THE GHOST AND THE REVOLUTION: INDIGENOUS SPECTRALITY AND TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO NARRATIVES

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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August 2019

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Cornell University 2019

This dissertation examines the traumatic and ghostly literary resonances of four contemporary transcultural novels from Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic/United States, in order to challenge historical representations of indigeneity and the traditional national paradigm. In what follows, I analyze Alison Spedding's *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*, Yuri Herrera'a *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez*, and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and concentrate in the ways they depict modes of community-formation across demarcations of race, culture, languages, and literatures. These seminal novels depict compulsive and spectral indigenous imaginaries, and generate disruptive and subversive impulses that prevent the coagulation of traditional sociopolitical paradigms and the neutralization of politics. The four novels show how, throughout Latin America, indigenous voices articulate phantasmal discourses and recover mythical narratives that disjoint the national paradigms they grow out of. On the other hand, these voices also constitute a communitarian compulsive force charged with revolutionary power that acts both as a political instrument with which to read the reemergence of native ideologies in contemporary Latin American literature and as a critical tool that shows the unraveling of specific national models.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sebastián Antezana Quiroga received a BA from the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, where he studied Latin American Literature, and an MA from the University of Leeds, where he studied English Literature. He went on to pursue a doctoral degree at Cornell University, where his research focuses on contemporary Latin American and Latino literature and politics, indigeneity, national and transnational studies, trauma studies, spectrality, and science fiction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Edmundo Paz Soldán for his guidance, his friendship, and his generosity throughout the years, before and during my time at Cornell. I would also like to express my gratitude to Cathy Caruth and Patty Keller for their help and scholarship, without which I could not have written this dissertation.

Thank you to my family, Mauricio, Marisol, and Pablo, always essential, always.

Thank you to my Cornell friends, especially to Mario, Liliana, Francisco, Rodrigo H, Janet, Rafa, Gustavo, and Rodrigo F.

Thank you to "El Taller," the Sunday writing workshop.

And thank you to Kimmy, for love, for happiness.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s until now, several thinkers have critically analyzed the dilemma of identification processes structured by the form of the nation and have argued that the national model is a non-representative mode of community. At the same time, since the end of the twentieth century multiple cultural manifestations coming from multiple places have pointed out, more and less openly although always intermingled with an apocalyptic narrative that speaks of the end of grand narratives, the end of the nation. Thus, the contemporary crisis of national identities and cultures, what Ramachandra Guha calls "the historic failure of the nation to come into its own" (43), implies a necessary rethinking of the links between culture, art, and sociopolitical modes of organization. In other words, the ties and tensions between narration and nation.

The Latinamerican Subaltern Studies Group, for example, points out in its Founding Statement that what was clear from the work of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group is that "the elites represented by the national bourgeoisie and/or the colonial administration are responsible for inventing the ideology and reality of nationalism" (117). That is, while the elites of the continent, represented by the bourgeoisie, command the destinies of the nation with a divisive, exclusionary logic, the nation itself is located at the point of intersection created between the old colonial power and the future postcolonial system in which elites still occupy a hegemonic role.

Latin-American critical responses to Benedict Anderson's interpretative framework produced, among other things, the evidence of the nation and the national as products designed by what Ángel Rama calls "letrados," the lettered men that populated, designed, and conducted the continent's urban centers in an exclusionary manner. From Mexico, Roger Bartra argues that "los estudios sobre 'lo mexicano' constituyen una expresión de la cultura política dominante. Esta cultura política hegemónica se encuentra ceñida por el conjunto de redes imaginarias del poder, que definen las formas de la subjetividad socialmente aceptadas y que suelen ser consideradas como la expresión más elaborada de la cultura nacional" ("studies on 'mexicanness' constitute an expression of the dominant political culture. This hegemonic political culture is undergird by a set of imaginary networks of power which defines the forms of socially accepted subjectivity, usually considered the most elaborate expression of the national culture" 15).

From Argentina, Beatriz Sarlo states that the re-launch of nationalism has several problematic features from a democratic standpoint. For Sarlo,

> el nacionalismo, la nación y las ideologías patrióticas funcionan entonces como sucedáneos colectivos de las ideas de comunidad que las dictaduras y los gobiernos reaccionarios son los primeros en destruir. Sobre una nación fracturada socialmente por las desigualdades económicas y culturales, el fantasma de la nación proporciona eso: una sombra que esfuma los contrastes, unificando, en el corazón de la Patria, a quienes en todos los demás aspectos están separados y son diferentes.[1] (109)

[1] "Nationalism, the nation, and patriotic ideologies function as collective substitutes for communitarian forms and ideas that dictatorships and reactionary governments are ready to destroy. Over a nation socially

Sarlo's "ghost of the nation" is directly related to Guillermo Bonfil's "México imaginado." In his seminal study *México profundo*, Bonfil promotes the idea that there is, on the one hand, a deep Mexico based on indigenous culture and, in the other hand, an imaginary Mexico, close to Anderson's "imagined communities." Bonfil argues that "el México profundo, portador de la civilización negada, encarna el producto decantado de un proceso ininterrumpido que tiene una historia milenaria [y es] sistemáticamente ignorado y negado por el México imaginario, que tiene el poder y se asume como el portador del único proyecto nacional válido" ("the deep Mexico, representative of a denied civilization, embodies the decanted product of an uninterrupted process that has a thousand-year history [and is] systematically ignored and silenced by the imaginary Mexico, that has all the power and sees itself as the bearer of the only valid national Project" 244). However, as Claudio Lomnitz further argues, the two ideological horizons of Bonfil's Mexico, the deep one and the imaginary one, arise both at the end of the colonial period. The product of a colonial vision, then, both Mexicos are connected to sets of real practices and beliefs, and thus are the product of the collective imagination. That is to say, both Mexicos are, at the same time, "deep" and "imaginary" and there are several "reasons why the imaginary Mexico has become so very real." (*Exits from the Labyrinth* 248)

From Venezuela, Gustavo Guerrero points out: "pareciera que, inopinadamente, las sociedades latinoamericanas se asomaran a un espejo vacío donde solo quedasen las

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fractured by economic and cultural inequalities, the ghost of the nation provides that: a shadow that erases contrasts, unifying, in the heart of the Homeland, those whom in all other aspects are separate and different".

ruinas (o las sombras) de un concepto y de un cierto modo del sentir colectivo que habían garantizado la cohesión y las dinámicas comunitarias durante doscientos años" ("it would seem that, unexpectedly, Latin American societies are looking into an empty mirror where only remained the ruins {or the shadows} of a concept and a certain way of collectively feeling, that had guaranteed community cohesion and dynamics for two hundred years" 134). That empty mirror that only shows the ruinous traces of what was once a process and dynamics capable of organizing societies communally, even if only in an idealized way, could allow us to see the gestures that led to this distortion, this transitional process from the nation to the ghost nation, both imaginary entities that function as rhetorical regimes.

Sarlo's "ghost nation," Guerrero's "ruinous traces," and Bonfil's "imaginary Mexico," are signs preceding and announcing something progressively more evident: the fact that the national model in Latin America is going through –or about to go through– a moment of transition. Indeed, the nation and the national mode seem immersed in a time in which colonial, postcolonial and future sociopolitical paradigms and projects overlap and confuse. In that sense, Sarlo, Guerrero, and Bonfil's, critical interpretation, the half-present half-absent ruinous and ghostly image of the nation, points to the same fact: Latin American subjects organized nationally actually live in what only appear to be national communities, in which most of those subjects have little chance to act politically and which are governed by an excluding and ideologically submissive elite prone to prolonging traditional power structures and social dynamics –which favor and make visible, almost exclusively, the ideologically colonialized, white and mestizo elites and middle classes.

However, the following dissertation neither claims that the national model has worked before in the history of Latin America, nor it suggests that nationality has ever been truly representative, a model capable of encompassing, containing, and sustaining the total of a human collective. On the contrary, as Sarlo indicates, in the face of the unbearable evidence of the national fallacy during the last century, Latin America has privileged and still privileges a ghost of the nation that "erases contrasts" that do not allow the real coagulation of a common horizon, a communitarian phantasmagoria that unifies all subjects "in the heart of the Homeland." Thus, historically, throughout the 20th century and even at the beginning of the 21st century, the national paradigm was and continues to be an idealized projection of being in community. That is to say, a trace (a "ruin") of a construct that never came to be even though, in practice, it is conceived and portrayed as an entity that was and is, an entity whose material and symbolic weight is recognized, even though it never really was and it never really will be. As a quick revision can show, this is largely discussed in the vast historical analysis, the sociology, the political philosophy and the literature of the previous century. In that sense, what my dissertation proposes is not a literary alternative against a sociopolitical and allegorical whole that once was and suddenly ceased to be during the past two decades. Rather, it argues that some of the most representative and critically acclaimed contemporary Latin American narratives show new specific ways in which the ongoing crisis of the national continues. That is, traumatic and spectral ways connected with once-again politically active indigenous imaginaries, subversive and compulsive representations that in and outside literature prevent the consolidation of a national horizon in specific cases. Thus, the novelty of this analysis lies in the specific way in which Latin American literature

materially and symbolically rejects a national model that, even though is thought of as reining above all other possible sociopolitical models, only consolidates the spectral traces of something never consolidated.

Against the overwhelming onslaught of the international economic market, the long reach of globalizing transnational policies, and the growth of the Latin American cultural studies machine (that, since the end of the last century, proposes countless versions of the post-national, trans-national, and meta-national when decoding the equation of "nation and narration"), it is true that the national reference is often considered anachronistic. However, despite being attacked from multiple critical fronts, the unstable phantom of the nation still manages to sustain itself as the privileged form of sociopolitical agglutination in the continent. As Néstor García Canclini points out, "la cultura nacional no se extingue, pero se convierte en una formula para designar la continuidad de una historia inestable, que se va reconstruyendo en interacción con referents culturales transnacionales" ("national culture is not extinguished but it becomes a formula to designate the continuity of an unstable history, which is being reconstructed in interaction with transnational cultural references" 132).

In fact, as Guerrero points out, "no se ha producido una superación de un estadio anterior ni tampoco se lo ha trascendido o atravesado" ("there has not been an overcoming of a previous stage nor has that stage been transcended or crossed"). On the contrary, "lo nacional sigue allí como aquello ante lo que se puede estar en contra, ciertamente, pero también junto a y al margen de, en una tensa e intricada topología" ("the national reference is still there as that against which we can organize, certainly, but also as that we can be in favor of, or at the margins of, in a tense and intricate topology"

162). Even if only as a concept, it is worth highlighting the material importance of the conceptual, the both abstract and concrete weight of specters, since the national paradigm is still the reference around which almost all of the Latin America's sociopolitical ideas, and cultural and literary constructions, are organized either in function of or against. Thus, like a flickering specter halfway between a time that opens up and another one that closes, or in between several historical times that superimpose in unison, the ghost of the nation experiences what Derrida calls "a spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time." (XIX)

Over this scene in formation and, at the same time, already ruinous, which depicts the almost transitional, if not fantastic, nature of the national experience, several literary traditions and projects are built. Projects like the ones I analyze in this dissertation, that are concerned, precisely, with literarily dissecting and analyzing the nation from its violent and colonial edges, from its traumatic and spectral instances. To do this, I read four novels both in literary and political terms, four novels that present four paradigmatic national cases: *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*, by Alison Spedding, which presents the case of Bolivia; *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, by Yuri Herrera, which concentrates on Mexico; *Insensatez*, by Horacio Castellanos Moya, that deals with Guatemala; and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Díaz, which studies the national and diasporic experience of the Dominican Republic and its relationship with the United States. To work with these novels, I recover Derrida's original notion of the "specter" and I read some of the essential theorists of so-called "Trauma Theory," such as Cathuy Caruth, Soshana Feldman, and Dori Laub. Using the theoretical framework of trauma theory, I study the ways in which the four mentioned paradigmatic novels, all

published during the first decade of the 21st century, deal with the paradigm of the Latin American (and Latino) nation from the perspective of one of its most historically subjugated subjects: the indigenous subject.

The Aymara indigenous subject in Bolivia, the Nahua subject en México, the Mayan in Guatemala, and the Taino in the Dominican Republic, represent traditionally excluded political subjects. In fact, they portray indigenous subjects who, just like in happens outside the novels, are never granted political agency and the ability to participate in public life. In that sense, I am interested in analyzing how the different indigenous cultures and communities presented by the novels function as traumatic collectives both in the novels and in their respective national (and transnational) landscapes. That is, in the ways in which indigenous characters, practices, and beliefs dislocate the time, the space, and the archive of the nation in order to coagulate, in parallel, alternative spectral communities. This is an important point, because, as Avery Gordon points out, unlike trauma, haunting is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done, it says "Something is making an appearance to you that had been kept from view. It says, Do something about the wavering present the haunting is creating." (178) Thus, the individual and collective indigenous subjects in the novels I read in what follows, do in fact hear this calling and answer it. In that sense, the four novels show how the Latin American indigenous world, understood as a series of contemporary myths that, at the same time, are calcified on the skeleton of the nation and –disembodied and spectral– are accumulated in society, conform a kind of metadiscourse: an intricate network of points of reference and intergenerational modes of resistance to hegemonic horizons –"the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of

totalitarianism," (Derrida XVIII). That is, spectral echoes that empower indigenous subjects by dislocating national ideology, culture, and time.

CHAPTER ONE

DE CUANDO EN CUANDO SATURNINA: BIRTH OF THE TRAUMATIC NATION

The novel *De cuando en cuando Saturnina. Saturnina From Time to Time. An oral history of the future* tells the events that occur in *Qullasuyo Marka* (also known as the Liberated Zone), a territory that includes almost totality of the former Bolivia to which, in this new configuration, has been added the Peruvian department of Puno, between the years 2070 and 2085. It is a futuristic novel that speculates on an alternative Bolivia and which has as its center the character of Saturnina Mamani Guarache, alias Satuka, a space navigator of great capacity and Andean warrior involved in a subversive guerrilla whose objective is the consecration of the indigenous rebellion that has changed the country. Written by British-Bolivian anthropologist and fiction writer Alison Spedding, and published in the year 2004, *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* is the first speculative novel written in three languages: Spanish, English and Aymara[2]. In the novel, all three become porous and contaminate one another, both grammatically and in its forms of structuring the experience, to form a *lingua franca* that brings together three

[2] "Aymara is a member of the Jaqi family, a formerly widespread linguistic family in the Andes, which also includes Jaqaru and Kawki. According to Hardman (1988), Aymara is the mother tongue of a third of the Bolivian population (i.e., more than 2 million people). These numbers, however, vary according to different sources. Based on a 1992 census in Bolivia and Chile, and in 1993 in Peru, the total Aymara-speaking population has been reported to be 1.6 million people. Today the Aymara area stretches north–south from the Titicaca Lake at the Peruvian–Bolivian border. In Chile, the Aymara community has approximately 38000 people, of which 12500 speak the language." (Núñez and Sweetserb 402)

different cultures and conceptions of the world This multilingual condition actualizes pre-Columbian Andean myths in a genre very seldom used in literature for this purpose: science fiction[3].

Antecedents

The plot of the book can be sketched in a few lines: since 2022, and after a series of violent rebellions of racial character that led to what is known as the "Liberation," Bolivia no longer exists as country, all the white and mestizo population (known as "q'aras" in Aymara) was expelled from the national territory or fled by their own means, and the government is run by indigenous authorities who re-baptize the former Bolivia as *Qullasuyo Marka*, or Liberated Zone[4]. Immediately after, the Peruvian province of Puno was annexed to the Liberated Zone and the new country's borders were closed in order to recreate a lifestyle similar to that of the pre-Columbian Americas. In this way, isolated from the rest of the continent and, effectively, from the rest of the world, the Zone does not allow anyone to enter or leave its borders, obsessed as it is in the reestablishment of traditional indigenous practices and a theocracy, a form of government where state administrators coincide with the leaders of a dominant religion.

Instead of a traditional government structure, in a gesture that refers to forms of organization prior to the Colonial arc, the novel presents a complex socio-political

[3] For this chapter, I'm using the second, revised edition of the novel.
[4] In the book this is posited as a response to an inescapable historical fact: the exploitation that the white and mestizo elites of Bolivia exerted over the indigenous population. About this René Zavaleta indicates: "The roots of present capitalism can be traced back… to large states and the hacienda. Actually, even more so than to large states, they can be traced back to the small hacienda. There is no doubt about it, the only stable business in Bolivia were the Indians. At the same time, the only innate, inalienable right of the white and mestizo casta was always their belief in their superiority over the Indians." (112)

structure based on religiosity and Andean community principles. *Qullasuyo Marka*, which takes its name from one of the fourth classic divisions of the Tawantinsuyo, the old Inca empire, is a stateless territory, in which there are no president, deputies, ministers, army or police, and which is governed by a set of community-based laws that find their origin in the so-called "ayllus" (small local ethnic groups)[5]. In a gesture that has been described as "retro futuristic" (Gonzáles León 76), the absence of classical authorities and a traditional state structure at the local and national level is countered by a group of guilds and rotating authorities, among which *amawt'as*, or indigenous priests, and *mallkus* and *jilaq'atas*, or local leaders, stand out. Thus, without a state, without national currency and without institutions like the Church, the media and the school, all eliminated after the triumph of the indigenous revolution because they were considered remnants of the colonizing impulse that dominated Bolivia for several centuries, *Qullasuyo Marka* decides to isolate itself from the world to carry out a process of internal reconstruction, and cultural and spiritual strengthening, enduring the disdain of the world, which considers them racist savages.

Once the borders are closed and an autarchic regime proclaims its auto-sustainability, nobody can get in or out of the walled indigenous nation, nobody except for the members of the Syndicate (as the "Space Engineering and Applied Astronomy Corporation" is colloquially known), a conglomerate of space pilots capable of travelling throughout the solar system, to which belongs Saturnina Mamani Guarache, main protagonist of the novel, space pilot, political activist, feminist, subversive lesbian, and

[5] "The ayllu is a network of families in a given area distinguished by comparative self-sufficiency and relations of reciprocity. It is a corporate whole, which includes social principles, verticality, and metaphor (...) Ayllu refers to people who live in the same territory and who feed the earth shrines of that territory." (Bastien 13)

member of the clandestine group Flora Tristán, which doesn't only conduct anticolonial terrorist attacks outside the Liberated Zone, but also defies the patriarchal authorities that maintain an oppressive regime inside of it. Thus, willing to exert violence to undermine the systems of colonial domination, internal and external to the Liberated Zone, Saturnina becomes famous at interplanetary level when, in the year 2079, plays an active part in the destruction of the Martian moon of Phobos, until then the last redoubt of white supremacy in the system. Two years later, in 2081, Saturnina reappears in two new attacks that destroy the fortress of Sacsayhuaman and the temple of the Coricancha. In this framework, this essay tries to articulate the ways in which, far from a utopic indigenous vision, *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*: 1) presents the Liberated Zone, the ex-Bolivia, as a traumatic community[6], and 2) problematizes readings that have traditionally associated novels of its kind, which discuss the nation, as a national representation or a national novel.

Lettered Polis, Wild Highlands

De cuando en cuando Saturnina is quite aware of its historical and political moment. Published in 2004, when the paradigm of the State changed radically in Bolivia, it is important to note how Spedding's novel and the alternative country it proposes, centered on the indigenous experience prior to the Colony, seem to anticipate, at least five years before, the official narrative of the Bolivian State. In 2009, this narrative literally re-founded the country through a new *Constitución Política del Estado* (Political

[6] That is, a community formed by unconscious drives that can be understood from a psychoanalytical standpoint, drives that together are the object of study of a field known as Trauma Theory. This essay concentrates on specific critical lines of the field, namely on those proposed by Cathy Caruth.

Constitution of the State) that, among other things, defines the "nation" as an indigenous entity different from any colonial institution. Thus, among the multiple approaches to the concept of nation, for the purposes of this chapter I propose one not lacking official support, and I adhere to the definition proposed in the new constitutional text: "La nación boliviana está conformada por la totalidad de las bolivianas y los bolivianos, las naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos, y las comunidades interculturales y afrobolivianas que en conjunto constituyen el pueblo boliviano" ("The Bolivian nation is made up of all Bolivians male and female, first indigenous nations and peasant peoples, and the intercultural and Afro-Bolivian communities that collectively constitute the Bolivian people." Article 3) In addition, I return to the same text to clarify the term "indigenous nation": "Es nación y pueblo indígena originario campesino toda la colectividad humana que comparta identidad cultural, idioma, tradición histórica, instituciones, territorialidad y cosmovisión, cuya existencia es anterior a la invasión colonial española" ("It is an indigenous nation and indigenous people all the human collectivity that shares a cultural identity, a language, a historical tradition, institutions, territoriality, and worldview, and whose existence is prior to the Spanish colonial invasion." Article 30) Taking this into account, it is clear that *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* speculates fairly accurately on the characteristics of a new Bolivian state, organized around indigenous specificities two years before Evo Morales came to power as the first indigenous president of the country, and five years before the new constitutional text changed the organizational nature of Bolivia and replaced the old republican paradigm, still close to its colonial heritage, with the figure of the "plurinational state," which recognizes its complex and varied indigenous composition.

Thus, the name of Liberated Zone, with which Spedding baptizes her futuristic Bolivia, functions as an accurate omen and also, as it will be later explained, as a trigger for the crisis of the revolutionary political moment that came immediately after its publication.

As I mentioned, another of the most obvious changes proposed by Bolivia's new Political Constitution has to do with the name of the country, which goes from being the "Republic of Bolivia" to the "Plurinational State of Bolivia." This new name, which seeks to distance the country from totalizing communitarian conceptions, alludes to the political and legal organization of several nations governed by a single representative government and subject to a single legislation. In addition to effectively rearticulate social classes and to project a new relationship of the country with History and the history of colonization and sovereignty, this shift demands a recomposition of nationality in several levels. If it is accepted that the republican state, descendant from or consequence of the colonial state, is not capable of producing national narratives and contents, since it is not the product of a constitutional event and its legitimacy falls outside the spectrum of the truly representative, it is clear that the establishment of nationality does not happen under the parameters of a state articulation but, on the contrary, state articulation is carried out following the contents that emerge in the building of a nation, designed around, or in opposition to, different horizons.

The nation, and specifically the Latin American nation, has largely been studied in literature and social sciences. In that line, one of the categories that most notably has marked the Latin American cultural analysis of the last thirty years is that of the "letrado" (man of letters). After the posthumous publication of Angel Rama's seminal book, *La ciudad letrada* (*The Lettered City*), in 1984, writing and urbanism became pillars of the

colonization project of the Americas. The product of centuries of administrative and ecclesiastical structuring dictated from Spain, the lettered city was shaped as a classic, civilized, fortified polis, inherently opposed to the great wild spaces of barbaric America. And it was also the natural space in which the new Latin-American subject, known as "el letrado", was born. Since the sixteenth century, the lettered city and the letrados (men of letters) produced the legal protocols, educational enterprises, religious projects, and communitarian ideologies that generated a clearly structured and stratified public life and a sociopolitical order in the different Spanish viceroyalties and colonies of the continent. Redoubts like this, with a political horizon clearly defined by European models and with strong links between lettered culture, state power, and urban emplacement, appeared all over Latin America.

At the center of this complex web of writing, power, and urbanism a small group of administrators, lawyers and other men of letters, (whom Brooke Larson calls "owners and lords of the written word, agents of the imperial government and demiurges of civilization," 117) became one of the main driving forces of Latin American public life. These letrados "not only controlled the narratives of imperial knowledge and power in radically heteroglossic and colonized societies, but they also conducted the day-to-day affairs of administration, justice, and extraction." (118) In addition, from the very beginning of the colonial enterprise, in fact since the dawn of the Conquest, lettered men were responsible for designing, implementing and disseminating the codes and legislation governing the language of the empire, Spanish, which was one of the main instruments for consolidating the power of Spain in America. Walter Mignolo recalls a rather well known anecdote that shows the links between writing and the Spanish colonization

project. Queen Isabel, "who was born in the year printing was invented," received the first Castilian grammar from Antonio de Nebrija, its author, in 1492, the same year in which Columbus arrived in America, and the first dictionary of Spanish language in 1495. Not only that, Nebrija famously told the Queen that grammars and dictionaries, the instruments of language legislation, were crucial for the consolidation of kingdom. Nebrija realized that "the power of a unified language, through its grammar, lay in teaching it to barbarians, as well as controlling their languages by writing their grammars." (306) Thus, the queen of Spain first, and all other imperial authorities later, realized that their work in America did not only involve to conquer but also to civilize the native population. Rama defines this eloquently:

> En el centro de toda ciudad, según diversos grados que alcanzan su plenitud en las capitales virreinales, hubo una ciudad letrada que componía el anillo protector del poder y el ejecutor de sus órdenes: una pléyade de religiosos, administradores, educadores, profesionales, escritores y múltiples servidores intelectuales, todos esos que manejaban la pluma, estaban estrechamente asociados a las funciones del poder y componían (…) un país modelo de funcionariado y de burocracia (32)[7]

These lettered cities eloquently highlighted the importance that writing had and still has in the structuring of societies, but also the exclusionist way in which it was used in the continent. Because one of the main features of the lettered city, especially during

[7] "In the center of every city, according to varying degrees that reach fullness in the viceroyalties capitals, there was a lettered city that composed the protective ring of power and the executor of their orders: a pleiad of religious men, administrators, educators, professionals, writers and multiple intellectual servants, all those who handled the pen, were closely associated with the functions of power and composed (...) a model country of civil service and bureaucracy."

its origins in the XVI century, is that it was, necessarily, an urban project, a traditional polis inhabited mainly by a white and mestizo population who had access to written language. Therefore, it was the antihtesis of the rural space, of the territory of indigenous peoples and peasants completely alien to the design of cultural models and the conformation of public ideologies. However, indigenous peoples were not entirely excluded from the project. There are very specific material causes that contributed to its establishment and growth, among them, as Mignolo argues, the fact that the elites (white and mestizo elites) lived, for centuries, "of the work of indians and slaves," which caused "the indigenous mortality that we euphemistically refer to as 'the demographic catastrophe' of the sixteenth century." But the strengthening of the lettered city in Latin America was not rooted in material foundations only. Rather, it happened ideologically, and this second colonization was based in the "evangelization (transculturation) of an indigenous population counted by millions, which was forced to accept of European values even if they did not believe or understand them." (Rama 34)

Thus, these eminently modern instruments of domination that were regulated writing and its executors, had a double function in Latin America: on the one hand they produced the first cities in the continent, and on the other they designed those urban projects as racially segregated projects of which the indigenous and peasant populations constituted the periphery. That is, an essential periphery but a periphery nonetheless. This happened more often in the Andean region of South America, where millions of indigenous subjects, which had traditionally inhabited the wild plateaus and mountains of the area, were dragged into what Larson calls "la órbita de la justicia imperial española," ("the orbit of Spanish imperial justice," 118) thus consolidating the colonization and the

evangelization of indigenous populations. This indeed happened more and more along the colonial arc and even long after the Latin American republics achieved independence. Thus, the lettered city of the early sixteenth century surpassed its original role as an outpost of Spain and at the end of the nineteenth century was transformed by what Larson calls the social forces of modernization: "migración, urbanización, la proliferación de culturas populares y laborales, el surgimiento de las movilizaciones campesinas y de trabajadores, la irrupción de una nueva generación de letrados quienes, en tanto periodistas, escritores nacionalistas, maestros, abogados, docentes universitarios, empezaron a ampliar el ejercicio de las letras" ("migration, urbanization, the proliferation of popular and labor cultures, the emergence of peasant and worker mobilizations, and the appearance of a new generation of lettered men who, as journalists, nationalist writers, teachers, lawyers, university professors, began to expand the practice of letters." 118)

One of the important changes that took place in the lettered polis between the colonial and postcolonial periods involved the political scenario: from the city to the national territory. This happened because the urban project of the previous centuries, during which peripheral indigenous subjects and peasants were evangelized and incorporated to the growing polis, was certainly successful and thus provoked several administrative, political and cultural transformations. Naturally, this movement involved a series of questions and debates about the appropriate ways to educate the great masses, mostly indigenous (especially in the Andean region), and to incorporate them into the nation. How to do it? How to incorporate them? As citizens with full rights including the right to vote? As regular workers, public employees, soldiers, church members,

educators? In order to try to answer questions like these, at the beginning of the twentieth century the reach of the lettered city was expanded to the countryside and, through writing, previously denied or forgotten native forms and customs started being revisited. Therefore, the pens of lettered men and the continent's elite began to concentrate, from different points of view, in exploring, classifying, and assimilating the presence of several indigenous groups as components of the national horizon. Political discussion, educational design, economic analysis and cultural manifestations all began to perceive in the indigenous a subject perhaps worthy of attention in the name of the consecration of national projects, although still a minor, subaltern, silenced, violated subject. Literature in the Andean region quickly noticed this veering and, thus, a sizable group of novels from the period inaugurated a subgenre that, in the case of some national traditions, continued to be expanded almost until the end of the century: indigenism.

Bolivia is a particularly interesting national case in which to analyze these tensions. The constant and institutionalized outrage suffered by the Bolivian indigenous people at the hands of a mestizo and white elite, supported by the State, is a traditional characteristic of nineteenth-century Bolivia. As Rene Zavaleta explains, "the first legal measures of the virtual expropriation of indigenous communities in favor of whites and mestizos, which resulted in a true feudalization of the countryside at least in the most populated part of the country, were given by [president] Melgarejo in 1866, but they continued without solution of continuity well into the twentieth century." 123) Thus it is understood that immediately afterwards, according to Silvia Rivera:

> los proyectos de ávidos y emprendedores hacendados se verían ampliamente realizados con la dictación de la ley de Exvinculación de 1874, durante el gobierno de Tomás Frías. Mediante ella se declaraba jurídicamente extinguida la comunidad india y se prescribía la parcelación individualizada de las tierras comunales y la reforma del sistema tributario con el objeto de aplicar un impuesto universal a la propiedad en sustitución de la 'contribución indígena'. Esta legislación de corte liberal permitió… un acelerado y prolongado proceso de expansión latifundista, que se desarrollará durante los 40 años subsiguientes, afectando principalmente a las zonas del Altiplano paceño (84)[8]

Afterwards, in 1898, after La Paz became the country's seat of political and economic power, it also became the national center of literacy, the residence of intellectuals, writers and statesmen in charge of developing new liberal policies, agrarian reform plans and educational projects aimed at the Aymara population of the "altiplano" (high plateau). After the rural areas surrounding La Paz, populated by more than half a million Aymara peasants, were prey of a landowner elite that uprooted the traditional territories of these communities, the "aimarización" (Aymarization) of La Paz became more intense during the first years of the 20th century and transformed the city into a "lugar de refugio y de protesta para los ex-comunarios, así como una caótica feria callejera para los comerciantes, mercaderes y trabajadores aimaras" ("place of refuge and protest for ex-

[8] "The projects of avid and enterprising landowners would be widely realized with the enactment of the 'exvinculación' law of 1874, during the government of Tomas Frias. Through this law, the Indian community was declared legally extinguished, and the individualized parcelization of communal lands and the reform of the tax system were prescribed in order to apply a universal property tax in substitution of the 'indigenous contribution.' This liberal-cut legislation allowed (...) an accelerated and prolonged process of latifundian expansion, which would develop during the subsequent 40 years, mainly affecting the areas of the La Paz high plateau."

community members, as well as a chaotic street fair for merchants and Aymara workers." Larson 122) This overwhelming gesture of the lettered polis, which later became the political metropolis and the economic nucleus of the nation, fueled racial contentions between groups that no longer lived in separate spaces and rather began to share the only space of capable of allowing public life: the capital. This "proximidad de grupos étnico-raciales en las calles, el mercado y las dependencias de gobierno" ("proximity of ethno-racial groups in the streets, the market, and government dependencies") not only meant the success of the lettered city project (a project of clear colonialist overtones and that was achieved through the material domination and ideological evangelization of native populations) and the beginning of nationalism, but it also provoked that the lettered elites of the city met face to face with their "Otros indios" ("indian Others." 122)

Furthermore, although these different ethnic-cultural groups began to coexist and to tensely share national narratives in that chaotic nucleus of the lettered city that was La Paz, this did not result in outbursts of violence because the coexistence occurred, precisely, in the city, the residence of a dominant white and mestizo elite that did not go into crisis in the face of their close, immediate, indigenous Others. This is because, from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, violence (and especially racial violence) was concentrated in the highlands surrounding the seat of government. Outside of the city walls, from that wild periphery constituted by the rural pampa, faced with the loss of their lands and the colonization of their ideological horizon, reduced to being forced servants of the large haciendas and to the periphery of the lettered city, the native Aymaras reached a boiling point that resulted in successive rebellions in the highlands. Thus, between 1880 and 1899 there were at least nine significant indigenous revolts that

sought to defend the community's lands and stop the abuses of the bosses. Or, as Rivera herself indicates, “En el curso de ese proceso, el Altiplano se convirtió en una tensa frontera interna de asedio a los territorios comunales de los ayllus, que veían progresivamente constreñido su espacio de reproducción y desmantelado su universo ideológico con la ofensiva latifundista” (“in the course of that process, the high plateau became a tense, internal border of siege to the communal territories of the ayllus, who witnessed the progressive disappearance of their reproduction space, and the dismantling of their ideological universe with the offensive landowner.” 86) Furthermore, the climax of the lettered city and the nationalization of previously local interests, also reinforced the exclusionary and coercive nature of oligarchic domination and allowed it to rework “sus sustratos coloniales más profundos en el planteamiento de sus relaciones con el indio.” (“its deepest colonial substrates in the approach of its relations with the indian.” Rivera 86) Therefore, the indigenous population of the highlands expressed “su enfrentamiento abierto contra la minoría criolla dominante” (“its open opposition to the dominant criollo minority”) through “la ideología y la práctica de una lucha anticolonial” (“the ideology and practice of an anticolonial struggle.” Rivera 86) Repetitively, systematically, through the rural crisis unleashed by indigenous rebellions, indigenousness, as a colonial category, began to appear and reappear, at different times, in the collective perceptions of society.

Thus, following the political changes of the country that marked the end of the nineteenth and the entry of the twentieth century, the reactions to the legal elimination of the indigenous community, that is, against what Zavaleta calls the “refundación de la oligarquía” (“refoundation of the oligarchy,” 147) were certainly not passive. Faced with

the loss of their lands, and in several cases being forced servants of the large haciendas, the Aymaras reached a boiling point that resulted in successive rebellions. Among all of them, perhaps none was as important as that of Zárate Willka. According to Edmundo Paz Soldán, the Zárate Willka rebellion falls within the civil war of 1899, which pitted the liberals of the rising middle class, allied to tin miners, against the conservatives of the old silver mining oligarchy. The Liberals sought Aymara support to overthrow the conservative party. However, the Aymara leader, Pablo Zárate Willka, had his own political project: after the conservative defeat, the Aymaras would attack their former liberal allies in search of the restitution of usurped communal lands and the constitution of an autonomous indigenous government. The Mohoza massacre, in which the Aymara troops killed 130 liberal party cavalrymen and committed acts of cannibalism, caused their leader to decide to eliminate Willka and decimate his troops. This reading of the historical moment is central because it shows, among other things, an indigenous political consciousness, not previously recorded in the national archive, in full development.

The Specter of the High Plateau

One of the first ruptures that De cuando en cuando Saturnina proposes regarding the tradition of the Bolivian indigenous novel is the construction of an native imaginary with an open, and at times aggressive, political will. Although in the history of the country there were uprisings that sought to consecrate bubbles of indigenous political autonomy, as in the case of the Zárate Willka rebellion, the Bolivian fiction that crosses the nineteenth century and reaches the twentieth seems not to have generated a

corresponding correlate, or an instance in which the indigenous is not a mere apolitical victim of the circumstances, and devoid of capacity for action, well into the twentieth century[9]. Thus, as Leonardo García Pabón indicates, many literary discourses of the time aimed "a mostrar los límites de la capacidad política del indígena" ("to show the limits of the indigenous people's political capacity.") However, indigenous practices before and after the uprising of Zárate Willka show that this was not the case. On the contrary, "la conciencia política indígena fue una de las características más importantes de la actuación de Willka. Esta claridad en sus objetivos políticos los llevó a buscar un gobierno indio separado y diferente al gobierno nacional; aspiración condenada a fracasar pero no por ello menos política" ("indigenous political consciousness was one of the most important characteristics of Willka's journey. This clarity in his political objectives led them to seek an indian government separate and different from Bolivia's national government; aspiration condemned to fail but no less political." 129) In *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*, the search for an indigenous government, which begins with the historical revolts of Willka, not only does not fail but it is consecrated and exacerbated. The Bolivia that appears in the novel is a Bolivia in which the indigenous revolution has not only triumphed but has eradicated from the territory any non-indigenous person and has reversed all the industrial and technological advances of the former republic in a desire for cultural and political regression. It is the lettered city being taken over and controlled by the same natives that, before the revolution, only dared to live in its periphery.

Rivera argues that:

[9] This would happen some years later, with the emergence of the "chola" narrative in works like Carlos Medinacelli's *La Chaskañawi* (1948) and Adolfo Costa du Rels' *La Misski simi* (1948); even later with the popularization of Jaime Saenz's narrative (in the 1980's); and finally with the critical success of "social grotesque" category, proposed by Javier Sanjinés in *Contemporary literature and social grotesque in Bolivia* (1992).

> La rebelión de Willka fue quizás la última rebelión india autónoma del período republicano. Duramente derrotados y diezmados, sus efectivos se comportaron en ella como una nación dentro de otra nación, expresando en su enfrentamiento abierto contra la minoría criolla dominante la ideología y la práctica de una lucha anticolonial. A través de la crisis desatada por la rebelión de Zarate, lo indio, como categoría colonial, se reproducirá en las percepciones colectivas de la sociedad criolla (86)[10]

The case is that Willka's political revolt, which aimed to get a place -in Bolivia- for Bolivian indigenous people, and thus had the pretension to stop being an island, a "nation within another nation," achieved the opposite effect. The realist novel tradition of the period expresses this defeat and confers the role of the victim to native peoples. Until Spedding's novel, there are no narratives (novels, essays, oratory, criticism) of the Indian, but discourses on the Indian, always coming from an otherness, the learned polis, the mestizo, the white, etc. These are narratives that portray indigenousness as linked to historical problems: poverty, illiteracy, susceptibility to illness, etc., and that condemn it to endlessly repeat attitudes that position it outside the sphere of the social and, thus, of the national (attitudes such as apathy, violence and even brutality)[11]. These narratives

[10] "The Willka Rebellion was perhaps the last autonomous Indian rebellion of the republican period. Violently defeated and decimated, the troops behaved during it as a nation within another nation, expressing in their open confrontation against the dominant creole minority the ideology and practice of an anti-colonial struggle. Through the crisis unleashed by the rebellion of Zárate, indigenousness, as a colonial category, will be reproduced in the collective perceptions of creole society."

[11] García Pabón reaffirms this when referring to "the strong and violent appearance of the Indians in the national political scene with the rebellion of Zárate Willka." (127)

also perceive the recurrence of violence as a cyclical feature of the indigenous character, as a traumatic fatality. But this is a clear historical error shared by several intellectuals of the early twentieth century that, on the one hand, ignores most of what happened during the revolt of Zárate Willka and, on the other, disregards the fundamental fact that Willka's revolt implied an awareness of the archetypal character of the rebellion in Bolivia. Or, as Rivera indicates, the fact that "la rebelión es el lenguaje fundamental a través del cual el indio formula sus demandas a la sociedad" ("rebellion is the fundamental language through which the Indian formulates his demands on society." 17)

Returning to the scenario previously posited by Larson, when the (white and mestizo) elites of La Paz, that is to say, the minority groups that led the destinies of the nation from the walled redoubt of the lettered polis, found themselves face to face with their indigenous Other, they did not become alarmed or go into crisis because the space in which that encounter occurred was the controlled territory of the city. In any case, while it is true that the meeting of ethnicities and cultures did not produce outbursts of violence in the city, while at first this clash did not trigger the internal security mechanisms of the urban elite, "el espectro de la reciente guerra racial en el altiplano sí logró hacerlo" ("the specter of the recent racial war in the altiplano did manage to do it." And this, again according to Larson, implied that indigenousness in Bolivia "fuera más urgente y real para los forjadores urbanos de la nacionalidad, que en cualquier otra parte de Latinoamérica" ("was more urgent and real for the urban forgers of nationhood, than in any other part of Latin America." 122)

This "specter" of ethnic conflict was and is capable not only of affecting but also of destabilizing the white and mestizo elites that, from within the lettered city, seek to

stifle the voices of the colonized indigenous majority subsumed into the national project. Because, as Rivera argues, rebellion is the fundamental language through which indigenous people formulate their demands to society, their specter is a ghost that systematically reappears, from the late nineteenth century to practically the twenty-first century, in many levels of Bolivian letters: in literature, in the form of narratives concentrated in wild rural areas and menacing characters; in politics, with the increasing recognition of indigenous people as full citizens, with the same rights as white and mestizo population; in the administration of justice, through the inclusion of indigenous communities in national legislation; etc. But it is also a ghost that appears and reappears in the different strata of Bolivian society, and in all of them the literate elite perceives it traumatically, because for them it represents a loss of privileges and a crisis of the national horizon they struggled to impose[12].

As Paz Soldán begins to suggest, it may be necessary to look for a literary specter of the national beyond the erotic passion referred by Doris Sommer and her foundational fictions, in the territory of difficult exploration inhabited by compulsion, the repressed, and trauma, in the cracks of individual experience that together create a chain that has no easy explanation. Paz Soldán is suggestive when he mentions the cyclical nature of the repressed in the construction of the national project, proposing a tension activated between the poles of History and psychoanalysis. Or, to use another figure, in this case related to the geographical territory of fictions like *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*, we

[12] Indigenismo, moreover, follows an irregular trajectory within the framework of Bolivian literature. After being one of its central issues during the first half of the twentieth century, and coinciding with the outbreak and the end of the "national revolution" of 1952, the indigenous discourse ceased to appearing systematically in the literary field –from then on concentrated in exploring other issues and other sensibilities, perhaps more urban, more middle class and linked to the mestizo as a privileged subject– and started appearing more in other arts and cultural manifestations, such as Miguel Alandia Pantoja's mural painting, Jorge Sanjinés' cinema, popular festivals like the Carnival and the "Gran Poder", etc.

would have to look for the specter of the nation –as Willca did– in wild rural areas, the lettered polis, the globalized world and, even beyond, in outer space, in every place that the ghost of the indigenous rebellion compulsively reappears[13]. For this is precisely what happens in Spedding's novel, in which the core of the national is disputed not only in the Liberated Zone but also in several other regions of the planet and also outside the planet, in the cosmos, where Saturnina carries out terrorist actions in the name of the Aymara culture. In this regard, it is interesting to see how, in the novel, Aymara customs, which demand an almost sacred attachment and veneration of the earth, –*Pachamama*– are reproduced in other parts of the world and even in outer space, a territory without territory. It is perhaps an ironic gesture, this one of Spedding, that gives indigenous peoples, finally, fictionally, the control of the entire territory of the country, in a speculated moment in which they almost do not need it, because the main means of subsistence of the Liberated Zone is space travel, which implies a systematic separation from the territory and from Earth. Thus, the famous "question of the land," closely linked throughout Bolivian republican life to indigenousness, is solved in the novel by a curious equation: the land is given entirely to indigenous peoples at the very moment in which, to survive, they begin to physically separate themselves from it.

Perhaps, with this ironic and nostalgic gesture, a narrative line that sees the Bolivian indigenous problematic as a knot of meaning projected towards the future can be envisioned. And this is another of the fundamental differences between the lettered projects, intellectual politics, and literature of the first half of the twentieth century, all of which deal with indigenousness, and Spedding´s novel, since the cyclical tragedy that the

[13] Before Spedding's novel, and according to indigenist literature, "la esencia de la identidad nacional" ("the essence of national identity") could be found mainly "en el espacio del 'campo', el llano, la selva, el altiplano" ("in the countryside, in the plains, the forest, the high plateau." Paz Soldán XXXVIII)

former set as a ideological horizon is transposed through the happy rebellious gesture of the latter. In this regard, Paz Soldán indicates that one of the most representative novels of this first half of the twentieth century, *Raza de bronce*, "sugiere que el realismo puede ser capaz de narrar la crisis del régimen andino, pero no de imaginar el futuro a partir del posible triunfo de la rebelión indígena (…) Lo que la novela realmente sugiere para la nación boliviana es que no parece haber forma de trascender esta etapa traumática de las relaciones" ("suggests that realism may be able to narrate the crisis of the Andean regime, but not to imagine the future starting from the possible triumph of an indigenous rebellion (...) What the novel really suggests for the Bolivian nation is that there seems to be no way to transcend this traumatic stage of relations." LVII) This is precisely what *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* does, it imagines the future as the triumph of an indigenous revolution and it transcends the current traumatic stage of national race relations in order to inaugurate a new one, because, on the one hand, it stays away from realism and its sociological pretensions, and privileges science fiction and its psychoanalytic tensions; and, on the other, it detaches its indigenous characters from the material referent of the land, in which letrados and critics have traditionally seen the core of the national spectrum.

Trauma, Temporality, and Revolution

De cuando en cuando Saturnina presents a double rejection, or double negation, of the national. On the one side, the rejection or negation of the Bolivian nation: socioeconomically unbalanced, historically incapable of reaching political consensus, and

literarily passive to reductive allegorizations. On the other, the traumatic rejection or negation not of the Bolivian nation but rather of the national paradigm itself: of the concept of the national as an ideological horizon susceptible of being allegorized by literature. Through the story told in the novel, Spedding shows that one of the most insightful ways of writing about national communities is to problematize the traumatic concept of the nation. This concept is a theoretical and cultural construct –which had an eventful development in countries such as Bolivia– that escapes the archival drive, a fixating pulsion that tries to "understand" and "explain" complicated societies, because its historical past comes back compulsively to destabilize the present from which the archival drive is initiated.

The narration of *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* isn't unidirectional or presented as a linear progression that leads the reader from a point "a" (say, the year 2022, when the indianist revolution explodes) to a point "b" (say, the year 2086, when Saturnina and other women meet to give their testimony of several decades of life and struggle in the Liberated Zone). Spedding proposes a looser reading experience and the novel narrates sixty years of the liberated *Qullasuyo Marka*, moving forward and backward between different instances of the present, the past and the future, which together form an intricate temporal web that does away with traditional story-telling conceptions. About this Raquel Alfaro indicates:

> La distribución en apariencia desordenada de los capítulos, los cuales guardan correspondencia con sucesos determinados… deriva del rescate de la concepción cíclica del tiempo del mundo andino, que articula secuencias

> históricas no sucesivas para provocar diálogos tensionados (o Pachakuti) y, a través de ellos, la lectura crítica del pasado que impediría la repetición de errores en el presente (346)[14]

The novel configures a complex temporality made of different retrospective historical layers that do away with historicist chronicities and frames the present of the book in 2086, the year when the story begins to be told both in the present and past tense, thus combining a speculative and futuristic drive with a retrospective narrative structure, in a "retro-futuristic" style. The novel begins in a distant moment in the future and as the story is narrated it chronologically gets closer to our present through the stories told by its protagonists. Spedding makes her reader contemplate a speculated future while the narrators of the book aim for the past when telling their stories; a past that, for us, however, is still the future. This can be better understood with the Aymara concept of *nayrapacha*, which Silvia Rivera explains as a "pasado, pero no cualquier visión de pasado; más bien, un 'pasado–como–futuro… Un pasado capaz de renovar el futuro, de revertir la situación vivida" ("vision of the past, but not just any vision of the past; rather, a past-like-future… A past capable of renovating the future, of reverting already lived situations." 44) Contrary to the Western conception of linear, progressive time[15], in the Aymara cosmovision time is circular and, perhaps more importantly in terms of this

[14] "The seemingly random distribution of the chapters, which correspond to specific facts (…) stems from a cyclic conception of time that comes from the Andean world, a conception that articulates non-successive historical sequences to elicit tensioned dialogues (or *Pachakuti*) and, through them, a critical reading of the past which would prevent the repetition of mistakes in the present."

[15] "An event in the future is seen as 'in front of' the experiencer—assuming that the experiencer is facing the flow of events—whereas a past event is behind the experiencer (bygone days are behind us, whereas the week ahead of us is approaching). Although a language typically has more than one metaphorical model of time, so far all documented languages… appear to share a spatial metaphor mapping future events onto spatial locations in front of Ego and past events onto locations behind Ego, rather than to the left of Ego and to the right of Ego, for example." (Núñez and Sweetser 402)

analysis, the past is always ahead, because it is known, it has already been experienced, it has already been seen; whereas the future, unknown and yet unseen, is behind. As Núñez and Sweetserb argue in their enlightening essay about the Aymara language and its relation with different temporal forms:

> In Aymara, the basic word for FRONT (*nayra*, "eye/front/sight") is also a basic expression meaning PAST, and the basic word for BACK (*qhipa*, "back/behind") is a basic expression for FUTURE meaning (…) The situation in Aymara attracted our attention because it is the only case in the literature of a mapping where indeed future (not general posteriority) seems to be metaphorically IN BACK OF EGO, whereas past appears to be IN FRONT OF EGO (402)

Thus, facing the known past and with the unknown future behind, Spedding's novel proposes a particular notion of progress capable of deconstructing colonial power structures through the recovering of ancestral Andean practices and knowledge, therefore becoming what some of the characters of the book, mostly people from outside the Liberated Zone that hear what goes on inside it but can't access it because they are foreigners, call an "archaic utopia," a revolution that aims to consecrate and institute an ancestral way of life, prevalent in Latin America before the Colony and the Conquest. But in spite of this the novel does not propose a pastoral fantasy, a luminous indigenous ideal without ideological dark areas. Contrary to that, as some of the novel's critics have noticed (Burdette, Gutierrez León), those dark areas are quite visible. For instance, the

Liberated Zone is not a traditional state and does not have a traditional government structure. Instead, it presents a sort of Andean theocracy in which *amawt'as* and *yatiris*[16] with growing power utilize "la plataforma de la espiritualidad para inmiscuirse en todos los aspectos de la sociedad" ("the platform of religion and spirituality to intrude into all aspects of society." Burdette 125) In several moments of the story the guild of amawt'as acquires features of a radical political regime, introducing to the social life of the Qullasuyo Marka rituals like ideological "reeducation", in the case of those inhabitants of the Liberated Zone that still hold on to the remains of Christianity; and "sacrifice", in the case of those who are considered traitors to the *Qullasuyo Marka*, poor souls who are taken to the snowed peaks of the area to be offered to the *achachilas*[17]. This impulse, this gesture that combines a lecturing, homogenizing drive, and a censuring of dissidence, is of key importance because, on the one hand, it evokes and subverts the letrado project of the lettered polis, and this time indigenous people are the ones in charge of producing narratives and contents with which to "reeducate" and indoctrinate the masses. On the other hand, it suggests an instance of institutionalized insurrection, a point in which the counter-power becomes regular power, in which anarchic destabilization becomes official form and, thus, unwritten law, silent pact, institution. What starts as an indigenous revolution that aims to change the ex-Bolivia and transform it into a society where historically subjugated indigenous people regain political control, becomes a new society that imposes a new form of control, an intolerant community that condemns dissidence.

[16] The glossary of the novel indicates "Amawta: Andean priest"; "Yatiri: wise man, healer, fortune teller."
[17] In the glossary "Achachila: spirit of nature, of the natural place; the higher the place the more powerful the spirit becomes; the most powerful spirits are located in the great snowed caps. Ancestral spirit."

In her seminal book *Unclaimed experience*, Cathy Caruth argues that traumatic experience is signaled by the repetition of an event that is never fully known. "The repetition at the heart of catastrophe–the experience that Freud will call traumatic neurosis–emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind." (2). Furthermore, Caruth states that trauma:

> is an event that… is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor… Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature —the way it was precisely not known in the first instance— returns to haunt the survivor later on (4)

I believe that a traumatic dynamic is at work in the compulsive ways in which the non-state of *Qullasuyo Marka* institutionalizes insurrection. If it is true that, on a first moment, in the year 2022 the indigenous population of what still was Bolivia raises in arms against the government and the white and mestizo population with the objective of re-founding the nation under the precepts of an archaic way of life, it's also true that in a second moment, once this objective is achieved and revolutionary power reaches a boiling point, the new society goes back to the colonial ways and structures that provoked the rebellion in the first place. There's a blank moment between the old story of an oppressed native people and the new story of that people now in an oppressing position, a

moment which in the novel takes place in the year 2022 as an armed revolution in the tradition of Zárate Willka, a social explosion that produces a blinding fire, so blinding that it prevents the people who ignite it from seeing what happens, from registering the facts, from witnessing their own story. In that spirit, as soon as the Liberated Zone is constituted, newspapers, television, public libraries and even the school system are prohibited because they are considered remnants of the oppressive, Western-like regime of the ex-Bolivia. As a response to the moment of blindness, that instant in which trauma is experienced –with Caruth– too fast, too soon, the historical change in the Liberated Zone cannot be witnessed by anybody because the revolutionary moment acts as a force that rejects the archival drive, that literally prohibits the existence of an archive, newspapers, books, schools, any collective recording of the facts. And since that moment isn't witnessed by anybody, it comes back later to haunt the reigning indigenous population, which therefore institutionalizes its own revolutionary impulse traumatically, thus preventing revolution from forming a new nation.

In this scenario, since the beginning of the novel Saturnina wages a silent war against the authorities of *Qullasuyo Marka*, especially against the *amawt'as* who basically control all aspects of life in the Liberated Zone even though they should restrict themselves to conducting the education and spirituality of the community. *Amawt'as* are authority figures in matters of cult, but in a systematic exercise of overtaking of public office they also become the center of political and economic power, and thus the main developers of the Liberated Zone's ideological horizon, to the point in which they dictate what other countries and communities the Liberated Zone must engage in battle with[18].

[18] Traditionally, this method of social organization has consolidated the sectrum of the nation in Bolivia. Zavaleta argues that "Un país o si se quiere una sociedad (o núcleo humano) concurre a la guerra con lo

Thus, guided by the *amawt'as*, the first action of the Liberated Zone as a collective society is to violently battle, murder and exile the *q'ara* population. In other words, *Qullasuyo Marka* exists as the expression and consequence of an act of war carried out by the indigenous population of the ex-Bolivia as a national community. However, this unstable national project quickly institutionalizes the revolutionary drive and thus provokes the emergence of pockets of resistances that work against hegemonic power. For Instance, as head of the terrorist organization Flora Tristán, Saturnina sabotages systematically the mail authorities of the Liberated Zone and actually sabotages the Liberated Zone itself as an indigenous national entity, as a community that represents what the Bolivian Political Constitution calls "toda la colectividad humana que comparta identidad cultural, idioma, tradición histórica, instituciones, territorialidad y cosmovisión, cuya existencia es anterior a la invasión colonial española" ("the human collective that shares a cultural identity, a language, a historical tradition, institutions, a territory, and a cosmovision, and whose existence precedes colonial invasion." Article 30, Numeral I)

Far from being the exception that proves the rule, Saturnina is a character that subverts it and shows how the vertical, hierarchized, indigenous fantasy of *Qullasuyo Marka* is not capable of producing a nation, because like the ex-Bolivia, not all its inhabitants share the same "cultural identity" (there are people in the Liberated Zone who are much more westernized than others, which creates constant conflicts); or the same "language" (even though Aymara, Spanish and English are official languages of the

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que es pero también con lo que no es… Donde no existe nación no se puede pedir a los hombres asistir nacionalmente a la guerra ni tener una sensibilidad nacional del territorio" ("a country, or society -or human nucleus- goes to war as what it is and against what it is not… Where there is no nation, men cannot be told to nationally go to war or to have a national sensibility of their territory." 31) Here Zavaleta refers to how Latin American wars forged Latin American national imaginaries, war being one of the most direct ways that societies have to differentiate themselves from others.

Liberated Zone, English is only used by members of the Syndicate); or the same "institutions" (there are people in the Liberated Zone that undermine the *amawt'as*' rules and rather than sharing a traditional Andean spirituality stick to remnants of Christianity); or the same "territory" (the world of the novel is, by a large extent, deterritorialized, because outer space has become the "territory" of several communities[19]); or, perhaps most importantly, the same "cosmovision" (Saturnina represents a large collective of women from the Liberated Zone who stand in opposition to the official policies of *Qullasuyo Marka*, all bent on prolonging male domination[20]). The traditional spectrum of the nation is not capable of fully forming also because, as an antibody struggling against a virus, Saturnina takes upon herself to dismantle the pillars that sustain the national paradigm: the same culture, language, institutions, territory, and cosmovision.

Saturnina wages both an anti-patriarchal and anti-national war; hers is an impulse that seeks the removal of old sociopolitical structures and the consolidation not of new structures but rather of the revolutionary drive itself, the pure subversive impulse. Like Saturnina herself claims: "Somos la revolución permanente. ¿Acaso no lo sabías?" ("We are the permanent revolution; didn't you know that?" 93) Thus, sometimes in a manner so subtle that for the authorities of the Liberated Zone is hard to notice, and sometimes in

[19] For instance, the "outlaw" community, made of pirates, exiles and people who live outside the law (Saturnina gets together with them in the novel to carry out the terrorist attack that destroys the Martian moon Phobos). About communities like the outlaws, the glossary of the novel states: "Since the year 2050 it was decided that all national and international laws would be applied only from Earth to the orbit of Mars, and from there on it would be free territory; therefore the outlaws can move and act freely in the asterior belt and the farthest parts of the solar system." (330)

[20] On this topic, Saturnina asks: "How many women are there in the Council of *amawt'as*? How many *ch'amakani* women? They say you can be a *qulliri*, a *qaquri*, they say you can prescribe herbal medicines, you can massage pregnant women, and that's it. And even in the rare occasion that they accept you in higher levels you have to act according to what they say… If I'm going to act, I'm going to act according to what I think and not follow a camarilla of men." (192)

an overt fashion, Saturnina eliminates the leader of the political opposition; afterwards she does away with the *Willkaqamani*[21] who, as Saturnina comes to find out, is her own father; after that she eliminates the *Juch'a Manq'suri*[22], a figure complementary to that of the *Willkaqamani*; and finally she gets rid of the new *Willqakamani*, who had just taken the position after the death of her father.

Changes in Authority

In the first case, when a group of authorities from the Liberated Zone goes to the snowed mountain Huayna Potosí to ask the *achachila* if it wants to punish Saturnina for her violent activities, the mountain not only doesn't punish her and instead saves her, it also kills Porfirio Calancha with an avalanche. Calancha is the sole political rival of the *Willkaqamani* Dionisio Laymi, and in order to clear her own path to power Saturnina feels that she needs to eliminate both, first Calancha and then Laymi. Indeed, she eventually does it, first with the help of Huayna Potosí:

> El Calancha se había ido por delante, ¡furioso!... Yo recuerdo ese camino por donde hemos subido; de donde el jardín se baja zeteando y luego hay como una ladera, casi una peña, de pura nieve que hay que cruzar (…) Él yastaba cruzando

[21] In the glossary "Willkaqamani: high priest, priest of the sun. Leader of the awamt'as" (338)
[22] In the glossary "Juch'a Manq'suri: he who eats or consumes all sins; in the amawt'a guild is in charge of witchcraft and black magic." (327) The Juch'a Manq'suri is a mystical figure equivalent to a shaman.

eso cuando han visto que estaba bajando la avalancha siempre. Le gritaban que vuelva, otros que corra adelante. Pero en vano… Se lo ha llevado siempre. (224)[23]

After Calancha she confronts the *Willkaqamani* Laymi who, it is revealed, turns out to be her father[24]. At some point Laymi becomes ill with a violent form of tuberculosis which is almost impossible to cure because of the commercial embargo that the neighboring countries have imposed on the *Qullasuyo Marka* after the terrorist attacks of Comando Flora Tristán, commanded by Saturnina, to the fortress of Sacsayhuaman and the temple of the Coricancha. Thus, once the *Willkaqamani* becomes sick it is very hard to save him because there are no hospitals in the Liberated Zone and medicines are very hard to find. It is also very difficult to save him from the disease because Saturnina does everything she can to avoid him being saved, as can be seen in the following conspiratorial dialogue he maintains with his dead grandmother, one of the ghosts she continuously speaks to:

"Está mal siempre… Es tuberculosis resistente a drogas múltiples, dicen… No va a llegar ni al Día de la Liberación. Capaz que esta noche siquiera le dé hemorragia"

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[23] "Calancha had gone ahead, furious! (…) I remember that road we climbed; the place in the garden from which all is downhill and twisted, and then there is like a hillside, almost a rock of pure snow that must be crossed (…) He was crossing when they saw that the avalanche was coming down. Some shouted at him to come back, others to run forward. But it was in vain (…) The avalanche took him."

[24] When Fortunata, Saturnina's best friend and lover, talks to Saturnina's mother, the following exchange occurs:

"- ¿El Diosinio Laymi? ¿El *Willkaqamani*?
- Es que… No solo es el *Willkaqamani*. También es su padre… él es su padre, aunque ella no quiere admitirlo".
("- Dionisio Laymi? The Willkaqamani?
- The thing is… He isn't only the Willkaqamani. He is also Saturnina's father… He is her father, even is he doesn't want to admit it." (184)

"¿Y quién más?"

"La Mama *Qulliri*[25] está trabajando fuerte. Hace un mes me ha querido llamar."

"¿Y no has contestado?"

"Claro que no."

"Debes contestarle nomás."

"Pero ¿qué leyde decir?"

"Dile que todavía no van a tragar una mujer en el cargo. Que escoja al más… manipulable, y le vamos a trabajar después" (223-224)[26]

After provoking this second death Saturnina is interested in manipulating the next *Willkaqamani*. Hers is a very precise sabotage: "Que escoja al más… manipulable, y le vamos a trabajar después" "Let them pick someone who is more… manipulable and we will work on him later." 224) Saturnina's idea is first to influence and then supplant this historically masculine authority figure and, with him, all patriarchal authority figures. Therefore, once her *Willkaqamani* father dies, Saturnina needs to deal with Cipriano, the *Juch'a Manq'suri*, the community's major wizard who she torments with the help of

[25] El glosario: "Qulliri: persona que maneja medicinas y cura con ellas" (332)

[26] "'He is seriously ill… They say it is drug resistant tuberculosis… He will not make it to Liberation Day. He might get a terminal hemorrhage tonight.'
'And who else?'
'Mama Qulliri is working hard. A month ago she tried to contact me.'
'And did you not answer?'
'Of course not.'
'You should answer her.'
'But what should I say?'
'Tell her that they will not accept a woman in charge yet. Let them pick someone who is more… manipulable and we will work on him later.'"

Santiago mataindios.[27] Soon after the deaths of Calancha and Laymi, Cipriano, who doesn't like Saturnina but who respects her for her abilities as a *ch'amakani*[28], starts to visit her in the Chonchocoro jail, where she is being held prisoner. Cipriano has no other option because he has systematic nightmares and hallucinations in which a furious, gigantic Santiago chases him on his white horse. This mere fact is scandalous enough because it suggests that the main shaman of the Liberated Zone, from which Christianity has been violently extirpated, is in contact with a catholic saint. Or, as Saturnina herself argues:

> Si un comunario cualquiera dice que lo persigue Santiago, se le charla. Si insiste, se le manda un rato donde la reeducación; para sacarle de la ignorancia. Pero si un *amawt´a* insiste en eso (…) No es ignorancia, es locura. Es peor que locura. ¡Es herejía! Admitir siquiera que Tata Santiago sigue existiendo y habrá que rendirle culto (…) Pero no hay Santo Oficio en la Zona Liberada, así que se le declara inhábil por desvarío y se le separa del cargo. Pero no lo suelten si es de jerarquía y peor si es el *Juch´a Manq´suri* (…) Para casos semejantes antes los curas tenían monasterios donde guardaban el voto de silencio, pero ahora (…) Les siguen curando. Y si no se curan (…) les curan para siempre (272-273)[29]

[27] Santiago Mataindios is one of the most important patron saints of Latin America. Usually represented riding a white horse and historically associated with the pre-Columbian lightning god, Santiago is said to have ravaged the Aztecs in the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Santiago Mataindios is also associated with the Spanish Santiago Matamoros, who is said to have conquest the Muslim Moors.

[28] In the glossary "Ch'amakani: literally, owner of the dark; spiritualist who calls the souls of the death." (322) On top of being a gifted space pilot and a fearsome terrorist, Saturnina is a deft witch. So much so that her friend and lover, Fortunata, calls her "perito de las artes negras" ("an expert on black magic." 305)

[29] "If a random community member says that he is being chased by Santiago, we try to talk some sense into him. If he insists, we send him to reeducation, to relieve him from ignorance. But if an

This compulsive return of features from the ex-Bolivia confirms that the *Qullasuyo Marka* hasn't formed a strong ideological horizon. This terrorizing return of the past is really what kills Cipriano, not him losing his mind. It is the violent blow of the past befalling him once again in a repetitive, seemingly inescapable cycle. Finally, once a new *Willkaqamani* is announced, Saturnina eliminates him by spreading the false rumor that the *amawt'as*, guild to which the new authority belongs, are all *kharisiris:*[30]

> "Los rumores, pues. Los rumores… Hay que tener historias creíbles, anecdóticas. Tales que al escucharlas una ya tiene ganas de ir a contarlas a otras personas".
>
> "¿Y qué van a ser pues las historias?"
>
> "Todas las historias de *kharisiris* que has escuchado en tu vida, en donde sea. Siempre que se incluya la mención de que algún *amawt´a*, y preferiblemente el *Chamak´an Piqi*, o sea el nuevo *Willkaqamani*, había estado metido en eso" (255)[31]

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amawt'a insists and claims the same (…) it's not ignorance, it is madness. It is even worse than madness, it's heresy! To even mention that Santiago still exists, that he should be praised (…) But there is no doctrine of catholic faith in the Liberated Zone, so he is declared unable and separated from his position. He should not be let go if he has a high hierarchy, and even more so is he is the *Juch´a Manq´suri* (…) For cases like these, priests used to have monasteries in which to keep a vow of silence, but now they just reeducate and cure him. And if the rebel is not cured then they "cure" him forever."

[30] In the glossary "Kharisiri: creature who makes people go to sleep so to steal their body fat to later commercialize it." (327)

[31] "'Rumors, rumors… We must have believable, anecdotal stories, tales that one is urged to communicate right after having heard them.'

'And what are the stories going to be about?'

'About kharisiris, as long as it is mentioned that some amawt'a –preferably the *Chamak´an Piqi*, the new *Willkaqamani*– is involved in it.'"

The rumor turns out to be very successful, as Saturnina herself can attest soon after she makes it up, when talking to a fellow woman during a bus trip:

Once the population is inflamed with the idea that the high priest is a human fat thief, somebody quickly takes him out. Thus, silently fighting the political and religious hierarchy that commands the Liberated Zone, which Saturnina doesn't really consider liberated since "es todavía patriarcal" ("it is still a patriarchal society," 243) Saturnina undermines the basis that sustains this retro-futuristic, walled country.

In the Aymara cosmovision, a necessary condition for the prolonging of the *ayllu* system is the constant destabilization of power. Mario Galindo Soza argues that

> en el sistema comunitario es imprescindible la práctica de la rotación de cargos por orden jerárquico, que garantiza una oportunidad a todos lo que por derecho están habilitados, y permite evitar cualquier desfase en el sistema administrativo sociopolítico de la nación. La realización plena del ser humano, *jaqi*, exige que el ejercicio de cargos político-administrativos sea rotativo, de forma que ningún grupo o individuo acapare el poder. Este mecanismo de administración es más democrático que otros sistemas puesto que permite un mayor acceso al ejercicio del poder (215)[32]

"There is no way to sleep here"… [says Saturnina]
"It is actually better not to fall asleep because you never know who you are travelling with. And now their boss is an authority."
"Whose boss is that?"
"He is the boss of the *kharisiris*, of course."
"Do kharisiris have a boss?"
"Yes, of course. It is the *Willkaqamani*, the one who just entered now." (257)

[32] "the practice of rotating hierarchical positions is essential in the communitary system, since it guarantees opportunities to all members and avoids pitfalls in the administrative sociopolitical system of the nation. Human fulfillment in the ayllu, or *jaqi*, demands that political and administrative positions are constantly rotating so that no one individual or group can accumulate power."

In this sense, Saturnina is the anti-patriarchal motor that generates fulfillment. She doesn't just fight against the state and its chameleonic ways, which in the Liberated Zone are translated to Andean practices that counter a centuries old colonial heritage, she also fights the Liberated Zone itself as a cohesive communitary model and as an uneven ideological horizon. Saturnina is a compulsive, destabilizing agent which prevents power from incarnating in a certain group or individual. However, it's necessary to separate her actions from the Andean political ideal of "rotation." Saturnina does not act as an agent of the community, as much as it could seem so at the beginning of the novel. Rather, she embodies a repetitive form of political violence, a systematic, traumatic pulsion which far from allowing communitarian stabilization and a peaceful change of authorities, surprises the *Qullasuyo Marka* with actions that, as Caruth indicates, are "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known." (4) Therefore, it is not possible to understand and process those actions "until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4).

Nightmares like the ones experienced by *Juch'a Manq'suri* Cipriano, who dreams of Santiago Mataindios chasing him (270-277); compulsive gestures with no easy explanation like the sudden spells of Christianity of Saturnina's mother (215); and repetitive actions like the constant visits that the characters make to the nuclear wasteland of El Alto (287). Saturnina, saboteur of authorities, dismantler of the national paradigm as an ideological horizon, exists far away from any type of control. She is the symptom of a dynamic that finds its reason beyond reason, beyond ideology, beyond the death and life drives, in the unconscious territory of compulsive pulsions. But Saturnina also becomes a traumatic gesture filled with a positive charge, since she ends up vindicating a

sort of permanent revolution because her struggle has to do with revolutionary trauma, a force that violently proposes permanent political change as a central value of the ex Bolivian community. There's something deeply subversive, almost anarchic about Saturnina. The group of authorities she exterminates has the ability to produce narratives and policies that include all the people of Qullasuyo Marka, that unify the nation, that give the community a purpose, a post-state direction. Saturnina literally acts as the traumatic event that can never be understood, she is a successful Zárate Willka, the nightmare that takes over the lettered city, the always rebellious native that compulsively haunts and taunts the Liberated Zone preventing it from settling, having authorities, establishing roots and connections, being an integral part of the world. Disregarding the core principles that hold the Syndicate and the whole of *Qullasuyo Marka* togerher, she is markedly more individualistic than communitarian and, paradoxically, by being thusly individualistic she does not only negate the state[33] and the nation, but actually becomes a communitarian-traumatic force (according to traditional Andean parameters), an unsettling political drive which constantly reconfigures the organizational parameters of the new country, held together by its attempts to process its own traumatic structure.

Conclusions

Communitarian psychic life in the Liberated Zone is constituted equally by compulsive gestures and involuntary memory impulses that, at the same time, remember and forget that the traumatic specter of indigenous revolution does not occur as a result of

[33] After all, as Zavaleta point out, "el indio es en realidad el único enemigo reconocido por el Estado en el plano de sus anhelos sustantivos" ("indigenous people are the only enemy recognized by the State at the level of its desire." 125)

the detonating aggression, but as reactivations of repressed primary contents. In the novel, the indigenous rebellion that ended Bolivia was initially motivated by a government decree issued at the end of 2022. With that decree, a political maneuver that evokes the "exvinculación" law of 1874, through which, during the government of Tomas Frias, "the indian community was declared legally extinguished and the individualized parcelization of communal lands and the reform of the tax system was prescribed," (Rivera 84) the authorities decided to take coca-growing lands from an important collective of farmers from a zone known as El Chapare. Saturnina's grandmother, who suffered the taking of her lands, tells how the authorities declared El Chapare a national park and thus rendered it untouchable:

> Declararon al Chapare como reserva forestal intocable. "Siete días para la desocupación total… Todos a abandonar sus domicilios y a trasladarse a los puntos de concentración donde les esperaban las movilidades del Estado". No decían dónde les iban a llevar, solo que si no salían les iban a sacar a la fuerza les iban a violentar, y hubo muchos muertos (38)[34]

It was after this action, the theft of their lands and homes, that indigenous Aymara farmers organized and decided to take revenge, thus initiating the revolution that would end the country. Because the decree had to remind them of the long list of thefts and aggressions they suffered at the hands of the State and the white man since the Conquest.

[34] People had "seven days to leave the place… Everybody had to leave their homes and move to a concentration point where they would find means of transportation provided by the State. They didn't say where they would take the people, only that if they didn't leave they would take them out by force. There were a lot of deaths."

If, with Caruth, the experience of trauma is constituted, even on an individual level, as a reflection of social forces that bear witness to, and negate, the traumatic event after it happens, "the concept of trauma can be said to bear witness (…) to individual and collective catastrophic experience by repeating what was not yet grasped in the one's own past formulations and passing onto the future what yet remains unconscious or unassimilable in both past and future historical experience." (*Listening to trauma* XIV) The temporality of trauma and the memory of the trauma, the ability of the surviving individual or collective to bear witness to the traumatic event, has to do with distributing to the past and the future, forward and backward, that which is not known about the traumatic event, with a subversion of the temporal order. And one of the paradoxes of the traumatic experience, as it was before mentioned, lies in its strange temporality (and in the strange temporality of the memory of trauma), because a traumatic event can only be understood as traumatic after it occurs, through symptoms like flashbacks and nightmares that are desperate attempts to understand, to apprehend the experience. Traumatic memory deals with a strange temporality, an event can never be understood in the past and can be seen as traumatic only after it happens, in the present or the future. According to Caruth this peculiar structure results in an aporia: "since the traumatic event, it is not experienced as it occurs. It is only fully evident after the fact or as displaced into an Other place, an Other time." (*Trauma: Explorations* 8) Therefore, trauma is above all a crisis in representation, in History, in narrative time.

On the other hand, "la sociedad aymara no tiene porqué olvidar su pasado, puesto que por su lógica lingüística e histórica, el pasado está por delante y no a la inversa y produce otro concepto histórico: el *pachakuti*, o 'retorno del tiempo y del

espacio', concepto que hace pensar que la historia andina no es lineal sino cíclica" ("Aymara society does not need to forget its past, since by its own linguistic and historic logic the past is in front and not behind, and produces *pachakuti* or 'the return of time and space,' which indicates that Andean history is cyclic rather than lineal." Yampara Huarachi 225) If the past is indeed always in front and the future always behind, then Colonial trauma and indigenous exploitation, and all the other traumas that societies like the Bolivian Aymaras suffered for centuries, are always in front of the subjects, in front of the people who face their history directly. Going back to Caruth, if trauma is traditionally experienced only in another time, a future time, because the traumatic event happens in the past in a manner impossible to grasp, that past trauma follows a different path in the case of the Aymara culture, which would assimilate the event during its original traumatic occurrence instead than during its compulsive repetition. If the past is always visible in front of Aymara eyes, then there's no distance that allows the flashback, the nightmare, the compulsive memory, because the traumatic image is always there and allows any traumatic time to be the present time.

The rebellion that ended Bolivia in *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* did not happen because the historical aggressions suffered by the indigenous population came back compulsively from the past to invade their present, but because their present was already disjointed by the presence of the past which they always stared at, their gaze fixated on sequences of historical violence and exclusion, their senses bearing witness to their own suffering, their minds becoming archival registrars of their own story, marked by the spectral figure of indianist revolution. The problem is not that Saturnina and the other members of the community were inflamed by the governmental decree that took

their lands away and forced them, one again, to occupy the periphery of the lettered national project the elites always sought to build; and it's not that that violence made their present vulnerable to the compulsive trauma of the past. The problem is that the government's decision showed, blindingly, how Aymara cosmovision turns Saturnina and the rest of the indigenous community of the Liberated Zone into permanent, inescapable witnesses of History.

If traditional trauma happens in a moment after the fact and not during the fact, because during the traumatic event comprehension fails and the possibility of registering history disappears, trauma in Spedding's novel functions as the impossibility of escaping witnessing, as the inability to leave behind a historical record. Thus Saturnina and the rest of the characters of the novel are the living archive of a largely traumatized culture.

CHAPTER TWO

SEÑALES QUE PRECEDERÁN AL FIN DEL MUNDO:

THE GHOST IN THE MAKINA

A specter is haunting the field of Latin American literature of the twenty-first century. An indigenous specter. Disregarding the old, naturalist impulse characteristic of the early twentieth century, reinventing its forms, and rethinking its role in the shaping of national histories, several critically acclaimed and contemporary Latin American writers are revisiting the indigenous world. A world that, since the quasi-hegemonic establishment of a mestizo identity on a continental level, what José Vasconcelos called the "cosmic race," seemed to have been left behind**35**. Mexico isn't an exception. Important authors, like Yuri Herrera, that initially seem only laterally concerned with the diffused spectrum**36** of Mexican indigeneity, are in fact proposing in their works an image of Mexico marked by a re-codified indigenous spectrum, which comes back from the past to disjoint contemporary discussions on sovereignty, modernization, violence, borders, and the nation.

[35] After revolutions and guerrillas, political and economic battles, and chaotic ethnic-cultural realignments, the Twentieth century transformed the continent into "una América Latina que no imaginaba la posibilidad de otros proyectos de nación más que aquélla de la nación mestiza" (Gros 128). However, the turn of the century brought about the surge and consolidation of several different indigenous groups that challenged and still challenge that conception of the region. For example, the EZNL in Mexico, the Inti Raimy uprising in Ecuador, and the social movements spear-headed by Felipe Quispe and Evo Morales in Bolivia, just to name three.

[36] It's important to note that in Spanish the word "espectro" means both "specter" and "spectrum".

Indeed, renewed in Mexico since the late twentieth century thanks to the emergence of social movements and political initiatives that maintain the indigenous experience as their core, and yet loaded with traumatic history and relegated to a national periphery that practically constitutes an outside of public life, the native world acts as a spectral drive in the work of Herrera, a ghostly heritage summoned to conduct a mourning process and therefore to revise the origins, potential, and limitations of its national paradigm. In a gesture that refers to *Specters of Marx*, Herrera rescues indigenous practices and beliefs to a large extent extinguished in contemporary Mexico, since it assumes, with Derrida, that "it is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not there yet." (XVIII) Of course, this does not imply that the indigenous presence in contemporary Mexico is non-existent or that it is becoming less relevant. On the contrary, in addition to constituting a culturally active and politically significant force –although ultimately still a marginal one– it is a presence charged with spectral power and therefore capable of dislocating the coordinates in which it is inserted. Herrera's work, on the other hand, is a privileged space to study the ways in which the literary field operates with the multiple forces that, at the same time, conform and destabilize Mexican culture, and the political, economic, idiomatic, and poetic discourses at work between Mexico and the United States[37]. With this in mind, this chapter has a double function: a) on the one hand, it argues that since the crisis of the Mexican nation-state, largely discussed since the second

[37] Herrera's first novel, *Trabajos del reino* (2004), and his third, *The transmigration of bodies* (2013), both show, from different angles, the way in which the author has been working on these forces.

half of the twentieth century, the Mexican indigenous world can be read as a cultural spectral horizon, and b) on the other hand it indicates that this spectral horizon is visible in *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009), perhaps Herrera's most representative novel, and that in the novel it proposes ghostly and subversive forms of community, alternative to the national paradigm.

Antecedents

In his seminal book, *El laberinto de la soledad*, Octavio Paz states that "frente a la muerte hay dos actitudes: una, hacia adelante, que la concibe como creación" ("there are two attitudes in the face of death: one, forward, towards death, which conceives it as creation,") and "otra, de regreso, que se expresa como fascinación ante la nada o como nostalgia del limbo" ("and another, backward, that comes back from death, which expresses itself as a fascination before nothingness or as a nostalgia for limbo." 68) With lexical choices that show a fondness of psychoanalysis, Paz does not exactly say whom the first attitude "towards death" benefits. But he does indicate that the second attitude is associated with "el mexicano" ("the Mexican,") an imaginary subject which would embody the country's spirit, would represent its citizen's characteristics, and would reproduce their costums[38]. The "forward" or creative attitude would be related, then, to a consideration of death as an action in the future and directed to the outside, whereas the

[38] That is, a subject that "reza, grita, come, se emborracha y mata en honor de la Virgen de Guadalupe" "(prays, shouts, eats, gets drunk, and kills in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe." 63) Paz' visión, however, has been challenged by important contemporary intellectuals, like Roger Bartra, who in *La jaula de la melancolía* calls it "una entelequia artificial" ("an artificial entelechy") that "existe principalmente en los libros y los discursos" ("exists mainly in books and discourses") and is linked to the "institucionalización del Estado capitalista moderno" ("the institutionalization of the modern capitalist state." 17)

"backward" attitude would be linked to a consideration of death as "fascinated" with the past and the inside, a certain "nostalgia" for the origins that is cristalized as poetic language: "Regresar a la muerte será volver a la vida de antes de la vida… al limbo, a la entraña materna" ("To come back from death will be to return to life before life… to limbo, to the mother's womb" 69)

As indicated, the language of Paz is certainly not restricted to poetry. It is also concerned with psychoanalysis, specifically with Freud, who first indicated that "the goal of all life is death" (32) and that the transgression of the pleasure principle is rendered as the instinct, or drive, characteristic of all organic life, of returning to an inanimate or pre-organic state, the "vida antes de la vida" ("life before life.")[39] On the other hand, the Freudian death drive, which Paz considers fundamental for the national subject he baptizes as "the Mexican," would then imply a double recognition: at first glance it requires an understanding of death as a close, intimate presence –"Nuestra muerte ilumina nuestra vida. Si nuestra muerte carece de sentido, tampoco lo tuvo nuestra vida" ("Our death illuminates our life. If our death is meaningless then so is our life" 64)– and at second glance it requires accepting that intimacy with death as one the mainstays of the county's mythical cannon. That is, as basis for "the Mexican," that quintessential national subject.

Visions about the nation like this one, that for decades has been generating counter narratives that define it as a mere product of the elites and State interference[40],

[39] Freud defines as "Eros" the juxtaposition of the sexual drive and the productive life drive: "the libido of our sexual instincts coincides with the Eros of the poets and philosophers, which holds all living things together." (44)

[40] Bartra argues that: "los estudios sobre 'lo mexicano' constituyen una expresión de la cultura política dominante. Esta cultura política hegemónica se encuentra ceñida por el conjunto de redes imaginarias del poder, que definen las formas de la subjetividad socialmente aceptadas y que suelen ser consideradas como la expresión más elaborada de la cultura nacional" ("studies on 'mexicanness' constitute an expression of

are problematic because they propose a naturalization and justification of the old colonial trope of a population not affected by suffering and death. This visión can be understood as "un proceso mediante el cual la sociedad mexicana posrevolucionaria produce los *sujetos* de su propia cultura nacional, como criaturas mitológicas y literarias generadas en el contexto de una subjetividad históricamente determinada que no es solo un lugar de creatividad y de liberación sino también de subyugación y emprisionamiento" ("a process by means of which post-revolutionary Mexican society produces the *subjects* of its own national culture, as mythological and literary creatures generated in the context of a historically determined subjectivity that is not only a place of creativity and liberation but also of subjugation and emprisonment." Bartra 15) Multiple examples of this can be found throughout the history of republican Mexico. Since the first years of the nineteenth century and the first Mexican state, in which rural and urban subjects, wealthy and empovirished citizens faced, unevenly, the challenge of defining themselves as a society, the encounter of multiple cosmovisions and political wills triggered a direct conflict. According to Claudio Lomnitz: "El indigenismo que intentaba mantener y fortalecer a las comunidades indígenas dentro de un orden nacional plurirracial, amenazaba con consolidar un país multinacional, cosa que para los liberales era una aberración" ("The indigenismo that tried to maintain and strengthen the indigenous communities within a multiracial national order, threatened to consolidate a multinational country, which for the liberals was an aberration." *Modernidad Indiana* 53) As it happened in the rest of Latin America during the tumultuous first republican period, Mexican elites and

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the dominant political culture. This hegemonic political culture is undergird by a set of imaginary networks of power which define the forms of socially accepted subjectivity, usually considered the most elaborate expression of the national culture." 15)

provileged populations considered perverse the annexation of the indigenous world to the national horizon:

> En la época colonial se manipulaba la identidad racial: se compraban actas de nacimiento para que los hijos fuesen clasificados como criollos... Con la Independencia se abandonaron las definiciones y resguardos legales de las castas: se liberaron los esclavos y se prohibió el tributo indígena, así como las clasificaciones raciales en actas bautismales. Sin embargo, la manipulación de la identidad racial continuó, más que nada en la lucha por la posición social. Sólo así podemos entender por qué Porfirio Díaz se polveaba la cara de blanco, y la exagerada preferencia del rico y del político moreno por la esposa blanca[41] (*Modernidad Indiana* 55)

This radical preference for a non-indigenous national identity remained largely unchanged throughout the twentieth century and still remains unchanged in the twenty first.[42] Despite the numerous crises and changes that the concept of nation has under

[41] "In the colonial period racial identity was manipulated: birth certificates were bought so that the children were classified as criollos [mixed race]... With the Independence the definitions and legal safeguards of the castes were abandoned: slaves were freed and the indigenous tribute was forbidden, as well as racial classifications in baptismal acts. However, the manipulation of racial identity continued, especially in the struggles for social position. Only in this way can we understand why Porfirio Díaz [Mexico's president from 1877 to 1911] was dusting his face in white, and the exaggerated preference of rich men and dark-skinned politicians for a white wife."

[42] In 2016, the INEGI or Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statictics Institute) published a study on the Mexican population's perceptions on race, skin color, and the relation these have with education and work indixes. For the study, the INEGI interviewed a representative simple of the Mexican population that today is between 25 and 64 years old (that is, more than sixty one million Mexicans.) According to the results, Mexicans consider that the darker the skin color is, the percentage of people occupied in high-qualification jobs is reduced. On the other hand, the fairest the skin color is, the percentage of people occupied in medium to high-qualification jobs is increased. The study also found that Mexicans consider people with dark skin as less likely to change their socioeconomic status (48.6%), as opposed to people

undergone during these years[43], the concept of the indigenous has remained relatively unchanged and still referrs to that which is different. Furthermore, after centuries of exclusion and violence conducted by the institutions of the colonial and postcolonial State, it still designates a traumatic community very closely related to death. In regards to this Lomnitz indicates that the colonial drive was organized "largely as an effort to rein in the destruction of the Indies," and ended up as a "devastation that had been unleashed in America" (*Death and the Idea of Mexico* 97.) A devastation, of course, that was directly exerted on Mexican native populations. And Giovanna Rivero argues that "México nace de una catástrofe. La conquista española que implicó el genocidio de los indios y la abolición de esa subjetividad originaria" ("Mexico is born of a catastrophe. The Spanish conquest that implied the genocide of the Indians and the abolition of their original subjectivity." 510) Afterwards, the postcolonial period was marked not anymore by an institutionalized genocide but by the relationship these native populations had and have with death in different ways. For example, the socioeconomic crisis that befell the country after the years of the National Revolution caused indigenous populations to suffer a chronic lack of attention from the State, a bewildering economic abandomenet, a constant marginalization from public life, and a systematic exercise of fraud and land-theft which, al together, implied a radical closeness between indigenous populations and death[44]. Despite some revolutionary sparks that traid to raise awareness about this long

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with light skin, which Mexicans consider more likely to change their status (52.2%.) ("Módulo de Movilidad Social Intergeneracional 2016" 24-26).

[43] For a more detailed analysis of the mutations that the idea of the nation has assumed throughout the 20th century in Latin America, see Schwarz, Roberto: "La referencia nacional: ¿olvidarla o criticarla?"; Ludmer, Josefina: "El coloquio de Yale: máquinas de leer el fin de siglo"; y Guerrero, Gustavo*: Paisajes en movimiento. Literatura y cambio cultural entre dos siglos*.

[44] The art of this period portraits the same closeness: the narrative fiction of B. Traven, José Revueltas, and Rosario Castellanos; the works of mural painters like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros; and the

history of injustice towards the end of last century, the partial anullment of the indigenous world from the official Mexican imaginary lasts to these days in the form of an identity and a representation crisis.[45] But the public certainty of this anullment also lasts to these days, like the trauma of being indigenpus in Mexico and being, at the same time, seen and unseen, a foggy, bewildering figure, both dissapeared and yet to come. Which embides a loss and a (re)aparition, like a specter disjointing the certainties of the present and its representations.

Mexican Myths

What is a ghost? Who is a ghost? A person, a family, a country, an idea or a system of ideas that are gone, that are lost and come back, from a dateless history, to disjoint the present of those who mourn them? Perhaps a ghost is that which, dim, is lost,

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drawings and etchings of José Guadalupe Posadas, who popularized the human skull –later known as "Catrina"– as a national symbol.

[45] In 2005, during the first proclamation of EZNL's "La otra campaña" (National Liberation Zapatist Army's "The Other Campaign"), commander David indicated: "En el caso de nuestro querido país México desde la conquista hasta nuestros días ha sido manchado y abonado con la sangre de millones de indígenas. En el tiempo de la conquista cayeron muchos miles de indígenas (…) En tiempo de la guerra de independencia de mil ochocientos diez, encabezada por el Padre Hidalgo, somos los indígenas que más sangre dimos por la independencia y libertad de nuestra patria. Después de esa guerra de independencia (…) se ignoraron la sangre de nuestros caídos y la existencia de los que sobrevivieron. Entonces no hubo libertad ni independencia de los indígenas, solo se cambiaron de amos y señor. En las leyes que se elaboraron ese tiempo no fuimos incluidos ni reconocidos en esas leyes. Luego de la revolución de 1910, también somos los indígenas y campesinos los que más sangre y vida dimos por tierra y libertad porque fueron nuestros hermanos indígenas y campesinos los que pelearon con valentía y heroísmo sin temor de perder más que la propia vida" ("In the case of our beloved country Mexico, from the conquest to the present day has been stained and fertilized with the blood of millions of indigenous people. At the time of the conquest many thousands of Indians fell (...) In the time of the independence war of 1800, headed by Father Hidalgo, we are the Indians who gave more blood for the independence and freedom of our country. After that war of independence (...) the blood of our fallen and the existence of those who survived were ignored. Then there was no freedom or independence of the Indians, they only changed masters and lord. In the laws that were elaborated that time we were not included nor recognized in those laws. After the revolution of 1910, we are also the indigenous and peasants who gave more blood and life for land and freedom because it was our indigenous brothers and peasants who fought with courage and heroism without fear of losing more than their own lives," "1ra. Plenaria de La otra campaña.")

is mourned, returns and happens –exists?- in and outside us, intimate and distant. It would then exist as a disjonting fog charged with meaning, a force both perceived and not perceived, seen and unseen, which occurs inside and out of those who sense it –let's remember, with Paz, that "the Mexican" experiences death on the "inside". For Patricia Keller, the spectral is "that which is paradoxically present and absent, already departed and imagined to arrive at some future time, that which has already been and is still yet to come," (5) and which operates in a time different than the present: a time charged with contemporaneity and non-contemporaneity, with present and alterity.[46] The specter would thus be that which signifies through dissapearing, a process of mourning, and a return that disjoints and opens up time.

The same dynamic is replayed in *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*. Intense and brief, the plot of the novel is easily recognizable as part of the narratives of contemporary Mexico: commissioned by her mother, Makina, a character that I consider an indigeous young woman that comes from a very small Mexican town[47], crosses the geographical border between Mexico and the United States to search for her brother, who has also traveled north years before. Since Makina does not have the necessary documents to make the journey in order, to ensure her trip she has to trade favors and permits with small local leaders –all of whom are involved in drug traffic- who reassure her they will transport Makina to her destination, but only provide her with a semblance

[46] It is important to note, with Keller, that "Derrida's ontological concept of haunting as demonstrated through the figure of the ghost… importantly parallels his political conception of mourning. For Derrida, politics is only possible through a structural relationship with the 'time and space of mourning,' a relationship that arises from reflection on the intractable reality of a loss as something both profoundly outside us and at the same time profoundly rooted 'in us'." (62)

[47] It has been speculated that this unnamed small town could be estar "enclavado en la mitad sur del país, en una región emparentable con el Valle del Mezquital, en el estado natal del autor, Hidalgo" ("located in the southern part of the country, in a region similar to Valle del Mezquital, in the state the author was born: Hidalgo." Navarro Pastor 4)

of security. Once she arrives in the United States, helped by several guides and criminals, Makina manages to find her brother in a military compound and almost does not identify him because of the effect that time and inhabiting a new culture have had on him. Soon after, seeing that the relationship with him is not what it used to be, they separate and Makina consolidates her transit by staying in the United States, not returning to Mexico and to the mother who still awaits her.

Makina's journey in the novel is largely a spatial journey, moving from the little village to the town, then to the city and finally to another country. However, as Rivero argues, "No es la espacialidad el lugar utópico que Makina va a conquistar con su éxodo (…) hacia el Gran Chilango, sino un lugar suspendido, sostenido por la interrelación humana" ("Spatiality is not the utopian place that Makina will conquer with her exodus [..] towards the Gran Chilango; rather, she aims towards a suspended place, sustained by human interrelation." 513) That is to say that the central character of this novel will not necessarily take over, or invade, a physical territory in which to sow the seeds of a new entelechy; rather, she will find, on the frontier and before and after it, an ideological ground based on a communitarian praxis that combines ethnic, linguistic, political, and spectral features. On the other hand, beyond the journey that seems to circumscribe Makina to the family sphere, she embodies a solid position in the debate on mexicanness. As Rivero indicates, in the face of the dramas and shortages of her place of origin –the anonymous small village in which Makina and the other inhabitants are subject to the whims of the local caudillos, all despotic small-time drug traffickers–, and considering the few possibilities of self-improvement and personal fulfillment that the future holds for her in the Mexican nation –which rejects Makina because of her indigenous ethnicity, or

accepts her only as a laborer, as part of the labor force–, "Makina se ve obligada a abominar de ella" ("Makina is forced to abominate it.") But the national failure is not only concentrated in Mexico, from which Mexicans subjects emigrate in considerable quantities since the early twentieth century. Instead, "el éxodo masivo hacia el Gran Chilango y luego la decepción ante la falacia del propio Gran Chilango son expresiones de ese aborrecimiento antinacional" ("the mass exodus to the Great Chilango [and the United States], and the following disappointment at the fallacy of the Great Chilango [and the United States] themselves, are expressions of that anti-national abhorrence." 507) That is to say that, due to the lack of opportunities, socio-economic mobility and security, and to an excess of shortages and authoritarian violence, both the Mexican and the American national projects end up being unviable for peripheral subjects such as Makina, an indigenous migrant representative of an important sector of an itinerant population that vacillates between two failed models.

Perhaps the secret core of the novel is on the border. When Makina manages to finally cross it, she finds the anodyne military barracks where her brother –who has long left their Mexican small town– lives with another name, with a new identity[48]. The brother has traveled north years before in search of a small plot of land that, apparently, they have inherited from the father after his death[49]. It is worth mentioning, in this regard,

[48] In exchange for money, the brother assumes the identity of a US soldier to save him from going to war, and goes to war in his place. After returning to the US, he is effectively left with the documents and identity of the young American (97-99).

[49] "Hacía tres años había venido un esbirro del señor Hache con unos papeles a decirle a Makina que ahí decía que tenían un terrenito allá, del otro lado del río, que les había dejado un señor. El papel decía un nombre que podía ser el del que había sido su padre antes de desaparecer mucho tiempo atrás (…) A la noche el hermano había vuelto diciendo Me voy a reclamar lo nuestro. Makina lo trató de convencer de que ahí no había más que palabras pero él insistía en que Alguien tiene que luchar por lo que nos corresponde y si ustedes no tienen los pantalones yo sí. La Cora [la madre] nomás lo miraba con hartazgo y sin decir nada hasta que lo vio e la puerta con su moral lleno de tiliches y ordenó Deja que se vaya y aprenda a defenderse con sus propios pantaloncitos". ("Three years ago, a henchman of Mr. Hache came with some papers to tell

that the struggle for the land, for its recovery and tenure, is one of the constants of Mexican peasant movements since the National Revolution to the present day. Under the slogan "Land and Freedom," throughout the twentieth century the indigenous and peasant populations of Mexico have struggled intensely to recover and maintain control of their territories. In that sense, Makina's brother gesture can be read as a natural claim not restricted by conventions such as borders. Rather, it is a new version of the peasant journey that, on this occasion, does not imply to leave the village and start the revolution, but to leave the village and migrate to the north, partly because the reclaimed plot of land is located in the north but, also, because it is assumed that this north –currently geographically located in the Southwestern United States and in Texas– is still a territory that belongs to Mexico and Mexicans. Or, as Gloria Anzaldúa points out, "Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos [the migration of Mexican peoples], the return to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north (...) Today thousands of Mexicans are crossing the border legally and illegally; ten million people without documents have returned to the Southwest." (11) There is something deeply revolutionary in the way that the brother prolongs and subverts the traditional struggle for the land of the peasantry, even though his mother and sister do not see his trip with good eyes, especially because the land implies in the scale of values of Herrera's novel a more important asset than the family. Thus it is understood that one of the nuclei and fundamental figures of the peasant communities, that particular mode of

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Makina that they had a little piece of land there, that a man had left them, on the other side of the river. The papers said a name that could have been her father's before disappearing a long time ago (...) At night the brother had returned saying I'm going to claim what's ours. Makina tried to convince him that those were only words on the papers but he insisted Someone has to fight for what belongs to us and if you do not have the pants to do it then I will. Cora [the mother] just looked at him tiredly, without saying anything until she saw him at the door with a bag full of knickknack, and ordered Let him go and learn to how defend himself." 31-32)

socio-political organization natural of Mexico and other Latin America countries with high indices of indigenous population, is precisely the land.

On the other hand, when Makina arrives in the United States after several vicissitudes and manages to locate the anonymous military barracks in which her brother lives and works, that moment in which the siblings meet after years of being apart, they recognize themselves without recognizing themselves because are separated by a spectral filter:

> la puerta se abrió y apareció, vestido en uniforme militar, su propio hermano. Ninguno de los dos reconoció de inmediato al espectro que tenía enfrente. De hecho Makina se puso de pie, saludó y comenzó a articular un agradecimiento y una pregunta antes de reparar en el insólito parecido que el soldado tenía con su hermano y en la manera definitiva en que se diferenciaba; era como él, de frente huidiza y pelos tiesos, pero descolorido y más robusto. En la misma fracción de segundo comprendió que aquello era un error, que ése era su hermano, pero también que eso no reparaba el equívoco. Dejó de respirar por un instante, apoyó las yemas de una mano sobre el escritorio para no perder equilibrio y levantó la otra para tocar a la aparición que era ese hombre[50] (96)

[50] "The door opened and he appeared, dressed in military uniform, her own brother. Neither of them immediately recognized the specter in front of them. In fact Makina stood up, said hi and began to articulate a thank-you and a question before noticing the unusual resemblance that the soldier had with her brother and the definite way in which he differed from him. He was like him, with a prolongued forehead and stiff hair, but discolored and more robust. In the same fraction of a second she understood that this was a mistake, that he was her brother, but also that this did not solve the misunderstanding. She stopped breathing for a moment, put the tips of one hand on the desk to keep her balance and raised the other to touch the apparition that was that man."

For the siblings, the mutual discovery of a specter in the person in front of them works as a disjointing temporal mirror. Makina, "en la misma fracción de segundo" ("in the same fraction of a second",) that absolutely unique time -so much so that it jumps out of the time line,- understands two antagonistic things: "that this was her brother," but also that "that did not solve the misunderstanding" that he was not. Because the man in front of Makina is her brother and the "apparition" of her brother, a ghost with another name and another body –"discolored"- at the same time a vaporus mist and someone deeply close, the lost brother who returns, the Mexican who in the United States loses his mexicanness and loses name and biography to become another one and the same, all "in the same fraction of a second." Herrera's gesture has to do with an opening of time and a transformation of that "fraction of a second" into what Derrida calls "a spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time," a disjointed instant that "is not docile to time, at least to what we call time."(XIX)

But the astonishment at the ghostly sibling is not unidirectional. It is not only Makina that experiences a spectral instant; her brother also perceives the phantasmagorical vision of Makina. Therefore, after the first meeting, both still feeling uneasy, remain "en silencio" ("silent,") turning "la cabeza para mirarse, ora él, ora ella" ("their heads to look at each other, now he, now she,") recognizing themselves in those who have returned to live in opposite sides of the border, "incrédulos ante" ("unable to accept" 96) their differences, in an attitude that recalls awe and mourning. That is because Makina is -or can be read as- an apparition, a spectral subject since, in the first line of the novel, she says "Estoy muerta" ("I am dead.") Because the story begins with

Makina in the middle of a tremor, a "locura telúrica" ("telluric madness,") that opens up the earth and sends homes and families "al inframundo" ("to the underworld." (11)

"Esas cosas siempre les suceden a los demás, hasta que le suceden a uno" ("These things always happen to somebody else until they happen to you," 12) says Makina as indicating that they happened to her at the beggining of the story. From then on, her status in the novel becomes unstable and causes in the character of the brother the same reaction of awe and mourning that she experiences upon seeing him: two ghosts recognizing one another without really recognizing each other[51]. This double impulse of loss and recognition that places Makina and her brother inside and outside the order of the living, incarnates in each one thus, on the one hand, splitting in two the story of a shared blood, and, on the other, dislocating a time lived and not lived in unison. Because, on a larger scale, there is a lot about *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* that does not obey a linear temporal logic. On the contrary, Makina's trajectory, when crossing the Mexico-United States border, reproduces and updates a much older narrative, the Aztec myth of the pilgrimage and the descent to Mictlan, the pre-Columbian underworld inhabited by the lords of death and where one can arrive only after having crossed the nine levels that anticipate in the indigenous imaginary the nine chapters in which the novel of Herrera is divided.

According to Luis Fernando Núñez y Roberto Martínez González,

> en el mito de creación [azteca, o nahua] de la humanidad, se dice que los huesos y las cenizas de los hombres de épocas anteriores se encontraban en el Mictlan… El

[51] In the novel there are several other scenes in which the reader can check the instability of Makina, the fact that she seems to be a dead woman traveling the underworld, for example on pages 43, 55, 96, 104, 118 and 119.

> acceso al Mictlan, "el país de los muertos", se hacía penetrando en la tierra, pues, tal como lo señalan los nahuas centrales y los nicaraos del siglo XVI, el Mictlan se encontraba "bajo la tierra"[52] (55)

Indeed, emphasizing not its symbolic but its mythological character, the novel begins with Makina in the midst of a tremor, or "telluric madness," that opens up the earth and unveils what is located below: "túneles horadados por cinco siglos de voracidad platera" ("tunnels pierced by five centuries of silver voracity." 12) In this line, the apocalyptic threat in the title of the book materializes as a displacement, from contemporary dystopia to native mythology, and the signals that predict or precede the end of the world are the closing gestures of a large process, that capable of producing contemporary dystopias: the Western world and its exclusive narrative machinery -what Jameson calls the "cultural logic of late capitalism." That is, the world imposed on Mexico since the conquest and reproduced to this day by the literate elites.

Along these lines, Herrera's proposal is rooted in a recent tradition in Mexican thought and culture that focuses, at the same time, on alternative ways of imagining the nation, different "a aquello que, durante años, se ha llamado 'lo mexicano'" ("to that which, for years, has been called 'Mexicanness'," Sánchez Prado 2) and on the tradition of revolutionary nationalism. After more than seven decades of the "national revolution," government, which led the reins of Mexico during the twentieth century, the new millennium marked a break not only in the political horizon and institutionality of the

[52] "In the [Aztec or Nahua] myth of the of humanity, it is said that the bones and ashes of men from earlier times were located in the Mictlan ... Access to Mictlan, 'the land of the dead,' was found penetrating the earth, since, as was pointed out by the central Nahuas and Nicaraos of the sixteenth century, the Mictlan was 'under the earth'."

country -that is, in that monolithic variable of the state and its institutions that was formed by the successive governments of the PRI-, but also in its forms of shaping society, in its cultural manifestations, in its collective psyche, even in its language. Roger Bartra refers to this shaping of the national soul as "el más hollado y a la vez el más impenetrable de los territorios de la sociedad moderna" ("the most trampled and at the same time the most impenetrable of the territories of modern society." 15) While the political regime change of the year 2000 may have been partial[53], the creation of renewed national identity narratives seems even weaker. About this Ignacio Sánchez Prado mentions how the most interesting criticism of the "proyecto priísta, que se ha venido construyendo a partir de finales de la década de los ochenta desde diversas posiciones, ha centrado su lectura en un fuerte cuestionamiento de la idea monolítica de nación y del nacionalismo cultural." ("PRI project, which has been building since the end of the eighties from various positions, has focused on a strong questioning of the monolithic idea of nation and cultural nationalism." 1)

That elusive and gaseous thing that has been called "Mexicanness," and that today is also defined against the current of globalizing forces that aim at the dissolution of the particular -for example the indigenous[54]- should be analyzed against a background marked by rampant capitalism, radical neoliberalism, institutionalized corruption, organized crime, migration, and also against a particular history that had in the fall of the PRI, of 2000, one of its more significant points. This because the breakdown of the most

[53] The PRI ruled Mexico uninterruptedly and hegemonically for more than seven decades, from the end of the National Revolution to the beginning of the new millennium, when for the first time it yielded to the opposition. However, twelve years later, in 2012, the PRI returned to power with President Enrique Peña Nieto. During its institutional life, the party had different names: Partido Nacional Revolucionario (1929-1938), Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (1938-1946) and Institutional Revolutionary Party (1946-2000, 2012-).

[54] However, we have to consider that "the indigenous" is itself a globalizing term.

powerful and lasting state apparatus of the 20th century in Latin America not only implies the need to reformulate the Mexican question today, but also calls for a historical review of the Mexican forms of nation-building. In this sense, the national issue in Mexico -and, by extension, in almost all of Latin America- has passed through a psychoanalytic confrontation with the past and, especially, with the ways in which the country's citizens –hailing from the countryside, the Street, and the intelligentsia- dealt and still deal with the great monsters of their history -past and future: the colonial impulse, systematic exploitation, and generalized violence in relation to which they are also defined. It is a matter of sharing a monumental private task. Or, as Wendy Brown points out, this is the arduous "assumption that suppression, repression, and the logic of mourning govern consciousness." (9) This is also so because to think of Mexico, or any country or community, in national terms, necessarily means to historicize their greatest claims in order to give them a sense of future –a futurity-, so that the confrontation with history –the history gone and the history to come- is related to a responsibility: "justice entails the present generation's responsibility for crafting continuity, as well as the limits of that responsibility and that continuity." (Brown 10) On the other hand, when this responsibility, is of a prospective nature and faces what is to come -in a gesture reminiscent of Paz and the "forward" attitude towards death- is once again a ghostly experience. Or, as Mark Fisher indicates: "the future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production." (16) Thus, the Mexican ways of critically thinking and building the nation, headed both forward and backwards, have to do with responsibly

considering the past and the future, knowing that both are, or can be, spectral ways of creating community.

In this scenario, Mexico's review of its indigenous future and past is one of the mainstays of its modernity project. Stemming from the wars of independence, in 1821, through the first republicanism, the "porfiriato," the years of the revolution, and the government of the PRI in its different incarnations, multiple analyzes from different fields become possible: anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, literature and political theory. All of these aim to elucidate the enigmatic nature of the indigenous, that phantom limb in the national body, that "presencia insoslayable de una civilización milenaria" ("inescapable presence of a millenarian civilization") that is attested "a cada paso" ("at every step." Bonfil 39) In his classic *México profundo*, for example, Guillermo Bonfil promotes the idea that there is, on the one hand, a deep Mexico, an underground communal imaginary based on indigenous culture, and in the other an imaginary Mexico, close in its gaseous character to the "imagined communities" of Anderson, which paradoxically would be the Mexico from today. Bonfil argues that "el México profundo, portador de la civilización negada, encarna el producto decantado de un proceso ininterrumpido que tiene una historia milenaria [y es] sistemáticamente ignorado y negado por el México imaginario, que tiene el poder y se asume como el portador del único proyecto nacional válido" ("the deep Mexico, representative of a denied civilization, embodies the decanted produc of an uninterrupted process that has a thousand-year history [and is] systematically ignored and silenced by the imaginary Mexico, that has all the power and sees itself as the bearer of the only valid national Project." 244)

On the one hand, the dichotomy proposed by Bonfil of a "deep" or real Mexico, connected to indigenous cultures, and an "imaginary" Mexico, disconnected from its native past which begins to be considered real only after the Colony, responds to Bartra's "subjugation and emprisionamiento," and the exclusion suffered by Mexican indigenous populations by the official Mexico, governed from the state by the elites. On the other hand, this dischotomy is content to repeat the old economic structure of damage, debt and payment[55]. It turns out, then, that what is called Mexico and exceeds the limits of the state and geography would not be defined by its indigenous past since, half abstract and half tangible, is necessarily a product of modernity. In dialogue with the Andersonian idea that nationalisms emerge as a result of the consolidation of "print capitalism" towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century in Europe, Lomnitz points out that the ideological horizons of Bonfil's Méxicos, the deep one and the imaginary one, are both born towards the end of the colonial period and that both are connected to sets of real practices and thus are the product of the collective imagination. That is to say, both Mexicos are, at the same time, "deep" and "imaginary" since, by giving one a real character and the other a symbolic character, Bonfil has not confronted at all "the reasons why the imaginary Mexico has become so very real." (*Exits from the Labyrinth* 248)

From this double perspective, one can begin to rethink the gaseous concept of Mexicanness, on the one hand, as a concept intrinsically associated with a project of modernity that, among other things, banished the remnants of the Spanish colony and

[55] Or, to put it in Lomitz's words, Bonfil "fails to recognize that Mexico, like all the nation-states of the world, is a creature of modernity, and its roots cannot be traced further back than the colonial period. In this sense, the imaginary Mexico is still the only Mexico that has ever existed as a nation-state" (*Exits from the Labyrinth* 248).

established independent republics in America Latina. On the other hand, it can be seen as an excluding concept, conceived over the indigenous bodies of the nation. Or, more precisely, over the indigenous corpses of the nation[56]. Thus, it wouldn't be hard to recognize Bartra's claim, that studies on Mexicanness constitute "an expression of the dominant political culture." Moreover, according to Bartra the constitution of Mexicanness would be the process in which Mexican society "produces the subjects of its own national culture, as mythological and literary creatures generated in the context of a historically determined subjectivity." (16) In this sense, any attempt to organize identity narratives that translate the gaseous spectrum of Mexicanness would imply, on the one hand, the subjection of those narratives, and the subjects they produce, to power, networks of power, and on the other hand it would be appear as a myth generated by the hegemonic culture. Except, of course, when that myth acts, when those mythical subjects act, compulsively and return, ideologically spectral, in literature and other cultural manifestations to propose, even in spite of their authors, a parallel, ghostly history, not generated by the hegemonic culture but in spite of the silence that that hegemonic culture wants to impose. This is what happens with Makina in *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, this is what happens with the indigenous world as a whole in the work of Herrera. Hence its importance when analyzing the role that literature plays in contemporary conversations about the ways of nation-building in Mexico.

[56] That is, over the ghosts of the nation (without considering the ghosts of the nation). Because, as can be seen in the history of the world, and as Martin Hagglund indicates, a systematic exercise of violence that targets a specific group eventually makes that a spectral group: "A salient connotation concerns phantoms and specters as haunting reminders of the victims of historical violence, of those who have been excluded or extinguished from the formation of a society "(47).

As a backdrop to Herrera's work, I am interested in recovering this idea, that of Mexicanness understood as a series of contemporary myths that, at the same time, are calcified on the skeleton of indigenous cultures and their mythologies, and -disembodied and spectral- are accumulated in society until they conform, with Bartra, "una especie de metadiscurso: una intrincada red de puntos de referencia… el lugar de donde provienen los mitos que no solo le dan unidad a la nación sino que la hacen diferente a cualquier otra" ("A kind of metadiscourse: an intricate network of points of reference ... the place from where the myths that not only give unity to the nation but make it different from any other arise." This is an important idea because, as a spectral vision, it breaks with the usual conventions of political theory and, instead, with Wendy Brown, recognizes that "it has little relation to a distributional definition" and that it is not "procedural, rights-oriented, tethered to law, or even tied to measures of participation or shared power. Rather ... it pertains almost entirely to the practice of responsible relations between generations." (147)

In this scenario, is not Makina, perhaps, a national subject –"the Mexican" of Paz, reinvented and ghostly- who recognizes her brother without really recognizing him, a connational, an uprooted consanguineous soul, entirelly himself and another, another ghost, another Mexican? Does Herrera's novel not say, without saying it, that its Mexicans are a gaseous community in perpetual return and "apparition" -in perpetual reapparition-, which coagulates through the interweaving of multiple phantasmagorical bonds, idiomatic, cultural, economic, and political bonds which operate, responsibly, inside and outside of the mestizo literate elite and the indigenous world, in and out of official history and time? In this light, the ways of thinking about the nation and national

subjects in Mexico would no longer subjugate themselves to a "tradición ideológico-intelectual que busca homogenizarl[os] con el fin de constituir o legitimar un poder político" ("ideological-intellectual tradition that seeks to homogenize [them] in order to constitute or legitimize a political power,") nor to a "estudio de culturas regionales" ("study of regional cultures") or to "la exaltación de lo regional" ("the exaltation of the regional.") (Sánchez Prado 3)[57] Instead, they would find in literature -in this case in the narrative of Yuri Herrera- ghostly intergenerational modes of resistance to the hegemonic horizons –"the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism," (Derrida XVIII)- spectral echoes that empower them by dislocating ideology, culture and time.

Spectral Brother

The mythological subversión proposed in *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* begins to be triggered by the distorted repetition of the characteristics of the Nahua myth. The gesture also replicates a traditional racial demarcation between the spaces of the nation. As Ana María Alonso indicates, "Space is a key boundary marker ethnoracial identity in Mexico. The rural is rural as Indian, whereas the urban is coded as Mexican."(54) Thus, the novel is divided into nine chapters –"La tierra", "El pasadero de agua", "El lugar donde se encuentran los cerros", "El cerro de obsidiana", "El lugar donde el viento corta como navaja", "El lugar donde tremolan las banderas", "El lugar donde son comidos los corazones de la gente", "La serpiente que aguarda", "El sitio de obsidiana, donde no hay ventanas, ni orificios para el humo"- that replicate the nine

[57] In this second case Sánchez Prado refers to Lomnitz's proposal.

levels that comprise the native myth of the descent to Mitclan[58]. In this sense, Herrera's novel, a product of the hegemonic order of mestizaje, presents indigenous and rural mortuary signs, a referential regime of the order of legend and myth. Thus, replicating the nine levels of the Nahua Mictlan, it confirms from the literary field what Alonso observes from anthropology: "If public urban space is represented as the space of a modernity that has integrated and transcended tradition, rural space is represented as the space of a tradition that has resisted modernization." (55) On the other hand, as argued by Ivonne Sánchez Becerril, to replicate the order of the pre-Columbian legend Herrera "retoma principalmente la descripción del Mictlan del *Códex Vaticanus* 3738, aunque incorpora también elementos de la que Fray Bemardino de Sahagún hace en *Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España*" ("firstly acknowledges the Mictlan description of the *Codex Vaticanus* 3738, although it also incorporates elements of the description Fray Bemardino de Sahagún makes in *General History of the things of New Spain.*" 109) And Herrera does so in a way that the indigenous conception of death finds a displaced correlate both in regard to the characters and the general organization of the plot:

> La ubicación del Mictlan –debajo de la tierra y hacia al norte…– se convierte en la migración a los EUA; el periplo de cuatro años que inicia cuando los distintos componentes del cuerpo se disgregan para arribar a la residencia definitiva y entregarse a una nueva actividad responsable, se convierte en el proceso de desprendimiento de lo propio, de aquello que le otorga una identidad cultural a

[58] For a detailed analysis of "las palmarias correspondencias entre las descripciones del acceso gradual al Mictlán –tal como las reconstruyó la antropología– y la trasposición literaria de motivos, imágenes, términos literales y pruebas iniciáticas" ("the correspondences between the descriptions of the gradual access to Mictlán -as reconstructed by anthropology- and the literary transposition of motives, images, literal terms, and initiatory proofs") in Herrera's novel, see Navarro Pastor. (8-13)

Makina, para cumplir con el deber de encontrar al hermano del otro lado y reunírsele[59] (109)

Indeed, placing the Nahua underworld under the current territory of the United States, Herrera adds a new semantic layer to border-crossing narratives and settles, beyond the drama of the frontier, in the drama of the redefinition of border spaces as instances loaded with mythical weight. Thus, in *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* there is not a country called Mexico or another called United States of America, there are no identifiable cities and, in fact, there are no proper names, there are only signs, ritual references, simple words that designate shapes. The vaporous concepts of identity and nation transmute and no fixed identity is perceived. The novel only portrais gaseous, post-national identities, a liquid community -in Bauman's roots- that overflows into an ambivalent territory, both strange and recognizable. The only one that preserves something similar to a name in this panorama is Makina who, at the beginning of the story, in her anonymous Mexican "pueblito" ("small town,") works as a receptionist of the only call center "en kilómetros y kilómetros a la redonda" ("for miles around." 19) This is the only center capable of receiving, transmitting and producing messages: "timbraba, ella respondía, le preguntaban por tal o por cual, ella decía Voy y vengo… A veces era gente de pueblos de por ahí la que llamaba y ella contestaba en lengua o en lengua latina. A veces, cada vez más, llamaban del gabacho [Estados Unidos]; éstos frecuentemente ya se habían olvidado de las hablas de acá y ella les respondía en la suya

[59] "The locating of Mictlan -underground and towards the north...- becomes the migration to the USA. The journey, that traditionally lasts four years and begins when the different components of the body disintegrate to arrive at the definitive residence and give themselves to a new responsible activity, becomes a process of detachment of one's self, of what gives a cultural identity to Makina, in order to fulfill the duty of finding her brother on the other side and join him."

nueva. Makina hablaba las tres, y en las tres sabía callarse" ("it would ring, she would answered, they would ask her about this or that, she would said I come and go ... Sometimes it was people from villages that called and she would answer in language or in Latin language. Sometimes, more and more, they would call from the gabacho [United States]; these people had often forgotten about the language from here and she would answer them in her new one. Makina spoke all three languages, and she knew how to keep quiet in all three as well." (19)

Able to function in three languages: "language", or indigenous language, "Latin language", or Spanish, and "gabacho language", or English, Makina is a direct communication machine and an automatic translator[60]. Playing with the literality of her almost name, she machinates the communication of at least three communities that work in unison in a shared space, although from different perspectives. She is aware of the power to cross borders inherent to that language ability, the power to reach others even without transmitting their own ideas, because "una no escoge cuáles mensajes lleva y cuáles deja pudrir. Una es la puerta, no la que cruza la puerta" ("one does not choose which messages one takes and which ones one lets rot. One is the door, not the one that crosses the door." 19) In addition, Makina, the one who machinates, is an indigenous person. She embodies a "sujeto prehispánico que [en ella] late y subyace, a punto de resucitar" ("pre-Hispanic subject that [in her] hums and underlies, about to resuscitate,") (Rivero 507). She is a native and ghostly Mexican, gone and reappeared, a profoundly contemporary indigenous woman who embodies idiomatic –she speaks a native language-, geographical -she lives in an eminently rural village in a rural area of the

[60] It is important to note that, in Spanish, the name "Makina" sounds exactly like the verb "maquina" (to machinate). Of course, in Spanish "Makina" is also very close to the noun "máquina" (machine.)

country- and cultural native traditions -her journey reproduces the Nahua myth of the journey through the underworld-. Makina is the center of a complex web characterized by pop influences, streaks of narco violence, migratory references, discourses on the cyborg and the posthuman, etc. All consumed, however, by the ghostly impulse of her story and discourse.

This impulse is made explicit towards the second part of the novel. When crossing the border in chapter VI, called "The place where flags fly," Makina finds a space marked by the imposing presence of symbols that allude not only to a new national regime but also to new cultural possibilities. Symbols that, first, are a conglomeration of multicolored flags that provoke in her a moment of astonishment ("Tan deslumbrada estaba Makina con la belleza del rito que tardó en reparar en que las parejas eran de hombres o eran de mujeres pero no de hombre y mujer") ("Makina was so dazzled by the beauty of the rite that it took her some time to realize that the couples were couples of men or couple of women, but never man and woman." 90) Shortly after, the symbol is repeated when Makina: "siguió su camino hacia el poniente, y al cabo de muchas cuadras divisó otra aglomeración de banderas, también bonitas pero muy alineadas y todas de un solo tamaño. Había llegado a donde los soldados" ("continued his way to the west, and after many blocks he saw another agglomeration of flags, also pretty but very aligned and all of a single size. He had reached the soldiers." 91) Thus, the transit of Makina along the border implies not only a change of national and cultural territory, but also a return to, on the one hand, the urbanized space (it is good to remember, with Alonso, that "the rural is coded as Indian, whereas the urban is coded as Mexican" or, in this case, "American"

or at least "non-indigenous") and, on the other, to a different kind of hostility. Thus, the first thing that she experiences in the United States is an clear moment of violence:

> Bolsa de escoria, escuchó cuando subía al octavo collado desde el cual, estaba segura, avistaría a su hermano, ¿Estás buscando que te den tu merecido, bolsa de escoria? Abrió los ojos. Un gabacho pelirrojo, enorme, oloroso a tabaco, la miraba. Makina supo que el cabrón se moría por patearla o cogérsela y se levantó lentamente sin quitarle la vista de encima quitarle la vista de encima, porque cuando uno da la espalda por miedo es cuando más se arriesga a que le sorrajen una patada en el culo; abrió la puerta del cajero y jarchó[61] (81)

Already in the United States, then, Makina experiences this first threatening gesture as a reminder of the peripheral place that she, and all who are like her -the other Mexican and Latin American migrants- occupy in this new space. Thus, the novel is framed within what Martín Lombardo calls "una literatura de los márgenes comunitarios" ("a literature of communitarian margins,") perhaps not necessarily because of the marginality characteristic of the majority of illegal Latino migrants to the United States, "sino más bien porque se interroga al grueso de la comunidad a partir de esos espacios en donde la comunidad empieza a borrar sus fronteras y construir otras formas de vínculos comunitarios: se interroga a la comunidad entera a partir de sus bordes" ("but rather

[61] "Scum bag, she heard when she climbed to the eighth hill from which, she was sure, she would see her brother. Are you looking to get what you deserve, you sack of human waste? She opened her eyes. A huge redhead, smelling of tobacco, looked at her. Makina knew that the bastard was dying to kick her or rape her and got up slowly without taking her eyes off him because she knew that, if she turned her back in fear, it was likely that she would receive a kick in the ass. So she opened the door of the cash-machine room she was sleeping in and went away."

because the bulk of the community is interrogated from spaces where it begins to erase its borders and build other bonds: the entire community is questioned from its borders." 194) These community bonds built between border subjects are expressed not only as the displacement they suffer towards a socio-political margin that practically constitutes an outside but also, among others, the different types of violence to which they constantly submitted: physical, sexual, economic, linguistic, and cultural violence, etc. Then, these border subjects fall headlong against what Lombardo calls "dos preguntas cruciales: ¿quién establece los límites? Es decir, ¿quién detenta la autoridad que organiza determinada configuración comunitaria?" ("two crucial questions: who sets the limits? That is to say, who holds the authority that organizes a certain communitarian configuration?" (194) The key figure when establishing the relations between politics and community is the authority. Both in Mexico and at the border, as when they cross it and arrive at "gabacho" territory, Makina and those like her must deal with figures of authority that generate and apply laws and regulations, with greater and lesser degrees of legality, that govern the different spaces in which border subjects bust and produce narratives. And in all cases the authority, the authorities who command these spaces, exercise different degrees of violence to command them.

In *Critique of Violence*, Benjamin argues that, in terms of legality, there are two types of violence: the one that creates or makes the law and the one that preserves the law, a law-founding violence and a law-protecting violence. However, according to Benjamin, this solid duality, which is replicated in almost all levels of life in society, finds a single and central exception in the figure of the police: "In a kind of spectral mixture, these two forms are present in Another institution of the modern state: the policy

(...) It is lawmaking for its characteristic function is not the promulgation of laws but the assertion of legal claims for any decree, and law-preserving because it is at the disposal of these ends." (286) The police combines both types of Benjaminian violence since the application of the law represents a gesture, a "decision," that occurs outside the law, "for security reasons, in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists." (287) Therefore, pólice action requires, and at the same time provokes, what Schmitt and Agamben call a "state of exception", of impossible translatability -because it occurs outside of the world of law and language-. That is to say, when the police acts, it does so in a performative way, at the same time "creating" the law that it "conserves".

In Herrera's novel, this state of exception is also a spectral state because it is instituted by a border police (the border patrol) and the territory in which it operates is not only the scenario where various languages, cultures, and races clash and intercross, but also where different legal policies and legislations clash and intercross. The laws that govern the border are fuzzy, gaseous laws, often unclear and, therefore, prone to vacuums or violent abuses. This is evident in the novel when Makina is chased or arrested, in more than one instance, by raids and checks of the border patrol. This branch of the police that traditionally extends its scope, inherently formless, far beyond what is sanctioned, incurring in countless abuses against migrants, is presented as a ghostly presence along the line between Mexico and the United States. As Benjamin indicates when referring to pólice in general, "its power is formless, like its nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states." (287) The natural space of this police is, thus, a non-space, an indeterminate area, unruly, untranslatable, in which border subjects merge, prodigal though dependent on authority. And its presence, its being there, is a "ghostly

presence." In *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, the police force in charge of patrolling the border does not simply dedicate itself to enforcing the law, to applying it -through a conservative violence-. Rather, it creates the law making autonomous decisions, guiding itself by its own ordinances, intervening in every moment when the legal situation is not clear -and in the border it seldom is- in order to guarantee order. In this way, promulgating and enforcing a distorted legislation, or one that is often outside the law, or perhaps at a blind mid-point between these two extremes, the police, in that particularly gaseous incarnation that is the border patrol, becomes an unmournable, threatening specter. Or, as Rodrigo Karmy Bolton indicates, "ella misma es fantasma, y lo es porque en ella hecho y derecho se confunden radicalmente. La ontología de la presencia –más aún hoy día, cuando la figura de la policía se ha extendido como paradigma- se lleva a su límite con la figura fantasmática de la policía" ("the police is a ghost itself, and it is so because in it action and law are radically indistinguishable. The ontology of presence -even more so today, when the figure of the police has spread as a paradigm- is pushed to its limits with the phantasmatic figure of the police." 39)

Herself a specter, Makina defies the police's law and presence by means of her machinated language, and in doing so she does not only highlight the inherent violence of the new space she has reached after crossing the Rio Grande but, in doing so, is capable of generating measures of resistance and communitarian security measures that rival the authority of the border patrol:

> Ya había dejado atrás el cuartel cuando escuchó ¡Tu también! ¡Adopta la posición! ¡Tu también! Giró la cabeza y vio que un policía horriblemente pálido

> la señalaba con un dedo. ¿Estás sorda? Ponte en fila. En un lote baldío y encharcado de agua negra, había media docena de hombres de rodillas y mirando al suelo. Todos eran o parecían paisanos. Así que piensan que pueden venir y ponerse cómodos sin ganárselo, dijo el policía. Pues les tengo noticias, hay patriotas que estamos vigilando y les vamos a dar una lección. Esta es la primera: acostúmbrense a estar en fila. Si quieren venir se forman y piden permiso, si quieren ir al médico, se forman y piden permiso, si quieren dirigirme la puta palabra se forman y piden permiso. ¡Así hacemos las cosas aquí, la gente civilizada! No brincándonos bardas ni haciendo túneles[62] (107-108)

The "horribly pale" police officer, in addition to replicating and radicalizing the spectral whiteness of Makina's brother -who appears "discolored" in their meeting- shows eloquently several of the referred characteristics of the police. On the one hand, the violence of the border patrol: for example the way in which they shoot at Makina and wound her as soon as she crosses the border (54), and the severity with which they force migrants to kneel and line up in the quote above. This is a type of violence that, in acting, creates the norm while operating outside the law. On the other hand, this double movement or ambiguous gesture, which Benjamin points out as "a spectral mixture," is enacted in the name of the motherland ("there are patriots who are vigilant and we will

[62] "She had left the barracks behind when she heard You too! Adopt the position! You too! She turned her head and saw a horribly pale police officer pointing a finger at her. Are you deaf? Go get in line! In a vacant lot with pools of black water, there were half a dozen men on their knees and looking at the ground. They all were or seemed like countrymen. So you think you can come here and get comfortable without earning it?, the police said. Well I have news, there are patriots who are vigilant and we will teach you a lesson. This is the first one: get used to being in line. If you want to come go get in line and ask for permission, if you want to go to the doctor, get in line and ask for permission, if you want to fucking talk to me, get in line and ask for permission. This is how we do things here, civilized people! Not jumping fences or digging tunnels."

teach you a lesson,") of a space and a history and a national culture that the border patrol considers contaminated by illegitimate subjects ("So you think you can come here and get comfortable without earning it?") and, finally, this violence, which at the same time creates and conserves the law, operates on behalf of civilization ("This is how we do things here, civilized people!") Regarding this last point it is important to return to Benjamin, who argues that the police constitutes a "nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states," and to Ana María Alonso's aforementioned differentiation of space in Mexico: "The rural is coded as Indian, whereas the urban is coded as Mexican." That is to say, that border subjects, native of Mexico and Latin America, would represent in the eyes of the border patrol a different ethnic segment and, therefore, a destabilizing, savage bunch. Whereas the police would consider itself the representatives of the city, of a civilized nucleus that needs to be defended by force and from outside the law, thus becoming a spectral impulse. This civilized state, however, is only pretendedly civilized, as can be seen when Makina manages to overcome the violent authority of the patrol through her use of language, her linguistic and rhetorical capacity. Thus, when a police agent orders one of the kneeling and detained migrants to write something, when the migrant confesses that he is a poet, Makina snatches the sheet of paper he was holding from his hands and begins to write a message that she then delivers to the agent, who reads it and then, without explanation, leaves the scene. It is there, in that sheet, that Makina explains exactly the way in which the border patrol looks at border subjects, those savages, those destabilizers:

> Nosotros somos los culpables de esta destrucción, los que no hablamos su lengua ni sabemos estar en silencio. Los que no llegamos en barco, los que ensuciamos de polvo sus portales, los que rompemos sus alambradas. Los que venimos a quitarles el trabajo, los que aspiramos a limpiar su mierda, los que anhelamos trabajar a deshoras. Los que llenamos de olor a comida sus calles tan limpias, los que les trajimos violencia que no conocían, los que transportamos sus remedios, los que merecemos ser amarrados del cuello y los pies; nosotros, a los que no nos importa morir por ustedes, ¿cómo podía ser de otro modo? Los que quién sabe qué aguardamos. Nosotros los oscuros, los chaparros, los grasientos, los mustios, los obesos, los anémicos. Nosotros, los bárbaros[63] (109-110)

Shortly before, in chapter V of the novel, "The place where the wind cuts like a razor," Makina established community bonds with other ghostly migrants, a thousand times dead and erased from the historical archive, illegalized in that territory of exception, violence and violent legislation that is the border. And, once again, becomes a savior capable of redeeming, even if momentarily, through her use of language, her capacity to name:

[63] "We are the culprits of this destruction. We, who do not speak your language or know how to be silent. We, who did not arrive by boat, who dirtied your portals with dust, who broke your barbed-wired fences. We, who come to take away your jobs, who aspire to clean up your shit, who long to work at odd hours. We, who stink-up your clean streets with the smell of food, who brought you a violence you did not know, who transport your medicines, who deserve to be tied around their necks and feet. We who do not care about dying for you, how could it be otherwise? We, which who knows what we are waiting for. We the dark ones, the short ones, the greasy, the withered, the obese, the anemic. We, the barbarians."

> Son paisanos y son gabachos y cada cosa con una intensidad rabiosa, con un fervor contenido... Tienen gestos y gustos que revelan una memoria antiquísima y asombros de gente nueva. Y de repente hablan. Hablan una lengua intermedia con la que Makina simpatiza de inmediato porque es como ella: maleable, deleble, permeable, un gozne entre dos semejantes distantes y luego entre otros dos, nunca exactamente los mismos, un algo que sirve para poner en relación. Más que un punto medio entre lo paisano y lo gabacho su lengua es una franja difusa entre lo que desaparece y lo que no ha nacido[64] (73)

A language that is a "franja difusa entre lo que desaparece y lo que no ha nacido" ("diffuse fringe between what disappears and what has not been born" is a language inhabited by the ghosts of the past and the future, the spectral code that assumes that there is no possibility for political action, for ethics and for the literature that deals with them, revolutionary or not, if this language does not recognize a responsibility, the derridian principle of respect for "those others who are not longer or for those others, who are not there yet, presently living, if they are already dead or not yet born." But there is also something else, the fact that Herrera's passage shows what in her work on landscape and mourning Patricia Keller calls "a condition of non-contemporaneity," characteristic of spectral narratives and figures, as Makina affirms that the countrymen who she finds when crossing the border "tienen gestos y gustos que revelan una memoria

[64] "They are countrymen [Mexicans] and they are gabachos [Americans] and every thing with raging intensity, with a contained fervor... They have gestures and tastes that reveal both an ancient memory and the awe of new people. And suddenly they talk. They speak an intermediate language with which Makina immediately sympathizes because it is like her: malleable, permeable, a hinge between two distant peers and then between two others, never exactly the same, something that serves to connect. More than a middle point between the paisano [Mexican] and the gabacho his language is a diffuse fringe between what disappears and what has not been born."

antiquísima y asombros de gente nueva" ("have gestures and tastes that reveal both an ancient memory and the awe of new people." That is to say, gestures and forms that, in unison, "en la misma fracción de segundo" ("in the same fraction of a second,") open up time to a remote past -which returns- and the new to come, -which does not end up arriving- dislocating linearities and globalizing progressions, conforming a present never constituted "by being 'in' the moment but rather by being undone by the moment, being outside of itself." (Keller 5)

When Makina meets those who at the same time are countrymen and gabachos (Americans), "y cada cosa con una intensidad rabiosa" ("and every thing with raging intensity,") they recognize themselves "de inmediato" ("immediately,") in the same "fracción de segundo" ("fraction of a second,") because they all share the same ghostly linguistic code, a "difusa" ("fuzzy") and foggy speech that summons, at the same time, "lo que desparece y lo que no ha nacido" ("what disappears and what has not been born"), the derridian "already dead or not yet born." In doing so, they subvert official narratives of legality and illegality, and constitute a subversive community. Makina's gesture replicates the spectral, communal impulses that in contemporary Mexico bring together subjects -past and future, indigenous and non-indigenous- under a new cultural and identity umbrella. Thus, it also replicates the untranslatable and subversive fact of inhabiting a time that is dislocated, critical of itself, open to the political possibilities of the past and the future, far from the organizational framework of official history and the ways sanctioned by those who intend to lead the reins of a human community that surpasses them.

Shortly after, between three worlds and three cultures, the American, the Mexican and the indigenous Nahua, emerges the central scene of the novel, Makina's meeting/non-meeting with the "apparition" of her brother, who "apareció, vestido en uniforme militar" ("appeared, dressed in military uniform") in front of her and, despite this, "ninguno de los dos reconoció de inmediato al espectro que tenía enfrente" ("neither of them immediately recognized the specter in front of them.") That because, transformed into a phantom by distance and disjointed time, the spectral brother is no longer the original brother and, on the one hand, exemplifies the contemporary dramas of Mexican migration to the United States and, on the other, represents the break of Makina's mechanical capacity, the end of her machinations. Despite the fact that Makina is a gaseous creature in charge of processing the communication between cultures, her brother appears as an illegible, unprocessable, uncountable spirit because he does not obey an interpretable code -that is, a logic subsumable and co-optable by a homogenizing whole - but to an alternative History, to what Martin Hagglund calls a "temporal order that can not be in itself, but is always disjointed between being no longer and being not yet." (42) In other words, this is a spectral impulse that alters the time of recognition and interpretation by mixing history's regular course with a mythical course. Thus, the moment of seeing her brother, "in the same fraction of a second," Makina understands "que aquello era un error, que ése era su hermano, pero también que eso no reparaba el equívoco" ("that this was a mistake, that this was her brother, but also that that did not make up for the mistake") that he wasn't her brother.

In an attempt to recognize her own, the flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood distorted by the spectral situation, Makina tries to "tocar a la aparición" ("touch the

apparition") but the gesture consecrates nothing more the same dynamoic of being and not being. "¿Te hirieron?" ("Did they hurt you?,") she asks shortly after, when she learns that her brother has gone to war under a new identity, and although the answer is negative Makina knows that her brother has to have suffered some injury, even a psychological wound -that, like all psychological wounds, is at the root of trauma and post-traumatic disorder[65]- because he adds: "Me quedé colgando en el aire… Creo que eso les pasa a todos los que vienen. Ya se nos olvidó a qué veníamos, pero se nos quedó el reflejo de actuar como si estuviéramos ocultando un propósito" ("I was hanging in the air ... I think that happens to everyone who comes here. We already forgot what we came for, but we are left with the reflex of acting as if we were concealing a purpose," 103) thus repeating the compulsive action of being when he no longer is, or of being the same when he is already the same and another[66]. The Mexican Makina finds living in the United States adds a spectral layer to the myth of identity and further problematizes it. A dead man who returns to the realm of the dead, he is the most radical personification of the Mexican death instinct and, moreover, is its subversion, a subversive death instinct that does not aspire to the consecration of anything other than its compulsive way of "acting" as an "apparition." That is, no longer the act but its phantom image repeated without purpose. No longer the capacity for co-opted action, but rather the capacity for recreation. No longer the practice of a migrant trying to plant in a new land signs that speak of his

[65] Cathy Caruth indicates that "trauma" is, literally, etymologically, a wound of the psyche. "The original meaning of trauma itself (in both English and German)," Caruth argues, is "the Greek trauma, or 'wound', referring to an injury inflicted on a body. In its later use, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind." (3)

[66] Hagglund reinforces this condition: "What is important about the figure of the specter, then, is that it can not be fully present: it has not been in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet." (47)

world, but rather an apparition that, as an apocalyptic gesture, returns and compulsively recreates signs that speak of the end of the world.

As Giovanna Rivero argues, Makina's role can be understood as an intermediation between life and death, between the pre-Hispanic past, the mythological future, and a non-current and dislocated present, riddled with indigenous signs and Westernism: "Ella debe desentrañar los intersticios de las lenguas y resucitar lo que ha estado muerto durante siglos, los valores antieconómicos que en su comunidad originaria constituían el éthos" ("She must unravel the interstices of languages and resuscitate what has been dead for centuries, the anti-economic values that in her community of origin constituted the ethos." 513) Of course, there is an important exception that should be marked: Makina does not carry out the ritual work of rescuing "what has been dead" and recovering original "values" to reincorporate them into the realm of the living, but as a compulsive way of showing the fundamental dislocation of the present and, with it, the dislocation of the paradigms and representations of the present, because she has a powerful linguistic ability, capable of endowing the old messages with new senses -fantasmal senses-. Proof of this is that Makina, the central subject of the story and in spite of it an irremediably peripheral subject in the Mexican world, considers one of her most valuable possessions during her trip "un diccionario latino-gabacho" ("a Latin-gabacho dictionary" 56) with which she negotiates her way through sometimes untranslatable territories, which represent several of the anxieties of contemporary Mexico.

Conclusions

Finally, as Ivonne Sánchez Becerril indicates, the novel postulates the impossibility of returning to the place of origin, among other things because there is no place -as there is no time- of origin. Even if Makina is successful on her journey and is able to find her spectral brother, even if she does what is required to return to the territory from which she leaves, at the end of the story she does not consecrate any come back because Makina, as her consanguine phantom did before, illegally adopts a new identity that allows her to stay in the United States. Makina, thus, indeed dies, travels north not following a traditional trajectory of modernity -that is to say, related to progress: leaving the small town for the small city, leaving the small city for the big city, leaving Mexico for the United States where she can find work, make money, overcome her original situation-, but subverting it. Makina travels north in appearance and in reality moves towards the mythical past, inhabiting a non-current and dislocated present, a ghostly present responsable with the past and the future, and returns to -reappears in- the subversive territory, the territory empty of organic life, of mythologies.

In other words, Makina's journey is, in the end, a pilgrimage to an intermediate realm, an ideological purgatory in which, prodigal, spectral, the nation-building drives and impulses of traditional cultural subjects and institutions are frozen. Against these, Makina, the indigenous, becomes an instinct capable of subverting, on the one hand, the classical trajectory of the national imagination -designated to consecrate horizons of meaning and national forms of community- and, on the other, the strength of myth, that narrative susceptible to power. Because, finally, *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* is not a literary device destined to collaborate with the modern project of consecrating national mythologies. Instead, operating against the grain of readings that want to find in

fiction the coded coordinates of its place in history, it challenges narratives associated with power that see in power a ritual form of signification destined to the prolongation of history, and also readings that want to subvert it to climb to a place of privilege. But Herrera's is not, either, a novel that focuses on balance but a phantom fiction that, through a meticulous recreation of mortuary gestures, announces that it does not exist to consecrate any vision of a nation because this impulse, traditionally communitarian and representative, has become an empty paradigm, a compulsive myth.

CHAPTER THREE

INSENSATEZ: PARANOID TESTIMONIO

"Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening," the second chapter of Soshana Feldman and Dori Laub's *Testimony*, begins with a telling paragraph.

> The listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation. In spite of the presence of ample documents, of searing artifacts and of fragmentary memoirs of anguish, he comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent: a record that has yet to be made. Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanism of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim's narrative –the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma– does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the over whelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma –as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock-has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to –and heard– is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the

> "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (57)

There are three fundamental concepts on this passage. First, the marked absence or emptiness left by trauma in its victim, a good metaphor for the impact it also has on the trauma "listener" –a person or a collective of people– and on language. Second, language and memory narratives' impossibility, or extreme difficulty, at describing traumatic events even if they are filled with data. This is due to the impractical, insufficient or vaparous character of language and the overwhelming nature of the traumatic experience. Thus, without a language capable of describing the horror, without a code dedicated to naming it without resorting to rhetoric or the undoing of language, its victims remain unseen, un-mourned, because trauma has not been actually experienced yet. Third, as has been mentioned, trauma requires an intermediary, a "listener" who, in the act of mediating, of listening, writing or editing, brings the traumatic event into life, experiencing and making others experience it at the same time. The listener is, then, the one who hears, registers, and awakens traumatic testimonies. And in that journey he is often traumatized himself.

This conception of trauma seems particularly valuable for the purpose of analyzing one of the most widely read Central American novels of the last fifteen years, Honduran-Salvadorian Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez* (2004). Hailed both as parodic testimony and an anti-testimony, as a novel about the trauma of war about the

difficulty of surviving that trauma, *Insensatez* concentrates on presenting the very experience of the mediator, of the trauma "listener," in the figure of a narrator in charge of correcting the traumatic testimonies of indigenous Mayan victims of war. Concentrating on the turbulent political history of Central America, and specifically on Guatemala's violent national crisis, Castellanos Moya's novel functions as a literary apparatus that bears witness to and processes traumatic experiences testimonies, thus awakening them and becoming a traumatic narrative traumatic. In the following chapter, I analyze the way in which *Insensatez* dialogues with the genre of testimonio, a bearing-witness narrative occupied with, precisely, mediating subaltern's systematic experiences of exclusion, and a narrative corpus central to the formation of Central American and Guatemalan identities in the last fifty years. In what follows, I also study the ways in which the novel's narrator, "listener" of his nation's violent history, becomes a victim of the same trauma he bears witness to and mediates in the testimonies of victims with whom he works. In the process, the narrator is the victim of a growing paranoia, ranging from casual disorder to pathological crisis. But this is a rational paranoia, capable of revealing not only the authoritarian and excluding ways of Guatemalan society, but also of unveiling a ghostly national subject, born from indigenous genocide.

The Report and Testimonio

The novel tells a deceptively simple story. The anonymous narrator and protagonist, a cynical and elitist Salvadorian writer living in Guatemala, undergoes a

psychological transformation as he works for the Catholic Church[67]. His work consists in copyediting a voluminous report that details the human rights abuses perpetrated against native Maya populations at the beginning of the 1980s, and the testimonies of the indigenous witnesses and survivors of those abuses. The narrator has three months to edit and organize "cien mil cuartillas en que se documentaban las centenares de masacres" ("a thousand one hundred pages that documented hundreds of massacres"[68] 15) all committed by Guatemala's national army. During those three months, he leads a simple life: he works at the Archdiocese office, he interacts with coworkers, and goes out to eat, and especially to drink, with his "compadre" and a couple of women he meets at work – and about whom the narrator fantasizes constantly, marked as he is by a despotic heteronormative sexual desire and a compulsion for objectifying women. However, above all, during the three months of his work the narrator is haunted first by the aesthetic and later by the political weight of the report he copyedits. The story of the narrator, then, is the quixotic story of a man consumed by the book he reads and rewrites. Obsessed with specific phrases from the indigenous witness accounts, the narrator copies those phrases from the report to his notebook and then shares them with whomever he meets and even repeats them to himself all throughout the novel. As Samuel Steinberg points out, while these phrases become more and more a part of him, "the nameless narrator enters a panicked state proper to those who suffered the war and whose testimonios he has been employed to edit"[69] (177). The paranoia and traumatic impulses

[67] Like the narrator, the country where the action takes place is never directly named in the novel, but the reader can safely assume is Guatemala for the multiple historical, cultural, and geographical indications the novel provides.
[68] All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.
[69] In total, there are 23 different phrases, long and short, that the narrator copies from the indigenous people's testimonies, writes down in his notebook and then repeats constantly. They are found on pages 13,

that engulf him due to the very sensitive nature of the report he is working on, and the infamous lack of tolerance of the Guatemalan army, make the narrator prone to believing the criminals of the Civil War are in pursue of him. Thus, unable to withstand the onslaught of his tortured psyche, the narrator flees the capital, first seeks refuge in the countryside, and then departs again after a particularly strong attack of paranoia. At the end of the novel, he is in Germany, where what seem like persecution delusion episodes continue. However, one night he returns to his cousin's house, where he is staying, and receives an e-mail that indicates him, and us, readers, that paranoia was justified all along. Back in Guatemala, two days after the report he copyedited is officially presented to the public, and therefore the information about the military's guilt in multiple crimes against humanity is disseminated in society, the bishop of the Archdiocese he was working for is brutally murdered, in an apparent retaliation for the publication of the report.

The report in the novel has a real life counterpart, published in 1998 by the Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (Division of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala), with the title of *Guatemala: Nunca Más. Informe del Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (*Guatemala: Never Again*)[70]. Like the report from the novel, the real report details massive violations of human rights that took place during the 36-year-long armed conflict

30, 31, 32, 38, 43, 47, 48, 63, 68, 82, 104, 113, 122, 129, 135, 141, 144, 149, 150, 152, 153, and 154 of the first edition of the novel.

[70] Carlos Martín Beristain, coordinator of Guatemala: Nunca Más, states that "el tiempo de investigación, desde la preparación del proyecto, selección y entrenamiento de entrevistadores, organización y desarrollo del trabajo de campo, codificación y estudio de los testimonios hasta la elaboración y publicación del informe *Guatemala Nunca Más*, fue de 3 años: 1995-1998 ("the research, the preparation of the project, the selection and training of interviewers, the organization and development of the field work, the codification and study of the testimonies, and the preparation and publication of the *Guatemala Never Again* report, took 3 years: 1995-1998.") ("Metodología de investigación")

between the Guatemalan military and various insurgent groups (1960-1996), and concentrates on the sinister number of acts of violence that took place in the early 1980s, especially in rural areas of the country with high levels of indigenous population. Drawing one of its conclusions, the report indicates:

> En los 5,180 testimonios recogidos por el Proyecto REMHI, son 55,021 las víctimas documentadas de violaciones de los derechos humanos, que corresponden a 14,291 hechos. Estos datos muestran que las violaciones de los derechos humanos tuvieron, frecuentemente, un carácter colectivo contra comunidades y grupos. Las muertes, individuales y colectivas, fueron los hechos más denunciados: 6,146 hechos y 25,123 víctimas (46%). En orden de frecuencia las otras víctimas de la violencia son: 8,675 personas que fueron amenazadas (16%) y 5,497 víctimas de atentados (10%), 5,516 de torturas y otros tratos crueles, inhumanos o degradantes (10%), 5,079 detenciones irregulares (9.2%); 3,893 víctimas de desapariciones forzadas (7.1%); 723 secuestrados que aparecieron vivos posteriormente (1.3%); 152 víctimas registradas de violaciones sexuales (si bien este dato infravalora la realidad) […] La responsabilidad oficial acumulada (Ejército + policías + PAC + Comisionados + Escuadrones de la Muerte) es abrumadora: 49,812 víctimas, que equivalen al 90.53%. Al ejército se le responsabiliza directamente de 32,978 de las víctimas por todo tipo de hechos (60%). Al ejército en actuaciones conjuntas con los grupos paramilitares (PAC y Comisionados Militares) de otras 10,602 víctimas (19.3%). A los grupos

paramilitares aisladamente de 3,424 víctimas (6.2%)[71] ("I. Impactos de la violencia")

According to historians like Dirk Kruijt, Henry Frundt and Lee Penyak, the bulk of the deaths and crimes were committed during the brief and bloody government of general Efraín Ríos Montt. Penyak points out that Ríos Montt governed Guatemala authoritatively and supported by the U.S. for sixteen months, from March 1982 to August 1983. During that period, he aimed at diminishing the leftist guerrilla activities in the countryside and, while doing so, he "suspended the constitution, prohibited all political activity, dissolved Congress, imposed strict censorship, and detained anyone suspected of disturbing the public order." (138) His main focus, however, was on indigenous populations, "because Indians constituted the majority of those Guatemalans who desired to create a new society based on peace, social justice, and the promotion of human rights," and because, therefore, Ríos Montt and "Guatemala's military considered them communist subversives." (140) Moreover,

The army's goal was to destroy village life and prevent additional Indians from joining guerrilla organizations. Those peasants who fought government pressure

[71] "In 5,180 testimonies collected by the REMHI Project, there are 55,021 documented victims of human rights violations, which corresponds to 14,291 incidents. These data show that violations of human rights frequently had a collective character against communities and groups. Death, individual and collective, was the most reported fact, in 6,146 cases and 25,123 victims (46%). In order of frequency, the other victims of violence are: 8,675 people who were threatened (16%) and 5,497 who were victims of attacks (10%); 5,516 people who were victims of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (10%); 5,079 people who suffered irregular detentions (9.2%); 3,893 people victims of forced disappearances (7.1%); 723 abductees who later appeared alive (1.3%); and 152 registered victims of sexual violations (although this figure underestimates the reality) [...] The accumulated official responsibility (of the Army + police + PAC + Commissioners + Death Squads) is overwhelming: it equals 49,812 victims, equivalent to 90.53% of the total. The army is directly responsible for 32,978 victims for all kinds of crimes (60%). In joint action with paramilitary groups (PAC and Military Commissioners), the army is also responsible for another 10,602 victims (19.3%). Isolated paramilitary groups are responsible for 3,424 victims (6.2%)."

> to relocate to controlled areas had their houses and crops burned by the military and were often brutally tortured and murdered. In addition, all male Indians in highland villages were coerced into joining civilian patrols which were used to attack villages suspected of harboring subversives (…) Guatemala's Catholic Church estimated that the army massacred 10,000 villagers during Ríos Montt's tenure. (140-141)

The historical and political meaning of these numbers and the horror they represent are overwhelming. It is no surprise, then, that in *Insensatez*, after discussing the narrator's copyediting job, his friend Toto tells him that "corregir mil cien cuartillas con historias de indígenas obsesionados con el terror y la muerte podría quebrantar al espíritu más férrro" ("editing one thousand one hundred pages describing stories of indigenous people obsessed with horror and death could break the strongest spirit.") Furthermore, Toto mentions to the narrator that "convivir con esos textos las veinticuatro horas del día podría ser fatal para una personalidad compulsiva como la mía, dispararía mi paranoia a niveles enfermizos" ("living with a text like that twenty-four hours a day could be fatal to someone as compulsive as [he] was, it would ratchet up [his] paranoia to truly unhealthy levels" 31). Paranoia and persecution delusions are indeed some of the life-disjointing threats that the protagonist faces while working through these testimonies, until the compulsive reading and repeating of the victim's accounts bring about his psychological breakdown. But this is a gradual process. At the beginning of the novel the narrator is overwhelmed not by the size of the task he has at hand, and not only by the traumatic stories he is forced to edit and reshape, and that in turn reshape him. Rather, at the

beginning of the novel he is overwhelmed by the profound poetic resonance of the testimonial phrases. As critic Christian Kroll-Bryce states, these phrases, unspeakable in their horror, are also "unforgettable in their phrasing, having a poetic beauty" reminiscent of César Vallejo "that twists and defies Spanish grammar and syntax" (383).

"*Yo no estoy completo de la mente*" ("I'm not complete in the mind" 13) is the first phrase, taken from the testimony of a Cachiquel native, that shocks the narrator with its strange poetic aura, since "no se trataba de cualquier frase, mucho menos de una ocurrencia, de ninguna manera, sino de la frase que más me impactó en la lectura realizada durante mi primer día de trabajo" ("it wasn't just another phrase, much less a witticism, it was the single most captivating phrase [he] read during [his] first day on the job" 13). This incompleteness of the mind also characterizes the narrator ("Yo tampoco estoy completo de la mente, me dije entonces, en ese primer día de trabajo"[72] 15) and Guatemala at large ("era la totalidad de los habitants de ese país la que no estaba completa de la mente"[73] 14). However, the reasons why the Cachiquel indian from the report, the narrator, and Guatemalan citizens are said to be, or consider themselves, "not complete in the mind," are markedly different. On the one hand, the survivor from the report is a "indígena cachiquel testigo del asesinato de su familia" ("Cachiquel man who witnessed the killing of his family" 13), and who saw "cómo los soldados del ejército de su país despedazaban a machetazos y con sorna a cada uno de sus cuatro pequeños hijos y en seguida arremetían contra su mujer" ("how the soldiers of his country's' army slashed and mauled, scornfully, each of his four small children and then attacked his wife" 14). On the other hand, the narrator and copyeditor of the report is certainly not a firsthand

[72] "I am also not complete in the mind, I told myself on that first day of work."
[73] "All of that country's inhabitants were not complete in the mind."

victim of violence, or at least not a victim of the same violence that consumed over fifty thousand, mostly indigenous, lives. Rather, as Lacey Schauwecker argues, "he often identifies with witnesses so closely that he even relives their memories with them." ("Tengo que gritarlo")

Historically, these memories follow the specificities of a narrative genre that in Guatemala and, more generally, throughout Central America, has a long and complex tradition. As critic Samuel Steinberg argues, "any reading of Castellanos Moya's novel cannot but be haunted by the question of testimonio" (187). What, however, is testimonio? As John Beverley, perhaps one of its most critically celebrated early proponents states, testimonio began "as an adjunct to armed liberation struggle in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World in the 1960s." Moreover, testimonio's canonization, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, is inextricable from "the military, political, and economic force of the counterrevolution in the years after 1973", because it was "the Real, the voice of the body in pain, of the disappeared, of the losers in rush to marketize, that demystified the false utopian discourse of neoliberalism" (77). As such, as a discourse inseparable from "solidarity networks in support of revolutionary movements or struggles around human rights" (77), testimonio is essentially a political narrative. Whereas a traditional testimonio, such as *Si me permiten hablar* (1977), by Bolivian Domitila Barrios de Chungara, or *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), by Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú, is a first-person narrative written by a transcriber who registers the spoken account of a subaltern, Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez* is very much a different kind of narrative. The novel's narrator is not the traditional scribe dedicated to compiling the accounts of victims. Rather, by means of a

programmatic disjointing of fiction and the traditional testimonial genre, the novel "turns on the revocation of the pious or even emancipatory ethos one usually imagines by the kind of scribe that we might expect (Elizabeth Burgos, let's say)[74], the kind of scribe that haunts the search for truth by way of the compilation of an archive." (187) The scribe or, to go back to Angel Rama's idea of the lettered city, the lettered men in the novel, finds himself in charge of shaping the "so-called collective memory" without being imbued with the traditional, and even required ethical and political views of traditional testimonio. He accepts the job of copyediting more than a thousand pages for money, not because he feels it is his political duty to help shape –reshape– the history of a nation. Moreover, from the opening scene of the novel the narrator feels like he has accepted the job "por culpa de un entusiasmo estúpido y peligroso" ("because of a stupid and dangerous enthusiasm," 17) and because, when his friend Erick came to him with the job offer, Eric could feel that the narrator already "estaba tan incompleto de la mente que aceptaría la propuesta y hasta me entusiasmaría con la idea de involucrarme en semejante proyecto" (was so not complete in the mind that [he] would accept the offer and would even be excited with the idea of getting involved in such a project" 18).

Altruism, empathy, and even common generosity seem to be absent from the narrator's set of values. He makes that much clear when he mentions that, for him, "el cumplimiento de un pago está por encima de cualquier otro valor" ("the payment of a debt [like the salary he is owed for his copyediting work] comes before any other value" 37). Clearly, his actions during this first part of the novel respond to what Kroll-Bryce calls "the rational calculations of neoliberal reason" (391) since, next to monetary

[74] Elizabeth Burgos Debray is the editor of Rigoberta Menchú´s famous testimonio *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*.

compensation, the narrator only cherishes sex and the poetic value of the report's indigenous phrases[75]. Money, sex, and poetry, these are the three pillars on which his sanity is sustained during the first part of the novel and which maintain his immunity from trauma and madness. As Steinberg points out, "instead of piety, solidarity, and the like," the narrator finds gain and "aesthetic pleasure in the lines he edits, in the testimonios with which he spends his days." (187) In effect, he constantly underlines their literary novelty and recites them compulsively throughout the novel, in very different circumstances, like a mantra that provides him with aesthetic relief and, at the same time, that gradually disjoints him to the point where he seems overtaken and, thus, undone. In that sense, the way in which Castellanos Moya designs his narrator and his narration creates an instant paradox, in as much as, on the one hand, the novel is rooted in –or related to, by proximity or separation– testimonio, and in the other hand the narrator, the lettered man, is different from the traditional testimonio narrator, which Beverley and Zimmerman define as "an interlocutor who is a journalist, writer, or social activist" with a clear political agenda (86).

There are, indeed, many filters and differences between a traditional testimonio and Castellanos Moya's novel, as is the case with several other contemporary Central American literary narrations that join *Insensatez*'s wake[76]. Actually, there are many

[75] Desperate to have sex with a (non-indigenous) woman, the narrator constantly asks a Pilar and Fátima, a couple of foreigner coworkers, on dates, he fantasizes about them, and tries to have sex with them. Sex is always on his mind among other things because "ya tenía mes y medio sin echar un polvo, desde que arribé a esta ciudad era víctima de la castidad como si me estuviese preparando para tomar los hábitos, pensé ya bajo el chorro de agua caliente y reconfortante, enjabonándome las ingles y los huevos, jalándome la verga" ("[he] had been a month and a half without getting any; since [he] arrived in this city [he] was a victim of chastity, as if [he] was preparing to take the habits, [he] thought under the hot and comforting stream of the shower, lathering [his] groin and balls, pulling [his] cock."74-75)

[76] For a detailed analysis of several of these novels and short stories in relation to testimonio, check Rodrigo Fuentes' *The Afterlife of Testimonio: Detective Fiction and the Archive in Contemporary Central American Literature*.

differences between testimonio and the novel form, even though the novel can take testimonial forms. As Beverley argues, in principle testimonio appears as "an extra-literary or even anti-literary form of discourse," and that is, paradoxically and precisely, "the basis of both its aesthetic and its political appeal." (42) It is interesting to see how, after the intellectual community more or less accepted this marked division proposed by Beverley and other subalternist Latinamericanists, that together created the critical church of the gospel of testimonio in the 1970s and 1980s[77], contemporary novels like *Insensatez* have been considered by many scholars, precisely, as an "anti-testimony," or "meta-testimony," or "para-testimony." Thus, this negation of the double essence of testimonio and contemporary novels that deal with it (there is no testimonio without literature and there are no novels like *Insensatez* without testimonio), does not prevent the fact that even though contemporary fiction is no longer seduced by the the "political appeal" of traditional testimonio, it does appear to have kept –modified and commodified– some of its "aesthetic appeal."

Therefore, a separation could be made between, on the one hand, traditional testimonio and, on the other, the testimonial novel, a narrative text in which an author "has either invented a testimonio-like story" or has "extensively reworked, with explicitly literary goals (…) a testimonial account that is no longer present except in its simulacrum." (43) This second case is the case of *Insensatez*, a novel that can be considered part of what Fernando Rosenberg deems as "un corpus narrativo que vuelve sobre una violencia históricamente anterior, la de las guerras sucias en las que la nación

[77] A church that was starting to become deserted in 1996, with the publication of *The Real Thing*, a collection of essays, edited by George M. Gugelberger, that theorized the decline of the genre at a time when cultural and political conditions were already very different to those which had given rise to canonical testimonios.

funcionaba como marco semántico de la violencia y del sacrificio, pero desde el tratamiento de sus consecuencias y efectos" ("a narrative corpus that returns to the violence of the dirty wars, when the nation functioned as the semantic framework of violence and sacrifice, in terms of its causes and effects"), that is, a narrative corpus that speaks of "la transición," a national ("transition" 91). Thus, close to political experience in terms of the plot, and far from politics as the form and the active subject of a narration not purely testimonial but literarily testimonial, the narrator of the novel and copyeditor of the report embodies a certain disappointment as he does not show any sign of having political obligations similar to those of traditional Latinamericanists. Far from concerning himself with "the transmission of the Truth" or with "the construction or reconfiguration of his subjectivity along the lines of an evident and unproblematic solidarity with the victims of military violence," the narrator's true object of desire, his true responsibility, is "his responsibility with the aesthetic" (Steinberg 188).

At first, by means of his apolitical, non-concerned attitude, the narrator of the novel does not seem to be bothered by the massive weight of the Guatemalan indigenous genocide, an event so violent that it provoked the –symbolic– disappearance of Guatemala's cultural and ethnic Other. As a consequence, a certain difficulty or impossibility to bear witness is generated (and in the novel represented) in the 'poetic,' rhetorical, syntax-defying language of victims' and survivor's testimonies. Therefore, without a language capable of describing the horror, without a code dedicated to naming it in its entirety without resorting to a flexible rhetoric and the undoing of language, its victims remain unseen, un-mourned, and their murders unsolved.

The *locus of enunciation* of Castellanos Moya and his narrator, with whom the author shares many similarities, is very different from the traditional place of utterance of testimonio's lettered men. Both Castellanos Moya and the narrator share several characteristics: they are both middle-class, highly educated ladino (mestizo) writers, who have traveled the world and who can afford to, oftentimes, accept the jobs that best suit them. Moreover, at the beginning of the novel the narrator feels markedly uncomfortable. He has recently arrived to a new city and a new country, and does not feel confortable:

> Un mes atrás me había visto obligado a abandoner mi país, por culpa de un artículo en el que sostuve que El Salvador era el primer país latinoamericano que contaba con un presidente africano, comentario calificado de "racist" que me granjeó la animadversion de medio país, en especial de los poderosos y de ¨los empleadores, pese a la aclaración de que yo no me había referido al hecho, por demás verificable, de que el president pareciera un negrito africano, que el color de la piel nada importa, sino a su actitud dictatorial y a su negative a escuchar las opinions de quien no opinara como él…[78] (49)

The narrator's experience mirrors the real life experience of Castellanos Moya who had to flee El Salvador after writing *El asco*, his third novel (1997). In *El asco*, as critic Nanci Buiza argues, the protagonist, Edgardo Vega, launches a diatribe against post-war

[78] "A month ago I had been forced to leave my country because of an article in which I argued that El Salvador was the first Latin American country that had an African president, a comment described as "racist" and that won me the animadversion of half the country, especially of the people in power and the people in charge of employing others, despite the clarification that I had not referred to the, verifiable, fact that the president looked like a black African, because the color of skin does not matter, but to his dictatorial attitude and his refusal to listen to the opinions of those who do not think like him…"

Salvadoran society that "leaves virtually no aspect of Salvadoran culture unscathed" and that "gained Castellanos Moya death threats in El Salvador that forced him into exile. (154) Similarly to Castellanos Moya, the narrator of *Insensatez* is an exile that, after fleeing El Salvador for political reasons, seeks refuge elsewhere. While real life Castellanos Moya finds it first in Mexico and later in Germany, the novel's narrator finds it in Guatemala first and Germany later. In real life and in fiction, both show a certain detachment with Central American national models and the politics that shape them. In "Los intelectuales y la transición," one of the essays of *Recuento de incertidumbres* (1993), Castellanos Moya argues that "una función básica del intelectual es la crítica del poder" ("one of the basic functions of the intellectual is the critique of power" 57). Furthermore, Castellanos Moya adds that, during the civil wars of Central America, the existence of confronted forces limited the exercise of this function, leaving "el alineamiento, el silencio o el exilio" ("[political] alignment, silence or exile" 58) as the lettered man's only options (58). Because of this, during the war decades the lettered man could not be "un generador de ideas cuestionadoras del poder, incluido el poder de la institucionalidad a la que pertenece" ("a generator of ideas that aimed to question power, including the power of the institutions to which he belongs" 59). Eleven years after *Recuento*, the narrator of *Insensatez* still seems incapable of consistently producing power-questioning ideas, at least with regard to political-ideological processes.[79]

This happens because, much like canonical testimonio, which with the publication of *The Real Thing* in 1996 was thought as unviable under non-canonical conditions, postwar narrative in Guatemala and, generally, in all Central America, can no longer be

[79] For power-questioning ideas in regard to economic processes and the commodification of all levels of life, I recommend Christian Kroll-Bryce's "Nómadas, desempleados y suicidas: racionalidad neoliberal y subjetividades alternas en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra."

read in a canonical way. In "Literatura y destrucción: aproximación a la narrativa centroamericana actual," Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott argues that Central American literature "ya no puede seguir siendo concebida de manera tradicional, como confirmación del pacto social republican (…) ni menos como vehículo de radicalización en el contexto de las luchas por la liberación nacional" ("can no longer be conceived in a traditional way, as confirmation of the republican social pact […] or as a vehicle for radicalization in the context of the struggles for national liberation"). Furthermore, Villalobos-Ruminott states that "la crisis histórica sufrida por la sociedad centroamericana vuelve imposible seguir pensando la narrativa contemporánea según el viejo modelo liberal, o según el modelo del arte comprometido y militante" ("the historical crisis suffered by Central American society makes it impossible to continue thinking about contemporary narratives according to the old liberal model, or according to the model of committed and militant art" 133). In the same light, Misha Kokotovic points out that, "while the 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of a politically committed literature that self-consciously sought to contribute to the struggle against dictatorship and oppression," more contemporary literary narratives, that in Guatemala were published after the 1996 peace accords, "express no overt political commitment." Instead, these narratives are characterized by a "disenchantment with, if not bitterness toward, the utopian political projects of the erstwhile revolutionary Left as well as those of the ruling neoliberal Right" (21).

In this sense, during the first half of the novel the narrator is immune to the full implications of the phrases and the report's testimonies. In fact, as mentioned before, this immunity is sustained on three pillars that function as the narrator's motivators and keep

him within reason and within what Kroll-Bryce calls "the constraints of the capitalist economy and bourgeois society" (391). These are poetry, money, and sex.

Paranoia

There are many things in Guatemala that do not interest or please the narrator, or that openly bother and displease him, thus tellingly portraying him as someone who "no profesa ningún tipo de compromiso o simpatía ideológica, religiosa o humanitaria, como es frecuente en las personas que colaboran en los trabajos de la memoria o literatura testimonial" ("does not have any kind of ideological commitment or inclination, any kind of religious or humanitarian sympathy, as it is common in people who collaborate in works of memory or testimonial literature" Sánchez Carbó 59). Among them, marimba music ("si algo aborrezco con especial intensidad es la música folclórica, y por sobre todo la música triste y llorona de la marimba, instrument que solo puede ser idolatrado por un pueblo triste y llorón" 24-25)[80]; the country's fervent Catholicism ("estaba penetrando a un mundo regido por las leyes del catolicismo, que siempre habían generado en mí la peor repulsion, lo que me hizo considerer la posibilidad de salir en estampida en ese instante" 26)[81]; the country's indigenous women ("centenares de indígenas ataviadas con sus étnicos trajes domingueros de colores festivos entre los que se imponía el rojo […] el emblema de la alegría de esas centenaries de empleadas domésticas que disfrutaban de su día de asueto […] pude constatar que ninguna de aquellas mujeres de

[80] "If there is something I hate with special intensity is [Guatemalan] folk music, and above all the sad and weeping music of the marimba, an instrument that can only be idolized by a sad and weeping people."
[81] "I was entering a world governed by the laws of catholicism, which had always generated in me the worst repulsion, which made me consider the possibility of stampede out oif there in that instant."

ojos rasgados y piel tostada despertaba mi apetito sexual ni mi morbo" 79-80)[82]; the national currency ("…preguntándome además si prefería recibir los dólares [del pago] en efectivo o un cheque en moneda nacional, una pregunta estúpida desde todo punto de vista ya que en mi trato con mi amigo Erick siempre hablamos de cinco mil dólares, sin mencionar nunca su moneda nacional, cuyos billetes viejos y apestosos no podrían server como incentive para alguien mínimamente en sus cabales")[83]; and even the city's main streets and landmarks ("enfilé por la Octava Avenida, una cuadra apestosa a orines y basura que separaba el palacio arzobispal del mercado central, un estercolero a espaldas de la catedral" 41)[84].

Bothered by the symbols, peoples, and sights of Guatemala's national landscape, the narrator feels a clear physical and spiritual discomfort that, gradually, as the plot advances, becomes a "enfermedad psíquica" ("a psychical illness," 124) a psychological urge to escape the country and, thus, save his life. This is exacerbated when the narration nears its end. In the last scene of the novel, once the narrator, fearing for his life, has fled Guatemala and has landed in Germany, he is still afraid of, and paranoid about, the military and the war criminals he is sure are after him for his role as copyeditor, as shaper, of the report. The narrator's behavior and state of mind, as Kroll-Bryce points out, "not only mirror those of a people subjected to State terror," they also suggest that paranoia and "incompleteness of mind are actually the direct result of state (sovereign)

[82] "Hundreds of indigenous women dressed in their ethnic Sunday costumes of festive colors, among which red [...] was a symbol of the joy those hundreds of domestic employees felt while enjoying their day of rest [...] I could see that none of those slant-eyed and toasted-skinned women aroused my sexual appetite or my morbid desire."

[83] "…They also asked me I preferred to receive the payment dollars or a check in national currency, a stupid question from every point of view since in my dealings with my friend Erick we always talked about five thousand dollars, never mentioning their national currency, whose old and smelly bills could never serve as , an incentive for someone minimally sane."

[84] "I walked down Eighth Avenue, a block stinking of urine and trash that separated the archbishop's palace from the central market, a dunghill behind the cathedral."

reason," (384) expressed in the novel by the persecutory atmosphere of the national landscape. Therefore, when one night he finds an email from his compadre Toto in his inbox, casually notifying him about the murder of the Archdiocese's bishop after the publication of the report, his fears –and the reader's fears, who throughout the novel has become a part of the same lettered and archival community against totalitarian power and criminal impunity– are revived and the paranoid atmosphere of his world is suddenly justified:

> En mi buzón había un mensaje del compadre Toto, el cual procedí a abrir con mi mejor entusiasmo, y que no era una carta sino una especie de telegrama que decía: "Ayer a mediodía monseñor presentó el informe en la catedral con bombo y platillo; en la noche lo asesinaron en la casa parroquial, le destruyeron la cabeza con un ladrillo. Todo el mundo está cagado. Da gracias que te fuiste"[85] (155)

Like so much in *Insensatez* –the narrator, the indigenous genocide, the Archdiocese report– the bishop's assassination mirrors a real life crime, the assassination of Monsignor Juan José Gerardi. Long active in working with Guatemala´s indigenous Mayan peoples, Gerardi was the report's architect and its most ardent promoter, and therefore was assassinated on April 26, 1998, two days after *Guatemala: Nunca Más* was presented for the first time to the public.[86] Like so much in *Insensatez*, as well –the

[85] "There in my inbox was a message from my buddy Toto, which I proceeded to open with the utmost eagerness, and which wasn't a letter so much as a kind of telegram that said, "Yesterday at noon the bishop presented the report in a bombastic ceremony in the cathedral; last night he was assassinated in the parish house, they smashed his head in with a brick. Everybody's fucked. Be grateful you left."

[86] For a detailed account of Juan José Gerardi's assassination, and the trial that followed, see Francisco Goldman's *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?*

narrator and the countries and cities where the action takes place– the murdered bishop remains nameless in the novel. This lack of proper names seems to follow Fredric Jameson's idea that testimonial literature –like *Insensatez*, a novel that assumes and adapts some of the narrative and rhetorical conventions of testimonio– produces a new anonymity, different from what Beverley calls the "overripe subjectivity" (34) of the modernist novel. This, however, in Castellanos Moya does not equal conceding to the subjects of the story, especially the indigenous victims and survivors of State terror, "the facelessness that is already theirs in the dominant culture" (34) because, far from both total depersonalization and totalizing figure of the lettered man, the novel represents what Jameson defines as "on a third possibility beyond the old bourgeois ego and the schizophrenic subject of our organization society today: a collective subject". That is, a subject that, while emerging in "certain forms of storytelling that can be found in third-world literature, like testimonial literature," is the product of "decentered storytelling," since the stories neither belong to a single subjectivity nor do they represent "schizophrenic isolation of the first-world subject" (45).

However, by means of a *paranoia sensata* (rational paranoia), as proved by the murder of the bishop at the end of the story, the narrator channels not just a collective subject but a paranoid collective subject, a phantasmagoric figure fluctuating between the extreme power of the report and its phrases, and the extreme threat of the Guatemalan army. Rational paranoia, thus, follows McClintock definition of paranoia, "a double-sided phantasm that oscillates precariously between deliriums of grandeur and nightmares of perpetual threat" (53). Nonetheless, if would be worth remembering that, whether McClintock's is an "American" version of paranoia, its focus on imperialist societies'

need for a perpetual enemy constitutes a significant contribution to the larger understanding of Western and westernized imperial projects, such as the U.S. backed Latin American authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century. Thus, we can see how the Guatemalan national project, indistinguishable from the Guatemalan mestizo project, had to create an internal enemy and was founded on the basis of a systematic discrimination of indigenous peoples, an ethnic Other which became the country's at times official and at times unofficial national enemy, as they were considered backwards, anti-progress, anti-market, and associated with leftist guerrilla groups.

The psychic illness that haunts the narrator and the paranoid collective subject from the beginning, and that during the first part of the novel is somewhat contained by the narrator's interest in money, sex, and poetry, can also be perceived in indigenous society as a whole. This can be seen in all of the report's phrases: from the Cachiquel man's confession of not being "complete in the mind;" to the utterance made by an old indigenous woman who witnessed the killing of seventy seven inhabitants of her village and their following unearthing from a common grave ("Que siempre los sueños allí están todavía" 122)[87]; to the complaint made by an old Quiché man left in utter solitude after the army assassinated all his children, grandchildren and other family members ("Si yo me muero, no sé quién me va a enterrar" 104)[88]; to the heartbreaking claim of a man who survived the day when the army came to his village and forced half of its people to kill the other half ("eran personas como nosotros, a las que teníamos miedo" 151)[89]. Clearly, the entire national population does not have rational paranoia, only those indigenous subjects and those persecuted by the government for other causes. This is why Guatemala

[87] "That the dreams were always there still."
[88] "If I die, I don't know who is going to bury me."
[89] "They were people like us, them who we feared."

appears to the narrator as an arcane, encrypted country, a society in which the majority of the mestizo population is not interested in "sus mal llamados compatriotas aborígenes" ("their so-called aboriginal compatriots" 32). Moreover, this is why the narrator sees Guatemalans as a collective that allowed a "genocidio perpetrado por el ejército de ese país contra la población indígena desarmada" ("genocide perpetrated by the army of that country against the unarmed indigenous population" 61).

Guatemalan urban-mestizo society appears as a prolongation of the threat of the army, and leads the narrator to believe that he is being persecuted by informants, torturers and snitches in the bars and restaurants of Guatemala City (24); persecuted by the press in which he reads, or imagines, State campaigns against him (60); persecuted by the military boyfriend of Fátima, a Spanish girl with whom he has a passing romance (101); and persecuted even at his workplace for his initial lack of commitment with the political implications of the report. The narrator recognizes that this last case can cause him problems in his job, which further triggers his paranoia. Indeed, while working at the Archdiocese, he often runs into "Monseñor" (the bishop who would be assassinated two days after the publication of the report) and fears to be perceived by him as "un literato alucinado en busca de versos allí donde lo que había era una brutal denuncia de los crímenes de lesa humanidad perpetrados por el ejército contra las comunidades indígenas de su país, que él pensara que yo era un mero estilista que pasaba por alto el contenido del informe" ("a hallucinated lettered man in search of verses where there was a brutal denunciation of the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the army against the indigenous communities of his country, as a mere stylist who ignored the content of the report" 69). Gradually less hold together by the poetic strength of the report as the plot

advances, the narrator begins to transform into a delirious man who takes extreme precautions every time he leaves the house, to "evitar la emboscada siempre temida, aquella en la que dos pseudoladrones –en verdad especialistas de inteligencia del ejército– me arrinconarían a puñaladas" ("avoid the always dreaded ambush, the one in which two pretended thiefs –actually, army intelligence specialists– would corner me and stab me to death" 24).

However, rational paranoia in the novel is also presented as a repetitive and oracular speech, an omnipresent discourse born as the testimony of the indigenous survivors and repeated compulsively by the narrator, who thus transforms it at the same time into a linguistic power fantasy that dominates the whole novel –every time the narrator speaks he can not help but repeating one of the testimonial phrases– and into the register of a materialized threat –the phrases are the testimony of a largely victimized community. Thus, at the level of language, paranoia is indeed a "double-sided phantasm," a flickering presence that introduces deeply antagonistic sociopolitical structures in Guatemala. The narrator defines as

> la enfermedad psíquica que me aquejaba y que consistía en que una vez que me estimulaban para comenzar a hablar quería contarlo todo, con pelos y olores, vaciarme hasta la saciedad, compulsivamente en una suerte de espasmo verbal, como si fuera una carrera orgásmica que culminaría hasta entregarme totalmente, hasta quedar sin secretos, hasta que mi interlocutor supiera todo lo que quería

saber, en una confesión exhaustiva después de la cual padecería la peor de las resacas.[90] (124)

Thus, on the one hand, paranoia in *Insensatez* is an incontinent verbal compulsion, a narrative excess motivated by an aesthetic reflex –the poetic power of testimonial discourse– and concretized as a ghostly, ambivalent gesture tensioned between fantasies of power and persecution delusions. On the other hand, the presence of paranoia in the novel clearly shows how a spectral multitude of murdered victims, in fact, how a spectral indigenous collective subject, decimated because it was considered dangerous for the stability of the state and Guatemala's national progress, actively haunts the memory and the present of the characters and the memory and the present of Guatemala, disjointing its time, opening it up to a spiral in which the present is permanently inhabited by a past that demands justice and closure.

A Loss of Immunity

With this state of affairs, in the face of the rational paranoia and the verbal paranoia that afflict him and afflict the indigenous collective subject in the national landscape, the narrator only has two options: on the one hand, succumb to the verbal delirium and repeat "como poseso" ("like a possessed man") the testimonial phrases of the report that he "pronto transcribí a mi libreta de apuntes" ("soon transcribed to [his]

[90] "The mental illness that afflicted me and consisted in that, once I was stimulated into talking, I wanted to tell it all with great detail, emptying myself over and over again, compulsively, in a kind of verbal spasm, an orgasmic race that would not culminate until I emptied myself completely, until I ran out of secrets, until my interlocutor knew everything he wanted to know in an exhaustive confession after which I would suffer the worst of hangovers."

notebook") and that he subsequently "repetí cada vez con mayor furia" ("repeated each time with increasing rage" 62). On the other hand, to combat the illnesses, the narrator constantly self-medicates. He does it by consuming alcohol –beer and whisky are his two drinks of choice, and he consumes them constantly, on weekdays and weekends, during and before and after work hours– and also by taking "Lexotán, el ansiolítico del cual yo debería ingerir 1,5 miligramos en la mañana y otra dosis similar en la noche, tal como el médico me había recetado varios meses atrás cuando sufrí el percance por el artículo sobre el primer presidente africano de mi país y que me había obligado a salir al exilio" ("Lexotan, the anxiolytic of which I should ingest 1.5 milligrams in the morning and another similar dose at night, as the doctor had prescribed me several months ago, when I experienced the mishap for the article on the first African president of my country that forced me to go into exile" 103). These self-medicating measures, though more so the alcohol than the drug, guarantee the narrator´s immunity during the first part of the novel. Coupled with his initial interest in money, sex, and poetry, alcohol and anxiolytics keep full-blown paranoia at bay. In other words, rational and verbal paranoia, the psychic illnesses he faces during the first part of the novel, constitute a spectral force tensioned between equally dense powers, the power of the report and the power of the army. At this stage the narrator is still preoccupied with making money, meeting girls and meditating on the poetic weight of the testimonial phrases. However, as the plot advances, the narrator loses interest in money and sex, abandons his job and his social circle, and fully surrenders to the persecution delusion. And he does so because, in spite of the alcohol and the drugs, he loses his immunity.

One day at work, after having sex with Fatima, the Spanish girl with a military boyfriend, the narrator finds himself feeling "cierta comezón en la punta del pene y una especie de tirantez en los testículos" ("a certain itch on the tip of his penis and a kind of tightness in the testicles" 114). Faced with this situation, he goes to the bathroom to check himself and,

> luego de echar el pestillo, procedí a revisar mi miembro: no hubo necesidad de que lo apretara demasiado para que apareciera la gota blanca que me dejó paralizado, boquiabierto, como hipnotizado, porque nunca en mi vida había padecido una enfermedad venérea (…) pues hasta entonces yo había creído que los hombres se dividían en dos grupos, lo sucios y los virtuosos, y que era precisamente la posesión o no posesión de esa gota la línea divisoria.[91] (115)

This is the moment in which the narrator loses physical immunity, "stained" as he is by the white drop that signals him as "sucio" (dirty), as a man of little virtue and, therefore, as a fallible, corrupt person. But this is only the beginning, because the lack of physical immunity finds a counterpart in a violent assault of autoimmunity that leaves the narrator outside the bounds and "the rational calculations of neoliberal reason" (391). About the same time he discovers his venereal disease, the narrator is working on the testimony of a girl who was kidnapped, brutally raped and manically tortured for months by the army. As luck has it, the victim of the horrendous abuses is working at the archdiocese herself,

[91] "after securing the door, [he] proceeded to check [his] member: there was no need to squeeze it too much for the white drop to appear and leave [him] paralyzed, gasped, as if hypnotized, because [he] had never had a venereal disease in [his] life (...) Until then [he] had believed that men were divided into two groups, the dirty and the virtuous, and the dividing line was precisely the appearance or absence of that drop."

so the narrator runs into her from time to time, though he dares not speak with her. Thus, one morning, and for the first time in the novel, the narrator has to stop in the middle of doing his work, because that is the moment he finds out that the woman at work is the same woman from the report:

> Vaya sorpresa la que tuve cuando esa mañana me enteré de que una mujer guapa y misteriosa, a la que apenas veía de vez en cuando recorrer los pasillos del palacio arzobispal, era la misma chica cuyo testimonio yo estaba corrigiendo y que me había conmovido a tal grado que no pude terminar la tarea de un tirón y había preferido salir al patio del palacio con el propósito de tomar aire.[92] (107)

Not being able to withstand the horror of the report any longer, the narrator breaks, his ill psyche gives and he realizes that he is no longer immune mentally or physically. According to Steinberg, it is this loss of immunity that displaces the narrator "toward his almost total refuge in the quotations." (190) Not only that, the loss of the physical immunity and the beginning of the psychological autoimmunity, he can no longer appreciate the testimonial phrases of the report only for their poetic value. Now, for the first time, he has to face their enormous historical and political significance. With the revocation of the immunity that had protected him from the testimonies as a political signifier, the fragments articulate with increasing faithfulness the fear that haunts him and the specters of the tortured and killed indigenous Mayans that, for the first time in the

[92] "What a surprise [he] had that morning when [he] found out that a beautiful and mysterious woman, whom [he] barely saw from time to time walking the corridors of the archbishop's palace, was the same girl whose testimony [he] was correcting and who had moved [him] to such extent, [he] could not finish the task and had to leave the bishop's office to find some fresh air."

novel, start demanding justice. One of the phrases he repeats constantly fro that moment on condenses very well the traumatic reality of bearing witness. One of the surviving indigenous women utters: "Herido sí es duro quedar, pero muerto es tranquilo" ("It is indeed hard to be wounded, but it is peaceful to die" 141). When explaining her ideas on traumatic experience and traumatic witnessing, Caruth posits a telling question: "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" (7) The indigenous woman's phrase, "It is indeed hard to be wounded, but it is peaceful to die" seems to eloquently illustrate the same point, that at the core of the traumatic survival experience there is "a kind of double telling," an "oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival." (7) Indeed, like the others that compile their testimonies in the report, the wounded indigenous woman has survived but has survived wounded, marked, violently touched by history[93]. As such the wounded survivors, but also the death through them, wound the narrator themselves via psychological autoimmunity, and start demanding less "hard" lives and memories as they actively haunt him and fully unravel rational paranoia, utterly traumatizing him.

By introducing the term "autoimmunity" to describe a democracy that self-destructs by establishing sovereign, homogeneous communities like the nation, Derrida proposes a metaphorical relationship between the human body and the body politic, a connection between the mental, the physical, and the national. However, conceptualizing the political body as a biological entity does not mean that autoimmunity necessarily provokes destructive consequences, as it does in the biological realm. Since in the

[93] Caruth recalls that "the original meaning of trauma" is the Greek word for wound, which originally refers to "an injury inflicted on a body." However, in its later usage, "the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind." (3)

political realm there is no such thing as absolutely immunity, because a totally immune democracy would be a lifeless democracy, autoimmunity develops democracy, it opens it up to difference and gives it life. As Derrida states,

> autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and *who* comes — which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect another, or expect any event (Rogues 152)

As the ill narrator of *Insensatez* shows, suffering from autoimmunity (a disease) implies for him an opening up to the suffering of others, of the indigenous victims whose testimonies he has been considering thus far almost exclusively from a detached, aesthetic point of view. Close to the end of the novel once he retreats to a secluded building in the countryside to give the report its finishing touches. There, however, the ghosts of victims and the traumatic voices of the survivors do not let him star in peace: "al cuarto día, debo reconocerlo, mi mente se me fue de las manos y no tuve ya un momento de sosiego (…) a grado tal que de pronto estuve fuera de mí, y cuando mis ojos no estaban repasando el texto en la pantalla era mi mente la que se transportaba al teatro de los hechos, y entonces ella ya no era mía" ("I must admit that in the fourth day my mind became loose and I did not have a moment of peace from then on (...) to such a degree that I was suddenly out of my mind, and when my eyes were not reviewing the

text detailing the massacres on the screen, my mind transported itself to the theater of events, because then my mind was no longer mine" 139).

This is the moment in the novel that several critics recognize as the narrator's psychotic break. Nanci Buiza and Misha Kokotovic call it a moment of "trauma" and "edge of insanity," respectively, while Christian Kroll-Bryce argues it demonstrates a "reasonable senselessness" appropriate for the chaotic violence still dominant within an increasingly neoliberal postwar Guatemala. Not in control of his body and especially of his mind, the narrator is taken along by it wherever it wants to go, the body gone, the mind taking over and fighting against itself, poisoning the memory with the spectacle of the tortured collective indigenous subject, laying death and mutilated in the national landscape. The ruin of the narrator's mind, however, implies a clear welcoming of difference, of the real weight of the phrases and testimonies, of a brutal national history that needs to be accounted for. In this sense, autoimmunity can be seen as closely related to the Derridean concept of "hospitality," with refers to an ethical relationship to alterity, an unconditional opening to and welcoming of the Other, even if "this unconditionality is a frightening thing, it's scary." (Politics and Friendship) Thus, at the end of the novel, the narrator arrives, through ethical illness, to a moment of political commitment. As Steinberg puts it, Castellanos Moya's novel therefore becomes "a rather conservative one, a novel circumscribed by the moral duty of restituting the politics of affective identification and their literary apparatus (testimonio)" (190). Indeed, there is something both pathetic and courageous in the narrator's development from hubris, individuality, and reason, to autoimmunity, the collective subject, and rational paranoia. Something that points to other possibilities or perhaps to a lack of possibilities. Ignacio Sánchez-Prado

writes that "The fundamental point here is that in Insensatez memory is not redemptive. The fact that the narrator must flee the country and that those responsible for the atrocities live in impunity shows its futility." (85) Moreover, according to Sánchez Prado,"by the time we get to [this] scene in which the editor himself howls like a sick animal, most readers of *Insensatez* have given up on him as a reliable narrator and witness, instead considering him to be a paranoid drunk." (82) However, the possibility of literary fiction haunts so-called truthful, responsible, serious testimony as its own autoimmune disorder possibility.

The indigenous collective subject that in the novel follows an anti-economic logic, not only recovers through his multiple testimonies the historical memory of the region, but he also represent the unportrayable, an anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, anti-market madness because, in his multiplicity, he is not a consumable subject. The narrator's editing of the broken discourse of a people rendered mad by political violence, displays before the reader an image of traumatic testimony not as a mere collection of facts, but as a figurative collection of meanings that reflect a moment of sociopolitical and subjective crisis. Castellanos Moya chooses to represent the indigenous collective subject as a reflection of himself, as paranoid, as mad, as one of society's most marginal members, as one who does not fit with the homogenizing ideals of the dictatorship or the market. Whether they are raped, killed, relegated to the countryside, condemned to wandering the national landscape, or locked in prisons and psychiatric hospitals, indigenous victims and survivors are invisible. This is why the narrator's final autoimmune act is important, because with it he shows that the only way of witnessing

and narrating paranoid, traumatic voices, is by adopting a paranoid, traumatic voice of his own, a poetics of the limits and scope of witnessing.

To put in in terms of Hannah Arendt's terms, via their ghostly, traumatic experiences, the paranoid narrator and the indigenous collective subject, both reveal the lie of the political sphere. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt suggests that the public sphere is the instance in which man acquires a political dimension and exerts his capacity for acting and thus creating something new. But the political sphere is not only the site of action but also the site for its remembrance, since "The root of the ancient estimation of politics is the conviction that man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action, and that these activities, despite their material futility, possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance."[94] (207-208) That remembrance, however, key for the developed life of politics, is called into question by, paradoxically, the very public sphere in which it's born. As Arendt points out in "Truth and Politics", the public realm eventually and inevitably becomes a site of deception, an instance in which the remembrance of politics is distorted or covered by the deliberate lie of politics, a place in which takes place "the clash of factual truth and politics, which we witness today in such a large scale" (236). Furthermore, Arendt points out that truth-telling seems to be, in a way, less political than lying, since lying involves a deliberate action –and a speech act– intended to change something in the world, to change history, and therefore it is seen as a quintessential characteristic of politics in the individual level. But there is a point in which the individual lie, capable of action itself and thus useful in the interest of politics, grows to a point in which it envelops the whole of society and stops serving politics, starts mass-

rewriting history and aims to the loss of reality, a feature of totalitarian regimes. Castellanos Moya's paranoid subjects, however, are neither truth-tellers nor liars. The collective subject's broken speech, reflection of his broken mind, appears abruptly and incontinently to conform an exasperating and beautiful haunting narrative. And yet, through the poetic confusion, meaning and some form of truth are conveyed. This happens because madness distorts truth in a different way than the political lie. Madness is an un-deliberate distortion, the unknowing, innocent modification of history. It occupies another category and works differently in the public sphere, almost creating a third type of narrative, a paranoid discourse that functions compulsively between political truth and lies, creating something new but in un-deliberate ways, acting unwillingly.

Obliterated by the military dictatorship, years of Civil War, and later by the narrator, the truth becomes the ghost of truth, a ghost of the testimonial possibilities that in the novel is translated as literature or poetry. This is somewhat an act of injustice for the indigenous victims: when their speech is spectralized they become spectral themselves. The only way to, while maintaining their spectral aura, returning the necessary solidity to them and to their testimonial words, is for the narrator, the mediator or "listener," to accept the arrival of paranoia and trauma within him, to open himself up to that terrible difference through which he starts the long process of doing justice to an unjustly treated people and an unjustly treated national community. The narrator's mission, then, is a double mission. On the one hand, he must be able to notice, and establish links with, the spectral aura of the human rights report with which he works, which is the same spectral aura that defines as unresolved the drama of the indigenous victims and survivors of the military genocide in Guatemala. On the other hand, the

narrator must accept that, in order to begin to resolve that which is unresolved within the indigenous collective subject, and in order not to remain in the same comfortable mestizo and petit bourgeois bubble that is for him a place of profound immunity and profound lack of life, he needs to accept rational paranoia in his life, he needs to open up his mind and surrender it, thus to be able listen to a traumatic history and let it become flesh in him. This, I believe, constitutes both his surrender and his victory.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO AND THE FACELESS DIASPORA

One of the inaugurating epigraphs of *The brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), the first and until this date the only novel written by the Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz, (which with he won the Pulitzer prize) is a fragment of the poem "The Schooner Flight," by Derek Walcott. The fragment ends with a quartet of enigmatic verses that, through assonating rhyme, refer to the lengthy and complicated history of colonization in the Caribbean.

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

Indeed, in mentioning Latin America's violent tradition of slavery, the cultural indoctrination to which its populace was subject to, and the multiple colonial conflicts the region maintained and still maintains with different European powers, Walcott's verses are markedly transparent with respect to their Caribbean identity (Dutch, English,

African, and Indigenous). But, it is the final verse, perhaps, the one which most powerfully commands attention, since it remits to a node of meaning with various ramifications, from the reference to Greek tradition and Odysseus –who also calls himself "nobody" in the midst of his tribulations– to the representative impulse of the poetic voice, tensioned between the extremes of being "nobody" and "a nation." If the game or the dilemma of Caribbean identity is presented thusly by the poetic voice, as a tension between the poles of total representativity (the nation) and null representativity (nobody), a connection can be perceived, a line can begin to be drawn, between Walcott's text and the national situation, or the national situations, of the Caribbean. Moreover, these situations would demand a total adherence of individuals to agglutinating national projects or an exclusion that would imply a total loss of identity.

It is not casual that Díaz chooses Walcott's poem to introduce his widely acclaimed novel, which proposes, among other ideas, a new perspective on the issue of Caribbean identity, critically related to a phantasmagoric expansion of national projects beyond their original territories. The characters of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Dominicans and Dominican Americans, specifically bring to light the limits and scope of the national Dominican project, defined by the geographic territory occupied by the Dominican Republic – and the political and cultural dynamics of that territory – and also by the wave of immigrants which abandoned the country and started forming migrant communities in places like the United States. Diaz's novel eloquently shows how a nation like the Dominican Republic, defined by and against its periphery and what lies beyond it, is a project that, historically, while agglutinating dominant subjects in charge of narrating the past and dictating the destiny of their society, left others aside. As literary

critic José David Saldívar points out, "even long after the Trujillo dictatorship had ended in the 1960s, political democracy in the Dominican Republic continued, as Diaz suggests, to exclude and 'blank out' from the nation the social subjects like" the main characters of the novel, "La Inca, Belicia, Lola, and Oscar." (133)

"Oscar" is Oscar de León, a fat, shy, nerdy Dominican-American teenager born in the United States, who lives in Paterson, New Jersey during the eighties, is obsessed with fantasy novels and science fiction in all its forms, and is desperate to find love despite only getting rejected by girls. "Lola" is his rebellious, attractive, and popular Dominican-American older sister, who has a tense relationship with her mother and who feels responsible for Oscar and his hardships. "Belicia" is Belicia Cabral, or Beli, the Dominican-born mother of Oscar and Lola, a victim of the political violence of the Trujillo dictatorship, from which she flees at the beginning of the sixties to migrate to New York[95]. Finally, "La Inca" is Nena Inca, a Dominican-born older and experienced woman, Beli's aunt and responsible for raising her after rescuing her from a life of poverty and abjection, years after the dictatorship murdered her parents. La Inca is a mother for Beli and a grandmother for Oscar and Lola, who stay with her when they travel to the Dominican Republic on vacation or when they have the need to get away from New York.

[95] Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina was the dictator of the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination, in 1961. He held power first from 1930 to 1938, and then from 1942 to 1952, and ruled indirectly from 1938 to 1942, and from 1952 to 1961, manipulating puppet presidents. The three decades of his government are known as "el trujillato," and are considered one of the bloodiest tyrannies in Latin America. Trujillo's government was characterized by the repression of all opposition, the restriction of civil liberties, excessive levels of corruption, an illicit enrichment of the ruling elite, and constant violations of human rights. As Dominican journalist Diana Batista points out, Trujillo "sumergió el país en un estado de pánico" ("submerged the country in a state of panic") en el que "una muerte podía ser encubierta como un accidente y cualquier persona considerada molestosa para el régimen podía ser encarcelada y torturada en una de las cárceles clandestinas" ("a death could be disguised as an accident and anyone considered troublesome to the regime could be imprisoned and tortured in one of the clandestine prisons." *Hoy Digital*)

Formally and thematically complex, the novel moves between these two geographic poles, the United States and the Dominican Republic, it presents what Edwidge Danticat calls "a courageous patois from the streets of New Jersey, via the Spanish-speaking Caribbean," (*Bomb*) it creates an alphabet of witty neologisms, and it maintains an extensive series of literary and cinematographic references that encompass popular culture and concentrate on science fiction as a privileged way of expressing the fears, desires, longings and impulses of the protagonists. The varied registers of the narration allude to Timothy Brennan's description of the novel as a genre that replicates "the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles," and a genre that provokes that "previously foreign languages meet each other on the same terrain, forming an unsettled mixture of ideas and styles, themselves representing previously distinct peoples now forced to create the rationale for a common life." (49) But in the context of Diaz's work, the nation represents not the nucleus but one of two nuclei or centers of the Dominican literary and sociopolitical experience. The other, as announced from the very beginning of the novel, and as Walcott's poem suggests, is diaspora. As critic Elena Machado Sáez indicates when mentioning the poem, the novel refers to "the labeling of diasporic subject as either 'nobody' or 'a nation.'" (524) Thus, working on the basis of this binary division, the novel creates a central opposition, since "the distancing of the diaspora from the nation sets up a parallel opposition between liberation and oppression, diversity and homogeneity." Thus, "in order to structure the relationship of the diaspora to the nation in binary terms, the essence of diasporic consciousness becomes defined as Other, as purely marginal." (525)

Before the defined and celebrated form of the nation ("I'm a nation"), Diaz's novel proposes a correlate of Dominican history that, during the twentieth century, and especially from 1960 until today, exposed the failures of the Dominican national project in the form of a massive diaspora. In other words, in the form of Dominicans who left and still leave the country ("I'm nobody") and who, in doing so, become "Other[s]," peripheral subjects. However, this chapter does not intend to propose a reading that privileges diaspora over the nation as a form of sociopolitical organization, although this is an often-repeated critical interpretation[96]. Nor does it intend to return to the trope of foundational fictions, which adopt the national paradigm as the basis of an erotic that relates political history and literature ("national romances"). On the contrary, what this chapter aims to show are the ways in which both the Dominican national and the Dominican diasporic projects, in and outside *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, are marked by a traumatic history of colonization and by a specter of ethnic and political violence, and thus prevent the coagulation of any sociopolitical communities except for a ghostly community.

Tainos and Fukú Americanus

The plot of this multigenerational story of Dominican Diaspora can be summarized in a few lines. After surviving his high school years, Oscar de León –called

[96] For a detailed analysis of critical approaches to the novel that privilege diaspora as a manifestation of diversity capable of challenging the narratives of the nation-state, see Elena Machado Sáez's "Dictating Desire, Dictating Diaspora: Junot Diaz's The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao as Foundational Romance."

Oscar Wao by friends and acquaintances– starts studying at Rutgers University, where his problems with girls continue:

> He had secret loves all over town, the kind of curly-haired, big-bodied girls who wouldn't have said boo to a loser like him. His affection (…) broke his heart each and every day. Despite the fact that he considered it this huge sputtering force, it was actually more like a ghost because no girl ever seemed to notice it. Occasionally they might shudder or cross their arms when he walked near, but that was about it. (23)

A ghost in front of whom the girls tremble, Oscar's obsession grows at the same pace as his spectral nature, while his love for genre literature and films deepens and his depression about his catastrophic social life intensifies to the point of attempting suicide. There, in Rutgers, is where he meets Yunior de Las Casas, a Dominican-born "player" who is Oscar's polar opposite: he is popular, sociable, athletic, and has an overwhelming success with women, whom he uses and leaves without regard. There, in Rutgers, Yunior, who is revealed as the narrator of the novel, tries to indoctrinate Oscar in the appropriate –traditional– ways of Dominican men, but Oscar being Oscar he does not succeed. After college, Oscar gets a job as a substitute teacher at his old high school, and in his free time he dreams of writing a long science fiction epic and develops more secret crushes. His attempts of establishing a relationship with a woman all fail or do not go beyond maintaining friendships that eventually, for different reasons, end up falling apart. Finally, seeing that he does not have options for personal growth, Oscar decides to travel

to the Dominican Republic, where he falls in love with Ybon, a prostitute who is older than him and in whom he finds, in the end, some form of reciprocity. This, however, causes serious problems, because Ybon is dating a savage local police captain who, when finding out about Oscar's infatuation, commands a pair of subordinates to kidnap him and take him to a sugarcane plantation, where he is beaten almost to dead. After the beating, which unambiguously recalls a similar situation experienced by Beli, his mother, years before, Oscar is taken back to New York where, after a few months of recovery and making plans, he begins, for the first time, and in a radical way, to change of life. He loses a lot of weight, hardens his will and, rebelling against his family's mandates, decides his own destiny. This destiny takes him back to Santo Domingo, where once again Oscar contacts Ybon and declares his love for her, before which she first gets scared and eventually recognizes that she also has feelings for him. Finally, facing their mutual revelation of love, the couple has sex for the first time, aware that they have no future because the police captain is after them. Eventually, through his subordinates, the captain finds them; he drags Ybon away from Oscar and beats her, and he orders Oscar's murder, which happens in the sugarcane fields.

Interspersed with the episodes of Oscar's life, the novel presents flashbacks and secondary narratives that focus on Lola, who narrates a long disagreement she has with Beli, her mother; and in Beli herself, who during her younger years in the Dominican Republic has an affair with a married man related to the Trujillo family, a relationship that ends with her being brutally beaten by agents of the dictatorship in the sugarcane plantations. The choice of this space, the sugarcane plantations, as the scene of repeated violence is not accidental. Sugarcane was first introduced in Hispaniola –the great

Caribbean island today divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic– by the Spaniards, a few years after having landed there after the "discovery" of America. The INAZUCAR (Instituto Azucarero Dominicano / Dominican Sugar Institute) states in its official website that "la historia de la industria azucarera de República Dominicana se remonta al año 1505. El primer ingenio que produjo azúcar de caña en escala comercial se instaló en San Cristóbal en el año 1517 y exportaba el azúcar a España. Para 1520 funcionaban tres ingenios de azúcar. En el año 1527 trabajaban plenamente 19 ingenios y 6 trapiches" ("the history of the sugar industry in the Dominican Republic dates back to 1505. The first mill that produced cane sugar on a commercial scale and exported it to Spain was opened in San Cristóbal in 1517. By 1520 three sugar mills were operating in the country. In 1527, 19 sugar mills and 6 trapiches were fully operational"). From the beginning, plantations and sugar fields were designed and owned by the colonizing project, and contributed to create an elitist economy led by white and mestizo elites. Sugarcane plantations, moreover, are a historical space of racial segregation and imperialist and capitalist violence, and in Díaz's novel they are shown as the scenario in which the Dominican dictatorial regime, first, and the democratic but authoritarian regime, afterwards, concentrate and demonstrate their power. Thus, after unwittingly provoking Trujillo's dictatorial regime by having an affair with Trujillo's sister's husband, Beli is brutally beaten in a plantation and the baby inside her is killed, sometime in the year 1960. Outside the novel but also in the sugarcane fields and in the same year, the Mirabal sisters were infamously murdered by Trujillo, who would not allow their political activism opposed to his rule. Finally, there too, in the plantations and back in the novel, is where Oscar is beaten first and murdered later, no longer by members or

associates of the dictatorship, but by Ybon's police captain boyfriend, an authoritarian figure who represents an extension of the political past.

In all cases the figure is similar: both Beli, in 1960, and Oscar, circa 1996, fall in love with people who are already in relationships. Beli falls in love with The Gangster, Trujillo's sister's husband, and Oscar with Ybon, Santo Domingo's police captain's girlfriend. This, however, does not deter them from continuing their infatuation. Therefore, when The Gangster and the police captain find out about the situation, they separately order their subordinates to kidnap Beli and Oscar, to take them to the plantations, and to strike them down. As though following an inescapable destiny, a compulsive fate, in 1996 the son repeats the mother's 1960 journey. Both are rebellious figures that flagrantly oppose authority, prolonging without being able to avoid it the repetition "at the heart of catastrophe," that emerges, as Cathy Caruth indicates, "as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one can not simply leave behind." (2)

In the novel, this traumatic repetition echoes long, painful history. In the first page the narrator begins to explain it in this terms:

> They say it first came from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims (…) In Santo Domingo, the

> Land He Loves Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name out loud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours (1)

Fukú is the name with which Yunior, the narrator of the novel, like Dominicans in general, know the curse resulting from the colonial arc that goes back to the arrival of Columbus to America. On the one hand, this *fukú americanus*, the force unleashed by the European genocide and originated in the Conquest of 1492, turns out to be a spell that goes beyond the unity of the nation-state and focuses on the "Antilles," the Caribbean territory where Columbus landed for the first time in what was called "the new world" and that, since then, was marked by the weight and violence of colonization. On the other, t=it is important to note that the curse "first came from Africa," which is to say that it has a tradition linked to the slave history of the Caribbean. And not only that, there is also the fact that fukú "was the death bath of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began.[97]" Thus, while the world that was being extinguished was the indigenous world, under the same impetus with which the colonizers and slavers chained and extinguished the African world, there was another worldcoming into being, the European colonizer world, which in a few decades practically extinguished the indigenous presence in the Caribbean.

[97] As argued by M. J. Fenwick, "Quisqueya is the legendary pre Colombian name of the Dominican Republic, the second largest island in the Caribbean once inhabited by people who called themselves the Taino, a culture formed from the historical synthesis of several ancient societies which had migrated over the centuries from South and Central America. The Tainos on Quisqueya were distinguished as five separate kingdoms which shared the island in relative comfort and peace." (15)

When Columbus arrived in America for the first time and landed on the island of Hispaniola, the Taino population who received him were many and very welcoming, as Columbus himself pointed out in his diaries[98]. According to historian Andrés Reséndez, contemporary historians posit variating numbers for the estimated population of Hispaniola at the time of first contact, "ranging from one hundred thousand to ten million." However, although the number of natives living in Hispaniloa when the colonizers arrived is debatable, it is difficult to doubt the massive genocide that followed it afterwards. "By the 1550s, a mere sixty years, or two generations, after contact, the Natives were memorably described by Columbus as 'affectionate and without malice' had ceased to exist as people and many Caribbean islands became eerie uninhabited paradises." (13) The causes of this devastating depopulation are clear: on the one hand epidemic disease has been thought of perhaps the main factor[99]. On the other, there is a profound disconnect between this biological explanation, that has generally been assumed to be the main cause of indigenous mortality in the Caribbean, and the reports of 16th century European travelers and migrants. According to Reséndez, Bartolomé de Las Casas, who arrived in America in 1502, indicated that "greed was the reason Christians murdered on such a vast scale, killing anyone and everyone who showed the slightest sign of resistance, and subjecting all ills to the harshest and most iniquitous and brutal slavery that man has ever devised for oppressing his fellow-men."(14) Of the two

[98] Addressing the Catholic king and queen, Columbus refers that the Taino indigenous people "Son gente de amor y sin codicia, y convenibles para toda cosa, que certifico a vuestras altezas que en el mundo creo no hay mejor gente ni mejor tierra: ellos aman a sus prójimos como a sí mismos, y tienen un habla la más dulce del mundo y mansa y siempre con risa" ("are a loving, selfish people, manageable for anything, and I can certify before your highness that there is no better people and no better land: these men love their fellow men as much as they love themselves; they speak the sweetest, gentlest tongue; and they are prone to laughing." Quoted in de Las Casas 285)

[99] For a critical compendium of the authors who consider epidemics as determining factors in the mortality of indigenous Americans after the arrival of Columbus, see Reséndez's *The Other Slavery. The Uncovered History of Indian Enslavement in America*.

hundred thousand or three hundred thousand Taino indians who inhabited the island of Hispaniola when Columbus arrived and unleashed the fukú, "that figure had fallen to 60,000; by 1514 it stood at merely 26,000, according to a fairly comprehensive census; and by 1517 the number had plunged to just 11,000." (16) Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to point out that the extinction of the natives of the island was due, in addition to the diseases, to the practice of an all-out war, slavery, famine and exploitation. It does not come as a surprise that King Ferdinand the Catholic, monarch of Spain during the Conquest and, perhaps, "el hombre mejor informado de su tiempo" ("the most informed man of his time"), pointed out that the high number of natives killed during the first years of the Contact was due to the fact that, "Lacking beasts of burden, the Spaniards had forced the Indians to carry excessive loads until they broke them down." (14)

Not only that. Facing the Spanish onslaught and the death of many of its community members, and before the passage of time and their inevitable subjugation under their colonizers, the Taino of Hispaniola began to intermingle with them. Indigenous women began to relate to conquistadors and, thus, the genes of the formerly called Old World and New World began to combine to create a mestizo race and a Caribbean people, which with the subsequent arrival of African slaves, during the first decade of the 16th century, developed what we now know as Creole characteristics. According to Robert M. Poole, by 1514, just two decades after the arrival of Columbus, "an official survey showed that 40 percent of the men had taken Indian wives, and the unofficial number is undoubtedly higher.[100]" In the face of the indigenous Taino

[100] However, despite the indigenous genocide unleashed by the first Contact, and despite being practically decimated, the Taino population managed to survive for centuries after the Conquista. Thus, as Poole

genocide, that inaugurates a traumatic cycle with the institutionalization of death as an instrument of conquest, mestizaje (miscegenation) reveals itself as a possibility to solve the unsolvable equation of conquerors and conquered. Moreover, as it should be clear, the indigenous population was never extinct but survived, on the periphery of colonial Caribbean society, to this day. And Tainos did it not only as an ethnic group but, above all, as a culture that remains present in the social practices and beliefs of the contemporary Dominican community. Thus, today's Dominican Republic is composed of a majority of mestizos, and a minority of Tainos and Afro-Dominicans, although many traditional Taino customs and life dynamics are present in all of these groups.

In this line, anthropologist Pedro J. Ferbel points out that "The Dominican Republic often uses its indigenous name of 'Quisqueya' as a common reference, and Dominicans like to call themselves 'Quisqueyanos.'" (4) Not only that, the Taino word is also present in the first verses of the Dominican national anthem: "Quisqueyanos valientes, alcemos/ Nuestro canto con viva emoción…" ("Brave Quisqueyans,/ Let's raise our song with vivid emotion..." 4) The presence of indigenous words in the pantheon of Dominican national symbols is another expression of Taino durability in the Caribbean. In other words, the colonial curse of fukú did not eradicate the native imaginary from the Dominican Republic, although, as it is evident in Diaz's novel, "many Dominicans claim that it is bad luck (fukú) to say the name Christopher Columbus aloud and that Isabella, one of the first Spanish settlements on the north coast of the island, is haunted by Spanish ghosts." (13) It is important to note this spectral mark on the Dominican horizon considered "post-indigenous," since the arrival of the colonial fukú is not only a curse but

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points put in the Smithsonian Magazine, "A recent nationwide genetic study established that 15 percent to 18 percent of Dominicans had Amerindian markers in their mitochondrial DNA, testifying to the continued presence of Taíno genes."

also, literally, the beginning of a very long and very complex process of haunting, in which the times and spaces of the indigenous Caribbean were at once disjointed, and in which the possibility of public action of its inhabitants was displaced by their specific way of dying and disappearing, and also of surviving.

Furthermore, the fukú in the novel is identified by Yunior as an all-encompassing curse (a haunting) that, in addition to having a five hundred year history, is still a current drive:

> But the fukú ain't just ancient history, a ghost story from the past with no power to scare. In my parents' day the fukú was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in. Everybody knew somebody who'd been eaten by a fukú, just like everybody knew somebody who worked up in the Palacio. It was in the air, you could say, though, like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about. (2)

The history of colonization to which the inhabitants of Hispaniola were subjected, what Yunior in the novel calls "the Great American Doom," (5) did not end with the Spanish occupation. Years later, it was furthered by two United States invasions, one that began in 1916 and lasted until 1924, and a second that started during the civil war and ended later the same year. As noted by Yunior about the latter, "as the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, LBJ launched an illegal invasion of the Dominican Republic (April 28, 1965). (Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq)." (4) Moreover, between both American invasions, between 1930 and 1961, "fukú had it good; it had a

hypeman of sorts, a high priest, you could say. Our then dictator-for-life Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse's servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an undertanding, that them two was tight". (2) In those terms, while Yunior defines fukú as a violent colonial bane, "the ghastly horror, and genocide between people living in what we today call the Global North and the Global South," (Saldívar 126) he also suggests that fukú had his own "high priest" or "hypeman" in the figure of Trujillo, whom he also calls throughout the novel "our Sauron," "Arwan," and "our Darkseid,[101]" a character so perverse that "not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up." Between genre fiction and enslaving colonialism –which in the novel is related to the cultivation of sugarcane and a traumatic repetition of stories in the Cabral family–, Trujillo stands on the Dominican national horizon, both inside and outside Díaz's work, as the haunting personification of fukú, the senior officer of a historical curse that, from his arrival to power in 1931, acquires a renewed savagery.

Literary critic Dixa Ramírez points out that "both Trujillo and Columbus have a similar relationship to occult power." (131) A quick historical revision makes it clear. Trujillo's profoundly authoritarian nature, his fondness for violence and his predilection for kidnapping, torturing and murdering subversives and opponents, which became an official manifestation of the Dominican state in his decades in power, were not limited to be exerted over the body of the nation and the bodies of the citizens, but they were also "a contest over the social imagination." (Saldívar 129). That is, over the collective

[101] In order, these three are fantasy, mythological, and comic books characters. Sauron is the main villain in *The Lord of the Rings* saga; Arawn is the king of the Otherworld in Welsh legends; and Darkseid is one of Superman's main antagonists.

imaginary of the country[102]. Thus, Trujillo's dictatorial impulses systematically modified not only the Dominican ideological horizon but also its psychic dimension, what Jung calls the collective unconscious. Along these lines, as critic Lauren Derby argues, unlike the crimes committed by the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, the kidnappings and murders that took place in the trujillato "were typically public affairs," since the government's minions and spies patrolled the capital with impunity "in their black Volkswagen beetles," creating the feeling that "Trujillo was always watching." (2) Indeed, this surveillance is markedly present in the novel. In the chapter "Santo Domingo Confidential," Yunior states that "it would be hard to exaggerate the power Trujillo exerted over the Dominican people and the shadow of fear has cast throughout the region." (224) Moreover, he indicates that the dictator acted as though the country

> was his very own plantation, acted like he owned everything and everyone, killed whomever he wanted to kill, sons, brothers, fathers, mothers, took women away from their husbands on their wedding nights and then would brag publicly about 'the great honeymoon' he'd had the night before. His Eye was everywhere; he had a secret police that out-Stasi'd the Stasi, that kept watch on everyone, even those who lived in the States (225)

[102] When Edwidge Dandicat interviews Díaz about his novel and the role that Trujillo has in it, Díaz states that "Trujillo's real writing (...) was done on the flesh and psyches of the Dominican people. That tends to be that the Trujillos of the world are truly invested in, and it's the kind of writing that lasts far longer and resonates far deeper than many of its victims would care to admit. I do not think there's a Dominican writer, past or present, who's matched the awful narrative puissance that Trujillo marshaled; his 'work' deformed, captured, organized us Dominicans in ways we can barely understand, and this 'work' has certainly outlasted his physical existence." (*Bomb*)

In effect, not only does Yunior point out a clear connection between Trujillo and other mythological and fantastical characters, but also, as Saldívar points out, "a prominent psychologist who directed a mental hospital during the Trujillo period had even argued that, as a result of the regime, paranoia became a national characteristic" (2).

I propose to read this paranoia as Anne McClintock defines it, as an "inherent contradiction with respect to power: a double-sided phantasm that oscillates precariously between deliriums of grandeur and nightmares of perpetual threat, a deep and dangerous doubleness with respect to power that is held in unstable tension." (53) As I understand it, this does not mean that the Dominican Republic became sick with a psychological disorder, since in concrete terms "nations do not have a psyche." Or that all its inhabitants fell under the same diagnosis. Rather, as McClintock points out, a nation can be dubbed paranoid if its government and the people who command it come together as a sole entity "around contradictory cultural narratives, self-mythologies, practices, and identities that oscillate between delusions of inherent superiority and omnipotence, and phantasms of threat and engulfment." (53) In that line, we can view Trujillo as a paranoid master lost in a delirium of self-adoration and all-consuming violence, and the Dominican nation as a paranoid community which is capable, consciously or unconsciously, of shining some light into the dark, spectral spots of authoritarian rule.

If paranoia became one of the distinctive features of the country during the dictatorship years, the problematic fact that Trujillo represented, as Yunior indicates, "the very embodiment of the nation," (3) implied that the Dominican nation, and not just the Dominican state, was in direct pursuit of its citizens. That means that some of the national community's practices and beliefs aimed to slow them down and annul them in a

dynamic of repeated violence, thus breaking one of the fundamental bases of the social project. Moreover, this institutionalized paranoia and secrecy, in addition to generating a traumatized national consciousness, created what Derby calls "an intense rumor culture about what truly motivated the hidden recesses of power and a hermeneutics of suspicion owing to the fact that little real information trickled down to the masses." (4) Between enhanced suspicion and three decades of no real data about the procedures and disquisitions of the government, a complex legend began to form around Trujillo and his immediate circle of trust, a legend or a mythical apparatus rife with fantastical features. Thus, "as Trujillo's inner sanctum became a virtual secret society, the veil of invisibility appeared to augment the powers within," in the same extent that the secrets "appear to grow in force as well as form. Secretism thus generated popular narratives about the occult ad even magical powers of the ubiquitous yet invisible inner circle." (4) As Yunior points out in the novel, "Dominicans are Caribbean and therefore have an extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomena." (149) Therefore, halfway between authoritarianism and magical thinking, fukú morphed into a colonial curse that managed to inscribe in the Dominican Republic some nationally shared features: paranoia, traumatic reflexes, a mythical imagination and a spectral aura. Finally, it comes as no surprise that Trujillo, the senior priest of the curse, was seen, according to Yunior, as though he "had supernatural powers! It was whispered that he did not sleep, did not sweat, that he could see, smell, feel events, hundreds of miles away, that was protected by the most evil fukú on the island." (226)

As Ramírez points out, throughout Trujillo's years in power it was rumored that he had the help of a "muchachito" (little boy), though it was likely that the muchachito

was actually a baká. “A baká is a malevolant spirit that surrounds and protects the property of its owner under the appearance of an animal.” However, as it happens, “bakás are not always clearly instruments of evil.” (131) There are a number of instances in Díaz’s novel when this is seen. For example, when Beli, Oscar’s mother, encounters “a creature that would have been an amiable mongoose if not for its Golden lion eyes and the absolute black of its pelt” (149) in the cane fields, after being savagely beaten and almost killed by Trujillo´s henchmen. And the encounter, according to Ramírez, “is either fortuitous in that she survives a near-death experience, or catastrophic, in that her life following the event is filled with hardsip.” (131) Furthermore,

> The discourse surrounding bakás in Dominican popular culture and in texts like Oscar Wao suggests that they are otherworldly manifestations of historical trauma. The mongoose comes to stand as the “wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.” (Caruth 4) Throughout the novel, the mongoose appears in moments that echo earlier violent events in places as historically “charged” as sugarcane fields. It appears, for example in the description of Oscar’s dream after his first beating in the cane fields. (132)

The mongoose, then, would act in *Oscar Wao* as the animal and mythical incarnation –baká– of the historical trauma of colonialism in all its forms, the fukú that haunts the Dominican Republic, and the Dominican characters in the novel, from Columbus to Trujillo, and even after Trujillo.

However, how exactly does the fukú begin to focus on Oscar's family in the novel? How did change from being, as Yunior indicates, "a ghost story from the past" to be a spectral story of the present? *Oscar Wao* shows that the arrival of fukú in the family of the protagonists began in the 1940s, when Dr. Abelard Luis Cabral got on Trujillo's bad side by denying him his beautiful teenage daughter. At this point it is important to mention another one of Trujillo's main characteristics, to which the novel makes constant mention, the fact that he was well known and feared "for fuckig every hot girl in sight, even the wifes of his subordinates, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of women." (2) The demonstration of an insatiable and absolutely heteronormative sexuality, coupled with the fearsome repressive apparatus of the dictatorship, and the fact that Trujillo was famous "for expecting, no, *insisting* on absolute veneration from his people (tellingly, the national slogan was 'God and Trujillo')," (2) implied that when he had someone in sight –a political enemy to eliminate or a woman on whom to unleash his sexual desire– that someone could immediately consider him/herself lost. Certainly, in the novel Trujillo represents at the same time the Dominican nation and the archetype of the hyper-sexualized Dominican male. That is, the polar opposite of Oscar, who despite his best attempts remains a virgin throughout the novel, who is deeply affected by these rejections that imply a failure in meeting the standards of Dominican manhood, and who because of his sentimentality is constantly denied his nationality, his ethnic and cultural roots. Oscar is constantly being told "Tú no eres nada de dominicano" ("You are no Dominican" 180) because, according to Machado Sáez, his virginity and sentimentality "invalidate his claim to Dominican masculine identity." (536)

Back to the family's first doomed days, in the early 1940s, Dr. Abelard Cabral, a successful and respected doctor and intellectual who lived in Santo Domingo, could not stand the attention that Trujillo began to show for his eldest daughter, so when he received the invitation –the order– to take her to a ceremony in which the dictator would be present, he refused to do so and, thus, everything began. According to Saldívar, Yunior, the narrator of the novel, "records in his inimical style how the subaltern 'folk' believed that 'not only did Trujillo want Abelard's daughter, but when he could not snatch her, out of spite he put a fukú on the family's ass. Which is why the terrible shit happened.'" (129) But the colonial curse that has led some critics (Saldivar, Lazendorfer) to recognize magical realism traits in *Oscar Wao*, had a very realistic history and development. Trujillo ordered his military police to have the doctor arrested and falsely charged with acts of "slander and gross calumny against the Person of the President." (239) And once he was secure in prison, the doctor's "prison guards proceeded to inform the other prisoners that Abelard was a homosexual and a Communist." (239) As Saldivar argues, Abelard's violated body "can not be separated from the neo-fascist turn under the Trujillato, since it was through the severe punishment of men and women that the military state imposed its projects of discipline, heteronormativity, and anti-communism." (128) Therefore, the first traumatic assault on the Cabral family, which consisted both in the torture and imprisonment of bodies and the snatching all the family's properties, is how fukú anounced itself to the Cabrals.

The product of a nation-wide, if not Caribbean-wide, authoritarian traumatic drive, the despotic reach of Trujillato started to repeat itself systematically in Dominican society and even survived Trujillo himself, who after three decades of dictatorship was

assassinated in May 1961[103]. Despite his death, the colonial curse remained and remains a repetitive violent gesture, a radical dislocation of Dominican time and spaces that, at the same time, presently constitutes a postdictatorial, neoliberal stage in Dominican history, and mourn a free, democratic life that Dominican society never really had. Thus, while the origins of fukú can be traced back to 1492, and while it remained present as a colonial impulse in the thirty one years of Trujillo's dictatorship, as Hanna, Harford Vargas, and Saldivar point out, fukú was "ever-present in the haunting afterlife of the Trujillato on the island, and in the 1980s Reagan-era United States of Oscar's and Lola's youth, and it still persists today." (7) In that sense, to understand what the characters of Díaz's novel experience in fiction and, furthermore, to get a glimpse of the historical violence of which Dominican citizens were and are victims, one should take into account "their traumatic personal and transgenerational memories of rape, torture, violence, and domination that [Díaz's] novel renders visible and central." (7) Moreover, as Diaz's novel eloquently shows through the idea of fukú, the uninterrupted practice of colonialism in the Dominican Republic and, strictly speaking, throughout Latin America, not only implied the subjugation of citizens to the mechanisms of the Conquest, the Colony, the first years of the republic, the three decades of Trujillo's dictatorship, and the later stage which continues to this day, "it also changed their knowledge of their world and forced them to adopt the mystified cognitive horizon of coloniality as their worldview." (Hanna, Harford Vargas, Saldivar 8)

Diasporic Nation

[103] Díaz offers a literary description of the ambush and the gun fight that lead to Trujillo's death in pages 154-155 of the novel.

This failure of the Dominican project, product of the scourge of Trujillato and the governments that succeeded it in the following decades, most of them in a similar though less authoritarian line, elicited a, conscious or unconscious, popular recognition of the crisis of the nation, and the consequent need to modify it. In the novel, for example, when Beli is still a teenager living in Santo Domingo, at the beginning of 1961, she has a very clear opinion about this crisis: "Dismissing her neighborhood as an 'infierno' and her neighbors as 'brutos' and 'cochinos,' she bragged about how she would be living in Miami soon, and would not have put up with this un-country much longer." (128) Moreover, Beli considers Santo Domingo, the country's capital, a place to scape from: "Her whole life she had tried to be happy, but Santo Domingo... FUCKING SANTO DOMINGO had foiled her at every turn. I never want to see it again." (163) Some weeks later, that same 1961, Beli indeed leaves the Dominican Republic and moves to the United States, just as hundreds of other Dominicans were embarking on the same journey. Thus, the formless entity that in the novel, and in the Dominican collective imaginary, began to displace the Dominican nation (that "un-country") as the hegemonic form of community, is the diaspora. With regard to the history of this entity, anthropologist and historian Jorge Duany indicates:

> Two main periods mark Dominican migration to the United States: before and after 1961. Under the three-decade dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1930–61), the Dominican government issued few passports — only 1,805 out of 19,631 applications in 1959. Trujillo's restrictive policies sought to prevent

> criticism of his regime and promote population growth in the Dominican Republic. Hence, the number of Dominicans abroad was extremely low (55)

Large-scale migration from the Dominican Republic began after Trujillo's assassination and the volume of Dominican migrants to the United States "multiplied tenfold between the 1950s and 1960s." (55) Afterwards, in 1963, "a coup d'état deposed the recently elected President Bosch, provoking a second wave of moderate and radical expatriates," which clearly points to the fact that the origins of Dominican mass migration "were rooted in political turbulence." (55) Not only was the country in a deep socio-political and economic crisis in those years, due to "the steep decline of sugar, coffee, and other traditional agricultural exports," but later, as a result of unemployment, the widespread informal economy and the high cost of living, "the 1980s were a lost decade for the Dominican economy." (58) Furthermore, during the 1990s, and since unemployment and poverty increased even more with the consolidation of neoliberalism, "emigration bec[a]me a common survival strategy for the lower and middle classes." (58) What's more, according to Duany

> the exodus reached unprecedented levels during the 1990s (…) The U.S. government admitted 365,545 Dominicans between 1990 and 1999 and 292,728 between 2000 and 2009 (…) In 2009 almost 7.5 million U.S. residents were of Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Dominican ancestry (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). This figure is equal to 29.8 percent of the combined populations of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Such large-scale population displacements have

> transformed daily life in the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean islands –from family structure and religious practices to businesses and political ideology. They have also reshaped the physical and cultural landscape of several U.S. neighborhoods, cities, and states. Their impact is most notable in New York City and Miami, their main ports of entry. (63)

This systematic relocation, which involves a literal partition of the Dominican population[104], constitutes a problematic diaspora since, like the Dominican national project, it is plagued by traumatic reflexes and ghostly instances that complicate it and prevent its consolidation as a communitarian horizon. The violent processes that lead Oscar and the other members of the Cabral family, and the rest of the characters of the novel, to be considered "doomed" or "haunted" by the curse of fukú, are not restricted to Díaz's book. Rather, in a gesture reminiscent of Frantz Fannon's *Les Damnés de la Terre*, these processes encompass the entire Dominican diaspora and constitute the traumatic history of the Caribbean. In the same way that Díaz historicizes the starting point of diasporic identity having first Abelard, then Beli, and then Oscar as subjects that the Dominican nation cannot assimilate, the second half of the twentieth century shows how diaspora encompasses a multitude of subjects nationally and diasporically unassimilable. In that sense, unlike famed theorists who read diaspora as "a counterculture to nationalist logics of exclusion," and who see in it "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity" that stands in opposition to the nation (Stuart Hall 235), diaspora is not a countercultural gesture opposed to the national paradigm. On the contrary, as *Oscar Wao*

[104] According to Duany, the 2009 census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that "1,356,361 persons of Dominican origin lived in the United States This figure represented 14.1 percent of the population of the Dominican Republic (9.7 million)."(169)

and the Dominican history of the 20th and 21st centuries portray, it is an entity plagued by traumatic instances and haunting dynamics that prevent the consolidation of any communitarian horizon capable of sustaining the lives of its citizens. Just like the national paradigm. This can be seen in the novel, for example, with Oscar and Yunior, the first the central character of the novel, a nerd without any social skills and a lost lover of women ("Tú no eres nada dominicano" / "You are no Dominican"), and the second the narrator of the novel and prototype of the Dominican male, a ladies man who founds his identity in the systematic exercise of a heteronormative sexuality ("I'm a nation"). Both characters are out of place in the Dominican Republic, Oscar being born in the U.S. and Yunior having migrated to the U.S. when he was a child. Both represent problematic, conflicting instances of sexuality within the Dominican diaspora. One for being a hopeless virgin and the other for being an excessive "player," neither is able to assimilate to the migratory community –because there is no possibility of assimilation within such an unstable, traumatic entity– or to live a happy life. Finally, both are haunted by their national past, by the Taino genocide, colonization, by Trujillato and its sequels, by an "un-country" that could not keep them in. As the novel shows, the Dominican diaspora is expressed through actions that follow the logic of consolidation of the nation, that is, demarcating and separating central subjects from peripheral subjects through an abusive sexuality, institutional violence, and an authoritarian ideology. Or, as Machado Sáez points out, "Yunior's relationship to Oscar is not one of solidarity but of competing diasporic identities (...) Even though Yunior and Oscar are both Dominican American men, the novel pits these characters, US-born versus immigrant, against each other." (525)

Political and cultural differences between diasporic subjects are marked and remarkable. As Duany argues, even thou they are often perceived as part of a homogeneous collective, "migrants from the Hispanic Caribbean often remain symbolically tied to their homelands in their new places of residence," and "they rename streets and schools, redecorate inner and outer spaces, and organize parades to celebrate their heritage." (66) Moreover, as Latino scholar Juan Flores states, "consciously and intuitively, personally and collectively, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans (…) most often project their respective national backgrounds as a first and primary axis of identity." (197) Thus, despite the fact that Caribbean diasporic subjects can settle in New York or Miami or any other city as part of a collective, the nucleus of their identity continues to be defined by their "national backgrounds," the nationality that extends its phantom reach beyond its geographical territory[105]. This difference is significant not only on an ideological and psychological level, but also on a material plane. According to Duany, socioecomomic indicators confirmed that Dominicans are one of the most underprivileged groups in the United States:

> In the 1980s Dominicans joined Puerto Ricans as one of the most stigmatized ethnic minorities in the United States. A host of popular films and television series has associated both groups with poverty, welfare abuse, urban blight, and crime. Journalistic reports routinely identify Dominicans as one of the main

[105] About this issue, in "Diasporic Dreams: Documenting Caribbean Migration" Duany refers to "the thorny question of whether Latinization is bringing together people from various Latin American countries in the United States." Reviewing a Latino filmmaker's work, he argues that "Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans remain deeply split by legal status, cultural practices, and mutual stereotypes." Furthermore, "many members of these groups perceive each other in largely negative ways (…) Unfortunately, interethnic rivalry often prevails over solidarity among Latinos in New York, San Juan, and elsewhere." (193)

> culprits of drug trafficking —especially the cocaine and heroin trade— along the U.S. northeastern corridor. Washington Heights is widely touted as "the crack capital" of New York City and even the United States[106] (…) The mainstream media portrayed New York's Dominican community as strange, disorderly, and dangerous. (Transnational Migration 77)

According to the information collected in the 2009 census, it was confirmed that Dominicanos "were more likely to be poor, live in female-headed households[107], and have lower levels of income, educational attainment, and occupational status than other major ethnic and racial groups, including African Americans and other Hispanics." (*Transnational Migration 71*) Moreover, Dominicans in New York City have been particularly marginalized "because of their low educational levels and limited English proficiency, as well as racial discrimination and the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy." (*Transnational Migration* 71)

In this difficult scenario that Yunior defines as "the loneliness of Diaspora," (164) diasporic Dominicans do not have many resources with which to consolidate their individual and communitarian identity, beyond instinctively resorting to their "homelands". While currently almost 44 percent of those relocated to the United States live in New York City, the Washington Heights neighborhood concentrates the single largest number of Dominicans outside the Dominican Republic. It is no surprise, then, as

[106] In Díaz's novel, the Washington Heights neighborhood is mentioned since the beginning as a Dominican concentration nucleus. It is also the place that Oscar visits a couple of times because that is where his sister, Lola, and Yunior are living together and in a relationship.
[107] In *Oscar Wao* all the main characters (Beli, when she is a teenager in Santo Domingo, and Oscar and Lola, when they are kids in Paterson, NJ) live in female-headed households. In all cases the father figure is absent.

Duany points out, that along its streets there are "Dominican-owned wineries, restaurants, bars, bakeries, beauty parlors, gypsy cabs, travel and remittance agencies, and retail stores, along with dozens of hometown clubs," which together create "the atmosphere of 'Quisqueya Heights,' as many Dominican residents call their neighborhood." (67) As mentioned before, Quisqueya is Hispaniola's pre-Columbian name, and its durability in the Dominican imaginary is evident as it is the unofficial designation of the largest concentration of Dominicans outside the Dominican Republic. Likewise, on the one hand, "since 1996 a local community festival [in New York city] has been dubbed 'Quisqueya on the Hudson.'" (67) On the other, "families had Spanish-language calendars with an image of the Virgin Mary (...) Others hung the Dominican flag or coat of arms in the living room. Many displayed the faceless ceramic dolls that have become emblems of the Dominican Republic (...) Such objects recreated the iconography of the Dominican Republic in Washington Heights." (176)

There is a clear connection between the pre-Columbian Tainos and contemporary Dominican migrants settled in Washington Heights and in other areas of the US territory and the world. A connection, not only analyzable through the lens of social sciences but, as Diaz's novel shows in its interpretation of the faceless doll figure, also very present in literature. In that vein, critic M.J. Fenwick comments that "even though the modern Dominican population has little racial or ethnic relationship with the ancient Taínos, the images of Quisqueya used in modern literature suggest a historical connection that is even more significant." (16) In the novel this is evident in the multiple mentions of the first contact between Tainos and Spaniards, and in the colonial dynamics that were generated at that moment, genesis of the fukú curse and the historical Dominican trauma.

Indeed, prominent Dominican scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant locates the genesis at the same point, "in the chain of historical events triggered in the Taino territory that became Santo Domingo by the fateful arrival on October 12, 1492 of Spanish ships headed by an Italian sailor." (15) Thus, the transnational vocation and the traumatic imprint of the Dominican Diaspora, in conjunction with the "racial fusions and cultural metamorphoses" that define it, "radically altered the socioeconomic visage and the existential options of people living worlds apart," both in Santo Domingo and in Quisqueya Heights.

Absent Dominicans

Since the Dominican diaspora comprises such a significant segment of the country's total population (practically 15%), it is natural that, for years, special migratory policies have regulated it, have assign it specific liberties and obligations, and have consider it a central segment of the Dominican people. At the same time, while a series of institutional practices began to be developed in the nation to deal with the diaspora, the language that designated the diaspora was also suffering mutations, casual and intentional transformations. Thus, in the same way that a New York City neighborhood started to be informally known as Quisqueya Heights, "during the past few decades, residents of the Dominican Republic coined the epithet 'Dominican-York' to describe Dominicans born or raised abroad, specially in New York City." (*Transnational Migration* 74) Nonetheless, as the term was perhaps too specific and limited the Dominican migrant experience not only to one country but to one single city, "in 1999 members of the

Dominican Congress proposed to officially eliminate the term Dominican-York and replace it with 'Dominicano Ausente' (literally, Absent Dominican)." (*Transnational Migration* 74) Moreover, on each December 20th the "Día del Dominicano Ausente" (Day of the Absent Dominican) is celebrated in the country. The festivity was officially established by the executive power on November 5, 1987, with the objective of remarking the contributions made to society by diasporic Dominicans.

This is not an insignificant fact because it implies a spectral gesture, the recognition and, in fact the celebration, of someone that is and is not there, already gone and always awaited. The term and the celebration proposed by the Dominican congress allude to "that which is paradoxically present and absent, already departed and imagined to arrive at some future time, that which has already been and is still yet to come." (Keller 5) Absent Dominicans, ghostly figures on the landscape of the nation, force us to think about the time and space of the nation –how are they organized? what are their limits and scope? who do they agglutinate and who do they leave aside?– Remembering a lost conational by enforcing his/her lack of presence, conjuring diasporic Dominicans by assigning them an 'absent' status, experiencing the fullness of the past while experiencing the emptiness of the present, results in an official mourning ceremony, a telling way of processing an immensurable loss of national life and national time. Absent Dominicans' clearly marked absence –their very present absence– constitutes a painful lack of life located deeply outside and deeply inside of the national soul. Furthermore, as a community, Absent Dominicans are spectral subjects who, as Avery Gordon indicates, have "a real presence and demands [their] due, your attention." (XVI) In that sense, their appearance is one way in which "we are notified that what is concealed is very much

alive and present, interfering with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed towards us." (XVI) With this in mind, it is possible to read the Dominican Diaspora literally as a ghost community, absent from the country, mourned and remembered, experienced at unison presently and in the past and, precisely for that reason, very much present. The "Day of the Absent Dominican," then, is the day that commemorates the present absence of those Dominican conationals who have left, unable to be accepted and subsumed by the nation, and who are at the same time right there, in the very soul of the nation, disjointing the tenuous, transnational space of the Dominican Republic.

Both in the country's history and in Díaz's novel, Dominicans make attempts "to be accepted, legible subjects who have fair access to political, economic, social, and cultural participation within national spaces (including the Dominican Republic, the U.S. and elsewhere), and within transnational or supranational imaginaries and histories such as Latin America and the Latino U.S. As has been previously discussed, the traumatic history of colonization that Dominicans endured and still endure, often counters those attempts through institutional violence, economic inequality, ethnic and cultural segregation and, in general, through a paranoid collective imaginary in which citizens home and abroad are prey of an exclusionist system. However, some official and unofficial instances that do recognize their material and spectral presence, still exists. In that sense, as Ramírez argues, artistic expressions like *Oscar Wao* portray the pressures, silences, violence, and sorrow of a history of colonization. These, in turn, signal what McClintock describes as "the ambivalent presence of ghosts," who "are fetishes of the in-

between, marking places of irresolution" and who "embody the unsettling prospect that the past can be neither foreclosed nor redeemed." (3)

Faceless

According to Gordon, haunting describes the ways in which abusive systems of power make themselves known, and make their impacts felt, in everyday life, especially when they are thought to be ended or when their oppressive nature is denied. Perhaps this, and the paranoid-traumatic dynamics that characterize Dominican national and diasporic communities, is best shown in *Oscar Wao* through one of its most enigmatic and meaningful figures: the specter, a shadowy faceless man who haunts the members of Oscar's family. First, the specter appears when Beli is still a young girl living in Santo Domingo circa 1959, in the midst of her affair with The Gangster which eventually ends up with Beli being cruelly beaten in the cane fields. In the scene, having been abandoned by her boyfriend after a fight, Beli is passing through "one of those god forsaken blisters of a community that frequently afflict the arteries between the major cities," when it suddenly happens: "Beli didn't know if it was the heat or the two beers she drank (…) but our girl could have sworn that a man sitting in a rocking chair in front of one of the hovels *had no face* and he waved at her as she passed but before she could confirm it the pueblito vanished into dust." (135) Menacing, evanescent, a featureless silhouette starts to haunt Beli. Right after this scene she finds out three things: that she is pregnant with The Gangster's baby, that The Gangster is married to Trujillo's sister, and that she is being hunted by Trujillo's sister and her men to make her pay for her affair. As Anne

Garland Mahler states, throughout the novel "the man without a face appears in moments of extreme violence when the family members experience the trauma of fukú in all its power." (122) Indeed, this enigmatic and anonymous character, who seems to be mysteriously present both in urban Santo Domingo in 1940s and in the rural countryside in the 1950s, and later on in New Jersey at the turn of the century, is an ominous figure related to violence. He seems to incarnate what Gordon mentions when defining the ghostly experience, "a frightening experience [that] always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present." (XVI) However, even more importantly, the faceless one, a man who could be anybody and who id everybody and nobody at the same time, a man who is both there and not there, a man in unison present and absent, a being with no recognizable being, is a paranoid entity by means of which something unseen but perceived, something that alters the experience of time and space, becomes present, acquires existential weight and stares back, eyeless, at Oscar's family members.

Gordon understands haunting as the "dense site where history and subjectivity make social life," and a ghost or an apparition as "one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way." (8) This is precisely the manner in which the faceless specter operates in Díaz's novel, offering us a look of the violent clash of a doomed national history and a series of characters barely aware of it, giving them, and the haunted reader, a glimpse of the monster –the traumatic colonial curse of fukú and the violent practices and beliefs that constitute national and diasporic culture–, showing us how it operates, both visible and invisible, behind and in front of the Dominican stage. In

the novel, after Beli's first experience with the specter, she feels him –it?– again when two of Trujillo's secret police agents kidnap her and take her to the plantations. Right before they beat her and kill her unborn baby, she screams: "Déjame (…) and when she looked up she saw that there was one more cop sitting in the car, and when he turned toward her she saw that he *didn't have a face*. All the strength fell right out of her." (141) A premonition of Beli's near-death beating and a reminder of previous episodes of violence she experienced as a child and a teenager, her second encounter with the specter functions as reassurance that haunting in the novel is a repetitive dynamic capable of folding time and bringing together past and present. Afterwards, deeply traumatic, the beating in the cane field is replicated some nights in which "there were nightmares of the cane, of the Faceless One." (161) However, these episodes are not purely traumatic because, as Gordon points out, unlike trauma haunting is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done. The ghostly haunt says "Something is making an appearance to you that had been kept from view. It says, Do something about the wavering present the haunting is creating." (178) Indeed, characters in the novel and throughout Dominican history have in fact heard this calling and have answered it. National and diasporic Dominicans have consciously tried to make themselves visible, legible, to make an appearance within social systems, political narratives and cultural manifestations that have erased them and misunderstood them, relegating them to a periphery when not an outside of the community. Thus, knowing that she needs to do something, and aware that the Dominican Republic has nothing to offer her but death, because she is one of its peripheral subjects, Beli decides to relocate, to leave the Dominican Republic, the "un-country" that has repeatedly marginalized her ("I never want to see it again" 163), and

starts a new life in New York City.

Another occasion, chronologically the first, in which the specter is visible in the novel and surfaces again as a nightmarish premonition, occurs immediately before Oscar's grandfather and Beli's father, Abelard Cabral, is imprisoned by the Trujillo regime for hiding his daughter from his sexual appetites, and the fukú is therefore unleashed upon the family. The night before Abelard is taken prisoner and his years of torture begin, his wife dreams about the ghost: "Socorro dreamt that the faceless man was standing over her husband's bed, and she could not scream, could not say anything, and then the next night she dreamed that he was standing over her children too." (237) After this, another Beli experience, this time presented as a memory from a childhood so distant that then she was not even called Belicia Cabral[108]. The man who poses as her father intentionally burns her with hot oil, and the traumatic memory returns ever since in compulsive dreams in which Beli "dreamt about the Burning, how her 'father's' face had turned blank at the moment he picked up the skillet." (261) It is clear that the association between the faceless specter and violence is unequivocal, though violence must be understood not just as physical or mental violence but as the product of the colonial curse of fukú, which has a distant origin in the Spanish colonizers' arrival to Hispaniola and the genocide of the Taino people.

Later in the novel, Oscar has an experience with the ghost himself when he too is savagely beaten, an assault that folds time and replicates in almost all details Beli's

[108] When her father, Abelard, is taken prisioner by the Trujillo regime and her mother disappears, Beli is practically a newborn, so she is taken by the military police and given to some distant relatives. Afterwards she is passed from those distant relatives to complete strangers who either buy baby Beli or accept her in exchange of something. Then she is passed around to strangers one more time, and lives in a remote rural location, in extreme poverty and being systematically abused by her 'parents,' until La Inca –who is Abelard's sister and, therefore, Beli's aunt– finds out about the situation and rescues Beli, bringing her back to Santo Domingo and into a more respectable life.

experience. Near the end of the novel, after travelling to Santo Domingo and, for the first time, starting something of a relationship with Ybon, a local prostitute engaged to a police Captain, he is kidnapped by two of the Captain's henchmen and driven to the cane. There, in the silence of the plantation, "he stared into the night, hoping that maybe there would be some U.S. Marines out for a stroll, but there was only an old man sitting in his rocking chair out in front of his ruined house and for a moment Oscar could have sworn the dude had no face." (298) Later that night, when he is being destroyed by the two henchmen in "the beating to end all beatings," (298) Oscar feels how "most of the time they took turns striking him, but sometimes they got into it together and there were moments Oscar was sure that he was being beaten by three men, not two, that the faceless man from in front of the colmado was joining them." (299) By virtue of its traumatic nature and by eliciting a need to do something, to politically act "when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done," (Gordon XVI) the Faceless One, a featureless personification of fukú and a harbinger of violence, acquires a ghostly status and, thus, systematically haunts the national and diasporic characters of the novel. Furthermore, as Garland Mahler indicates, Díaz's No Face man is clearly associated with the figure of Trujillo:

> The connection between the fukú, Trujillo, and the faceless man is revealed when Oscar associates the word 'fukú' to the English slang phrase 'fuck you.' Throughout the novel, Díaz refers to Trujillo as 'Fuckface' or in other words, fukú face, and when Trujillo is assassinated, he is symbolically shot in the face (ibid.). Since the faceless man personifies the fukú curse on the family and

> Trujillo's nickname is analogous with fukúface, this terrifying figure that haunts Oscar's family members can be understood as the ghost of Trujillo's faceless corpse. (123)

This connection is made explicit when Oscar, like so many Dominicans before him, finally falls to the terrifying reach of Dominican politics and social norms, neoliberal heirlooms of Trujillo´s regime –the fact that the specter appears systematically in and around sugarcane fields suggests a link to slavery and colonization–. Back in the United States, recovering from his beating, and not relinquishing what he considered his right to love Ybon despite her boyfriend –whom Ybon does not love, and who she is with because of a long history of machismo and female subjugation–, Oscar decides to go back to Santo Domingo and face his fears, among which there is the very real threat of being assaulted again, or worse. In preparation for the trip, and for the first time since childhood, Oscar looses a significant amount of weight and becomes relatively slender. Furthermore, "in addition to the fatboy becoming thin," the conclusion of the novel "provokes an inner transformation, one that allows Oscar to disregard the authority of his grandmother's 'Voice' and continue endangering his life by pursuing Ybon: 'Something had changed about him. He had gotten some power of his own." (536) However, his determination leads him unavoidably towards death. Once he declares his love to Ybon and after they spend a couple of days together, finally consuming the heterosexual love that makes Oscar, for the first time, a "real" Dominican, the Captain boyfriend decides that Oscar needs to be dealt with. Therefore, he commands his henchmen to kidnap Oscar again, take him one more time to the sugarcane fields, and this time end him. On their

way there, “they drove past a bus stop and for a second Oscar imagined he saw his own family (…) even his poor dead abuelo and his poor dead abuela, and who is driving the bus but the Mongoose and who is the cobrador but the Man Without a Face.” (321)

It has been mentioned before how some Dominican diasporic families settled in Quisqueya Heights, and in other parts of the United States and the world, displayed in their homes “the faceless ceramic dolls that have become emblems of the Dominican Republic.” (176) Featureless national symbols, these dolls known as “Muñecas Limé” were first created in the 1980s “but their significance carries with them a heritage that goes all the way back to the 16th Century” (Alba). Sculptor Liliana Mera Limé (hence the dolls’ name) first created these dolls with a blank face so that the lack of features would make them “a true symbol of the Dominican Republic, as it reflects the Dominicans’ mixture of African, European and Aboriginal identities, races and cultures – a result of numerous colonizations.” (Alba) With this in mind, the specter in the novel, a terrifying ghostly doll, can be seen as another faceless national and diasporic emblem, a figure that calls the characters’ attention to that which has been lurking in a blind spot of Dominicans’ multicultural and multiethnic identity and suddenly comes into view: a traumatic history of “colonization.” Far from hiding or obscuring something, the absent facial features in the specter and in Muñecas Limé symbolize a violent past that, like Gordon’s ghosts, “is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view.” (XVI) Like ghostly Limé dolls, the specter finds himself –itself?– at the center of Dominican culture in the novel, and hauntingly elicits the need to do something, to act. This is, indeed, how the story changes.

Once in the cane field in the middle of the night, Oscar faces his killers:

> They looked at Oscar and he looked at them and then he started to speak (…) He told them that what they were doing was wrong, that they were going to take a great love out of the world. He told them about Ybon (…) He told them that it was only because of her love that he'd been able to do the thing that he had done, the thing they could no longer stop, told them if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak or about to be struck by a car and then they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn't be no fatboy or dork or kid no girl had ever loved; over there he'd be a hero, an avenger (321-322)

In this final passage of his life, facing the pistols of the men who are about to end him, Oscar makes a prophecy. After his murder, and after years and years pass, his killers and his killer's children "would sense him waiting for them," a restless spirit, a repressed or unresolved entity about to make himself known again, signaling a change in history that involves not only himself and his family but Dominican society as a whole. This is Oscar turning into a ghost. As Yunior points out at the end of the novel, that night in the cane Oscar knew that nobody would solve his murder and that his murderers would never be captured ("Four times the family hired lawyers but no charges were ever filed. The embassy didn't help and neither did the government (…) Lola swore she would never return to that terrible country. On one of our last night as novios she said, Ten million Trujillos is all we are" 324). And because he knew that, because he seemed aware of the

traumatic history of the island and his own traumatic personal biography, he felt that he too needed to accept his death, his turning into a ghost in almost a sacrificial manner, to hasten the need to act before compromised national and diasporic projects, to raise awareness about the endemic violence and corruption on his colonized community.

Thus, as a specter –as the specter of the novel– Oscar starts haunting Yunior's dreams:

> About five years after he died I started having another kind of dream. About him or someone who looks like him. We are in some kind of ruined bailey that's filled to the rim with old dusty books. He's standing in one of the passages, all mysterious-like, wearing a wrathful mask that hides his face but behind the eye-holes I see a familiar set of close-set eyes (…) Sometimes, though, I look up at him and he has no face and I wake up screaming. (325)

Haunting the narrator, and the narration, as a spectral memory that demands political action[109], Oscar fuses with Trujillo, and the faceless dolls of Quisqueya Heights, as the national and diasporic emblem of Dominican identity. Taking the role of the no-face specter both at different points of the story and in unison, Oscar and Trujillo represent the problematic, contradictory, and often violent ways of social organization by which they live and die. However, if we accept that the "acknowledgement of these ghosts opens us to the potential of redemption, healing and the possibilities of alternative futures," (Dixa

[109] After Oscar's death, Yunior collects all his writings and with them, the notes, the diary entries, the fictional stories, he writes the novel we are reading. "Even now as I write this words" he says, "I wonder if this book ain't (…) my very own counterspell." (7) To begin countering a long history of colonization, the traumatic narrative of fukú, Yunior gives us, readers, the novel.

7) then the novel ends on a positive note, with a posthumous letter from Oscar arriving to Yunior's house. In it, he states that because of the love he shares with Ybon, and certainly through the discovery of sex, he has found happiness and, more so, "The beauty! The beauty!" (335) Furthermore, the apparition of Isis, Lola's infant daughter, at the end of the novel, provokes Yunior to imagine her as a grown woman who, "if she's as smart and as brave as" Yunior expects, will finally "put an end to it," (331) to the family's curse that is the Dominican fukú. This certainly is a promissory vision of the future. Finally, as Gordon argues, writing ghost stories, like Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, a novel about a diasporic community that encompasses a nation, "is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible." In the end, it is also about recuperating historical and political narratives "that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future." (22)

CONCLUSIONS

The previous dissertation originated from three main ideas or observations. The first was the awareness of the national paradigm's overall crisis, specifically the frailty of the national model in Latin America and its limitations of representation. When first drafting this work I realized that if the initial roadmap of the 21st century seems to indicate something at the socio-political and literary level, it is that national forms and national narratives, understood as modes capable of agglutinating the ideological core and the material core of a human collective and of narrating that agglutination, are gradually being replaced by alternative communities and texts. Even if only symbolically.

The second main idea or observation stems from the recognition of a recent interest, expressed by much of the most successful contemporary Latin American narrative, in reassuming indigenous imaginaries as one of its thematic nuclei. Of course, this interest is not new. The attention to what Miguel Ángel Asturias, from Guatemala, and José Carlos Mariátegui, from Peru, called "the problem of the Indian" is proverbial, and the vast literature and sociological analysis from the end of the 19th century until the 1950s certainly prove it. However, contemporary Latin American narratives, inherently motley and of mestizo origin, return to what Brooke Larson qualifies as its "Other Indians," but they do it from a very different perspective to that of intellectuals like Mariátegui and Asturias.

This reasoning led me to the third main idea or observation that triggered this dissertation, the perception that, far from the agglutinating spirit that at the beginning of the twentieth century tried to subsume the indigenous subject into the national horizon, in the novels here analyzed this subject forms compulsive and subversive communities, ghostly and traumatic human collectives capable of disjointing and undoing the nation's time and space by being charged with a particular history of subjugation and violence. That is because, from the very beginning, the hegemonic national formations of the continent were hierarchical projects that confined indigenous subjects and indigenous imaginaries to their periphery and, at the same time, were founded upon them. Thus, the traumatic and ghostly communities present in the novels I work with show that memory, individual or collective, haunts but it also produces material life. And because that production occurs in opposition or in parallel to the national model, it is always subversive, untamed, revolutionary.

On the other hand, I have to reiterate that this thesis does not claim that the national model has worked before in the history of Latin America, it does not suggest that nationality has ever been truly representative, a model capable of encompassing, containing, and sustaining the total of a human collective. On the contrary, as Beatriz Sarlo indicates, in the face of the unbearable evidence of the national fallacy during the last century, Latin America has privileged and still privileges a "fantasma de la nación" ("ghost of the nation") that "esfuma los contrastes" ("erases contrasts") that do not allow the real coagulation of a common horizon, a communitarian phantasmagoria that unifies, "en el corazón de la Patria, a quienes en todos los demás aspectos están separados y son

diferentes" ("in the heart of the Homeland, those whom in all other aspects are separated and are different" 109).

Thus, historically, throughout the 20th century and even at the beginning of the 21st century, the national paradigm was and continues to be an idealized projection of being in community. That is to say, a trace (a "ruin") of a construct that never came to be even though, in practice, it is conceived and portrayed as an entity that was and is, an entity whose material and symbolic weight is recognized, even though it never really was and it never will be. As a quick revision can show, this is largely discussed in the vast historical analysis, the sociology, the political philosophy and the literature of the previous century. In that sense, what my dissertation proposes is not a literary alternative to a sociopolitical and allegorical whole that once was and suddenly ceased to be during the past two decades. Rather, it argues that some of the most representative and critically acclaimed contemporary Latin American narratives show new specific ways in which the ongoing crisis of the national continues. That is, traumatic and spectral ways connected with once-again politically active indigenous imaginaries, subversive and compulsive representations that in and outside literature prevent the consolidation of a national horizon in specific cases. Thus, the novelty of this analysis lies in the specific way in which Latin American literature materially and symbolically rejects a national model that, even though is thought of as reining above all other possible sociopolitical models, only consolidates the spectral traces of something never consolidated.

In this dissertation I present four national cases –those of Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic/United States– in whose recent narrative this dynamic can be clearly appreciated: the symbolic and material abandonment of the

national model carried out by different communities encoded by an indigenous political alphabet, and the consequent formation of subversive societies marked by traumatic and ghostly impulses. In the first chapter I analyze the novel *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*, by Alison Spedding, and I briefly review the historical and literary trajectory of the Aymara insurgencies in Bolivia that, ending in the rebellion presented in the novel, acts as a compulsive force that interrupts the consolidation and representativeness of the traditional national horizon. The novel and the cantankerous character of Saturnina do not intend to consecrate anything beyond a sort of permanent insurgency, a systematic revolt against both the historic national paradigm and the indigenous revolution that institutes a new model, thus consolidating a particular version of Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* which I call "revolutionary traumatic drive."

In the second chapter I review *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*, by Yuri Herrera, with the idea that the indigenous mythological substrate of the book is a spectral archive related to proposals such as those of Octavio Paz and Claudio Lomnitz, who consider death as one of Mexico and mexicanness' foundations. However, *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* proposes a displaced vision of this relationship with death: on the one hand a vision territorially displaced and headed north, and on the other hand a vision that points towards the mythical past. Thus, the novel's proposal is based on a displacement, on the disjointed possibility of building a common identity. In that panorama, Herrera´s book is a narrative device that does not collaborate with the modern project of consecrating national mythologies. Rather, operating against a critical tradition that wants to find in fiction a national allegory, and against narratives associated with power that find in it a ritual form of significance, it proposes, halfway between Mexico

and the United States, a spectral community defined by its adherence to an indigenous imaginary.

In the third chapter I read *Insensatez*, by Horacio Castellanos Moya, and analyze the ways in which it dialogues with the genre of testimonio, a bearing-witness narrative occupied with mediating subaltern's systematic experiences of exclusion, and a narrative corpus central to the formation of Central American and Guatemalan identities in the last decades. The novel's narrator, a "listener" of the state's violent attacks against its indigenous populations, becomes a victim of the same trauma he bears witness to and mediates. In the process, he becomes the victim of a growing paranoia, ranging from casual disorder to pathological crisis, but this is a rational paranoia, capable of revealing not only the authoritarian and excluding ways of Guatemalan society, but also of unveiling a ghostly collective subject, born from indigenous genocide, that ends up forming compulsive communities both outside and within the bounds of the archive and the national horizon.

Finally, in the fourth chapter I read *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Díaz, and in it I identify what I call a "faceless diáspora," a correlate of Dominican history that, during the twentieth century, and especially from 1960 until today, exposed the failures of the Dominican national project in the form of a massive diaspora. In other words, in the form of Dominicans who leave the country and who, in doing so, become national Others, peripheral subjects. However, I do not consider diaspora above the nation as a better, more diverse, or more politically outspoken form of sociopolitical organization. Nor do I intend to return to the trope of foundational fictions, which traditionally adopt the national paradigm as the basis of an erotic that relates political

history and literature. On the contrary, I claim that both the Dominican national and the Dominican diasporic projects, in and outside *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, are marked by a traumatic history of colonization and by a specter of ethnic and political violence, and thus prevent the coagulation of any sociopolitical communities except for a ghostly community.

All together, these four novels point out to an identifiable fact inside and outside literature: the national model in Latin America is going through –or about to go through– a moment of transition. Indeed, the nation seems immersed in a time in which colonial, postcolonial, and post-postcolonial paradigms and projects overlap and confuse. Given that indigenous Latin American subjects live in what only appear to be national communities in which they have little chance to act politically, these communities are revealed to be not national and representative at all. Rather, like a flickering specter halfway between a time that opens up and another one that closes, or in between several historical times in unison, the ghost of the nation experiences what Derrida calls a spectral moment and also a spectral territoriality, as traumatic communities are, as shown in the novels, deterritorialized, transnational communities. Thus, the novels this dissertation works with show how the Latin American indigenous world, understood as a series of contemporary myths that, at the same time, are calcified on the skeleton of the nation and are accumulated in society, conform a kind of metadiscourse: an intricate network of points of reference and intergenerational modes of resistance to hegemonic horizons. That is, spectral echoes that empower indigenous subjects by dislocating national ideology, culture, and time.

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