesucristo, de quien se cuenta les dijo a los cristianos una vez [...] ‘No he venido a traeros la paz sino la guerra.’ [...] suponiendo que ese haya sido mi destino, no cabe duda de que los líos y yo estuvimos juntos desde muy temprano” (23). Even though Mármol is a communist and will claim to be an atheist, he cannot escape the religious doctrine that is prevalent in his Catholic country. He even quotes the Bible, which means that he is familiar with its religious message. In addition, he does not dispute the religious comparison to Christ. Based on this quote, he actually believes that his destiny and that of Christ are similar.

There is another important allusion to the image of Christ, when he tells his sister and mother that his activism is more important than family because it is for a greater good. In this case, he compares his mother’s suffering to the Virgin Mary’s and his revolutionary role to that of Christ:

Mi mamá me ha hablado siempre de los grandes hombres y me los ha diferenciado de los traidores. También me ha hablado de los sufrimientos de la Virgen María, la madre de ese revolucionario que era Cristo. [...] sé que nos queremos mucho, pero yo estoy luchando por millones de hombres, que tienen millones de mamases y millones de hijos y millones de esposas y millones de hermanos y hermanas. (118).

This is of great significance since Mármol distrusts the institution of the Catholic Church and he criticizes its affiliation as well as support of corrupt dictatorships like that of General Martínez. Despite his communist indoctrination, however, he still invokes iconic religious figures and he even believes in miracles. He calls his survival of the massacre a miracle (203). He even goes as far as invoking God when he is speaking about the nurse who treated his wounds: “desde entonces bendigo a aquella señora tan buena y espero que si Dios existe también la habrá bendecido por aquella caridad revolucionaria. Y lo digo yo, que soy comunista y no creo en Dios” (211). In other words, he is not an atheist because he contradicts himself by implying that there might be a God. His religious upbringing is in conflict with his political ideology and he never seems to reconcile the two.

### **3.5 The Idealized Hero and the Trauma of the Survivor**

At times, Mármol feels traumatized and guilty for surviving the massacre when thousands of Salvadorans did not. His psychological trauma is revealed when he describes a feeling of horror upon hearing the sound of machine guns: “Lo más tremendo para mí en aquellos días eran las descargas cerradas que se oían al anochecer: vidas de camaradas y personas inocentes que no iban a tener mi suerte” (205). The shootings do not allow him to rest in peace. He mourns the senseless death of innocent people, and perhaps the worst thing of it all



is that he cannot help them. He is barely alive, but instead of focusing his attention on getting better, he wishes he had died a heroic death like Farabundo Martí and his two student followers:

Murieron como vivieron: fieles a sus convicciones, al Partido y al pueblo. Los periódicos decían que Martí había rehusado defenderse ante el Tribunal Militar porque no se quería acoger a las leyes contra las que luchó toda su vida, que se negó a confesarse con un cura católico y que antes de morir había aclarado que consideraba al General Sandino el mayor patriota del mundo. (209)

He idealizes Martí's ideological convictions and his loyalty to the people and the Communist Party. According to Mármol, Martí's behavior and actions before his death exemplify his heroic qualities. However, because Mármol is so focused on the bravery of others and not his own, he fails to realize that his story is also heroic. Mármol defied death and the military government by surviving the massacre and sharing his personal experience with Dalton. His psychological trauma, however, does not allow him to see his own heroic actions. His testimony is not just about him; it also pertains to the nation's history and past. The 1932 massacre was a significant historical tragedy that shaped the country's history for many decades. In this manner, Mármol's testimony is representative of the nation's story and that of so many others who were victims of the authoritarian regime. In addition, Mármol's activism did not end with the massacre; it only intensified because he continued to be an avid opponent of Martínez's dictatorship.

### 3.6 A Contestatory Response

Mármol presents a contestatory response to the official story about the massacre and he criticizes the Catholic Church and the national newspapers for supporting the authoritarian regime in its anti-communist purges: “La prensa diaria vomitaba veneno sobre la supuesta barbarie roja y las iglesias y los púlpitos eran tribunas de agitación en la que se pedía la cabeza de los demonios comunistas sobrevivientes” (213). The institution of the Catholic Church and the newspapers repeated the anti-communist discourse of General Martínez and the upper classes. The military regime used the church and the local media to spread its anti-communist message and to retain its political power. Those who did not agree with the government’s use of torture or assassinations were forced to flee their country and became refugees in other Central American nations. This leads to the breakdown of the traditional family structure because many people had to leave their relatives behind in order to save their lives. Mármol himself flees to various parts of the country to avoid death. The climate of the time was one of terror and fear. No one felt safe in his or her own communities because anyone could be accused of being a communist at any given time.

Mármol attempts to challenge the official discourse of the massacre, which blames the communists for all the atrocities of 1932. He calls such discourse a type of *leyenda negra* (black legend) against the Salvadoran Communist Party. The authoritarian regime used the national

media, the Catholic Church, schools and universities to help spread its anti-communist message and to support the government-sponsored terrorism against its perceived opposition: “Desde entonces se comenzó a pintarnos como una horda de desalmados que entrábamos en las ciudades machete en mano, asesinando y saqueando, volándole la cabeza a los propietarios y violando a las vírgenes” (248). Mármol refutes the accusations that the communist rebels’ goals were to kill, rape, and ravage the entire nation. His narrative enters into a challenging dialogue with newspapers, texts and government documents that have contributed to the spread of the so-called *leyenda negra*.

For example, Mármol quotes a falsified document attributed to the communist leadership that the Salvadoran regime used to create fear among the authorities and the middle class. The document is called *Instrucciones al comunismo salvadoreño para su ofensiva general del 22 de enero de 1932*. This text lists a number of instructions to be followed by communist rebels during the massacre:

La acción revolucionaria contra la burguesía deberá ser lo más contundente que sea posible a efecto de que, en pocas horas de terror inmisericorde, quede reducida a la más absoluta impotencia, empleando contra ellos los medios oportunos, es decir: fusilación inmediata o muerte en cualquier otra forma, sin detenerse en nada. (234)

The middle class became fearful of the uprising because they thought that rebels would kill them.

The purpose of such negative propaganda against the communists was to demonize them, so that fewer people would support them.

General Martínez also used the above document to create fear among the national authorities. Members of the military, the police and the national guard believed that they would be assassinated in a communist takeover. According to Mármol the military regime also used this propaganda to justify the massacre: “Fue en documentos como éste que las fuerzas represivas trataron de basar la justificación del asesinato masivo de 30 mil campesinos y obreros: alegando que se trataba de una acción preventiva contra los crímenes programados supuestamente por los comunistas” (237-38). This negative publicity confused people into believing that all communists were evil and dangerous to the well-being of the nation. In other words, the authorities felt justified in their killings of progressive or innocent people because they saw it as their duty to stop the dissemination of communism.

Mármol disproves the official story about the massacre, which blames the communists for the government atrocities of 1932. He cleverly does this by using right-wing texts about the communist casualties of the massacre. For example, he references Jorge Schlesinger’s *Revolución comunista: ¿Guatemala en peligro?* (1946), an anti-communist text that compares the 1932 political climate of El Salvador with that of Guatemala in 1946. According to Lindo-

Fuentes, Ching and Lara Martínez: “He gives a clear indication that his work will depict the terror of the insurrection, the enormous dangers of the communist propaganda, and the need to respond firmly to any attempt to disseminate it” (344). Mármol, strategically, uses Schlesinger’s book to affirm that the casualties caused by the government far outnumbered those caused by rebels:

Veintidós muertos, la casi totalidad de ellos en franco combate y el resto en circunstancias no del todo determinadas, y cuatro heridos, son las cifras que se nos pueden achacar a los comunistas en esta acción. El resto de los 30 mil muertos que hubo es culpa negra y eterna de la oligarquía y la burguesía salvadoreña, del Ejército de la tiranía de Martínez, del sistema capitalista dependiente del imperialismo norteamericano. (251)

Mármol holds not just the military regime accountable for the massacre, but also the Salvadoran middle class, the elites and the capitalist system, which was supported by the United States’ government. Mármol’s counter-discourse of the massacre deconstructs the *leyenda negra* of the communist rebels.

In this manner, Mármol presents a subaltern perspective of the massacre, which challenges the official story about this historic event. He states that if the government’s interpretation about *La Matanza* is true, then why did it censor all written sources about the massacre? The following questions engage the reader into demanding answers that contest the official narrative of the massacre:

¿Por qué es que sigue siendo prácticamente prohibido en El Salvador hablar de 1932?  
¿Por qué hasta los periódicos de aquella época tremenda han desaparecido de las

bibliotecas y hemerotecas, de los archivos de las mismas empresas periodísticas, que se ofrecen como servicio público? ¿Por qué nuestros historiadores y periodistas se siguen conformando con dar a la juventud la visión esquemática, falsa y criminal de “la matazón que en 1932 hicieron los comunistas,” y no se atreven a plantear con pelos y señales la verdad desnuda? (253)

These questions also address Salvadoran intellectuals and journalists who have accepted the official discourse of the massacre. They too are held responsible for silencing subaltern voices of *La Matanza*. In other words, they failed ethically and politically in their job as investigators who should have revealed the “truth” about what actually happened in 1932. These questions also highlight the importance of his testimony, given that it is a marginalized perspective about the events of 1932. Mármol feels a desperate need to tell his story of the massacre because he owes it to the Salvadoran masses and those who fell victim to Martínez’s dictatorship.

Mármol’s message is intended to re-educate the Salvadoran and foreign public about this national tragedy and to contest the communists’ *leyenda negra*. In this manner, Mármol’s account of the massacre represents a history of subaltern agency and resistance that differs from the official narrative of 1932. The predominant discourse favors the interests of the ruling power, for it perpetuated a narrative that silenced and tried to erase the subaltern voices by eliminating any traces of the massacre from the national archives.

### 3.7 Dalton's Voice in *Miguel Mármol*

Although this study focuses mainly on Mármol's subaltern perspective about the massacre, it is important to give a brief analysis about what Dalton hoped to accomplish with his publication of *Miguel Mármol*. Dalton was a member of the *generación comprometida*, a generation of writers who believed they had an ethical and moral responsibility to write about the social and political issues affecting Salvadoran society. Perhaps Dalton saw his transcription and publication of *Miguel Mármol* as part of his intellectual responsibility to reveal the "truth" about the horrific events of the massacre, which affected many generations of Salvadorans including his own. He addresses the impact of the massacre in future generations in his poetry when he says "todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932" (*Todos*). Dalton's documentary poetry is further discussed in chapter two of this study.

In *Miguel Mármol*, Dalton employs the technique of intertextuality to highlight the veracity of Mármol's testimony. For example, he includes an official testimony of Colonel Gregorio Bustamante Maceo in *Miguel Mármol*. The Salvadoran press published the colonel's testimony in *Historia militar de El Salvador* (1951). Bustamante Maceo's testimony is important because it represents a perspective of a military member who recalls the events of the massacre. In his testimony, the Colonel feels guilty and traumatized by the brutalities of the national army against the peasant and indigenous population of 1932. He alludes to the number

of those killed when he says “Las crónicas publicadas por distintas personas afirmaron que el número de muertos ascendió a más de 30 mil, pero en realidad no bajaron de 24 mil los asesinados. Jamás podrán olvidarse los aciagos meses de diciembre de 1931 y los de enero, febrero y marzo de 1932” (247). Dalton also incorporates this testimony in *Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932*, a documentary poem about the massacre. In both cases, the testimony is left to speak for itself since Dalton does not discuss its relevance.

However, by including it in his texts, Dalton gives important historical relevance to this testimony as he hints in *Miguel Mármol*, when Mármol states: “la verdad suele surgir cada cierto tiempo para llenar de vergüenza a la nación” (245). Through the narrative voice of Mármol, the reader can hear Dalton’s voice and reason for juxtaposing the colonel’s testimony with that of Mármol’s. Dalton’s use of intertextuality illuminates the element of truth in Mármol’s account of the massacre. This addresses some of his editorial power. However, what were the reasons for writing Mármol’s testimony?

In *Miguel Mármol*, Dalton lists five personal reasons for publishing this text, all of which are political:

1. Contribuir a dilucidar una serie de hechos políticos desconocidos dentro del proceso de lucha revolucionaria del pueblo salvadoreño y del Partido Comunista de El Salvador, a fin de que puedan enriquecer la experiencia de todos los revolucionarios salvadoreños y latinoamericanos [...]
2. Enfrentar el testimonio presencial de un revolucionario sobre la historia de las principales luchas del pueblo salvadoreño entre 1905 y la mitad de este siglo, a las



versiones reaccionarias que se han hecho ya tradicionales y oficialmente históricas [...] y a las versiones aparentemente imparciales [...] que comienzan a aparecer en El Salvador y en otros países sobre fenómenos como la masacre de 1932 [...]»<sup>37</sup>.

3. Ayudar a la búsqueda de antecedentes políticos en la historia nacional que puedan eventualmente apoyar y reformar las posiciones seudorrevolucionarias, anti-marxistas y contrarrevolucionarias en el seno del movimiento popular de nuestro país y de nuestro continente.
4. Ratificar, con la riqueza de hechos de característica inequívocamente criolla que puebla el relato y la vida de Miguel Mármol, el carácter profundamente nacional de la lucha revolucionaria salvadoreña inspirada en el marxismo-leninismo.
5. Tales objetivos involucran: el de la denuncia. El de la denuncia directa e inocultable contra el imperialismo y las clases dominantes salvadoreñas. Contra el sistema capitalista como modo internacional de dominación y explotación del hombre. ( 20-21)

Dalton's goals go beyond the revelation of a counter narrative about *La Matanza*, for he incites other Latin American revolutionaries to learn from the Salvadoran experience of 1932. Dalton believes that many of the conditions that lead to the revolt of 1932 are still prevalent in the sixties and seventies because El Salvador continued to be ruled by authoritarian regimes and the coffee oligarchy. Dalton sees the economic and political problems that affect Salvadoran society as issues relevant to some Latin American countries, which were also under military dictatorships. Additionally, he blames the hierarchical and exploitative nature of the capitalist system for the poverty that affects many Latin American societies. His ultimate goal, then, is to use the past to transform the present with a successful revolution that would eliminate the capitalist system and replace it with a communist structure of power. Dalton's revolutionary

plans were cut short when members of his own guerrilla faction, the ERP-*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (The People's Revolutionary Army) assassinate him in 1975.<sup>38</sup> He was four days shy of his fortieth birthday. This was a tragic death because Dalton was a great thinker, poet and activist. Who knows how his radical ideas would have evolved with the passing of time and how much they would have transformed the Salvadoran society. This said, his testimonial text, *Miguel Mármol* should be seen as an important literary work that rewrites history by presenting a counter-discourse about the massacre.

## CHAPTER 4

DISCOURSES OF POWER AND RESISTANCE IN: *CENIZAS DE IZALCO* BY

## CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA

Claribel Alegría is a prolific and well-known contemporary Salvadoran and Nicaraguan writer. She has written poetry, novels, testimonial literature, translations, and anthologies. Her writing often reflects the political climate of Central America. The Nicaraguan poet Daisy Zamora describes Alegría as “an advocate for human rights” and a “voice for the voiceless.”<sup>39</sup> Alegría’s books of poetry include: *Anillo de silencio* (1948), *Acuario* (1956), *Huésped de mi tiempo* (1961), *Sobrevivo* (1978), *Flores del volcán; suma y sigue* (1981), *Mujer del río* (1989), *Thresholds/Umbrales* (1996), *Saudade* (1999), and *Soltando amarras* (2002). Among her works of prose are *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966), *No me agarran viva* (1983), *Despierta, mi bien, despierta* (1986), *Para romper el silencio: Resistencia y lucha en las cárceles salvadoreñas* (1987), *Luisa en el país de la realidad*<sup>40</sup> (1987) and *Mágica tribu* (2007). Alegría has won various literary awards including Cuba’s Casa de las Americas Prize, the U.S. Independent Publisher Book Award for Poetry, and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Although Alegría has an impressive body of literary work, this chapter’s focus is *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966), a historical novel that offers a literary representation of *La Matanza*. In my study, I will examine how a colonial and patriarchal discourse of power is constructed, repeated

and used to justify the massacre. I will also highlight how some characters resist this colonial and patriarchal discourse. In *Cenizas de Izalco* characters that represent members of the Salvadoran bourgeoisie, the coffee oligarchy, the military and an American traveler replicate a colonial discourse that has echoes of Edward Said's notion of *orientalism*, conceptualized in his book *Orientalism* (1978). In his text, Said describes the unbalanced power relationship between the East and the West: "Orientalism depends for its strategy" on a "flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (134).

Said's main analysis in *Orientalism* is the Western colonial discourse about the East and how it has "represented" the East stereotypically throughout history. His theory is based on analyzing the Western colonial discourse about the relationship between the West and the East, which he describes as "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony, and is quite accurately indicated in the title of K.M. Panikkar's classic *Asia and Western Dominance*" (Said 133). What this means is that since the end of the eighteenth century up until 1978 when he published *Orientalism*, Said reiterates that for the most part everything that the West had written or said about the East reproduced a stereotypical Western discourse about the East in order to colonize it and have control over the region. Consequently, the Orient that Western discourse created is imaginary; the fictional world does not correspond to the "real"

Orient. As will be discussed later on, Said's theory is useful in my literary analysis of *Cenizas de Izalco*, where different characters repeat a similar type of stereotypical discourse when describing El Salvador's landscape and its people. Although this chapter's main focus is *Cenizas de Izalco*, I will also include a literary analysis of two of Alegría's poems that reference the massacre: "Ojo de cuervo" and "Flores del volcán." Since my study considers Alegría's text a historical novel, I will first provide background information about this genre, followed by a summary of *Cenizas de Izalco* and the postcolonial and feminist theoretical approach of the novel. After the literary analysis of *Cenizas de Izalco*, I will discuss her two poems and then I will conclude this chapter by highlighting the most important aspects of Alegría's interpretation and representation of *La Matanza*.

#### **4.1 The Historical Novel in Latin America**

The literary critic Helene Carol Weldt-Basson provides a thorough study on the development of the historical novel and proposes new categories for Latin American historical fiction in her latest book *Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction: The Impact of Feminism and Postcolonialism* (2013). According to Weldt-Basson, in the 1930s the Marxist critic Georg Lukács outlines the development of the historical novel in Europe and defines it in his book *The Historical Novel*: "Lukács largely defines the classical form of the genre on the basis of the nineteenth-century works of Sir Walter Scott" (Weldt-Basson 1). Weldt-Basson quotes the main

characteristics of the classical historical novel as defined by Lukács: “Representation of a distant past, historical figures as minor rather than major characters, the hero as an average man who represents social trends and historical forces [...], past historical events as a prehistory of the present, and adherence to historical facts” (1). Paraphrasing Weldt-Basson, prior to Georg Lukács’s work on the genre, Alessandro Manzoni had also written about the contradictions of historical fiction in his nineteenth-century book *On the Historical Novel*. Manzoni believed that “the only real difference between historical fiction and history proper was that the former had the poetic license to fill in [...] the gaps in words, thoughts, and feelings of historical subjects that do not appear in the historical record” (Weldt-Basson 2). Weldt-Basson views Manzoni’s theory on the historical novel as an early anticipation of the “postmodernist notion of post-history: there can be no complete adherence to historical fact because ‘facts’ are subjective, based on individual perceptions and interpretations, and thus the concept of history is negated” (2).

In her book, Weldt-Basson emphasizes the influence of feminism and postcolonialism in Latin American historical fiction.<sup>41</sup> She also stresses that although feminism and postcolonialism share some similarities with postmodernism, they are not synonymous. In her study, Weldt-Basson discusses the development of the three waves of feminism<sup>42</sup> and its current evolution in the United States. She also stresses some differences in how this movement took shape in Latin America. According to Weldt-Basson, “in general, feminism is concerned not

only with women's rights, but also with recovering the work of women writers, analyzing the portrayal of female characters, and any general issues concerning women" (11).

Regarding the ideological concept of postcolonialism, Weldt-Basson quotes Neil Lazarus when she says that postcolonial criticism "evinces an undifferentiated disavowal of all forms of nationalism and a corresponding exaltation of...hybridity and multiculturality...it refuses an antagonistic or struggled based model of politics in favor of one that emphasizes 'cultural difference' [and] 'ambivalence' " (11). In her study of the impact of postcolonialism and feminism on the Latin American historical novel, Weldt-Basson identifies four major categories of contemporary historical fiction: novels in search of a national identity, novels that present a mixture of history and myth, novels that employ historical intertextuality and the symbolic historical fiction (13-39). In the first category, Weldt-Basson examines "the manner in which the concept of national identity in historical fiction has changed through the advent of feminism and postcolonialism through an analysis of two important Mexican novels: *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) [*The Death of Artemio Cruz*] by Carlos Fuentes and *Malinche* (2006) by Laura Esquivel" (13).

In the second category, Weldt-Basson analyzes *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez and *La casa de los espíritus* (1982) by Isabel Allende. These two texts she calls "magical realist historical texts." Novels in this category tend to "seek to illustrate, through

myth and fantasy, both how Latin American history at times seems more incredible than fiction and how Latin American popular beliefs have influenced the perceptions of reality and history” (22). In the third category of novels that use historical intertextuality, Weldt-Basson compares “two historical novels from the past 50 years that are both contestatory of official historiography but illustrate the subtle move from a postmodern to postcolonial focus” (28). These two texts are *Yo el Supremo* (1974) by Augusto Roa Bastos and *Flight of the Swan* (2001) by Rosario Ferré. While in the category of symbolic historical fiction, she examines Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) and *La fiesta del chivo* (2000). In these two texts: “One country’s history becomes a metaphor for another’s” (37).

Weldt-Basson considers Claribel Alegría’s *Cenizas de Izalco* an example of her first category of historical fiction, a novel that deals with the creation of an alternative national identity during the 1930s in El Salvador. She also argues that it is “an early example of how both feminism and postcolonialism have shaped the contemporary Latin American novel” (Weldt-Basson 19). Patricia Varas further develops this idea in the second chapter of Weldt-Basson’s book, which is called “*Ashes of Izalco: Female Narrative Strategies and the History of a Nation.*” In this chapter, Varas explores how Claribel Alegría uses feminist narrative strategies to create this alternative national identity. For example, in Alegría’s text she uses the diary of a male character, Frank Wolff, to recount the horrific event of the massacre, the eruption of a



volcano and his story of his love affair with Isabel, an upper-class Salvadoran woman. Isabel then leaves the diary to her daughter, Carmen, when she dies. It is through this diary that Carmen learns about her mother's affair and the history of her country. Varas views Alegría's novel as a feminist text that "makes the private narrative of a bourgeois woman and her love count within the national history and public tragedy, effectively erasing the traditional historiographic dichotomies and exclusions" (Varas 49). Varas, like many of the critics who have studied *Cenizas de Izalco*, highlights the feminist aspects of the novel. My examination of *Cenizas*, however, is different from previous studies because I also examine the colonial discourse of power in the novel and how this discourse is used to justify the massacre and to perpetuate the patriarchal and capitalist system that keeps women and the masses oppressed.

My study considers Claribel Alegría's *Cenizas de Izalco* a historical novel because it has many of the characteristics of this literary genre. For example, like the classical historical novel, *Cenizas* is based on a distant past because it is written and published more than thirty years after the massacre. In addition, Farabundo Martí, a historical figure who was one of the main leaders of the 1932 revolt, is a minor character. According to Patricia Varas, the manner in which reality is presented in the novel "emphasizes the importance of social criticism and the historical moment of the *Matanza*, which marks the characters and makes them conscious of the fact that their existence is historically conditioned—an essential requirement for a historical novel,

according to Lukács” (53). In addition, *Cenizas* questions the official historiography of the massacre by presenting conflicting accounts of *La Matanza*. In this manner, Claribel Alegria puts the official historical discourse of the massacre under erasure.

#### **4.2 *Cenizas de Izalco*'s Impact in Central American Literature**

Alegria's novel has had a great impact on the literature written by Central American women. Her use of “innovative strategies of composition contributed to a new kind of writing in Central America that introduced women's voices into the cultural canon even as it reconfigured the novel. Through the efforts of writers like Alegria, Central American fiction emerged from the social realism that dominated literature prior to the 1960s” (Barbas-Rhoden 17). Barbas-Rhoden and Varas consider *Cenizas de Izalco* Alegria's most well known literary work. Alegria's literary success with this novel and others is significant because she is “the first female novelist whose prose has received extensive popular distribution and critical acclaim in Central America and abroad” (Barbas-Rhoden 17-18).

The literary critic Arturo Arias in his essay “Claribel Alegria's Recollections of Things to Come” (1994) further discusses the impact of *Cenizas de Izalco* on Salvadoran literature when he says “it not only experimented formally in order to create new symbolic codes and broke away from the old paradigms in order to tackle the task of redefining Salvadoran society from the perspective and viewpoint of the Matanza, it also generated a generic shift from poetry to

narrative” (Arias 22). Other Salvadoran poets like Roque Dalton and Manlio Argueta also decided to follow Alegría’s example and began to write novels. This contributed to what Arias calls “the generation of a novelistic ‘mini-boom’ within Central America in the 1970s” (Arias 23). *Cenizas de Izalco* is first published in El Salvador in the late seventies under the military dictatorship of Arturo Armando Molina (1972-1977). At the end of his term, Molina ordered, “[the] ministry of Education [...] to publish works by Salvadoran writers, and, ironically, *Ashes* is one of those chosen” (Boschetto-Sandoval and Phillips McGowan xix). It appears that Molina did not read the novel, which explains why he did not view it as a threat to the military government. Unlike Argueta’s testimonial novels, which were banned for being too subversive, Alegría’s novel was widely taught in high school classrooms.

#### **4.3 Origins and Summary of *Cenizas de Izalco***

Alegría’s *Cenizas de Izalco*<sup>43</sup> (1966) is a short historical novel with multiple narrators, who denounce the patriarchal role of women and the atrocities of the 1932 massacre. According to Nancy Saporta Sternback, “In 1964 it was revolutionary enough just to write about the Matanza, but to claim that women count enough so that their stories really are the stories of their countries allows us to examine women’s roles in the formation of national states” (“*Ashes of Izalco* and the Making of a Writer” 63). This study considers *Cenizas* an important account of the massacre in part because it is one of the few literary texts written from a woman’s

perspective. Claribel Alegría is considered a Salvadoran and Nicaraguan writer because she was born in Nicaragua in 1924, but was raised in her mother's country, El Salvador, in one of the massacre's targeted areas.<sup>44</sup> Alegría is a survivor of this horrific event. In various interviews and presentations, Alegría discusses the impact that *La Matanza* had on her as an individual and a writer. For example, Jorge Ruffinelli discusses the origins of *Cenizas* when he quotes Alegría in his essay "Public and Private in Claribel Alegría's Narrative:"

There were certain things that I was not able to write as poetry, like all that horrible massacre in El Salvador in 1932. That event impressed me deeply even when I was only seven years old. I used to tell Bud (my husband) and some other friends episodes which I witnessed. I kept in my memory the stories that I had heard. Martínez ordered all the newspapers of the epoch to be burned, and nobody dared to write about that chilling event. It seemed as if the Salvadoran people had suffered a collective lobotomy. Nobody remembered the horror. At last Bud convinced me to write a novel with him, and that is how *Ashes of Izalco* was born. For me it was an experience of catharsis. (Ruffinelli 4-5)<sup>45</sup>

It is important to mention that in the previous quote, Alegría alludes to the co-authorship of the novel because she and her American husband, Darwin J. Flakoll, wrote it. However, most critics see Alegría as the main author of *Cenizas* because it tends to discuss Salvadoran issues.<sup>46</sup>

Alegría views her writing of *Cenizas* as a healing process for her own personal trauma. Her decision to incorporate the massacre in her writing is an act of resistance against the Salvadoran military government that had tried to silence the collective memory of this historical event by imposing strict censorship measures and by destroying the national archives and the newspapers

covering this national catastrophe. A defiant Alegría reconstructs the memory of the massacre in her novel with the help of “three newspaper clippings hidden in her father’s library” (Saporta Sternback 64). In this manner, she dares to speak about the nation’s history as well as the oppression of women at the time of the massacre.

*Cenizas de Izalco* takes place in a small town of Santa Ana, located in western El Salvador. The novel has some autobiographical information; for example, the character Carmen like Alegría grows up in Santa Ana and leaves her country to study in the United States where she gets married to an American. In addition, Carmen is the daughter of a respected doctor and her mother is a member of the Salvadoran oligarchy, just like Alegría’s parents.<sup>47</sup> In the novel, Carmen returns from Washington D.C. for her mother’s funeral. Upon Carmen’s return, she receives the diary of her mother’s lover as her only inheritance. After reading the diary, Carmen begins to reflect and question her mother’s identity and their relationship. Carmen arrives at the conclusion that she did not really know who her mother was. The storyline follows the failed marriage of Carmen’s parents, an upper-middle class couple, Isabel an elite housewife and Alfonso Rojas the local doctor. At first glance, Isabel appears to represent the typical role of a “good wife” in her society, who despite her unhappiness sacrifices herself for the greater good of her family. For example, in spite of her husband’s unfaithfulness, she continues to take care of Alfonso, her children and her home. Gloria Anzaldúa summarizes the situation of a middle and

upper class woman in Latin America when she says that a female used to have three choices: “she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute or the home as a mother” (39). For a moment, Isabel appears to have chosen the traditional role of a wife and mother. As the narration unfolds, the reader soon realizes that she is not as complacent and obedient as the patriarchal social norms expect her to be. Isabel rebels against her traditional role in society in many ways including by having an affair with an American named Frank, which was not in the decorum of a “good wife,” and by beginning the dialogue of female suffrage. In addition, as the novel unfolds, one realizes that it recounts General Martínez’s military coup and the military atrocities during the 1932 massacre. The last chapter of the novel includes excerpts from Frank’s diary, which narrate the horrific and gruesome slaughter of thousands of peasants and Indians by the military.

In the novel, some members of Isabel’s class mistake Frank, her lover, for being a “communist,” while in reality he was an American adventurer who called himself a writer. He happened to be in El Salvador at the time of the massacre. However, he never participated in the revolt that took place in 1932, even though he did keep a diary of the events that he witnessed. He was an eyewitness to the slaughter of thousands of peasants and indigenous people at the hands of military officers who had seized the small town of Izalco after the rebels had taken it over. Izalco was heavily targeted by the military during the 1932 revolt. In *Cenizas*, the

bourgeoisie is split between those who were in support of the military regime and the landed elites, and those who protested the status quo and wanted a social revolution.

#### **4.4 Summary of the Literary Approach**

My study builds on the argument that, in *Cenizas*, Alegría compares the oppression of women with that of the masses. One of the critics who alludes to this connection is Laura Barbas-Rhoden in “Awakening Women in Central America: Claribel Alegría’s Fictions.” Barbas-Rhoden’s literary analysis compares three of Alegría’s texts: *Cenizas de Izalco, No me agarran viva* (1985) and *Despierta, mi bien, despierta* (1986). In Barbas-Rhoden’s study, she argues that Alegría’s “narrative fictionalization of Salvadoran history points to the underlying oppression of women in society, as well as their awakenings to limitations and their subsequent insistence on change” (16). My study of *Cenizas* also examines the patriarchal and capitalist system that keeps women and the masses oppressed, and how these two subaltern groups challenge their traditional roles within this structure of power. However, unlike Barbas-Rhoden’s analysis, my study also draws on postcolonial and feminist perspectives in order to focus on the colonial discourse in the novel used to justify the massacre.

While the previously mentioned ideas of Edward Said are useful in my literary analysis of the racist hegemonic discourse of power used by the Salvadoran oligarchy and members of the middle class to describe the indigenous and peasant population of the time, Gloria Anzaldúa’s

critique of a patriarchal society in *Borderlands* (1999) provides a literary lens for the feminist analysis of *Cenizas de Izalco*. As Anzaldúa puts it, “If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn’t renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish” (39). In the novel, the main narrator challenges the views held by her mother’s high-class friends, who endorse a patriarchal value system that supports the status quo. Different generations of women enter into dialogue that exposes the male-centered political discourse of the time. They protest their disenfranchisement and note the absurdity of their social roles in society. Therefore, the female characters transcend the male boundaries of their time and gain agency into the patriarchal system. They position themselves in ideological debates as subjects who demand to be part of history, who at times agree with their male counterparts and, at others, challenge them.

#### **4.5 The Patriarchal Discourse of Power**

In *Cenizas de Izalco* the patriarchal discourse of power is reflected in the traditional role of female characters. Women are relegated to the private home where they fulfill the role of “perfect” wives and mothers. Carmen, the main narrator, recalls that the Salvadoran high society of her mother’s time expected women of her social class to marry or be subject to public scrutiny. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, in a patriarchal society, “Women are made to feel total failures if they do not marry or have children” (39). This is the case with one of Carmen’s aunts who does not get married; she is criticized for this because, according to Carmen, in Santa Ana



“no hay lugar para las tías solteras” (25). Carmen criticizes this cultural norm of patriarchy when she says, “Puede ser que esté cambiando, pero hace veinte años el único futuro para las señoritas de ‘sociedad’ era casarse con cualquiera, siempre y cuando ese cualquiera perteneciese a una familia conocida” (*Cenizas de Izalco* 25). In this quote, Carmen alludes to what may be interpreted as the commodification of upper-class women who were used by their fathers and husbands for social mobility. These women are supposed to honor their families by marrying within their social rank. Thus, Carmen’s use of the word *cualquiera* (anyone) is oxymoronic within the context of the patriarchal discourse, which only allowed a high society woman to marry someone within her class. In this manner, a woman becomes a highly sought and priced commodity for middle- and upper-class men who want to improve or maintain their status. This norm ensured the continuation of the social hierarchy.

Isabel, Carmen’s mother, marries Alfonso Rojas, a Nicaraguan doctor who comes from a humble family of farmers. Although Alfonso is from a different social class than Isabel, their marriage is accepted by Salvadoran high society because he is a respected local doctor. Furthermore, since Isabel’s family has lost their money, her marriage to Alfonso represents financial stability. On the other hand, Alfonso’s marriage to Isabel is symbolic of his upward mobility within the system of patriarchy. Alfonso implies this when he objectifies Isabel by equating his marriage to her with his academic achievement: “era preciso que el tío Gregorio

conociera a mi linda mujer y que viera mi título de médico. ¡Hubieran visto! Estaba feliz como un muchacho” (20). In other words, Alfonso views Isabel as a trophy wife, something to boast about to his uncle in Nicaragua.

In the novel *Alegría* demonstrates that the patriarchal discourse of power is not only perpetuated by men, but by the various generations of women who have internalized their own oppression. Isabel illuminates this perspective when she implies that mothers raise their daughters to behave according to societal norms, which dictate what they can and cannot do: “el crochet es obligatorio, y las salsas francesas. Nuestras madres nos enseñan a preparar cuatro o cinco platos exquisitos, pero nunca la cocina de todos los días. Aprendemos a conducirnos como si fuésemos hechas de vidrio, incapaces de inclinarnos a recoger un papel del suelo” (114). In other words, mothers transmit the cultural values that oppress women in a patriarchal society by teaching them to be submissive and “delicate” beings. Women are expected to know how to crochet and to prepare a few elegant dinners, so that they can impress their future husbands. This cultural value system resembles what Anzaldúa has called *cultural tyranny*, which she defines as “Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (38). Isabel denounces her cultural values because they make women passive while empowering men.

Isabel resists *cultural tyranny* in her own way. For example, she actively seeks a different education and future for her children. She does not want them to internalize the same cultural values that have oppressed her all of her life. She wants her children to be free to choose their own destiny: “Debo darles lo que yo nunca tuve: la oportunidad de elegir su camino” (115). However, Isabel’s own internalized colonial mentality at times makes her believe that patriarchy is only a Salvadoran issue: “Veo a Carmen crecer aquí y me angustio pensando que va a caer en la misma red estúpida, insípida, convencional, que me atrapó a mí. Es este pueblo el que hace que todas sus mujeres actúen de acuerdo a un patrón” (115). She is happy when Carmen goes to study in the United States, where she gets married and raises a family. Isabel thinks that Carmen has escaped patriarchy because she left Santa Ana, but this is not the case. Carmen will make this clear when she compares her life in the ‘60s in the United States with that of her mother’s in the ‘30s.

When Carmen returns for her mother’s funeral, she begins to unravel her memories of her mother. She is bothered by the repetitiveness of her mother’s daily routine: “Después del desayuno a planear el menú con la cocinera, ver si están brillantes los pisos y los cobertores estirados, regar el patio, arrancar las malezas de las plantas [...]” (16). Initially, Carmen finds her mother’s daily existence boring; however, she quickly realizes that her own life in America is just as dull as and even more isolating than her mother’s: “Washington es más grande que Santa

Ana. Hay teatro, parques, museos, pero pensándolo bien mi vida es parecida a la de mamá y quizá peor. No tengo hermanas, ni siquiera una amiga íntima con quien desahogarme. Todos los días hacer las camas, pasar la aspiradora, lavar platos, cocinar. La vida en los Estados Unidos es solitaria” (26-27). Even though Carmen lives in a modernized city (with access to theaters, parks, museums, etc.), she still feels isolated and marginalized because she is a woman living in a patriarchal society. Carmen’s role in society like her mother’s is defined by her gender. Alegría is alluding to the notion that patriarchy is not bound to a small town like Santa Ana; it affects many societies around the world including that of the United States. At times, the life of these two women are mirrors of each other, for they both feel trapped in their own marriage and their traditional roles.

All of Carmen’s life she had thought that her mother was satisfied with her life; however, upon reading Frank’s diary and reflecting on her own memory of Isabel, Carmen arrives at the conclusion that her mother was not as happy as she had imagined: “recordándola me da la sensación de alguien que llevaba un bulto muy pesado y sólo se libraba de él cuando estaba fuera de casa o escondida entre sus libros. Ese peso no pudo haber sido otro que papá” (Alegría 16). Isabel’s sadness or unhappiness stems from her loveless marriage, her feelings of emptiness, and her traditional role in society. The system of patriarchy has become a prison for Isabel because it does not allow her to exercise her will; she must behave according to what is expected of her.

Patricia Varas argues that Isabel “plays the role of conventional mother and wife well, adopting traditional behaviors deliberately, in order to later undermine them through her passion for reading, her travel fantasies, and her romance with Frank, or by maintaining a distance through her awareness of not belonging to that world” (54). I would add that Isabel not only undermines her traditional roles, she actively rebels against them by reading, sending her children to a non-traditional school, having an affair, leaving her lover’s diary to Carmen and by providing her daughter with choices.

Carmen remembers how her mother used to read to escape her surroundings and the gender roles that suffocated her: “Por las noches, mientras papá tenía la radio a todo volumen escuchando la onda corta con noticias de Nicaragua, ella se levantaba a leer, levantaba una muralla invisible que la separaba de nosotros, de papá, de la casona” (16). While immersed in her books, Isabel creates her own symbolic feminine space/room that brings to mind Virginia Wolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Isabel’s symbolic room is a space where she can be creative by imagining a different life, away from the gender roles that define her identity. Reading then becomes Isabel’s first act of protest against the patriarchal system.

On the surface level, it appears that Isabel behaves according to what is expected of a woman of her class. She is a good Catholic woman, who takes care of her husband and children, she is always dressed appropriately for every social occasion and her house is well

kept. However, as the novel unfolds, Isabel becomes more aware of her marginalized condition as a woman living in a patriarchal society and starts to rebel. This is made evident when she first notices the male gaze of Frank Wolff, her admirer, who has been invited by her husband to a dinner at their home. During Frank's visit, he partakes in a male-centered dialogue about the government of President Araujo, and the possibility of a peasant revolution:

Yo contemplaba a la señora de Rojas que parecía absorta en su crochet. Levantó la vista de pronto y me sorprendió. Para disimular mi vergüenza de adolescente le pregunté: --¿Qué opina usted, señora? Me ofreció una de esas sonrisas reales con las cuales las mujeres lindas reconocen la rendición de otra víctima. —Las mujeres no votamos en El Salvador—dijo—. Cuando los hombres empiezan a discutir política, nosotras cerramos los oídos y pensamos en cosas más importantes. A propósito—se levantó—, ya la cena está lista. (42)

When Isabel's eyes surprise the male gaze, she is aware of Frank's initial objectification of her physical beauty. She knows that he is only pretending to be interested in her political opinion because she caught him staring at her, and not because he truly wants to know what she thinks. She cleverly dismisses his question by alluding to the disenfranchisement of Salvadoran women. When she says that women cannot vote, and that they choose to not hear or enter into political debates, she is denouncing the system of patriarchy that oppresses women's voices by not granting them equal voting rights like their male counterparts.

Eduardo, Isabel's brother, also insists on knowing her political opinion when he asks "¿No te duele la miseria que hay en este país? Andá y asomate un poco a los mesones y a las

chozas del campo” (43). Eduardo’s question pertains to the issue of poverty that affects their society and he wants to know if Isabel is disturbed by the living conditions of the poor, to which she responds “—Sí—decía mamá—, es cierto, ¿pero te imaginas lo que sería aquí una revolución?” (43). Isabel says that she is aware of the poverty of the masses, but that a revolution is not a viable solution to the current social inequality because, she says, “Esas gentes transpiran odio y teñirían con sangre al país” (43). Isabel is repeating a colonial discourse that views the masses as “blood thirsty people” who are “filled with hate” against the upper and middle classes. Eduardo then asks her: “— ¿Y quién tiene la culpa de ese odio? ¿No odiarías vos también si hubieras sido explotada toda tu vida y encima de eso te trataran peor que a un animal?” (43). Isabel does not respond to Eduardo, who insists that she would also hate a group of people who had exploited her all of her life. Her silence may be interpreted as a moment when Isabel begins to establish a connection between her own oppression as a woman and that of the masses, for they are both marginalized by the same capitalist and patriarchal system, which favors elite and powerful men. In addition, it is important to mention that none of the male revolutionary characters in the novel discusses the issue of women’s rights. The female characters like Isabel and her daughter Carmen are the ones who directly and indirectly challenge the system of patriarchy by protesting their social roles and their marginalized condition.

Isabel is a very complex character because she challenges both the capitalists and the revolutionaries. For example, she criticizes her husband for financially supporting the guerrillas in Nicaragua: “—No seas tonto, viejo —se irrita mamá—, estás malgastando el dinero que nos hace falta. ¿No ves que todos los que te piden para la revolución son unos oportunistas? Te están explotando, te engañan con sus grandes planes y después se burlan de ti” (58). She is skeptical of the revolutionaries because she thinks they are “opportunists.” However, she does not support the capitalist system either; she makes this clear when she decides to send her children to a non-traditional school. Carmen recalls her time at this school when she remembers her teacher, Don Chico Luarca, an indigenous man who is very critical of the great coffee landowners. He once told her class a story about the coffee town of Ataco:

—En Ataco—nos cuenta—solo hay una escuela que llega hasta el tercer grado. A los nueve años empiezan los niños a trabajar. Para el tiempo de corte se van a las fincas con sus padres; les pagan por tarea, no les dan su ración de comida, porque dicen los patrones que no rinden lo suficiente. ¿Cómo pueden esos niños mal nutridos encontrar energías para seguir estudiando? No—le temblaba de cólera la voz—, este país no podrá prosperar hasta que sus niños no se alimenten mejor, hasta que en vez de cantinas se construyan escuelas. (Alegría 31)

Don Chico Luarca is denouncing the cyclical nature of the exploitation of poor families in the town of Ataco, where nine-year-olds are forced into child labor on the coffee plantations. He is outraged at the capitalist greed of the coffee bosses who deny children their right to food simply because they cannot harvest the “right” amount of coffee to earn a meal. The exploitation and



dehumanization of the coffee workers on the plantations is horrendous; they are treated like machines and not as human beings. Their poverty is so great that they cannot afford a decent meal for their children, and much less an education beyond the third grade. Luarda blames the coffee oligarchy and their insatiable greed for the extreme poverty conditions that affect the poor in Ataco. It is disturbing for Luarda to see this cycle of exploitation that must be broken, so that the poor children of Ataco and, by extension, of all El Salvador can have a chance at a different life.

According to Carmen, Luarda was an influential individual in her life; he made her aware of the disparity among the social classes, and he taught her to question religious beliefs: “fue don Chico el que me convirtió en agnóstica y filisteo. Me convenció de que la investigación científica era lo más importante” (31). It is also important to mention that during this passage Carmen also recalls Luarda’s reference to a Salvadoran legend: “En Ataco—nos cuenta—, se oye pasar a la medianoche la carreta del diablo. Es una carreta vieja, desteñida, tirada por bueyes invisibles que corren, desbocados. Adentro va un hombre también invisible que grita, grita y grita” (31).<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that Alegría juxtaposes this national legend with the capitalist greed of the coffee oligarchy because one of the beliefs is that this wandering wagon appears to people who are hypocritical, greedy, or who engage in dishonorable actions/conduct. Alegría seems to be using the myth of this wandering wagon to criticize the actions of those in power. In other

words, this is a criticism of the capitalist system at the time of the massacre. The greed of the coffee growers who exploit the land and its people can only lead to destruction, which this wagon seems to be predicting. This could all be viewed as a foreshadowing of the revolt and the massacre.

Isabel's decision to send her children to this particular school is in direct protest to her social class, the system of capitalism and her religion. Celia, Isabel's bourgeois friend, highlights this when she criticizes her decision: "¿No te da miedo mandar a tu hija al colegio de Héctor? –le preguntaba Celia a mamá—. Él es encantador, pero sólo tiene maestros comunistas como ese don Chico Luarca. Además piensa en las amistades de tu hija. Los niños que van allí no son de buena familia, hasta turcos hay" (31). Celia's views about Carmen's school are racist and classist, given that she looks down upon the students at the school simply because they belong to a lower class and maybe a different race. Her assumption that Luarca is a "communist" teacher merely because he is critical of the status quo is in par with the elite and military discourse of the time. Despite Celia's comments, Isabel continues to send her children to Héctor's school.

As stated before, Isabel also decides to have an affair with Frank, which is in direct defiance of the system of patriarchy. Although it is true that for thirty years Isabel kept her affair a secret, at the end of her life she tells Eugenia to give Carmen her lover's diary. Isabel's

decision to leave the diary to Carmen is important because she was instructed by her former lover to destroy the diary after he had left, but she did not: “Isabel: Eugenia te entregará esto después que me haya marchado. Cuando lo termines de leer, destrúyelo” (151). Isabel disobeys Frank’s wishes and decides to leave his diary to Carmen as an act of defiance to patriarchy because only her best friend Eugenia knew about her affair due to the shame that this would mean for a woman of her class. Throughout the novel, Carmen wonders why her mother left her Frank’s diary: “¿Por qué me dejó mamá este diario, este cuaderno amarillo, escrito de prisa, tachado, con la tinta desteñida después de treinta años? Las páginas están gastadas de tanto manosearlas, de tanto ser releídas” (123).

Isabel leaves Carmen the diary so that she can become aware of her struggles as a woman in a patriarchal system. Isabel empowers Carmen as a woman for several reasons. First, she might have been aware that her daughter was unhappy with her own marriage, and by having her read the diary she could empathize with her mother and even end her own marriage before it consumed her. Second, she probably wanted to share with her daughter her rebellious side and the duality of her own life because her family only remembers her passive actions. Third, she hoped that after reading the diary, her daughter would be conscious of the political turmoil at the time of the massacre and of the views that her family and friends had of the status quo. In other words, Carmen has the power to decide which version of her mother’s identity she will accept as

“true;” and she is also empowered to choose between the various perspectives surrounding the historical event of *La Matanza*.

#### 4.6 Echoes of *Orientalism* in *Cenizas de Izalco*

The stereotypical colonial discourse of power used by various characters in *Cenizas de Izalco* to describe the indigenous and peasant population echoes Said’s theoretical notion of “orientalism.” For Said orientalism is:

a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of ‘interests’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world [...]. (138)

In other words, “orientalism” is a type of Western discourse used to describe the Orient, which for many Europeans was an object to be studied and analyzed. Thus, it is based on a relationship of power, where the Orient is “inferior” and the West is “superior” in everything. For Said, the discursive rhetoric about the Orient for the most part has been very stereotypical not just from a historical point of view, but throughout all kinds of fields of knowledge that he states above. Although Said is not referring to Latin America, his concept of “orientalism” is useful in my study of *Cenizas de Izalco* where various characters that are representative of the Salvadoran

Westernized local elite use a very similar type of discourse that many Europeans applied when describing the Orient. As will be demonstrated later on, these various characters have internalized a hegemonic discourse that presupposes Western superiority just like “orientalism” does.

However, my study of *Cenizas* is not just about how the colonial discourse of power is constructed and repeated, but also how it is challenged and deconstructed by members of the same Salvadoran bourgeoisie class. It is important to mention that Said does not discuss the Western opposition to the notion of “orientalism” nor does he focus his study on how this hegemonic discourse was internalized in the East. In *Cenizas*, members of Isabel’s family at times contradict each other’s political views; their diverse perspectives deconstruct the hegemonic colonial discourse that is trying to maintain the status quo. This is the case with Eduardo, a journalist who challenges his father’s views of the *campesinos*. Eduardo gets into a political debate with his father when he theorizes about the military coup: “Citaba en la conversación las idas y venidas de ciertos líderes militares y de otros a los que él llamaba barones, para ilustrar su tesis de que una crisis política era inminente” (40). Eduardo argues that members of the military and the coffee barons (a group of elite and powerful men who controlled the wealth of the country with their monopoly of coffee) are planning to overthrow President Araujo. Eduardo thinks that if the military ousts President Araujo, the rural peasants will defend

him because he has promised to return their land. His father disagrees with his revolutionary views.

The relevance of Eduardo's political debate with his father is their differing perspectives about the rural peasants and the state of affairs of the country. For example, according to Don Manuel "Los campesinos no tienen líderes, ni planes, ni armas. Un populacho desarmado no puede enfrentarse con soldados adiestrados. Ya verás—lo amonestó con el índice—, Araujo se tendrá que ir el día que cinco coroneles decidan que están cansados de él" (41). Don Manuel's view of the *campesinos* is reflective of his internalized colonial mentality because he describes the peasants in a pejorative manner by implying that they are "inferior" when he calls them "un populacho desarmado" in comparison to the "superiority" of the soldiers who have been trained to fight. In other words, he thinks that the peasants are incapable of organizing a successful revolt against the government. Eduardo challenges his father's views of the *campesinos* when he strategically uses the same type of language to describe other successful revolutions that were led by marginalized sectors of various societies: "—No se olvide—le dijo Eduardo con deferencia forzada—que fue un populacho desarmado el que tomó la Bastilla y asaltó Versalles en 1789. La revolución mexicana la hicieron campesinos descalzos, y la rusa obreros de fábrica" (41). Unlike Don Manuel, Eduardo believes in the power of the *campesinos* to organize and lead a revolt because El Salvador is ripe for a revolution given the socio-economic conditions of the

time. Eduardo's views are in direct opposition to his father's. This is important because it highlights the heterogeneity of political perspectives among the bourgeoisie at the time of the 1932 revolt; and by doing so it also provides evidence that there was resistance within this class to the colonial and racist discourse of the time. In other words, Isabel's family is divided between those who support General Martínez's military dictatorship and those who oppose it.

Even though Don Manuel has lost his economic power due to bankruptcy, he is still a loyal member of the oligarchy; he will continue to show support for the elites and the military even after the massacre. Don Manuel is a character that has internalized a Eurocentric Western discourse about his own people. This is made clear when he repeatedly makes racist and classist comments against the *campesinos*:

-Tus campesinos revolucionarios –dijo- están desparramados, no tienen planes, ni coordinación; ni siquiera saben leer para darse cuenta por tu periódico de lo que pasa. Si por milagro se apoderan de la capital, en menos de una semana tendrán que entregársela a gentes, más eficaces. Se necesita un mínimo de cultura y educación para llevar las riendas de un país. Tus bolcheviques descalzos no lo tienen. (42)

Don Manuel states that the peasants cannot govern the nation because they are “uncultured,” “illiterate,” and a bunch of “disorganized communists.” His stereotypes imply that the *campesinos* are culturally inferior and incompetent people. Don Manuel's interpretation of culture brings to mind Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*, which Said describes in *Orientalism*: “In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over

others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West” (134). In other words, *hegemony* is a form of control used by the ruling classes or the state to dominate the masses. The subordinate classes *consent* to their own domination by accepting a certain set of cultural values that represent the interests of those in power. Said makes this clear when he says, “Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent” (134). In *Cenizas de Izalco* Don Manuel repeats and supports a hegemonic discourse that justifies the subordination and control of the *campesinos*. For example, he says that only a select minority, to whom he refers as “gentes más eficaces” or “superior” people, can and should govern the nation.

Don Manuel is a product of his own Eurocentric education. According to Carmen, her grandfather received an elite education at the medical school of the Sorbonne in Paris: “Papá Manuel fue discípulo de Charcot y conoció a Freud. Cada vez que alguien alababa en su presencia a algún intelectual salvadoreño, él apretaba los labios y soplaba explosivamente a través de sus bigotes” (18). Don Manuel views Western thinkers as “superior” to Salvadoran ones because he has assimilated a European aestheticism. In this regard, Don Manuel resembles Frantz Fanon’s *native intellectual*.<sup>49</sup> According to Fanon, one of the three phases of the native



intellectual is that of European assimilation. During this first phase, “the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own. He will not be content to get to know Rebelais and Diderot, Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe: he will bind them to his intelligence as closely as possible” (Frantz 205). In the second phase, Fanon argues that the native intellectual interprets his own culture’s literature using a “borrowed estheticism” and a “conception of the world which was discovered under other skies” (208). In other words, the “native intellectual” has assimilated the culture of the colonizer. In his efforts to be like the Europeans, the native intellectual abandons and rejects his own culture. He is a divided individual who hates a part of himself. For example, he despises Salvadoran thinkers and the peasants because he has internalized a Eurocentric colonial discourse. Don Manuel, however, never arrives at the third phase of Fanon’s intellectual development (“the fighting phase) because he is not a revolutionary.

Don Manuel is a character that has assimilated not just European culture, but French culture in particular: “Por las mañanas cuando Alfredo y yo nos íbamos al colegio, él regresaba a su escritorio con paso nervioso y ágil, enarbolando el bastón de ébano con pomo de oro que había traído de París. Se pasaba los días leyendo en francés, traduciendo a Buffon, criticando a los pérfidos ingleses, atisbando muchachas desde su ventana” (18). The fact that Don Manuel spends his time reading and translating the French natural scientist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), is important because he is influenced by Buffon’s ideas. Buffon

in the mid-eighteenth century theorized about the “immaturity” and “inferiority” of the Americas. The Italian scholar Antonello Gerbi in *The Dispute of the New World* (1973) scrutinizes and explains the inner motivations that inspired the thinking of Buffon and Cornelius De Pauw. According to Gerbi, Buffon describes the Americas as an immature and impotent continent where the “great seeds” of the Old World cannot grow due to its “antagonistic” nature:

There is thus...something antagonistic to the increase of living nature in this new world: there are obstacles to the development and perhaps even the formation of the great seeds; those very seeds which have received their fullest form, their most complete extension, under the beneficial influence of another climate, are here reduced, shrunken beneath this ungenerous sky and this empty land, where man, scarce in number, was thinly spread, a wanderer, where far from making himself master of this territory as his own domain, he ruled over nothing; where having never subjugated either animals or the elements, nor tamed the waters, nor governed the rivers, nor worked the earth, he was himself no more than an animal of the first order, existing within nature as a creature without significance, a sort of helpless automaton, powerless to change nature or assist her. (Gerbi "Buffon and the Inferiority of the Animal Species of America" 5-6)

Buffon denigrates the climate and the indigenous men of the New World. Nature in the Americas is so hostile and primitive because it has not yet evolved like the European one. The Old World seeds find an inhospitable climate where they are reduced to “shrunken” or deformed plants because the sunlight cannot reach the continent. According to Gerbi, American nature is “between a world in embryo and a world already rotting” (9). In this New World, the native inhabitant is not considered a human being, but rather “an animal of the first order.” In other words, he is a powerless and lazy creature, who is incapable of dominating the animals of the

jungle, working the land and “civilizing” the continent because he is no more than a passive element.<sup>50</sup> He has not tamed the nature of the Americas because he is too “weak.”

The Prussian encyclopedist Cornelius De Pauw (1739-1799) expanded Buffon’s racist and Eurocentric discourse. De Pauw viewed the state of man in the New World as worse than that of the animals: “they are so weak that ‘in a fight the weakest European could crush them with ease.’ They have less sensibility, less humanity, less taste and less instinct, less heart and less intelligence, less everything in fact. They are like idiot children, incurably lazy and incapable of any mental progress whatsoever” (Gerbi “De Pauw and the Inferiority of the Men of America” 55). De Pauw reduces the indigenous man to an “idiot” child, someone with a physical and mental deformity who is easily defeated by even the “weakest” European. Even though De Pauw never traveled to the Americas, he was considered an “expert” on the continent.

In the novel, Don Manuel’s stereotypical discourse about the *campesinos* resembles Buffon and De Pauw’s Eurocentric ideas about Latin America<sup>51</sup>. According to Gould and Lauria-Santiago, at the time of the massacre the Salvadoran elites “consistently portrayed Indians as inferior, backward beings who would squander any pay increase on alcohol and retreat into indolent barbarism if given any land” (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 49). Don Manuel’s elitist comments against the *campesinos* is challenged by Eduardo’s argument when he says “—Los barones y coroneles que están en el poder —replicó—, no se hacen notar precisamente por su

cultura; sin embargo nos rigen desde la independencia” (42). Eduardo implies that his father’s argument contradicts itself given that the military and coffee barons, who have controlled power since their independence, are not necessarily “cultured” individuals.

A young Eduardo is a follower of the revolutionary Farabundo Martí, a charismatic communist leader who was one of the main organizers of the 1932 uprising. This is made clear when Eduardo says, “El Salvador continuará siendo un pantano de malaria habitado por niños raquíticos y gentes analfabetas, hasta que haya una verdadera revolución, hasta que la riqueza del país sea puesta al servicio de sus habitantes” (42). Eduardo, like Martí, believes in the leveling of society by placing the country’s resources and wealth in the hands of its entire people, and not just for the benefit of a few. There are a few references to Martí in *Cenizas*. For example, in one passage Eduardo takes Frank and Virgil (Frank’s veterinarian/missionary friend) to meet Martí. During this encounter, Frank describes Martí as “uno de esos jóvenes idealistas que aparecen de vez en cuando aquí y allá, con la firme determinación de reformar el mundo. Repartió su propiedad entre los campesinos que la trabajan, y emplea todo su tiempo libre haciendo mejoras de tipo social en áreas rurales” (95). According to Frank’s perspective, Martí was a romantic revolutionary who believed in the social transformation of Salvadoran society. He led by example, given that he distributed his own private land to the peasants. Martí, however, is not a

major character in the novel. There are only a few passages that mention him and even fewer instances of him actually speaking.

The only time that Martí speaks in the novel is when Eduardo takes Frank and Virgil to Martí's farm. During their visit, Martí discusses the growing political awareness among the *campesinos*: "nuestros campesinos empiezan a darse cuenta que pueden imponerse por medio de la organización, que pueden exigir un cambio en la estructura social del país" (98). The *campesinos*' demands for social change are based on their desire to transform the power structure that has marginalized them. Eduardo believes that the system of power can be made more inclusive, but he also recognizes that the military and the landed coffee barons are not going to relinquish their power: "-No te olvides, Farabundo—le interrumpió Eduardo—, que los cafetaleros y los militares no están con los brazos cruzados. Ha habido varias reuniones secretas en Santa Ana. Estoy seguro que planean un cuartelazo" (99). Eduardo warns Martí of the military coup that will oust President Araujo with the support of the coffee oligarchy. Without even knowing it, Eduardo is also foreshadowing the bloody massacre that will follow the 1932 peasant revolt.

Although a young and idealist Eduardo believed in a social revolution, as he gets older his beliefs change. Thirty years after *La Matanza*, a middle-aged Eduardo no longer thinks in binary terms because he has come to realize that social change takes time, and that reality is

more complex than he had thought: “Poco a poco me fui dando cuenta de que la realidad no es tan simple; no es ni blanca ni negra; es gris. Las cosas cambian lentamente” (128). Eduardo’s political strategies have changed, but he is still critical of the establishment because it continues to exploit the masses. He no longer supports an armed revolution because he fears that another revolt will result in “Otra massacre como la del treinta y dos” (128). For him, violence can only lead to more violence without ever solving the root causes of poverty and injustice. I argue that Eduardo, like Isabel and Carmen, represents hope for El Salvador because their political identities continue to change and evolve. Their thinking has the possibility of transforming Salvadoran society by re-imagining a more humane society that would end the cycle of oppression, violence and hate.

Going back to how the colonial racist discourse is constructed in the novel, it is relevant to note that even Dr. Alfonso Rojas, who opposes the military dictatorship and is critical of the massacre, at times repeats a racist colonial discourse. This is the case when he makes references to General Martínez’s race and class: “—No cabe la menor duda que el golpe fue organizado por el general Martínez, que era hasta ayer vicepresidente, además de jefe mayor del ejército. Le aseguro que dentro de pocos días será declarado presidente. — ¡Bah! —exhaló despectivamente—, no es más que un indio ignorante casado con una ex-lavandera ” (102). In this passage, Dr. Rojas repeats a hegemonic colonial discourse when he calls General Martínez

an “ignorant Indian.” He also makes references to Martínez’s class by implying that he does not have any social status due to his background and his marriage to a dishwasher woman. Dr. Rojas’s remarks are interesting given that he also came from a humble family; however, unlike General Martínez, he gained social status by marrying someone from an elite family. In this passage, it seems that Dr. Rojas is more upset about being governed by a poor Indian than by a general who has illegally taken power. Dr. Rojas’s racist and classist remarks against General Martínez speak to his internalized colonial mentality. Later on in the novel Dr. Rojas will once again refer to Martínez’s race when he mentions his dictatorship: “—Sí —suspira papá—, así fue como el general Martínez se asentó en el poder por doce años. Tan inofensivo que parecía el indito” (78). Dr. Rojas is shocked that General Martínez took control of the government for so long, given that he appeared to be so “inoffensive” or non-confrontational, almost childlike. Dr. Rojas’s use of the diminutive pronoun “indito” reinforces the idea that General Martínez is of an inferior race. As has been said before, at the time the word “Indian” or any variation carried with it various negative connotations.

The upper class women who justify their power and exploitation of the masses by viewing them as inferior people have also internalized a hegemonic and colonial discourse that is similar to Said’s concept of *orientalism*. For example, some of Isabel’s friends are very grateful that General Martínez carried out the massacre to stop the dissemination of “communism.” This

is made clear when Carmen asks María Luísa if she remembers Frank, and she responds by saying “-¡Cómo no me voy a acordar! Era un comunista que dijo que había venido aquí para escribir un libro. Puras mentiras venía con órdenes directas de Moscú. Él y aquel Farabundo Martí fueron los culpables del levantamiento. Por suerte teníamos a Martínez de presidente y él ligerito supo arreglar la situación” (26). María Luisa labels Frank a “Russian communist” and blames him and Farabundo Martí for the 1932 revolt. Her categorization of Frank is misleading because he was neither a communist nor a rebel. Frank is a traveler who writes about his daily adventures in his personal diary. María Luisa’s stereotypes were common among the elites and members of the military who considered anyone who did not support them a “communist.” In addition, María Luisa’s admiration of General Martínez’s strategies during the revolt is representative of the elite’s support for the military’s decision to repress the 1932 rebellion with *La Matanza*. She expresses great gratitude and admiration for General Martínez because his dictatorship ensured the continuation of elite control.

In her efforts to understand her mother and her country’s history, Carmen juxtaposes conflicting perspectives about the massacre and her mother’s identity. By doing this, Carmen dismantles the hegemonic colonial and patriarchal discourse that justified *La Matanza*. For example, she questions María Luisa’s interpretation of the revolt and her “communist” categorization of Frank when she asks Alfredo, her older brother if Frank was indeed a



communist: “¿Es verdad que era comunista? Alfredo resopla. –Cuentos de viejas. Era un bolo inofensivo como yo. ¿Te acordás de las navidades que pasó con nosotros? A mí me regaló un camión con grúa y una cachimba de cohetes [...] Aquí venía mucho a jugar ajedrez con papá”

(30). Carmen’s questions lead to the unveiling of multiple versions of the truth surrounding the events of 1932 and her mother’s affair with Frank. In the end, it is up to her to decide which version of the truth about her mother or the massacre she will believe. Regarding her mother’s identity, it seems that Carmen decides that no one ever knew who she really was because her identity kept changing. With respect to the massacre, Carmen seems to side more with the marginalized perspectives about this historical event because she distrusts the official discourse of *La Matanza*.

Carmen mistrusts and criticizes the military discourse of the massacre because she witnessed some of their abuses of power when she was a child. She recalls an incident at the time of the massacre when two guards brought a *campesino* to their base that was directly across the street from Carmen’s house. From her bedroom window, Carmen and her brother saw that a colonel by the last name of Gutiérrez insulted and intimidated the peasant, who had his hands tied behind his back:

Alfredo y yo estábamos asomados a la ventana del dormitorio cuando dos guardias trajeron a un campesino. Tenía las manos atadas por detrás con un cordel alrededor de los pulgares. Se quedó allí, parado, con la cabeza gacha, mirándose los pies desnudos. El coronel se le acercó y le habló, pero él no dijo

nada, siguió mirando hacia abajo. El coronel le volvió hablar con una voz violenta. El preso lo miró y le contestó con un monosílabo. El coronel le golpeó y volvió a hablarle iracundo” (29).

Carmen is appalled at how the colonel mistreats the peasant who clearly cannot defend himself.

The colonel gets so angry at how the *campesino* answers his question that he ends up not only yelling at him, but also hitting him, which further humiliates him. The colonel’s actions reveal his sense of superiority over the peasant. Carmen highlights the *campesino*’s lack of shoes and that he was staring at his bare feet. Her observation is important because she sheds light on the extreme poverty of the peasant who cannot afford shoes, and the symbolic unequal power relation between the colonel and the *campesino*. The former’s uniform is what gives him a license to mistreat a defenseless peasant. The *campesino*’s sense of powerlessness is further illustrated by his inability to speak or look at his oppressor in the eyes. When the *campesino* finally gets the courage to say something, the colonel imposes his power over him by beating him and raising his voice. The *campesino* is treated like an animal by the colonel rather than like a human being.

Dr. Rojas witnesses this humiliating scenario from his office, and he is outraged, so he comes out to the patio to scorn the colonel for hitting a defenseless peasant: “-A un hombre indefenso no se le pega, coronel- le dijo. El coronel también se puso rojo. –Usted ocúpese de sus enfermos, doctor-exclamó mirando a los guardias-, yo seguiré ocupándome de guardar el

orden de la ciudad” (29). Colonel Gutiérrez turns red because he cannot believe that a civilian has dared to question his authority in front of the other guards. He looks at the guards and responds to Dr. Rojas arrogantly when he tells him to stay out of his military affairs. Dr. Rojas then faces him as a sign of equal power, and threatens to call his supervisor to complain about him, if he does not stop mistreating the *campesino*. This scenario is a good example of how Dr. Rojas, a member of the middle class opposes the military abuses of power during the massacre. Also, this passage is indicative of the military’s sense of superiority over the peasant population.

Thirty years later, Colonel Gutiérrez dies, and there is an elaborate funeral because the majority of the elite see him as a national hero. This is reflected in the novel when various characters mourn his death and glorify his military life. Dr. Selva, a friend of Dr. Rojas, announces his death: “—El coronel Gutiérrez acaba de morir. —¡Que en paz descanse! —exclama Celia—, estuvo mucho tiempo enfermo, de seguro que el entierro va estar solemne. —Por supuesto—afirma Meches—, yo oí decir que hasta el general Sisniega pensaba venir desde San Salvador” (75). Celia and Meches are two of Isabel’s former friends, who glorify the military life of Colonel Gutiérrez. They are elite women with conservative views who are not afraid to express their opinions or disagree with their male counterparts. However, Carmen challenges Meches and Celia’s perspective of the massacre by questioning their praise of Colonel Gutiérrez.

She does this by juxtaposing her own view of the colonel as well as her father's with that of

Celia and Meches:

¿Recuerda, papá—interrumpo—, cuando el coronel le pegó a aquel preso que tenía las manos atadas? —Que Dios lo perdone—dice papá—, pero fue muy duro el coronel. —Cuando sucedió lo de ese preso, ¿ya había pasado la revuelta? —Sí dice papá incorporándose en la silla—, acababa de pasar y el coronel le ordenaba a la guardia que pusiera preso o liquidara a todo el que parecía sospechoso. Se cometieron muchos abusos. En Izalco le temblaban—recuerda el Dr. Selva. —Es cierto —dice Meches—, ya se me había olvidado que en ese tiempo usted trabajaba en Izalco. —Sí —dice el doctor—, estuve sirviendo como médico forense. El coronel tiene muchas cuentas que rendirle a San Pedro. (75-76)

Carmen strategically confirms her own memory of the colonel's abuses of power when she asks her father if he remembers when the colonel attacked a defenseless peasant. Her follow-up question regarding the revolt of 1932 is even more important because what Carmen is trying to piece together is if Colonel Gutiérrez was one of the main leaders of the massacre. Her father's answers confirm her suspicion. Dr. Selva, who served as a forensic doctor during the massacre, also remembers some of the military atrocities committed under the leadership of Colonel Gutiérrez. Carmen's father and Dr. Selva condemn the colonel's military abuses of power. Their marginalized perspective of *La Matanza* challenges the official narrative of this historical event.

Meches and Celia, however, represent the official discourse of the massacre because they sincerely view Colonel Gutiérrez as a hero who "saved" the nation from communism: "Pobre

hombre—exclama Celia muy segura de sí—, hay que reconocerle que también hizo mucha obra. Acuértese—se dirige a papá—que él fue el organizador de la guardia cívica. Sin eso quien sabe, nos hubieran volado a todos la cabeza, igualito a Cuba estaríamos” (76). Celia is repeating the so-called *leyenda negra* attributed to the communist rebels that Miguel Mármol speaks of (and examined in chapter three of this study). For her the communists of the 1930s were angry mobs who would have assassinated every member of the oligarchy. She is happy that the 1932 revolt was not successful because, otherwise, El Salvador would have become a communist society like Cuba. Celia is also grateful to Colonel Gutiérrez for organizing the famous “Guardia Cívica” (Civic Guards), which was composed of young male volunteers from the wealthiest families who helped the military carry out the massacre:

Young middle- and upper-class volunteers responded to the call for formation of a Guardia Cívica while their parents footed the bill for armaments and additional troops from the eastern (unaffected) departments. The five hundred armed Civic Guards who patrolled the capital and Santa Tecla, along with the arrival of reinforcements from eastern Salvador, allowed the government forces to deal with the insurgency in the west. (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 184)

During the massacre, the civic guards persecuted and killed many people who they saw as a threat to the establishment. According to Gould and Lauria-Santiago, the civic guards used voter registration lists to persecute communist sympathizers: “Throughout February and March, Civic patrols and the National Guard searched for those PCS supporters, and when they found them they shot them either with or without the benefit of judicial trappings” (227). The previous two

quotes shed light on the bourgeoisie's support for the military and their own personal involvement in the assassinations of 1932.

Alegría's novel denounces the crimes committed by the civic guards during the massacre, as is evident when Dr. Rojas challenges Celia's praise of the Civic Guard: "—Perdone que la contradiga—le replica papá mirándola a los ojos—, pero en la famosa guardia cívica había muchos matones. Con el pretexto de defender el país se cometieron crímenes horribles" (76). Dr. Rojas represents a different perspective about the civic guards and by extension the massacre because he contradicts Celia's argument. He tells her that many of the civic guards were killers, who committed all kinds of atrocities against the rest of the population. Dr. Rojas is dismantling the official discourse of the massacre justifying *La Matanza* in its efforts to combat the dissemination of communism. Celia, however, is not convinced by Dr. Rojas' argument and continues to say that the Civic Guard was an honorable authority: "— ¿Cómo dice eso, doctor? La guardia cívica estaba formada por muchachos decentes. Algunos de tus tíos—me apunta con la barba—, Pedro, Rodolfo, Ricardo, estuvieron allí" (76). Celia describes the members of the civic guards as "decent young men" maybe because they were members of her elite class; she even tells Carmen that three of her uncles were civic guards. In other words, Carmen's family was divided between those who supported and aided the military during *La Matanza* and those that opposed it like her father and mother.

In *Cenizas de Izalco* various characters that represent the Salvadoran oligarchy blame Farabundo Martí for the revolt of 1932, but they fail to mention their own exploitation of the masses, which was a main reason why people rose up in rebellion. For example, Isabel's friend Meches refers to Martí as the major culprit and criminal of the uprising: “—Ese fue el criminal— se indigna Meches—, el que tuvo la culpa del levantamiento” (76). Although Martí was one of the key organizers of the 1932 rebellion, he did not lead the revolt because he was arrested (and later killed) before it took place. In addition, he was not the only organizer of the revolt; there were others, which the official discourse fails to mention. Some of them were communist, like Miguel Mármol, but others were not. Moreover, peasants who were fed up with their working and living conditions, as various historians have pointed out, fought in the rebellion<sup>52</sup>.

Once again, Dr. Rojas challenges the official discourse of the massacre when he says to Meches “—Perdón, Mercedes —dice inclinando el cuerpo hacia delante—, yo fui amigo de Farabundo y no era ningún criminal. Fue secretario de Sandino y era muy valiente. Puede ser que tuviera ideas equivocadas, pero vivió lo que predicó” (76). Although Dr. Rojas does not seem to have agreed with Martí's ideology, he still regards him as a courageous man who led by example. Furthermore, he calls him his friend and defends him from the accusation that he was a criminal. Dr. Selva confirms Dr. Rojas's marginalized perspective when he adds “—Junto con él fusilaron a aquellos muchachos Luna y Zapata—interviene el Dr. Selva—, ¿te acordás, Alfonso?

El pobre Luna apenas tenía veinte años y se acababa de casar” (77). Alfonso Luna and Mario Zapata were two law students who were followers of Martí and who were arrested and assassinated along with him. Dr. Selva mourns and denounces the three deaths, but he especially laments the students’ deaths because they were so young.

On the other hand, Celia feels no remorse for the death of Luna and Zapata as is clear when she says “—A eso se exponen—salta Celia—, muchachos locos, les gusta sentirse santos antes de tener experiencia con la vida. No se dan cuenta de que los zapateros y los pordioseros existen porque no sirven para otra cosa. Yo al coronel Gutiérrez lo admiraba. Hizo todo lo que pudo” (77). Celia repeats a hegemonic colonial and capitalist discourse with her biased presumption about the poor, whom she considers inferior and incompetent people, who are incapable of transforming their social circumstances. She holds them responsible for their poverty. Celia does not recognize that the marginalized condition of the poor is a part of a systemic problem. She also fails to acknowledge her own elite privilege as a member of the exploiting class. At the time of the massacre, the oligarchy used the military to oppress and subdue the masses so that they could continue their monopoly of power. Therefore, it is not surprising that Celia ends her argument by declaring her admiration for Colonel Gutiérrez, and justifying all the atrocities that he committed during the massacre since she is echoing the hegemonic discourse of power. For her, Colonel Gutiérrez is a military hero who “did



everything that he could” (including killing innocent people) to protect the interests of the ruling class and the military dictatorship.

Colonel Gutiérrez was responsible for training the civic guards and sending them to carry out the massacre at Izalco. One of the guards under his command was Perico Ramos, who was sent with a military truck and a group of guards to put down the rebellion at Izalco. Dr. Rojas describes Ramos as an “obsessed” man. His obsession becomes clear when he kills a guard for not shooting at a group of peasants who were gathered by the trunk of a tree. Ramos orders the other guards to get out of the truck and to move the tree trunk, so that he can kill all of the peasants: “Después le ordenó al chófer que pusiera en marcha el camión. No hubo tiempo de apartar los cadáveres y tuvieron que pasar por encima de ellos. Pobre hombre, desde entonces quedó neurasténico—dice papá” (77). According to Dr. Rojas, Ramos was never the same after the massacre; he seems to have gone insane. According to Dr. Rojas, Ramos was not just an executioner, but also a victim of the military dictatorship because he was following direct orders from his superior, Colonel Gutiérrez. This is to say that Dr. Rojas holds the colonel responsible for the military atrocities at Izalco.

Carmen continues to dismantle the official discourse of the massacre by challenging her mother’s friends’ interpretation of *La Matanza* and by interjecting her own memory of the time period and comparing it with that of other family members. For example, she recalls a brief

testimony of the massacre at Izalco given by an indigenous woman who used to come by her home to beg for money: “—Unitos quedaron en Izalco—le contaba a mamá la indita que venía a pedir limosna—. Unidos—se miraba los pies descalzos” (77). Carmen juxtaposes multiple perspectives of the massacre to shed light on what actually happened during *La Matanza*. She ends up not only favoring the marginalized discourse given by the indigenous woman, and other characters such as Eduardo, Dr. Rojas and Dr. Selva, but she also sheds light on how the various social classes viewed the revolt and the massacre. Throughout this process, Carmen also reveals the various degrees of internalized racism, classism and sexism prevalent in the Salvadoran society of the 1930s and the 1960s. However, as will be discussed below, the Salvadoran characters are not the only ones who repeat a hegemonic colonial discourse.

#### **4.7 The Objectification and Exoticism of the Other**

Frank Wolff, the author of the diary that Carmen uses to reconstruct her own memory of the massacre and that of her mother, is also a character who initially views the poor and the geography of El Salvador as an “exotic Other.” Frank is a recovering alcoholic who is undergoing an existential crisis when he decides to leave the United States in search for a deeper meaning of life elsewhere. Frank states this in his diary where he mentions his haphazard plans to visit his friend Virgil, an American missionary and veterinarian living in Santa Ana. His intentions are to travel through Central America so that he can visit the Mayan ruins, and later he

wants to go to Mexico. Frank resembles the typical Western traveler that Said criticizes in *Orientalism*, a traveler who believes in the myths about the Orient, in this case Latin America. For example, Frank believes in the greatness of the classic Mayan civilization, but he does not value the contemporary Mayans. In addition, he thinks that the life of the Salvadoran peasants is “exotic.” According to Frank’s preconceived notions, Latin America is a place with classic ruins, which are worth exploring, and a tropical climate that promises a “paradise.” His views of Latin America resembles the West’s idea of the East that Said criticizes when he says “in the West’s awareness, the Orient was a word which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings, associations and connotations, and that these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient but to the field surrounding the word” (142). In other words, Westerners started to believe their own myths about the Orient and saw them as “truths.” This is the case with Frank in regards to El Salvador; for example, upon his initial observation of El Salvador’s geography, he assumes that it is a “tropical paradise.” Frank is quickly disappointed when he realizes that El Salvador’s reality does not conform to his preconceived imaginary world:

Mi odisea marina tocó su punto final esta mañana, cuando desembarqué en La Libertad con mi aleta y tomé el trencito de juguete a San Salvador. Llegué a la capital sin prejuicios previos, sin planes concretos en cuanto a la duración de mi estadía. A primera vista la ciudad me deprimió. La vegetación exuberante y verde que se veía desde el tren, los conos volcánicos en el horizonte, prometían un paraíso tropical. Mis ilusiones se hicieron trizas al llegar” (65).

Frank states that he did not have any initial prejudices against the country, but he contradicts himself when he is disappointed that San Salvador is neither an idyllic paradise nor a modern city. His prejudices are evident the moment that he arrives at the Port of La Libertad and takes a “trecito de juguete” to the capital, meaning not modernized and big like the ones in the United States. His preconceived notions about the city are further exemplified when he is disgusted by its structure, appearance, smells and ambience: “Es una ciudad fea, agazapada, de casas con techo de lamina acanalada. Los pocos edificios de ladrillo o cemento que hay, están rajados y amenazan con desplomarse. La ciudad entera tiene el aspecto de un campo de refugiados” (81). Instead of asking himself why there is so much poverty and underdevelopment, he spends his time complaining about the “Third-World” characteristics of San Salvador. Frank is further disillusioned when the only trees that he sees are in a “little park.” His tropical paradise has turned into his worst nightmare. He even hates his hotel and complains about its service because no one there caters to his preconceived fantasies.

As an American tourist, he is pleased to find his “paradise” in Isabel’s home. For Frank, Isabel’s home conforms to his mental image of what the rest of El Salvador should look like. This is made clear during a conversation with Isabel, when Frank admires and envies her beautiful garden and home: “—Y yo le envidio a usted todo esto—respondí—, vive en el paraíso y no lo reconoce: es la imagen de paz que he añorado desde que fui expulsado de mi edén” (92).

Frank's Western colonial mentality prevents him from critically understanding the complexities of Isabel's life. For Frank the perfectly manicured house and garden are representative of his ideal image of a tropical paradise; however, for Isabel her world is more like a prison than a paradise. She makes this clear when she says—"Aquí tiene usted mi mundo, Mr. Wolff: cuatro paredes lo limitan: es tan opaco y provincial como Santa Ana. Créame que lo envidio" (91). Isabel expresses her sense of imprisonment when she feels trapped by the four walls that surround her and the repetitiveness of her existence: "—La vida tiene que ser más que este pequeño círculo aburrido de actividades que se repiten, se repiten, se repiten interminablemente. Un hombre como usted es libre, puede darse gusto, sentir el hormigueo de la aventura, pero una mujer... — levantó un hombro con tristeza" (92). In this passage, Isabel alludes to her marginalized condition as a woman living in a patriarchal society that limits her ability to travel freely like Frank, a man.

Throughout the novel, Isabel tries to make Frank more aware of her subordinate role in society. At times, he seems to empathize with Isabel's feelings of emptiness and her sense of oppression, but at others, he too marginalizes her. This is the case when he calls her "weak" because she is a woman: "Eres mujer, eres débil" (148). He writes this in his journal after Isabel decides that she does not want to run away with him. He views what may be interpreted as an act of female agency as weak, when in reality he is the one who is powerless because she does

not choose him. Frank repeats a patriarchal hegemonic discourse when he insults her by implying that she is “inferior” because she is a woman and not a man like him. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, in a patriarchal society when a male says “ ‘You’re nothing but a woman’ [he] means you are defective. Its opposite is to be *un macho*” (105). Frank continues to insult all women when he repeats all kinds of stereotypes against the opposite sex: “Las mujeres por regla general son conservadoras, cobardes, prefieren marchitarse a arrancar de cuajo sus raíces y transplantarse en suelo desconocido. Es tu problema, Isabel. Naciste mujer en Santa Ana. Todo lo que tienes que hacer es dejarla atrás” (148). Frank’s patronizing remarks imply that not only is she weak because of her gender, but also because she was born in Santa Ana, a “backwards” Latin American town.

He presents himself as the American “savior” who has come to rescue Isabel from her “macho” Latin American husband. This is clarified when he says “—No amas a Alfonso— dijo—, te ha engañado, te trata como a esposa, propiedad privada, bien inmueble. [...] —Eres un bien móvil, Isabel” (149). Frank is criticizing Alfonso for viewing Isabel as “private property,” but he too views her as his property. The only difference is that he has not cheated on her and her literary interests fascinate him, but he is still trying to “protect” her since he sees her as a delicate tropical flower that must be allowed to flourish in a “better” environment, which he thinks he can provide. In addition, Frank does not just insult women in general, but also the

Latin American men whom he considers “macho.” Anzaldúa states that the “modern meaning of the word ‘machismo,’ as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention [...] The Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him” (105). Although Anzaldúa is speaking about the power relationship between the Anglos and the Chicanos in the United States, her deconstruction of the concept of “machismo” is useful in my analysis of Frank’s view of Latin American men because he uses a similar discourse when referring to Isabel’s husband and the other men in her life.

Frank’s Western colonial mentality is further illustrated in his exoticism of the Salvadoran peasants. This is made clear when Eduardo takes Frank for a ride through the countryside. On their way, they pass a group of *compesinos* and Frank gives a picturesque description of them:

El camino era de grava, había un sorprendente movimiento: carretas tiradas por bueyes llenas de sacos de café, mujeres descalzas llevando sobre sus cabezas, con mucha gracia, cántaros de agua y canastos; burros flacuchos casi invisibles bajo sus enormes cargas de pasto fresco, indios con cacaxtles o haces de leña. De vez en cuando, un rebaño de ganado raquítico se nos cruzaba por delante, obligándonos a la inmovilidad. El panorama tenía vida: así se lo dije a Eduardo. (96).

In this passage, Frank portrays an exotic picture of the Other by being fascinated with what appears to him as an archaic world. For Frank the Salvadoran peasants live in a “different time.”

In this pre-modern world, they do not have the need for paved roads, running water or even

shoes. In addition, everyone is happy fulfilling his or her daily obligations. For example, the women transport heavy buckets of water on their heads with such “grace,” and the men are just as graceful carrying their loads. Clearly, Frank does not understand the reality of the peasants’ oppression. His view of the *campesinos* is similar to what Johannes Fabian has called the *denial of coevalness* in his book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983), which is a critique of anthropological writing. For Fabian *coevalness* refers to the sharing of the same historic time and space. According to Fabian, the *denial of coevalness* is “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent (s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (31). Fabian criticizes the way some Western anthropologists have written about their subjects because they deny their subjects contemporaneity by viewing them as if they existed in a “primitive and cyclical Time” (41). He lists numerous studies that try to establish a difference between “Western linear Time and primitive cyclical Time, or between modern Time-centeredness and archaic timelessness” (Fabian 41). Fabian takes issue with this type of writing because it views the West as always changing and evolving, while the rest of the world remains static. According to Fabian “What makes the savage significant to the evolutionist’s Time is that he lives in another Time” (27). Frank’s colonial discourse about the *campesinos* resembles Fabian’s notion of the *denial of*



*coevalness* because he objectifies the peasants when he is “attracted” by their life since they seem to live in an archaic and cyclical world.

Eduardo is disturbed by Frank’s problematic view of the peasants’ life; so he attempts to educate him when he says, “El ganado que acabamos de dejar atrás, camino al matadero, no es de las gentes que lo guían, ni siquiera son de ellos las carretas, o los bueyes. Don Jaime Domínguez es el dueño; vienen de su finca. Todo lo que ve, con excepción de la grava, las líneas de teléfono, y este auto, está exactamente igual desde hace doscientos años” (96). Eduardo explains to Frank that the peasants do not own anything because everything belongs to a great landlord named Don Jaime Dominguez. He is trying to inform Frank of the great economic disparities between the coffee barons and the peasants who work for them. The lack of modernization is also upsetting for Eduardo, who indirectly criticizes those in power for forcing the people to live in conditions of extreme poverty similar to those in the eighteenth-century. Despite Eduardo’s efforts to make Frank see the reality of the poor, he continues to view them as “exotic.” Frank is not disturbed by the lack of development; he actually finds it “attractive” because it allows him to see the Other in a different time: “Tenía razón, por su puesto. Su cuadro acusaba la inmovilidad de El Salvador, cosa atractiva para mí” (96). The “backwardness” of the Other is what is fascinating to Frank, who then writes about it in his journal just as the great conquistadors did in theirs.

Frank further romanticizes the poor and the tropical weather of El Salvador, when he says “—Menos mal que este es un país tropical y el desempleo no es tan grave como en tierras frías— dije—. Me sentiría mucho más a gusto siendo pobre aquí, que en los barrios bajos de Chicago donde uno precisa carbón y ropa gruesa” (96). He believes that it is “better” to be poor in a tropical place like El Salvador, where he assumes the weather is pleasant, than in cities such as Chicago where it gets cold. This last ignorant comment irritates Eduardo even more who responds by saying: “—Póngase en el lugar de ellos, Frank—exploró—, puede ser que su país tenga un clima ingrato, pero no es más agradable morir de hambre que de frío. ¿Cómo le gustaría a usted ser tratado como un burro toda su vida y ver a sus hijos crecer en la miseria, sin poder ir a la escuela? Son seres humanos como usted, Frank. Piense en eso” (96). Once again, Eduardo attempts to correct Frank’s racist colonial discourse by placing him in the peasant’s shoes and catering to his humanity. In other words, Eduardo tells Frank to stop objectifying the life of the peasants, and to start viewing them as subjects who are being exploited by the very powerful. In addition, their extreme conditions of poverty are human injustices that must be eradicated.

Frank finally understands that his exotic view of the Other is problematic because, in his picturesque world of the peasants, he accepts their social disparities as normal and even “attractive.” This is made clear when he says:

Tenía razón. Desde que llegué aquí he aceptado las disparidades que me rodean como elementos bien compaginados de un cuadro exótico y atrayente. Me ha parecido pintoresco el hombre descalzo y harapiento que guía la carreta, me ha maravillado la gracia con que caminan las mujeres llevando grandes jarros de agua sobre la cabeza. Fue sólo después del estallido de Eduardo que me detuve a preguntarme por qué las mujeres deben acarrear así el agua, cuántos kilómetros tienen que caminar todos los días, qué clase de existencia puede edificarse sobre una base de carretas con bueyes, jarros de agua y chozas con piso de tierra. (96-97).

Eduardo's constant criticism of Frank's view of the Salvadoran *campesinos* makes him aware of his ethnocentric view of the peasants and he begins to question his picturesque image of them. He arrives at the conclusion that the peasants' reality is far more unjust and complex than he had imagined. Alegría's decision to make Frank aware of his colonial mentality is significant because, by doing so, she is deconstructing the Western colonial discourse that does not recognize the agency of the Other.

#### **4.8 The Massacre at Izalco**

In the last chapter of *Cenizas de Izalco*, Frank gives his personal testimony of the massacre at Izalco and the eruption of the volcano. After his failed attempt to convince Isabel to run away with him, Frank finds himself drinking again and trying to reach her. He is unable to get to Isabel's home because he is trapped in Izalco during the eruption of the volcano, the peasant revolt, and the massacre. At first, he is confused about the situation partly because he is inebriated, but also because he did not understand that the peasants at Izalco had revolted. He

spends two days stranded during the volcano's eruption and, by the time he reaches the central plaza of Izalco, the military has already blockaded the town:

Dos camiones del ejército estaban estacionados a la entrada del pueblo. Había largas filas de hombres frente a ellos. Advertí que cada uno de los campesinos entregaba su machete a los soldados y recibía, en cambio, una hoja de papel impreso. – ¿Qué pasa? –le pregunté al oficial que vigilaba la maniobra. – Desarmamos a los campesinos de la región—dijo—. Hay órdenes de fusilar a cualquiera que se encuentre esta tarde con machete o sin salvoconducto [...] Regresé pensativo a la cantina. Las medidas que tomaban me parecían duras, pero probablemente se justificaban bajo las circunstancias. (164)

Even after noticing the military siege, and their extreme measures to restore “order,” Frank still thinks that maybe the military is justified in their strategies given the circumstances. The *campesinos* that he mentions above have been ordered to give up their machetes in exchange for a “safe-conduct” pass that was supposed to save their lives, so thousands of peasants gathered in the town square to receive their *salvoconducto*.

At this point in the novel, neither Frank nor the *campesinos* know that they are the targets of a military ambush; this becomes clear when the officers begin to shoot at the thousands of defenseless peasants. Frank and his friend Virgil witness their massacre from a bar that is directly across from the plaza:

Disparan desde los camiones. Derribé la silla al levantarme. Un torbellino de gritos angustiados ahogó el ruido de las próximas descargas. La plaza entera estaba en violenta moción; una masa de calzones blancos se agitaba como hojas de otoño que levanta una ráfaga de viento. Las ametralladoras estaban montadas en los camiones, con oficiales manejándolas. Mientras mirábamos, la masa de campesinos en el espacio abierto de la plaza salía de su estupor, buscaba a ciegas escaparse por un hueco [...] Frente a nosotros,

tres o cuatro torsos aparecieron sobre las cabezas de sus compañeros. Habían sido arrebatados del suelo y luchaban desesperados por alcanzar un alero bajo. Uno de ellos lo logró; se arrastraba ya por las tejas cuando una ametralladora lo pilló y quedó allí, desparramado. (169-170)

The desperate *campesinos* try to escape, but everywhere they turn, there is a bullet. Their slaughter is beyond horrific. Frank cannot believe what he is witnessing. In addition, he keeps on repeating that all of the *campesinos* were dressed in white, a common ethnic marker for indigenous people. This is important because some scholars have called the massacre at Izalco an indigenous genocide since the military deliberately targeted this group of people.<sup>53</sup> Frank estimates that in Izalco alone the military massacred about five to six thousand indigenous people: “Todo esto pasó en menos de un minuto. La mayor parte de los indios apiñados en el centro de la plaza seguía viviendo; algunos ilesos, otros levemente heridos. Aun con media docena de ametralladoras lleva tiempo matar cinco o seis mil personas” (171). If in a span of minutes the military massacred that many people, it is not surprising how quickly the numbers rose to thirty thousand, because *La Matanza* lasted a few weeks, and it did not just affect Izalco; there were about a dozen villages and towns in western El Salvador that were also heavily targeted. Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago divide *La Matanza* into three different stages and they describe the first phase as “extremely violent, accounting for thousands of deaths” (211). According to these scholars, during the first phase of the massacre the military targeted the areas surrounding the major sites of rebellion: “the countryside around Ahuachapán

(mainly nonindigenous), Tacuba (largely indigenous), Juayúa (largely indigenous), Nahuizalco (indigenous), Izalco (bi-ethnic), and the Cumbre de Jayaque (some indigenous, mainly self-identified as non-Indian)” (211). Although not everyone that was killed in the course of *La Matanza* identified as Indian, there is no question that many indigenous peasants were brutally murdered during the massacre and that sometimes the military did use their ethnic identity as a reason for killing them. In addition, Gould and Lauria-Santiago argue that even when the victims did not have any ethnic markers, “From the point of view of their executioners, however, all the dark-skinned campesinos in these cantons and in Ahuachapán and La Libertad were *indios*, a term replete with highly charged and negative, if ambiguous, meanings” (220). My study argues that in *Cenizas de Izalco*, Alegría is not only denouncing the massive military killings of the indigenous people at Izalco, but also the racist colonial discourse used by the Europeanized Salvadoran elite and the military to justify *La Matanza*.

#### **4.9 Allusion to 1932 in Alegría’s Poetry**

Although Claribel Alegría has experimented with diverse literary genres, on several occasions she has said that poetry has always been her passion. For example, during her acceptance speech for the 2006 Neustadt International Prize she stated, “ever since my childhood, poetry has been and continues to be my passion. From before I knew how to read, my parents had me memorize poems by Rubén Darío, the great Nicaraguan poet who founded

the modernist movement that transformed the Spanish language and whose work I recited with pleasure” (“The Sword of Poetry” 30). At first glance, her poems may appear to be “simple” due their style and accessibility; however, one must be careful with the illusion of simplicity, as Daisy Zamora has previously stated:

At first glance, her poetry can be superficially judged as being simple because of its brief lines and language, which give it a fast, pulsating quality, a mercurial rhythm (even when the poet herself reads it aloud) that sounds almost like the singing of a nightingale. But such apparent simplicity is a mirage. On closer examination, an attentive reading reveals a powerful, accurate distillation of language, line by line, until it achieves, like a nightingale, a maximum capacity of complex expression. The exact weight that the poet extracts from the apparent simplicity of each word, and the complexity it really contains and expresses, gives the work perfect balance. (“Knowing Claribel Alegría” 44)

In other words, Alegría chooses her words carefully in order to communicate her poetic and social message. For Alegría the written word is a powerful tool that can be used to transform reality: “The word is our sword, our strength, the magic force that is given to things in order to name them [...] As a poet, I like to invent and conjure up words, watch them fly, remain in flight, and many times fall and rise again bruised and wounded. There are words that reveal and others that conceal” (“The Sword of Poetry” 31). Alegría is not only concerned with the aestheticism of poetry, but also with its ethical value; for her the poet has an intellectual responsibility to use his/her poetry as a weapon that denounces all forms of injustice. She is particularly critical of the intellectual role of the Central American poet: “The poet, especially

where I'm from, cannot and should not remain in an ivory tower" (31). The Central American poet has to be a committed writer; someone who reflects and denounces in his/her work of art, the complex political and social reality of his/her time.

Two of Alegría's poems with a clear political and ethical message are "Flores del volcán" and "Ojo de cuervo." The latter appears in a collection of poems called *Threshold/Umbrales* (1996) and the former was published in 1981 in a poetry book with the same name. In these two poems, the topic of the massacre appears as a literary motif in the beginning of each poem. The main topic of "Flores del volcán" is the cycle of violence, oppression and exploitation that has affected Salvadoran society since the time of the Spanish conquest and that has continued since then. In the poem she combines elements of nature, history and indigenous myths: "Catorce volcanes se levantan / en mi país memoria / en mi país de mito" ("Flores del volcán" 158). The fourteen volcanoes are symbolic on three levels: they allude to the country's geography, its division (El Salvador is divided into fourteen departments), and they are a literary reference to the Salvadoran oligarchy that exercised control over El Salvador since its early history. When she says "en mi país memoria / en mi país de mito" Alegría is making a connection between her country's history and the cyclical nature of various indigenous myths. This is made clear when she says "¿Quién dijo que era verde mi país? / es más rojo / es más gris / es más violento: / el Izalco que ruge / exigiendo más vidas / los eternos chacmol / que recogen la sangre / y los que



beben sangre / del chacmol” (158). The poetic voice describes the continuous eruptions of the Izalco Volcano<sup>54</sup> as representative of the Mayan god Chacmol, who demands human sacrifice at the end of every cycle of life, which is then a metaphor for her country’s history of violence.

“Flores del volcán” is a type of testimonial poem that recounts the country’s bloody history from the position of a subaltern poetic voice. In this poem Alegría references the 1932 massacre and rescues it from historical oblivion: “y el volcán babeando / toda esa lava incandescente / y el guerrillero muerto / y los mil rostros traicionados / y los niños que miran / para contar la historia” (158-159). As has been said before, Izalco erupted during the massacre, so this is a direct reference to that time period. For example, the “guerrillero muerto” is an allusion to the death of Farabundo Martí and the “mil rostros traicionados” is a reference to the thousands of peasants and indigenous people who were massacred during the military ambush at Izalco. According to the poetic voice, the collective memory of this historical event resides with the children who bore witness to the military atrocities, and who will give a counter-narrative of the massacre. Alegría is one of those children who survives the massacre and who later overcomes her personal trauma by telling her story through the literary lens of fiction. Despite all the violence and exploitation that El Salvador suffers in the colonial era, and later on under its own elite/military leadership, and under the imperial influence of the United States’ government,

the poetic voice seems to give some hope for the future generations of the country because the children bring flowers from the volcano.

However, the cycle of violence and exploitation continues because the rich do not want to relinquish their power and control over the masses; they shelter themselves in big mansions with beautiful gardens and build huge walls to separate their world of wealth from the poverty of the people: “Desde la terraza ensombrecida / se domina el volcán de San Salvador / le suben por los flancos / mansiones de dos pisos / protegidas por muros / de cuatro metros de alto /” (160). The rich live extravagant lives in their gated communities; however, they cannot continue to exploit the masses without any resistance from the people. The poem ends with an allusion to the beginning of the Salvadoran civil war: “pero crece la ola / que se los va a tragar / porque el chacmol de turno / sigue exigiendo sangre / porque se acerca el ciclo / porque Tlaloc no ha muerto” (161). Once again, the next wave of violence is aimed against the oppressors of the people. During this cycle of life and death, many children will die as is clear when the poem references Tlaloc, the rain god who demands child sacrifices. If nothing is done to alleviate the extreme poverty of the masses, the cycle of violence will continue indefinitely.

In “Ojo de cuervo” (“The Crow’s Eye”) Alegría references various wars and massacres of the twentieth century that have marked her life since her early childhood.<sup>55</sup> These historical events range from: *La Matanza*, the massacres of the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the

atomic bomb in Hiroshima, the Vietnam War, the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel, the Rwandan Genocide, the Salvadoran Civil War, etc. In the poem the poetic voice is personified in the persistent eye of the crow, a strong and fierce bird that has borne witness to the various human and environmental atrocities mentioned above: “Soy el ojo del cuervo / el persistente ojo / recorriendo / fugitivos instantes / de mi tiempo / Domino con mis alas / el espacio / a mi tiempo domino / al que me fue otorgado” (“Ojo de cuervo” 54). The bird’s eye is a type of scanner that records the past, so that it is not forgotten. Later in the poem, the eye turns into an arrow that is triggered by the past to recover its memories: “El pasado es mi tiempo / soy la flecha / me dispara el pasado / debo recuperarlo / recorrer mis recuerdos / con los ojos” (54). In other words, the poetic voice empathizes with all of those who were killed during the great wars and massacres of the twentieth century and demands that their voices be heard by insisting on telling their story.

In the poem the 1932 massacre is the first historical reference probably because it is the earliest event that marked Alegría’s life. The reference begins with an allusion and personification of the Izalco volcano: “eructando el volcán / llameando / eructando / arrojando piedras” (54). The poetic voice describes the volcano’s explosive eruption as if it were an angry individual throwing rocks of lava at anyone in sight. The rage quickly turns into sadness as is made clear when the volcano cries: “mientras llora cenizas el volcán / y yo evitando el humo /

me desvió a la plaza” (56). The crying of the volcano is symbolic because it foreshadows and laments the massacre at Izalco. In addition, the volcano’s smoke guides the crow’s eye to the plaza where the assassinations will take place. The next few lines of the poem describe the horrific slaughter of the indigenous men and young children gathered at the plaza:

Una lluvia fina  
 de cenizas  
 cotonas blancas  
 hacinadas en la plaza  
 son los hombres de Izalco  
 son los niños  
 limpiándose su rostro  
 con pañuelos  
 traca-traca-trac  
 la tartamuda  
 van cayendo cotonas  
 decenas  
 centenares de cotonas  
 que caen  
 se retuercen  
 inmóviles se quedan. (56)

Alegría references the sound of machine guns to emphasize the nihilistic element of the massacre at Izalco. She also alludes to the assassination and mourning of young male children who are gathered at the plaza with their fathers. They wipe their faces (probably their tears after seeing their fathers killed) with their handkerchiefs before the soldiers kill them. This passage is very similar to Alegría’s description of the massacre at Izalco in her novel. There are some changes in word choice and style because it is a poem, but, other than that, it has intertextuality with the

passage in the novel that describes the killing of thousands of indigenous men who were dressed in white clothing. The main difference is that in the novel there is only one child who is killed with his father.

The last verses that reference the massacre in the poem like in the novel describe the gruesome murder of a young and terrified boy holding his father's hand: "Un niño con su padre / de la mano los dos / un niño que no entiende / y mira con ojos desorbitados" (58). In the novel the little boy is about twelve or thirteen years old: "Un hombre y un niño de doce o trece años se levantaban. El niño miraba aterrorizado, pero obediente, a su padre...Virgil cruzó desde la cantina. Tomó al niño de la otra mano. Los tres empezaron a caminar hacia la iglesia. La vieja se puso junto a mí. Los seguí con los ojos hasta que cayeron" (Cenizas de Izalco 172). In both allusions the little boy is scared and does not understand the brutality that is taking place; he follows his father's advice and holds his hand hoping that he will protect him, but he cannot. In the novel the little boy dies with his father and Virgil, Frank's friend who tries to save him. Frank ends his account of the massacre with this horrific scene. In the poem the crow descends to Izalco to witness the massacre, and at the end, it flies away: "Levanto el vuelo / y me alejo / me alejo" (58). Frank and the crow both leave, but not before recording their memories of *La Matanza*. Frank writes down his eyewitness report in his journal, which he then leaves to Isabel,

so that she can know what happened. In the poem the crow scans the massacre and stores it in its memory, so that later it can be retrieved for future generations.

Perhaps Alegría's message is that although *La Matanza* primarily affected Salvadorans, it should not be considered just a Salvadoran issue because it was a massacre against humanity. It seems that, for her, it is important that not just Salvadorans know about its history, but also other people around the world. It must not be relegated to historical oblivion. All those who died in *La Matanza* need to be remembered just like the innocent victims who perished during the massacres of WWI or WWII. Her message highlights the loss of human life during *La Matanza*. In other words, every human being should denounce any crime against humanity.

#### **4.10 The Capitalist Discourse of Power**

Alegría is also very critical of the Salvadoran capitalists, who continued to oppress the poor decades after *La Matanza*. When Carmen returns for her mother's funeral, she is enraged at how little things have changed in her hometown of Santa Ana. Her mother's friends are still obsessed with their social status and they continue to fear a communist revolt because they do not want to lose their power or share their wealth. Therefore, they reinforce a colonial discourse when they describe the lower classes. For example, Meches is obsessed with buying material things from foreign countries like furniture and flowers. Meches has bought into the capitalist mentality of purchasing newer and shinier commodities for the symbolic value that they

represent. At the same time, she cannot escape the fact that she lives in a third world country where the gap between the rich and the poor is very great. While she brags about the new home that she has built for her nephew and his family, she also complains about the poverty that surrounds her home. “Toda la piedra de la pared de enfrente—levanta la mano con un gesto ampuloso—la hicimos venir de Guatemala; los azulejos de los baños, las alfombras, los muebles, los espejos, todito se pidió a los Estados Unidos” (70). Meches’s material wealth gives her a higher social status and that is why she boasts about where the objects came from and how much money she spent in purchasing them.

Despite her wealth, she chooses to exploit the poor that live in her town even though she is aware of their marginal conditions. For example, she emphasizes that her nephew’s house is the only place with running water in the town, and not only does it have running water, but it also has an unnecessary pool. However, she loathes the poor who come to buy water from her family because they are “dirty.” “—Lo único malo, doctor...es que el traspatio, donde tenemos la bomba, se mantiene llena de gente que llega a comprar agua. Son tan sucios, da lástima ver cómo está de sucia la pared que da ese lado; el otro día Lito tuvo que decirle al mandador que echara a una mujer que estaba muy tranquila comiendo con sus hijos debajo del amate” (71). Instead of feeling sympathetic or even empathetic about the living conditions of the poor families that come by to buy water, she is upset about the filthy wall.

Meches is so consumed by her own materialism that she never questions why some are so impoverished and denied necessities like water. The above passage describes existing social inequalities. Many of these people are probably homeless or have small huts as homes. All they can afford is to buy the minimum amount of food and water for their survival, not even enough to bathe, while Meches spends thousands of dollars on different brands imitating the life of the very wealthy from the United States or Europe. It is not surprising that when the revolt occurred some of the rebels targeted the homes of the elites because they were fed up with the social discrepancy between the rich and the poor. The workers began to resent the bourgeoisie and the landlords because they owned a lot of land and lived extravagant lives, while their workers barely survived on their meager salaries.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

Alegría's literary representation of the massacre in *Cenizas de Izalco* deconstructs the internalized hegemonic discourses of power that were used to justify the massacre and to retain control over the masses. She also denounces the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system that kept women at the margins of power. Throughout the novel she sheds light on the various degrees of internalized racism, classism, and sexism. In addition, her juxtaposition of the various perspectives surrounding the topic of the massacre and the ambiguity of Isabel's identity highlights the complexities of individual identities and the constructed nature of history. For



example, Carmen arrives at the conclusion that no one ever knew who her mother really was because her identity kept changing. Regarding the issue of the massacre, Carmen appears to side with the marginalized perspective of this historical event, but not without first illuminating the various interpretations of *La Matanza*. In this manner, Alegría demonstrates that historical accounts, just like individual identities and memories, are always partial, mediated by the dynamics of power and resistance, and therefore always subject to change.

Alegría's representation of the massacre is different from the previous literary representations that this study has examined. First, she interprets the massacre from a female perspective, which addresses issues of gender oppression that are not included in the other accounts. Alegría establishes a connection between the economic exploitation of capitalism and sexism. In other words, she illuminates how the system of patriarchy and capitalism marginalizes women and not just the lower classes. The other authors had not fully developed this link. In addition, she is the first author to establish solidarity ties with a controversial American male character, Frank Wolff. Alegría decides not to idealize Frank and Isabel's romance, so that their personal relationship and their individual identity are just as complex as the history of the massacre, and by extension, the foreign ties between El Salvador and the United States' government. The fact that Frank denounces the atrocities of the massacre at Izalco in his diary and then leaves his personal document to Isabel is significant because his

binary and exotic view of the Salvadoran *campesinos* has begun to change (even if the extent is unclear). He is at least aware of their brutal reality and their persecution during the massacre. Alegría's decision to raise Frank's awareness is symbolic of the importance of building international solidarity for national issues that should be considered crimes against humanity. In this manner, she deconstructs all forms of binary thinking that prevents the continuous evolution of every society.

Frank's changing perception of the social reality of the people is part of Alegría's multi-perspective interpretation of the massacre, which highlights a complex reality of the events of 1932 that transcends national borders, class and gender lines. In other words, oppression can only be defeated when all humans unite against it. In addition, the fact that the novel is as much about the massacre as the historical memory of this event is indicative of the distortions and misrepresentations of the various historical accounts surrounding this topic, which continue to change as new voices or interpretations are heard.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**MANIFEST ORIENTALISM, FIXITY, AND ABJECTION: MANLIO ARGUETA'S**  
**REPRESENTATION OF *LA MATANZA***

Manlio Argueta is a contemporary Salvadoran poet, novelist, and an author of children's books. Argueta began his literary career writing poetry, but he is best known for his novels. His books of poetry include: *En el costado de la luz* (1968), *De aquí en adelante* (1970), and *Las bellas armas reales* (1975). Among his published novels are *El valle de las hamacas* (1970), *Caperucita en la zona roja* (1977), *Un día en la vida* (1980), *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* (1986), *Milagro de la paz* (1994), and *Siglo de o(g)ro: bio-no-vela circular* (1997). In 1956 when he was a first-year law student at the University of San Salvador, Argueta joined the *Círculo Literario Universitario*, which was a literary circle founded in the same year by the revolutionary poets Otto René Castillo and Roque Dalton.<sup>56</sup> This literary circle was very influential for him because it transformed Argueta into a committed writer. In an interview with Zulma Nelly Martínez, Argueta discusses the ethical role of the writer as theorized by the various members of the *Círculo Literario Universitario*:

En esa época, 1956 y 1957, entablamos una discusión pública sobre el papel del escritor en una sociedad como la nuestra que ha conocido sólo la represión y la injusticia. Comenzamos nuestro trabajo literario bajo el lema: 'el escritor es una conducta.' Es decir que el escritor no puede permanecer callado, no puede hacerse cómplice con el silencio de una dictadura que en esos momentos cumple 25 años....Desde ahí se inicia nuestra polémica pública, denunciando a la dictadura,

escribiendo poesía, haciendo activismo cultural, participando en organizaciones políticas. (Martínez 42-43)

In other words, Argueta becomes a political activist and committed writer in the *Círculo Literario Universitario*. Since then, he denounced the military dictatorship that began in 1931 with the government of General Martínez and continued for several decades. The members of the *Círculo Literario Universitario* believed that they could transform the social reality of their country with their writing and their social activism.

Since writers like Argueta and Dalton were outspoken critics of the military dictatorship, they were persecuted, jailed, and even exiled by the government: “Como trabajadores de la palabra éramos perseguidos, éramos como la voz de quienes no podían hablar. [...] De allí viene la tradición anti-palabra, anti-libro, anti-ideas ‘extrañas,’ etc.”<sup>57</sup> (Personal interview). The authoritarian government of the time repressed the members of the *Círculo Literario Universitario* because it saw them as a political and social threat to the establishment. Roque Dalton was arrested on December 15, 1959; he was the first to be arrested. According to Argueta, the military government targeted them partly because at the time they were among “los primeros en demostrar como la palabra puede ser peligrosa para el poder dominante. Después lo hizo tan heroicamente el Monseñor Romero, pero eso fue ya en el ochenta” (Personal interview). In 1972, Argueta goes into exile for twenty-one years, after the military had taken over the National University and begun the persecution of students and professors:

Me fui del país después que el ejército se tomó la Universidad de El Salvador. Esa vez hubo más de dos mil universitarios capturados (entre funcionarios, profesores y estudiantes y la universidad pasó cerrada casi tres años); muchos salimos para Costa Rica. En El Salvador no contaba con mínimos espacios, excepto la Universidad. (E-mail interview)

He decides to go into exile to escape the political persecution in El Salvador. Finally, in 1993, after the Salvadoran Peace Accords that brought an end to the civil war (1980-1992), Argueta returns to his native country. He currently resides in El Salvador, where he is the Director of the National Library.

This chapter examines the literary representation of *La Matanza* in Argueta's two testimonial novels about the Salvadoran civil war: *Un día en la vida* (1980) and *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* (1986). In the latter and the former the topic of the massacre appears in different chapters as a leitmotif when the peasants compare their existing social and political situation to that of 1932. In these two novels the repressive Salvadoran government and the military forces use the same colonial discourse prevalent at the time of the massacre to justify the marginalization and persecution of the *campesinos* during the civil war. The older generation of *campesinos* resists and challenges the hegemonic discourse of power by remembering the horrors of 1932 and educating the younger generation about their continuous persecution and exploitation. To analyze these themes, this literary analysis will draw from the theories of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Julia Kristeva. It will be demonstrated that in *Un día en la*

*vida*, the American military advisors/trainers teach the soldiers a hegemonic colonial and misogynist discourse that resembles Said's notions of *latent* and *manifest orientalism*, conceptualized in his book *Orientalism* (1978). As a result of this military indoctrination, the soldiers hate themselves and their fellow countrymen. Bhabha's concepts of *fixity* and the ambivalence of the colonial discourse in "The Location of Culture" (1994) are also useful theoretical tools when discussing the construction and repetition of the stereotypes rooted in colonization and repeated by the military power. In this study, I will first give a brief description of the testimonial novel genre, a summary of *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán*, followed by the examination of the colonial and misogynist discourse used to justify the massacre and the Salvadoran civil war, and then I will examine the military killings and purging of the dead bodies after the massacre. I will conclude this analysis by highlighting the most important aspects of Argueta's literary representation of *La Matanza*.

### **5.1 The Testimonial Novel**

Argueta's *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán* are considered *testimonial novels* by critics like Linda Craft in *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* (1997), Anna Lee Utech in her doctoral thesis, *Las novelas de Manlio Argueta: La historia, cultura e identidad salvadoreñas* (1993) and Bruce Fox in his doctoral thesis, *The Contestatory Nature of the Testimonial Novels by Manlio Argueta: Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur and Un día en la*

*vida: A Socio-Historical, Narratological, and Cultural Reading* (2008). These critics and others have mostly focused on the main topic of the novels, the Salvadoran civil war. My study of *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán* is different from theirs because my focus is *La Matanza* and how it is represented in these two novels. This said, I will draw from Craft's study when referring to the literary representation of the civil war in these two texts. Regarding the genre of the *testimonial novel* John Beverly defines it as "the literary texts in which an 'author' in the conventional sense has either invented a testimonio-like story or, as in the case of *In Cold Blood*..., extensively reworked, with explicitly literary goals (greater figurative density, tighter narrative form, elimination of digressions and interruptions, and so on), a testimonial account that is no longer present as such except in its simulacrum" ("The Margin at the Center" 38). In this type of writing the author can build on existing testimonial accounts and elaborate them into a novel. The creativity of the author is not constricted by the testimonial account. According to Craft, the testimonial novel is a version of the testimonial in which there is "an elaborated and more literary point of view, more attention paid to literary speech, figures, metaphors, so on and so forth" (Personal interview). The development of the testimonial genre in Latin America is discussed in chapter three of this study using the theoretical ideas of John Beverly and Miguel Barnet. Paraphrasing Beverly, one of the main differences between a *testimonio* and a *testimonial novel* is that in the former the informant/main narrator of the text is usually a

subaltern subject who is not a professional writer, whereas in the *testimonial novel* the main author of the literary text is a skilled writer who then may alter or invent a testimonial account in his/her novel to communicate a social injustice.

For example, *Un día* was inspired by a real testimony from a peasant woman whom Argueta met while he was in exile in Costa Rica ("E-mail interview"). The author combined her testimony and the testimony of former soldiers in his fictional writing. *Un día* has many testimonial sections that Argueta did not modify. He directly quotes his informants and differentiates those passages from the rest of the novel by beginning with *italic letters* (Martínez, Zulma Nelly 48). While living in Costa Rica, Argueta founded a cultural institute for thousands of Salvadoran refugees that had fled the civil war: “En ese momento, habían como veinte mil campesinos salvadoreños que habían huido de aquellas tácticas de quitarle el agua al pez<sup>58</sup> [...] entonces empezaron a perseguir a los campesinos y a matarlos” (Personal interview). Argueta organizes several interviews with the Salvadoran refugees in Costa Rica and later uses their testimonials as an inspiration to write *Cuzcatlán* (Personal interview). These two novels, *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán*, are narrated from the point of view of characters that describe the circumstances of peasants before and during the civil war.<sup>59</sup> The voice of the narrators in *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán* represents the voice of the peasants transforming the notion of these experiences from an “I” to a “we the peasants.” In these novels the characters, especially the older generations, reference the



1932 massacre and compare it to their current political situation. In this manner, the memory of this horrific event is presented in the collective memory of the older peasants, who try to tell their version of the story, orally, to their younger relatives, who were either too young to remember the event or not yet born. In other words, the history of the massacre is transmitted orally by the older generation that is resisting the discourse of power that tried to erase any written documentation of *La Matanza*. Both novels represent the 1932 massacre as a leitmotif that appears in different chapters.

For example, in *Un día*, Guadalupe Fuentes (the main narrator) has a conversation with her mother who tells her of the event for the first time: “ ‘La indiada se había levantado y eso no lo iban a perdonar aunque se acabara toda la gente de por aquí.’ Me decía mi mamá. Fue despuesito del treinta y dos. ‘No te imaginás lo terrible que fueron esos días, ni siquiera se podía tener un santo de estampa porque ya creían que la oración que tiene escrita por detrás eran consignas del comunismo” ’ (50-51). Guadalupe’s mother is repeating how the massacre was labeled by those in power, the military and the government, a “communist revolt” led by the “indiada,” a pejorative term that became synonymous with “communist” and “*campesino*.” According to Lindo-Fuentes et. al., the local elites in the late 1920s and early 1930s “freely interchanged the word ‘communist’ with older terms like ‘*Indio*’ (Indian), ‘*campesino*’ (peasant),

and ‘*gente pobre*’ (poor people, or lower class)” (47). The local elites used these terms as insults for the poor without bothering to differentiate between all three expressions.

This passage is also an allusion to the indigenous *cofradías*, a type of religious syncretism that combined elements of Spanish Catholicism with indigenous beliefs. According to Argueta, during the 1932 revolt, “estas cofradías fueron los centros de levantamiento indígena” (Personal interview 2011). Argueta is illuminating the religious element of indigenous resistance and agency in the revolt. In other words, even though some priests supported General Martínez’s anti-communist purge, there were other sectors in the Catholic Church like the indigenous *cofradías* that favored the revolt. Argueta confirms this when he says, “desde entonces existe de parte del poder autoritario un temor y una enemistad en contra de lo religioso” (Personal interview 2011). In this regard, this passage is an allusion to a non-traditional element of resistance within the Catholic Church in El Salvador. In other words, the role of religious resistance on the part of the *cofradías* during the uprising of 1932 may be seen as a precursor to the development of the Liberation Theology movement in El Salvador.

According to Linda Craft, in Latin America this movement developed in the late sixties:

This new theology of liberation was first articulated in 1968 by the Latin American Council of Bishops in Medellín, Colombia, to apply Vatican II and the new understanding of the social gospel to the Church in their continent. In 1979 the bishops met again in Puebla, Mexico, to refine this theology. Liberation theology grows out of the experience of suffering in Latin America; its point of departure is the daily reality of millions of the continent’s exploited. In other

words, this theology comes from below, from the Third World, rather than from Rome or the First World. [...] Liberation theology entails theory and doctrine as well as praxis. The church must stand in solidarity with the poor even if such action leads to martyrdom.<sup>60</sup> (116)

The Liberation Theology priests believed in a message of solidarity with the poor of Latin America. In Argueta's novels the characters distinguish the "new priests" from the traditional Catholic priests. For example, the Liberation Theology priests deliver the mass in Spanish and not Latin, so that the masses can understand their religious message. In addition, they dress in normal clothing, and they visit the people with more frequency to learn about their economic and living conditions. More importantly, they no longer teach them to accept their poverty, but rather to change their social reality. In this manner, they raise awareness among the poor of El Salvador. In *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán* Argueta juxtaposes the teachings of the traditional Catholic Church with the new doctrine of Liberation Theology. This is made evident when the peasants repeat and compare both types of discourses as is the case in *Un día* when Guadalupe, the main narrator says the following:

Hasta que de pronto los curas fueron cambiando. Nos fueron metiendo en movimientos cooperativistas para hacer el bien al otro, a compartir las ganancias. ... Llevar los huevos al pueblo y no venderlos en la tienda porque don Sebas paga muy poco... Ahora todo es serio en la misa pues los padres comenzaron a abrirnos los ojos y oídos. Uno de ellos nos repetía siempre: para ganarnos el cielo primero debemos luchar por hacer el paraíso en la tierra... Le fuimos perdiendo miedo al cura. Antes nos daban miedo, creíamos que eran especies de magos, que con un gesto podían aniquilarnos. (20)

Through Lupe's words, one can hear the Liberation Theology perspective. According to Lupe, the new priests teach the *campesinos* how to form cooperatives where they can help one another, so that they are not dependent on the landlords. Furthermore, they rebel by not selling their farm products such as eggs in the company store, where the owner cheats them out of a profit. The peasants start to take control of their lives and begin to improve their economic situation. In other words, the new theology raises social awareness among the *campesinos*, so that they can resist their marginalization. This type of discourse challenges the traditional church doctrine that taught them resignation and acceptance of the established order. In El Salvador the Liberation Theology movement became strong in the 70s and 80s among the peasant communities and Catholic priests like Archbishop Romero, who opposed the military atrocities and spoke against the social injustices affecting the poor.

Regarding the topic of the massacre, in the novel the peasants remember *La Matanza* as a way of resisting their marginalization since they are living under similar repressive circumstances. For example, in *Un día* Guadalupe's son is accused of communism and is brutally murdered. He is mutilated, decapitated, and his body is left on the street for all villagers to see. In other words, the military is sending a message of terror and intimidation to stop the spread of the guerrilla movement in the countryside, a strategy similar to that of General Martínez in the 1932 massacre.

## 5.2 Summary of *Un día and Cuzcatlán*

In *Un día* the main character is a *campesina* named Guadalupe Fuentes, who narrates the tragedy of her family who has been the victim of the military atrocities during the Salvadoran civil war. The novel is narrated using the colloquial language of the Salvadoran *campesinos*. Through an interior monologue, Guadalupe speaks of her family's tragedy during the military repression, and she discusses the peasants' political/social situation before and during the civil war. As the title implies, the novel takes place in the course of a day in the life of Guadalupe Fuentes.<sup>61</sup> The narration begins at five o'clock in the morning and ends at five o'clock p.m. At first, it seems that Guadalupe will only speak of her daily routine, but she quickly begins to narrate a larger reality where she addresses the following topics: the peasants' awareness, their exploitation by the coffee landlords, the state's military repression, the traditional Catholic priests, the Liberation Theology priests, the peasant cooperatives, and the topic of the massacre. According to Guadalupe, the males in her village have been forced to sleep in the hillsides (*monte*) in order to avoid military capture. All the men in the village fear the guards because they can "disappear" them, so that their families never see them again. In Guadalupe's case, her son, husband, and son-in-law were "disappeared" (killed) by the guards. Regarding the death of her son Justino, she finally finds out that the National Guards brutally murdered him because he had organized many villagers into going to the bank to ask for lower costs for seeds and

fertilizers. Justino's mutilated body is left on the street for all villagers to see: "su cuerpo fue encontrado por un lado y la cabeza por otro, clavada en un palo del camino [...] Tenía más de siete balazos" (*Un día* 85-86). Justino is not only tortured and killed, but his decapitated dead body is also used to intimidate and to create fear among the rest of the villagers. Additionally, Guadalupe has to confront the authorities when they ask her to identify the corpse of her husband, José Guardado. José is tortured and killed by some guards because he participated in peasant cooperatives that were trying to improve the lives of the poor. During this passage, Guadalupe denies her relationship with the dead victim in her efforts to save the lives of the rest of her family.

Although Guadalupe is the main narrator and character, there are other female and male narrators: María Romelia (Guadalupe's neighbor), María Pía (Guadalupe's daughter), Adolfina (Guadalupe's granddaughter) and *Ellos* (the guards or soldiers). Most of the narrators are females, which sheds light on the role of women during the civil war. For example, in Guadalupe's family, all of the men have been killed or "disappeared." These circumstances reverse the traditional gender roles because women are forced to find work, so that they may provide for their families, and they have to protect their loved ones from the military persecution. In other words, women are powerful subjects who enter into dialogue with the military authorities and other institutions of power in order to protect their own lives and those of other

family members. They are the survivors who denounce the atrocities of the civil war, which makes them important vessels of collective memory.

On the other hand, *Cuzcatlán* may be viewed as a continuation of *Un día* because in *Cuzcatlán* Argueta develops the psychology and family history of José Guardado's murderer (Corporal Pedro Martínez). For Argueta it was important to humanize the character of the killer: "Me interesa el guardia como personaje literario: indagar cómo vive, cómo se relaciona con su madre..." (Martínez 45-46). In *Cuzcatlán* the reader gets to know the humble origins of the guard who was once a loving child, but once he becomes a soldier, he is transformed into one of the worst assassins of his villagers. According to Argueta, this plot development illuminates the reality of war: "Esto se verifica en la realidad, para los soldados en la guerra no había familia, o estabas de su lado o eras enemigo. Es el mismo lema de todo lo que se mueva es un enemigo. Esto incluyó niños y todo ser vivo. Inclusive árboles donde podían esconderse guerrilleros" (E-mail interview). Just like during the massacre, at the time of the civil war, the soldiers are trained to differentiate themselves from the rest of the members of their community, so that they can kill them.

Although the central theme of *Cuzcatlán* is the military repression during the first years of the civil war, there are also other sub-themes included in the novel such as: the history of El Salvador since the conquest, the development of the indigo and coffee plantations, the reasons

for the civil war, and the indigenous cultural inheritance and national identity. For example, the novel begins with a reference to the Spanish conquest of El Salvador. Argueta incorporates an excerpt from a letter written to Hernán Cortés by Pedro de Alvarado in 1524:<sup>62</sup>

....me partí a otro pueblo que se dice Acaxual, donde bate la mar del Sur en él...ví los campos llenos de gente de guerra...con sus armas ofensivas y defensivas, en mitad de un llano...y llegando a esta ciudad de Cuxcaclan, hallé todo el pueblo alzado; y mientras nos aposentábamos, no quedó hombre de ellos en el pueblo, que todos se fueron a las sierras... (7)

This letter alludes to the indigenous resistance against the Spanish conquest. At the time of the Spanish arrival to what is now El Salvador, various indigenous groups ruled over different regions of the country. Paraphrasing Roque Dalton in *El Salvador: monografía* (1963), the biggest and most powerful native group was the Pipil (a náhuatl speaking ethnic group related to the Aztecs) and they controlled the western and central region. Their territory was called Cuzcatlán and it had a city by the same name. The Lencas controlled the eastern region, and various Mayan groups (the Pokoman and Chortíes) and others had some control of smaller areas of the country.

According to Dalton, it took several expeditions for the Spanish to conquer El Salvador because the Pipil were fierce warriors who resisted colonization for years:

La rebeldía de los pipiles se siguió manifestando en la lucha diaria contra el invasor. Y en 1529 hubo una gran sublevación de indios de San Salvador que tuvo que ser reprimida por una expedición punitiva llegada desde Guatemala al mando del capitán Diego de Rojas, y muchos años después de consolidada la colonia española los levantamientos se sucedían con renovada violencia. En



1539, sin embargo, la dominación de lo que hoy es territorio salvadoreño era ya suficiente para que se considerara a los cuzcatlecos como ‘sometidos al real servicio.’ (15)

Argueta’s decision to begin his novel with a fragment from the conquest of El Salvador is important on several levels: first, it informs the reader that the inspiration for the title of his novel came from Alvarado’s letter to Cortés and the indigenous name of the country (Cuzcatlán). In the letter Alvarado describes El Salvador as a place “donde bate la mar del sur.” In other words, Argueta is alluding to the initial foreign invasion that leads to centuries of domination, exploitation, and subjugation of the native people. In addition, despite the superiority of weapons on the part of the Spanish conquistadors, the indigenous people resist their conquest just as they will resist their domination by the local elites and the military during the 1932 revolt and the civil war. The historical connection between the Spanish conquest and the civil war is made clear when Argueta juxtaposes the synopsis of the conquest with a quote that references the civil war: “ ‘¿Encontrás bella esta montaña? Yo la odio. Para mí significa la guerra. Nada más que el teatro para esta guerra de mierda...’ ” (7). After the quote a note identifies the speaker and clarifies the message: “(Responde el Ctde. Jonatán a un periodista extranjero que le hace solicitud para tomar fotos de las montañas, Frente Oriental, El Salvador, 1983)” (7). The juxtaposition of these two quotes relates the violence of the conquest with that of the present. Moreover, it implies that the colonial racist discourse used to justify the conquest and the

massacre of 1932 is still prevalent at the time of the civil war. This argument will be developed later on in this chapter.

The novel is divided into fifteen chapters with different narrators, and it does not follow a chronological order. The first chapter is called “Microbús a San Salvador, enero 9, 1981” and the narrator is a guerrilla named Lucía Martínez (a niece of corporal Martínez). In the chapter, Lucía travels to San Salvador where she is going to confront a political prisoner (corporal Martínez) who was an accomplice to the murder of Lucía’s great-grandfather, Emiliano Martínez. In addition to Lucía, there are other narrators including Beatriz (Lucía’s grandmother), Eusebio (Lucía’s grandfather), Jacinto (Lucía’s father), Juana (Lucía’s mother) and Emiliano (Lucía’s great-grandfather). The first chapter situates the reader in the political context of the civil war, but it also includes flashbacks of *La Matanza* and the political persecutions of 1932. In a 2011 interview, Argueta states the reasons for referencing the massacre in his novels:

Yo siento que ese es el inicio de todo un círculo de fuego y de horror que hemos vivido los salvadoreños y que para romperse ese ciclo de horror y de fuego hubo necesidad de una guerra o sea se rompió a partir del diálogo por la paz en el 92. Todos los salvadoreños hemos estado señalados/lisiados psicológicamente desde el 32. Para mí eso es una lesión psicológica, silenciar historia, no sólo eso, sino que te capturen o que te repriman porque tú vas a un bar o porque tú quieres investigar. (Personal interview)

For Argueta the 1932 massacre is the beginning of the cycle of violence and horror that would culminate in a twelve-year civil war. The physical and psychological trauma of the massacre and

the civil war is still prevalent in the post-war period, which unfortunately continues to be characterized by violence. In other words, *La Matanza* is a pivotal moment in the history of the nation because symbolically it marked the legitimization of state terror, violence, repression, and exploitation. However, since *Cuzcatlán* begins with an excerpt of the Salvadoran conquest, the novel suggests that the origin of the cycle of violence in El Salvador can be traced back to the Spanish conquest itself because it was rooted in a racist ideology that justified the domination of the native people of Cuzcatlán/El Salvador. Aníbal Quijano refers to this colonial structure of dominance as *the coloniality of power*. Santiago Castro Gómez has aptly summarized Quijano's concept in the following way:

According to Quijano, Spanish colonizers established a relationship of power with the colonized based on ethnic and epistemic superiority of the former over the latter. This matrix of power did not only entail militarily subjugating the indigenous peoples and dominating them by force (colonialism); it also attempted to radically change their traditional knowledge of the world, to adopt the cognitive horizon of the dominator as their own (coloniality). (Castro-Gómez 281)

In the novels Argueta alludes to the racist ideology of the Spanish colonizers and their colonial system of dominance that continued in the post-independence era when the local elites took control of the nation. *Cuzcatlán*, for example, is a novel that illuminates the working conditions of the peasants in the indigo and coffee plantations of El Salvador. The indigo landlords and, later on, the coffee planters exploit the family of corporal Martínez. According to

Quijano, the exploitation of labor of the colonized is rooted in the *coloniality of power*: “The racial inferiority of the colonized implied that they were not worthy of wages. They were naturally obliged to work for the profit of their owners” (Quijano 539). This is the case at the time of the 1932 revolt when the peasants decided to take up arms against their abusive coffee landlords who had slashed wages in half in order to cut costs. The indigenous and peasants who rebelled were resisting centuries of exploitation since the time of the conquest. In *Cuzcatlán*, after gaining political consciousness, some members of corporal Martínez’s family rebel against their oppressors. Corporal Martínez, however, becomes a tool of those in power when he is transformed into the executioner of his own people. Finally, the novel ends with Lucía on a bus to San Salvador imagining her dialogue with corporal Martínez, her uncle and the killer of her great-grandfather. The end of the novel is hopeful because Lucía decides to forgive corporal Martínez, which is a step in the right direction for the psychological healing of the nation. In addition, Lucía’s refusal to avenge the death of her great-grandfather and that of others foreshadows the peace agreement that is needed to end the war. With this ending, Argueta is providing a peaceful alternative to the violence that has characterized the history of the nation since the Spanish conquest.

### 5.3 Manifest Orientalism and Fixity in *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán*

In Argueta's testimonial novels, the peasants' discourse about the massacre dismantles the discourse of power represented by the military soldiers who have internalized a hegemonic discourse that has echoes of *orientalism* and Bhabha's notion of *fixity*. As stated before in chapter four, for Said *orientalism* is a type of a stereotypical discourse created by the West in order to describe the Orient: "It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (133). Said distinguishes between two different but related concepts, *latent orientalism* and *manifest orientalism*. The former refers to the underlying Western colonial discourse about the Orient, and the latter pertains to the various stereotypes about the East. According to Said, *latent orientalism* does not change; it is "an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity" (144). It refers to the colonial discourse of Western superiority over the East.

On the other hand, *manifest orientalism* is "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology and so forth" (144). The stereotypes or prejudices (manifest orientalism) about the East can change and at times, they might even contradict each other, but the underlying discourse (latent orientalism) is more or less constant. For example, Said criticizes some European writers of the nineteenth century including Renan, Marx, Flaubert, and Nerval when he says that, "the differences of their ideas about the Orient can

be characterized as exclusively manifest differences, differences in form and personal style, rarely in basic content. Every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability” (144). According to Said, despite their differences, they all viewed the East as “inferior.”

In *Un día* the military discourse suggests the same type of discursive characteristics applied by some Europeans when describing the Orient. However, it is not the Europeans describing El Salvador or its people in a pejorative way, but the Salvadoran soldiers who during the civil war internalized a colonial discourse that has echoes of Said’s *manifest* and *latent orientalism*. They learned this stereotypical discourse from their foreign military teachers/advisers, who in the following passage will be represented by “el gringo:”

*Pues fíjese que el gringo dice que al pueblo le han envenenado el alma. Le han lavado el cerebro. Esto es algo científico, pero por estos lados por ser países atrasados no lo entendemos. No es que seamos majes sino que somos un país de analfabetas, como quien dice brutos; bueno, porque ya nacimos haraganes. Tuvimos la mala suerte de ser conquistados por españoles que eran nada más que grandes bebedores, mientras que allá arriba, en el norte, llegaron los ingleses que son grandes trabajadores. Además los ingleses acabaron con los indios mientras que los españoles no. Ese fue el gran error. Porque usted sabe, y no es por hablar mal de la raza de uno, pero los indios somos huevones, todo queremos que nos caiga del cielo. (76).*

The narrator of this passage is an unnamed soldier who reiterates his training to his civilian friend at a bar. This section of the book is called *Ellos* (them), which is a pronoun used for the

military soldiers. The title of the passage in the novel implies a collectivity of voices and this is made clear when the narrator conjugates almost every verb in the third person plural. In this manner, the soldier represents the collective voice of the military men who have internalized a racist colonial discourse about their own people. The soldier's speech is littered with stereotypes about "backwards" and "brainwashed" Latin American countries. The narrator says that El Salvador is a country filled with "illiterates," "brutes" and people that are inherently "lazy." The colonial discourse is thus reflected in the juxtaposition of Latin Americans as "backwards" and "inherently inferior." The former can be resolved with education because it pertains to the problem of illiteracy, and according to Bhabha, "under certain conditions of colonial domination and control the native is progressively reformable" (*The Location of Culture* 83). However, the inherent quality of inferiority attached to the colonized is irreparable. This brings to mind Bhabha's idea that colonial discourse characterizes the colonized as never "quite" like the colonizer, "almost the same but not quite" (89). According to Bhabha, this gives way to the idea of "almost the same but not white" (89). In other words, the colonial discourse uses the notion of "white supremacy" to justify the marginalization of non-Western cultures that it depicts as "inferior" races. In *Un día* the racial superiority of the Anglos is further illustrated when the soldier blames the Spanish conquerors for their "inferiority," describing them as nothing more than drunkards. The British, however, who conquered North America, are portrayed as

“hardworking.” Moreover, the soldier blames the Spanish for not annihilating the indigenous people like the British did in North America. He blames the Spanish for mixing the races and thus creating an “inferior” race (that of the *mestizo*), which is half indigenous and half Spanish. The soldier repeats the racist stereotype that the indigenous people are lethargic and inferior to their North American counterparts multiple times. However, the *repetition* of the stereotype already points to an underlying anxiety about the ultimate instability of the soldier’s own identity, and that of his foreign advisors. Homi Bhabha’s notion of *fixity* and his analysis of the colonial subject are useful in deconstructing the alleged subjectivity of the soldiers. Bhabha defines the notion of *fixity* in *The Location of Culture*:

Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. (Bhabha 66)

Since colonial discourse depends on the concept of fixity, it always reinforces stereotypes about the Other. These stereotypes must be anxiously repeated because the identity of the colonizer is not stable.

In *Un día* the above-mentioned soldier and his American trainer recur to more stereotypes about the Salvadoran people, so that they can justify their persecution and death. This is the case when the soldier describes the women as inherently “sluts” and their sons



as “gay” or “machos” depending on whether or not they wear uniforms, because the training that they receive from their foreign advisors transforms them into “real men.” In other words, the soldier’s binary thinking represents a stereotypical image of the Salvadoran masses because they are seen as degenerate human beings whose identity is fixed. The narrator’s discourse reflects his foreign training because his teacher, “el gringo,” continuously makes his military unit repeat all kinds of prejudices against themselves and the masses. The character of “el gringo” treats them like animals; he kicks them and does not refer to them by their names, but rather by all kinds of vulgarities. For example, he says to them, “*¡Cállense hijos de puta! Porque esa palabra viera que bien la dice, es de las primeras que aprendió, nos dijo un día, pues pienso que la vamos a utilizar bastante...Que debíamos de irnos acostumbrando y que nosotros también la supiéramos emplear cuando fuera necesario, y con naturalidad*” (79). This passage speaks to the racist and dehumanizing military training that the Salvadoran soldiers receive from their American advisers. According to Cynthia McClintock, about 105 to 125 U.S. military advisers were stationed in El Salvador to “improve the Salvadoran military’s combat effectiveness” (*Revolutionary Movements in Latin America* 230). Paraphrasing McClintock, the majority of U.S. advisers were assigned to Salvadoran military units and many of them participated in combat. In the novel Argueta denounces the role of the American military advisers when “el gringo” indoctrinates the soldiers into believing that *el pueblo* is the worst enemy of the state:

*El profesor nos pone a gritar: ‘¿Quién es el peor enemigo de nosotros?’ Y nosotros contestamos a gritos: ‘El pueblo’ [...] ‘¿Quién es el peor enemigo de la democracia?’ Y respondemos todos: ‘el pueblo.’ Más fuerte, nos dice. Y gritamos con todo el galillo posible: ‘El pueblo-el pueblo-el pueblo.’ Esto se lo cuento a usted en confianza. A nosotros nos dicen los especiales. (Un día 75)*

In this passage the soldiers and el gringo “anxiously repeat” the stereotypes or prejudices against the people, so that they can justify their persecution. The aim of the American military trainers is to teach the Salvadoran soldiers that the masses are the “enemy” because they are all “communists” and a threat to “democracy.” The irony of it all is that the soldiers are the people since most of them have lower class origins. It is for this reason that the foreign teachers have to psychologically manipulate them into believing that they are “better” and more “civilized” than the civilians. The narrator also makes it a point to say that he belongs to a “special unit” within the military; this is important because he has undergone intensive training that makes him even more deadly than the average Salvadoran soldier.

During the civil war the highly trained special military units that the soldier references were feared among the civilian population because they were known for their methods of torture and extreme violence against those who were regarded as a threat to the establishment. One of these special units is the famous Atlacatl Battalion that was responsible for numerous assassinations including the murderer of six Jesuit priests, their cook, and her daughter.<sup>63</sup>

According to Noam Chomsky, American military advisers trained the Atlacatl Battalion:

The Jesuits were murdered by the Atlacatl Battalion, an elite unit created, trained and equipped by the United States. It was formed in March 1981, when fifteen specialists in counterinsurgency were sent to El Salvador from the US Army School of Special Forces. From the start, the Battalion was engaged in mass murder. A US trainer described its soldiers as ‘particularly ferocious...we’ve always had a hard time getting them to take prisoners instead of ears.’ In December 1981, the Battalion took part in an operation in which over a thousand civilians were killed in an orgy of murder, rape and burning. (“The Crucifixion of El Salvador” 37-38)

According to Chomsky, the American government under the leadership of Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. intervened in the Salvadoran conflict by providing military aid to the dictatorship and training some of the most ruthless killers. Chomsky states that the American aid continued despite the protest from religious figures like Archbishop Romero, who in 1980, “sent a letter to President Carter in which he begged him not to send military aid to the junta that ran the country. He said such aid would be used to ‘sharpen injustice and repression against the people's organizations’ which were struggling ‘for respect for their most basic human rights’ ” (34). A few weeks after writing the letter to President Carter, Archbishop Romero was killed while saying mass. Paraphrasing Chomsky, the mastermind behind Archbishop Romero’s assassination was the neo-Nazi Roberto d’Aubuisson. The Salvadoran government viewed religious figures like Romero, the Jesuits, and the four American nuns who were raped and murdered by military forces as a threat to its power because these individuals opposed its record of human rights abuses and social injustices.<sup>64</sup> Despite the

religious persecution and human rights abuses against the Salvadoran population, the American government continued their military and economic aid to El Salvador.

The scholar Cynthia McClintock confirms the U.S. economic and military support to El Salvador in *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America*:

The U.S. government was deeply engaged in the effort to thwart the revolutionary movement in El Salvador, intervening on a massive scale to affect the Salvadoran polity, military, and economy. The total amount of U.S. aid to El Salvador during the 1980s was approximately \$3.6 billion. Historically, U.S. aid to El Salvador had been low: in no year between 1965 and 1979 did U.S. aid surpass \$14 million. But in 1985, U.S. aid rocketed to a whopping \$570 million [...] During the course of the decade, El Salvador was the fifth largest recipient of U.S. aid worldwide. (McClintock 221)

According to McClintock, the Salvadoran government used the military aid to pay for training and to buy ammunition, aircraft, fuel, equipment, etc. In addition, with the help of the American aid the Salvadoran army more than quadrupled its size: “from approximately ten thousand in 1979 to forty thousand by 1984 and to fifty-six thousand by 1987. Whereas in 1980 the ratio of government forces to guerrillas was a mere 1.5 to 1, by the late 1980s the ratio approached 8 to 1” (McClintock 229). In this manner, the U.S. military aid transformed the Salvadoran forces into a well-equipped and well-trained army that could defeat the rebels of the FMLN (the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). McClintock quotes four U.S. lieutenant colonels that confirm the military role of the U.S. government:

We would not want to underestimate the magnitude of the American achievement...from 1980 through 1984. The transformation of ESAF (El

Salvadoran Armed Forces) during that period from a ‘militia of 11, 000 that had no mission’ into a much larger and incomparably more capable force that turned back the FMLN stands as a significant feat of arms...Clearly..., the Salvadorans could never have succeeded without American arms, advice, and training.<sup>65</sup> (229)

In *Un día* Argueta denounces the American government’s involvement in the Salvadoran civil war. He confirms this in an interview when he says that the characters of “el gringo” and “el chino” are based on real testimonies: “Estas historias las saqué de unos testimonios que me obsequiaran unos nicaragüenses mientras departíamos en un cafetín universitario de Costa Rica, ellos sabían que estaba escribiendo una novela sobre las crueldades de esos años. El gringo y el chino figuraban en esos testimonios como instructores de tortura” (E-mail interview 2007). Also, Argueta confirms Chomsky’s statement that many of the Salvadoran soldiers were trained in the art of war by American trainers who taught them military tactics to combat communism: “nuestros militares eran adiestrados en la Escuela de las Américas situada en la zona del Canal de Panamá. Todos los oficiales de América Latina pasaron por esa escuela y dieron origen a las dictaduras militares y que ahora han desaparecido, por suerte” (E-mail interview 2007). Through the teachings of the character “el gringo,” one can hear the discourse of the foreign power that is manipulating the thinking of the soldiers. El gringo teaches them to hate their own country, culture, and history. Their military training is dehumanizing because it turns them against their own neighbors, friends, and even family members. In other words, the soldiers have internalized

a military, racist, homophobic and misogynist discourse that teaches them that they cannot trust the Salvadoran people because they have been rebels since 1932:

*Nosotros somos distintos [...] no le andamos dando ninguna confianza a los civiles, dios nos libre, porque el guanaco si se le da la mano se toma el codo; si vos te reís con él ya cree que sos puta o culero. [...] Además, hay otra cosa, el guanaco tiene predilección por el comunismo, desde mil novecientos treinta y dos.<sup>66</sup> (Un día 101)*

This passage affirms the continuation of the same type of colonial and stereotypical discourse that was used to justify the massacre. During the civil war, the soldiers are taught to believe that they are “saving” the country from the “evils” of communism, just like in 1932. The military regime uses the same anti-communist discourse of the massacre as a military rhetoric against the guerrillas in the 80s. In addition, during the civil war General Martínez is revered and regarded as the national hero who saved the nation from “communism.” Argueta confirms this when he says that General Martínez was and continuous to be loved by the military: “Lo amaban y lo siguen amando. Es decir, es el héroe, es el paradigma de honor militar, de defensa a los principios ‘democráticos’ ” (Personal interview). For example, in the 1980s a notorious right-wing death squad was named after the general, the Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez Brigade. This brigade was responsible for killing a number of Marxists and Christian democrat leaders.<sup>67</sup> According to Argueta, “Todavía existen organizaciones paramilitares que llevan su nombre”

(Personal interview). In other words, General Martínez is still revered by the extreme right-wing sectors of society and by the military that continues to view him as a military hero.

Perhaps the major difference between the soldier's training in 1932 and that of the civil war is that General Martínez refused to accept foreign intervention in his military indoctrination and his quest to eliminate the spread of "communism." However, in 1980 the Salvadoran government along with the local oligarchy welcomed the American government's involvement in the Salvadoran conflict. In the novel Argueta is not only criticizing the American foreign policy and its military aid to El Salvador during the civil war, but also the continuation of the state-sponsored violence that was legitimized under General Martínez's dictatorship. In addition, the military's anti-communist rhetoric of the 1930s is replicated in the 1980s against the guerrillas and their perceived supporters. This leads, once again, to the continuation of the communist hysteria of the 30s in the 80s; the narrator alludes to this when he says the following:

*Pues que el treinta y dos, los comunistas ni siquiera habían triunfado y ya estaban violando a la gente, a los ricos, pues el odio de este pueblo es con los ricos; nacimos con la envidia adentro, no podemos ver ojos contentos en cara ajena porque ya estamos viendo como nos cagamos en el prójimo. Y nosotros estamos precisamente para evitar las envidias, exterminarla a punta de bala, decisión y firmeza. Estamos preparándonos más y más, porque el comunismo ya viene. (102)*

This passage reveals all sorts of communist stereotypes and racial prejudice against the Salvadoran people. On the one hand, it depicts all communists as violent and hateful people, and

on the other; it goes as far as to claim that all Salvadorans (except the elites) are inherently “envious” people. In other words, the soldiers are taught to believe that they are “inferior” to their American trainers simply because they had the “misfortune” to have been colonized by a marginalized European power that decided to mix the races. According to the narrator, the Salvadoran *mestizo* has a predilection for “communism” and has always been envious of the rich.

This type of psychological manipulation brings to mind the thinking of Ignacio Martín-Baró, a priest and social psychologist, who was one of the Jesuits who was murdered by the military regime on November 16, 1989. In his writings Martín-Baró theorizes about the psychological impact of the civil war on the mental health of Salvadorans. In the *Psicología social de la guerra: trauma y terapia* (1990) Martín-Baró describes the Salvadoran civil war with three terms, *violencia*, *polarización* and *mentira*. For Martín-Baró, the violent element of the war was the worst one: “Ante todo, la violencia. Es el dato más inmediato, el más hiriente y, por ello mismo, el más sujeto a la ideologización racionalizadora. La guerra supone una confrontación de intereses sociales que acuden a las armas como recurso para dirimir sus diferencias” (28). According to Martín-Baró, the violent aspect of the war is extremely dehumanizing, because it becomes the “best” alternative to resolve any minor or major problem of difference. Violence affects the mental health of individuals and groups since it creates a



social environment where individuals view violence as a habitual and normal aspect of life.

Also, this leads to social polarization:

la guerra supone una polarización social, es decir, el desquiciamiento de los grupos hacia extremos opuestos. Se produce así una fisura crítica en el marco de la convivencia, que lleva a una diferenciación radical entre ‘ellos’ y ‘nosotros,’ según la cual ‘ellos’ son siempre y de antemano ‘los malos,’ mientras ‘nosotros’ somos ‘los buenos.’ Los rivales se contemplan en un espejo ético, que invierte las mismas características y las mismas valoraciones, hasta el punto de que lo que se les reprocha a ‘ellos’ como defecto se alaba en ‘nosotros’ como virtud.” (29)

In the novel this social polarization is reflected in the racist foreign trainers who teach the soldiers that although they are of an “inferior” race, their military training has transformed them into “superior” men whose duty it is to eradicate the spread of communism, even if that implies killing their own family: *“Entonces, nosotros no podemos andar respetando esas cosas de hermanos, tíos, primos y hasta tatas. [...] si quieren balas pues que se pongan tontos porque las van a recibir a montones. No podemos andar con contemplaciones ni mucho menos con sentimentalismos”* (103). This type of psychological brainwashing by the military trainers is dehumanizing because it teaches the soldiers to resort to extreme violence when confronting their “enemy.” Additionally, the military trainers teach the soldiers to reject those human emotions that may lead to empathy and compassion for the poor. In other words, the soldier’s internalized racism reflects their military indoctrination because they view their own people with the colonial gaze.

The military discourse is further illustrated in *Cuzcatlán*, when Pedro (Corporal Martínez) participates in the killing of Emiliano, his grandfather. Pedro acts and behaves according to his military indoctrination. Pedro was recruited by the military when he was only seventeen-years-old and he returns to his former village more than twenty-five years later. Upon arriving at the village, Pedro burns his grandfather's hut and his cornfield because he is ordered to do so by his military supervisor. Pedro's grandfather begs the military men to stop burning his corn because he needs it to survive: “-No nos queme el maíz, por vidita suya –les decimos a ver si se consternan. –Este maíz no lo necesitan, porque ustedes siembran más de la cuenta para venderlo a los subversivos que andan peleando en el monte” (229). The grandfather's voice, which represents the peasant discourse, contradicts the military discourse that is repeated by the soldier who tells him that the peasants do not need their corn because they use it to supply the guerrillas with food. In other words, the soldier is echoing what he has learned from his Salvadoran and foreign military trainers. This passage brings to mind Salarrué's short story “El espantajo,” which is examined in chapter two of this dissertation. “El espantajo” is a short story that depicts some of the military horrors of the massacre. In the short story the soldiers also burn the cornfields and set a village on fire in their efforts to destroy the “communist rebels” and their perceived supporters. This confirms that the communist hysteria of the 80s has its origins in the 30s, and the military strategies used to carry out the massacre are repeated and intensified during

the civil war. The dehumanization and indoctrination of the soldiers is a constant variable in both historical events.

In addition, Argueta sheds light on the individual struggle of Corporal Martínez (Pedro) who is conflicted when he interviews Emiliano and recognizes him as his grandfather, whom he has not seen in over twenty-five years. Pedro wants to embrace him; nevertheless, Pedro is aware that he cannot express his feelings to his grandfather because he fears the reaction of his captain and that of his fellow-soldiers. Pedro is internally conflicted because part of him wants to scream to Emiliano that he is his grandson, but the other side of him knows that he cannot. In the end, he whispers his name to him (as if he were ashamed of himself). Upon recognizing him, his grandfather physically attacks him and curses him. Soon after Pedro's captain shoots Emiliano and kills him:

El cabo Martínez, sin soltar el fusil, ridiculizado en el suelo, mira a su capitán y de reojo ve el cuerpo de su abuelo. El casco de acero se le ha desprendido y cuelga de la nuca descubriendo el rostro pálido y sudoroso del cabo. Se da cuenta que está situado precisamente entre el límite de la vida y la muerte y tiene que decidir. -¿Qué te pasa? -pregunta el capitán-. No me vas a decir que te aculeró el balazo. ... No me pasa nada, -mi capitán -se interrumpe unos segundos, para agregar, casi tartamudeando-: Así quieren estos hijos de puta. Pero no sabe por qué le va entrando un gran pánico, algo que nunca le había ocurrido al cabo Martínez. Y se pone a llorar. Por primera vez en más de cuarenta años. Y ya no tuvo tiempo de retroceder. Cuando mira que el capitán y los guardias rasos lo están observando, piensa: ¿Y ahora, qué será del cabo Martínez? (249-50)

Upon the murder of his grandfather, Corporal Martínez falls apart and begins to cry, but he is forced to deny his relationship with the dead victim. Corporal Martínez's behavior and discourse is characteristic of Bakhtin's *internally polemical discourse—the word with a sideward glance* because Corporal Martínez's reactions anticipate his superior's discourse. According to Bakhtin, "The individual manner in which a person structures his own speech is determined to a significant degree by his peculiar awareness of another's words, and by his means for reacting to them" (Bakhtin 196). Corporal Martínez does not want to admit that he is crying because he has just participated in the killing of his own grandfather, admitting this could cost him his own life since it might be interpreted as a sign of weakness. According to Bakhtin, in the *discourse with a sideward glance* "The other's words are present invisibly, determining the style of speech from within" (228). This is precisely what happens to Corporal Martínez when he denies his relationship with the dead victim and instead proceeds to insult him. The Other's voice is present in Corporal Martínez's own discourse and it influences his own speech and behavior. Even though the killing of his grandfather is painful for Corporal Martínez, he is not brave enough to confront his superiors and tell them that the dead man is a family relative. Corporal Martínez's behavior is reflective of his military indoctrination. He is the product of his circumstance; and instead of being a martyr, he chooses to be one of the killers of his grandfather and a victim of the military power that controls him. This type of colonial and military discourse

is represented throughout *Cuzcatlán* and *Un día*. However, the peasants in the novels resist the colonial and military discourse that oppresses them. This topic is further discussed below.

#### **5.4 The Peasant Resistance**

The military's racist discourse is resisted by the peasants who view the majority of its members (the soldiers and guards) as victims of those in power and not just perpetrators. In *Un día* the peasants' discourse is reflected in Guadalupe's memory of her partner, José Guardado. Guadalupe remembers José Guardado's words in the following passage:

Lupe no son malditos; ni siquiera son hijos de puta, son como cualquiera de nosotros, sólo que están en el bando enemigo, ellos mismos están en el bando de sus propios enemigos, vos no vas a ver a ninguna de esas autoridades que sean dueños de una finca, o de una casa de dos pisos o de un carro de lujo, ellos apenas andan en un yip que es un instrumento de trabajo, como el machete para nosotros, no los vas a ver con una mudada de lujo, no; cuando andan de civiles se ven humildes como nosotros, ni siquiera se les conoce, se transforman en otra gente, en lo que son...(99)

Through Guadalupe's memory, one can hear the voice of her husband José, who represents a discourse that resists the military discourse of el gringo in *Un día*. For example, José rejects the stereotypes of the soldiers and by extension those of the Salvadoran masses when he tells Guadalupe that the soldiers are not "malditos" or "hijos de puta," but rather marginalized *campesinos* like Guadalupe and José. In other words, the majority of the guards and soldiers are poor peasants who have internalized a racist, imperialist and colonial discourse from their military trainers. They then repeat said discourse when addressing the masses, because the

soldier's indoctrination manipulates them into believing that they are "better" than the average peasant. However, they too are exploited by the military and the foreign power that controls them. As José points out in the previous passage, the guards and the soldiers are at the bottom of the military hierarchy, but since they are not aware of their marginalized condition within the existing power structure, they cannot see that they are also victims of those in power. José understands the complex power structure that keeps the people oppressed and that turns their own neighbors and family members against each other.

After José's assassination, Guadalupe also resists the military discourse of power when she denies recognizing her husband's corpse. The site of her dead husband's mutilated body is beyond horrific for Guadalupe, but she manages to contain her emotions, so that she can be strong enough to deny him. Guadalupe does this in order to save the rest of her family: "Se me helaba el cuerpo al verte transformado en un pedazo de carne mordida por los perros, porque se te asomaban los desgarrones en la ropa como si te hubieran agarrado a mordidas, quitándote los pedazos de carne, chupándote la sangre...Entonces dije que no. Tenía que ser un no sin temblor de voz, sin el menor titubeo" (149). Guadalupe represents the voice of the peasants who resist their victimization by the military authorities. Her "no" is in direct opposition to the military discourse represented in the voice of Corporal Martínez: "Nada más lo traía para que vieran cómo pueden terminar todos los bandidos que se han afiliado a la federación de no sé qué putas

de campesinos, así van a terminar todos” (150). Corporal Martínez brings the mutilated body to create fear among the *campesinos* that have joined the peasant cooperatives. He is repeating the military discourse of the Other (the foreign trainers), but his military threats fail because Guadalupe refuses intimidation. Thus, regardless of her suffering, Guadalupe is not defeated by the military discourse because she survives it and manages to save the lives of the rest of her family. At the end of the novel, she continues to fight for her rights and she forgives her oppressors.

The act of forgiving is also an important element of resistance in *Cuzcatlán*, where the peasants refuse to perpetuate the cycle of violence. This is reflected in the actions of Lucía Martínez who decides that she will forgive Corporal Martínez for participating in the death of her great-grandfather. At the end of the novel, Corporal Martínez is a prisoner of the guerrillas and Lucía is part of the jury that has to decide his verdict. She imagines Corporal Martínez crying and begging her forgiveness. According to Lucía’s imaginary conversation, Corporal Martínez will think that she is his mother, to whom he will justify his murders because he was avenging the death of his brother who was killed by the guerrillas. To his confession she will respond with, “¿Y quién tomará venganza con vos, en tus veinticinco años como guardia nacional, cometiendo injusticias con toda impunidad? Él responderá: perdóneme. ¿Cómo hace un hombre para convertirse en bestia? Le preguntaré. Y él adivinará mi pensamiento.

Responderá para sí mismo: los asesores gringos nos han hecho malos” (283). Corporal Martínez’s essentialist answer to Lucía’s existential question regarding his process of dehumanization is too simplistic, because it does not address his and by extension the country’s complex history of violence, nor the social, political and economic inequality that led to the 1932 massacre and the civil war. In other words, although the United States advisers are in part to blame for the psychological manipulation of the soldiers, they are not the only players who should be held responsible for the atrocities of the war. It is important to remember that the Salvadoran oligarchy and the country’s military government not only supported the American involvement in the civil war, but they also benefited from the American intervention in their country because their ultimate goal was to defeat the guerrilla rebels who posed a threat to their power. In addition, the Salvadoran government, the oligarchy, and the authorities have a long history of social injustices against the lower classes and they too should be held responsible for the root causes of the war and its atrocities. Moreover, Corporal Martínez as an individual is not just a victim of the system but a perpetrator as well, and he must be held accountable for his own abuses of power. However, the important aspect of Lucía’s imaginary dialogue is her desire to forgive Corporal Martínez’s crimes against her family and other villagers.

With the act of forgiving, Lucía not only resists the colonial and military discourse, but she also opposes any type of violence and vengeance that may lead to further death. Lucía



represents hope for El Salvador because, despite all the suffering that her family endures due to the atrocities of Corporal Martínez, she decides to forgive him. Lucía understands that perpetrators like her uncle are also victims of those in power and a product of their military training. She cannot justify killing Corporal Martínez because that reinforces the continuation of the cycle of violence. With this hopeful ending, Argueta foreshadows the signing of the peace accords that end the Salvadoran civil war. In addition, the peasants in the novels continue to resist their marginalization by remembering the dead bodies of the massacre and comparing the macabre history of the past with that of the present.

For the *campesinos*, the collective memory of *La Matanza* serves as a symbol for unity and inspiration against those in power who have persecuted them since 1932 and who continue to do so in the 1980s. In this manner, the peasants use their historical memory of the massacre not only to resist their present marginalization, but also to challenge the historical annihilation of *La Matanza* from the official discourse of 1932. In other words, the peasants have not forgotten the horrors of 1932; they compare them with their current social repression. This is made clear when Emiliano remembers why the peasants were persecuted in 1932: “Porque todo lo que se refiera a protesta por mejoras de salarios o por algún derecho cualquiera, si viene de los pobres es visto como comunista y ahí viene la metralla” (*Cuzcatlán* 44). According to Emiliano, the *campesinos* of 1932 were labeled “communist” and many were killed simply for demanding their

basic human rights. In the novels Argueta registers the historical memory of the massacre. Despite the government censorship, this historical memory was still alive in the peasant communities of the 80s, especially among the older generations, who survived it and who are trying to pass that collective memory on to the younger generation, so that they can know their continuous history of terror and repression, but also of survival.

In addition, the peasants deconstruct the official story of the massacre that blames the communists for the atrocities of 1932. Emiliano makes this clear when he states that the Salvadoran government orchestrated the great massacre of 1932, which he calls a national tragedy: “la gran tragedia nuestra [...] fue la matazón de campesinos, que hiciera el gobierno” (*Cuzcatlán* 49). In other words, the government and military repression against the rural peasants in the 1980s is very similar to that of 1932 because those in power continue to see the *campesinos* as prone to “communism” and a threat to the establishment. Furthermore, the *campesinos* in the 1980s just like those of 1932 are exploited by the same unequal power structure that favors the Salvadoran oligarchy and the great landlords. The relationship between these two historical events, the massacre and the civil war, is the permanence of the colonial discourse of violence, racism, exploitation that began with the Spanish conquest and that has continued throughout the history of El Salvador, and into the postwar era, which is also very violent. Furthermore, the capitalist system continues to benefit the wealthy of society and it has

widened even more the economic gap between the rich and the poor. In this manner, Argueta's novels establish a connection between the economic/political and social instability of the 30s with that of the 80s, and they foreshadow the country's future, because El Salvador is still affected by issues of extreme violence, high unemployment, poverty, and exploitation of the poorest sectors of society. This said, in the novels the peasants are not just victims of those in power, they are also resilient survivors and subjects who resist their marginalization. For example, the peasants resist the historical erasure of the massacre from the official history by remembering the horrific site of the dead bodies of 1932. The analysis of the dead bodies of the massacre is discussed below.

### **5.5 The Abject**

Julia Kristeva's notion of the *abject* and *abjection* in *Powers of Horror* (1982) is helpful in the literary analysis of Argueta's representation of the massacre, especially the sections describing the military killings and purging of the *abject* bodies that lay exposed after *La Matanza*. According to Kristeva, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (Kristeva 4). In the novels the soldiers justify the killings of the peasants during the massacre by regarding them as *abject* beings that must be expelled from the body of the nation, because those in power assume

they are a “threat” to the establishment. For example, in *Cuzcatlán* one of the narrators,

Emiliano, recalls the massive assassinations of the *campesinos* during *La Matanza*:

Recuerda el año 32; tenía unos treinta años. Capturaban al montón de gente y las ponían a abrir sus propias tumbas, grandes zanjones hacían. Luego formaban en filas a la gente y la ponían a la orilla de los zanjos. Ahí mismo los fusilaban: después venían los mismos soldados a echar paladas de tierra y a empujar con los pies a los que habían quedado con los brazos o con parte del cuerpo fuera de la zanja” (43).

In this passage the *abject* peasants must be “spit out” from the nation in order to reestablish order and control. In addition, the horrific sight of the dead bodies can be seen as a form of *abjection* because they are the filth or collateral damage that is left after the slaughter of thousands. It produces a disturbing effect on the military men and the rest of the population because they are faced with death and thus their own mortality. In other words, the *abject* does not respect any type of border or control. According to Kristeva, “the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything” (3). In Argueta’s texts various narrators reference the resurfacing of the cadavers when pigs unearth and then eat the bodies. This ultimately contaminates the food chain and leads to food loathing, which for Kristeva is “the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection” (2). I propose that the resurfacing of the *abject* corpses may be regarded as a form of political resistance, because the dead refuse to disappear and preserve the illusion of a united and coherent nation from which they were expelled. One of

the narrators, who remembers how the pigs ate the dead bodies, makes the abjection of the corpses clear in Cuzcatlán:

Los cuerpos medio se enterraban. Quedaban a flor de tierra. Nadie quería carne de choncho. Los animales habían sido vistos con un pedazo de pierna o un brazo de gente, colgados del hocico. Hasta gordos se pusieron en esa época los mentados marranos de tanto muerto que desenterraban, y como eran tiempos de mucha hambruna, que ni maíz había, ellos felices de la vida, andaban escarbando en las zanjas para encontrar su alimento macabro. (*Cuzcatlán* 50)

In other words, the *abject* cadavers destabilize the military power by resurfacing and transgressing the boundaries of power and control. They refuse annihilation and come back to center stage to haunt the living, those who killed them.

Additionally, according to Kristeva, in the Bible the corpse is considered impure and “represents fundamental pollution” (109) and that is why it is seen as *abjection* of waste. The dead body cannot be touched and it must be buried quickly, “so as not to pollute the divine earth” (Kristeva 109). Kristeva further references the Bible and states that once the decaying body is buried, it is purified. During the massacre, however, most of the corpses were not properly buried because either they were placed in massive graves or they lay exposed contaminating their environment. In the novels this is manifested when the animals eat the cadavers of the massacre. In *Un día* Guadalupe illuminates this horrific element of the massacre when she recalls her mother’s memory of 1932:

dice mi mamá que en ese tiempo del treinta y dos los chuchos se comían los cadáveres, tanta era el hambre que había que ni siquiera los animales encontraban

qué comer, ya ni siquiera los aguacates que es el alimento preferido de los chuchos. Todo era una miseria. Y lo peor es que algunas gentes que vivían de criar chuchos no pudieron venderlos porque también los chuchos se comían los cadáveres y entonces la gente ya no quiso comer carne de chanco. (*Un día* 53-54)

The disturbing fact that the pigs and dogs eat the dead bodies is considered a form of *abjection* because it not only produces a repulsive and horrifying image of the desecrated corpses, but it also transgresses borders and disturbs identity, two important characteristics of *abjection*: “It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 4). In this manner, the *abject* in the novels illuminates the horror of the massacre and the dehumanization of the dead bodies that do not receive a proper burial and that are not identified, thus endangering their identity. Furthermore, the *abject* is also seen as a form of political resistance because the cadavers reject their expulsion from the nation when they transgress the boundaries of power and control by resurfacing from their graves.

In the novels the peasant survivors of 1932 register the collective memory of the massacre by remembering the massive assassinations and the desecration of the *abject* cadavers. In addition, they resist the official historical obliteration of *La Matanza* by educating the younger generations of peasants about their continuous history of persecution, resistance, and survival. In other words, the novels give voice to an alternative and contestatory history of this time period.

The memory of 1932 serves as a tool of empowerment and solidarity for the peasant and indigenous population of the 1980s, who, once again, is resisting an oppressive power structure that has marginalized them since the time of the conquest. Argueta's novels thus give voice to a marginalized perspective of the poorest sectors of the *campesino* population: those who were the most affected by the above-mentioned historical events. Furthermore, the novels deconstruct the colonial discourse used to justify the atrocities of 1932 and those of the civil war.

## 5.6 Conclusion

As this study has demonstrated, *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán* draw some parallels between the violent persecution of *campesinos* during *La Matanza* and the peasant repression of the early years of the civil war. Additionally, the novels shed light on the peasant's resistance to the colonial discourse that was used to justify their marginalization. The fact that the *campesinos* keep the memory of the massacre alive is important because by doing so, they are directly defying the government and its supporters who continue to oppress them. Perhaps the most important aspect of the *campesino*'s historical memory of the past is its comparison with their current oppression. For example, in *Cuzcatlán* one of the narrators, Lucía, alludes to this connection when she says, "Somos perseguidos desde 1932. Las autoridades no pueden vernos a los campesinos sin llenarse de odio. Más de medio siglo después las cosas han empeorado. No existen cárceles. Persona que cae en manos de la ley es gente muerta. Dicen que nuestro país es

demasiado pequeño para que viva tanta gente” (*Cuzcatlán* 11). As Lucía’s words imply, the colonial and stereotypical discourse that justified the government massacre of 1932 had intensified by the time of the civil war. The Jesuit and scholar Ignacio Martín-Baró sheds light on the continuation of the cycle of violence and repression during the early years of the war, and he confirms that those most affected by the horrors of the conflict are the *campesinos*:

Quienes día tras día mueren en los frentes de batalla pertenecen en su gran mayoría a los sectores más humildes de nuestra sociedad, en donde se alimenta discriminadamente la leva militar. Son también los sectores más pobres, sobre todo campesinos, los que sufren el impacto directo del quehacer bélico, que destruye sus viviendas y arrasa sus milpas, como son ellos los más afectados por los mecanismos de la represión, el accionar de los ‘escuadrones de la muerte’ o los operativos militares de todo tipo. Y, de nuevo, son los sectores bajos los más brutalmente golpeados por el alza en el costo de la vida, por el creciente desempleo y por el empeoramiento en la asistencia sanitaria, deterioros que se suman a una situación socioeconómica ya muy crítica. (Martín-Baró 32)

Martín-Baró affirms that more than fifty years after the massacre, the exploitation and repression of *campesinos* continues. The peasants of the 1980s and those of 1932 share similar conditions of extreme poverty because they still live subject to an unequal power structure. Therefore, it is not surprising that in 1980 the FMLN rose up in rebellion against the establishment. In other words, what Argueta’s novels demonstrate is that despite the differences that may exist between the rebellion of 1932 and the revolutionary movement of the eighties, the social and economic disparities of the time as well as the persecution of *campesinos* are constant.



In the novels Argueta also alludes to the broader connection between the violent conquest of El Salvador, the Spanish colonial exploitation of the native people and their land, and the centuries of oppression that followed the colonial era. This is made clear throughout *Cuzcatlán* and *Un día*, when the older generations of *campesinos* keep the memory of their history alive by sharing their stories of collective suffering with the younger generations. In this manner, the *campesinos* use their oral stories about their family history of marginalization to propose a counter-narrative of the country's official history, because their personal stories of displacement and exploitation in the various agricultural plantations challenge the unequal power structure that has oppressed them for centuries. One of the narrators of *Cuzcatlán* makes this clear in the following passage:

Trecientos años antes, los cuzcatlecos fueron desalojados de sus tierras y conminados a poblar los volcanes. Ya con el café, de nuevo hubo despojo, los terratenientes subieron a las zonas altas para sembrarlo; se dieron los decretos respectivos para obligar a los pobladores a que entregaran sus pequeñas propiedades a los nuevos empresarios del café. Se creó entonces la Guardia Nacional para que los decretos se hicieran efectivos en caso que hubiera oposición. Que los cuzcaltecos regresaran al norte, de donde habían salido trecientos años antes, que regresaran a las tierras muertas y empobrecidas por tres siglos de cultivo de añil. Y si no querían retornar había que hacerles la guerra, para que se respetaran las leyes y decretos de estimulación al cultivo del café. (132).

In this passage Argueta does not just allude to the Spanish conquest, he also criticizes the Salvadoran government, the authorities and the landed oligarchy that had taken over the

communal land of the people for their cultivation of coffee. According to Marc Zimmerman in *El Salvador at War: a Collage Epic*, the so-called Fourteen Families of the oligarchy became the owners of the communal land between 1880 and 1912, after taking it from the indigenous communities or buying it at very low prices. The land was used mainly for the cultivation of coffee, cotton and sugar: “In 1971, six families owned as much land as 80% of the rural population together” and “by 1980, over 60% of the rural population was landless and along with poor farmers unable to subsist on their holdings” (Zimmerman 24). This alludes to perhaps the main cause of the civil war, the great social and economic gap between the poorest sectors of society and the ruling elite.

This study has shown that Argueta’s contribution to the literary representation of the massacre is different from that of the previous authors because his novels are written from the perspective of the *campesinos*, those who have been the most affected by the continuous history of oppression since the time of the conquest. In addition, the main characters are peasant women who speak for their communities and denounce the atrocities committed against their people. In other words, the female characters are the courageous heroines who not only *speak the truth to power*, but also forgive their oppressors. The latter is perhaps the most positive aspect of *Cuzcatlán* and *Un día*, because their forgiveness suggests that the only way to stop the vicious cycle of violence is by forgiving one another and by working together for the betterment of

society as a whole. However, in order to obtain that goal, the nation must first go through a process of healing, which is not an easy undertaking. This last point is important because, although the Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992 put an end to the civil war, the post-war era remains characterized by extreme violence, meaning that the nation has not healed from its macabre history of violence.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The literary works examined in this dissertation attempt to offer a counter-narrative to the traditional historical discourse surrounding *La Matanza*. Traditional historical approaches tend to be concerned with finding the ultimate “truth” about what happened. Those approaches are important, as it is essential to find and unearth as much factual information on an event that was omitted from official Salvadoran history for decades. My literary analysis complements those historical approaches by insisting that the “truth” is always complex and never singular, and that different historical actors and social groups may provide important, albeit frequently divergent insights into the events of 1932. Within the context of the officially sanctioned erasure of those events from Salvadoran historiography, it fell on literature and other arts to bring to light the voices of those silenced by violence and by history (itself).

My literary analysis exemplifies several counter interpretations of the massacre that emphasize the plurality of perspectives concerning the massacre. In this way, I highlight the historical contributions that literature has made with its accounts of that important historical event. This literary analysis demonstrates that despite the silence imposed by the military government, Salvadoran writers found a way to resist government censorship by telling their own accounts of the 1932 revolt, by keeping the memory of the massacre alive in their literary

texts. This dissertation makes its biggest contribution in the area of literary representation of the massacre, which has not been sufficiently explored.<sup>68</sup>

To conclude this study, I will rearticulate how the various authors complement each other in their representations and interpretations of the massacre in different literary genres –poetry, essay, short story, testimonial, testimonial novel and the historical novel—in an effort to challenge the obliteration of this important historical event from Salvadoran history. I will also connect the themes that run through all of my chapters by summarizing the most important arguments, and by comparing and contrasting the various literary interpretations of *La Matanza*. In addition, I will highlight the importance of studying the various literary accounts of the massacre and how they offer a counter-narrative interpretation of *La Matanza* and the nation's history of violence. Finally, I will briefly state how this current study will inform my future research on the Central American region.

### **6.1 The Multiplicity of Literary Perspectives**

Chapter one of this study highlights the historical background of the massacre, while the other chapters offer a multiplicity of literary perspectives on the subject of *La Matanza*, emphasizing different elements of this national catastrophe. In this study the various literary accounts of the massacre contribute to the collective memory of this historical event by keeping it alive and by denouncing the atrocities of 1932. In addition, this study sheds light on the

importance of remembering El Salvador's complex history of violence in order to better understand the post-war era. One of the purposes of this literary analysis has been to establish a connection between the colonial/patriarchal and capitalist discourse used to justify the atrocities of the massacre and those of the civil war, and how these two historical events have had lasting effects on the country's present. In the post-war period, the nation continues to struggle with similar issues of socio-economic inequality and violence.<sup>69</sup>

Rafael Lara-Martínez, to whose criticism I will refer below, tends to dismiss Salarrué and Dalton's literary contributions of *La Matanza*. However, this study has shown that it is important to recognize the historical value of the literary representations of this event, because they illuminate the complex reality regarding the socio-economic, political, and individual issues at stake that led to the 1932 revolt and the massacre. Writers like Salarrué, Dalton, Alegría and Argueta offer important counter-narratives to the official history of the massacre. Their texts dismantle the predominant discourse of that time by bringing to the center marginalized perspectives of *La Matanza*. Each author represents a different yet complementary perspective of 1932. For example, Salarrué's "El espantajo" attempts to give voice to the indigenous peasants who were the most affected by the massacre. In his essay "Mi respuesta a los patriotas" Salarrué criticizes the divisive prevalent discourses of the left and the right that led to *La Matanza*. Salarrué's account of the massacre is important because he sheds light on the

hegemonic discourses of the time and on the persecution of the indigenous people. Alegría's representation of the massacre is different from Salarrué's because she offers an upper-middle-class perspective of the massacre and because she highlights the ever-changing identity of individuals and of the history surrounding the time period. Alegría like Salarrué also criticizes the oppressive nature of the capitalist system, but, unlike Salarrué, she establishes a connection between the oppressive nature of capitalism, patriarchy and the colonial discourse that led to the massacre.

On the other hand, both Dalton's and Argueta's literary representations of the massacre reflect how important it is to keep the memory of *La Matanza* alive, because it is viewed as a pivotal moment in the nation's history of marginalization, violence, and resistance. Although they were both committed writers and activists, their approaches to social change are different and this is reflected in their writing. For example, Argueta's testimonial novels of *Un día* and *Cuzcatlán* draw parallels between the violence of the Spanish conquest, the massacre, and the civil war. In addition, like Salarrué, Argueta gives voice to the *campesinos*, but he goes beyond Salarrué by making the peasant women the main characters of his novels. Furthermore, he exposes the colonial discourse used by the military trainers to psychologically manipulate the Salvadoran soldiers into persecuting the *campesinos* who are regarded as "communists" just because they are poor and Salvadoran. Argueta's novels deconstruct the racial superiority of the

foreign trainers and the internalized racism of the Salvadoran soldiers. Argueta also emphasizes the importance of forgiving the perpetrators in order to begin the process of healing caused by the country's macabre history of violence. However, the power to forgive only exists in the imaginary, because it lies in the future of El Salvador. Even though Argueta was persecuted for his social activism, and he was forced into political exile, his testimonial novels end with a hopeful message for the future.

Dalton, on the other hand, is a Marxist intellectual and a revolutionary activist who was inspired by the Cuban revolution, which he saw as a model for the rest of Latin America. Dalton's ultimate goal was to replace the existing capitalist power structure, which he saw as oppressive, with a socialist society. His writings tend to reflect his political ideology and social commitment as a leftist revolutionary. Dalton was persecuted, jailed and exiled on several occasions as a result of his political activism. This forced him to live a clandestine life. In *Miguel Mármol* Dalton illuminates the communist elements of the uprising. The main character Miguel Mármol challenges the so-called *leyenda negra* attributed to the communists by the official history of *La Matanza*, which tends to blame the communists for the revolt of 1932. Furthermore, *Miguel Mármol* shows how the military used mainstream newspapers to spread propaganda and an anti-communist message. *Miguel Mármol* describes the history of the Communist Party in El Salvador and its involvement in 1932. *Miguel Mármol* is an important



text because it is the testimony of a key communist militant who, along with Farabundo Martí and other leaders, had a part in the planning of the revolt. Though important, this text fails to recognize the agency of indigenous people in the revolt. In *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory* (2007) Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erick Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez take issue with Dalton's denial of indigenous agency. According to Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, this critique is important "in that it explains to some extent how the revolutionary left failed to understand the role of ethnic relations in the events of 1932. Yet like *I Rigoberta Menchú*, despite its constructedness and distortions, *Miguel Marmol* remains a fascinating and invaluable source for understanding the period" (*To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* xix-xx). In chapter three of this dissertation, I argue that *Miguel Marmol* is a testimonial text that represents a subaltern's contestatory account of the massacre that challenges the official narrative of 1932. Marmol's testimony contributes to the multiple literary perspectives of the events of 1932 because it gives voice to the role of the communists in the uprising.

Although Dalton conveys the significance of the events of 1932 and makes important contributions to preserving the memory of the massacre, he may be called to task for his treatment of Alberto Masferrer in his poem "Viejuemierda." In that text, Dalton dismisses

Masferrer's ideas and his efforts to improve the social inequalities of the time. In the poem Dalton criticizes Masferrer for not denouncing the atrocities of 1932. However, it seems that he was unaware of a private letter that Masferrer wrote to his sister while he was in exile in Honduras. In this letter Masferrer expresses his deep sadness for the massacre. Furthermore, he denounces those in power who were too greedy to implement social reforms proposed by Masferrer and which he felt might have prevented the brutalities of that year. Marta Elena Casaús Arzú, in *El libro de la vida de Alberto Masferrer y otros escritos vitalistas* (2012), publishes a copy of Masferrer's private letter to his sister in which he calls the massacre a "horrendous" act of violence:

Es algo horrendo y que despierta el deseo de no volver nunca a ese país. Lo que soy yo, me considero con esto desterrado para mucho tiempo, quizá para siempre. No me haría ninguna gracia estar ahí de mudo espectador, ante las represalias, la insolencia de los asesinos. Día por día desde que inició la crisis les anuncié lo que iba a suceder, y lo que esos egoístas, podridos en plata no quisieron hacer por razón y justicia, tendrán que hacerlo ahora—ya por miedo—. Sólo el miedo convence a los cobardes y a los mezquinos. (Casaús Arzú 86)

This letter was written on February 2, 1932, at the height of the massacre, and, although there is only one paragraph about the event, he clearly felt horrified by it. In addition, the letter alludes to Masferrer's realization that those in power would never willingly share their wealth with the poor, which is a change from his previous thinking. Unfortunately, Masferrer died seven months after he wrote this letter, so one will never know what else he may have said about the massacre.

After Masferrer's death, he became an icon that was manipulated and appropriated by various sectors of the left and the right:

a su muerte se convirtió en un icono para El Salvador y en una figura emblemática e indiscutida a la que le han dedicado todo tipo de monumentos, bibliotecas, escuelas e incluso centros militares, siendo una figura que ha sido enormemente manipulada tanto por la izquierda como por los militares. (Casaús Arzú 43)

Dalton's poem about Masferrer illustrates how he too may have distorted Masferrer's thinking and image. Dalton is not the only Salvadoran intellectual who criticized other intellectuals for not denouncing the massacre.

Rafael Lara-Martínez claims that "all" the Salvadoran intellectuals of the time supported the political and cultural policies of General Martínez: "Los estudios sobre 1932 y el martinato borran—reitero quizás adrede—las fuentes primarias del régimen, ante todo, las que describen el apoyo absoluto que recibe el general Martínez *de todos* los intelectuales salvadoreños a su proyecto cultural de nación" (*Política de la cultura del Martinato* 2). Lara-Martínez's study examines the controversial cultural and political policies of General Martínez and the dictator's nationalistic project. However, Lara-Martínez disregards the artistic literary contributions that writers like Salarrué made on the topic of the massacre. According to Lara-Martínez, Salarrué was a supporter of General Martínez's cultural policies after the massacre, which ironically, promoted indigenous nationalism and regionalism. In addition, Lara-Martínez criticizes Salarrué

and other prominent intellectuals for not denouncing the atrocities of 1932 until many years later. In a section of his book called “Armas y letras,” Lara-Martínez traces the intellectual contributions from 1923-1933 of a prestigious Salvadoran magazine, the *Revista del Ateneo*. According to Lara-Martínez, General Martínez and his Minister of War, Tomás Calderón, the main leaders behind the massive killings of 1932 and the suppression of the revolt, were members and contributors of the *Ateneo*. In other words, Lara-Martínez uses General Martínez’s membership in the *Ateneo* as evidence to prove a connection between the most prominent intellectuals of the time and the top two military leaders of the country:

Más allá de toda controversia sobre el etnocidio, el ensayo revela la existencia de una totalidad intrínseca entre ‘soldado y letrado,’ según máxima cervantina. Ambas esferas se reúnen bajo un proyecto común por refundar la nación en un arte indigenista, regionalista, teosófico, etc. Por este fundamento *espiritual*, el nacionalismo salvadoreño se impone sobre toda intrusión materialista extranjera: capitalismo o imperialismo estadounidense y comunismo bolchevique. (70)

Lara-Martínez’s study illustrates the controversial cultural and political aspects of General Martínez’s government; however, his generalization that “all” Salvadoran intellectuals supported the regime does not take into account the absolute power of a totalitarian dictatorship and the complexities of individual identities which, like historical representations, are subject to change. Regardless of what may be viewed as Salarrué’s support for the dictator’s nationalistic cultural policies in the years after the massacre, my study has demonstrated that Salarrué was also very critical of the establishment and the military atrocities of *La Matanza*. This is made evident in

his literary works “Mi respuesta a los patriotas” and “El espantajo.”<sup>70</sup> In the former Salarrué criticizes the patriotic, capitalist, and communist hegemonic thinking that led to the massacre, while in the latter he denounces the military killings of *La Matanza*. The delay in publication of “El espantajo” (1954), which was written in 1933, is important because it alludes to the state of institutional terror and repression that was prevalent during Martínez’s dictatorship.

This study demonstrates that the literary representations of the massacre are significant because they offer a counter-narrative of the time period that questions the official discourse of the massacre. Furthermore, the texts in this study keep the memory of the massacre alive in their efforts to break the silence surrounding this historical event. These authors make an important literary contribution not only because they capture the complexities of the 1932 massacre, but also because they dared to break the silence surrounding the events of *La Matanza*. Salarrué, Alegría, Dalton and Argueta defied the government’s censorship and challenged those in power by incorporating this historical event into their literary texts. In addition, the literary interpretations and representations of the massacre help to demonstrate the cycle of violence that continued through the country’s civil war and that still affects the poorest sectors of Salvadoran society.

This study will inform my continuing research on the Central American region. In the future, I will explore the history of gang violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala and

how the current violence and extreme poverty in these societies have led to the massive migration of children and young adults to the United States. The history of violence and oppression in El Salvador that began with the Spanish conquest and continued in the years after independence reached a pivotal moment during the 1932 massacre. State-sanctioned violence became even more ruthless during the civil war and resulted in the assassination of about 75,000 people and in “half a million displaced” Salvadorans (Negroponte x).

The government finally confronted this history by issuing an important apology for the atrocities of the massacre. On October 12, 2010, former leftist President Mauricio Funes “issued an apology on behalf of the state for the 1932 violence and the ongoing discrimination against El Salvador’s indigenous population” (De Lugan 968). This public apology is a step in the right direction, because for many decades the Salvadoran government perpetuated the discourse asserting that in 1932 General Martínez had saved the nation from the evils of communism. For example, for many years the right-wing party ARENA (*Alianza Republicana Nacionalista*) “launched their national political campaign from Izalco by stating that this is the place ‘where the country was saved from communism’ ” (De Lugan 968). El Salvador currently faces a great challenge in its efforts to democratize its society after such a long history of militarized authoritarianism, exploitation, and violence. The country’s history has influenced the current social unrest caused by gangs and transnational criminal organizations. For this reason, it is

important to examine the country's past, for it can explain some of the root causes of the contemporary violence. The careful examination of these literary works may contribute to a critical understanding of that past, which in turn may help lead to the future transformation of Salvadoran society. The country is in much need of sustainable solutions that can end the vicious cycle of violence, marginalization, and inequality.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> For more information regarding the reasons and the participants of the massacre please see: *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory* by Lindo-Fuentes, Ching and Lara-Martínez.

<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding the crimes committed by the military versus those by the rebels see *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* by Michael McClintock.

<sup>3</sup> For more information regarding this topic see: “Un directorio militar ha asumido desde anteanoche los destinos de la república.” *Diario del Salvador*, 4 Dec. 1931, San Salvador. This periodical was consulted at the National Library of San Salvador.

<sup>4</sup> For further analysis, please see McClintock and *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* (1985). During the Meléndez Quiñónez period El Salvador had its first big strikes: the railway workers’ in 1921, tailors’ in 1920, shoemakers’ in 1921, and various partial strikes by craftsmen (104).

<sup>5</sup> See McClintock and *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* (1985).



<sup>6</sup> See Gould, Jeffrey L. and Lauria-Santiago, Aldo A. *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (2008). In San Salvador they were among the first “full-fledged strikes” in the countryside (141).

<sup>7</sup> For more information about the misuse of the term “communist,” please consult *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador* by Lindo-Fuentes, Ching and Lara-Martínez pages 46 and 47.

<sup>8</sup> According to Lara-Martínez the belief that the revolt did not have any local leadership was a common belief up until the late 1940s among certain sectors of the population who represented the official story. For more information, please read “La verdad de la ficción.” *Revista El Salvador* 2009: 48-59

<sup>9</sup> However, if the reader wants to read these texts, he or she is encouraged to do so because they are some of the first texts written about the massacre. Be advised that both books are out of print.

<sup>10</sup> *Salarrué, el último señor de los mares* (2006) published by Albacrome in collaboration with MUPI, MARTE and Telefónica is a thorough catalogue of Salarrué’s paintings. MUPI, a small museum in San Salvador is home to many of his paintings. This dedication to Salarrué’s legacy is donated by Ricardo Aguilar Humano and granted by the Salarrué Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Currently, there are several publications of this essay including one done by the Spanish journal *Guaragua* (1998). However, this publication is missing two paragraphs from the original essay. Therefore, this dissertation will quote a 2009 publication of the essay by MUPI and Casa de Salarrué, which is a replica of the original source.

<sup>12</sup> Ricardo Aguilar Humano states that in 1933 Salarrué in *Conjeturas en la Penumbra*, a conference presentation describes himself as a spiritual and peaceful man, and that injustices should be resisted with peaceful actions. For more information about this topic, consult his conference presentation or read *El ultimo nahual de Cuscatlán* in the magazine *Trasmallo*, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> In a personal e-mail interview with Ricardo Aguilar Humano, he says that Salarrué did not belong to any political party or religion.

<sup>14</sup> In the Salvadoran vernacular, the word “jaz” can be interpreted as “middle” and the word “tunalmil” means a summer cornfield, whereas the word “chacho” in this context means “two” and the word “dundito” refers to someone who is mentally challenged.

<sup>15</sup> Consult the *Diccionario de la lengua española*.

<sup>16</sup> Later on, this character will say that the military killed a young man, who was only fourteen years old. Thus, the military did not always stick to their “rule” of sparing the men who were younger than fifteen.

<sup>17</sup> Pring-Mill's influence is James Monaco's *How to Read a Film* (1977), whose book is about the theorist of film realism, Siegfried Kracauer. According to Kracauer "film serves a purpose. It does not exist simply for itself, as a pure esthetic object; it exists in the context of the world around it" (*The Redemption of Reality* ix). In other words, film has to fulfill an ethical purpose, not just an esthetic one. Documentary poetry like that of Ernesto Cardenal has an ethical purpose to "debunk, corroborate and mediate reality" (*The Redemption of Reality* ix).

<sup>18</sup> Dalton takes his official testimony from *Historia Militar de El Salvador*, 2<sup>a</sup>. Edición, Publicación del Ministerio del Interior, Imprenta Nacional, San Salvador, 1951.

<sup>19</sup> According to Racine, vitalism is a type of moral code that did not begin with Masferrer. She traces it back to the Renaissance humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and later on in the twentieth century to the French philosopher Henri Bergson. Their "notion of an organic and harmonious nation that functioned along the lines of Christian charity and the dignity of all work strongly colored Masferrer's beliefs" (211).

<sup>20</sup> Racine explains that it was not until his later years that he was an outspoken critic of the Salvadoran government. For example, he was a "personal advisor to opposition Presidential candidate Arturo Araujo in 1931" (210). Prior to Araujo's candidacy, various Salvadoran governments appointed Masferrer to different diplomatic posts in Costa Rica (1894), Chile

(1901) and Belgium (1911). He returned home in 1917 after almost twenty years and “quickly became a well-known public figure and involved himself in the intellectual life of the capital” (Racine 220).

<sup>21</sup> According to Racine in *Alberto Masferrer and the Vital Minimum* in 1962 (three decades later) the Christian Democratic Party’s platform basically adopted his plan or philosophy of *vitalismo* (p. 226).

<sup>22</sup> Masferrer was not a communist, but at times he was labeled one by those in power. According to Racine it is not easy to categorize his thought. “Masferrer the humanist gave primary importance to the betterment of social and economic conditions for those living on the material plane, while Masferrer as a Christian stressed the otherworldly values of humility, hard work, patience and charity. Masferrer the communist called for a return to the *ejidal* land-holding system of the traditional Indian communities and a guaranteed standard of living for all Salvadorans, but Masferrer the corporatist recognized the existence of a natural state of hierarchy and felt that harmony would prevail if each remained true to his pre-ordained vocation” (210).

<sup>23</sup> In this poem Dalton says that he was born in Alegría, Usulután. For a detailed description of Masferrer’s life and philosophy consult Karen Racine’s article *Alberto Masferrer*

*and the Vital Minimum: The Life and Thought of a Salvadoran Journalist, 1868-1932* published in *The Americas*, Vol. 54, No. 2, Oct., 1997 page 209-237.

<sup>24</sup> Said takes the idea of *real intellectual* from Julien Benda and his *La trahison des clercs* (*The Treason of the Intellectuals*, 1969).

<sup>25</sup> Masferrer saw the social hierarchy of the time as “natural,” but what was “hateful” were people who did not fulfill their “natural” role in society. “It is natural and useful that there are the rich and rulers (warriors in Hindu terminology) and there are intellectuals (Brahmans), and workers. What is hateful, pernicious, venomous and deadly is that there are false rich, false statesmen, false poets, and false workers” (Racine 228). If everyone performed his or her “natural” role, the nation would prosper. Racine explains that this neo-Pythagorean attitude was typical in Latin America during the early twentieth century. “Neo-Pythagorean refers to a return to the ideas of the ancients, particularly Plato and Pythagoras, who conceived of the universe as a vast symphony. All its parts were interconnected in perfect mathematical and musical harmony whose rhythm was not necessarily reducible to scientific understanding” (Racine 232).

<sup>26</sup> Masferrer actually died in San Pedro Sula, Honduras after being forced out of Guatemala by President Jorge Ubico. “The subsequent government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez feared an incursion by the Araujista/vitalista ctingent which had accumulated across the

border and put great pressure on Guatemalan President Jorge Ubico to dispose of the troublesome elements” (Racine 235).

<sup>27</sup> To be fair to Dalton, only 100 pages actually discuss the massacre in detail. The rest of the testimony covers many aspects of Mármol’s life, which is on par with a testimonial account. Also, the text discusses different elements of Salvadoran history and the social and political movements of the time. In addition, there is a lengthy introduction written by Dalton as well as many photos and a dictionary of Salvadoran vernacular words at the end of the book. This is not to say that Dalton is an objective transcriber, for he does add additional information to Mármol’s testimony. Dalton’s editorial role will be examined in this analysis.

<sup>28</sup> In the introduction to Mármol’s testimony, Dalton explains that he is addressing a foreign public since his texts were banned in El Salvador at the time, but his ultimate goal is to reach the Salvadoran people (p. 3).

<sup>29</sup> This is stated on page 2 of Dalton’s introduction to Mármol’s testimony.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Said writes that intellectuals should always “speak the truth to power” in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1996).

<sup>31</sup> Linda Craft uses this term in: *Novels of Testimony and Resistance: From Central America* (1997). *Concientization* is used to describe the process of social awareness in Manlio

Argueta's testimonial novels about the Salvadoran civil war such as: *Un día en la vida* (1980) and *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* (1986). In those novels the women and peasants come "to terms with their own oppression in order to overcome it" (Craft 107). She uses the term "*tomar conciencia*" or "*concientización*" to refer to their awareness about their social injustices.

<sup>32</sup> Mármol was an autodidact, who read Latin American writers like Ruben Darío. He especially liked his poem "A Roosevelt," which was addressed to the then president of the United States. Salvadoran writers such as Francisco Gavidia and Alberto Masferrer, two intellectuals who wrote about tyrannical governments and other social issues, also inspired him.

<sup>33</sup> Many Salvadoran intellectuals and professionals gave lectures about politics and the economy at the People's University (*Miguel Mármol* 80).

<sup>34</sup> Farabundo Martí was a colonel in the Sandinista army and he was also Sandino's personal secretary. However, according to Mármol, Martí drifted from Sandino due to differences in political ideologies.

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Jacinto Colocho was trying to flee from the rebellion when the rebels in a small town called Colón stopped his car. He was with his driver and a friend when some rebels recognized him as the man who had subjugated them to force labor. The rebels decided to retaliate against him by killing him and the other two men. Mármol denounces this crime in his testimony and

says that the people responsible for this murder would have paid the consequences. However, he also states that Dr. Colacho was not an innocent man, since he was also responsible for sending innocent men to prison, men who were later killed because he had accused them of communism (196).

<sup>36</sup> For an indigenous and peasant focus of the rebellion see: *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: the Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory* (2007) by Hector Lindo-Fuentes, et al. This text does not consider the revolt a communist uprising and the authors explain how the elites and the government used the term “communist” to refer to all peasants and indigenous people. A text that recognizes the heterogeneity of the revolt is: *Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932*(2008) by Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago.

<sup>37</sup> Dalton is referring to two American texts about the massacre: *Matanza: El Salvador's 1932 Communist Revolt* (1971) by Thomas Anderson and a dissertation called: *The Communist Revolt of El Salvador 1932* (1970) by Andrew Jones Ogilvie. He does not believe that these texts provide a reliable interpretation of the massacre, partly because they repeat the official discourse regarding the events of 1932. Also, Dalton thinks that only the survivors of a massacre can adequately represent what actually happened.



<sup>38</sup> For more details about his tragic death, see *La teoría literaria de Roque Dalton* (2009) by Carlos Roberto Paz Manzano.

<sup>39</sup> "Claribel Alegría the 2006 Neustadt Laureate." *World Literature Today* 81.3 (2007): 29.

<sup>40</sup> This text also mentions the massacre, which gave rise to *Cenizas de Izalco*. However, this study will not discuss *Luisa en el país de la realidad*.

<sup>41</sup> For a more detailed analysis on the development of the Latin American historical novel see Weldt-Basson's first chapter of her book *Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction: The Impact of Feminism and Postcolonialism* (2013).

<sup>42</sup> In the United States: first-wave feminism refers to the female suffrage movement of the 1920s, second-wave feminism took place in the 1960s and 1970s and it refers to the women's liberation movement when they fought for equality. Third-wave feminism begins in the 1980s and 1990s and it challenges the essentialist notions about women, while stressing "female diversity through race, class, age, and the like" (Weldt-Basson 9). The most recent studies on feminism tend to use postmodern terminology such as "gender theory" and the notion of "postfemenism" to discuss the evolution of this movement (Weldt-Basson 11).

<sup>43</sup> *Cenizas de Izalco* (*Ashes of Izalco*) was written during Alegría's exile in Paris (1962-64), and according to Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval and Marcia Phillips McGowan's essay "An

Initial Cartography,” *Cenizas de Izalco* was “among the best books in the Biblioteca Breve Competition in Barcelona” (xix). These critics also state that in Paris, Alegría formed close friendships with other Latin American writers: Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, Mario Benedetti and Mario Vargas Llosa.

<sup>44</sup> In the forward to *Claribel Alegría and Central American Literature*, Marjorie Agosín states that Alegría’s parents relocated to El Salvador when she was a nine-month-old baby because her father was forced into political exile due to the invasion of American troops in Nicaragua. Alegría returns to Nicaragua after the Sandinista victory. Due to her geographical dislocation, both countries claim her as a national author.

<sup>45</sup> Ruffinelli is quoting an interview done by Elena Urrutia in 1988 called “Letras del exilio Latinoamericano,” which was published in *La Jornada Libros*, Mexico. In a different interview done in 1966 that appeared in *Cultura*, Alegría also adds that while in Paris, Carlos Fuentes insisted that she write this novel and that her husband agreed to help her. For more information on this subject, see “Awakening Women in Central America: Claribel Alegría’s Fictions” by Laura Barbas-Rhoden.

<sup>46</sup> For further discussion on this subject see “Awakening Women in Central America: Claribel Alegria’s Fictions” by Laura Barbas-Rhoden in *Writing Women in Central America: Gender and the Fictionalization of History* (2003).

<sup>47</sup> For further discussion on the autobiographical elements of the novel, see Patricia Varas’ *Ashes of Izalco: Female Narrative Strategies and the History of a Nation*.

<sup>48</sup> This legend is known in El Salvador as *La carreta chillona* or *La carreta bruja* and it is part of the national folklore.

<sup>49</sup> Frantz Fanon describes three phases of the native intellectual’s development in his essay “On National Culture,” which is published in: *Postcolonialism: an Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* (2005). In the first phase the native intellectual shows assimilation of European culture. In the second phase he is “disturbed” or divided between two cultures (that of the colonizer and the colonized); in this second phase “since the native is not part of his people, since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only. Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory: old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies” (208). The third phase is what Fanon calls the “fighting phase;” it is during this phase that he writes revolutionary and

nationalist literature. As a native intellectual, Don Manuel never gets to the third phase that Fanon describes, but he does have some characteristics of the first two phases of the native intellectual's development.

<sup>50</sup> Prior to Buffon, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo had already alluded to the “inferiority” of the Americas in *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (1526). For a summary of Oviedo's original chronicles see *Summario de la natural historia de las indias* (2002), edited by Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois. Oviedo was a Spanish historian and writer who participated in the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean and later wrote about his personal experiences in the above book. Antonello Gerbi refers to Oviedo's chronicles in *The Dispute of the New World*. For a counter-narrative about the Spanish conquest of Latin America and the mistreatment of indigenous people read Bartolomé de las Casas' *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552). This is to say that even during colonial times there were Europeans like Bartolomé de las Casas who opposed the Spanish extreme methods of colonization against the native inhabitants of the Americas.

<sup>51</sup> In Latin America, some thinkers like Domingo F. Sarmiento in *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845) and José Enrique Rodó continue important aspects of this Eurocentric tradition.

<sup>52</sup> For more details about this subject see: *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and*

*Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (2008) by Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago.

<sup>53</sup> For a further discussion on the topic of “genocide,” please see *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (2008) by Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago. These scholars divide the massacre into three different stages and argue that stage II was unequivocally genocidal because “it focused exclusively on self-identified Indians” (221).

<sup>54</sup> The Izalco Volcano was commonly known as the “Lighthouse of the Pacific” because it continuously erupted from 1770-1958. This further illuminates Alegría’s view that the history of El Salvador is a history of continuous violence.

<sup>55</sup> Alegría ends her acceptance speech for the 2006 Neustadt Prize with an excerpt from “Ojo de cuervo,” a very personal poem for her since she recalls in it “the events that have marked” her life (“The Sword of Poetry” 32).

<sup>56</sup> Otto René Castillo was a Guatemalan poet that was living in exile in El Salvador in 1956. Dalton and Castillo were second-year law students when they founded the *Círculo Literario Universitario* and recruited Argueta along with other committed writers. Argueta conveyed this information to me in a personal interview on February 25, 2011 at the National Library of El Salvador.

<sup>57</sup> Argueta is referring to the tradition of the Salvadoran government that banned and censored any text with “strange” ideas. For example, Dalton’s and Argueta’s books were banned in El Salvador for many years. Also, it became illegal to criticize the government.

<sup>58</sup> Argueta is referring to the military tactic that targeted the peasants because the government believed that their communities supported the guerrillas. The phrase “quitarle el agua al pez” alludes to a popular Maoist quote that draws a comparison between a fish, which needs water for survival, and the guerrillas who also depend on a larger community for their success and survival. During the Salvadoran civil war it became a common practice for the military to destroy entire communities in their counterinsurgency measures.

<sup>59</sup> El Salvador’s civil war lasted twelve years from 1980-1992. The Salvadoran government waged this war against the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), the guerilla group that was trying to take control of the government. During this civil war about 80,000 Salvadorans were killed, and many more were injured, others were forced into exile to the United States or other Latin American countries. The reasons for the civil war were many, but among the most important is the great economic and social gap between the poor and the wealthy. For more information consult Marc Zimmerman’s book, *El Salvador at War: a Collage*

*Epic* (1988) and for a brief summary about the civil war see Peter Smith's text, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (2000).

<sup>60</sup> The Peruvian theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez is considered by Craft as one of the founders of Liberation Theology in Latin America. For further discussion on this subject consult Gutiérrez's text *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (1973).

<sup>61</sup> In a personal interview in 2011 at the National Library of El Salvador, Argueta told me that he purposely named his novel *Un día en la vida*, a title that he took from the famous 1962 Russian novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He wanted to demonstrate that a peasant woman, Guadalupe Fuentes also had her day just like the prisoner Ivan Denisovich. However, he claims that he never actually read the Russian text. Regardless of their differences, both texts denounce the repression that the main character has experienced or witnessed.

<sup>62</sup> Pedro de Alvarado is the conquistador of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. He also participated in the conquest of Mexico and Cuba as well as other Spanish explorations.

<sup>63</sup> Among those killed is the Spanish-born Ignacio Martín-Baró, a Jesuit, scholar, and psychologist who wrote about the psychology of war in El Salvador and its effects on mental health. His work will be consulted later on.

<sup>64</sup> It is important to mention that there were also laypeople especially among the rural peasants who were also targeted by the military government for speaking out against the social injustices of the time. For further information on the lay peasants who were followers of the Liberation Theologian movement in El Salvador see “Peasants, Catechists, Revolutionaries” (2004) by Leigh Binford.

<sup>65</sup> For further information on the impact of U.S. military and economic aid see *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America* (1998) by Cynthia McClintock.

<sup>66</sup> The word “guanaco” is a slang term used to refer to a Salvadoran person.

<sup>67</sup> For more information on the death squads that became active in the late 1970s consult the data of the *Library of Congress Country Studies* on “El Salvador: Right-Wing Extremism” (1988).

<sup>68</sup> In addition to the various texts on the topic of the massacre that this dissertation has already mentioned, there are other important studies that also examine certain aspects of the events in 1932. Among them is Patricia Alvarenga’s *Cultura y etica de la violencia: El Salvador, 1880-1932* (1996) this text explores the root causes of the violence of 1932. Also, for an interesting study on the newspapers of the time see Sheila Candelario’s article “Patología de una insurrección: La prensa y la matanza de 1932” (2002). In the article Candelario focuses on the



*Diario de El Salvador*'s depiction of the peasants and indigenous groups that rebelled in 1932.

Candelario also wrote a dissertation *Representación de lo irrepresentable: Violencia, muerte y la guerra en El Salvador* (2002) where she examines the massacre of 1932 and that of *El Mozote*.

During the 1981 massacre of *El Mozote* and other northeastern towns about 1,000 children, women and men were killed in a "three day sweep by military forces" (Candelario iv).

Candelario is a contemporary scholar who also establishes a connection between the violence of 1932 and that of the civil war. For a recent study on the commemoration of the massacre in El Salvador and in California by members of the Salvadoran community in the San Francisco Bay Area see Robin Maria De Lugan's article "Commemorating from the Margins of the Nation: El Salvador 1932, Indigeneity, and Transnational Belonging" (2013). De Lugan traces the first non-governmental public commemoration of the massacre in El Salvador to January of 2005 and points out that in San Francisco the Salvadoran community has been commemorating this historical event since 1997. For a different interpretation on the effects of the massacre on the indigenous community of El Salvador see Erik Ching and Virginia Tilley's article "Indians, the Military and the Rebellion of 1932 in El Salvador" (1998). Ching and Tilley challenge the belief that the massacre resulted in the demise of Indian ethnic identity.

<sup>69</sup> For further information on the issues affecting El Salvador in the post-war period consult *Seeking Peace in El Salvador: The Struggle to Reconstruct a Nation at the End of the Cold War* (2012) by Diana Villiers Negroponte.

<sup>70</sup> Salarrué also wrote a novel *Catleya luna* (1974) where he speaks against the military and communist atrocities of the massacre. Although *Catleya luna* and “El espantajo” were not published until after General Martínez’s dictatorship, the fact that he wrote about this horrific event at all demonstrates that it was important for him to denounce the brutalities of *La Matanza*. Furthermore, according to Nelson J. López, Salarrué “resurrected” those who died in 1932 by naming his characters of *Cuentos de barro* (1933) after them. For further information see López’s dissertation *Translating Salarrué: Cultural Evolution, Memory and Indigenous De-Exotization from the Massacre of 1932 to the Negation of Indigenous Ancestry in the Salvadoran Spanish of Today* (2011). In other words, Salarrué continuously attempted to give voice to the indigenous people in his literary representations of the massacre.

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**ABSTRACT****THE LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF *LA MATANZA***

by

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This dissertation examines the literary representations and interpretations of *La Matanza*, a Salvadoran massacre that occurred in 1932. A peasant-led uprising resulted in the assassination of thousands of *campesinos* and indigenous people by General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez's repressive military regime. As a result of government repression and censorship, the events surrounding *La Matanza* were intentionally omitted from Salvadoran history for many decades. Despite these censorship efforts, writers like Roque Dalton, Claribel Alegría, Salarrué and Manlio Argueta defied authoritarian government repression and incorporated the events of *La Matanza* into their writing. The literary texts that this dissertation analyzes are: Salarrué's "Mi respuesta a los patriotas" (1932), "El espantajo," (1954), Dalton's

*Miguel Mármol: Los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador* (1971), “Todos,” “Viejuemierda,” “Hechos, cosas y hombres de 1932,” Alegría’s *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966) and Argueta’s *Un día en la vida* (1980) and *Cuzcatlán donde bate la mar del sur* (1986).

These authors exemplify multiple and often conflicting perspectives concerning the massacre. Each of them offers a unique interpretation of this event, emphasizing issues such as class, identity, gender and race, among others. However, all of them share the attempt to use literature as a vehicle to lend a voice to populations that did not have a place in official historical accounts. This study draws upon subaltern, postcolonial, feminist and other theories, in order to highlight the particular position of each author. Moreover, in this dissertation I argue that, the colonial, racist and patriarchal discourse that was used to justify the massacre was also used to justify the atrocities of the civil war in the 1980s. In addition, this analysis emphasizes the links between the peasant resistance of the 1930s and that of the 1980s. Furthermore, this dissertation stresses the importance of remembering El Salvador’s complex history of violence in order to better understand the post-war era.

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

I was born in Cuscatlán, El Salvador. When I was eight years old a personal tragedy brought me to the United States. In the summer of 1991 I returned to El Salvador, where I lived until I was sixteen years old. Thanks to the efforts of my American mother and the generosity of The Roeper School in Birmingham, Michigan, I was awarded a four-year scholarship for high school, and returned to the United States in 1997. While in high school, I spent my summers volunteering at Detroit Summer, a non-profit youth organization. We turned empty lots into beautiful gardens and painted murals around the city. I met some of the most incredible people in Detroit Summer. I graduated from Roeper in 2001 and went onto Oakland University, where I was awarded a Dean Scholarship from the School of Arts and Sciences. In the summer of 2004 I traveled to Seattle, Washington where I volunteered as a Spanish interpreter and translator at the North Western Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP). I graduated with honors in 2005, with a double major in Latin American Language and Civilization and Spanish Language and Literature, and a minor in Political Science.

In the fall of 2005 I was awarded a Graduate Teaching Assistantship in Spanish from the Department of Classical and Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at Wayne State University (WSU). I was a GTA for five years and I graduated with my Master of Arts in Spanish in 2007. In 2008 I enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Spanish with a minor in Literary Criticism. During my graduate studies at WSU I was vice-president of the Spanish Club. I also served as president and vice-president of the Graduate Forum. I am very grateful for the academic support and guidance that I have received from the professors of the Department of CMLLC. I am currently a part-time faculty in Spanish, and in the winter of 2015, I will be joining the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies faculty as a part-time instructor.

In the Spring of 2012 my husband and I welcomed our beautiful and sweet baby girl, Evaluna. Everyday she teaches us something new, and for that, I am very grateful.