

Realms of Inconsequence:
U.S. Imaginaries of Central America, 1979-2005

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how novelists, solidarity activists, and intellectuals draw out the significance of armed uprisings in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala between 1979 and 2005. The wars that resulted from these insurrections seem to many to have been the last paroxysm of an expired idea: revolutionary struggle. Theorists and scholars often view the 1980s and 90s as the apex of the culture of late capitalism with its attendant features of postmodernist depoliticization and the retreat of the hope for radical social transformation. By contrast, this dissertation demonstrates how Americans engrossed in Central America's conflicts shared a belief in the viability of revolutionary politics and the persistent social importance of culture. Moreover, U.S. narratives about Central American rebellion, I argue, allowed their authors to imagine themselves as participants in transnational history, even human history. Chapters on counterinsurgency theory, David Stoll's anthropology in Guatemala, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's and Jennifer Harbury's solidarity memoirs, and Central American diasporic novelist Héctor Tobar analyze the dispute between political imaginaries relevant to conflict in Central America. Two prevailing tendencies run through the culture of U.S. imperialism in Central America: a reactionary imaginary that seeks to nullify the premises of revolutionary struggle, and an imaginary committed to the project of radical social transformation. Although both tendencies interpret Central America's rebellions against landed oligarchies, military dictatorships, and U.S. hegemony in the region as aspects of a unified event, they diverge in how they narrate these uprisings. Disagreements about the nature of politics arise in these accounts about the capacities and limitations of populations, the function of the state, the dynamics introduced by capitalist expansionism, and the viability of sweeping social change. While the reactionary strand construes these insurgencies as the manifestation of a Hobbesian primordial chaos, the

committed strand apprehends the same occurrences as expressions of an emancipatory groundswell. By mapping the range of political imaginaries that arose as part of and in response to U.S. involvement in Central America, this dissertation supplements scholarship exploring how American militarism in Central America anticipated our contemporary wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and how forms of violence helped generate conditions necessary for the rise of neoliberalism. It takes up questions of the legitimacy of Americans' political and cultural solidarity with social transformation occurring outside the United States. This dissertation reveals that, whether they aligned their aspirations with the forces of change or allowed an imperialist agenda to distort the shape of events, Americans mobilized diverse political imaginaries to engage with revolution beyond U.S. borders.

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Introduction

"The Most Important Place in the World": Central America at the Cold War's End

In a scene just before the climax of John Milius' film, *Red Dawn* (1984), Nicaraguan Colonel Ernesto Bella composes a letter home that details his unhappiness as an occupier of Calumet, Colorado. The film depicts the hypothetical aftermath of reputedly communist forces' triumph over Central America. Nicaragua's communist transformation, as the film's opening intertitles announce, set in motion a cataclysmic series of events during which even U.S. allies—El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico—fall in the wake of regional destabilization.¹ With the support of Cuban and Soviet troops, Bella's forces invade the sleepy Colorado town, and a band of American teenagers flee to the mountains and organize themselves into a subversive guerrilla cell, the Wolverines. Under the leadership of Jed, played by a young Patrick Swayze, the Wolverines retaliate against their occupiers, cutting deep into their morale, including Col. Bella's. The Colonel's epistolary lamentations express ambivalence over the value of his mission: "¿Cómo llegué en lugar tan alto, tan desolado dónde no hay mas que soledad? Tanto esta perdido." (How did I come to this high, desolate place, where there is nothing but loneliness? So much is lost.) In a conversion that would appear to make him intensely sympathetic to American audiences, Col. Bella chooses not to fire on Jed as he carries his wounded brother following the Wolverines' siege on the communist command post in Calumet. Instead, Col. Bella gestures that the guerrillas should flee. "Vaya con dios" (Go with God), he says to them. In the last words of his letter, Col. Bella concludes, "Para mi ya no hay revolución" (For my part, there is no revolution), and he decides at that moment to resign from his post.

¹ The executive branch's theory of the collapse under Soviet influence was summarized by the Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, during a 1981 press conference where he explained, "I wouldn't necessarily call it a domino theory, I would call it a priority target list—a hit list, if you will—for the ultimate takeover of Central America" (qtd. in McClintock 332).

Premised on the existing insurgencies in Central America, *Red Dawn's* plot is also deeply speculative, even hyperbolic, in how it represents the dangers they pose to the United States.

Consequently, the film's intrinsic tension between real events and illusory threats points to a reserve of anxieties, ideologies, fantasies, and expectations that Americans superimposed upon Central America between the 1970s and 1990s. This dissertation examines these political imaginaries, which arose from the United States' multiple investments in Nicaragua's, El Salvador's, and Guatemala's concurrent insurrections. The coincidence of these regionally concentrated but nationally circumscribed rebellions, I suggest, provoked U.S. artists, intellectuals, and activists to conceive of each uprising as expressions of a unified event with transnational implications. Revolution's promise to upend the reigning order served as a call to arms for Americans with various affinities to the region to envision their part in the unfolding of events, the ensuing violence, and the resulting transitions in power. By contrast to the culture of exhaustion and the discourse of reckoning prevalent in American culture and politics, U.S. narratives about Central American rebellion, I argue, allowed their authors to imagine themselves as participants in transnational history, even human history. Like the "pleasure in agency" expressed by Salvadoran peasants in interviews with Elisabeth Jean Wood, these American authors conceived of themselves as potent historical subjects capable of pursuing their intentions through foreign conflicts (235).² However, at a vantage removed from the immediate geography and violent repercussions of Central America's conflicts, this enhanced agency of American subjects aroused feelings of ambivalence and cynicism over their missions in the

² Wood's research serves as a useful comparison with U.S. imaginaries of Central America because she confronts the lack of immediate benefits for participating in the insurgency for *campesinos* in El Salvador, just as U.S. citizens and residents' interest in Central America bore few immediate advantages or disadvantages for those passionately involved in these wars.

region. Like the rivals represented in Milius' *Red Dawn*, the political imaginaries examined in this dissertation appear deeply polarized.

In a way, the film's implausible chain of events and its representation of protagonist Col. Bella's shifting loyalties dramatize the dispute over insurrection in Central America. On the one hand, the film's conjectures could have been borrowed from narratives promulgated by the American right. The Committee of Santa Fe, for instance, warned that the Gulf of Mexico was rapidly becoming a "Marxist-Leninist lake" as a greater share of nations and movements within and surrounding the Gulf proclaimed socialist affiliations and antipathy to U.S. hegemony in the region ("New" 15). In their view, America's southern border is the nation's "soft underbelly," exposed to an increasingly hostile and allegedly Soviet-affiliated Central America (Committee of Santa Fe "New" 11). On the other hand, Col. Bella's sympathetic identification with the Wolverines' innocence and desire for self-determination suggests an interpretation amenable to audiences from the contemporaneous movement for peace and solidarity with Central America. In the film, Col. Bella sees in Jed and his Wolverines echoes of his previous role as a "partisan" fighter. As a liberator turned imperialist, Bella's ambivalent position correlates with the experience of Americans who opposed Ronald Reagan's saber rattling against uprisings that sought to overturn landed oligarchies and military dictatorships in Central America. Released in the same year as Reagan's reelection bid, *Red Dawn* thematizes the contradictory notions of politics, foreign policy, and culture held by many Americans during this period.

These two possible interpretations of *Red Dawn* correspond roughly with the two antagonists in the defining politico-cultural conflicts of the long 1980s. Whether reacting against or committed to Central America's projects of radical social transformation, proponents of these opposed political imaginaries disagreed about the very nature of politics. The reactionary

tendency viewed Central American conflict as an incarnation of primordial, Hobbesian chaos, while the committed tendency saw it as an emancipatory groundswell. Rebellion in Central America became a means for Americans to conceptualize the abstract meaning of politics on the edge of the Cold War's conclusion—a moment when the idea of revolutionary struggle seemed to have hit its expiration date.

Whereas politics sows dissension between reactionary and committed political imaginaries, the polarity breaks down when examined through the lens of culture. Composed in a moment where other intellectuals bemoaned culture's diminishing political salience, stories composed about Central America's insurgencies both theorized and bore witness to the vital role of culture in catalyzing violence, impeding mobilization, and as a field of action or a repository for insurrectionary knowledges. In Central America, authors and intellectuals confronted the possibility that culture itself might be a casualty of war as civilians were increasingly consumed by escalating violence. In this dissertation, I examine how counterinsurgency intellectuals, anthropologists, solidarity activists, and Central American diasporic writers in the United States imagined, narrated, and mapped their visions of culture and politics in representations of social space.

Scholars who examine the significance of Central American conflicts during the “age of Reagan” have documented their features, charted their implications, and theorized the social forces contending for influence in them. The preponderance of scholarship about the period, however, interprets the coinciding transition to neoliberal capitalism and the end of the Cold War as marking the failure of political visions as a means of social transformation and the triumphant commencement of a reactionary revolution that would bring with it a punitive form of foreign and domestic policy. My own interpretation highlights an undercurrent of politicization and

cultural contest in an era often read retroactively as the inevitable triumph of market over politics and culture, and U.S. hegemony over the Americas.

The historical record testifies to a persistent American obsession to dominate Central America. According to Ileana Rodríguez, within the discourse of early-nineteenth-century explorers seeking ways to promote U.S. modernity, “Central America is just a geographical medium” (*Topographies* 138). This perspective reduced the region to a means for linking trade between California and the East Coast by way of a canal. Hoping to actualize a southward version of “Manifest Destiny,” in 1855 U.S. mercenary William Walker began a four-year campaign to dominate Nicaragua. Declaring himself the nation's president and reinstituting slavery, Walker's short reign came to an end when other Central American nations deposed and executed him. In 1903, Theodore Roosevelt fulfilled U.S. dreams of converting Central America into a means of exchange by promoting the independence of Panama from Columbia. Construction of the canal began almost immediately. The treaty that followed granted United States sovereignty over the zone surrounding the canal, and not until Jimmy Carter's presidency did the U.S. restore Panamanian sovereignty in the Canal Zone.³

Early in the twentieth century, threats to the United States' economic interests necessitated the dispatch of U.S. Marines to Nicaragua. In answer to two occupations of Nicaragua between 1912 and 1933, Augusto César Sandino led a guerrilla insurgency against the foreign intruders. After American occupying forces withdrew, the Nicaraguan National Guard captured and executed Sandino despite a peace treaty with the new government. Sandino's name and legacy inspired the Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación*

³ In a treaty signed by Carter and Panamanian Commander General Omar Torrijos in 1979, abolished the special U.S. sovereignty in the Canal Zone by December 31, 1999. Carter's actions were deemed particularly controversial by the American right, particularly the neoconservatives, who deemed the treaty as a relinquishment of a crucial strategic asset in the region.

Nacional, FSLN) in the 1970s. Not coincidentally, Anastasio Somoza García, the founder of the Somoza dynasty that the Sandinistas toppled in 1979, had also authorized the National Guard to assassinate Sandino. He seized power in 1936, and by maintaining the National Guard's support and cultivating a secure relationship with the United States, the Somoza family maintained control of Nicaragua for close to forty-three years.

Over the same period, Cold War imperatives heightened the stakes of maintaining United States hegemony in Central America. Fearing that agrarian reform would jeopardize U.S.-owned fruit plantations and that the president's cabinet included communists, the CIA orchestrated a coup against the democratically-elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.⁴ The CIA used the nascent strategies of psychological warfare, and, in the words of historian Greg Grandin, "created the illusion...of a dramatic unfolding of events, of inescapable confrontation, which effectively turned potential actors into passive spectators" (*Last* 68).⁵ Owing to the Guatemalan Army's collusion with the CIA, a sequence of military dictatorships controlled the post-Arbenz political order, an outcome that extinguished hope for reforming the nation's highly exploitive and racist structure of agrarian labor conditions.⁶ The overturning of Guatemalan democracy and labor reform also served as a warning to other Latin Americans to the degree that Ernesto "Che" Guevara regularly commented that Cuba "will not be Guatemala" (qtd. in Grandin, *Last* 91).

⁴ According to Greg Grandin, the Eisenhower Administration commissioned the CIA to stage the coup and operation "PBSUCCESS, as the CIA dubbed the campaign, became the Agency's most ambitious covert operation and would serve as a model for future actions" (Grandin, *Last* 77).

⁵ President Arbenz's election resulted from urban protests that sparked the 1944 October Revolution that unseated what was at the time Latin America's longest-running dictatorship. Grandin notes, "Often those who lived through the 'trauma of 1954,' as the [post-Guatemalan civil war] truth commission describes the overthrow of Arbenz, repeatedly, compulsively affirm that the October Revolution could have succeeded had it not been for U.S. intervention" (*Last* 70).

⁶ Historian James Dunkerley draws a correlation between agrarian labor conditions in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Although the region experienced economic growth in the postwar years, Dunkerley observes, domestic staples had grown very little compared to those harvested for export. By the 1960s these staples were insufficient to sustain the population in basic foods. Thus growth was coupled with an increasing experience of scarcity (Dunkerley, *Power* 195).

The histories of Nicaragua and Guatemala point to how U.S. foreign policy choices determined the region's geopolitics and structured the unrest and resulting conflicts that confronted Americans in the 1980s. It follows that the U.S. government's meddling in the affairs of Central American and Caribbean nations were designed, in part, to serve as warnings for other nations in the region. For example, the Reagan Administration's pretext of rescuing American medical students stationed in Grenada by invading the island nation in 1983 and deposing coup-plotters at the helm of the government served as a warning to Nicaragua that they too could face a conquering force.⁷

U.S. responses to Central American conflicts in the 1980s were also conditioned by hard times within American borders during the years leading up to Reagan's presidency. A number of historians have remarked on a widespread crisis of confidence among the American public following the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon's announcement of U.S. troop retreat from Vietnam in 1973 represented America's first defeat in war, no matter how often Nixon repeated the descriptor "peace with honor" to characterize the proceedings (qtd. in Perlstein, *Invisible* xiii). Retreat from Vietnam, along with the concerted efforts of the FBI's COINTEL-PRO (Counter-Intelligence Program) to intimidate, infiltrate, and destroy movements for social justice in the United States, fractured the New Left, which at that moment lacked its core motivation and any semblance of internal solidarity. Subsequent hearings in the Senate and House further undermined public trust by revealing the CIA's culture of lawlessness.

Other traumas arose during the 1970s with the Arab oil embargo, which seemed to hold the American economy hostage. Further economic issues emerged from growing inflation in the context of rising unemployment, a new expression of U.S. capitalism dubbed "stagflation." And

⁷ During his presidency George H.W. Bush sent similar signals to the FSLN in Nicaragua when he deployed Special Forces Units to apprehend and incarcerate Panamanian dictator and former U.S. ally Commander Manuel Noriega.

the Watergate scandal, in which top aides to Nixon were revealed to have broken into Democratic Party field offices in order to gather information to support the president's reelection, revealed to the citizenry that their leaders were little better than common criminals. President Jimmy Carter diagnosed the nation's problem in his "American malaise" speech of 1979: "too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption," he admonished (qtd. in Collins, *Transforming* 23). In this address, Carter chose not to indulge in a renewed sense of American optimism, but instead, he participated in what Rick Perlstein calls the "stark discourse of reckoning" common among post-Vietnam War politicians (*Invisible* xiv). In the view of conservative historian Robert M. Collins and a number of Cold War militarists, Carter's speech imagined a "diminished future" for the United States and a reckoning with the limits of American military power (Collins, *Transforming* 25).

To conservative Americans, Carter's foreign policy already represented a capitulation to the Soviet Union, particularly in his approach to Nicaragua. After years training for guerrilla warfare in the mountains, occasionally skirmishing with the Nicaraguan National Guard, and covertly organizing in Nicaragua's cities, the Sandinistas presided over a 1979 victory for the Nicaraguan revolutionary forces. Facing urban riots, a general strike, and a nation largely controlled by the FSLN president, Anastasio Somoza Debayle resigned on July 7 of that year. The Sandinistas' triumph was short-lived, however, because it coincided with a rightward conversion in American politics around the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. Before his overthrow, Somoza had been a staunch U.S. ally in the region, but for the new Administration the Sandinistas' Marxist rhetoric and their hopes of redistributing land and resources cast them as Soviet proxies located dangerously in the United States' "backyard." Reagan and his supporters believed that the Carter Administrations' failure to militarily impede the Sandinistas and their

irresolute approach to Nicaragua represented a catastrophic entry of Soviet power into America's sphere of influence.

In the humiliated aftermath of these events, many Americans saw optimism, hope, and faith in American power resurrected in Reagan's presidential bid. In contrast to Carter's vacillations, Reagan regularly invoked a heroic, optimistic idiom that projected a restored sense of United States exceptionalism. For example, when questioned about the broader significance of the Watergate scandal, Reagan asserted that the scandal said little about America and repeated a quotation from Pope Pius XII: "Into the hands of America, God has placed the destiny of an afflicted mankind" (qtd. in Perlstein, *Invisible* 747). Reagan and his neoconservative advisors denounced Carter's lack of an exceptionalist vision for U.S. foreign policy in Central America and the world. By way of illustration, mocking the Carter Administration's use of impersonal "forces" and "processes" to characterize the anarchy of international relations, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Reagan's future U.N. ambassador, questioned, "What can a president with such complicated, inexorable, impersonal processes do? The answer, offered again and again by the President and his top officials, was, Not Much" ("Dictatorships" 39). The need for a clear-eyed view of American authority in the world united the various newly-mobilized rightist groups that brought Reagan into power. These New Right groups centered their foreign policy concerns on discord and insurrection in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In 1981, Kirkpatrick famously described Central America as "the most important place in the world for the United States" (qtd. in Grandin, *Empire's* 71).

Although Reagan's message resonated with a great deal of the populace, Kirkpatrick's alarm about Central America did not. A profound fatigue with war had infected the American populace, a sentiment that the Administration dubbed "Vietnam syndrome"—an unwillingness to

sacrifice American lives and resources for U.S. "glory" in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Confronted with "Vietnam syndrome" and the public's reluctance to fund overt military operations in Central America, the Reagan Administration turned toward a covert form of warfare called Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC). Like its predecessor, counterinsurgency, LIC describes a multidimensional form of combat meant to "privatize" and "civilianize" the costs of and participation in war, in the words of Ivan Molloy (*Rolling* 2). The Administration pursued LIC in Nicaragua by secretly assembling, funding, and training Latin American anti-Sandinista forces. These guerrilla-styled units were later known as the Contras. LIC strategy had the benefit of functioning as counterinsurgency in two senses: it threatened the stability of the Sandinista government and forced it to redirect funds toward defense and away from its social programs, and proxy fighting forces preempted opposition in the domestic sphere by obscuring the level of U.S. involvement.

The U.S. government's interest in Central America intensified as their authoritarian allies in El Salvador and Guatemala now faced their own threats of insurrection. Encouraged by the Sandinistas' success, the absence of direct U.S. efforts to prevent it, and polarizing and savage government repression, leftist guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Guatemala amplified their campaigns to seize power from landed oligarchies and military dictatorships in 1981 and 78 respectively.⁸ The resulting uprisings gathered broad coalitions of popular movements, unions, student groups, and guerrilla organizations. In response to this spreading, ostensibly communist menace in Central America, the Reagan Administration redoubled its efforts to prop up the

⁸ In El Salvador, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional; FMLN) became the leading unified guerrilla coalition, joined by a civilian revolutionary organization, La Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas (the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses). By January 1982 the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca URNG) consolidated all guerrilla forces and the Committee of Campesino Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina, CUC), formed in 1978, became a popular extension of the guerrillas.

Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments.⁹ In addition to shipping in numerous military advisors, funding arms purchases, instructing military officers at American military institutions, and circulating counterinsurgency manuals, the United States supplied generous foreign aid.¹⁰ For example, the Reagan Administration made El Salvador the recipient of more aid than all but two other nations for over a decade beginning in 1980.¹¹ U.S.-supported counterinsurgent forces in Central America disbursed boundless violence against guerrillas, their suspected collaborators, and civilians. "All told," historian Greg Grandin explains, "U.S. allies in Central America during Reagan's two terms killed over 300,000 people, tortured hundreds of thousands, and drove millions into exile" (*Empire's* 71).

Faced with extreme levels of brutality, the flow of refugees into the United States increased to unprecedented numbers. Evidencing this mass exodus, the majority of the Central American diaspora living in the United States today arrived during the 1980s. Many settled in cities like Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, where inbuilt familial and social networks

⁹ Within a month of assuming office, the Reagan Administration issued what became known as the "White Paper" that alleged Soviet, Cuban, and Nicaraguan intervention in El Salvador. In spite of the gravity with which the press treated the document, Dunkerley observes:

upon closer inspection the voluminous empirical evidence presented to support its claims appeared at best extremely flimsy and at worst clumsy concoction by an over-hurried CIA...and indeed over the following four years CIA specialists charged with 'proving' the existence of material support for the FMLN from the Sandinistas signally failed to turn up one shred of persuasive evidence. (403)

¹⁰ Two secondary, but nonetheless crucial funding decisions addressed specific security concerns through other agencies and measures. First, the Reagan Administration reestablished the CIA's paramilitary capabilities, rehiring agents formerly dismissed by the Carter Administration (McClintock, *Instruments* 349). This would prove to be crucial to maintain the war effort throughout Central America, particularly when Congress barred and withheld funding in response to reported human rights violations, and CIA operatives were frequently called in "off the books" to maintain the efforts in Nicaragua and elsewhere when doing so would have been illegal (Molloy 121). A second measure came about after the 1983 Anti-Terrorism Act, a response to bombings of U.S. and Italian barracks in Beirut, which restored overt financing for police assistance in foreign nations. Recognizing previous abuse conducted under similar funding by the now-disbanded Office of Public Safety, Congress had outlawed such funding during the 1970s. With the Anti-Terrorism Act, however, the Administration was able to redefine policing in other nations as militaristic in nature (McClintock 389). What was passed off as supplementation of criminal justice proceedings through police aid attracted notable "death squad" participants to the first police training courses in the United States (McClintock 396). These transitions in policy allowed dynamic multi-agency participation in low-intensity conflict with the added benefit of producing a layer of deniability against allegations that the military colluded with human rights abusers.

¹¹ Dunkerley reports that between 1980 and 1984 U.S. military support increased from \$5.9 million to \$136.5 million (401). In total, the U.S. government spent \$6 billion on propping up El Salvador's government (Schwarz v).

sustained this new populace whose bids for asylum the federal government refused to recognize. Fearing deportation back to war-torn poverty and certain death, many Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the United States remained invisible for nearly a decade. Others bravely chose to organize with anti-interventionist movements, labor unions, or in the name of organizations in their home countries.

Americans of faith and Latinos/as, who shared communities with the new arrivals, reached out support Central American immigrants. Some were inspired by recent translations of Latin American liberation theology into English, others by missionary experiences in the region, and still others by previous work in the radical struggles of the Vietnam War era.¹² In addition to providing many Central Americans with sanctuary, this base began to seek solidarity with those suffering from the atrocities of war in Central America and to support revolutionary movements. The resulting organizations and their rhetoric of solidarity formed a potent counterforce to the Administration's deeply ideological speeches and talking points.

In the sphere of international affairs, the Reagan Administration defended the policies of its allies in Central America. They proclaimed, for instance, that Guatemala's president Efraín Ríos Montt, who was responsible for genocide against the Maya, had received a "bum rap" over his human rights records.¹³ In the domestic sphere, Reagan and his administrators subverted Congressional refusals to fund the Contras in Nicaragua by organizing secret arms deals between the U.S. and Iran. Furthermore, the executive branch funded an unconstitutional Office of Public Diplomacy, which planted stories in the U.S. media that supported reactionary forces in Central America. Solidarity activists reported break-ins, surveillance, FBI visits to their employers, and

¹² The Maryknoll Catholic order translated Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* into English in 1973, and it sold more than one hundred thousand copies in the United States (Smith, *Resisting* 146).

¹³ These alliances were evident fairly early in Reagan's tenure as president when the man considered to be the father of Guatemala's death squads, Mario Sandoval Alarcon, was seen dancing at the president's 1981 inaugural ball (Diamond 214-15).

prosecution by federal immigration authorities, all signs of a government campaign to undermine the movement. Consequently, the powerful appeal of Reagan's recourse to a hoary exceptionalism concealed a significant program for undermining struggles for social transformation and freedom from U.S. imperialism in Central America, a so-called "rollback" of Soviet influence in the Americas.

Scholarship on "the age of Reagan" highlights two intertwined developments that culminate during his administration and which are crucial for understanding our own present: the resurgence of a more strident brand rightwing American politics and the ascendance of market forces over other sectors of national life. Evincing either a presentist bias or a historical determinism, traditional historians and Marxist historians of culture tend to interpret Reagan's domestic electoral victories and foreign policy successes, and his part in the period's momentous liberalization of economy as uncontested foregone conclusions. One element of this view of history is the scant attention paid to the struggle over the implications of war in Central America embedded in narratives from the 1980s and 90s. Rather, culture itself is subsumed or rendered a mere reflection of the triumph of reactionary and capitalist forces. Traditional historians construe the rise of Reagan as symptomatic of long-term processes in American society: its political-cultural fragmentation and its comprehensive transformation in ways that benefitted the Right. Rick Perlstein's *Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (2014), for example, argues that, contrary to his reputation, "Ronald Reagan is not a uniter. He is in essence a divider" (xvi). Perlstein usefully explains the dissent growing within the American populace during the age of Reagan: "Optimism, pessimism; America the innocent, America the compromised: these incommensurate polarities have come to be part of the very structure of the left-versus-right order of battle in American political life" (xix). But his analysis of American polarization

focuses exclusively on presidential politics as mechanisms for consolidating broader trends in American society and hence neglects the grassroots. Similarly, Sean Wilentz's *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (2008) and Robert M. Collins' *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* (2007), written from the viewpoints of the center-left and center-right respectively, suggest that Reagan was the most important politician at the turn of the century and that his election represented a realignment of American life. Although Collins does take up the Reagan doctrine on Central America, he paints the atrocities with which the Administration was complicit as "unintended consequences" (211). Rather than accede to the view that the administration's Central American adventure and the responses it elicited from intellectuals, activists, and artists was incidental to shifts in American politics and culture, my own work draws on Amy Kaplan's observation that "imperialism is also about consolidating domestic cultures and negotiating intranational relations" ("Alone" 14).

Taking a perspective that shares some of these assumptions, Greg Grandin examines the interrelation between politics in the United States and Central America most directly in his *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (2006), where he shows how Central America served as a "proving ground" for the United States' strategies for extraterritorial dominion, war maneuvers, coups d'etat, and coercive economic pressures. He argues, "Reagan could afford to execute such a calamitous policy not, pace Kirkpatrick, because of the region's importance but because of its unimportance" (Grandin, *Empire's* 71). Lacking attractive resources, powerful allies, or large populations, Central America bore few consequences for the Administration. In order to explain both the scope of violence in Central America, the precedents it sets for American international policy in the contemporary Middle East, and policymakers' imperial remove from the consequences of Low-

Intensity warfare, Grandin's work necessarily focuses on the decisions and ideologies of elites. Less apparent is the relevance of his ideas to the realm of culture.

Some of the most influential analysis of culture during the "age of Reagan" comes from Marxist historians of culture. For Marxist scholars, the Reagan administration represents the consolidation of economic processes encompassed by various terms like late-capitalism, neoliberalism, post-Fordist capitalism, and globalization.¹⁴ These different handles attempt to name a global shift toward deregulation of financial markets, privatization of public assets, a redistribution of wealth upward, the ballooning of Third World debt, a restoration of economic power to the upper class, increasing precarity / flexibility in labor markets, and the ideological equation of entrepreneurial freedom with human well-being. For these scholars, the Reagan administration represents both a symptom and architect of the broader shift toward the ascendance of the market over politics and culture.¹⁵ In "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Fredrick Jameson opines that in the context of social processes associated with post-Fordism the sphere of human culture has lost its semi-autonomy from changes in capitalist accumulation. As a result the culture of the Reagan era is a postmodernist culture, which "abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm"

("Postmodernism" 85-6). Published months before Reagan's reelection, Jameson's argument

¹⁴ In his *Neoliberalism: A Brief History*, David Harvey outlines the concomitant economic and political precedents that helped define these variously named transitions. Harvey explains, a growing crisis in capitalist accumulation that culminated in the 1973 recession with the OPEC oil embargo and a shift in political-economy to what he calls "flexible accumulation." On the political front Harvey points to Fed Chairman Paul Volcker transformation of U.S. monetary policy from encouraging full employment to now curb inflation "at all costs." As Harvey recounts, Volcker argued that this was the only way out of the stagflation that plagued the American economy (*Neoliberalism* 23).

¹⁵ Reagan completes the task begun by Volcker by instituting "deregulation, tax cuts, budget cuts, and attacks on trade union and professional power" (Harvey *Neoliberalism* 25). Harvey sees Reagan as the culmination of corporate power's project "to claim the Republic Party as their own instrument" and the beginning of "the momentous shift towards greater inequality and the restoration of economic power to the upper class" (*Neoliberalism* 48, 26).

laments what he sees as the diminishing power of culture to contest the reigning order or to imagine political projects toward the remaking of the future. Read alongside the views of traditional political historians, Marxist approaches to culture suggest that culture has reconciled itself with processes of capitalist accumulation and also merely reflects the right's new dominion in the halls of power.

Missing from these historical accounts are meaningful considerations of culture are examinations of cultural contestation occurring at the grassroots: namely as the Central American diaspora found its voice in the U.S. and the wave of cultural production by multi-ethnic solidarity movements. Recent works of literary criticism outline the presence of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and other Central American immigrants amongst Latinos/as in the U.S.; and they explore how Central American histories of oppression demand transnational affiliation with those struggling against domination, exploitation, and violence. Several chapters from Ana Patricia Rodríguez's *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literature and Cultures* (2009), for example, trace the connections that tie the Central American diaspora to both the United States and Central America. Moreover, she emphasizes the fluidity of "Central American narratives [that] transect and transcend [...] boundaries" (Rodríguez 3). In a chapter on Latino/a solidarities with Central Americans, Rodríguez warns against a solidarity that might be too ardent because "the subject who extends solidarity to another also takes agency away from that other," particularly when such efforts tend to extol the history of U.S. Latino/a culture and resistance (153-4). Similarly, Ariana Vigil's *War Echoes: Gender and Militarization in U.S. Latina/o Cultural Production* (2014) explores how "U.S. Latinas/os have participated in, protested against, and formed relationships with U.S. militarism" beginning in 1979 (2). Vigil, like Grandin, draws continuities between war in Central

America and contemporary wars in the Middle East, focusing on Latina/o cultural engagements with militarism that "disrupt and alter nationalist expressions of social and political commitments" (4). Hence, for both Rodríguez and Vigil, the presence of Central Americans in the United States in the aftermath of counterinsurgency wars points to the necessity of engaging with questions of solidarity and calling into question the nationalism that legitimates calls to war.

My dissertation points to underexplored narrative forms as sites where the contentiousness and political salience of culture resides—sites through which readers might reimagine the degree to which underlying shifts of economy and policy during the "age of Reagan" were inevitable. I explore narratives in the form of literary culture and cultural theory because both conceptualize, and in some cases systematize, the potentialities of social transformation in a way the broader culture did not. By centering my argument on wars of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Central America, my project takes note of the dangers posed by forms of combat that weaponize culture. More specifically, if cultural studies theorizes culture as a "whole way of life," my dissertation looks to authors and narrators who confront how such forms of war may maim and even put into question the very "life" of culture assumed in this equation. However, rather than bemoan the capitulation of culture to drastic violence in Central America or to market imperatives in the U.S., these intellectuals, authors, and activists employed narrative to document massacre's disfiguring effect on culture, to theorize culture's manifold expressions through conflict and politics, and to enact culture's defiance in the face of overwhelming odds. In doing so, these narratives highlight the contingency of the transitions examined by the historians and Marxist cultural theorists I investigate above. All of this stress on factors of chance and possibility, I argue, permitted U.S. authors with radically divergent access

to the means and institutions of power to envision themselves as agents within events of wide-ranging significance.

Within Americans' profound experience of influence over history, dissension grew between social and political visions of Central America during the 1980s and 90s. I categorize these divergent representations of war and insurgency found in texts about Central America into two political visions: one committed to the project of radical social transformation in Central America, which I call the committed imaginary, and one that denies the efficacy of politics to produce social change, which I call the reactionary imaginary.¹⁶

The reactionary and committed imaginaries share a sense that the rebellions of the Sandinistas, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity bear ramifications beyond the borders of their home countries. In other words, in both imaginaries the Central American revolutions of the long 1980s represent a moment of transnational and transregional significance that resembles philosopher Alain Badiou's definition of the Event. The Event is a concept Badiou employs to explain a historical or epistemological novelty that transforms human lifeworlds and the functioning of systems governing these worlds (which he calls the state of affairs) by presenting a new truth, e.g. the equality of all humans. Revolutions thus always carry the seed of a potential Event. But Events must be deliberately maintained in order to enact their potential transformation of the reigning order, and so they require many forms of what Badiou calls "fidelity."¹⁷ Events are neither happenstance nor accidents; they are actively sustained by "an interpretive intervention that can

¹⁶ I draw the named for the committed imaginary from Jean Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* where he argues, "The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change" (23).

¹⁷ In *Being and Event*, Badiou explains fidelity this way: "To be faithful is to gather and distinguish the becoming legal of a chance" (232). In his *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, he more explicitly defines how an Event "compels [those who seek fidelity] to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation" (42).

declare that an event is presented in a situation" (Badiou, *Being* 181). Because certain acts of fidelity to the Event require retroactive interpretation in his thinking, Badiou's model suggests the importance of narrative to understanding social upheavals and revolution. Moreover, the production of narrative texts may require intense reflection and they are often published and distributed only after the events they aspire to portray. Thus they represent a form of fidelity to the extension of the Event into the future. For example, narratives composed by adherents of the committed imaginary represent acts of faith with insurrection in Central America because they sustain the possibility of social transformation in spite of its failure in the 1980s. Solidarity activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, one committed voice, explains her fidelity to Nicaragua's revolution: "I write [so] that the younger generation may have access to an earlier generation's political experience and theory" (*Blood* 13).

By contrast, texts produced within reactionary imaginaries reject the possibility of Central American uprisings attaining the status of an Event. They interpret them instead as what Badiou calls "simulacra" of the Event. "Simulacra" produce no "truth," but instead imitate the processes of truth and fidelity to the Event and have as their "[real] content massacre and war" (*Ethics* 74). As an example of a simulacra, Badiou names the rise of the Nazis in Germany, an occurrence which had all of the appearance of a popular revolution, but with its "invocation of blood and soil, of race, of custom" actually worked against future emancipatory Events (*Ethics* 76). These insights roughly correlate with how reactionaries in my dissertation see the rise of "totalitarianism" as promising to liberate human capacities by eliminating want, but offering instead a more profound form of human subordination. As Chapter 1 and 2 demonstrate, claims about "human subordination" are often masquerades for imperial prerogatives to dominate Central America.

In the reactionary imaginary, the prospect of social redistribution and the egalitarianism that Central American insurrections represented the negation of adherents crucial precept of meritocracy. Indeed, as Corey Robin observes, reactionaries engaged in a politics of mourning around a "narrative of loss" (*Reactionary* 21). According to the neoconservative Kirkpatrick, "The experience of this century's socialist regimes suggests that equality is unachievable at any price and, moreover, that in regimes that try to achieve it, less wealth is produced, fewer comforts are available, and ordinary people are less free than in many other societies" ("Introduction" 14). Hence, the hope for equality that binds the committed imaginary to uprisings in Central America represents a loss of legitimacy for neoconservatives' ideas and prestige.

I anchor my examination of the committed and reactionary visions of Central America in readings of a diverse group of research materials that includes counterinsurgency manuals, anthropological monographs, solidarity memoirs, and Central American diasporic novels. This broad range of texts provide a means for painting a fuller picture of the investments, ideologies, fantasies, and histories surrounding the U.S. experience of Central America during the long 1980s. For example, while counterinsurgency manuals give readers some sense of the military tactics and strategy employed on the battlefield, diasporic novels hint at the lived texture of low intensity conflicts and the traumas that persist as a result. Furthermore, the novelists, intellectuals, and activists who composed these narratives shared a diagonal relationship to the prevailing ideologies about war in Central America circulating in public discourse. In other words, because their roles were as functionaries, practitioners, and observers, the authors I examine did not intend to disseminate particular ideologies. Instead, their particular relationship to events in Central America positions their work as closer to something like "on-the-ground" narratives. For example, counterinsurgency intellectuals in the military disagreed with the

Reagan Administration's stance and believed that legitimate grievances and injustices had precipitated the uprisings in Central America. But counterinsurgency solutions to these grievances just as often involved the use of violence to demobilize insurgents as they advocated for ameliorating injustices through political negotiation. As a result, military specialists positioned themselves as technocrats rather than ideologues. Similarly, Héctor Tobar, a member of the Central American diaspora and a novelist, derives many of his insights and plotlines from working as a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*. Thus, the committed political imaginary as it appears in Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1996) arises as much from his grafting together of numerous news items into a fictional narrative as from any predisposition to a specific ideology. Put another way, this is not a dissertation about presidential rhetoric despite its being concerned with the age of the Reagan presidency and its aftermath. Rather, this project illuminates the divergent imaginaries that arise from how distinct actors envision their relationship to Central America and the urgent proximity of its insurrections.

My analysis of these narratives is grounded squarely in the imaginary, a concept I derive from transnational American studies and U.S. Latina/o studies. While the term itself evokes romantic, nearly metaphysical, notions of human spontaneity and creativity as expressions of an inner spirit, for these two fields of study the imaginary is a critical tool for describing the simultaneously ideational and socially consolidating aspects of meaning making in history. Put another way, the imaginary explains how, out of the surplus of meanings produced within a specific historical period, some configure themselves into radical possibilities "slumbering in a given social formation," and others bind together already established relationships, including those constituted by the prevailing mode of production (Saldívar et al. "Imaginary" x).

Transnational American studies scholars trace these two valences of the imaginary to works like

Cornelius Castoriadis' *The Imaginary Institution of Society* and to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, both of which theorize the imaginary's penchant to bring forth new collectivities and to pattern or structure social relations.¹⁸ Furthermore, for both transnational American and U.S. Latino/a studies, fields that require a conceptualization of affinities that transgress spatial boundaries, the imaginary's capacity to theorize "ongoing emergence" usefully captures how scholars understand the transnational "not as a set of stable social units spanning across national orders but rather as a constantly changing ensemble of formations-in-information" (Saldívar et al. "Imaginary" viii). It follows that by concentrating on transnational imaginaries, my dissertation hopes to pull apart the presumed domestic coherence and optimism brought by the "age of Reagan" in answer to an America assailed by internal doubt about its future. By pointing to the variety of significances that Americans attached to Central America and how they appear to split around investments in revolution, my dissertation illustrates, in the words of Amy Kaplan, how "putatively domestic conflicts...spill over national boundaries to be reenacted, challenged, or transformed" ("Alone" 16).

It is difficult not to see parallels between the imaginary's simultaneous operations of legitimizing prevailing social relationships and as creative font for new possible orders, and the role assigned to ideology in more traditional Marxist theory. Like Castoriadis, Louis Althusser's notion of ideology draws upon psychoanalytic sources to substantiate his revised theory of ideology, "to the 'individuals' who live in ideology...ideology = an imaginary relation to the real

¹⁸ In *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Susan Buck-Morss theorizes "political imaginaries," the term I use to describe the imaginaries examined in my dissertation. She defines political imaginaries as "collective dreams [that] dared to imagine a social world in alliance with personal happiness, and promised to adults that its realization would be in harmony with the overcoming of scarcity for all" (*Dreamworld* ix). Her book considers a the conflict between two political imaginaries: the "industrial capitalist" and the "socialist" nations during the Cold War, both of which held out a utopian promise of happiness for all citizens and the recognition of a global rival in the proponent of the opposite imaginary—what she calls a "topology of two irreconcilable enemies" (Buck-Morss x). In other words, Buck-Morss' theory of political imaginaries combines a structuring antagonism with a transnational enemy with the deeply ideological valences of dreams of happiness.

relations" ("Ideology" 113). The term "real relations" foregrounds how, in Althusser's view, capitalist ideologies render commonsense the interests of the capitalist elites in subordinating and exploiting the workers so that they "go on their own" in accord with these seemingly unconscious mandates.¹⁹ While Althusser's view of the "imaginary" within ideology may seem mechanistic, it reminds us that imaginaries are not merely bundles of meanings and references that evolve over time, but also that critics should connect them with material interests and dispositions that generate and are generated by social relationships. As Peruvian Marxist theorist José Carlos Mariátegui comments on the spontaneity of the imaginary, "One could say that people do not foresee or imagine more than that which is already germinating, maturing in the dark entrails of history" (401). Mariátegui's qualification ties the imaginary back to the forces of history but in such a way as to not lose the sense of ideational creativity and the utopian gesture intrinsic to ideas of the radical imaginary. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the struggle for Central America, through which imaginaries verge into commitments that, at times, conveyed versions of prevailing ideologies of their historical moment. In this way, my dissertation supplements transnational American studies' imaginary as analytic tool with Marxist theory's concern that culture may be encoded with values, ideas, and interests "relevant to social power" (Eagleton 45).

This dissertation is organized to emphasize the divisions between political imaginaries about Central America and also to highlight the experiences of the Central American diaspora. Each chapter examines how authors construe four core themes: the capacities and limitations of populations, the function of the state, the viability of sweeping social change, and the dynamics

¹⁹ In the recently translated and complete *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses* Althusser makes frequent recourse to the phrase "go all by itself" to indicate the general absence of direct coercion involved in his contemporaneous forms of capitalist exploitation and the population's general assent to the state of affairs.

introduced by capitalist expansionism. I draw support for my interpretations of the ramifications of U.S. militarism from diverse scholarship in critical security studies, sociology of social movements, and critical/cultural geography.

My first chapter, "Counterinsurgency's Precepts," explores how counterinsurgency manuals and theories narrate warfare through a holistic theory of social relations. I examine how U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force and CIA manuals, as well as counterinsurgency theory, take up and then reimagine the theories and historical strategies of insurgent movements when confronted with an enemy that does not follow the conventional rules of warfare or refuses to assemble in a conventional battle space. I argue that manuals like *Foreign Internal Defense: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Special Forces* (1994) situate counterinsurgents in a parasitic relationship to insurgencies. Consequently, through their reenvisioning of insurrectionist theories, counterinsurgent intellectuals imagine eradicating rebellion by disaggregating and reengineering the social relations that gave rise to unrest. By contextualizing counterinsurgency's intellectual output within the violence its practitioners helped to engender in Central America, this chapter sets the terms to which the following chapters respond.

Chapter two, "Neutralizing Rigoberta Menchú: Neoconservative Resonances in David Stoll's Anthropology," examines anthropologist David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999). Against Stoll's protestations that his book had no ideological agenda and was merely committed to the truth, this chapter explores how Stoll's ambivalence toward guerrillas in Guatemala, and the narratives composed in support of their insurrection, pushes his reasoning in the direction of the political right. I argue that Stoll's conclusions bear strong resemblances to the ideologies of neoconservative authors of the Reagan Administration's policy in Central America. Within Stoll's polemical and deeply politicized monograph resides a

political imaginary that inadvertently affirms the coercive power of the Guatemalan government, pillories symbols of martyrdom in left politics, and imagines Guatemala's unaligned peasants as correlative to the U.S. "silent majority," a concept conceived to describe the upsurge of conservatism in American politics. Stoll represents a version of the reactionary imaginary inasmuch as his rejection of extant leftists pushes his conclusions toward the right.

The third chapter, "Composing Affiliations in Solidarity Memoir," turns toward imaginaries committed to justice and emancipation in Central America and in the U.S. through a look at Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (2005) and Jennifer Harbury's *Searching for Everardo: A Story of Love, War, and the CIA in Guatemala* (1997). I contextualize Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz in the broader Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement (CAPSM) that arose in response to Central Americans' powerful stories of suffering, witness, and consciousness, which represented an alternative angle on the Reagan Administration's campaigns in the region. In doing so, this chapter charts the movement's accomplishments and liabilities through the narrative form of a subgenre I define as the "solidarity narrative." I show how solidarity activists' proclivity to elevate themselves through the pains of others emerges in solidarity narrative as sentimentalist representations of graphic suffering. Ultimately, I argue, solidarity narrative represents a means for conceptualizing ethically-attuned solidarity activism through what Luciano Canfora calls "analogical thinking." Analogies assume neither perfect unity nor homogenous identity between counterparts in a relationship of solidarity, but, as a form of thought about solidarity, they seek to build comparisons toward mutual striving in the name of shared goals.

In the final chapter, "Configurations of Justice in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*," I examine how Guatemalan-American novelist Héctor Tobar imagines distinct forms of justice for

massacre and death in Guatemala and for undocumented labor exploitation in Los Angeles. In *The Tattooed Soldier*, Antonio Bernal, survivor of a death squad attack, encounters the commander of the death squad on the streets of Los Angeles. My reading suggests that the narrative offers several configurations of justice, which include the murder of the commander, the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, and a more speculative version I call the "interrogative mode of justice." Through figures that are simultaneously homeless, refugees, and question marks, the interrogative mode of justice points toward a future politics that combines struggle against U.S. imperialism and against economic neoliberalism. Bringing Tobar's novel into conversation with actually existing Central American diasporic politics reinforces the necessity of an "interrogative mode" of justice that evades the closure on political struggle which the novel's revenge plot represents.

In the context of a renewed U.S. imperialism in the Middle East, the questions explored in this project are of enduring importance. How might cultural texts and theories of culture allow us to reimagine the end of the Cold War not as a closure but as an opening of a number of contradictory visions of politics and social relations? What do representations of uprisings in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala tell us about the life of revolutionary ideals in the United States? Are acts of solidarity in a socially transformative project possible between profoundly unequal partners? Finally, what cultural ramifications result from U.S. counterinsurgency campaigns abroad? As various commanders that cut their teeth on counterinsurgency warfare in Central America have shifted to managing postwar conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (for example, James Steele, who served as unofficial director of the CIA in Afghanistan), we see an attendant resurgence of the tactics of massacre, torture, and targeting of civilians that made

Central America's civil wars so brutal.²⁰ By contrast to the Central America Peace and Solidarity Movement, however, anti-intervention activists have made less recourse to amassing potential allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although there is perhaps a significant cultural divide between activists in the U.S. and the Middle East, as well as a sweeping geographical distance, and a decreasing belief in the relevance of politics in the face of violence, I hope my dissertation presents useful means to conceptualize the value of internationalist solidarity by challenging assumptions that those living in the United States must, by their very positioning in the world, further the cause of imperialism.²¹ More precisely, I suggest that we lose the crucial idea political affinity when we reduce the politics of individuals and collectivities to their geographic situation.

²⁰ An investigation by *The Guardian* revealed Steele's unofficial presence in Afghanistan in 2013. He is a veteran of U.S. campaigns in both El Salvador and Nicaragua.

²¹ More recently, domestic calls for solidarity have arisen from the #blacklivesmatter movement. Journalists have also documented the sharing of information pertaining to the effects of tear gas between protestors in Occupy Wall Street encampments and the Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia.

Chapter 1

Counterinsurgency's Precepts

Consider a photograph, captured by translator and photojournalist Marcelo Montecino, that depicts a Guatemalan special forces unit known as the "Kaibiles" in a mundane moment (see Figure 1.1). Taken in 1982, the image strikingly depicts the Kaibiles at rest during the height of the U.S.-supported Guatemalan military campaign. Arms and equipment have been set aside while the troops of this counterinsurgency-trained unit enjoy a meal. To their left a painted slogan announces: "The night and the mountain are neutral. They deliver themselves to those who do not fear them." This slogan attempts to eliminate the threats represented by terrain that is inaccessible to regular armed forces (the mountain) and by situations in which soldiers experience diminished faculties (night). In discounting these threats, the slogan bolsters Kaibile morale by rhetorically returning geography and darkness to a state of indifferent availability. Undaunted soldiers, the slogan seems to declare, will find the mountain and the night depopulated of danger and surrendering themselves to Kaibile maneuvers.

To the casual observer, this attempt to personify the landscape and times of day and to treat them the way militaries treat allies or enemies in conventional war might appear absurd. It would seem that Kaibile soldiers would do better to reserve these hyperboles for their adversaries rather than for the mountain and the night. However, beyond merely asserting that Kaibile units have the upper hand, even in contexts where military forces face uncertain odds, this motto counters essential guerrilla tactics. For example, in his 1961 *Guerrilla Warfare* Ernesto "Che" Guevara enjoined guerrilla fighters to conduct operations at night to both avoid encirclement by a potentially stronger force and to damage their opponent's morale (27). Similarly, Guevara argues, impassable terrain like mountains, protects guerrillas who may be overwhelmed by

consistent skirmishes with regular military units (33). Thus, Montecino's photograph highlights how counterinsurgency forces frequently adopt, modify, and (as in the slogan) invert the tactics and principles of insurgent forces. By appropriating guerrilla precepts and using them for opposite purposes, Kaibile rhetoric reveals its origins in counterinsurgency (COIN), a unique military doctrine that the United States imported to Central America during the Cold War.



Figure 1.1: Marcelo Montecino, *Kaibiles, Special Anti-Insurgency Troops, Guatemala, 1982*.

Counterinsurgency's logic of appropriation and reversal is the subject of this chapter. I explore the ways that U.S. military manuals and theory composed to fight, reorganize, and steer conflict in Central America aspire to delegitimize insurgencies in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Counterinsurgency intellectuals understand that in order to successfully combat revolution, one must become a revolutionary. I argue that, as a consequence of this view, counterinsurgents adopt versions of the premises, tactics, and goals of Central American insurgencies conducive to more fully confronting their opponents. In doing so, these military technocrats imagined themselves as meticulously disarticulating the historical subjects of revolution by operationalizing the constitutive features of revolutionary struggle, but then

redeploying these features to support either ruling regimes or U.S. hegemony in Central America. Assuming this strategic vision, within counterinsurgency's reactionary imaginary, the vocation of political struggle to achieve social change becomes unintelligible, a fiction rejected out of necessity, or alternatively actively disassembled through coercive incentives. However, the counterinsurgent's position is not without its ambivalence. With a thoroughgoing knowledge of the insurgency's grievances and moral perplexity over apparent collusion with forces known for their cruelty, these intellectuals also encounter instances of ambivalence toward their errand into the Central American "wilderness," a sensibility I discuss at the end of the chapter. This experience of ambivalence was, perhaps, compounded by the fact that war against revolutionaries required more than mere military defeat in the battlefield.

Practitioners in the U.S. Army, Air force, Special Forces, and Central Intelligence Agency suggest that counterinsurgency's operational objectives demand more than mere combat to repress armed uprisings through military means. Counterinsurgency requires soldiers to combine nonmilitary knowledge and skills with the imperative for constant adaptation. According to the most recent U.S. military counterinsurgency manual, "COIN requires Soldiers and Marines to be ready both to fight and to build" (*Counterinsurgency* 1-19). Out of a recognition that insurgencies frequently arise from and respond to, socio-political contexts of disenfranchisement, grinding poverty, and/or government negligence and abuse, counterinsurgency requires its operatives to "employ a mix of familiar combat tasks and skills more often associated with nonmilitary agencies" ("Foreword" n.p.). In their foreword to the manual, Lt. General David Petraeus and Lt. General James F. Amos delineate these additional skills as necessary for reestablishing institutions and security forces, facilitating the rule of law, and coordinating combat in concert with a number of institutions and organizations.

Counterinsurgency forces, the generals suggest, must prepare to serve two roles: "to be greeted with either a handshake or a hand grenade while taking on missions" ("Foreword" n.p.). Put another way, soldiers must be custodians of public goods and contracts (accepting "handshakes") and also warriors (preempting, meeting, and defending against "hand grenades").

COIN's perpetual evolution in response to the developments of the insurgency and foreign national situations is a second, but interrelated, characteristic of the doctrine. This prerequisite of constant adaptation to changes in the field demonstrates how "An effective counterinsurgent force is [also] a learning organization" (Petraeus et al 1-26). This passage indicates how counterinsurgents apprentice themselves to the insurgencies they combat and the environments and populations within which they subsist. The Kaibiles above, for example, absorb knowledge of guerrilla principles in order to better match their adversary's capacities. Taken together, these descriptions suggest that counterinsurgency understands itself as operating at the boundaries of traditional warfare, repurposing humanitarian concerns as a means of combat, and perpetually adapting to a shifting environment and an evolving insurgency. Granting that Petraeus and Amos' summation of counterinsurgency usefully condenses key characteristics, they portray counterinsurgency as a benevolent and defensive doctrine. By contrast, critical counterinsurgency studies emphasizes its offensive and destructive role throughout the Cold War.

Critical counterinsurgency scholars share three preoccupations—the institutional relations that give rise to counterinsurgency, the doctrine's participation in an ongoing history of American imperialism, and its corrosive impact on individual lives and societies—all of which

they overridingly interpret through its historical effects.²² Critical counterinsurgency studies scholars of an institutionalist bent define counterinsurgency as a response to the constraints and imperatives of states and institutions, and particularly to the survival of established social orders when undergoing novel challenges.²³ Jennifer Schirmer argues that "specific threats [...] caused the Guatemalan military to defend itself increasingly as a corporate entity" against challenges to its legitimacy (7). With its autonomous, institutional future in peril the military pursued a counterinsurgency strategy that paired democratic elections with the declaration of a state of siege (Schirmer 4). As the subtitle of her book (*A Violence Called Democracy*) suggests Schirmer's account contrasts COIN's claim to advance humanitarian and democratic ends within an increasingly securitized state as a "structured and violent denial of human rights and dissent" (2).

Other scholars explore the instrumentalist ends to which militaries and states put counterinsurgency knowledge and strategy. Former human rights monitor in Latin America Michael McClintock argues that even in its origins during the 1960s counterinsurgency denoted "both measures to combat insurgency and the export of a kind of insurgency, a guerrilla threat of America's own devising" (175). In McClintock's assessment, counterinsurgency practitioners' far-reaching knowledge enables them to both undermine and promote insurgencies. Extending the observation that COIN combats and cultivates insurgencies a bit further, Michael Klare and Peter Kornbluh argue that low-intensity conflict (LIC) (the name for counterinsurgency practices in the 1980s) is essentially a doctrine for use against a political-social process rather than a discreet enemy. "But while military strategists depict LIC as a war for all seasons," Klare and

²² Although not a defined field of scholarship in its own right, in order to define critical counterinsurgency studies I include scholars and intellectuals from history, anthropology, sociology, and geography who cast a critical lens on the COIN practices and their results.

²³ Scholars who study counterinsurgency through the lens of the institution include Eldelberto Torres-Rivas, Michael McClintock, and Lesley Gill.

Kornbluh explain, "in essence it is a doctrine for countering revolution" (7).²⁴ The elasticity of counterinsurgency theory and practice therefore enables a broader pursuit of state interests not only through the elimination of insurgencies, but also by enabling insurgencies to undermine revolutionary governments in foreign countries, as in the U.S. sponsorship of the Contras against the Sandinista government.²⁵

Counterinsurgency, scholars of the anti-imperialist tendency argue, perpetuates not merely the occasional pursuit of U.S. interests abroad against insurgencies, but an unbroken American empire.²⁶ For these scholars, counterinsurgency becomes one of a number of tools used by the United States to subjugate nations and populations to American sovereignty. As Alfred McCoy observes, the U.S. strategy to embed a powerful counterinsurgency apparatus within the government of the Philippines "installed a point of entry for later intrusions into the internal affairs of a sovereign state" (*Policing America's Empire* 19) and produced innovative means of social control that "damaged democracy" both at home and abroad (8). Greg Grandin ties counterinsurgency practices in Latin America directly to the rising neoconservative movement in the United States, noting a return of imperialist ideology with both the administrations of Ronald Reagan and of George W. Bush. "[It] was in Central America,"

²⁴ According to Michael McClintock, under Ronald Reagan's presidency "The new buzzword was 'low-intensity conflict,' which subsumes counterinsurgency and the whole range of special warfare" (298). The administration presented low-intensity conflict as the "low-cost, low-profile, and low-risk" alternative to direct intervention, Ivan Molloy observes (15). McClintock outlines the significance of this change as, "Low-Intensity conflict," a term previously used to describe levels of violence which now implied the "minimal commitment of American forces, a limited objective, and the comforting premise that 'U.S. forces never risk military defeat'" (335). Nevertheless, the level of violence was equivalent to high-intensity warfare, its "burden... would fall on allied foreign forces, proxies, or mercenaries" (335).

²⁵ As a number of critical counterinsurgency scholars have already argued, counterinsurgency doctrine includes military efforts to both suppress and promote insurgencies. My case study of Central America features both forms of American intervention, but this chapter predominantly investigates the suppression end of the doctrine. I emphasize the "counter" in counterinsurgency for two reasons: because the declassified, leaked, and public documents tend to be overwhelmingly oriented toward suppression of insurgencies; and because I share Grandin's assumption that by challenging the U.S.-dominated geopolitical order leftists in Central America waged an insurrection against American imperialism.

²⁶ Those who consider counterinsurgency to be just one maneuver in a history of American imperialism include Ivan Molloy, Ranajit Guha, and Alfred McCoy.

Grandin explains, "where the Republican Party first combined the three elements that give today's imperialism its moral force: punitive idealism, free-market absolutism, and right-wing Christian mobilization" (*Empire's Workshop* 6). Grandin's association of rightwing ideology and counterinsurgency suggests that any challenge to U.S. interests in Central and Latin America is also an insurgency against American imperial rule.

The most significant contemporary scholarship on counterinsurgency calls attention to how COIN manipulates the lives and lifeworlds of the populations amidst which the U.S. military operates.²⁷ Exploring nations that are simultaneously the sites of imperialist intervention and ecological disaster, Christian Parenti states, "COIN targets—*pace* Foucault—the 'capillary' level of social relations. It ruptures and tears (but rarely remakes) the intimate social relations among people, their ability to cooperate, and the lived texture of solidarity—in other words, the bonds that comprise society's sinews" (*Tropic of Chaos* 23). Here Parenti asserts that counterinsurgency exceeds the carnage of conventional warfare by damaging the very fabric of sociality and culture. The non-military knowledge and skills necessitated by counterinsurgency, according to Parenti, lay claim to social processes themselves and result in comprehensive societal corrosion. If counterinsurgency promotes the dissolution of established cultural and social bonds, one might ask, then what new organization of life does it promote? Visual studies scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff begins to answer this question when he obliquely draws on "commander vision," a military concept that describes the desired culmination of operations as envisioned by the campaign's commander.²⁸ "Commander vision," in Mirzoeff's analysis, is both a visual schematic of a whole society and an act of imperialist violence. He asserts, "COIN seeks

²⁷ Other scholars who explore counterinsurgency's effect on the life of populations, as a form of biopolitics, include Ben Anderson and Derek Gregory.

²⁸ Field Manual 100-20 *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* defines commander vision as, "Leaders must formulate a vision of success and communicate it to their subordinates. That vision must include political and psychological end states, as well as military objectives" (1-9).

to render a culture in its own image that will actively want to be subjected to biopolitical imperial governance" (295).

In spotlighting COIN's deleterious results, critical counterinsurgency studies contributes to knowledge about the doctrine and practices used by militaries against internal threats. Critical COIN studies accurately diagnoses counterinsurgency as the result of pressures internal to states and militaries. These institutions turn toward unconventional forms of violence, at the same time adopting the mantle of democratic and humanitarian reform, to address novel threats.

Furthermore, these scholars demonstrate how counterinsurgency both thwarts and promotes insurgencies depending on U.S. interests as an expression of a continuing history of American imperialism. The United States pursued both aims simultaneously in Central American during the 1980s, promoting the Contra insurgency in Nicaragua and scaffolding governments against insurgents in El Salvador and Guatemala. These scholars also demonstrate the effect of circumventing revolutionary processes by highlighting how U.S. military functionaries weaponize politics, culture, and economics, damaging the very relationships that hold together society. Despite its close attention to the institutional matrix out of which COIN comes to be and the ends to which governments wield this doctrine, critical counterinsurgency studies equates the imaginaries behind this military doctrine with American imperialist or rightwing ideology.

In their consideration of COIN's effects, scholars in critical counterinsurgency studies neglect the following questions: what "commander vision" renders the nations in which the United States applies counterinsurgency strategy as always-already receptive to imperialist control? More specifically, what precepts about order, politics, culture, sociality, and human behavior does counterinsurgency concoct for itself to perennially affirm the viability of COIN missions and tactics regardless of context? Most importantly, how does a military doctrine that

begins with humanitarian and democratic goals conclude with the dissolution of core social bonds?

In this chapter I point to how the technical language of COIN manuals—in which identification, definition, instruction, and regimented inquiry are the key modes of its surface discourse—masks a deeply ideological vision within counterinsurgency doctrine. When read closely, what appears to be functionalist reasoning in one context becomes a map of imagined social relations. If we believe Petraeus and Amos, for counterinsurgency theorists and practitioners insurgencies set key parameters for theory and action. Based on their assumption, in this chapter I argue that in contrast to the quantifiable strengths and weakness of adversaries in conventional warfare, counterinsurgency endeavors to mimic or mirror the amorphousness of insurgencies in order to better dismantle them. Disassembling insurgencies in Central America then required militaries to adopt and modify insurgencies' premises, seizing on their practices, and extending to the remaining population diminished versions of insurgent goals. Counterinsurgency theory thus sought to seal off revolutionary processes by inhabiting the insurgent's frame of mind; staking a claim on her range of operations; and curtailing her objectives, substituting government forces, U.S. intervening forces, or a manufactured insurgency for the actual agent of change. Counterinsurgents imagine their strategies through a parasitic logic, in which their efforts draw them into an incontrovertible proximity with insurgencies. Derek Gregory calls this a "presumptive intimacy" ("The Rush to the Intimate" 15), sapping insurgents' sources of strength; ingesting their knowledge, discourse, and culture; in some cases switching roles with the host; and ultimately disarticulating historical subjects and the possibility of social transformation they represent. The corrosive costs and regressive

consequences of dismantling these organizations and movements, and subverting of revolution in Central America are well documented.

The missions of the Kaibil special forces unit with which I began the chapter capture something of the brutality of counterinsurgency operations during the 1980s. On American military installations in Panama, U.S. Army trainers instructed Kaibiles in counterinsurgency practices, which included the use of torture, "psychological operations," anti-communist indoctrination, and the encirclement, investigation, and destruction of villages perceived to be sympathetic to the insurgency (Rothenberg 103). Known later for their cruelty, the Kaibiles had numerous opportunities in which to put their training to use, including the 1982 massacre of the village Las Dos Erres, where the Kaibil soldiers systematically murdered all inhabitants of the village with sledgehammers and firearms, raping women, and tossing the bodies into a well (50-1). In El Salvador, as with Guatemala, the massacre of entire villages was common, including the Sumpul River (1980), Lempar River (1981), and El Mozote (1981) massacres. Financing from Washington and training from U.S. military bases contributed the development of "death squads" as a form of organized terror against suspected guerrillas, their families, and their supporters (Commission on the Truth for El Salvador 20). Similarly, the CIA-trained, U.S.-funded Contras were known to decapitate, castrate, and mutilate civilians and foreign aid workers in Nicaragua, "using spoons to gorge out eyes, slicing breasts off of one civilian defender, ripping flesh off the bones of another" (Grandin, *Empire's* 90). During interrogations torture became a regular implement of counterinsurgency organizations and regimes. In Guatemala, torture included the murder of children in front of their families, the amputation of limbs, the burning alive of "subversives," the opening of pregnant mothers' wombs, and the extraction of viscera from living persons (Rothenberg *Memory* 13-14, 24, 44, 67-75). Forced disappearances, arbitrary

executions, and the institutionalization of rape as a means of combating communist subversion spanned the conflicts in these three nations. As a Special Forces Commander in El Salvador, Thomas Waghelstein's statement that low-intensity conflict is "a step toward the primitive" resonates in a different way given the context of these extensive atrocities (178). Although he intended to imply that technology-intensive military conventions should be rejected in counterinsurgency operations, "primitive" is an apt description of the calamitous consequences and barbaric character of these same operations.

In recognition of this "lavish brutality," in the words of military analyst Benjamin Schwarz, this chapter details the social logic intrinsic to counterinsurgency theory surrounding conflict in Central America during the 1980s and 90s (79). Media discourse tends to attribute blame for widespread brutality to the inadvertent results of otherwise sound policy decisions, or to uniquely sadistic, psychotic, or criminal individuals. As I will demonstrate, what might appear to be unforeseen but occasional incidents can be traced back to a systematic vision within counterinsurgency's guiding documents. My analysis of COIN's consciously patterned vision centers on four major military publications: Army field manual *31-20-30: Foreign Internal Defense Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Special Forces (FID)*, Army and Air Force field manual *100-20: Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC)*, CIA field manual *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare (PSYOPsGW)*, and David Galula's foundational *Counterinsurgency Warfare*.²⁹ One of a number of military genres, field manuals represent the joint between theory and practice, where doctrine has been formalized into distinct itineraries and procedures employed by the military in training and combat scenarios, i.e. in the field. I take these documents to be representative of the ideological vision of counterinsurgency doctrine

²⁹ WikiLeaks leaked the *FID* field manual in 2008 with the attendant release tag, "What we learned about running death squads and propping up corrupt government in Latin America and how to apply it to other places" ("U.S. Special Forces Foreign...").

during the 1980s and 90s.³⁰ I also make recourse to Galula's more explicitly theoretical *Counterinsurgency Warfare* as the Vietnam era precursor to the field manual's period-specific speculations. Galula's pioneering text helps me develop instances that remain merely associative in the field manuals. This chapter charts how, in part, the atrocity perpetrated throughout the isthmus may also be attributed to the objectionable socio-political premises upon which counterinsurgency generates and rationalizes that strategy. I argue that military intellectuals narrate three broad patterns of implementing counterinsurgency theory: the adaptation of insurgent theoretical precepts to different ends, the usurping of insurgent practices, and the appropriation of the motivating grievances behind insurgent movements, substituting a hobbled liberalism for the desires of insurgent organizations and social movements.

Part 1: Premises

For "orthodox" insurgencies, remarks foundational counterinsurgency theorist David Galula, "Guerrilla warfare is the only possible course of action" to build military power against the state (33).³¹ Yet, guerrillas represent a continuing predicament for military analysts. As was the case in the Vietnam War, guerrillas induce conditions where traditional military rules of action do not apply. In traditional interstate warfare, the battlefield is partitioned between sides, with battalions moving through space to confront their opponents. The "rear" of each faction is where the leadership resides, through which they route supply lines, and it is therefore a place of great vulnerability. Concepts like "movement," "front," and "rear" are illegible in guerrilla

³⁰ Moreover, because they were published in the later stages of Central America's low-intensity conflicts (the Sandinistas ceded power to the neo-liberal Violeta Chamorro in 1990. The Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars concluded in 1996 and 1992 respectively) the manuals aggregate knowledge, ideologies, and practices in a more thoroughgoing manner than manuals published earlier.

³¹ A former French operative in his nation's war against Algerian decolonization, Galula entrenched himself in the intellectual military infrastructure of the late 1960s, publishing his classic *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* while on a fellowship at the Center for Military Affairs at Harvard in 1964 (Nagl "Foreword" vii). With this text, Galula formalized reflections from his experiences in Algeria, Greece, Italy, and as a captive of Chinese Maoists developing the fundamental doctrine of counterinsurgency practice in the United States.

warfare contexts because confrontations depend on small guerrilla units operating in secrecy, often occluded by the surrounding populace, into which they can quickly disappear. Galula articulates the "guerrilla dilemma" facing counterinsurgents through the trope of unlocatedness: "The trouble here is that the enemy holds no territory and refuses to fight for it. He is everywhere and nowhere" (50). Because guerrillas confound standard military logics, and "counterinsurgency exists solely as a reaction to an insurgency," then to some degree insurgency in general, and guerrilla warfare in particular, sets the "strategic patterns" for counterinsurgency, according to Galula (29).

This section examines how counterinsurgency theory adopts and modifies premises and motivations that it attributes to both a theoretical composite insurgency and actual insurgencies in Central America. I explore how COIN theory wrangles with assumed insurgent premises about the primacy of politics, the population as the objective and terrain of conflict, the war apprehended as a rhetorical demonstration, and the acknowledgement of underlying social causes of war. Ultimately, the notion that insurgents set the parameters of action for counterinsurgency reflects the doctrine's desire for extreme proximity with the forces of insurrection. Thus, in sharing premises and deriving theory out of the historical output of guerrilla thinkers (Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara, Regis Debray, Ho Chi Minh, etc.), counterinsurgency strives to cleave to revolutions so that it might more thoroughly dismantle them.

Politics is Primary

Dismantling of revolutions begins with counterinsurgents' acknowledgement that wars of insurgency are political wars. In the writings of arch-warfare theorist Karl von Clausewitz, nations conventionally triumph in wars by concentrating forces for a "decisive maneuver" (Greentree 15-6). The cessation of hostilities in Clausewitz's writing results in political effects,

but political consequences are not aims inside the conduct of war itself. By contrast, in his 1964 *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, David Galula argues that for counterinsurgents "politics becomes an active instrument of operation" (5). Almost twenty years later, an enhanced version of this logic emerged in Guatemala, where the Minister of Defense, General Héctor Alejandro Gramajo Morales, described the military's mission in pursuing elections to combat guerrillas. "Our strategic goal," Gramajo stated, "has been to reverse Clausewitz's philosophy of war to state that in Guatemala, politics must be the continuation of war" (qtd. in Schirmer 1). Thus counterinsurgency strategy links political victories, organized in the name of the government, with victories over enemy forces. Killing guerrillas and neutralizing their networks occurs simultaneously with attempts to reform governance and to coerce or prompt elections. In this "unconventional" warfare, military violence must be weighed in terms of its political effects, just as the politics promoted must be comprehended through their effects on the greater military effort.

Put generously, an insurgency represents a breach in a regime's legitimate claim to rule. Politics, broadly conceived, then becomes an instrument to resume governmental legitimacy and at the same time to delegitimize the insurgency in the eyes of the national populace. In an article from *The Military Review*, "LIC in Central America: Training Implications for the U.S. Army," Lt. Col. Jimmie F. Holt articulates the implications of entangling politics and violence through the notion of "popular will." "Traditional military thinking," he argues, "was based on controlling terrain, while revolutionary warfare is based on controlling polarized popular will" (Holt 11). Although Holt's remark fails to demonstrate how military forces might command intangibles like "popular will," he nonetheless indicates to his readers the new center and terrain of conflict in counterinsurgency war: the populace.

Mobilizing Static Populations

In order to solve problems arising from the difficulty of fixing guerrillas in battle space, counterinsurgents adopt one of guerrilla warfare's central tenets: the population is the terrain of struggle. The U.S. Army authors of the *Foreign Internal Defense Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Special Forces* field manual (*FID*) instruct Special Forces units to learn both the geography of operation and also the demography of the battle environment, because "The populace is a critical factor" (1-3). Thus, Mao Tse-Tung's observation, "The [people] may be likened to water and the [guerrillas] to the fish who inhabit it" (93), is equally assumed by theorists and practitioners of counterinsurgency. For both insurgents and counterinsurgents the recentering of conflict on the population itself multiplies the points of entry and tactical choices through which war takes shape. Against the amorphousness of unconventional conflict, counterinsurgents stabilize the conflict's basis and its object by adopting this key guerrilla premise. Through this new theoretical frame, military practitioners imagine the populace as simultaneously the "center of gravity" and the audience for the contest between insurgent and counterinsurgent.³²

Yet how *FID* concentrates war on the people, should give us pause, because it renders populations as little more than geographic features in counterinsurgency theory. To a degree this geographic trope used to represent the populace arises from the layering of landscape or "battlefield" metaphors on the body politic, as in Mao's ocean teeming with guerrilla fish. Counterinsurgents utilized similar geographic metaphors to describe Central America as the "proving ground" of future forms of unconventional or low-intensity warfare. Writing from the perspective of the recent occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, Todd Greentree argues that

³² According to *The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* "center of gravity" is "The source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act" (35).

“Central America was in some important respects a proving ground for the political philosophy that has guided current interventions” (14). The stasis of populations and their status as "proving ground," a phrase that describes the uninhabited terrain on which the military tests missiles and combustible weaponry, connotes an insensate and passive material, not a population galvanized by unrest or lacerated with internal conflict.

By appropriating insurgent premises about the function of populations, counterinsurgents envision a reified national people, prone to stasis throughout hostilities. A pronounced desire for "normalcy," an attitudinal conservatism, and/or anti-politicization, I will demonstrate, denote counterinsurgency's stasis model of populations. Ultimately, this modified insurgent precept empowers counterinsurgents to deny mass politics and preserve the viability of their mission. Within this schema low-intensity conflict becomes a game in which the logic of violence herds populations toward one adversary or another.

The portrait of the populace as static stems from the counterinsurgent belief that unreflective attitudes govern mass behavior. COIN manuals tend to characterize the people as "unresponsive" to either insurgent or government demands even in the early stages of war. The U.S. Army authors of the *FID* assume that "Most of the population remains uncommitted" as a base existential condition of populations during war (3-22). Explained through descriptors like "attitude", the authors suggest that population inertia derives from an inherent distrust of either the government or "outsiders" (read: insurgents). Rather, "In most instances, the general desire of most of the public is to be left alone, to earn a livelihood, and to conduct its normal affairs" (*FID* 3-22). Furthermore, the *FID* field manual instructs Special Forces to channel this "desire for normalcy" in order to direct it against the insurgency (3-22).

Of course, the *FID* manual's description of static populations is completely self-interested. Counterinsurgency doctrine writes socio-political circumstances that make its mission daunting, if not impossible, out of existence. It follows that defining populations as shaped by uncritical inclinations, not surging politicization, affirms the viability of counterinsurgency missions in the first place.³³ Hence, counterinsurgency's fictitious population, with its pronounced desire for normalcy and the status quo, makes incumbent success imaginable and also rationalizes the United States' effort. Taking this reasoning to its logical conclusion, RAND analysts Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf assert that "popular support" for insurgents is quantifiable insofar as the population tolerates the insurgency and allows it to persist (8). Instead, "a pervasive...passivity of feeling toward both sides is quite consonant with popular behavior that is highly beneficial to one side" (Leites and Wolf 42). In other words, the weakness of the "popular support" concept comes from the possibility that it may be measured exclusively by the population's willingness to denounce the insurgents living amongst them. The *FID* manual echoes Leites and Wolf over a decade later, suggesting that insurgencies depend on the "passive acquiescence of the general populace" reinforcing the image of populations as inert and unvarying in their preferences (1-8).

As may be already apparent, ascribing to populations a universal suspicion of change also authorizes counterinsurgents to attribute to them a political conservatism as an effect of their generalized torpor. Michael Sheehan, a former counterterrorism operative in Central America, notes a popular inclination toward conservatism in his exceptionally ideological account, "Comparative Counterinsurgency Strategies" in a 1989 issue of *Conflict*. Sheehan argues that the indigenous folk of Guatemala seek "to maintain their way of life that is based on small, generally

³³ James Dunkerley describes the profound mass politics on which the Sandinista frequently depended in his *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America*. Demonstrations in support of the new government were frequent responses to U.S. brokered "opposition" rallies (Dunkerley 275).

inefficient plots of land" (130). Conservatism, in this context, designates less a political program than a preference for unchanging conditions or a negative attitude toward transformation and modernity. In historian Alfred McCoy's *Policing America's Empire*, he maintains that with regard to the Philippines, studies that emphasize legitimacy and order "incline toward a portrayal of the people as innately conservative, willing to accept any government—colonial or national, authoritarian or democratic—that offers peace and prosperity" (55). As I argue later in this chapter, seeing the people as in want of a benevolent sovereign is to a counterinsurgent force's advantage. A habitually conservative populace invariably supports governments so long as they supply the benefits of order and economic opportunity. At the same time, to define such politics as attitudinal, rather than emerging from reflection, relegates politics to a condition of placating the herd. In a sense, COIN depicts the masses as predisposed to an organized, capitalist order.

The herd's preference for equilibrium stands at odds with counterinsurgency's aspiration to completely mobilize the civilian populace against the enemy, because hypothetically counterinsurgency theorists need the broader populace to throw their lot behind the incumbent effort in order to extricate the insurgency. Thomas Waghelstein, the United States Military Group Commander in El Salvador who served through much of the country's civil war, argues that assuming insurgent premises about the national population reconstitutes counterinsurgency combat as "total war at the grassroots level" (127). Adopting the principle that the population itself is the terrain of combat then demands total war. Total war exceeds the bounds of conventional warfare that limit what resources might be usefully deployed against an opponent and the selection of legitimate targets.³⁴ In a complete mobilization of resources and populations,

³⁴ General Erich Ludendorff popularized the concept of the "total war" concept in his 1935 *Der Total Krieg* (*Total War*), but it originates with French civilian leaders during World War I, with terms like *guerre totale* and *guerre*

"total war at the grassroots" level weaponizes economics, politics, and socio-psychological states in order to eliminate targets, military or civilian, and to render an impact on the mundane existence of those within the combat zone. Hence this ideal galvanization of all aspects and members of society, to which Waghelstein refers, would be "total" down to the grassroots, leaving no element, no individual, within a society in its original condition.

This rhetoric of transformation cuts two ways. On the one hand, it alludes to mass political mobilization in the name of the government, a notion that the stasis of model of populations denies. On the other hand, it suggests a violence that sweeps up civil and military segments. Precluding the language of mass politics, theories of counterinsurgency open the door to mobilizing and controlling the populace through the logic of violence. Soldiers and militaries wielding the power to affect society down to the grassroots implies indiscriminate killing. In order to evade such a charge, counterinsurgents rationalize their activities not as the application of violence, but the preservation of life.

Low-intensity conflict theoreticians navigate the contradiction between the value of total mobilization and the supposition that social aggregates by nature abstain from mobilization by utilizing medical metaphors to describe their task. In the context of the Cold War, American culture and politicians trafficked in "contamination" motifs to represent indefinite threats, communist or otherwise.³⁵ Counterinsurgency specialists during the period reproduce these

intégrale. According to Roger Chikering and Stig Förster, "Total war...demanded the loyal participation of the whole population" including men, women, and children (10).

³⁵ In "Containing Culture in the Cold War" Andrew Ross describes the origins of Cold War anxieties of contamination arising from diplomat George Kennan's writing on the policy advocating the containment of Soviet incursion that involve both an international and domestic component: "one which speaks to a threat outside of the social body, a threat which therefore has to be isolated, in quarantine, and kept at bay from the domestic body; and a second meaning of containment, which speaks to the domestic contents of the social body, a threat internal to the host which must then be neutralized by being contained, or 'domesticated'" (331). Kennan's representation of how best to contain Soviet influence, according to Ross, "anticipates, if it did not exactly advocate, the Red scare that mobilized much of the postwar hysteria about aliens, bugs, pods, microbes, germs and other demonologies of the Other" (332).

motifs to describe their operations as curatives or surgical extraction. Lt. James Holt, writing for the *Military Review* in 1990, counts among the U.S. military's deficits a limited preventative capacity in preparing for low-intensity conflict environments. "U.S. defense capability," he explains, "is analogous to a medical capability to treat only serious diseases, with no preventative medical program" (Holt 8). The phrasing of this quote implies that the military's preparation for war and "acts short of war" licenses it to treat "infected" foreign contexts and peoples. Like a massive inert body with temporarily confused or disabled ties to its governing consciousness, the incapacitated population becomes vulnerable to subversion and insurgency.

Explaining insurgency as a social pathology illuminates implicit directives to COIN forces in the field. Occasions where, for example, experts describe how insurgents station seemingly uninvolved persons (engaged in everyday tasks) as lookouts against government infiltration—or "security and early warning nets"—absorb these civilians into the insurgency pathogen (*FID* B-16). In portraying the populace as snares for government agents, the *FID* manual reifies the insurgency's support. Killing insurgents and neutralizing their support networks therefore releases the population from their role as insurgent instrument and makes them available for government and counterinsurgent mobilization. By this logic COIN imagines that it might eliminate the stasis of populations along with the insurgent threat. Thus, critical counterinsurgency scholar Ben Anderson's observation that, "counterinsurgency explicitly advocates killing life of a particular kind—insurgents that refuse the remedial logic of repair and improvement. Counterinsurgency is the point of contact between two ways of dealing with what threatens—a will to improve life and a will to destroy life," applies to Central America as it does to the contemporary Middle East (229).

By analyzing insurgency as a form of life whose persistence imperils the life of the populace itself, counterinsurgency theorists discount the idea that insurgencies arise from the recognition of persistent injustices, of urgent political contradictions that cannot find resolution within the structures of the state, or of a desire for profound transformation. COIN therefore misrecognizes the symptom for the disease.³⁶ A similar rationale applies to "Vietnam syndrome," as a rightwing and militarist label for the American populace's aversion to military intervention following the Vietnam War. Owing to the fact that American disaffection with conflict hampered the Reagan Administration's wars in Central America, the Vietnam-syndrome epithet implied that two body politics required healing: one from resisting a broad capitalist consensus and the other toward a recuperation of American sacrifice for American glory.³⁷ Like the authors of the *FID* field manual, who reduce politics to unreflective attitudes, the tendency to depict insurgencies as virulent pathogens within the populace marks their appearance as foreign and *sui generis*: alien to and divorced from the "life" and history of the society. U.S. counterinsurgents, then, concentrate war in the population in order to quarantine insurgents and their support from the populace.

Governments, Special Forces operatives, and U.S. manufactured guerrillas adopt population as terrain premise to repudiate the idea that insurgents metonymically represent a latent, but greater unrest. Rather, counterinsurgency's social vision depicts conceptualizations like mass politics and collective grievances as so capacious as to be logically implausible and

³⁶ However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, COIN interprets the population as body politic less through the oncological language used more recently by General Petraeus and instead to treat the population in the terminology physics—of motion and rest, of mobilization and stasis. For an extended discussion of oncological metaphors in Petraeus' oncological metaphors as biopolitical management of Iraq see Derek Gregory's "Seeing Red in Baghdad" (2010).

³⁷ Critical counterinsurgency studies scholar Ivan Molloy argues that LIC policy had two targets, within and without the United States "LIC also targeted the United States in terms of attempting to generate domestic support for US foreign policy and eradicating the Vietnam Syndrome that severely constrained the Reagan Administration's military options" (16).

therefore necessarily fictitious. In their place, the stasis model of populations replaces discrete historical relationships between the coordination of rebellion and those whom the rebellion aspires to represent. Insurgency may have an organic relationship to a population in this theory, but it remains at a pre- or proto-cognitive level of connection. Put another way, the counterinsurgency theory of populations disallows the consciousness of history in the national public, and instead grievances petrify into "attitudes" which cannot be recognized but only spurred or herded into action.

A Vast Rhetorical Demonstration

As a point of departure for counterinsurgency strategy, the stasis model of populations requires alternative tactics for capturing the population's "hearts and minds."³⁸ With population at its center, war becomes a vast rhetorical demonstration of each rival's political vision, and both rivals' strategy aims at "convincing" the population of the viability of their competing programs. While theorists Nathan Lienes and Charles Wolf, Jr. express their skepticism of the view that understands triumph in wars of insurgency as "analogous to the progress of an electoral campaign"—in which triumph in war conveys broad popular preferences—they nonetheless consider persuasion as a key instrument of counterinsurgency operations (23). However, because military planners are apt to advocate force and therefore lack expertise in political persuasion, from Vietnam forward COIN doctrine walks a fine line between persuasion and coercion masquerading as persuasion. The term "psychological operations" (PSYOPs) designates the persuasive component of COIN, and it includes not only propaganda efforts, "disinformation" campaigns to disrupt insurgent organizations from within, forgiveness of defectors, and development assistance, but also the pivotal elimination of guerrilla cells that indicates to the

³⁸ For an extended history of the "hearts and minds" credo in political discourse see Elizabeth Dickinson's "A Bright Shining Slogan" (2009).

population (neutral or otherwise) the state's commitment and the rebellion's eventual failure (*FID* 3-24, 3-25).³⁹ In a speech to the American Enterprise Institute in 1987, Thomas Waghelstein crudely summarized the core function of PSYOPs as warfare when he argued, "The only territory you want to hold [in a civil war] is the six inches between the ears of the campesino" (qtd. in Kalyvas 92). In this excerpt, Waghelstein highlights the ways in which legitimacy depends on individuals' rational deliberation, their attention, and their perception. In a moment of social-constructionist reasoning, the *Foreign Internal Defense* manual's authors assert, "Recognizing that perceptions may be more important than reality in this area, [American Special Forces] must ensure all audiences understand [Special Forces] operations" (1-5). Like other aspects of counterinsurgency practice, PSYOPs verges on and overlaps with other operations in order to lure and manage the perceptions of the people into support for governments, militaries, and/or U.S. fabricated insurgencies. Against the model of the populace as electorate, PSYOPs conceives of populations as audiences for the operations of war. This reasoning illustrates how demonstrable success in war recommends one adversary over another to the population at large.

In a sociopolitical terrain rendered all the more vexed by increased violence, proving the government's "political competence" becomes paramount. Todd Greentree, a former junior reporting officer in El Salvador's U.S. Embassy, reflects that the counterinsurgent's primary aim should be the resumption of "legitimacy and authority" by the government (16). As Greentree's observation indicates, legitimacy is the crux of struggle in low-intensity environments. As a

³⁹ The *Foreign Internal Defense* field manual recommends PSYOPs operation in particular, the county fair or "village festival [which] adds another dimension: winning the hearts and minds of the populace using psychological and [civil affairs] operations. The emphasis of the whole effort is on winning the sympathy of the populace and gathering information about the enemy" (C-3). In the village festival technique, the PSYOPs team "organizes film shows, distributes PSYOP materials, and holds education sessions for the villagers to promote the government's cause and policies while countering enemy propaganda" (C-4). Counterinsurgency theorist Todd Greentree, novelists Joan Didion and Robert Stone, and Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú all describe the prevalence of this PSYOPs tactic.

consequence of its basis in the fluidity of public perception, the *FID* manual contends, "legitimacy...can be the principal consideration in the selection and attainment of tactical objectives" (1-9). For counterinsurgents, legitimacy—the elusive state of resumed order and social consensus—describes the end result of war's extensive rhetorical display. PSYOPs, in this logic, becomes the art of coaxing the populace away from the grievances, calls for justice, and utopian vision behind the insurgency.

Divided Subjects: Splitting the Heart from the Mind

The U.S. Army and Air Force authors of the 1990 field manual *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict (LIC)* identify several social and political causes at work in LICs. These causes include poverty, discontent, and instability. Moreover, the authors speculate about how these underlying motivations spark insurgent movements and organizations:

When people sense injustice, they become discontented. Groups may form around specific issues of discontent. People may support or join groups committed to social or political change through violent means. The intensity of their sense of injustice often determines the degree to which they participate in violence. (*LIC* 1-2, 1-3)

Through this crude sociology, the manual concedes that insurgencies emerge from material "problems" analogous to those that produced revolution in the United States (1-3). In actuality, a sense of injustice or specific grievances—against military dictatorships or juntas, against corruption, against the collusion between governmental elites and agricultural oligarchies, against the maldistribution of wealth, and against the continuing presence of U.S. supported military and paramilitary groups—contributed to the emergence of insurgencies in Central

America.⁴⁰ David Galula indicates that the social problems underlying these grievances are not only the first cause of insurgencies but "can progressively transform into concrete strength" (12). The presence of political and social causes puts counterinsurgents at a disadvantage, according to Galula, because they cannot legitimately champion the dissatisfaction these issues produce without revoking power (13). Whereas insurgencies may brand themselves as harbingers of a coming justice, the prevailing order is at pains to mobilize the population around its continuing control. Consequently, if counterinsurgents are to pull apart insurgencies, they must find ways to address these underlying causes, or, if not, to alter their appeal to the public.

Beginning in 1963, the rhetoric of "winning" the population through their "hearts and minds" crept into public justifications of U.S. involvement in Latin American and later counterinsurgency policy in Vietnam, which argued for securing the population's loyalty by addressing its growing desire escape from poverty. Yet COIN manuals reveal a marked ambivalence toward such popular demands. For instance, in a discussion of "traditional insurgencies," the authors of the *FID* manual both accept and dismiss the value of popular grievances. Traditional insurgencies, the manual suggests, do not tend to pursue the overthrow of existing regimes but instead to pursue smaller goals (like regional autonomy). In an effort to quell these particular uprisings the authors propose instituting some of the demanded reforms, but they warn, "The concessions the insurgents demand, however, are so great that the government concedes its legitimacy along with them" (*FID* 1-12). Put another way, any compromise that might address insurgent demands endangers an incumbent's control. This contradictory reasoning—simultaneously acknowledging and rejecting grievances—substantiates

⁴⁰ James Dunkerley's *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America* (1988) traces many of the political grievances of populations in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua to the uneven development of their economies that produced vast disparities in wealth, growth, and employment. In particular, see "Uneven Development, 1950-80" where he draws broad strokes comparisons between the political economies of these three nations (169-219).

the COIN imperative to separate the popular sympathies of Central Americans from their collective behavior.

COIN theorizes the splitting of the populace's subjective affiliations from their objective interests—dividing the "heart" from the "mind." In order to disentangle the rebellion from the population, counterinsurgent strategy compels individuals to choose between following their "heart," their aspiration for justice, or the "mind," their rational choice to avoid injury at the hands of the state. Counterinsurgency theory recommends fracturing the people's awareness of shared injustice by disaggregating preferences and interests at the level of the individual. Through persuasive/coercive PSYOPs, "individuals often had to choose between survival and solidarity," historian Greg Grandin explains (*Colonial* 197). Moreover, by diminishing the value of collective grievances, COIN theory appears to reinforce a capitalist logic of selfish individualism: subjects have no interests apart from the local, familial, and personal. Ultimately, governments, under the tutelage of the United States, achieve popular compliance by dividing individuals' interests through the application of "rational-choice" theory.⁴¹

Before I address counterinsurgency's schema for choice and behavior, it is worth noting how COIN doctrine formulates the relationship between the insurgent and the cause they espouse. Even though COIN experts like Galula admit that the cause, as "unsolved [political] contradiction," spawns insurgent movements, the evolution of war alienates one from the other (14). Whereas the initial insurgent movement pursues a consistent stand on popular grievances, Galula concedes, "tactics pull [the insurgency] toward opportunism" against its adversary (16). For later field manual writers considering Central America, the explanatory value of opportunism tends to supplant any organic relationship between insurgency and cause. Indeed,

⁴¹ I adopt the term "rational-choice theory" from Greg Grandin, who uses it to describe the application of economic reasoning to the use of coercive violence (*Empire's Workshop* 98).

the *LIC* manual describes how the "insurgent leadership stresses and exploits issues which key social groups support" (2-1). By this reasoning, insurgents bear no direct relationship to local grievances. They do not represent or give voice to these widespread dissatisfactions because the relationship between the two is opportunistic or incidental. In practice, when Special Forces and CIA operatives deny insurgencies any organic relationship to persistent social "frictions" and disparities, they supply themselves with an alibi for categorically challenging or fabricating insurgencies.

Having accepted and then rejected an organic relationship between public discontent and insurgencies, counterinsurgency theory turns toward the civilian population as the solution for the war itself. The manuals prescribe measures that attempt to reorient popular discontent toward the insurgents themselves. One component of this broader endeavor involves displacing the stakes of conflict for potential civilian participants from the resolution of underlying social conflicts to the very persistence of their communities. For example, through the development of Civilian Self-Defense Forces (CSDF) the military incorporates civilians into the broader effort against the insurgency by making them paramilitary "defenders" of their own villages. In a rationalization of the CSDF program, the authors of the *FID* manual illustrate this reorientation. Peasants rarely choose to fight to the death for corrupt dictators or inefficient bureaucrats, the manual's authors make clear. Instead:

The village or town [...] is a different matter. The average peasant will fight much harder for his home and for his village than he ever would for his national government. The CSDF concept directly involves the peasant in the war and makes it a fight for the family and village instead of a fight for some far away irrelevant government. (*FID* D-2)

Through CSDF programs the counterinsurgent transmits the government effort and engenders support for the government through the protection of the village, its inhabitants, and their resources. In effect, forcing villagers and peasants into civil patrols and paramilitary units in opposition to the guerrillas lurking in their midst drives civilians to choose the persistence of their world over the making of a better world.

Methods like CSDF, which proffer intolerable sacrifices as penalty for supporting the insurgency, have roots in Vietnam-era military scholarship and theory. Defense think tank models produced by Kremlinologist Nathan Leites and economist Charles Wolf, for example, set the precedent for later theory and held "a fatal attraction for policy makers," observes historian Ron Robin (198).⁴² In their 1970 *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflict*, Leites and Wolf conceptualize war as a scenario of incentives and disincentives. Contrary to the prevailing COIN assumptions which sought to reduce "demand" for rebellion, Leites and Wolf attack the problem of insurgency at the "supply-side." They argue that counterinsurgency operatives should "make the cost of R [rebellion] exceed the price that its internal or external supports are willing to pay to support it, especially at high levels of activity" (Leites and Wolf 38). In other words, counterinsurgents extract a "payment" (threat, injury, or death) from the insurgency's membership and support, in order to minimize expressions of insurrection. By enfolding war into a pecuniary logic, Leites and Wolf nullify the grievances that motivate the struggle.

In order to achieve "support" for the desirable faction, Leites and Wolf assert that when counterinsurgents enforce a "price" on assistance to the insurgency, they induce "cost-benefit analysis" in the population. Rational individuals in low-intensity war find themselves calculating

⁴² According to Robin this study had wide appeal for frustrated policymakers, the military establishment, and the air force in particular because of its "crisp, unambiguous, and readable" assessment written in "the terse language of Econ. 101" (198).

their behavior according to the potential risks and profits each act might produce. In order to substantiate this line of reasoning, Leites and Wolf emphasize those whose loyalties might be made more pliant. While insurgencies may be founded on the strongly committed, Leites and Wolf maintain, as they grow, they require more support from those with "flexible" preferences (11). Contrary to the committed few, this flexible set's preferences can be shaped "by fear and advantage combined with predictions of the conflict's outcome" (Leites and Wolf 11). In this model, individual wagers based on a fear of the consequences ("damage-limiting"), anticipation of gain ("profit-maximizing"), or merely the relative odds of each side's success, determine the allegiances of individuals irrespective of the political stakes. "Support" then depends on modifying the magnitude of gain or penalty for each act, or what Leites and Wolf describe as "assisted preferences" (11). With concepts like "assisted preferences," these RAND Corporation theorists illustrate the disturbing confluence between persuasion and coercion-theorized-as-persuasion in PSYOPs. Moreover, by focusing on this hypothetical set of uncommitted persons, COIN theory reduces political commitment to a matter of comportment. On final analysis, Leites and Wolf produce an image of civil war in which those who wield violence and the promise of gain adjust civilian behavior through procedures of push and pull, which should then instigate a series of automatic and rational calculations in individuals.

When COIN theorists acknowledge and attend to the underlying exploitation and injustice at the core of an insurgency, they also accept the possibility that the reigning order might be overturned. In order to abrogate the potential for positive change, counterinsurgency frames the enemy's demands as pliant and easily fragmented by coercive violence. Therefore, PSYOPs functions (to borrow a phrase from geographer Oliver Belcher) to "tame chance" in battlespace by harnessing and splitting the national population into rationally calculating

individuals ("Best Laid Plans" 261).⁴³ In practice and in theory, counterinsurgent campaigns in Central America "disaggregat[ed] powerful collective movements into individual survival strategies" in the words of Greg Grandin (*Colonial* 196).⁴⁴ For scholars like Grandin, the ways militaries, paramilitaries, and governments drove apart insurgencies and the collectivist movements that supported and produced them contributed to the shift in global capitalism toward neoliberalism. By conditioning individuals to use calculations that position individual interests against those of a greater whole, counterinsurgency conditioned Central Americans to ratiocinate as neoliberal subjects. Just as COIN theory discredits social causes by imposing cost-benefit analysis, it also it also sees opportunities to vilify the enemy by reimagining her practices.

Part II: Practices

Concerned with the adequate preparation of American forces for "rapidly changing times" when "challenges to the national interests of the United States will multiply," Lt. Col. Jimmie Holt insists that the military must develop "soldier power" (3, 14). Contrasted with the traditional military model in which commanders amass skills and knowledge at the top, "soldier power" is a "bottom-up" training directive that mimics guerrilla practices (Holt 14). Holt pairs his demand for "soldier power" with a call for light infantry divisions that demonstrate the capacity for "mobility and surprise" (14). These recommendations renovate military units to resemble guerrilla cells' versatility and skill set. By prescribing that military planners shape deployments in ways that mirror guerrilla forms, Holt demonstrates a second broad tendency in

⁴³ Belcher employs this phrase to describe how contemporary counterinsurgency uses social science to predict and anticipate the emergence of future insurgencies in unstable societies.

⁴⁴ As if to anticipate their later efforts to devalue mass politics, Leites and Wolf's previous work negated the value of politics and forms of collectivity. Nathan Leites, a RAND fellow since 1949, who according to cultural historian Ron T. Robin, used psychoanalysis to "[dismiss] conscious articulations of political actions as unreliable data" and sought instead to locate the "vulnerabilities" in the Communist mind (132). His coauthor, Charles Wolf was a counterinsurgency specialist, also at RAND, and as a strict behavioralist. He understood collective behavior as purely an extension of individual behaviors in composite form (217).

counterinsurgency theory: the adoption and adaptation of the insurgency's methods in order to better meet and dismantle insurgent organizations. Because COIN analysts imagine insurgents to be without location and thus transpose conflict onto the population itself, the counterinsurgent's lines of action are determined by the known activities of the insurgency. In the words of geographer Ben Anderson, "To know the enemy requires tracking an insurgency's dispersion and emergence" through events, networks, and methods (211). In this section, I explore how counterinsurgency theory's exaggerated representations insurgent tactics and behaviors allow COIN intellectuals to both conjecture on the broader significance of insurgency and devise appropriate measures to circumvent its exaggerated threat. Counterinsurgents therefore posit that a predisposition to chaos and terrorism, a command of culture, and her axiomatically meager constituency are exemplary of the enemy's practices.

"The Hobbes Problem" and Counterterror in Central America

Assessing El Salvador's war one year before the signing of the peace treaty in 1992 for the RAND Corporation, Benjamin Schwarz insists that "El Salvador remains a chaotic and murderous environment, and permeated by intimidation and the ever-present threat of terror" (66). Schwarz, whose comment finds fault with the U.S. effort in El Salvador, describes a context replete with indiscriminate violence as "chaos" and references how counterinsurgents understand the threat of insurgency. In COIN intellectuals' estimation, insurgencies intentionally sow disorder and introduce a condition described by seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes as "a warre [...] of every man against every man" (83). Hobbes employed this phrase to designate the human condition before the emergence of a Sovereign. This Sovereign coerces obedience to "Lawes of Nature" and to social covenants and compels his subjects out of the war-

ridden state of nature (Hobbes 115). Thus, in order to describe the disruptive character of its adversary, the technicist discourse of counterinsurgency adopts Hobbes' premise as its own, partially by way of U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick.⁴⁵ COIN's Hobbesian outlook on war contributes to a comprehensive social vision that enables counterinsurgency to claim humanitarian means and ends, but nonetheless promote or collude with extreme violence (for example, the use of torture and the institutionalization of rape). Ultimately, sharing a similar formula for the cessation of hostilities with Hobbes, counterinsurgency's portrait of insurgency as social atomization disavows the history and operation of U.S. imperialism.

Historically, COIN doctrine has construed the insurgent's primary purpose as fomenting chaos. David Galula, for example, charts revolutionary conflicts along an axis of order (incumbent government) and chaos (the insurgency). In his classic *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, Galula argues that "disorder—the normal state of nature—is cheap to create and costly to prevent" (6). Assuming that disorder produces significant "costs" for the incumbent state, disorder becomes the legitimate vocation of an insurgency. By deduction, the sovereign power must "show the difference between the effectiveness of his rule over the inadequacy of his opponents" (Galula 7). Galula's description, intended to draw a sharp distinction between the value of sovereign order against insurgent disorder, poses the problem of war not as a condition arising from deep frictions, but as an almost metaphysical battle between the riotous encroaching of a state of nature and the necessity of order to curtail the creeping dominion of chaos.

⁴⁵ I turn to Kirkpatrick because politics is primary in counterinsurgency operations, as I explain above. Political leadership not only establishes political goals for counterinsurgency operations, but also strategic guidelines for action (which includes political action). In her role as ambassador Kirkpatrick articulated most thoroughly what later journalist Charles Krauthammer dubbed as the "Reagan Doctrine:" to "rollback" perceived Soviet influence. According to historian Greg Grandin, Kirkpatrick "provided the moral and intellectual framework for Reagan's Central American policy" (*Empire's Workshop* 73). Moreover, Kirkpatrick frequently contributed to National Security Council meetings and was generally a resource for cabinet members on foreign policy matters, according to NSC member Constantine Menges (380). The NSC directly advises the president "with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to national security" (*LIC* A-1, A-2).

This line of reasoning was taken up fifteen years later by Jeane Kirkpatrick, a former rightwing think tank intellectual, burgeoning neo-conservative, and member of the bellicose anti-Soviet Committee for the Present Danger, in her 1980 essay "The Hobbes Problem: Order, Authority, and Legitimacy in Central America."⁴⁶ Kirkpatrick invokes Hobbes in order to formulate and justify the Reagan Administration's policies in El Salvador. She asserts that El Salvador exemplifies the contest between a condition of chaos and the state, in which "intermittent disruption and violence make order the highest value" (506).⁴⁷ Following Hobbes, Kirkpatrick argues that all social goods radiate from the end of hostilities and the resumption of authority by a sovereign. In the "The Hobbes Problem," the UN ambassador justifies this deference to Hobbes' argument by turning toward an earlier, corollary moment in El Salvador's history, *la Matanza* of 1932 where 30,000 peasants met their end at the government's hands in retaliation for a brief uprising. In Kirkpatrick's estimation, *la Matanza* met the approval of "many Salvadorans" because it "restored order and the thirteen years of civil peace that ensued" (506). Although she provides no evidence for the Salvadoran consensus on *la Matanza*, her argument preemptively justifies the 1981 El Mozote village massacre by the School of Americas trained Atlacatl Battalion and perhaps the now widely acknowledged genocide in Guatemala.

Implicitly calling for massacre as the key to order and social good, Kirkpatrick alludes to Hobbes' argument for the "terror of some power" in which a common good might be found through common subordination (Hobbes 115).⁴⁸ In Kirkpatrick's reasoning, as with Hobbes', the

⁴⁶ Kirkpatrick had a multiyear appointment at The American Enterprise Institute.

⁴⁷ During his presidential campaign Ronald Reagan tapped Kirkpatrick to be his U.N. ambassador after reading her landmark denunciation of President Carter's foreign policy in a 1979 essay "Dictatorships and Double-Standards." In that essay Kirkpatrick argues that Carter catastrophically repudiated "friendly territories" (frequently post-colonial dictatorships), a sentiment very much in line with Reagan's incensed hostility toward the Soviet and Cuban influence in the Third World.

⁴⁸ The *FID* manual emphasizes using fear, among other motivations, in order to compel elements of population to become informants, including: "civic-mindedness, patriotism, fear, punishment avoidance, gratitude, revenge, jealousy, financial rewards" (B-6).

consistent need for collective fear of punishment enfranchises the Sovereign to perpetually hold back the generalized calamity of the state of nature. Thus, autocratic rule in nations like El Salvador cultivates social goods and virtue, and maintains the covenants crucial to society. Moreso than Galula, however, Kirkpatrick articulates the battle between order and disorder along clear political lines, where leftist insurrection in the Third World originates from a metaphysical or presocial chaos. In Kirkpatrick's schema, order won by any means necessary becomes the exclusive foundation for any collective benefit.⁴⁹

Within the confines of an imaginary that interpreted as catastrophe situations of contested national sovereignty, the decisive power of terror wielded to delegitimize the enemy and reorient the populace assumes a certain rationality. Of course for COIN intellectuals "terrorism" begins with the insurgency, and consequently they exercise "counterterror" with the intent of turning insurgent "terror" against its ostensible architects. Beginning in the 1960s, the "standard [military] argument," according to Michael McClintock, "was that American terror [because it was selective] would be used only to suppress or preempt a greater systematic terror— understood to be intrinsic to the communist system. The utilitarian terror of the counterinsurgent was [...] an unpleasant solution to greater problem" (238). Whereas the *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict* field manual provides a glimpse of counterterrorism as "the full range of measures to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism," Michael McClintock's historical analysis illuminates the set of precepts guiding COIN thinkers (*LIC* 3-12). With an eye toward the 1980s, he argues: "Underlying the counterterrorist doctrine is the premise that terrorism is overwhelmingly effective. It has been taken for granted in all U.S. Army field manuals and training curricula for foreign armies. Insurgents are continually characterized as terrorists, and

⁴⁹ The late-Cold War epithet "subversive," which identifies any potential challenge from the left to the capitalist consensus, hints at this correlation between left-wing challengers to the state and harbingers of chaos.

terrorism is vaunted as their best shot at power" (McClintock 440). Counterterror advocates argue, like much of COIN doctrine in general, that one must "fight fire with fire" and terrorize purported terrorists through assassination, ambushes, kidnappings, and intimidation.

In a chapter discussing "Armed Propaganda," the 1983 CIA manual *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare (PSYOPsGW)* suggests, "It is possible to neutralize carefully selected and planned targets such as court judges, cattle judges (jueces de mesta), police or State Security officials, CDS chiefs, etc." (33). Distributed in Spanish amongst the Fuerza Democratica Nicaragüense (the Contras), this field manual advocates eliminating leaders and public authorities and thus systematizes the tactical murder of civilians.⁵⁰ These killings may be "the most effective available instrument of a guerrilla force" (35). Moreover, eliminating enemy personnel functions as propaganda for the movement "resulting in positive attitudes on the part of the population toward that force" (*PSYOPsGW* 35).

A look at U.S.-trained death squad activities clarifies the character of the COIN-induced positive attitudes. In Vietnam, one method involved painting a grotesque eye on walls facing the houses of suspected Viet Cong sympathizers and placing printed images of these eyes on the mangled bodies of Viet Cong leaders who died mysteriously in their beds. Describing the practice as an instance of "phrasing the threat" in PSYOPs, a 1966 Army study indicated that Operation Black Eye produced an "eerie, uncertain threat" (qtd. in McClintock 240). A similar practice arose in Guatemala during the 1980s and 90s, where a "white hand" marked the doors of suspected dissidents or the mangled bodies of death squad victims (Grandin, *Empire's* 97). The CIA authors of *PSYOPsGW* confirm the ubiquitous fear these tactics induce when they describe

⁵⁰ When journalists revealed to the broader public and the House Select Committee on Intelligence investigate charges that it violated U.S., President Reagan famously responded that the demand to "neutralize" enemies meant little more than to tell these civilians "you are not in charge any more" (qtd. in McClintock 447).

the very presence of the Contra guerrilla as an "implicit terror" for the population, a threat they warn should rarely become "explicit" (9).

In the end, the threat of the socialized terror embodied in atomistic and compounding war, explicated in COIN discourse by way of Hobbes, serves to conceal the history and continuing presence of the United States in regional affairs. In an essay meant to dampen U.S. policymakers' enthusiasm for a 1979 coup that replaced El Salvador's rightist military dictatorship with a reformist junta, Kirkpatrick vacillates between whom to attribute the power of Sovereign violence. Indeed, the Sovereign's role shifts between the Salvadoran government and the United States in her essay; in the latter's case, it holds ultimate power "to inhibit the use of force against violent challengers" in El Salvador (Kirkpatrick "Hobbes" 507). Here, as in Hobbes and in counterinsurgency doctrine broadly, to explain insurgency as an atomizing chaos is to elide U.S. imperialism. America's entanglements in the region, its continuing influence, and its arming of El Salvador's military (even in Carter's tenure) bear no relationship to the pre-social disorder afflicting El Salvador. During a 1976 lecture, Michel Foucault made a similar critique, in which Hobbes' theories functioned to suppress previous critical discourse that understood the state as founded on domination imposed by a history of perpetual Conquest, and not on the overwhelming power of Sovereignty over a state of nature (110).⁵¹ In taking up Hobbes, COIN theorists attempt to dispel U.S. imperialism and its history of conquest by emphasizing an

⁵¹ To insist on the inevitable, chaotic atomization as Hobbes does, Foucault argues, erases history. In *Society Must be Defended* Foucault contextualizes Hobbes' argument amongst a number of competing versions of English history and the civil war in Hobbes' era, some which highlight history as perpetual conquest. The state of nature, described by Hobbes, negates history in effect abolishing the history conquest upon which the English state was actually founded. In doing so, Hobbes suppresses a critical discourse that Foucault calls "political historicism." This discourse understood power relations as domination in place of sovereignty, "an infinitely dense and multiple domination that never comes to an end" (111).

inherent human propensity toward disorder and imagining every rebellion as a manifestation of that disorder.⁵²

Cordoning the Village or Culture in COIN Discourse

Throughout the low-intensity conflicts in Central America, counterinsurgents approached the village as a primary object of operations. The *Foreign Internal Defense* field manual describes villages as places with population density, spaces inhabited by vital "lines of communication," and economic centers (C-2). Because of these characteristics, the manual recommends prioritizing villages in efforts to consolidate state power and secure the population (C-2). Villages hold similar value for insurgent groups. In the words of 1960s guerrilla theorist and French émigré to Cuba Régis Debray, "the first nucleus of [guerrilleros]" encounters and "imbues [the masses] with revolutionary faith" by way of the village (*Revolution* 47). More than simply a convenient location for inciting the population to revolt, in these predominantly rural societies villages also act as cultural units. When compared to the dedicated guerrilla-propagandist, Debray argues that the government soldier appears as "an occupier...alien to village life and the customs of the country" (50). If Debray correctly diagnoses the guerrilla's "cultural" advantage over the state's forces or those provided by the United States, then the COIN theorist must imagine means to offset the guerrilla's advantage. Although U.S. counterinsurgency intellectuals in the eighties and nineties lacked the robust theory of culture characteristic of contemporary doctrine, post-war truth commissions detail how counterinsurgency campaigns interrupted and even harmed culture.⁵³ With a retrospective attention to these effects, I will

⁵² The U.S., of course, had a definitive hand in shaping the region as it was in the 1980s. Guatemala's military dictatorship involved a long succession of generals installed after the CIA instigated a coup against democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz in 1958. Similarly, the Sandinistas take their name from Augusto César Sandino, Nicaragua's first guerrilla, who fought a war against U.S. occupation between 1927 and 1933. Thus, in both nations the history of U.S. involvement gave shape to their political orders, as well as their

⁵³ In his "The Rush to the Intimate," geographer Derek Gregory defines General David Petraeus-era counterinsurgency as characterized by new visual regimes as well as by a broad "cultural turn." Petraeus delineates

explore three unformalized descriptions of culture preponderant in COIN theory: culture as tool of warfare, culture as "field" of military action, and culture as medium for transforming societies afflicted by insurgencies.

At base, counterinsurgency requires a literacy of the national cultures in which the United States intervenes. Both the *Foreign Internal Defense* and *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict* manuals call for linguistic and cultural fluency as basic requirements of Special Operations trainers and soldiers. For example, in pursuit of intelligence about the enemy, the *FID* advises, "A complete and intimate knowledge of the environment is essential to conducting current intelligence operations" (B-2). In this passage "environment" describes the socio-political context in which operations are undertaken, and cultural knowledge establishes the way to differentiate insurgent and civilian supporter when outright attack, or "kinetic operations," fail to detect or overwhelm insurgents (B-2).⁵⁴ Counterinsurgents value cultural literacy because it facilitates mapping the society as a whole. "The populace is a critical factor," and thus "SF [special forces] personnel must understand the demography, culture, taboos, beliefs, customs, history, goals and needs, ethnic composition, and expectations of the populace," argue the authors of the *FID* manual (1-3). The dynamics between groups, their interrelationships, "who can influence whom," and how influence is achieved and exercised are all fundamental components of a comprehensive knowledge of the operations environment (*FID* 1-3). A systematic knowledge of the nation's social and cultural dynamics then illuminates pressure

the necessity of "cultural sensitivity" to war efforts in a 2006 essay for the *Military Review*, where he suggests that "cultural awareness is a force multiplier" of nearly greater value than geographical knowledge ("Learning Counterinsurgency..." 51). Because counterinsurgency is a "full spectrum" form of warfare, one that employs a number of social channels in order to achieve its goals, culture necessarily falls within its purview.

⁵⁴ According to critical counterinsurgency studies scholar Ivan Molloy, "Conflict environment' broadly refers to the political, economic, cultural, military and historical environment within which a conflict is located. The nature of the conflict environment can be determined by the predominance of any one element, or combination of these elements, influencing a transformation of the prevailing status quo" (*Rolling Back...* 13).

points and vehicles of manipulation through which Special Forces operatives steer populations and violence.

Counterinsurgents therefore instrumentalize their knowledge of culture for combat purposes. For example, the "Hunter-Killer" technique, prescribed in the *FID* field manual, involves clothing the counterinsurgent hunter, who "[tracks] down enemy forces while maintaining constant communication with the killer element that is on alert and ready for action," in civilian clothes (C-3). The 1960 Special Forces manual, *Counter-Insurgency Operations*, suggests that Hunter-Killer assassination teams dress and operate as guerrillas: "Personnel wear local indigenous civilian clothes or nondescript military attire" (qtd. in McClintock 215-6). As an exercise intended to generate surprise and to camouflage the real intent of Hunter-Killer commandos, this tactic effectively conceals a real military operation within the trappings of culture.

The CIA employed a similar approach to culture (as accoutrement) when it published a 1983 manual for Nicaraguan civilians in comic form. *El Manual del Combatiente por la Libertad* (*The Freedom Fighter's Manual*) not only provides the population with simple and accessible instructions for engaging in sabotage, the manufacture of Molotov cocktails, damaging office and government machinery, and placing threatening calls to employers, but also instructs its users to attack culture and its infrastructure. This comic book-style manual prescribes that "patriotic" Nicaraguans paint their "gritos, quejas, y demandas contra los pro-Rusbanos del FSLN en las paredes" [screams, complaints, and demands against the pro-Russian Sandinistas on walls]—for example, "Viva El Papa" or "Long Live the Pope" (see Figure 1.2). This illustration typifies how COIN theory pits one "culture" against another: an ideological portrait of the Sandinistas as Soviet-funded atheists against the assumed conservative inclinations of the

population in favor of the papacy. Other panels in *The Freedom Fighter's Manual* recommend destroying books and undermining the beginnings of the new culture instituted by the Sandinistas, particularly farming cooperatives that manifested the spirit of the new government in leveled hierarchies and community mutual support.⁵⁵

Anthropologist Phillipe Bourgois explores an additional retooling of culture for the aims of combat through the CIA's manipulation of Nicaragua's Miskitu indigenous population against the predominantly ladino (mixed race) Sandinistas. He describes the CIA campaign to segment the Nicaraguan people as an instance of "ethnic liberation opportunism," a strategy that sought to intensify long-standing antipathy against the ladino (mixed race) majority in order to multiply the fronts on which Sandinistas fought (Bourgois 75).⁵⁶ This instance demonstrates that cultural difference becomes not only a tool of U.S. operatives but also a medium through which COIN arranges one adversary against another; in other words, culture becomes a field of operation.

If we take Debray at his word and recognize the village as not only a nexus of economic and communication flows or as an aggregation of the people, but also as a site of culture and community, then COIN techniques involving the village must also be understood through their cultural ramifications. The authors of the *Foreign Internal Defense* field manual position the village or town as the focal point of "Cordon and Search" operations. These techniques attempt to surround a community (see Figure 1.3) in order to expose hidden revolutionary cells, followed by the "destruction of the insurgents and their infrastructure" (*FID* C-4). The village thus becomes a conduit for "localizing" the seemingly unmoored insurgent and annihilating her,

⁵⁵ The Contras similarly targeted these cooperatives with military force, attacking civilian residents and defenders, making no distinction between adult and child, armed and unarmed. For testimonial accounts of Contra attacks on cooperatives and state farms, see Reed Brody's *Contra Terror in Nicaragua Report from Fact-finding Mission: September 1984-January 1985*.

⁵⁶ The Guatemalan genocide as might be considered the obverse of "ethnic liberation opportunism." However, both understand culture as a medium of conflict.

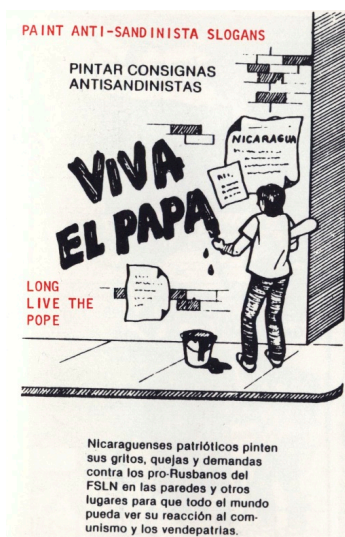


Figure 1.2: from *The Freedom Fighter's Manual*, c1983.

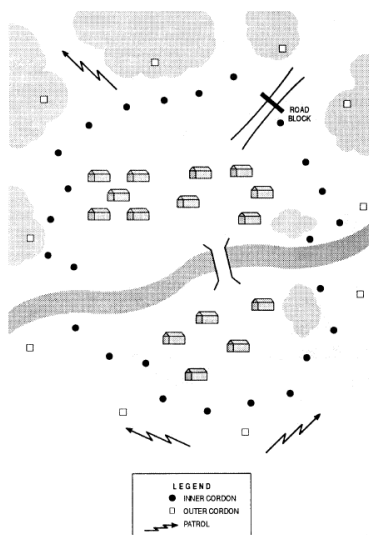


Figure 1.3 *Foreign Internal Defense Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Special Forces* illustration of "village cordoning" operation (C-9).

along with her "infrastructure" (civilian supporters). While the *FID* describes the "Cordon and Search" exercise as one among many techniques, it represents how U.S. proxies in Central America (the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador, and the Contras in Nicaragua) concentrated significant military resources on and through villages. Amassing military forces

around and in villages, the *FID* cautions, may pose "the risk of irritating the populace and winning further support for the insurgents" as cordon and search teams disrupt village life (C-5).

The threat of "irritated" villagers, however, alludes to the extreme violence that COIN forces frequently applied in order to quell resistance. The *FID*'s authors interpret antagonism in the village as representative of the whole village, rather than unique to individuals, as search-team interrogators "must not automatically regard children as innocent since they may have been trained to be hostile" (C-14). In contrast to aerial bombings that may kill children inadvertently, one might infer from the *FID* that those who operate in low-intensity conflict environments must assume children are enemies as a matter of course. La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala's postwar Truth Commission) has determined that exercises, like those targeting children impede the very persistence of culture. Children of Mayan communities (a group categorically singled out by Guatemala's military) attacked by counterinsurgency operations often found themselves orphaned and consequently "lost the possibility of living a normal childhood based on their cultural values" (Rothenberg 184-5).

Along with the emphasis on "local customs, courtesies, and taboos" and concern for military interference with holidays and religious ceremonies, the victimization of children proves that culture exists in COIN theory as a code to be transgressed or as prey to its machinations. Otherwise culture might hinder operations in Central America (*FID* 3-26). Guatemala's military strategies like Operación Cenizas (Operation Scorched Earth) included massacre, forced disappearances, and coerced displacement. Executions of "Mayan authorities, leaders and spiritual guides were not only an attempt to destroy the social base of the guerrillas, but above all, to destroy the cultural values that ensured cohesion and collective action in Mayan communities" (Rothenberg 185). Counterinsurgency disrupts the very continuity of culture by

targeting the bearers of culture and the values they represent. The Truth Commission concludes that COIN operations produced negative consequences for the oral transmission of knowledge, the abandonment of traditional indigenous dress, and interruption of cyclical ceremonies (188, 68, 48). Therefore, counterinsurgency in Central America took aim at and subsequently impaired culture. Rather than destroying cultural artifacts, critical counterinsurgency scholar Christian Parenti reasons, "COIN targets...the 'capillary' level of social relations" and disfigures the very fabric of culture and social life (23). Hence the COIN proclivity to theorize culture as if it were merely a code governing choice and assigning preferences catalyzed the razing of culture.⁵⁷

Another instance of counterinsurgency's use of culture as a "field" or medium of conflict occurs in their justifications for organizing civilians into combat roles. By compelling noncombatants into Civilian Self-Defense Forces, COIN theorists route conflict through civil life itself. These civilian forces and patrols provide a strategic advantage, according to the authors of the *FID* manual, because the insurgency cannot ignore them nor leave them unpunished. To do so would encourage other villages to accept CSDF programs organized by the military or the state. Here is the *FID* authors' rationale for organizing civilians:

The insurgents have no choice; they have to attack the CSDF village to provide a lesson to other villages considering CSDF. In a sense, the psychological effectiveness of the CSDF concept starts by reversing the insurgent strategy of making the government the repressor. It forces insurgents to cross a critical threshold—that of attacking and killing the very class of people they are supposed to be liberating. (D-1)

⁵⁷ In a critical analysis of contemporary doctrine, Nicolas Mirzoeff explains that counterinsurgents apprehend culture "as if it were a set of rules" conditioning "how and why people perform actions," establishing the difference between right and wrong, and assigning individual priorities (298). For extended discussions of General David Petraeus' approach to culture see Mirzoeff's "Global Counterinsurgency and the Crisis of Visuality" in *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*; and Derek Gregory "'The Rush to the Intimate': Counterinsurgency and the Cultural Turn" in *Radical Philosophy* 150. According to Gregory, the Orientalism of COIN in Iraq and Afghanistan that conjoins images of the enemy as culturally monstrous, pathological, and chaotic with the demand for a "forceful imposition of order" ("The Rush..." 17).

If the insurgent uses propaganda and intermittent violence in order to push to the surface the ruling elite's undeclared war on the oppressed masses, through the CSDF program the counterinsurgent displaces this now undeniable conflict onto the population itself. Like the infiltration, invasion, and destruction of villages, what sociologists J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith call "domicide," forcibly integrates civilians into civil war and rends the loyalties and the cultural common ground of society apart (3). In spite of what appears to be a systematic dismemberment of culture, military intellectuals stipulate cultural features in need of reform.

Commanders and theorists contend that war provides an opportunity to adjust Third World cultures to the strictures of capitalist modernity. Reasoning of this kind suffuses counterinsurgency manuals' parenthetical moments when they explain the emergence of revolution and insurgency. In the culture-as-obstacle paradigm, culture is not a vehicle for thought and reflection, but a representation of their absence. The authors of *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict* suggest that insurgency may result from societies that fail to "incorporate change" associated with modernity "into their traditional cultural value system" (1-2).⁵⁸ These pre-modern cultures confronting the transformations of modernity react maladaptively, hence the need for counterinsurgency to reorient their trajectory toward free markets and representative governance. Cultural maladaptation to an encroaching modernity serves as a convenient scapegoat to which theorists ascribe the brutality of their particular brand of warfare. A frequent military refrain during El Salvador's civil war referred to a latent national

⁵⁸ I use the term "modernity" here to stand in for the *LIC* field manual's description of disruptive change: "innovation or the sudden impact of external social influences" (1-2). Innovation, as something these cultures lack given their propensity of conservatism and distrust of change, and the "impact of external social influences" which may imply the influence of countries with a broader cultural, political, economic, or military reach bringing new dynamics into the "host nation." These both bear strong resemblances to Eurocentric notions of modernity as based on innovation and radiating from the West.

inheritance from the Pipil indigenous tribe which exhibited congenital cruelty in pre-Columbian ceremonies where they allegedly flayed living humans.⁵⁹ Activated by the civil war, Pipil cruelty became a distraction and point of origin for the state-propagated savagery. It also rationalized the protracted character of wars between insurgencies and the state.⁶⁰ Along these lines, COIN intellectuals posit that culture operates as a mechanism of restraint on action and against conscious questioning, and as a result they conclude that culture is inimical to the movement of bodies and minds.

Given this fairly retrograde portrait of "traditional culture," COIN advises replacing it with cultures that mobilize the populace, transforming the people into subjects of a militarized capitalism. These provisional substitutes include celebrations of the instruments of violence. In *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare* the CIA recommends that Contra forces prepare simple slogans to generate allegiances between the people and the Contras through their weapons. "Our arms are, truly, the arms of the people, your arms," is one slogan the manual proposes (*PSYOPsGW* 26-7). "All of this should be designed to create," the manual reasons, "an identification of the people with the weapons and the guerrillas who carry them" (*PSYOPsGW* 27). Although in other places the manual's authors argue that "political awareness-building" is a primary skill of some Contra combatants, the passage portrays a scenario in which potential Sandinista defectors imagine their affiliation with the Contras through their implements of war. In other words, the CIA contends that peasants hallucinate an affiliation with the Contras through a mystified experience of shared firearm ownership.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Schwarz's *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador* (1991), Todd Greentree's *Crossroads of Intervention* (2008), and Joan Didion's *Salvador* (1982) all note this repetition of this myth to explain the violence in El Salvador. To Didion's credit she is deeply suspicious of the myth, which she attributes to American operatives and embassy personnel.

⁶⁰ Of course the cruelty ascribed to Salvadorans resonates significantly with Jeane Kirkpatrick's arguments about the violence she sees as endemic to region.

In a similar feat of elliptical reasoning, Michael Sheehan's 1989 essay for the *Conflict* military journal seems to promote refugee camps as useful contexts for inculcating capitalism. Sheehan praises the Guatemalan military's commitment to "civic action." In particular, he describes the military's solution to internal displacement due to the growing scope of violence through what were described as "model villages" (*aldeas modelo*). In "model villages" the Guatemalan military resettled internal refugees, providing them with services and materials with which they might construct new homes and organizing them into civil defense patrols (Sheehan 145). Sheehan praises the developmentalist ambitions of these villages, where refugees received food relief in exchange for participating in government activities. Thus, rather than offering these refugees mere succor, model villages, in Sheehan's assessment, communicate, "There were no free handouts, and the people were expected to work to rebuild their homes and support the government" (145). Sheehan criticizes the Guatemalan military's "model villages" because they failed to incorporate the "private sector," and as a result served as impractical centers of production, but he applauds how they nonetheless acculturated model villagers to relations of exchange and production, replacing the hindrances of their cultures (146). Taken together, Sheehan, the CIA authors of the *PSYOPsGW*, as representative of COIN theory, call for a martial state through which the citizenry imagine their unity and also a militarized conditioning of civilians to market forces, free and equal only insofar as "we will all have economic opportunities" (*PSYOPsGW* 27).

The Power of the Small Numbers

Maiming traditional culture in the hopes of replacing them with a culture more attuned to capitalist processes or authoritarian governance may appear to many unwarranted in light of the fact that counterinsurgents understand their adversaries as small and weak by nature. Of course

insurgents challenge the state's monopoly on "the legitimate use of physical force," to paraphrase Max Weber's classic *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, but they rarely come into being with the instruments of war or battalions in hand (154). Hence, guerrilla theorists as far back as Mao Tse-Tung transmute insurgent weakness into a strength. Arguing by analogy to the Yin-Yang as an expression of "a unity of opposites," Mao argues:

concealed within strength there is weakness, and within weakness, strength. It is the weakness of guerrillas that they operate in small groups that can be wiped out in a matter of minutes. But because they do operate in small groups, they can move rapidly and secretly into the vulnerable rear of the enemy. (25)

Similarly, as opposed to traditionally organized armies where the dispersion of battalions demonstrates defeat, for guerrillas dispersion confuses the enemy and "preserves the illusion that the guerrilla is ubiquitous" (Mao 25). As I have already suggested, counterinsurgents respond to the disorientation engendered by insurgents with both tactical mimicry (for example deploying small mobile units) and through highly ideological framing of all insurgencies. While the size and power of the insurgency dilate and contract due to a number of factors, COIN theory nonetheless consistently conceives of insurgencies as intrinsically small and weak. This image serves two interconnected purposes: to demonstrate the "reality" that elites and vanguards invariably control politics and to make revolution through mass politics unimaginable.

When counterinsurgency theorists deduce that wars between insurgents and incumbents are ontologically asymmetrical they naturalize the logic of imperialist intervention. Todd Greentree's recent *Crossroads of Intervention*, for example, paraphrases the Reagan Doctrine: "if weak states in the Third World were vulnerable to revolutionary overthrow, newly established revolutionary states were also weak and vulnerable" (162). Writing to derive "lessons" for

counterinsurgency practices in the Middle East, Greentree describes the realms in which the Administration sought to apply its doctrine as weakened by their proximity to revolution. Like the impaired nations through which the United States applied LIC doctrine, theorists suggest that insurgencies must overcome their congenital weakness if they are to survive the war. "The insurgent has to grow in the course of the war," David Galula argues, "from small to large, from weakness into strength, or else he fails" (4). The premise of the factional quality and smallness of insurgent organizations and/or their relative weakness when compared to government forces offers obvious advantages insofar as interpretations of insurgencies without fail reduce their viability and meaning. The diminished appeal and size of rebellions enables U.S. intervention in all manner of civil and asymmetrical wars, a choice not often given to the counterinsurgency theorist or practitioners, for whom the field's calculus of support and control in foreign nations is irrelevant in the face of imperial desires and drives to accumulate.

COIN theory's emphasis on the numerical smallness of insurgent organizations neatly coincides with the belief that all insurgencies are the premeditated manufacture of small groups. The authors of the *Foreign Internal Defense* field manual foreground how a limited number of actors, "active" and "empowered" elites as well as "mobilized" sectors of the insurgencies, drive the struggle between incumbents and insurgencies (3-22). Herding the population through psychological operations and violence increasingly becomes the objective of insurgencies as the war's initial cause and ideology disappear. "The war becomes the principal issue," according to Galula, "forcing the population to take sides, hopefully with the winning one" (16). Although prolonging war diminishes the significance of the war's motivation, in this passage Galula represents insurgent organizations as devoid of underlying grievances or an awareness of injustices, and instead preoccupied with defeating their opponent. Military planners, therefore,

maintain that "discriminate" and propagandistic violence is the common denominator between elites from both the insurgency and counterinsurgency. This calculus of violence emerges in the CIA's *PSYOPsGW*. In "neutralizing," or killing, particular targets, the manual advises its users to consider questions like the "degree of violence acceptable to the population affected" (*PSYOPsGW* 34).

To COIN theorists, this cynical brokering of power between elite and empowered minorities eliminates the theoretical viability of revolution and mass politics as a matter of necessity. Counterinsurgency's tendency to approach revolutionary warfare exclusively through the numerical inferiority of the insurgency, and thus through privileged factions, invalidates the injustices and motivations that inspired rebellion in the first place. Reasoning that foregrounds charismatic elites as the catalysts of history categorically discounts the function of popular unrest, interpreting insurgent organizations not as correlative phenomenon but as the conjurers of mass politics. U.S. policy in Central American historically demonstrates the conviction that great men administer historical change, illustrated by frequent coup plots in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.⁶¹

American Exceptionalism as Agent of Transformation

By proclaiming that only an elect few govern not only war's outcomes, but also the shape of history, COIN scholars and U.S. policymakers distort the essence of historical change and the agents of change in Central America. Instead the counterinsurgency manuals of the period naturalize imperialism by insisting on America's unique role in history. The Army and Air Force authors of the *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict* field manual insist that contexts

⁶¹ The CIA's involvement in the coup against General Lucas García in 1982 with the eventual author of the most brutal, genocidal period in Guatemala's civil war, General Efraín Ríos Montt exemplifies the formalization that elite brokers govern historical change. Previously, Guatemala's government and military merged after a 1954 coup plot orchestrated by the CIA as well. Similarly, the U.S. Nicaragua's Somoza dynasty, against which the Sandinistas waged their first campaign,

imperiled by low-intensity conflict may also pose indeterminate threats to "national survival [hence] the decision to stand aside is as profound in its effect as the decision to become involved" (1-8). This passage unmistakably conflates national interest with the stability of neighboring governments and allies. However, more significant still, the *LIC* ascribes a far-reaching influence to the U.S. military because both action and inaction produce momentous consequences. As if torn from Jeane Kirkpatrick's notes on the Carter Administration's negligence, the manual further explains U.S. policy's unique role by arguing against isolationism: "noninvolvement accepts the piecemeal degradation of security interests and tolerates unnecessary human suffering, both of which might be prevented or alleviated by a more active, if necessarily selective, approach" (*LIC* 1-9). The *LIC*'s argument combines ameliorating suffering, a humanitarian concern, with U.S. national security policy. For the affected Central American nations, this reasoning chains humanitarian assistance to a condition of degraded national sovereignty and subjection to America's unique mission.

Narratives concerning America's exceptional status fuse the adversities of foreign peoples, and the historical ideals of the United States as features of national security policy into a logical sequence. In the American exceptionalist narrative, the United States surpasses other nations through its foundation on egalitarian premises that endow it with a unique duty and destiny.⁶² "Americans have agreed since 1776 that the United States must be the beacon of human rights to an unregenerate world," observes historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The question has always been how America is to execute this mission" (505). As I demonstrated above, COIN

⁶² Alexis de Tocqueville, who first coined the "exceptional" descriptor, attributes to the United States a unique egalitarianism which generates a "general compassion" or humanity from one citizen to another. Americans' unique humanity or "mildness should therefore be attributed to the equality of conditions rather than to civilization and education" as compared to Europe (407). Fredrick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History* similarly imagines a unique destiny for the United States through the conquest of the frontier as a space unlike Europe and as a result exempt from the cataclysmic histories that formed European identity. He writes, "The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society." Turner's America represents a new chapter in a broader "universal history."

documents propose a largely interventionist version of America's duty to the world. This imperialist exceptionalism reflects the precedent set by President Reagan, particularly in comments he made following 1986 talks with the Soviet Union. "The ultimate goal of American foreign policy is not just the prevention of war," Reagan claimed, "but the extension of freedom - to see that every nation, every people, every person someday enjoys the blessings of liberty" (qtd. in Weinraub A-12). Although the two appear to be parallel goals, Reagan equivocates here as to whether or not the "extension of freedom" in other quadrants also necessitates hostile engagement. Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, equivocated less when describing the threats facing America's exceptional role in regional affairs: "The escalating set-backs to our interests abroad...and the so-called wars of national liberation are putting into jeopardy our ability to influence world events" just after Reagan's inauguration (qtd. in Klare et al. 9). With an awareness of the failure to achieve victory in Vietnam in 1975 and the ousting of colonial, dictatorial, and U.S. friendly governments throughout the Third World, Haig's comments indicate that American exceptionalism also enfranchises the U.S. government to adjudicate between uprisings as either liberatory or totalitarian.⁶³ Moreover, Third World "liberation," in Haig's interpretation, enervates U.S. command over the course of history. American Studies critic Donald Pease criticizes the legacy of American exceptionalism as a "state fantasy" that empowers Americans to disavow U.S. imperialism (20). Through the geopolitical lens of this exceptionalist "fantasy" the Reagan Administration and COIN strategists imagined themselves as architects of all emancipatory struggle. In doing so, the policymaker and the COIN operative replace revolutionaries in combat against their prevailing conditions with America's mission to bring perfection to an imperfect world.

⁶³ Discussion of Alexander Haig's pugnacity can be found in Jesús Velasco's *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush* (2010), Sean Wilentz's *The Age of Reagan* (2009), and Greg Grandin's *Empire's Workshop* (2007).

Part III: Goals and Objectives

In a 1972 article for the *Midwest Journal of Political Science* entitled "Political Soldiers," soldier-scholar Sam Sarkesian argued that the counterinsurgent's task is to "take the revolution out of the hand of revolutionaries" (qtd. in Grandin *Empire's* 112). Sarkesian's argument is as ambiguous as it is evocative: this passage simultaneously supports my claim that counterinsurgency seeks to mimic or mirror insurgency by adopting its theories and tactics, and it suggests that military practitioners disengage revolution from its moorings and assert ownership over it. If American exceptionalism authorizes U.S. militarists to imagine themselves as the sources and arbiters of liberation, Sarkesian develops a militarist interpretation of exceptionalism when he argues that processes of radical social transformation might be appropriated and reoriented toward other ends. According to critical counterinsurgency scholar Ivan Molloy, Central American insurrections were repeatedly "presented as expressions of the greater [Cold War] superpower rivalry with their true nature diminished or distorted" in American public discourse (1). More than merely misrepresenting revolutionary struggles, however, counterinsurgency theory seizes on revolutionary war in Central America, mitigating the insurgency's demands into weakened versions of Western liberalism. I explore two counterinsurgency measures for the dissipating the aspirations that motivated insurrection: a call for elections and a demand for "economic opportunity." Applying these mandates in the eighties and nineties proved difficult in this "new counterinsurgency era," and Michael McClintock observes that LIC theory endured "a quiet watering down of its reform and development dimension" (417).

Democratization

Before, during, and after the U.S.'s low-intensity campaign in Central America, COIN intellectuals repeatedly held up the pursuit of democracy as justification for war. Amidst instructions to "neutralize" hostile civilian elements in Nicaragua, even the Contras mobilized the notion of democracy in *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare* field manual. In a section on manufacturing and manipulating public demonstrations, the manual's authors recommend that "our covert cadres should make partial demands, initially demanding, e.g. 'We want food,' 'We want freedom of worship,' 'We want labor union freedom'—steps that will lead us toward the realization of the goals of our movement, which are: GOD, HOMELAND, and DEMOCRACY" (*PSYOPsGW* 68). In a similarly slogan-like proclamation, Michael Sheehan argues for "democratization, social justice, and economic development" subsequent to elevating the Guatemalan government's authoritarian policies over those of its Salvadoran counterpart (152). Even retrospective military analyses come to similar conclusions about the aims of these conflagrations. Arguing that Central America serves as the "bridge" between counterinsurgency campaigns in Vietnam and those in contemporary Iraq, Todd Greentree asserts, "It seemed highly improbable at the time, but democracy did prove the way out" (xi). A former foreign services officer to El Salvador, Greentree explains that the conclusion of combat, in which adversaries relinquished "the power of violence for the legitimacy of elections," furnishes conclusive evidence that these wars benefited the greater good through democratization (xii).

Yet, as the pro-democracy sloganeering suggests, democratic processes provide window-dressing for COIN operations. Within the counterinsurgency documents of the period, holding elections appears to be the only imaginable horizon of democracy. In a comparative analysis of Ronald Reagan's and George W. Bush's foreign policy, sociologist Jesús Velasco maintains that those who consider free elections as sufficient for democracy privilege "procedure over

substance" and neglect the role of social and economic justice as expressions of a democratic impulse (179). Counterinsurgency's mechanistic theory of the state mistakes electoral procedure as adequate to address the popular concerns out of which struggles in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala were borne.

Despite paying lip service to conceptions like "popular support" that hint at a more comprehensive democratic practice, counterinsurgency doctrine vacillates between appeals to democratic principles and yielding to the necessity of repression. By way of illustration Todd Greentree's postwar examination of Nicaragua and El Salvador finds, "There is no inherent contradiction in promoting democracy while using force" (163). Statements like these conjure away how rampant violence deforms so-called "free elections." For this reason, Guatemalan sociologist Edelberto Torres-Rivas describes Central America's postwar governments as "Low-Intensity Democracies" (*Centroamérica* 140-1). The Reagan Administration's coercive insistence on elections in El Salvador and Guatemala (where counterinsurgency campaigns eliminated virtually all of the public and political proponents of the insurgencies) and in Nicaragua (where the CIA and Contra sabotaged significant economic and social programs, and prevented the Sandinistas from carrying out promised reforms) in effect invalidated the agents of transformation and discredited the possibility of any future change (Molloy 27). These coextensive processes of terror and electoral progress, in Torres-Rivas' work, indicate that democracy became a weapon of counterinsurgency ("Guatemala" 4). Democracies arising from cataclysmic violence, Torres-Rivas alleges, fail to supply even the most basic function of the bourgeois state: securing its citizens from continuing and dispersed violence (*Centroamérica* 156). Consequently, Central America's democratization under conditions of extreme violence

delegitimated not only the insurgent groups and revolutionary organizations that sought change, but also a broader possibility that the region's obscene inequalities could ever be addressed.

The Promise of Modernity

Low-Intensity Conflict intellectuals during eighties and nineties proposed economic development assistance as a second major "nation-building" strategy in Central America. Internal defense and development programs (IDAD), explained in the *Foreign Internal Defense* field manual, conjoin defense from "subversion, insurgency, and lawlessness" with:

building viable institutions—political, economic, military, and social—that respond to the needs of the society. Development programs, carefully planned and implemented and properly publicized, can serve the interests of population groups and deny exploitable issues to the insurgents. (1-2) ⁶⁴

Facilitating economic growth and the expansion of markets occurs as a component of the national strategy to consolidate government power, wherein counterinsurgents, and their affiliated agencies, dispense "prosperity [to] the populace and allow them to appreciate the contrast between government action and empty promises made by the insurgents" (C-2). While *FID*'s authors task the U.S. Agency for International Development and the host nation's government with the technical details of development, programs like the IDAD were designed to demonstrate the magnanimity of the state. For example, in 1982, Guatemalan President Efraín Ríos Montt lauded his new effort to undermine leftist guerrillas organizing in his country as the "Frijoles y Fusiles" (Beans and Rifles) project, a combination of securing the government from unrest and securing food for the underfed peasantry. This program's core principles of "techo,

⁶⁴ Michael McClintock describes how the term Foreign Internal Development and Defense, a previous code word for counterinsurgency, selected in the late 1960s, "as an upbeat, politically astute formulation for public consumption and had persisted into the 1980s" (338).

trabajo, y tortilla” (shelter, work, and food) targeted the hearts, minds, and stomachs of the Guatemalan populace (Schirmer 27-28).⁶⁵

Geographer Ben Anderson attributes this tendency to repurpose humanitarian concerns as a form of combat to a “providential” strain of counterinsurgency theory (205). The *FID* narrates counterinsurgency’s generous “providence” through IDAD, a process that eliminates domestic threats and also leads to modernity (development) for affected nations. In these instances COIN rhetoric charts a way out of the inequitable quagmires of the Third World and onto a path toward a dynamic, future modernity through economic development. Accompanied by occasional violence, this narrative is a minor variation of the traditional narrative of modernization with the addition of a Western (in this case American) counterinsurgency tutor benevolently guiding the impoverished out of the clamor. The *FID* field manual’s most concrete measures for economic development follow the manual’s description of the village cordoning procedure and the organization of the Civilian Self-Defense Forces. As part of the larger struggle to protect the village, military forces should encourage every member of the society to participate in economic development, which includes “[raising] livestock and [engaging] in handicrafts such as embroidering, weaving, sewing” (D-5). That these labor practices might already constitute a significant part of village life seems lost on the Army and Air Force authors of the manual. Instead, they corroborate the stereotype of the Third World villager as desultory and devoid of entrepreneurial spirit. In contexts where counterinsurgency theory promotes a constructive engagement with the entrenched inequalities that foster insurgency, “free enterprise” retains its allure as ultimate solution to inequality. What begins in COIN as the expropriation of foreign

⁶⁵ In May 2013 Ríos Montt was convicted on the charge of genocide and “crimes against humanity” in Guatemalan courts, which was later overturned by the highest court in the country (Malkin A6).

revolution, concludes with, in the words of Greg Grandin, "free market absolutism" (*Empire's* 119).

The counterinsurgency project pursued in the name of democracy and free markets produced instead enfeebled governments, autocratic militaries, and populations socialized to accept economic contingency and austerity.⁶⁶ Counterinsurgents' pursuit of acute proximity with insurgencies and revolution enfranchised them, in the words of Michael McClintock, "explicitly to mimic the worst they could imagine of their ideological enemies, and to export this parody of the adversary as a counterinsurgency model through which to defend the Free World" (424). In other words, when military intellectuals imitated insurgencies in order to unconditionally eradicate them, McClintock's argument implies, their distorted copy bore the potential for catastrophic results. Apart from the extensive body count (which Grandin estimates exceeds 300,000 in a region where national populations number in the few million) and the thousands more that were tortured, displaced, or stripped of families, COIN seized upon and mutilated the very fabric of civil society, severing the bonds of culture, and discrediting any form of politics that might confront the injustices and extreme economic, social, and racial disparities out of which the conflicts emerged (*Empire's* 71). In the end, the U.S. effort in Central America commandeered potentially emancipatory circumstances in order to represent itself as purveyor of a progressive new reality, when in actuality it entrenched regressive, authoritarian, or imperialist situations.

As I have demonstrated, instances where COIN intellectuals adapted and revised insurgent goals are also moments when their schematics lack programmatic detail and their arguments flounder most profoundly. This vacillation between contradictory premises indexes

⁶⁶ For discussions of counterinsurgency's connection to the imposition of neoliberalism see Greg Grandin's *Empire's Workshop* (2007), Michael Parenti's *Tropic of Chaos* (2012), Edelberto Torres-Rivas' *Revoluciones Sin Cambios Revolucionarios* (2011) and *La Piel de Centroamérica* (2007), and Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2008).

counterinsurgency scholars' occasionally profound ambivalence toward their endeavors.⁶⁷ For example, Benjamin Schwarz's scathing account of low-intensity measures in El Salvador, challenges the military's "tinkering with techniques" rather than "questioning or testing the assumptions that underlie the doctrine" (77). Schwarz's critique suggests that COIN practitioners are not blind to the persistent moral dilemmas and ambiguities that they might face in low-intensity conflict environments. Paradoxically, arguments like Schwarz's that attempt to come to terms with the violence frequently lament their professional state, trapped between political imperatives at home and the endemic brutality of forces abroad. Indirectly referencing Jeane Kirkpatrick's speech at the 1984 Republican National Convention, Schwarz argues that the persistent demand for counterinsurgents to "try harder" to meet U.S. government objectives, reveals "a dangerous tendency to blame America first for failures in counterinsurgency" (77).⁶⁸ Instead, he insists on COIN operatives' good intentions and a professionalist ethos as "an extraordinary energy and commitment" (77). As much as Schwarz excoriates the presumption that the United States might build a nation from the ground up, he does not question its right to do so, hence his critique remains ambivalent—married to the United States' global dominance, even as he disputes its methods for the good of soldiers and the military hierarchy. Derek Gregory describes this counterinsurgency tendency as disavowing their role in the promotion of American imperialism, repositioning the U.S. military as "an innocent and virtuous bystander" in low-intensity conflicts ("The Rush" 20).

The COIN intellectual's ambivalence mentioned above points to a potential limitation in my analysis: the acute systematicity with which counterinsurgents applied these theories. The

⁶⁷ COIN intellectuals as early as Nathan Leites expressed their ambivalence toward theories they concocted. Ron Robin notes that Leites "As a concerned citizen, he rejected the very policy that he, as a scientist advocated; he doubted the 'moral acceptability of these policies even if conducted efficiently'" (181).

⁶⁸ Kirkpatrick's speech was entitled "Blame America First."

qualitative nature of the violence, the targeting of civilians, and the experience of socialized terror that resulted from the implementation of U.S.-funded and –supported counterinsurgency practices were features fundamental to both major U.S. political imaginaries of Central America. Despite the immense variability in the scope and extensiveness of atrocities from nation to nation, and despite changes in U.S. capacities for supervising or altering the level of violence throughout these conflicts, these features remained omnipresent. As the remainder of this dissertation illustrates, there is something irrefutable about the suffering and the corrosive influence inflicted by these COIN campaigns. His disputations of prevailing narratives about Guatemala's radical left aside, anthropologist David Stoll nevertheless concedes U.S. responsibility for the violence that consumed whole villages in Guatemala's indigenous highlands. Less incontrovertible are the ramifications of the violence for the imaginaries that surround its aftermath. Although the remaining chapters share a sense that some injury has been perpetrated, their protagonists split over how to identify those victimized by violence, how stories must be told in order to best represent those caught up in the social inferno, and whether justice or a politics of justice may be conceived of in the aftermath of such systematized cruelty. Although anthropologist David Stoll limits questions of justice for mass killing in Guatemala to quantifiable numeric responsibility, his greater concern is to cease what he sees as the catastrophic consequences of guerrilla warfare. Stoll's unease over the violence contradictorily translates into an implicit investment in the right of state's to commit extreme brutality to terminate the cycle of violence. Ultimately, the contradiction between those who imagine broadly inclusive visions of justice, and those held captive by the mechanics of violence and its application determines the divide between committed and reactionary imaginaries.

Chapter 2

"Neutralizing Rigoberta Menchú: Neoconservative Resonances in David Stoll's Anthropology"

When David Stoll published his 1999 study, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans*, he moved from the role of removed scholar and bystander of history to that of a protagonist with a tangible political impact. Stoll admits some hesitation in publishing his discoveries about the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, "in the hope that a peace agreement [in Guatemala] would be signed" (11). However, the consequences of Stoll's work for the laureate—a former supporter of the guerrillas and now an indigenous advocate and human rights activist—were much less benign than this comment suggests. Stoll's study effectively discredited Menchú Tum and her 1983 testimonial memoir, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* for much of her international audience.⁶⁹ According to fellow anthropologist Dianne Nelson, Stoll's study resulted in a precipitous decline in international funding for Menchú Tum's foundation, curtailing the organization's initiatives in postwar Guatemala to curb military impunity after the civil war, and to gain voter registration, healthcare, indigenous rights, and education. "These effects," Nelson relates, "have led many to suspect that such deleterious ends were planned by Stoll" (124). If these unnamed critics are correct, Stoll's work represents an unalloyed partisan intervention into the affairs of post-war Guatemala and against the efforts of leftists like Menchú Tum. Greg Grandin reports that Stoll found these comparisons between himself and the political right so prevalent and overwhelming that he "often complained...that Menchú's defenders

⁶⁹ Throughout the chapter I refer to Rigoberta Menchú Tum by the combined surnames: Menchú (belonging to her father) followed by Tum (belonging to her mother's family) as is the tradition in Latin America. In spite of the fact that the additional name does not appear in the title of her book *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, I use both names for 2 reasons. First, to avoid Stoll's (among others') patronizing approach when referring to Menchú Tum by her first name. And, second, because I want to avoid the confusion of distinguishing her from her father who is a central protagonist of her story and therefore this chapter.

accused him of being a CIA agent" (*Who* 10).⁷⁰ That the results of his scholarship suggest a latent alignment between Stoll and the perpetrators and abettors of Guatemala's genocide illustrates the troubling possibility that even advocates for the civil war's survivors may perpetuate the influence of the genocide.⁷¹

American public intellectuals on the right recognized the resonances of Stoll's work on Menchú Tum and parlayed his argument into culture wars of the 1990s. In the hands of rightwing culture warriors like David Horowitz, Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* became a document about the faithlessness and mendacity of leftist luminaries.⁷²

This chapter plumbs the possibly inadvertent alignment between Stoll and America's rightwing by tracking echoes between Stoll's anthropological work and the writings of neoconservatives. The presence of these echoes, I claim, represents a failure of interpretation on Stoll's part. More specifically, Stoll's attempt to set the historical record straight on Menchú Tum and the Guatemalan guerrillas and subsequently affirming rightwing views says more about his inability to intellectually cope with the extensive violence of Guatemala's civil war than about reliability of his evidence and his informants. His insistence that the guerrillas were provocateurs of the state's genocidal violence leads him not, as one might expect, to stake out a pacifist

⁷⁰ Given the Guatemalan army's gross violation of human rights, President Jimmy Carter cut off direct military aid to the military in the late 1970s. However, covert U.S. aid to the military continued, including \$35 million between 1977 and 1982, the period of the military's most brutal activities (Schirmer *Guatemalan* 169). In an interview with social scientist Jennifer Schirmer, a source close to army intelligence explained, "The CIA had been working in Guatemala all along, so this kind of intervention is not unusual," after the US Central Intelligence Agency delivered another \$30 million in covert aid to the military after 1983 (qtd. in *Guatemalan* 169).

⁷¹ Anthropologist Victoria Sanford perceives political commonalities between Stoll's attack on Menchú Tum's authority as witness and the radically repressive politics of the Guatemalan civil war. Like Colonel Gramajo and the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala, Stoll disputes survivors' credibility "in keeping with the politics of La Violencia in Guatemala" (Sanford 62).

⁷² The book also reinforced Dinesh D'Souza's criticism of the overly political correct curriculum of college campuses. D'Souza published an essay in his book *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991) entitled "Travels with Rigoberta: Multiculturalism at Stanford" where he copiously focuses on the booklists of core courses in a renovated Stanford undergraduate curriculum.

position for international mediation or for governmental reforms that might address the underlying problems, but paradoxically he justifies the very acts he seems to condemn. Within his reactionary imaginary, Stoll criticizes how North American leftists depend on moral clarity to define their politics, particularly by using symbols of martyrdom. These symbols stand in the way of "solidarity audiences'" access to the reality of the Guatemalan populace, a reality which, Stoll's narratives seem to suggest, resembles the U.S. New Right's fantasy of a "silent majority" inured against demands for social transformation. Stoll's retelling, written for audiences outside the academy, therefore reinterprets guerrilla strategy in Guatemala to eradicate the conditions of possibility for violent forms of uprisings in the future.

Stoll might never have anticipated any of these ramifications when he published his investigation of Menchú Tum's narratives. He acknowledges Menchú Tum's value in the reckoning with the violence of Guatemala's civil war throughout the book. Her testimony and subsequent activism garnered her a Nobel Peace Prize and, Stoll admits, "enabled her to focus international condemnation on an institution that deserved it, the Guatemalan army" (*Guatemalans* x-xi). Further, Stoll allows that Menchú Tum's testimony inspired international pressure that "obliged the Guatemalan army to negotiate with the guerrillas and accept U.N. observers throughout the country" as aspects of the 1996 peace process (*Guatemalans* 205). The publication of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in multiple languages, including English, "propelled her into a position of astonishing prominence," according to Stoll (x). This final consequence troubles him, however, because, from his perspective, Menchú Tum's story resembles a kind of Marxist-guerrilla fable, misrepresenting her life and the history behind her struggle. Herein resides Stoll's ambivalence about the politics of his project: the esteem he holds for Menchú Tum's successful condemnation of the Guatemalan military competes with his interrogation of the chain of events

she lays out in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. "That a valuable symbol can also be misleading," he confesses, "is the paradox that obliged me to write this book" (*Guatemalans* x).

Conveying her experiences of state terror during *la violencia* and the eruption of indigenous consciousness about structural asymmetries in Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchú Tum's *I, Rigoberta Menchú* drew international attention to the plight of the Maya during the civil war. Recorded in 1982 and transcribed and published in 1983 by anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, Menchú Tum's testimony narrates cycles of exploitative plantation labor, intimidation and eviction by the oligarchy's stooges, the necessity of struggle, the loss of family members to military violence, and the ambivalence of exile. With the addition of the Nobel Peace Prize, the popularity of Menchú Tum's story, in Grandin's view, "strengthened the non-militarist wing of the insurgents" and helped build political space from which to negotiate (*Who* viii).

Against the optimism of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*'s defenders, Stoll discloses three interdependent concerns that motivate his objections to the narrative. First, he asserts that Guatemalan indigenous peoples did not want a revolution nor did they support the guerrilla (*Guatemalans* 273). Second, through representations of her fellow K'iche indigenous community as irreversibly mobilized by the insurgent left, Stoll worries that Menchú Tum plays to North American expectations of an untapped revolutionary potential in Guatemalan *indígenas* (indigenous people). Those "seduced" by "romantic" representations of peasant struggle include academics from the West, who Stoll perceives as ceding authority to "fashionable forms of victimhood" and revoking the "task of verification" crucial to adjudicating responsibility in violent conflicts like the Guatemalan civil war (*Guatemalans* 274). Because the Menchú Tum misleadingly promotes guerrilla warfare as the authentic expression of indigenous and peasant unrest, because the "outsized role" of her leftist audience in the United States propped up the

guerrilla movement in Guatemala, and because, for fear of appearing racist, scholars renounce impartiality in judging between the rivals at war, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Stoll complains, prolonged the war in Guatemala and further perpetuates the viability of guerrilla warfare when, ultimately, the "bill will be paid by the peasants who are turned into military targets" (*Guatemalans* 276, 280).

That Stoll characterizes these issues as unanticipated results is significant. In doing so he duplicates the logic employed by principal policy architects that bolstered the Guatemalan government during the war. Neoconservatives, intellectuals that shaped President Ronald Reagan's foreign policy in Central America, used a similar rhetoric of unintended consequences to describe the domestic and foreign policies of Reagan's predecessor. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, a neoconservative from the American Enterprise Institute, argued that under the Carter administration "The United States has never tried so hard and failed so utterly to make and keep friends in the Third World" ("Dictatorships" 23). Hoping to usher in a more democratic and progressive government to replace the dynastic dictatorships of the Somoza family, Carter, the future US ambassador to the UN insists, failed to notice Soviet backers behind the 1979 Sandinista insurrection. In other words, Carter's non-involvement in Nicaraguan affairs was intervention of another sort insofar as in stepping aside from the revolution the United States traded a friendly authoritarian government for a hostile totalitarian regime (Kirkpatrick "Dictatorships" 28).

This emphasis on unanticipated results, on the part of both Stoll and the neoconservatives, adds up to what Albert O. Hirschman has described as the right-wing's recurring "jeopardy thesis," a particular reactionary argumentative form posed against reform

and social transformation.⁷³ According to Hirschman, the right construes arguments in favor of even the most meager socially redistributive policies as bearing the seed of unforeseen but potentially cataclysmic results. Reactionaries contend that proposals for change, while not objectionable in principle, their "unhappy consequences are excessive in relation to [their] benefits" (84). While, in principle, Carter's policy of nonintervention in Nicaragua tacitly accedes to the end of a dictatorship, in actuality, conservatives argue, it promotes Soviet influence in the Americas. Similarly, North Americans' support of Rigoberta Menchú Tum and Guatemala's former guerrillas aspires to further the forces of progress against the army, but lacks foresight into how this support perpetuates the legacy of violence by investing in the mythology of guerrilla struggle. Glossing on arguments such as these, Hirschman explains, "What at first looks like progress is not just illusory, but outright impoverishing" (123). In keeping with what Hirschman calls the "rhetoric of reaction," these arguments about the risks of political change consistently undermine the enfranchisement and liberation of others, for example, disputing suffrage claims from groups previously excluded from the right to vote. In a like manner, neoconservative discourse reconstructs moments of insurrection and potential emancipation into lessons on the dangers of irresponsibility in U.S. foreign policy.⁷⁴

Although the first-generation of neoconservatives bore salient differences with other New Right groups during the 1980s and 90s, within their ranks they shared a profound ideological

⁷³ Although all of Hirschman's examples includes only issues of domestic concern, it is my proposal that with regard to Central America, issues of concern to foreign policy become domestic issues insofar as they are enfolded into national imaginaries by recasting them as national security concerns.

⁷⁴ In these terms, Kirkpatrick translates Carter's inaction with regard to Nicaragua for her essay "Dictatorships and Double Standards." "Vietnam presumably taught us," she opines, "that the United States could not serve as the world's policeman; it should have taught us the dangers of trying to be to be the world's midwife to democracy when the birth is scheduled to take place under conditions of guerrilla warfare" (34).

vision that found its fullest expression in their foreign policy agenda.⁷⁵ Counter to neoconservative Irving Kristol's observation that his cohort was merely a "persuasion" or "mode of thought," scholars that investigate the first-generation of neoconservatives agree that neoconservatives shared a rhetorical tendency to exaggerate threats to U.S. national security from the Soviet Union and its supposed proxies in Central America (qtd. in Diamond 178). Examining how one such neoconservative vehicle intended to correct the CIA's underestimation of Soviet strength, Robert Horwitz describes how "Team B's projections of Soviet military strength were vastly exaggerated...Despite warnings of huge Soviet outlays, in fact growth in Soviet military spending slowed in the mid-1970s and was flat for the next decade" (131).⁷⁶ Similarly, neoconservatives tended to portray the U.S. as "a besieged fortress," an image that, according to Jesús Velasco, "was key to obtaining the endorsement of political and economic elites and the population in general for an American military buildup" (127). Calls for military buildup, intransigence toward missile treaties, and a confrontational attitude toward imagined communist incursions in Central America and Afghanistan illustrate the neoconservative doctrine of "rollback" of Soviet influence in the world, as opposed to previous "containment" or détente doctrines. Contrary to what Norman Podhoretz described as the "appeasement" of Soviet aggression manifested in these previous strategies, first-generation neoconservatives held markedly pessimistic views about the USSR's international goals, they consistently demanded

⁷⁵ According to Sara Diamond, other rightist groups that propelled Reagan into the presidency include the newly mobilized Christian right, and the anti-communist New Right which contains family values-focused traditionalists and libertarian free-marketeers (*Roads* 9-10).

⁷⁶ Team B developed out of President Ford's 1976 request that CIA director George H.W. Bush name experts to evaluate CIA data on Soviet military capabilities. Titled "Team B" these experts, headed up by Richard Pipes, later became members of the Committee for the Present Danger (CPD) (Velasco 55). According to Juan Velasco, appointing Pipes guaranteed that pessimism about the Soviet Union's intentions dominated their assessment, particularly in the USSR's push toward first-strike capabilities (56). The CPD, which included neoconservatives like Jeane Kirkpatrick, Norman Podhoretz, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, and Nobel Literature Prize winner Saul Bellow, "popularized Team B's findings with the aim of shifting public opinion and, in particular, elite perceptions about the 'Soviet nuclear threat'" (Velasco 58).

superior first-strike capabilities for the U.S. military, and they advocated direct engagement with their Cold War rival's proxies in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador (Velasco 55-6, Diamond 217). Consequently, these scholars assert, neoconservatives embraced the idea that a United States that projects its power into the rest of the world also projects its values to far-flung peoples.⁷⁷ Interpreting this neoconservative account of America's unique role in the world through the extensive barbarism eventuated by its application in Central America, Greg Grandin calls this ideology "punitive idealism," in which the successful projection of democracy and the free market required the use of pervasive violence (*Empire's* 88).

Although these scholars agree on the homogeneousness of neoconservative ideology on foreign policy in Central America, they disagree as to the source of this unity. Horwitz and Diamond, construe neoconservatives through on-going traditions of right-wing political partisanship, coalescing around anti-establishmentarianism or anticommunism respectively.⁷⁸ By contrast, Grandin refuses to see neoconservatives as anything other than expressions of a resurgent "nationalist militarism...fired by a lethal combination of humiliation in Vietnam and vindication, of which Central America was the tragic endgame" (*Empire's* 7). Hence, Central America became the proving ground for aspects of what Grandin calls the "new imperialism," a project renewed through US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and the restoration of neoconservative power in the Whitehouse with the election of George W. Bush.

⁷⁷ William Clark, Assistant for National Security Affairs to Reagan, saw the human rights policy as laid out by Congress in 1973, which allowed the executive branch a great deal of lassitude when it came to application of "human rights" policies, or against whom to charge with gross violation. He argues, the "administration believes that a strong America—an America whose national security is assured—is good for personal liberties throughout the world" (Velasco 95-6).

⁷⁸ Horwitz asserts that the Christian Right and neoconservatives reenergized the anti-establishment conservative strain during the 1970s, and both focused their loathing on the "cultural upheaval" of the 1960s (13). Around their candidate for president, Horwitz concludes "embodied the anti-establishment conservative outlook [and around whom] coalesced the interlocking sets of conservative issue groups, the mobilization of material resources, and the articulation of a powerful political ideology of victimhood" (17).

Diamond prefers to examine neonservatism as an expression of anti-communism. "Anticommunism became the American Right's dominant motif," she argues, "not just because it justified the enforcement of U.S. dominion internationally but also because it wove together disparate threads of right-wing ideology" (9).

Much of the academic criticism of David Stoll elucidates correspondences between his assertions in *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* and rightwing ideology by conflating all forms of rightist thought, whether they are Christian rightists or American imperialists. Some assert that Stoll's argument reproduces reactionary interpretations of the Cold War. For example, Claudia Ferman argues, Stoll's very thesis "follows a Cold War logic and should be understood in that context" (161). As if to further explain Ferman's observation, Grandin remarks that Stoll repeats Cold War ideologies that blame armed insurgents for the catastrophic violence that states wield against them (*Who* 13). Contextualizing the controversy in the U.S. academy at the height of the "culture wars," Mary Louise Pratt argues that Stoll's aggressive questioning of Menchú Tum "was undertaken with the awareness that it would be received by the right as a splendid vindication not only against Menchú and her testimonial text, but also against multiculturalism, social movements, and the efforts to decolonize higher education in the United States" (37). The publication of his study had coincident aims of undermining the laureate and weighing in on the university's "culture wars," a moment when the "children of the 1960s" clashed with the increasingly powerful cultural rightwing in the 1990s (Pratt 30). By implication, Stoll's argument lends support to the revanchism in both Guatemala and the United States, affinities that correlate with neoconservative policy during the 1980s.

Other critics choose to tackle the empirical implications of Stoll's work, both at the level of the assumptions he brings to his analysis and the evidence he uses to support his claims. Literary scholar Daphne Patai worries that by continuing to teach *I, Rigoberta Menchú* after Stoll's revelations, scholars alarmingly "conflat[e] political and intellectual goals" (284-5). Similarly, Mario Roberto Morales applauds Stoll's critique of guerrilla vanguardism (363). He suggests that Stoll's analysis encourages his readers to recognize the need to "[retire] certain

kinds of idealism that have outlived their usefulness" (Morales 364). By contrast, critics supportive of Menchú Tum argue that Stoll, encouraged by questionable assumptions, ineptly investigates the story. In her interpretation of testimonial texts like Menchú Tum's, Elzbieta Sklodowska reads "a peculiar mixture of experience, creation, manipulation, and invention" (256). Hence, instead of the fabrication detected by Stoll, "I see allegories and metaphors. In short, I see a text" (Sklodowska 256). Carol Smith attacks Stoll's insistence on neutrality and academic integrity, which promises "illusory truth of 'objective reportage'" of war and social strife in Guatemala (24). Rather, his research on the reasons behind indigenous and peasant impoverishment, the wellspring of the civil war's unrest, is incomplete, Smith alleges, "and I very much doubt that his analysis of Guatemala's poverty would be accepted as it stands for an M.A. or Ph.D. in any social science department emphasizing development issues" (151). Instead, she explains, what's at stake for Stoll is less "scholarly conviction and more...personal frustration about losing a monopoly on authority" as a white male academic to subalterns like Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Smith 153).

These questions about the viability of Stoll's guiding precepts and the limitations of his research should point readers back toward the ideological underpinnings of *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. While academic responses to Stoll note coincidental relationships between rightwing goals and the public reception of his research, or uncover echoes of conservative rhetoric in his conclusions, few scholars seriously engage with the history and varieties of U.S. rightwing ideology beyond cursory references to broad principles or notable representatives. In other words, scholars take for granted the positions of the rightwing without scrutinizing their specific claims against insurgencies in Central America. I want to suggest that a closer look at the ideologies produced by the first generation of neoconservatives illustrates

more profoundly the regressive ideologies perpetuated, perhaps inadvertently, in Stoll's writings about Rigoberta Menchú Tum.

In spite of his ambivalence toward Menchú Tum and toward the potential effects of the revelations contained in his monograph, I ask how does contextualizing Stoll within U.S. reactionary discourse unsettle what appear to be inevitable conclusions based the evidence from his research? In what ways does such contextualization illustrate latent commitments within Stoll's research agenda in Central America? And, most importantly, what are the implications of these inadvertently reactionary commitments for those who endeavor to support the struggle of subordinated groups and classes? This chapter argues that while Stoll appears to advocate for those suffering in Guatemala's protracted civil war, he exemplifies the reactionary response to insurrection in Central America, echoing the political responses of the first-generation of neoconservatives, and revivifying their influence beyond the confines of the civil war. Neoconservatives participated in the Administration's overt and covert efforts to aid the forces opposed to social transformation in Central America, brandishing financial, ideological, logistical, and operational support for the Contras in Nicaragua, El Salvador's military government, and the Guatemalan state's apocalyptic strategies. Thus, to scrutinize Stoll's claims through an ideology critique is to elaborate how his rejection of the revolutionary left's narratives about social conflict, subaltern consciousness, and the results of this consciousness seem to leave him little choice than to embrace the suppositions of the right. This chapter extends scholarship that point's toward Stoll's implicit biases by concretizing these resonances through an examination of Stoll's scholarship alongside the history and ideology of a particular camp of Reagan's New Right, the first generation of neoconservatives.

I begin this chapter by providing two brief histories: first, of the neoconservative movement, and, second, of David Stoll's research. Through these histories I hope to demonstrate how parallels between a previous allegiance to and eventual revocation of the radical left by both Stoll and the neoconservatives, reveals affinity between their claims about Central America. In the second section of this chapter, I explore three arguments crucial to Stoll's work on Menchú Tum's life and narrative that seem to duplicate the preoccupations of neoconservatives and the New Right that rose to power with the election of Ronald Reagan. Foremost amongst these parallel positions, Stoll obliquely argues for an instrumentalist view of the state, in which the presence of insurgents inexorably calls for governments to react with absolute savagery. I suggest that in the process of critiquing the human rights violations that resulted from guerrilla strategy, Stoll's vehemence against *guerrilleros* ultimately compels him to confirm the rationality of the Guatemalan government's genocidal counterinsurgency strategy. As a former believer in the left's explanations about Guatemala's exploited and dispossessed, Stoll now rejects these reverential stories of what he takes to be triumphalism and martyrdom. His examination of Rigoberta Menchú Tum and her testimony about her family provide him with a means by which he might, like the neoconservatives, undercut leftist axioms about the oppressed by attacking the laureate's function and use of symbols. Finally, I show how Stoll substitutes Menchú Tum's idealistic portrait of the revolutionary oppressed with what he deems to be a greater majority of Guatemalans "who [also] reject the left", indigenous and campesino voices now marginalized by Menchú Tum's narrative (12). I note significant parallels between Stoll's "silenced majority" and a similar concept, "the silent majority," employed by the Republican Party to legitimate dreams of remaking the United States as a land of entrepreneurialism, respect for property, and stalwart support for military intervention. Stoll's account of Guatemala's "silent majority" gives voice to

their buried agendas that seem to amalgamate conservatism, economic neoliberalism, and a deeply anti-political attitude. Ultimately, because Stoll imagines that Guatemala's "silenced majority" are the real victims of the civil war, he mistakes his argument about Menchú Tum and the rationalization of the military's brutality as acts of solidarity with the oppressed.

I. Stoll and the Neoconservatives

A transition from left to right typifies the political trajectory of the neoconservative movement in postwar America.⁷⁹ Exploring the formation of the neoconservatives through the lens of their foreign policy recommendations and maneuvers, Jesús Velasco designates three phases in the development of this group: early alignment with the radical left and its organizations during the 1930s, the assumption of positions as social scientists and writers in defense of liberalism during the 1950s and 1960s, and, later, roles as public intellectuals by way of think tanks and political organizations as advocates of neoconservatism beginning in the 1970s (20).⁸⁰ As the designation suggests, neoconservatives considered themselves, not lapsed conservatives resuming their previous allegiances, but those whose apprehension of unfolding historical events induces a rightward conversion. In this section, I argue that the political path taken by the neoconservatives prefigures Stoll's eventual rejection of the left. Stoll, like the neoconservatives, reacts to historical events that push against the limits of comprehension and the explanatory power of previous political axioms. The apparent deficiency of these axioms inspires him to adopt reactionary positions on Guatemala's civil war.

⁷⁹ Velasco notes that amongst the second-generation of neoconservatives, for example Dick Cheney or Paul Wolfowitz, Marx and Marxism are completely ignored (26).

⁸⁰ Among their ranks, Velasco numbers a few as the core of neoconservatism, Nathan Glazer, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Hilton Kramer, Irving Kristol, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Norman Podhoretz, James Q. Wilson, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Michael Novak (18).

For first-generation neoconservatives engagement with Marxism, anti-Stalinist Trotskyism, and socialism constituted an indispensable political education that contributed to their later work as intellectuals, politicians, and diplomats. Some neoconservatives—Irrving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, among others—began their political education in the radical student groups of 1930s City College of New York, where they steeped themselves in the intellectual culture of their fellow students (Velasco 24). “City College was, in a way, a training camp for these neoconservatives,” Velasco explains, “Here they not only learned Marxism and became aware of domestic and international problems. The college also initiated them into their future careers—the world of political and intellectual debate” (24). Others, like Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, were longtime Democratic Party supporters who challenged what they believed to be strong communist currents within their party in Washington, New York, and Minnesota (Velasco 28). Still others, like Carl Gershman, joined later in the 1970s as a result of splits within the US Socialist Party and out of a desire for an anticommunist socialism (Velasco 31).⁸¹

However, the the USSR's 1948 invasions of Czechoslovakia, the Korean War, and the revelation of Stalin's massive abuses, prompted, what Velasco calls, a “deradicalization” of these young polemicists (26). Afterward, these fledgling intellectuals became respected social scientists and writers, defending their severe version of the liberal tradition against what they perceived to be an encroaching totalitarianism, and forming institutions like the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in 1952 (27). Their views on the matter were particularly influenced by Hannah Arendt's 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Velasco 89). Arendt portrays totalitarianism as a universal condition of terror. Drawing parallels between the Soviet Union and The Third Reich, Arendt argues that totalitarianism is a political process that

⁸¹ Gershman later worked with Kirkpatrick at the United Nations.

dominates and terrorizes its citizens from within, that claims sovereignty over the whole of humanity, demanding the "elimination of every competing nontotalitarian reality," and that is difficult to uproot once entrenched (23, 90, 13). For the neoconservatives, Arendt's cursory demarcation between the limited, nationalist aims of Benito Mussolini's fascism and the voracious imperialist nature of totalitarianism inspired Kirkpatrick's 1979 essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," in which she argued for the irreformability of totalitarian systems as opposed to rightwing dictatorships. In her view, Anastasio Somoza represented the potential for reform of the rightwing dictator contra the "Marxist-Leninism" Sandinistas, and therefore policymakers in the U.S. should support the former against the latter in Nicaragua.⁸² These reflections would later contribute to the Reagan Doctrine that tied U.S. national security interests against the Soviet Union to battles between so-called "freedom fighters" and totalitarians.⁸³

Those who would later become neoconservatives drifted further to right in reaction to the 1960s New Left and the counterculture, phenomena they interpreted as irresponsible, anti-intellectual, and alienating in their calls for an "all-embracing social justice" (Velasco 115). Kirkpatrick exclaimed that the movement's "passionate rejection...constituted a wholesale assault on the legitimacy of American society," and hence credits the movement for the catalyzing neoconservatism (qtd. in Velasco 115).⁸⁴ Neoconservatives, then, react not only to the abuses of foreign powers, like the Soviet Union, but the perceived excesses of the domestic left.

⁸² Whereas fascism sought to merely establish the fascist elite, Arendt contends, totalitarianism seeks instead to dominate and terrorize its citizens from within (325).

⁸³ During Reagan's 1985 State of the Union address the doctrine became clear, "We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression...Support for freedom fighters is self-defense and totally consistent with OAS and U.N. Charters...I want to work with you to support the democratic forces whose struggle is tied to our own security" (qtd. in Grandin *Empire's* 117).

⁸⁴ Using virtually identical language Patrick Moynihan describes the behavior of youth culture and politics as "mindless assault on the civic and social order" (qtd. in Velasco 115).

Corporate America's renewed political agency catalyzed the third phase of this first-generation. Business interests sought greater influence in postwar public life by funding think tanks. Actively recruited by these private interests, neoconservatives shifted toward work as public intellectuals on the verge of immense power over foreign policy (Velasco 60). In think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, through organizations like the Committee for the Present Danger, and once embedded in the Reagan administration neoconservatives fomented on the failures of U.S. foreign policy to sufficiently address the looming Soviet menace. Because of their prominence in public debate, they came to form Reagan's virtual "shadow cabinet" with the appointment of sixty-two neoconservatives and their allies to foreign policy oriented posts (Diamond 211). In Reagan, they found an inspiring, aggressive call for "rollback" of Soviet influence, and a sometimes-disappointing champion in foreign affairs. Nevertheless, Grandin claims, through the administration neoconservatives brought "the full power of the United States against a much weaker enemy in order to exorcise the ghost of Vietnam—and, in so doing, begin the transformation of America's foreign policy and domestic culture" (*Empire's* 5).

Neoconservative Robert Kagan, retrospectively described Central America as "the main battleground of the political and ideological war of the 1980s" and Kirkpatrick affirmed it was "the most important place in the world for the United States" (Kagan *Twilight* 171; qtd. in Grandin *Empire's* 71).

Stoll's Disenchantment with the Left

David Stoll's intellectual biography exhibits disillusion with the left and a similar drift rightward to that of the neoconservatives. Stoll began as journalist researching the influence of evangelical Protestants on Central America. By his own admission he intended that his journalism might help activists opposed to the Reagan's campaign against the Sandinistas in

Nicaragua. "When the North American religious right became involved in the Reagan administration's Contra war in Nicaragua," he reveals, "I sensed that the Latin American left, as well as many Latin Americanists in the U.S., were failing to deal with the many issues posed by the rapid growth of evangelical churches" ("Faculty Bio" n.p.). His 1983 book *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire* probes the mutual support of Christian missionaries and an underlying imperialist design. His 1990 *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, examined the specific appeal of Protestant evangelism for Latin Americans in contrast to liberation theology.

Subsequently, as a PhD student in Stanford University's anthropology program, he focused increasingly on Guatemala's civil war. Exploring Guatemala's Ixil indigenous communities during and after the civil war, Stoll's dissertation and first academic book *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (1993) argues that the coercive logic of civil war pushed indigenous people into *la violencia* rather than affinity with one side or the other. Published before the announcement of her Nobel Prize, Stoll first corroborates points made in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and then challenges how Menchú Tum plays to North American expectations of an untapped revolutionary potential in Guatemalan *indígenas* (indigenous people). These hopes, he proclaims, "were sure to be disappointed" (*Between* 17). Later, during a research trip, Stoll requests that informants in Chajul verify the laureate's portrayal of public executions that took place there. Their puzzled responses motivate Stoll to test the veracity of Menchú Tum's narrative. According to an interview conducted for a Stanford alumni magazine, as early as 1989, Stoll had interviewed one hundred and twenty of Menchú Tum's neighbors and relatives (Strauss "Truth" n.p.). He finds he cannot keep silent in the face of this countervailing evidence.

When compared to *Between Two Armies*, his second academic work shifts from addressing an audience traditionally immersed in scholarly anthropological debate toward a broader North American left audience mistakenly caught up with Guatemala's guerrillas. Referencing the frequent association between guerrilla warfare and one of its key proponents, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Stoll details his own task, "Facing the limitations of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* will, I hope, help the Latin American left and its foreign supporters escape from the captivity of Guevarismo" (*Guatemalans* 282). Thus, Stoll's book addresses not only those who might take up arms against abusive governments in Latin America but also those who played an "outsized role" in the Guatemalan civil war, Menchú Tum's audience in the United States (*Guatemalans* 276). As insurgent violence diminished during negotiations, "The more important war became the international one, of images, and that is the war the guerrillas won with the help of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*" (Stoll *Guatemalans* 7). Stoll asserts that Menchú Tum prolonged an unpopular war by rousing transnational audiences to pressure the government to negotiate, in effect preserving the myth of guerrilla warfare.

These conclusions point to a line of inquiry begun in his previous monograph. In *Between Two Armies*, Stoll wonders at how American leftists appear to irresponsibly project their own agendas onto Guatemalan *indígenas*. He notes "transitory" popular support for the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejercicio Guerrillera de los Pobres, EGP) from *indígenas*. Contending with this reality, scholars like Stoll, who once "[identified] with the Left" find themselves in an "uncomfortable position" (*Between* 305). "[W]here do we find a revolutionary subject to support our work?" he asks (*Between* 305). Given his ethnographic experiences amidst the Ixil, Stoll worries that anthropologists endow the oppressed with a weighty agenda in their perpetual search

for the subordinated to "resist"—an agenda for which they prefer not to "pay the costs" when faced with war's ravages (*Between* 305).

II. The Guatemalan Army's *Raison d'État*

One obvious point of commonality between Stoll and the neocons is their sweeping condemnation of Latin America's leftist insurgencies. In *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalan's*, Stoll holds El Ejercicio Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor EGP) and other guerrilla organizations as uniquely blameworthy for the civil war's drastic violence. His view of the EGP would seem to concur with Jeane Kirkpatrick's logic in a December 1, 1981 address to the United Nation's Third Committee of the General Assembly. During her speech Kirkpatrick explained what she saw as the Salvadoran guerrillas' cynical motives. "They have sought and invited reaction from the extreme right," she accused, "in the hope that it will ultimately lead to a revolution from the extreme left, and have deliberately set-off a chain reaction of violence and counter-violence which imperils the freedom, security, and well-being of every El Salvadoran" ("Human" 120). According to Kirkpatrick, the only party hoping to "pacify" these "murderous" enemies is the Salvadoran national government ("Human" 118). In her polemic, Kirkpatrick divorces the Salvadoran state from the factions competing for power, recasting it as an entity autonomous from the conflict, and with the exclusive interest of preserving social order and the promise of democracy.⁸⁵ Insurgent violence against a non-totalitarian government, in this view, is the first cause of the social strife, disorder, and even the

⁸⁵ Kirkpatrick insists, "The government of El Salvador is made up of democrats who respect the right of the El Salvadoran people to choose their rulers and their capacity to do so," at this point El Salvador at this point was dominated by a military junta that assumed control after a 1979 coup d'état (116).

murder of unarmed civilians.⁸⁶ By repositioning blame for atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala, these roughly equivalent arguments seem to vindicate measures taken to uphold the state.⁸⁷

In this section, I argue that Stoll rationalizes the government's pacification campaign and the resulting genocide. He represents this campaign as a reasonable response to the guerrillas' actions. I begin with a brief history of Guatemala, followed by an examination of how Guatemala's postwar truth commission report invalidates his claim that the guerrillas were responsible for the civil war's drastic violence, but reveals the overwhelming responsibility of the Guatemalan government. Given the truth commission's consensus about the fault of the state, I then examine how Stoll appears to exonerate the state by magnifying the cynicism and hubris of the guerrillas. In a like manner, he seems to demand the intervention of state forces in the face of a pronounced enmity within Mayan communities brought out by civil war. Finally, he emphasizes moments when the government's counterinsurgency actually furthered the aims of indigenous enfranchisement. I interpret these claims as symptomatic of the *raison d'État* doctrine, which understands the state as a rational actor.

By weighing in on the Guatemalan civil war, Stoll wades into the debate over one of anthropology's most researched events and he takes issue with the consensus he sees there.

⁸⁶ In this address, Kirkpatrick goes so far as to blame the murder of mourners at Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero's funeral mass in San Salvador on the Faribundo Martí Movement for National Liberation (FMLN). According to the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at Notre Dame University's Biography of Romero, "a series of small bombs were hurled into the crowd of mourners, apparently from the windows of the National Palace, which overlooks the Cathedral plaza... The blasts were followed by rapid volleys of gunfire... Many witnesses saw army sharpshooters dressed in civilian clothing, firing from the roof and balcony of the National Palace" ("Funeral" n.p.). After the shooting forty civilians were found dead and hundreds more seriously wounded.

⁸⁷ Kirkpatrick, for example, is strangely at odds with a study commissioned on behalf of US military think tank the RAND Corporation. In this study, Benjamin Schwarz continually ascribes blame to the Salvadoran state that was pervaded by rightists. "The Salvadoran right," he asserts, "through its control of the legislature and judiciary, has eviscerated legislation that threatens its prerogatives, and has been unable—or refused—to try, convict, and punish those responsible for official and rightwing violence" (*El Salvador* 59). On the part of the armed forces, "it is precisely the young, aggressive, U.S.-trained officers who are most intoxicated by the extreme right's vision... and who commit many of the worst atrocities" (Schwarz *El Salvador* vi-vii).

Social scientist Staffan Lofving explains, "For anthropology, the U.S.-backed Guatemalan counter-insurgency project that aimed at draining the sea (meaning the people) in order to kill the fish (meaning the guerrillas) represents one of the most analysed wars of the 20th century" (80). For example, he contradicts a number of leading social scientists and historians that collaborated in the United Nations-sponsored El Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico's (Historical Clarification Commission, CEH). Their report, *Memory of Silence: The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report*, released the same year as Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, argued that profound social and political divides formed the basis of the Guatemalan civil war. These divisions originated in a racialized and colonial division of wealth and land, which resulted in the *ladino* (ethnically mixed Guatemalans of Spanish, immigrant, and indigenous heritage) oligarchy's enduring control over the economy and politics. The landed oligarchy's imposition of violently expropriative labor practices upon indigenous and *campesino* (peasant) workers constitutes a second feature of this colonial system. The 1954 CIA-orchestrated coup, which instantiated a series of military dictatorships, was another event that fostered the discord of the civil war.

The first stirrings of armed opposition to the post-coup order developed in the 1960s from disaffected army officers and communist groups, but were quickly crushed by the military's brutal campaign and an "increasingly intrusive intelligence service" (Rothenberg xxi). Although the government's offensive quelled the opposition, security force strategies in subsequent decades demonstrated the Guatemalan state's irreformable despotism to leftist organizers. These measures included the 1978 army massacre of peasants protesting uncompensated plantation labor in Panzos, and the 1981 Spanish Embassy fire which killed indigenous and student occupiers protesting the atrocities committed by the Guatemalan government. According to

Grandin, these events "galvanized the national left, providing a focal point of unification" (*Colonial* 165).

Recognizing opposition groups' efforts to organize Guatemala's disenfranchised indigenous communities, the army escalated its campaigns in the *altiplano* or Mayan highlands.⁸⁸ Repressive practices including extrajudicial execution, forced disappearances, torture, and massacre increased under the regimes of Gen. Fernando Romeo Lucas García and Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt. Guatemalans came to describe the proliferation of atrocities as, simply, *la violencia*. In 1982, the guerrilla groups unified as the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, URNG), which sought to coordinate efforts between groups. Throughout *la violencia*'s most monstrous phases, Ronald Reagan's presidential administration stressed that despite the abuses, the Guatemalan government "brought considerable progress" and sought to lift embargos on direct military aid to the nation's army (Malkin A10).⁸⁹ The war resulted in the death of over 200,000 predominantly civilian and indigenous Guatemalans, the torture of thousands, and the displacement of between 500,000 and 1.5 million Guatemalans (Rothenberg xxii). After decades of repressive violence and the return of civilian governance, the guerrillas and government began negotiations in 1987.

By contrast to the CEH, throughout his monograph on Rigoberta Menchú Tum, particularly in his less reserved moments, Stoll asserts that guerrilla provocation is the sufficient and necessary cause of government repression. "Insurgency would seem to be a remedy that prolonged the illness," he argues, "by bolstering the rationales of the most homicidal wing of the officer corps in one country after another" (*Guatemalans* 279). In this passage he means to

⁸⁸ The term opposition groups includes unions, priests propagating liberation theology, peasant self-organizing collectives, and guerrillas.

⁸⁹ In January 1985, Americas Watch issued a report observing that Reagan's State Department "is apparently more concerned with improving Guatemala's image than in improving its human rights" (Parry n.p.).

undermine leftist explanations that the continual over-exploitation of indigenous and *ladino* labor and the extreme division of wealth—both classified as the "illness"—produced violent uprisings from below, in the form of guerrilla warfare—as the "remedy" to social disease. However, rather than deliver justice to the grassroots by allowing the exploited and the dispossessed to seize lands and eradicate their oppressors, Stoll believes that armed insurrection jeopardizes their very existence and multiplies the subordinated's suffering by reinforcing the worst proclivities of the forces representing the status quo. Furthermore, he asserts, "guerrilla strategies are far more likely to kill off the left than to build it" (*Guatemalans* 282). These passages differ from Kirkpatrick's line about the state as rational intermediary in an obvious way, by demarcating a state institution, Guatemala's officer corps, as party to the conflict. These quotations also differ from the neoconservative perspective more subtly insofar as they appear to entertain leftist concerns about asymmetries in wealth and power, even indulging in the hope that the left in Guatemala and elsewhere might have a future beyond the Cold War. However, readers should note that Stoll's argument isn't exclusively directed at the armed left in Guatemala, but more generally toward guerrilla warfare itself, and as I hope to demonstrate throughout the chapter, against the very idea of revolutionary struggle. The fact that Stoll forsakes the idea of revolution does not in and of itself entail wholesale endorsement of neoconservative ideology—any number of politics might emerge from such a rejection. The task remains then to demonstrate his affinities with neoconservative ideology through his account of governments besieged by guerrillas.

Here I return briefly to the post-war truth commission report in order to illustrate not a little partisanship in Stoll's claims about the guerrillas' responsibility for *la violencia*. The Historical Clarification Commission's report definitively quantifies responsibility for the

atrocities through close attention to each reported abuse. This report attributes ninety-three percent of human rights violations and acts of violence to the Guatemalan state, three percent to the guerrillas, leaving approximately four percent of human rights abuses to undetermined or unaffiliated parties (Rothenberg 179-80). In his introduction to the English translation of the report Daniel Rothenberg explains that the Guatemalan state responded to the growth of the guerrilla movement in the 1970s and 80s by instituting systematic brutality as "the central mechanism of daily rule and the key manner in which the government interacted with citizens" (xxii).

Indigenous communities, in the Guatemalan *altiplano* or highlands, were a particular target for state repression. As Rothenberg reports, the Guatemalan Truth Commission "determined [the government's campaign in the *altiplano*] met the legal definition of genocide" (xxi). Further, beginning in 1981, the army found ways to coerce civilian complicity with acts of extreme cruelty against their own communities, by organizing Patrullas Autodefensivas Civiles (Civil Defense Patrols, PACs) (Rothenberg 117). PACs became the army's means of "extending military power over daily life" and to help "terrorize entire populations so that they would not support the insurgency" (Rothenberg 120). The conclusions of this multi-expert study contradict the indictments Stoll lobs at the armed left. Moreover, the truth commission report suggests that his position on Guatemala's civil war originates from a case-study that is insufficiently generalizable and, perhaps, represents the manipulation of his case to suit a specific agenda.

Conceivable examples of this less-than-objective disposition arise in places where Stoll hopes to demonstrate the insurgency's faithlessness and hubris. In making the case for the guerrilla's responsibility for the massacres that follow, he represents the EGP as cynically compelling indigenous Guatemalans toward brinksmanship rather than sincere revolutionary

struggle. For instance, Stoll depicts the left's ideological work in the *altiplano* as exclusively a means to an end: a premeditated tactic for overthrowing the incumbent regime. While exploring former guerrilla Mario Payeras' reflections on the difficulty organizing the Maya, Stoll comments, "the Guerrilla Army of the Poor [could not] deal with the complexity of indigenous communities, that is their felt needs... Instead, [guerrilla organizing] was a strategy for seizing power at the national level that required the sacrifice of the communities it was purporting the defend" (138). Moreover, he interprets the flight of union and popular organization membership into the guerrilla organizations, after the amplification of state terror in the early 1980s, as evidence of some guerrilla ploy to swell their ranks. "Pulling popular organizations [as in the Committee for Campesino Unity] into the war was a disaster," Stoll protests; "By infiltrating the peasant movement, then mobilizing it, the guerrillas brought down ferocious repression" (175).⁹⁰ It would appear, from his assessment, Stoll perceives that the EGP, and guerrilla strategists in general, envisioned both their social base in the people and other left organizations as equally dispensable in a craven bid for power.

As some of Stoll's many assertions on the EGP already attest, he understands the presence of guerrillas to be an adequate rationale for state terror.⁹¹ Distinguishing the context of his first ethnographic study from the Menchús' home department, he writes, "I heard of far fewer guerrilla killings in Uspantán than in Ixil country, but there were enough to justify a retaliatory

⁹⁰ Although he cites a 1986 interview with Rolando Morán (Ricardo Ramírez), the EGP's commander in chief, that describes the CUC as a recruiting vehicle for the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, this is four years after the Guatemalan government ramped up terror and the CUC declared it would join the armed rebellion. Stoll's task is to describe that this arrangement between the EGP and CUC occurred at the Committee for Campesino Unity's formation (99).

⁹¹ One common security forces tactic involved disguising themselves as guerrillas before committing atrocities, in order to steer blame toward the guerrillas. Peasants quickly learned to distinguish the two groups; when later asked to assess responsibility for the violence, they blamed the government far more often than they blamed the guerrillas (Amnesty International 67, 94-96)

holocaust" (142).⁹² Stoll definitively links the EGP's political assassinations in the region to the arrival of the pacification campaigns that butchered and displaced their people. Although here he does not heap direct responsibility on guerrilla cadres for the massacres to come, he nevertheless establishes a "retaliatory holocaust" as the necessary outcome of the insurgency's activities. In explanation for this conclusion, Stoll insists guerrillas instill paranoia in army planners and government. "By claiming to represent a civilian population that is typically mute, terrified, and divided," Stoll argues, "insurgents muddy the distinction between themselves and noncombatants" in the eyes of soldiers (154). Because guerrillas frequently aim to subsist amongst the populace and remain indistinguishable from them, "brutality toward civilians is the predictable result of irregular [guerrilla] war" (155).⁹³ Its predictability, however, "hardly justifies government reprisals against noncombatants," but because of its "sociological probability" guerrilla strategy virtually guarantees incalculable sacrifice (Stoll 155). His vacillation here represents Stoll's more complicated relationship to violence in Central America when compared to the neoconservatives. Whereas the latter seems to embrace coercive power of violence and fear, Stoll recognizes that state terror is morally reprehensible. However, he finds reason enough to reproach the EGP and other guerrillas because the state took advantage of their operations to justify genocide. This mechanistic logic would seem to exonerate the state for its conduct because of guerrilla provocations.

This point is further underscored when Stoll investigates how leftists, against prior experiences to the contrary, cling to illusions of seizing state power. For example, he accuses the EGP of not learning from their experiences in the 1960s, when the army dispersed and massacred

⁹² Guatemala's governance structure divides the country into departments and municipalities. Departments function like states, but lack the autonomy of the U.S. federalist states.

⁹³ *The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines irregular warfare as "A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)" (146).

the first guerrilla columns with the support of U.S. advisers.⁹⁴ In a later instance, involving the communities in and around Menchú Tum's village, Chimel, Stoll describes how the story of lessons not learned repeats itself and bloodshed is the result. He recapitulates that before executing landowners in Soch, a village neighboring Chimel, a Guerrilla Army of the Poor cadre visited Menchú Tum's village and held a meeting (110-1). Seeing Chimelinos as guerrilla collaborators, relatives of those kidnapped or killed by the guerrillas denounced them to the army (113). Chaos then ensued as "Almost to the man...*gente pacífica, gente trabajador* (peaceful and hardworking people)" became military informers and killers through the army's Civil Defense Patrols (142). Armed insurrection against the state, Stoll implies, tends to result in state perpetrated terror and violence against civilians.

Having already suggested that Stoll's account diverges significantly from more comprehensive accounts of the civil war, to what degree should we accept his more specific accusations against the EGP? In her close work with Guatemalan military documents and testimony on the CEH, Jennifer Schirmer explains that the government did distinguish between the strategies of different guerrilla groups.⁹⁵ *La Jefatura* (the military high-command), Schirmer documents, made analytical distinctions between the strategies of EGP and the Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas, ORPA), the two major guerrilla organizations. For example, they recognized that whereas the EGP organized whole villages in the hopes of a widespread insurrection, ORPA's preparations for popular

⁹⁴ These first guerrilla columns, according to Stoll, "also let down their guard at a time when their advances were galvanizing the army into working with U.S. advisers. Soon the army drove them out of the areas they had organized and slaughtered their supporters" (48). Diane Nelson objects to Stoll's demand that guerrillas anticipate the state's brutal response. She claims, "the popular movement and the guerrilla were always a motley—making stuff up as they went along, shocked and awestruck by the historically unprecedented level of violence unleashed upon them" (149).

⁹⁵ Although the four organizations El Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Labor Party, PGT), Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces, FAR), Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA), and the EGP shared similar goals and strategies, their structures and principles differed (Rothenberg 125).

resistance included more clandestine, anonymous fighting and the complete separation of civilians from guerrilla combat (Schirmer "Whose" 69). However, despite the army's theoretical differentiation between EGP and ORPA strategy, in practice the army indiscriminately employed the most intense violence in territories controlled by either organization, and similar violence was documented in the capital (Schirmer "Whose" 69).⁹⁶ In explanation for the military's uniform response, in spite of their recognition that the EGP and ORPA approached civilian non-combatants differently, Schirmer clarifies, "It is a particular kind of mindset that responds in this exceptionally brutal manner—a mindset not created by the EGP" ("Whose" 70). Instead, "once a certain rationale became mandated" by the army high command, all within the military's "killing zones" were subject to elimination (Schirmer "Whose" 70). Reflecting on Schirmer's analysis, it's difficult not to see Stoll's indictment of revolutionaries as an oblique apologia for the state and its prerogatives, for "unintentionally" targeting non-guerrillas as well as guerrillas.

Her work also points to noteworthy holes in Stoll's research. In contrast to the numerous informants and snippets of testimony included from the Menchú Tum's family and neighbors, other inhabitants of the region, and key witnesses, he analyses very few of the military's official documents and gathers almost no testimony from soldiers and officers in the army hierarchy.⁹⁷

Another salient factor, acknowledged and then left hanging in Stoll's analysis, is the long history of U.S. involvement in the training, arming, and structure of the military and intelligence

⁹⁶ On the drawing boards of the Guatemalan army's General Staff, maps separated villages into "white zones," where safe villages were located, "pink zones," to be attacked by left standing, and "red zones," in which, according to Schirmer, "no distinction was made between the *guerrilleros* and their peasant supporters" (*Violence* 48). Hence, the army marked the "red zones" for massacre.

⁹⁷ The premise of Schirmer's article is that the voices of military actors have been excluded from the Stoll-Menchú debate, "This article does not address the controversy over Rigoberta Menchú's story directly. Rather, it argues that the only voices represented in the debate are those of the victims or the anthropologists whose narratives claim to represent them. Without denying the crucial importance of those voices, what we have lost sight of is what the armed actors in this story might tell us about why and how the violence occurred" ("Whose" 61).

infrastructure of Guatemala.⁹⁸ According to the CEH, a significant share of responsibility for the catastrophes of the civil war should be attributed to the U.S. government. Beginning in the 1960s, the U.S. linked economic assistance to military aid, fostering in Guatemala's military a profound anti-communism through its military support and training programs, some of which continued into the height of the genocide (Rothenberg 182).⁹⁹ Stoll's sketch of the Guatemalan state's rationale in absence of its internal discourse, the ideologies that thread it together, and their origins from U.S. counterinsurgency training and policy, comes to us purely through the effects of its policy—through indigenous voices that witnessed and survived the slaughter. Assuming the constraints posed by his evidence and his objective to speak broadly about the conflict, he had little choice but to portray the *guerrilleros/as* as prime mover, and government as merely their reactive counterpart. The resulting image paints the state as a kind of deliberative agent, rationally weighing its options in responding to its opposition.

Stoll explains the Guatemalan government's policy choices as reasonable on several occasions. An example of how he rationalizes the government's behavior occurs in his exploration of the January 31, 1980 Spanish Embassy fire. In response to growing violence in the *altiplano* and the kidnapping of family members, students, *campesinos* (peasants), and activists peacefully occupied the Spanish Embassy in Guatemalan City, and sought to catalyze international condemnation of the Guatemalan government's drastic violence. But during the occupation, fifteen died, including Vicente Menchú (Rigoberta Menchú Tum's father), immolated alive by a firebomb. In the context of increasingly systematic repression, popular

⁹⁸ With his concluding chapter, Stoll concedes the role of the U.S. government before quickly turning to another blameworthy party, "The United States bears much of the responsibility for this tragedy, but it could not have happened without the specter of foreign communism, as provided by the revolutionary theatrics provided by Cuba" (*Guatemalans* 279).

⁹⁹ A *New York Times* article from December 19, 1982, describes how despite Congressional restrictions on military aid to Guatemala, "some military parts, instruction, and informal [military] advice" continued to flow from the United States to Guatemala (Meislin n.p.).

opinion surmised that the government had ordered the bombing, and like few other events, the Spanish Embassy fire significantly altered the Guatemalan left's organizing strategies, impelling many toward armed insurrection (Schirmer *Violence* 41).

Stoll revisits these events finding reason to substantiate the government's public defense against accusations that Guatemalan ministers ordered the firebombings. For example, he emphasizes how the occupiers were armed with machetes, 3-4 revolvers, and Molotov cocktails (*Rigoberta* 79). He also accuses the occupiers of using embassy employees as human shields "herded along at gunpoint" (Stoll 79). The state's version of events held the campesino and student occupiers responsible for the fire, dubbing them terrorists and "a suicide squad planning to immolate themselves to embarrass the government" (Stoll 83). Although later investigations by the United Nations, the Catholic Church, and a Spanish judge all concluded that a government interior minister ordered the bombing, Stoll protests, "Not all the official story was outlandish" (Grandin "Who" 15, Stoll *Guatemalans* 83).¹⁰⁰ In the ensuing analysis, he maintains the possibility that the occupiers intended to self-immolate, finding correlations with similar occupations in Brazil and encountering one Guatemala City firefighter who declared, "Everything there was premeditated" (85). Admitting that in this instance the state isn't justifying its right to burn protestors alive, but instead is absolving itself of all responsibility, it nevertheless demonstrates how Stoll interprets the state's behavior is rational and sound.¹⁰¹

Even if the guerrillas were sincere in their efforts, Stoll insists that the history of Menchú Tum's village, Chimal, demonstrates an undercurrent of self-interested opportunism, hostility,

¹⁰⁰ Courts in Guatemala have since determined that the fire began with the explosion of a Guatemalan City police officer's gas canister, after which the police chief Pedro García Arredondo ordered the Embassy building sealed off, with the words "No one gets out of there alive!" Guatemalan courts have sentenced García Arredondo to forty years in prison for these crimes (BBC "Guatemala" n.p.).

¹⁰¹ Jennifer Schirmer cites the military's account directly. They identified the occupiers as "a guerrilla commando, dressed in indigenous dress from El Quiché, who were following the Sandinista example in the taking of the National Palace in Nicaragua" (qtd. in *Violence* 303).

and anomie unleashed by civil war, phenomena that call for further intervention by a rational state. Vicente Menchú, hero of his daughter's testimony, serves as Stoll's foremost example of those who use war to settle long-standing vendettas. According to the testimony of another villager, Menchú Tum's father welcomed the EGP to Chimel with the words, "'There are lots of enemies on this earth. We want to finish off the ones filled with envy to be in peace.' How many enemies he had," the source continues, "He wanted a new life, but he embraced evil" (111).¹⁰² Besides defining one of the many faces of Menchú Tum's father, Stoll employs this testimony to show that Menchú Tum underplays how violence radiated not from oligarchs, landowners, and generals mistaking innocent peasants for guerrillas, but from the mutual denunciation of each villager against the others.¹⁰³

In the process of establishing her community's struggles, Stoll asserts, Menchú Tum played to the North American assumption that "indigenous communities are more cohesive than nonindigenous ones" when in reality "land conflicts between peasants [are common], even moreso than conflicts between plantation owners" (31). Stoll interprets the view that violence encroached on the village from without, as part of the "tendency of Uspantán peasants to blame someone else—government functionaries or *ladinos*—for their land conflicts with each other" (40). It's not difficult to perceive, in this depiction of a latent undercurrent of mutual enmity underlying K'iche life, powerful resonances with the reactionary theorizations of civil war, a brimming, savage chaos held dormant by the coercive power of the state. A deficit in the

¹⁰² According to Greg Grandin, by presenting Vicente Menchú as an opportunist who used the guerrilla "to get the upper hand against their peasant rivals" Stoll echoes "rational-choice counterinsurgent theory" in which "the cause and outcome of social conflict is reduced to a single variable: coercion" (*Who Is* 12). In other words, whoever wields the greatest power for violent reprisals will dominate the most people. Clearly, there is a noteworthy affinity between Stoll's arguments and counterinsurgency theory.

¹⁰³ John Beverley argues that Stoll's depiction of indigenous communities as "irremediably riven by internal rivalries, contradictions, and different ways of telling" has profound political implications ("What happens" 225). This portrait seems to "deny the possibility of political struggle as such" by discrediting the very notion of "collective will" (225).

monopoly of coercive power by the state in societies like Guatemala and El Salvador, Jeane Kirkpatrick contends, endangers the fragile order of traditional societies that depend on the sovereign's capacity "to secure obedience, to punish those who disobey" ("Hobbes" 507). By contrast to Kirkpatrick's clinical tone, Stoll's writing assumes the mood of the lament, a lament in which any form of governance, even one that governs through a permanent state of siege, is more desirable than the persistence of hostilities. It's not so much that Stoll misrepresents how civil war awakens hostilities within communities, but instead that this animosity might be inborn and dormant in communities, held at bay by the threat of punishment. By contrast, anthropologist Duncan Earle observes, the Guatemalan government's "military tactics encouraged such a local settling of scores" (304). Thus, Stoll mistakes the institution that sews these enmities, as their custodian.

When Stoll defends the state's rationale for its extreme measures, he adopts the discourse of *raison d'État*, a five hundred year-old discourse of governance.¹⁰⁴ Critical security studies scholar Mark Neocleous argues that *raison d'État* became the common ideological language of superpower struggle during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West, its "mechanism of confrontation" (45). Neocleous describes the original dilemma of *raison d'État* as the conflict between matters of conscience and matters of state, wherein sovereigns felt the need to justify conduct considered immoral, against Christian values, and even against its own laws (40). Hence, the idea that the state is a rational actor, or "form of mind" in Neocleous' turn of phrase, authorizes statesmen to evade the strictures imposed by civil society and civil laws. In effect, "the state could act as a subject with reasons for its own actions" (42). Neocleous cites maxims like *salus rei publicae suprema lex*, or the security of the state is the supreme law, to

¹⁰⁴ Mark Neocleous cites recent invocations of *raison d'État* by Donald Rumsfeld in order to justify the treatment and conditions of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay in 2002 (40).

capture best the notion that in some cases the state must operate in excess of its own legal codes for the greater good (the good of civil society or its own good) (43).

Subtle expressions of the *raison d'État* logic emerge in places Stoll remarks on an almost clean efficiency to the state's maneuvers throughout the civil war. Amidst his broad strokes plotting of the army's counterinsurgency strategy, Stoll observes, "Once the population was intimidated [by the massacres], the army reined in its killers" (148). He approaches this new strategy—dubbed "securing the population" by military planners—rather clinically, as if death squads were a necessary, if regrettable, tactic to be used against the guerrillas.¹⁰⁵ While he admits the Guatemalan state's extreme, systemic violence, Stoll's commentary suggests that he feels pushed by circumstances to ascribe to the Guatemalan government a cogent rationale for its actions. By implication, his audience's presumptions about the reprobate character of the Guatemalan state, deprive them of the ability to judge its actions.

In fact, Stoll documents instances of benevolence in the state's genocidal conduct. He concludes that the pacification campaign helped empower *indígenas* against *ladino* economic and political monopolies by appointing indigenous people to local positions of influence. In the Nebaj department, Stoll maintains, "the town halls were being taken over by Ixils who were also moving into labor contracting, truck ownership, and the teaching profession. Counterinsurgency disrupted this process, then accelerated it" (*Between* 309). Stoll would have his readers believe that the state's intensified violence during the civil war actually participated in a broader purpose: the gradual liberation of the Maya from subsistence farming and impoverishment. Furthermore,

¹⁰⁵ The 2009 U.S. Army field manual, 3-24.2 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, defines "securing the populace" as "Actions to eliminate the remaining covert insurgent support infrastructure, such as the underground, auxiliary, and mass base, must be continued, because any insurgent presence will continue to threaten and influence people" (3-22).

counterinsurgency appears to have set aright a gradual process disrupted when the left mobilized Guatemala's disempowered with promises of liberation through insurrection.¹⁰⁶

"Stoll's allegations," Dianne Nelson proposes, "with their attendant assumptions that everything was going fine until the guerrilla showed up, help legitimize, in some hearts and minds, the counterinsurgency" (124).¹⁰⁷ Put another way, in spite of Stoll's cautions to would-be guerrillas about the consequences of armed insurrection, the skew of his declamations suggests a willingness to rationalize the state's pacification measures, against insurgent resistance.

Furthermore, Stoll's case against guerrilla warfare, according to Greg Grandin, falls prey to "affirming the consequent," a logical fallacy to which several of Menchú Tum's detractors make recourse (*Who* 3). Grandin convincingly traces this fallacious reasoning through to the controversy in the U.S. academy in which Menchú Tum's rightwing critics, including David Horowitz, assert with reference to Stoll's argument, "the source of violence and ensuing misery that Rigoberta Menchú describes in her destructive little book is the left itself" (qtd. in Grandin *Who* 13). In other words, guerrilla-supporting leftists are their own worst enemies, believing themselves to be promoting a cause, and yet thrusting themselves on their own swords. Without necessarily meaning to, Stoll succumbs to a reactionary argument that has plagued the left since the French Revolution, argues Grandin, a logic in which, "the very idea of revolution generated Jacobin terror" (*Who* 13). Guerrilla operations are so inimical to the life of society, Stoll seems to

¹⁰⁶ According to Greg Grandin, "It was the practicality of Marxism, its claim to put social enfranchisement within reach, and not its distance theoretical utopianism, that accounts for its appeal among many of Guatemala's political elite" (*Colonial* 54).

¹⁰⁷ Greg Grandin indicates that the extended Guatemalan Truth Commission report "dated the beginning of the military's harassment of Chimal to earlier than this first EGP action" (*Who* 17). Diane Nelson cites Hernández Pico's work on the Ixil territory (Stoll's first ethnographic region), where the army kidnapped for a ransom, a tactic frequently attributed to the EGP, well before the guerrillas exchanged kidnapped oligarchs for political prisoners (132). These considerations demonstrate that Stoll's claim that the Guatemalan army merely reacted to guerrilla tactics is erroneous.

suggest, that it would be to everyone's benefit, including the radical left, if state's as a matter of course annihilated all stirrings toward insurrection.

In the conclusion to *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, Stoll returns to the issue in the context of the Zapatista uprisings in Chiapas, Mexico. For Stoll, this 1994 rebellion of indigenous *campesinos* bore a strong resemblance to insurrection in Guatemala, not least of all because the international attention and solidarity for the rebels that poured out of the West. "If that were not enough," he complains, "the Mexican army was prevented from strangling the Zapatistas only by media attention" (280). The tenor of Stoll's complaint suggests that he would have preferred that Mexican troops had annihilated the Zapatistas and with them the myths of revolutionary struggle. In Stoll's analysis, guerrillas laboring under the thrall of these myths invite cruelty and slaughter from state forces by pervading communities and subsisting amongst subordinated groups. Like the totalitarians of Kirkpatrick's "Dictatorships and Double Standards," guerrillas "claim jurisdiction over the whole life of society" rendering it vulnerable to mutilation by recalcitrant state forces all in the name of a utopian mirage (51).

III. On the Life of Myths and Symbols

In his 1976 essay, "Socialism: An Obituary of an Idea," neoconservative Irving Kristol asserts a significant discontinuity between the mythologies of socialism and the *realpolitik* of existing socialist countries. "Socialism," he declares, "is one of those ideals which, when breathed upon by reality suffers immediate petrification. Which is why all those who remain loyal to this ideal will always end up bewailing another 'revolution betrayed'" (Kristol 302). This observation attempts to crystallize the failure of socialists to deliver the ideals promised during

revolutionary struggle. Like several fellow neoconservatives, Kristol experienced disillusion with the radical left, not without some regret. "Joining a radical movement when one is young," he explains in another essay, "is very much like falling in love when one is young. The girl may turn out to be rotten, but the experience of love is so valuable it can never be entirely undone by the ultimate disenchantment" ("Trostkyist" 470). Here Kristol communicates the process of renouncing his previous allegiances as a kind of maturation: stepping aside from the fantasies of youth and coming to grips with social reality. For the neoconservatives, maturation brings an ideological hardening against nations, movements, and organizations bamboozled by the radical left. While serving with the Contra-aid organization Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America (PRODEMCA), Richard Penn Kemble summed up the neoconservative position on the hard realities of existing revolutionary governments with the phrase, "communist nations are the chief violators of human rights in the world" (qtd. in Velasco 91).¹⁰⁸ Thanks, in part, to neoconservative advocacy on behalf of the Guatemalan government in the early 1980s, nations fighting communism assumed a significant share of this honor: the only recorded genocide in the twentieth-century Americas occurred in Guatemala.

With an equal concern over vexatious "realities," clouded by myth and rumor, David Stoll questions how audiences behave as if Rigoberta Menchú Tum were a sacred icon. "Many observers have been struck by the religious overtones of Rigoberta's appearances in the United States," notes a wary Stoll, "especially when they occur in large churches packed with supporters" (*Guatemalans* 245). While we might chalk up his description of the laureate's saintly air to rhetorical irreverence, Stoll draws a parallel to religion not to illustrate Menchú Tum's

¹⁰⁸ PRODEMCA served as a conduit for the funding of pro-Contra newspaper *La Prensa* in Nicaragua and it gathered intelligence on the rationale of members of Congress for opposing aid to the Contras (Diamond 220). When it was revealed that Penn Kemble, president of PRODEMCA, was involved in the illegal Contra supply operations PRODEMCA quickly disappeared (Diamond 220).

moral elevation, but to highlight how her person and testimony have become "sacrosanct"—spreading "the mantle of unquestionability" around the left's version of events and its tendency to "speak for victims" (*Guatemalans* 245). Her prestige and indisputable narrative, Stoll worries, shroud unpleasant realities about the EGP.

Thus, Stoll's argument depends on the idea that social movements and organizations invent figures like Rigoberta Menchú Tum to attract the attention of the domestic and international left. Moreover, those engaged in solidarity not only identify with those on the margins—"victims, dissidents, and opposition movements"—Stoll surmises, but also draw stark dichotomies through complex social phenomena in order to build support for these groups (235). As follows from this description, Stoll construes solidarity as primarily emotional, generating "melodrama" out of dense political situations, overlooking limitations and shortcomings in some areas, and seeking a "single platform of support" against a "greater evil" (235). As I hope to show, Stoll's critique of Menchú Tum's "symbolic eminence" draws him closer to reactionary logic by contradicting her testimony with the "hard realities" of the existing left in Guatemala. Stoll describes how Menchú Tum oversteps her role as a single, perhaps idiosyncratic, voice amongst other *indígenas*. This trespass from representation into reality, I argue, preoccupies Stoll throughout his critique. In this section, I trace how he rewrites the narrative of Menchú Tum's life, by explaining how her metonymic power comes at a cost, by eroding her father's exemplarity, and by using her career as an object lesson of how political symbols substitute themselves for the realities they are meant to represent. Rather than an innocuous narrative about indigenous uprising, Stoll insists that throughout *I, Rigoberta Menchú* the protagonist/narrator validates the "coherence" and moral viability of the Guatemalan left by allegorically representing

them through her own story and that of her father (236). However, in dispensing with her representative power, Stoll reconstructs her life as incidental rather than exemplary.

Instead he warns, to believe too ardently in Menchú Tum's testimony risks an unreflective idealism about her and the guerrilla movement she represents. "As a survivor capable of projecting herself to audiences," he explains, "she could make her father a powerful symbol to idealize the dead and demonstrate that the struggle continued" (*Guatemalans* 197). Stoll is careful enough to admit that Menchú Tum's testimony should not be read literally. However, in my view, the dissonance Stoll encounters between her story and the testimonies he collects drives him to explain her narrative, her persona, and the fascination Menchú Tum attracts as a symbol with overwhelming social influence. It is precisely her capacity to stand in for her social milieu, that Stoll contests: "she was explicit that this was the story of all poor Guatemalans. On reflection, that could never be the story of one poor Guatemalan" (*Guatemalans* 273).

At the outset, Stoll approaches his project of undoing Menchú Tum's narrative as a dilemma not without hazards. "Even if the life told is not particularly her own, even if it is a heavily fictionalized heroic life," Stoll concedes, "she achieved what she intended in a way that one person's life never could" (*Guatemalans* 283). However, he suspects that *I, Rigoberta Menchú's* narrator and protagonist has "tailored [her story] to the propaganda needs of a guerrilla movement" campaigning internationally for support (*Guatemalans* 278). Furthermore, Stoll expresses concern that her story too closely "mirrors" the left's notions about the "purity" of indigenous culture, the intersection of racial oppression and capitalist exploitation, the consciousness of the oppressed, and the culpability of militarized governments (*Guatemalans* 246). What results is an extensive rewriting of Menchú Tum's life story. As I would summarize

it, *I, Rigoberta Menchú's* narrative is: Her family's limited means require the Menchús to labor at plantations owned by prosperous *ladinos*, who frequently abuse, exploit, and extort from their workers. These same landowners expropriate land from Menchú Tum's village, Chimeh, through state institutions, through illegible contracts, and through the intimidation and violence of the Guatemalan army. Radicalized by these experiences, her father, Vicente Menchú Pérez, begins organizing, co-founding the Committee for Campesino Unity (Comité por la Unidad Campesina, CUC), which exposes him to beatings, torture, and incarceration. Subsequently, the military kidnaps Menchú Tum's brother, Petrocino, on suspicion of Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) membership. They torture and then burn him alive. In protest, Vicente Menchú participates in the historic Spanish Embassy occupation in Guatemala City during which he perishes. The family continues to organize, including Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who develops consciousness around worker exploitation, racial inequality, and feminism through interactions with the movement and liberation theology. When the army's rapacious violence swallows up her mother, Rigoberta Menchú Tum flees Guatemala in fear for her life.

Weighing her account against those of a number of survivors he finds more credible, Stoll renarrates *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Without her personal and biographical "reinvention," Stoll indicates that the plot of Menchú Tum's testimony would be:

Government death squads are on the rampage in some parts of Guatemala, but not in others. One day, a guerrilla column shows up in a village whose most serious conflict is with other peasants. Shortly thereafter, the guerrillas introduce political assassination to the area, which prompts the army to start kidnapping peasants. When relatives go to Guatemala City to protest, fifteen die in the conflagration at the Spanish embassy. Back home, the army kidnaps more villagers. One young woman [Rigoberta Menchú Tum],

who has lost three members of her family while away at boarding school, flees to Mexico. There she joins the revolutionary movement, returns to Guatemala as an organizer, and starts telling her story to the world. (*Guatemalans* 192)

This sparse synopsis calls attention to how Stoll disassociates growing levels of repression from the family's increasing political activism, their exposure to privation from an evolving consciousness of the roots of their suffering, and the struggle for land from Guatemala's racial hierarchies. Moreover, Stoll represents the army's massacres as responses to guerrilla presence in the village. His version of events plainly downplays the political coherence of Menchú Tum's narrative and the blameworthiness of her opponents. By disengaging Menchú Tum from these structural conflicts, Stoll divests her of symbolic authority.

At stake, for Stoll in denying the laureate's authority, is a noteworthy concern over what he interprets as the real-world damages precipitated by Rigoberta Menchú Tum's representations. He connects the detrimental circumstances resulting from *I, Rigoberta Menchú* to how its protagonists seem to "condense" a number of incompatible elements. "Like any symbol of sacrificial commitment," Stoll explains, "Rigoberta's image commands loyalty by fusing together a great deal of experience, feeling, and conviction" (*Guatemalans* x). This statement captures how, in Stoll's view, the laureate's testimony melds together elements in such a way that it overwhelms a reader's capacity to reject the narrative's point of view. Problems arise, he explains, because "symbols prevent frank discussions" (*Guatemalans* xi). More to Stoll's point, the phrase "symbol of sacrificial commitment" implies that, as social phenomena, symbols entail shared penance. He acknowledges that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* "enabled [Menchú Tum] to focus international condemnation on an institution that deserved it, the Guatemalan army. But the condensing power of such a symbol comes at a cost" (*Guatemalans* xi). The language of "cost"

here is ambiguous. Does Stoll intend to argue that Menchú Tum's narrative merely abbreviates debate and obscures other valuable realities, or that some other undefined payment must be made? When read alongside Stoll's condemnation of guerrilla warfare in general, the language of sacrifice evokes the countless dead and tortured bodies of Guatemala's civil war. Stoll attributes the lion's share of responsibility to the revolutionaries and, inadvertently, to the U.S. left for perpetuating the war, but he also blames Menchú Tum's narrative because it effectively congealed disparate elements of the war and the insurgency into a magnetic image.

For the Guatemalan left, as for her North American supporters, *I, Rigoberta Menchú's* concentration of a number of key national and transnational issues into a single life speaks to its value both as a political and pedagogical tool. *Testimonio* (the new genre of Latin American testimonial novels) critics recognize this metonymic quality as one of the book's literary merits. John Beverley, for instance, contends that "Each individual *testimonio* evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences" ("The Margin at the Center" 16). Through this literary device, where Beverley detects an emergent collective subject, Stoll finds an amalgamation of expired ideas. Stoll judges the exact source of her testimony's appeal to reside in Menchú Tum's gathering together of "images of resistance from the previous decade" (*Guatemalans* 7). Laying claim to the present, these belated "images" communicate, according to Stoll, an almost anachronistic "triumphalism" not shared by the victims of its various sacrifices (*Guatemalans* 125). Indeed, instances from *I, Rigoberta Menchú* that depict moments of near-instantaneous mobilization against oligarchical and military control lend credence to Stoll's descriptions of the narrative as epic, "breathless, action-packed," and tending toward a triumphant image of the left (*Guatemalans* 177). Prepared for this imperious "triumphalism" by Stoll, Greg Grandin admits, "When I returned to the book, I half expected to find in Menchú a

left-wing John Galt, a character with no inner life, a pure propagandist" (*Who* vi). Instead, he finds a much more complex narrator with "dissonant impulses, pleasure in the middle of terror and currents of despair running under surface triumphalism" (*Who* vi). A generous reader might take heed of the fact that Stoll is primarily interested in the testimony's significations once it enters a transnational public sphere and hence might view his potentially-hyperbolic descriptors as motivated by the need to articulate the distortion that this global context brings to the narrative. Yet, as Grandin suggests, Stoll never takes up this metacritical stance, and compares his portrait of Rigoberta Menchú Tum to a leftist Ayn Rand.

To call into question Menchú Tum's triumphalism, Stoll also redacts Vicente Menchú Pérez's biography, because Menchú Pérez is the "hero of his daughter's account" (*Guatemalans* 3). Stoll corroborates that Menchú Pérez fought tenaciously to acquire titles for his village's farmlands. However, Menchú Tum misleads her readers, Stoll determines, regarding her father's role in founding one of the most prominent left, popular organizations in Guatemala, the Committee for Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina, CUC). Stoll's research determines that Menchú Pérez was not documented as a cofounder of the CUC until his daughter told her story to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in 1982 (*Guatemalans* 94). Stoll's disclosure about Menchú Pérez's leadership in the CUC matters because it would seem to dissipate readers' sense of acute proximity to events of national significance in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and to downplay her father's courage.

For Stoll, the revelation is more telling still. The CUC at its founding maintained a broad vision of representing "all rural workers," including rural proletarians, small landholders, the landless *ladinos*, and *indígenas* (*Guatemalans* 90). As the "discredited" left flagged during negotiations, he explains, both the portrait of her father and Menchú Tum's testimony "vouched

for the imagery surrounding the CUC, including the idea that it represented peasant masses eager to take up arms against the state" (Stoll 95). More than the benign work of rural labor organizing through the CUC, Stoll reads his daughter's rendition of Menchú Pérez as representative of North Americans' fantasy of the confrontational campesino who pursues violent means to obtain justice and equality. Lurking behind this particular romanticization, Stoll detects the "long history of projecting fantasies of rebellion into Indians" (*Guatemalans* 281). Furthermore, he describes how these "utopian fantasies" draw North Americans to Guatemala in pursuit of "a space of innocence in which to align ourselves on the side of good against evil" (*Guatemalans* 238). Through Menchú Pérez, Stoll contends, leftists fulfill a psychological wish for a moral universe shorn of ambiguity and for a righteous figure that promises violent retribution for the legacy of Western imperialism.

More than misrepresenting the abundance of anti-government *campesinos*, Stoll argues that through the figure of her father, Menchú Tum reconciled historical contradictions that Menchú Pérez never saw resolved. Stoll finds significant disagreement between the depictions advanced in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and the fruits of his own ethnographic study, and this disagreement exposes further problems with a leftwing commitment to symbols. His research demonstrates that Menchú Pérez's primary conflicts were not with rich *ladino* oligarchs, but with other peasants and *indígenas* struggling for land (Stoll *Guatemalans* 105). In these smaller, less glorious, conflicts, Stoll locates the root of all civil war suffering. He writes that from Menchú Pérez's conflict with his in-laws over his village land "was to pour a river of tragedy" (*Guatemalans* 27). His portrayal as mediator or coalition builder, in his daughter's *testimonio*, articulates a false unity within the poor and within the Maya, according to Stoll. "In the person of Vicente Menchú," he explains, "the Committee for Campesino Unity represents a moment when

peasants overcame their differences and united to defend their rights" (Stoll *Guatemalans* 105).¹⁰⁹ Hence, Stoll argues, connections Menchú Tum establishes between *la violencia* and "vertical" conflicts, e.g. *campesinos* vs. the army or the oligarchy, convert "a nightmarish experience into a morality play" (*Guatemalans* 235). For this reason, Stoll describes Menchú Pérez as a figure of the "universal peasant," who embodies a false unity and stands in for all indigenous *campesinos* (*Guatemalans* 102).

With the help of *I, Rigoberta Menchú's* tremendous international reception, Stoll reiterates, Menchú Tum took up her father's role as "symbolic substitute" for an absent popular base (*Guatemalans* 196). As the popular left organizations suffered attrition due to peasant alienation, the laureate served as surrogate for the broken coalition between the revolutionary left and Mayan *campesinos* (*Guatemalans* 198). By scaffolding the Guatemalan left and its legitimacy in representing all poor Guatemalans, Menchú Tum reputedly prolonged the war by ensuring the left's political survival and continuing "moral authority" in Stoll's telling (*Guatemalans* 203). Likewise, in her nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, Stoll observes another instance in which representation overtakes reality: "the reward for her long years of presenting herself as a representative of her people [yielded] the chance to prove that she was" (*Guatemalans* 211).¹¹⁰ However, because Menchú Tum represents not her people, but leftist "assumptions about *indígenas*" and the inevitability of armed struggle, Stoll implies, the much-admired icon makes a hollow political representative of actual indigenous struggle (*Guatemalans* 246). By drawing our attention to the distance between North American leftist expectations of

¹⁰⁹ While he acknowledges that the CUC made a decisive break with peaceful consciousness-raising and rural labor organizing and joined the armed resistance in 1980, Stoll maintains that the organization functioned, even in its origins, as a guerrilla front organization (*Guatemalans* 197). "An organization launched as a vehicle for guerrilla warfare," he argues, "without explaining this purpose, is an instrument for luring peasants into a high-risk strategy without giving them enough information to understand what they were getting into" (Stoll *Guatemalans* 100).

¹¹⁰ On account of the quincentenary Christopher Columbus' landing in the New World, or five centuries of indigenous subordination, the award bore special significance both for *indígenas* in Guatemala and global indigenous peoples (Stoll *Guatemalans* 211).

poor indigenous peoples and their real experiences and aspirations, Stoll highlights the tangible results of leftist imagery on political and social existence in Guatemala. Symbols, therefore, requisition real life: they force payment from those they endeavor to represent.

Stoll expresses comparable alarm at several political acts depicted in Menchú Tum's narrative, which similarly take on a life of their own. Foremost amongst these acts is the occupation of the Spanish Embassy—"a common form of protest in Latin America," Stoll admits, "But the tactic can go terribly wrong" (*Guatemalans* 71). Stoll judges the deaths of Menchú Pérez, several *campesinos*, students, and embassy workers as the dreadful result of this particular occupation, which sought to catalyze international condemnation of the Guatemalan government's drastic violence. As with guerrilla warfare, the embassy occupation brings about the same conclusion—death and ruin. Consequently, as the embassy occupants and their captives burned alive in what appeared to be government-promulgated attack, "the massacre became a powerful symbol for pulling together a broad coalition," and, according to Stoll, those killed "became exemplary victims, martyrs whose death presaged victory" (*Guatemalans* 59-60). Yet the value of these deaths supercedes the admiration of martyrs for their sacrifice, Stoll admits, "Like no other event, the fire captured the brutality of the security forces and played it out in front of television cameras" (*Guatemalans* 71). As a result, the sitting military-president Fernando Romeo Lucas García suffered international reproach, and the public outrage enfranchised the CUC to organize a massive strike along the Pacific Coast that forced the president to triple the minimum wage (*Guatemalans* 90).

The profound effects of this pyrrhic symbol, however, belie a more troubling reality, according to Stoll: the "left's cult of martyrdom" through self-immolation (*Guatemalans* 88). Stoll reexamines the episode with the ethos of a professional investigator, finding that contrary to

the only survivor's account "a terrible possibility remains: The massacre at the Spanish embassy could have been a revolutionary suicide that included murdering hostages and fellow prisoners" (88).¹¹¹ Under his scrutiny, the occupation is depicted as an appeal for national and international aid against state terror, paradoxically requiring the sacrifice of unwitting *campesinos* and embassy employees. In other words, the consummation of left symbols exacts a terrible price. But Stoll's refusal to recognize that the Spanish Embassy fire was not a leftist mystification meant to distort social reality, but a symbol that captured and concentrated Guatemalan's real conditions, leads him to insinuate that the occupiers were at fault for their own immolation.

In my reading, Stoll proposes that symbols problematically reconcile political actors, divergent histories, and populations, propagating uncanny but also inescapable realities. Ultimately, Stoll seems to argue, Menchú Tum's narrative misleads because we need to be deceived. Like fable readers, solidarity audiences expect moral simplicity. Paramount amongst the North American solidarity movement, the academic left solicits reductive images like the Menchús out of the fear that they might be "associated with counterinsurgency research, that is findings that could be used against popular movements," Stoll remarks, as had occurred during the Vietnam War (238). This anxiety about the wrong sort of complicity, he argues, compels academics to revoke the ability to "judge the truth of what we are told" (Stoll 217). In sum, enshrining Menchú Tum as an exemplar of peasant struggle and indigenous misfortunes, blinds North Americans to the uncomfortable "realities" underlying the Guatemalan left's ideological representations.

IV. Guatemala's "Silent Majority"

¹¹¹ According to Greg Grandin, subsequent investigations by the Catholic Church, the UN, and a Spanish judge concluded that an interior minister ordered that security forces bomb the Spanish Embassy in 1980 (*Who* 15).

In Between Two Armies and Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans

David Stoll contradicts the radical left's representations of the impoverished and exploited Guatemalans. One such disproof, visited and revisited in both books, is the ostensibly lose-lose situation faced by *indígenas* living in war zones—between supporting government forces or joining the guerrillas. Doubtless civilians held captive by civil war adversaries often confront difficult choices such as these. But Stoll offers still further exposition about the significance of choosing the guerrillas over the Guatemalan military. "If peasants do make ideological connections with insurgents," he claims, "these do not last very long, not least because so many are killed or forced to surrender. Among survivors, many decide that their revolutionary period was a mistake" (*Guatemalans* 119). More than explaining the disillusionment with the left documented by Stoll throughout his work on Guatemala, this passage presents one of his most consistent rhetorical devices, the use of terms like "many" that allude to an amorphous population, an obscure majority, whom he regularly characterizes as hostile to the overtures of guerrilla organizers. Never quantified within the communities in which Stoll conducts his ethnographic research, this unspecified "many" nevertheless rhetorically gestures toward what Stoll takes to be widespread alienation from the guerrillas.

In the decades leading up to the election of Ronald Reagan, the rising New Right leadership within the Republican Party imagined a similarly emergent, specifically rightwing majority. For example, Barry Goldwater's 1960 "A Statement of Proposed Republican Principles" invokes a "forgotten" America. Left behind by the prevailing New Deal consensus in U.S. politics, Goldwater argued in the name of Americans "who quietly go about the business of paying and praying, working and saving" that would bring about the Republican majority in national elections (qtd. in Mason 5). As an exemplar of a new form of anti-establishment

conservatism, Goldwater articulates two major characteristics of this neglected majority that seized conservative imaginations: that they were beneficiaries of the status quo and entrepreneurs without debt and dependency.¹¹² During the 1960s and 70s, Republican strategists used different conceptualizations of the national populace to envision an America amenable to their political ambitions.¹¹³ During a November 3, 1969 address to the nation, Richard Nixon introduced his version, "the silent majority," in order to persuade the populace to stay the course in the Vietnam War. In contrast to the widespread protests, which seemed to declare "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home," Nixon insisted:

Let historians not record that when America was the most powerful nation in the world we passed on the other side of the road and allowed the last hopes for peace and freedom of millions of people to be suffocated by the forces of totalitarianism. And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support... Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. (11)

¹¹² Historian Matthew Lassiter employs the "silent majority" concept to describe the racial backlash from the white suburbs against the black innercity during the late 1960s and 70s. He writes, "Through the populist revolt of the Silent Majority, millions of white homeowners who had achieved a residentially segregated and federally subsidized version of the American Dream forcefully rejected race-conscious liberalism as an unconstitutional exercise in social engineering and an unprecedented violation of free-market meritocracy" (Lassiter 2). In their shift to electoral politics, Lassiter suggests, the "silent majority" turned from mere beneficiary to active proponent of the racial and economic status quo. Exploring cross-class allegiances posited by the rightwing, Kim Phillips-Fein notes that in 1975 the publisher of *The National Review*, William Rusher, released *The Making of the New Majority Party*, which argued for a conservative alliance between the working class and the business sector as unified around their identity as the "productive sector" in opposition to new class elements including academics, government workers, the media, and the dependent/parasitic poor (218).

¹¹³ Historian Robert Mason notes that in 1968 Nixon contrasted his vision of the "silent majority" with the Democratic Party's constituency, which he understood to be formed of a coalition of interest groups. He claimed, "The new majority is not a grouping of power blocs, but an alliance of ideas [while many of these men and women once belonged to these blocs.] But now, thinking independently, they have all reached a new conclusion about the direction of our nation" (Mason 27-8). Nixon's appeal to a new majority occurred simultaneous with growing interest in "paradigm realignment," a concept through which scholars in science of electoral behavior sought to explain "electoral patterns across time" (Mason 3). For these scholars, U.S. electoral behavior maintained remarkable stability through time. In their studies, once a citizen commits to a party, they tend to hold on to their affiliation. However, this immutability could be disrupted by periods when large numbers of Americans "suddenly reassessed their party loyalty; people changed their minds about politics. Others, previously apathetic about politics, started to vote on one side or another" (Mason 3). Mason suggests that the possibility of "paradigm realignment" represented a "benefit for conservative politics" (3).

Through his speech, Nixon identified this hypothetical "silent majority," and demarcated their presence within a public sphere that was seemingly saturated by the political demonstrations of the civil rights movement and countercultural groups.¹¹⁴ The president's appeal underscores a chief characteristic of the "silent majority" concept: fortitude useful for Cold War interventionism.¹¹⁵ The hope was that reactionaries at the grassroots might topple the newly mobilized and militant left from its prominence in public debates, renouncing a former state of silence, and move to uphold US foreign policy. Actually mobilizing the "silent majority" proved elusive until Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, during which he drew upon a politicized Christian right grassroots, militarists, and corporate America's funding.¹¹⁶ Although Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell later proclaimed, "Ronald Reagan saved the country," for nations in Central America, Reagan's influence was less than benign (Williams 135).

This section expands the scope of the complimentary lines of logic I trace between David Stoll and the postwar American right to include New Right elements imagining into existence a new majority out of, what David Horwitz calls, a "powerful undercurrent of still largely inchoate—or at least largely unorganized—disagreements, anxieties, animosities, fears, and resentments" beneath America's liberal consensus (42). Neoconservative anxieties about totalitarianism's simultaneous subjugation of individual to the masses and the masses to totalitarian logic, might explain their shying away from notions of "general will" and mass

¹¹⁴ Nixon described the most important part of this new majority as "the silent center"—centrist millions, "who do not picket or protest loudly" (Mason 28).

¹¹⁵ According to Mason, Nixon sapped momentum from the Vietnam War moratorium campaign with his "silent majority" speech and "isolated a group of Americans potentially sympathetic to the Nixon administration and did so vividly and inescapably" (63). Furthermore, Nixon's speech formed a strong rallying point, particularly for those members of the working class fed up with the protestors. White House polls revealed, repeatedly, that "many Americans considered themselves members of the silent majority, who mostly supported Nixon's policies"—75% identified with the silent majority (Mason 64).

¹¹⁶ According to sociologist Robert Horwitz, "The political figure who embodied the anti-establishment conservative outlook was Ronald Reagan. It was around Reagan's 1980 candidacy that coalesced the interlocking sets of conservative issue groups, the mobilization of material resources, and the articulation of a powerful political ideology of victimhood" (17). Daniel K. Williams argues that one of Reagan's biggest contributions to American politics was catalyzing the Christian Right as a political entity (135).

politics implied by the idea of a majority. Meanwhile, other aspects of Reagan's new governing coalition incorporated conceptions of a conservative populism into their campaigns by reconceiving the American populace. In a similar manner, Stoll's project to record what he takes to be a predominant antipathy toward the left, does more than disclose contradictory feelings amongst *indígenas*, *campesinos*, and all poor Guatemalans. Rather, in both *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* and *Between Two Armies* he cordons off a segment of the population impervious to the radical politicization sought by the guerrillas, popular organizations, and liberation theology. In place of leftwing fantasies about heroic *indígenas* or *campesinos*, Stoll conjures out of Guatemala a "silent majority." I select the term "silent majority" from Richard Nixon's 1969 speech in order to draw a parallel between the imputed conservative tendencies of the American populace and a number of characteristics Stoll attributes to Guatemala's poor: avowed militarism, a respect for the status quo, and an entrepreneurial drive. Beyond documenting the rightwing populism of the masses, by imagining into existence a "silent majority" Stoll also demarcates the subjects he deems to be "the war's most tragic victims" (Strauss n.p.). Seen through the lens of the "silent majority," those most subject to violent counterinsurgency strategy paradoxically approve of pacification measures conducted in their names and favor the order the Guatemalan military fights to preserve.

Although Stoll does not invoke the term explicitly, the "silent majority" nevertheless captures the unspoken consensus he ascribes to Guatemala's poor and oppressed. He contrasts an overflow of support for the guerrillas with a silent faction:

What was invisible was another population that remained silent, behind closed doors or out in the fields. They were too distrustful to become involved. Although a few could be singled out as army spies, to be killed or driven away, most could not. From these wary

bystanders the army would, once it had rolled over the EGP's weaker forces, start civil patrols and impose rigorous controls. (Stoll *Guatemalans* 101-2)

These villagers represent a kind of political remainder as non-actors in the conflict. Silenced by forces beyond their control, persecuted for their hesitation at choosing sides, with their actual affinities inscrutable to the revolutionaries that enter their community from the outside, Guatemala's "silent majority" become accessory to the state. Their aversion to the left, Stoll indicates, affects them to such a degree that the army uses these apprehensive *campesinos* as instruments of renewed control. By documenting the apprehension and mistrust engendered by the guerrillas Stoll registers experiences not expressed in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

Instead, Menchú Tum depicts how the armed defense came not from the village's exterior, but from the villagers themselves. Upon realizing that through self-organizing and militancy they might one day transcend their repressive relationship to the army and the landed oligarchy, Menchú Tum "threw myself into my work and told myself we had to defeat the enemy," she explains, "We began by each of us trying to remember the tricks our ancestors used. They say they used to set traps in their houses, in the path of the conquistadores, the Spaniards... They used ambushes... We said: 'If they threaten us, why don't we threaten the landowner?'" (145). Far from the uneasy peasants of Stoll's rendition, villagers in the laureate's Chimal seem unanimous in their new aggressive stance toward the army, building traps, planning escape routes, forming alternative living spaces in the mountains, and, if forced, using their few weapons—machetes, stones, boiling water, chile, and salt—against an invading army or paramilitary force. Thus, the revolutionary awakening of Menchú Tum's village emerges intrinsically from communal reasoning and reconnection with Mayan past.

According to Stoll, however, the international pressure brought to bear on Guatemalan affairs by *I, Rigoberta Menchú* redoubled the silence imposed by the Guatemalan government's pacification programs.¹¹⁷ Consequently, voicelessness in Guatemala's national affairs is a chief aspect of Stoll's silent majority. "Rigoberta's story may have given voice to the dead in the early 1980s," Stoll argues, "but by the late 1980s it had become so sacrosanct that it was drowning out the voices of other Guatemalans who, every time I visited, told me they wanted the war to end" (*Guatemalans* 278). Stoll credits Menchú Tum for bringing international attention to the particular violence of the pacification, but he implies that the means by which she punctures the suffocating culture of silence in Guatemala suffocated still other perspectives. Astride a wave of international support, Menchú Tum's narrative indicted the government at the expense of other *indígenas* who identified the guerrillas as "another tribulation, and wanted the war to end far sooner than it did," Stoll insists (*Guatemalans* 217). This indefinite bloc, he explains in his earlier *Between Two Armies*, represents a "third side [within the conflict], most of the population, who were being taken for granted in the grand contest between armies, ideologies, and presumed social classes" (*Between* xi). The uncounted majority in *Between Two Armies* comprises the main point of reference for *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*: most Guatemalans, Stoll reiterates, experienced themselves as trapped "between two fires" (*Guatemalans* 229).¹¹⁸ Stoll's mission to call attention to voice of "the in-between position of the

¹¹⁷ Daniel Rothenberg explains the character of this culture of silence: "[The Truth Commission] has established that beyond the physical elimination of opponents, either alleged or real, state terror was applied to make it clear that those who attempted to assert their rights, and even their relatives, ran the risk of death by the most hideous means. The objective was to intimidate and silence society as a whole in order to destroy the will for transformation in both the short and long term" (187).

¹¹⁸ Jennifer Schirmer cites Guatemalan Colonel Noack on the role of civil patrols, "That was what we needed to understand [to win the war]: the phenomenon of campesinos being between two armies and not necessarily belonging to either...Not everyone was an EGP volunteer" in a 1995 interview (*Violence* 48), which is oddly Stoll's thesis. Stoll actually adopts the army's intended effect as a representation of the Guatemalan populace's genuine reactions to the politics of one side or the other rather than the explicit strategy of the army itself in folding the conflict into the populace.

beleaguered civilian," demonstrates his belief that this position most authentically describes the indigenous experience of the war (*Between* 139). As negotiators achieve prolonged gridlock, Stoll discovers that most *indígenas* adopted the stance of "determined neutralists" with regard to the war and its underlying political crisis (*Between* 132). Subjugated by army controls and effectively mute in peace negotiations and public affairs, Stoll imagines Guatemala's "silenced majority" as in need of an external advocate who might communicate their distance from the conflict's ideologies to a wider audience.

But this silence, along with misinformation and lies often noted from postwar testimonies, speak of more than the ambivalence, neutrality, or even an apolitical stance of indigenous Mayans, as Stoll would have us believe. These strategies, Staffan Lövving argues "adhere to the communicative tool kit of people in politically unstable circumstances. This is partly the reason why 'the truth' is so contested in war" (89).¹¹⁹ Under such circumstances, to speak of one's past or present alignment, would be to expose oneself to more extreme dangers than public censure, particularly during the period when Stoll conducted most of his research before the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1996.

Bearing the function of obscurity and silence in mind, when Stoll introduces apologists for the Guatemalan military might strike readers as somewhat perverse. For example, when the government appeared to pacify Nebaj and the Ixil Triangle, those who supported the army seemed to "find satisfaction with a ceremonial display of firepower by the army. What they wanted most was to be on the stronger side" (*Between* 125). Similarly, peasants in the civil war made choices not based on affiliation, grievances, or a particular political aspiration, but "very aware of their lack of power," Stoll insists, "they understand the importance of maintaining good

¹¹⁹ Ileana Rodríguez comes to a similar conclusion, "Obscurity, or secrecy, then, is simultaneously a technology and its effect; it is a way for indigenous peoples to renegotiate the continuation of their culture by submerging it. Again, if knowledge is power doesn't the denial of knowledge constitute a counterpower?" (338).

relations with whatever faction has the upper hand" (*Rigoberta* 119). As opposed to the people erupting with insurrection depicted in Menchú Tum's narrative, Stoll recasts those caught in the crossfire as cautious, calculating for expediency over justice. In Stoll's book, other *indígenas* praise Efraín Ríos Montt's regime, which they "remembered almost fondly" for appearing to preside over a cessation of violence in spite of the fact that he administered the genocide (*Between* 5).¹²⁰ Stoll's suggestion of indigenous fondness for Ríos Montt connotes tacit tolerance for his methods. This tolerance would appear to be at odds with the dictator's bad reputation amongst Western leftists and international human rights audiences, Stoll is quick to observe (5).

Not only does the "silenced majority" condone the policies of a genocidal dictator, Stoll argues, they also antagonize the guerrillas. In his narration of the prominent ex-Jesuit EGP operative Fernando Hoyos, Stoll reveals, "In 1982 he died after being trapped by one of the army's civil patrols, composed of the Mayan villagers that he hoped to liberate" (98). Neglecting for the moment the fact that the army's civil patrols were rarely voluntary and enacted profuse violence, in the context of Stoll's other claims, this episode effects a certain irony—the dispossessed delivering those who claim to be their champions to their adversary.¹²¹ The use of irony alludes to an assumption that subtends much of *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*: actions always index intention. Placed in a chapter where Stoll details the Committee for Campesino Unity's (CUC) failure to represent Guatemala's exploited rural

¹²⁰ John Gledhill questions the viability of this testimony in particular. "It may be, however, a mistake," he argues, "to see attitudes to Ríos Montt today as a reflection of memories of his contribution to either moderating or improving the efficiency of state terror" (152).

¹²¹ *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (PAC), or Civil Patrols were implemented beginning in 1981. Through PACs, the army incorporated civilians into military operations and armed confrontation. According to the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission, "The Army forced patrulleros to observe interrogations in which torture was used to obtain lists of suspects, to make suspects suffer before killing them, to punish relatives or witnesses of presumed guerrillas, and to terrorize entire populations so that they would not support the insurgency. Later they were forced to do the same on their own or under the supervision of military forces. If they refused, they were punished by death or torture" (Rothenberg 120).

laborers, the use of this ironic episode implies that, contrary to the left's utopian delusions, participation in civil patrols exemplifies Mayan villagers' actual objectives.

Nevertheless, to conclude as Stoll does that participation in civil patrols is tantamount to full-fledged support for the program would be a mistake. Carol Smith cites a study conducted by Paul Kobrak with a different population of Maya in Guatemala that similarly claimed, "we were between two armies" in spite of initially strong signs of support for the revolutionaries (20). Because of the profound militarization of Mayan communities, Kobrak argues, and "with their participation in the civil patrol system villagers had a strategic and psychic need to justify collaboration with the army. Residents of civil patrol villages are most comfortable with rhetoric that equates the two sides, putting them in the middle as unwilling participants in the war, as spectators to the repression, rather than as participants" (qtd. in Smith 20). Smith explains that the ubiquity of villagers denying involvement and neutralizing their position in the war demonstrates that "it was virtually impossible to obtain a clear view of how villagers in the affected regions (where village civil patrols operated twenty-four hours a day from 1982 to 1996) viewed the guerrilla or the army" (20). Stoll acknowledges this as a possibility when he writes, "Maybe the truth is unknowable, because the milieu is too ambiguous and fraught with repression to have confidence in any particular version" (*Guatemalans* 63). Although he appears to entertain these doubts, he sets them aside without explanation.

Indigenous animosity toward the insurgency, Stoll implies, derives from something in their culture inaccessible to leftist frames of analysis and misinterpreted in revolutionary overtures. This propensity is most evident when Stoll discusses the Guatemalan left's campaigns to organize indigenous groups around issues of exploitation through exercises in consciousness-raising and education. He determines that on such occasions organizers perpetually confronted

the fact that *indígenas* found their paradigms inscrutable. Where some peasants acknowledged the appeal of the revolutionary vision, Stoll observes, such consciousness was "usually a passing phenomenon" and was replaced by disillusion once the war ended (*Guatemalans* 192).

Highlighting regions inhabited by indigenous peoples where rebel organizations met with the most success, Stoll indicates, "they were not able to concentrate enough forces to hold the area, and they never became strong in the core of the region...perhaps because Mayan ethnic consciousness preempted their appeals" (*Guatemalans* 50). Disenchantment with the guerrillas' vision originates not from its failure to persuade, or a climate of terror—although both clearly accelerate the process—but from an inherent cultural isolationism, a distrust of foreign influences. Arguments that stress culture's untranslatability across populations, pose organized rebellion as a more than a mere disruption of everyday life but as a lapse in properly ethnic consciousness.

Deductions like these suggest that Stoll believes in an irreducible cultural difference between the indigenous person and the Westernized Guatemalan leftist. Out of a recognition that such assumptions lead to problematic conclusions, John Gledhill condemns Stoll's unwillingness to "concede that peasant movements are evolving in a changing world, and this is largely because he does not see indigenous peasants as past or present historical actors" (147). If historical actors endeavor to alter social relations by seizing upon or generating new forms of politics, Stoll represents indigenous and poor Guatemalans as uniform in their aspiration for changelessness. The view that culture overrides the economy or politics in determining social relations reflects a reactionary position honed by architects of U.S. policy in Central America. Neoconservative Patrick Moynihan summarized the argument in 1986, "The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal

truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself" (qtd. in Horwitz 120).¹²² Hence, politicization might be seen as an anomaly, a deviation from a people's inherent balance between habit and impulse.¹²³

Out of this propensity for their habitual relations, Stoll's "silenced majority" advocates for the racial and ethnic status quo. More specifically, these campesinos seem to acquiesce broadly to Guatemala's extreme ethnic stratifications. In his research Stoll finds, "There's lots of confidence in *ladinos*," claims one villager, "They know how to express themselves when there are delegations. So people were content" (*Guatemalans* 20). Moreover, Stoll states explicitly that his own research discounts the "bipolar model of ethnic relations" at root in much of the conflict in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (*Guatemalans* 16). He has good reasons for challenging this model when he argues that the division between *ladinos* and *indígenas* in Guatemala has no biological origin (16). But Stoll appears to dismiss the material effects of these distinctions by emphasizing the ease with which an indigenous person might "ladinize" herself. To do so, she must engage in "some combination of moving away from home, getting a good education, disclaiming their natal language, marrying into the *ladino* raza, or acquiring wealth" (16). While Stoll is no doubt right about how one might go about redefining oneself as *ladino*, he neglects an analysis of how aspects of upward mobility ("acquiring wealth") are related to markers of this mobility ("disclaiming their natal language" for Spanish), how one might entail the other, or how difficult acquiring any of these characteristics might be.¹²⁴ Unsurprisingly, he discovers his skepticism

¹²² It's worth noting that Moynihan was at odds with the Reagan administration over its policy in Nicaragua and Central America more broadly. But having been a neoconservative up until Reagan's

¹²³ As Norma Stoltz Chinchilla has commented, to assert that Indians would prefer "to be left alone to live the life they have always lived," is to treat Indian culture as a "timeless static, trans-historical" entity (37).

¹²⁴ Stoll cites the fact that the *ladinos* of Uspantán were not a wealthy upper class apart from the *indígenas*, but "work mainly in commercial and service occupations, as skilled laborers, teachers, and nurses. Many are poorer than the most prosperous *indígenas*," finding *ladinos* that owns more than 45 hectares of land is difficult (Stoll, *Rigoberta* 20). Stoll does not however move out of his immediate locale to compare Uspantán's racial profile to national and structural determinants on race relations.

about the tensions between racial/ethnic populations in Guatemala confirmed by his research subjects. "The *indígena* is half to blame for discrimination," claims one of Stoll's Mayan informants, "Sometimes discrimination gets worse if one deprecates oneself, if one doesn't feel equal. If someone says, 'Because I'm an indio, I'm not equal,' then [that person] is discriminated against. But if one feels equal, no" (26). While this testimony refers to the idea that domination depends on tacit acceptance by the dominated, the informant only mentions, the oppressed person's assumption that she is unequal with regard to dominant groups as one mechanism through which discrimination takes place. Thus, Stoll's analysis of race appears to conclude that racism, or the belief that one is the subject of prejudice, like an illusory hierarchy, is a thin social tissue to be cast aside by anthropologist and indigenous person alike.

Along similar lines, Stoll dispenses with left notions that relate the intensity of oppression and subordinated groups' willingness to confront power, choosing instead to call attention to an entrepreneurial spirit amongst Guatemala's peasants. The left's "immiseration thesis" (which correlates exploitation and resistance to exploitation) "is not a good description of the conditions that highland peasants faced before the war," Stoll makes clear, "Instead, compared with the harsh conditions recalled by elders, they perceived mild improvements and hoped for more in the future" (*Guatemalans* 64). Stoll explains that this hope derives in part from the slow fruits of modernity—"a capitalist system that allows them to improve their lot in small, incremental ways" (*Guatemalans* 96).

As opposed to extreme images of the subsistence farming in the *altiplano* and the abject stoop labor of the plantations of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Stoll imparts the surprising revelation that Vicente Menchú Pérez was an enterprising innovator. Apparently, Menchú Pérez took part in a number of initiatives established by Peace Corps volunteers and the Heifer Project. According to

one Peace Corps volunteer, the Menchú patriarch "was a real progressive farmer...Everything we had to offer, he would try out, and he was good" (*Guatemalans* 93). Another Western volunteer observed that the Menchú's "were tiny capitalists trying to make ends meet, make a buck, and get ahead" and hence "not revolutionary in any sense" (Stoll *Guatemalans* 94). Anthropologist Diane Nelson remarks that contrary to his daughter's portrait of "Vicente Menchú as the Che Guevaran New Man," Stoll renders him as "the post-NAFTA neoliberal man" (135). The Guatemalan left and the solidarity set inflated the aberrant circumstances of *campesinos* who, apparently, worked less on plantations than previous generations and "were going to school in record numbers. Some were prospering in business" (*Guatemalans* 25). Seized by the spirit of capitalist enterprise, Vicente Menchú Pérez seems to shed some of his heroism in light of Stoll's revelations, and he becomes less an expression of insurrectionary conviction and more a claimant on future advancements and profits. Through this reconstruction, Stoll assimilates Vicente Menchú and his fellow villagers into the "silent majority" whose activities before the war show little cause for confrontations with the state.

The "silent majority"—as a powerful myth that motivated transformation in the Republican party and its conservative identity—and the "silenced majority"—the consensus Stoll posits against the ambitions of Guatemala's revolutionaries—serve as powerful pretexts for contesting prevailing conceptions of the political order. Both are unavailable to the left's analysis, embrace military power, support the status quo, and seek economic opportunity without dependency. My parallel between the Guatemalan populace in Stoll's investigations and the American historical construct break down in the contrast between the victimization each group experiences. Nixon, Goldwater, and Reagan (among others) appealed to Americans who perceived themselves as outside the beneficence of the welfare state and believed that radicals

held public discourse hostage, precipitously demanding the U.S.'s decline. According to Robert Horwitz, the new populist right consolidated its identity around a sense of "victimhood" (91). Whereas Republicans crafted their "silent majority" as silenced by their disgust over transformation in social mores and structures, and the left's influence in public space; Stoll regards his "silenced majority" as having suffered deeply at the hands of the army and the guerrillas. He illustrates his concern for their hardships by tallying killings conducted by the guerrilla forces, ones he insists human rights organizations never counted.¹²⁵ The beleaguered majority Stoll portrays here has never been interested in the missions given them by "outsiders" eager to "identify native people as an insurrectionary subject" (281).

Isolated and individualized by their adversities, the "silenced majority" stands at a further remove from political struggle than before the war began. For them, "the whole category of *política* is associated with treachery and failure," preferring incremental, local change as expressed in "the ubiquitous campesino phrase *poco a poco* (bit by bit)" (*Between* 259, 308). While the American right positions the "silent majority" on the verge of politicization, Stoll's "silenced majority," disenchanted with revolution, rejects politics wholesale, and yet Stoll positions them nevertheless as in need of justice.

Conclusion: Bad Faith Solidarity

David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú: and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* seems to stand with the neoconservatives, when it should stand in judgment of them. Instead, their common imaginary frames either end of a social catastrophe. In their agitation, the neoconservatives

¹²⁵ Stoll attributes the oversight of two political killings in and around Chimal to "the influence that guerrilla cadres and sympathizers attained in human rights reporting" (*Guatemalans* 114). In effect, they were not counted among those caught in the war between the guerrillas and the government because the guerrilla movement had "stigmatized" them (*Guatemalans* 114).

refused to perceive insurgencies in Central America as anything other than the Soviet Union's encroachment into America's geopolitical "backyard." Within this logic, revelations of atrocities were easily imputed to Guatemala's ostensibly totalitarian insurgency, similar to that which brought about Stalin's Gulags and Nazi concentration camps. The logic also contradictorily posits atrocity as a necessary medium to reestablish order amidst murderous chaos. Stoll stands at the other end of the conflict, with little choice but to acknowledge the atrocities committed during the war and the calls for justice. But in his redefinition of the injured parties and his ascription of blame to the revolutionaries, he inadvertently travels a different route to similar conclusions as those first championed by the neoconservatives. Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that such reasoning arises from one who so closely investigated the aftermath of an event for which neoconservative policymaking is at least partly responsible.

On another level entirely, Stoll remains deeply engaged with the lexicon and the dilemmas of the left. He vacillates between reinforcing its condemnation of the Guatemalan state and rejecting leftist paradigms altogether. Grandin accurately describes *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* as "a strange exercise in compulsion, in which the author repeatedly reaffirmed his admiration for Menchú but then drove himself to dispute even her off-handed comments" (*Who* 8). More importantly, Stoll's skepticism about Rigoberta Menchú Tum and Guatemala's rebels cuts to the core of leftist axioms—that the oppressed may recognize their subjection as subjection and through that recognition invariably seek means to abolish their subordinate condition. Having abjured how the left narrates this process of overcoming and, nevertheless, professing the necessity that something further must be done for the civil war's victims, what politics does Stoll offer that might achieve justice for those he imagines suffered the most? Stoll models what I will call "bad faith" solidarity.

On the one hand, solidarity implies mutuality and exerting oneself in tandem with another's struggle but accepting that struggle in terms defined by that other. "Bad faith," on the other hand, denotes the false appearance of loyalty. According to philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, "bad faith" is a process of self-deception (72). Those who conduct themselves in "bad faith," as Sartre defines it, circumscribe their conduct to the "facticity" of what they have always been. In other words, to behave in "bad faith" one must regard one's past choices and previous self-comportment as one's destiny and thus deny one's freedom (Sartre 80). In expressions of "bad faith," "the subject deceives himself about the meaning of his conduct, he apprehends it in its concrete existence but not in its *truth*" (Sartre 73, ital. in original). Implicit in Sartre's notion of bad faith is the idea that one must address one's behavior and existence as objects of thought, or through the lens of a necessarily split subject examining her counterpart. Bearing the implicitly split subject of his theory in mind, I want to suggest that Stoll's argument, written out of his commitment to those he considers disregarded by the peace process in Guatemala, constitute an act of "bad faith" solidarity. Stoll assumes that his commitment to these silenced peasants and *indigenas* exemplifies compassionate practice by communicating the experience of the oppressed. But in this group he finds a mirror for America's "silent majority," staunch believers in military power and the rightness of capitalist enterprise. Thus, he rejects the freedom of his object of study to become something other than peasants espousing the status quo. More specifically, Stoll denies the possibility that the subordinated *campesina* or *indígena* might become a revolutionary and seek her liberation. Stoll's argument about Rigoberta Menchú Tum is made in "bad faith" because he mistakes his embrace of Guatemala's "silent majority" and his rationalization of the military's brutality as solidarity practice.

Chapter 3

"Composing Affiliations in Solidarity Memoirs"

During the 1982 meeting of the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, former insurrectionist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz wonders at her role as a UN lobbyist. In her book, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (2005), she ponders, "Was I now a diplomat instead of a revolutionary?...I struggled with myself over the values of these very different kinds of work. My radical 1970s self believed that all this diplomacy was ultimately a kind of treason since I was essentially organizing tribal planners to work within the capitalist system, or indigenous leaders to work inside the United Nations" (Dunbar-Ortiz 115). Strikingly, throughout her transition from underground organizer of a feminist, anti-imperialist cell to "well-compensated speaker" and human rights pundit, Dunbar-Ortiz persists in designating herself as a revolutionary. In other moments, the voice in her memoir is confident that diplomacy does affirm her identity "as a political radical, [and] I began grappling with and seeking out realities, rather than [youthful] romanticized versions of anti-imperialism" (Dunbar-Ortiz *Blood* 46-7). Eventually she solves the crisis between her aspiration toward revolutionary praxis and her day job, and she relinquishes the greater part of her work at the United Nations with the intent of bolstering social transformation in Nicaragua.

Jennifer Harbury, the Connecticut-born daughter of a Yale professor, experienced a similar self-recruitment to fight injustice in Central America. On her 1985 information gathering trip to substantiate refugee claims back in Texas, Harbury encountered deeply disturbing situations that eventually drew her to stand in solidarity with Guatemala's guerrillas in the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas, ORPA) and to directly confront the Guatemalan government. Irrespective of witnessing a

death squad kidnapping, cradling an infant who died because a government-imposed curfew prohibited her medical care, and overhearing numerous stories of atrocity during the army's counterinsurgency campaign, Harbury realizes she cannot imagine herself anywhere else. "I came unraveled," she admits, "for I could never again work on something far from Guatemala. I could not forget my friends" (*Everado* 25). Responding to an unofficial U.S. press blackout on issues surrounding Guatemala, Harbury left her job and committed to writing *Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Compañeros and Compañeras* (1995), an anthology of guerrilla testimonies compiled during her visits to a clandestine volcano encampment. In her second book, a memoir titled *Searching for Everardo: A Story of Love, War, and the CIA in Guatemala* (1997), Harbury recounts her Guatemalan embroilment, her eventual marriage to an ORPA commandante (codename "Everardo") whom she meets on the volcano Tajumulco, and her campaign to free him after she learns of his abduction and secret detention.

In this chapter, I examine Harbury's and Dunbar-Ortiz's memoirs on the one hand in order to reveal the political significance of internationalist solidarity, and, on the other, to assess the limitations of the Central America Peace and Solidarity Movement. Like the movement, Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz envision a potent and transnationally salient emancipatory event and an opportunity to circumvent U.S. imperialism in the region in Central America's insurgencies. Because both Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz understand their activism to support movements for social change in Central America and the writing of their memoirs as part of the same project, this chapter seeks to define a particular subgenre I call solidarity narrative. Solidarity narrative is politically beneficial because it stages for readers both the trap of sentimentalism in supporting "weaker" movements in the Third World and the successes of deliberate practice. Thus, in its most successful iterations, solidarity narrative imagines its objectives along political lines

defined by comrades in Central America. It follows that solidarity narrators and authors theorize their acts of solidarity by way of their literary form, predominantly by portraying themselves and their protagonists as accessories to historical change. Through an analysis of the politics of form, I chart correspondences between some solidarity authors' recourse to sentimentalism's representations of extreme suffering, as expressions of an appropriative overidentification with subalterns in the movement. But solidarity literature also seeks to overcome these limitations through a complex but continuous process of comparison between struggles in the U.S. and Central America, what Luciano Canfora calls "analogical thinking." Through descriptive processes like "analogical thinking," solidarity authors imagine themselves as the committed auxiliaries for social transformation in Central America. Of course, political engagement with revolution abroad always risks the charge of escapism.

For conventionally minded audiences, Dunbar-Ortiz's and Harbury's decisions to suspend their careers in the United States may evoke a romance of political intrigue and lives renewed, or even begun again, in a nameless tropical location. My reading of Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz's priorities and life trajectories shows this to be an unavoidable, if inadequate, inference. Through their efforts in Central America, these women pursue self-transformation, a problem characteristic of what I call solidarity narratives. But to reduce the significance of their memoirs to self-actualization in foreign terrain is to misrepresent the narratives and to diminish their political intentions.

A full interpretation of the memoirs would not take for granted the authors' politics. Careful readers would respect Harbury's and Dunbar-Ortiz's pursuit of solidarity with movements for social transformation in Central America and pay attention to how their memoirs—as chronicles of striving and witnessing—extend their acts of solidarity. Frequently

diverging from the reflective mode of the memoir into the didactic voice of the human rights report, *Blood on the Border* and *Searching for Everardo* serve as resources to examine North Americans' hopes for sustaining the emancipatory struggle in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, and securing justice for those consumed by state violence. The concept of solidarity, which encompasses these two goals, is in fact one of the ways that Dunbar-Ortiz historicizes her involvement with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Describing the legacy of Vietnam-War-era movements and organizations, she explains, "Solidarity with liberation movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America formed part of the content of the [New Left] party organizations, but also [for individuals] as many U.S. activists formed anti-imperialist solidarity groups that supported national liberation movements" in areas where the United States intervenes or levers conflicts by way of the flow of arms (Dunbar-Ortiz *Blood* 7). Dunbar-Ortiz here represents solidarity as an activity in which one preserves the revolutionary energies released by insurrectionary uprisings—uprisings that do not belong to her or other U.S. citizens. Further, as she defines it, solidarity practice obliges resistance to U.S. policies that compromise or annihilate these insurrections.

Dunbar-Ortiz and Harbury were not alone in their endeavors on behalf of Central American revolutionaries. Rather, their memoirs hint at an expansive movement that included organizations like the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), Witness for Peace, Sanctuary, Pledge of Resistance, and numerous other committees and solidarity networks. "In this movement," Christian Smith explains, "more than one hundred thousand U.S. citizens mobilized to contest the chief foreign policy initiative of the most popular U.S. president [Ronald Reagan] in decades" (*Resisting* xvi). Academic explorations of the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement (CAPSM) investigate how these organizations actively forge

alliances and relations of solidarity with movements and populations in Central America.

Focusing mostly on the solidarity movement testimony and interviews, useful for historical and social science research, these scholars do not look closely at memoirs of former movement participants.

Beginning in the 1970s and extending, albeit in a diminished form, into the present, scholars agree that CAPSM began as the largest and most significant U.S. antiwar movement since the conclusion of the Vietnam War.¹²⁶ CAPSM scholars investigate the sources of the movement's consciousness, its relationship to the left, its ethnic composition, and, most significantly, its legacy for American political culture. In one of the field's most comprehensive works, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*, Smith indicates that the movement took place primarily among middle-class, well-educated, predominantly white North Americans and was "largely initiated, organized, and led by people of faith," chiefly Christians (178, xvii). For Smith, the preponderance of religious opposition to Reagan's foreign policy poses "important theoretical and practical questions about the relationship between religious faith and politics" (xvii). Where Smith sees the unique role of religious ideology, Van Gosse sees the renewal of the American Left happening through its support for Third World revolutionaries, a tendency that declined with the demise of the U.S. Communist Party and arose again in the late 1950s with the Cuban Revolution (*Where* 10). Héctor Perla contests these ethnically-homogeneous and geographically-restricted representations of the movement by noting the role of Central American revolutionaries who appealed for international support and the Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan diaspora's participation in establishing CAPSM organizations. Instead, Perla argues, the Central America solidarity movement was a "transnational social

¹²⁶ Margaret Powers and Julie A. Charlip observe, "the U.S. solidarity movement of the 1980s was the largest protest movement against our government's foreign policy since the struggle against the Vietnam War" (3).

movement, which I define as one in which protagonists in two or more countries cooperate and/or coordinate efforts to achieve a common political goal or purpose" ("Vencio" 138).

Whether we frame it nationally or transnationally, weighing accomplishments against liabilities must be an essential component of determining the solidarity movement's legacy. Perla and others explain that, thanks to solidarity activists, the Reagan Administration's Nicaragua policy:

was effectively defeated within the formal realm of politics. This was an unprecedented accomplishment given the president's popularity, his intense commitment to the policy, and the lack of U.S. casualties. This is something that has not been thoroughly grasped, explored, or emphasized because of scholars' focus on understanding what went wrong with the Sandinista revolution." ("Heirs" 16, ital. in original)

Smith assumes a more restrained position, suggesting that the CAPSM ultimately failed to sustain revolutionary struggle in Central America against the Administration's attacks, but nevertheless, "the Central America peace movement not only helped to force the Reagan administration to pay a very high price for the success of its Central America policy, but also...contributed to the ultimate, partial demise of the Reagan presidency and administration" (*Resisting* 359, 372). While Van Gosse shares other scholars' optimism he also warns of "the persistence of crippling if not chauvinistic sentimentality [and] illusions of altruism" amongst movement affiliates, from the religious sanctuary provider to the self-conscious member of a solidarity cadre ("North" 20). Movement members' tendency to misrepresent their Central American comrades through sentimentalist clichés suggests the urgent need for those directly involved in struggle to represent themselves, rather than leaving their public image in the hands of well-meaning outsiders.

A parallel but related conversation concerning solidarity occurred during the 1980s and 90s in Latin American studies and literature departments, where scholars researched and taught *testimonio*, a genre closely associated with the rise of armed insurgencies in Central America. Composed predominantly between the 1960s and 80s, *testimonios* are first-person narratives from Latin America's subordinated classes and/or insurgent groups that are transcribed and recomposed into novel-length books. One prominent example of the genre is Rigoberta Menchú-Tum's 1983 *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, which I discuss in Chapter 2. The critical conversation surrounding *testimonios* became for a time the premier academic site for analyzing the relationship between Westernized academics and Latin American subalterns through literature, a conversation that was coextensive with solidarity movements in Central America. Moreover, *testimonio* criticism's keen attention to the critic's role in legitimating authors and disseminating literature renders it a key lens through which to interpret how those in the United States may extend the struggles of others.

By virtue of its form, *testimonio* transcribes the voices of the insurgent and oppressed into works of literature, and yet their words and stories are virtually uncontaminated by the representational schema of Westernized authors. By incorporating these rebel narratives into research and teaching agendas, John Beasley-Murray suggests, Latinamericanists attempted "to transform the (reading) public in places such as the United States [and] were offered...a chance to be critical intellectuals within the U.S." ("Latinamericanist" 127). Furthermore, for scholars of Latin American literature, *testimonio* constitutes a form of political and cultural solidarity. Because *testimonio*'s composition requires both the narrative of a previously "voiceless" subaltern and that of a literate intellectual who transcribes the testimony and compiles it into long narrative form, John Beverley, George Yudicé, and Marc Zimmerman suggest the genre

itself is an act of solidarity. "In other words, *testimonio* is not a form of liberal guilt," Beverley claims, but "It suggests as an appropriate ethical and political response more the possibility of solidarity than of charity" ("What" 19).¹²⁷ Beverley compares *I, Rigoberta Menchú* to an act of "sisterhood" between its narrator and her transcriber Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. Hence in its very form and pedagogy, *testimonio* evokes the intellectual's solidarity with the oppressed (Beverley, "What" 12).

On aesthetic grounds, however, Alberto Moreiras disputes that *testimonio* could ever model legitimate solidarity practice: "*testimonio* does not produce solidarity, but only a poetics of solidarity, a fallen and derivative kind" ("Aura" 198). According to Moreiras, *testimonio* criticism imagines its object of study as an unmediated subaltern voice and these critics contend that by furnishing this seemingly transparent access to "the real" *testimonio* becomes an extraliterary, even anti-literary, genre. But, he continues, such a conceit traps *testimonio* critics within disciplinary constraints in their hope to speak for absent or even dead subjects.¹²⁸ Consequently, *testimonio* critics risk "fetishizing subaltern production" and "reaestheticizing it" in order to authorize their own disciplinary practice (Moreiras, "Aura" 217). In doing so, they remain "on the side of the epistemological subordination of the represented [subaltern], and can then only with extreme difficulty avoid the charge of exerting [themselves] in the interests of colonial and neocolonial domination" (Moreiras "Aura" 215). Rather than restore the political value of deliberate aesthetic representation, Moreiras never finds a way out of the predicament

¹²⁷ From a similar perspective, and one that is uniquely tied to the concerns of postmodernist criticism, George Yudicé argues, "My argument regarding *testimonio* and its challenge to master discourse relies on those texts that are written as collaborative dialogues between activists engaged in struggle and politically committed or empathetic transcribers/editors" ("Postmodernism" 45).

¹²⁸ Moreiras names *testimonio* criticism's wish to speak with and for the dead the "auratic practice of the postauratic" ("Aura" 217).

he raises, but even his critical look at *testimonio* criticism alludes to the instructive ethical tangle that results from attempts to conceive of solidarity exclusively through literature.

Far fewer scholars directly investigate literary representations of solidarity activism during the 1980s and 90s. Most significantly, Ana Patricia Rodríguez criticizes (predominantly Chicana) feminist novelists, filmmakers, and theorists whose work centers on Latina protagonists who support insurgencies in Central America or who break U.S. law by assisting Central American asylum seekers in the United States.¹²⁹ In the hopes of appealing to transnational Third World feminists, these women "produced a 'fiction of solidarity' predicated on Chicana/Mexicana subjectivity" (Rodríguez 200). Here Rodríguez seems to echo Moreiras, saying that literary expressions of solidarity amount to little more than fictions of affiliation, more autopoietic than reciprocal. Writing from the perspective of the Central American diaspora, Rodríguez asserts that these North American Latinas assume too much immediate affinity, resignifying Central America and Central Americans through the archetypes of Chicana resistance, for example, "through the tropes of...La Malinche (the enslaved woman who served as mediator between the Spaniards and the Aztecs)" (214, 223). Authentic solidarity practice resembles something more like a *testimonio* for Rodríguez: "The act of solidarity begins in letting others produce their own narratives out of their particular pain, injury, and situations" (218).

Although Rodríguez's point that solidarity activists in fact may blot out differences between themselves and their Central American comrades by over-identifying with them is well taken, her argument risks reducing these authors' actual material practices to mere "background"

¹²⁹ Dalia Kondiyoti-Martínez's "Host and Guest in the 'Latino Contact Zone': Narrating solidarity and Hospitality in *Mother Tongue*" (2004) and Ariana Vigil's *War Echoes* (2014) also explore the problem of solidarity and how Latinas in the United States square their solidarity with the aspirations of their Central American counterparts, although not necessarily by way of "solidarity" as a concept.

for literature's production. In Rodríguez's schema, the meaning of solidarity is best encapsulated by the literature about solidarity and is the best means to assess these solidarity activists' intentions. Holding too closely to such a conceptualization of solidarity elevates reflection on and exposition of solidarity to a position of greater importance than the activism that the literature eventually betrays. This line of reasoning, however, reveals a clear division in the scholarly conversations about solidarity between the historical the realization of solidarity through political activism and the deliberation about the significance of solidarity through literature or criticism.

This split between the practice of and the thought about solidarity inadequately represents the evident overlap between activism and the culture of solidarity practices that occurred in the 1980s and 90s. For example, between 1983 and 84 Central America-oriented organizations like CISPES did a good deal of thinking about the "meaning of solidarity" according to Van Gosse ("North" 35). In a complementary manner, *testimonio* criticism theorizes literature and criticism as enactments of solidarity, not merely mimetic repetitions or approximations of the movement's socially powerful acts.

This chapter points to how the investments and intentions captured by solidarity narratives are inadequate means for appraising the value of solidarity in general, just as solidarity practice is not exhausted in demonstrations, civil disobedience, or material support for revolutionaries in Central America. By examining memoirs of solidarity activists, I hope to overcome the shortcomings of scholarship on solidarity narrative and solidarity practice. I explore how narratives composed by solidarity activists, specifically solidarity memoirs, allow audiences to deliberate on the significance of the Central America solidarity movement by enfolded the material practice of solidarity into their composition. How does the use of narrative

and storytelling conventions reframe the project of solidarity and non-interventionist activism in the 1980s and allow readers to better trace the historical significance of solidarity? Similarly, how does the narrative recasting of solidarity through life writing allow readers to better examine the predicaments and failings of CAPSM? Finally, how does solidarity narrative resolve the historical constraints and shortcomings of the movement? My reading is guided by the assumption that memoirs about solidarity work bridge the praxis/reflection divide and in that juncture provide a means to analyze both.

In this chapter, I will argue that solidarity narratives like *Blood on the Border* and *Searching for Everardo* stage the contradiction between solidarity's aspirations and the problems that arise from solidarity practice. I begin with my definition of the solidarity narrative, using Dunbar-Ortiz's and Harbury's writing to provide a framework from which to examine the goals of solidarity practice. As examples of the strand of American discourse committed to supporting the radical politics of Central America's insurrections, these solidarity narratives (novels, short-stories, and memoirs) share the objective of transmitting solidarity's mission. This mission includes supporting struggles that are not one's own and grappling with the same risks as one's counterpart in solidarity. As I explain in this first section, the concern for one's "other" in the literature of solidarity manifests in the form of the narrative as a "standing aside" from the development of events. An examination of Harbury's and Dunbar-Ortiz's places in the solidarity movement follows the definition of solidarity narratives, in the chapter's second section. Both memoirists/activists share a Vietnam-era upbringing and a transformative experience of Central America with other members of the movement. Their unique relationship to the movement and to the Central Americans they aspire to support, I argue, situates their accounts as useful counterpoints for examining the problems in CAPSM. In the third section, I explore how these

obstacles to successful solidarity practice emerge in the texts through a sentimentalist narrative mode that displaces politics into the realm of feeling. As I will demonstrate, the sentimentalism of solidarity literature appears in Harbury's clichéd representations of Guatemala's indigenous population, her moments of near-suicidal compassion for Guatemala's subalterns, and her potential redemption through common feeling and common suffering with these subalterns. The final section of this chapter claims that the memoirs attempt to resolve the contradiction between the aspirations and liabilities of solidarity through what Luciano Canfora calls "analogical thinking," a practice that compares geographically disparate legacies and experiences. The solidarity memoir's propensity to write and think by way of analogy and metaphor is instructive of how we might conceive of academic and political work that hopes to support and preserve the struggles of our various ethnic, racial, gendered, and geopolitical others without, at the same time, overstepping our bounds.

The Solidarity Narrative: A Definition

Though solidarity narratives often feature tense activity, their narrators and protagonists rarely perform or bear witness to historically transformative acts. Instead, the subgenre portrays protagonists' involvement within Central America's social struggles as secondary or adjacent to the force of popular movements, guerrilla organizations, and aggrieved populations. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, for instance, adopted this posture when she met Rigoberta Menchú Tum in the summer of 1982. She admits, "Although I was nearly twice her age, I felt like a student learning from Rigoberta, particularly about the importance of collectivity and community as opposed to individualism" (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 146). In spite of her hard-won development of one of the first Native American Studies programs in the U.S. (at California State University Hayward) and

of her status as a veteran-activist, Dunbar-Ortiz seems to relinquish her standing in order to apprentice herself to the twenty-three-year-old Menchú Tum. As is evident from this example, Dunbar-Ortiz's *Blood on the Border* renders her role as that of an onlooker and an accomplice.

Like Dunbar-Ortiz in her encounters with Menchú Tum, protagonists of solidarity narratives focused on Central America's uprisings 1980s and 90s cede agency to the struggles they depict.¹³⁰ Correspondingly, solidarity literature features fictional and real narrative voices that seem to "stand aside" from the formal emplotment of key events. In spite of the fact that these narrators and protagonists expose themselves to some of the dangers faced by their counterparts in Central America, solidarity narrative authors often prefer to broadcast their comrades' travails and aspirations rather than their own. Because solidarity movements focused on Central America sought to bear up, but not commandeer, historically transformative events, the activities of protagonists in solidarity narratives place them somewhere between the bystander and the partisan. In place of robust historical subjects, solidarity narratives represent, articulate, and stage conceptualizations of solidarity practice, deliberating through their sympathies, their objectives, and the consequences by way of exposition, images, and dramatization.

Dunbar-Ortiz's and Harbury's memoirs serve as useful illustrations of solidarity narrative for several reasons: because the authors' embeddedness in Central America situates their readers in particular geopolitical contexts; because, like the Central America solidarity movement, Dunbar-Ortiz and Harbury provide crucial aid to the forces of social transformation in Nicaragua

¹³⁰ Solidarity narratives touching on uprisings and war in Central America include Helena María Viramontes's "The Cariboo Café" (1985), Demetria Martínez's *Mother Tongue* (1997), Alma Luz Villanueva's *Ultraviolet Sky* (1998), Graciela Limón's *In Search of Bernabé* (1993), Ana Castillo's *Sapongonia* (1994), Carole Fragoza Fernández's *The Sleep of Innocents* (1991), Alejandro Murguía's *Southern Front* (1990), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Yvonne Dilling's *In Search of Refuge* (1984), Ana Carrigan's *Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan* (1986), Sister Dianna Ortiz's *The Blindfold's Eye: My Journey from Torture to Truth* (2002), and, perhaps, numberless public testimonies.

and Guatemala; and because much of their writing involves discussion of how to conceive of their counterparts in solidarity. Like other narrators in solidarity narratives, their own American life stories seem to diminish, sit suspended elsewhere, or matter little in relationship to the historical shifts and events occurring around them. In a way, the protagonists and narrators of solidarity narratives remain adjacent to history, simultaneously witnesses, reporters, and often defenders of particular causes, but rarely powerful subjects or privileged onlookers in their own right.

Examples of this adjacent stance recur throughout *Blood on the Border* when events in Dunbar-Ortiz's life take a back seat to the Contra war against the Sandinistas. Recounting the personal, professional, and intellectual antecedents that led her to Nicaragua, Dunbar-Ortiz scatters a few details of her disintegrating marriage to Simon Ortiz—someone she considered "the love of my life, my destiny"—amidst longer expositions of her developing knowledge of the bridge between indigenous history and Marxist theory (*Blood* 33). Dunbar-Ortiz's clipped discussion of her personal life speaks to the ways that solidarity literature's purpose may often subvert a storyteller's absorption in the texture of her own subjectivity.¹³¹

The prevalence of women and multicultural writers as authors of solidarity narrative is another noteworthy feature of this subgenre. For many of the Chicano/a authors writing on Central America, the impetus to analyze derived from their previous involvement in the Chicano movement during the 1960s and 70s, which drew them to support Central American struggles.¹³²

¹³¹ Even the narrator-protagonist of Alejandro Murguía's moody *Southern Front*, who remains preoccupied with memories of failed love back in the United States, exists in a state where the trajectory of a domestic life seems deferred for other aims. Ulises, the novel's central protagonist, ritually laments the loss of Miriam but also fails in his overtures to a Sandinista *compañera*, who reveals herself to be a young widow. Each of *Southern Front*'s characters, their intimacies and personal storylines seem postponed for the purposes of the broader struggle.

¹³² Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla note that Chicano/a veterans of United Farm Workers and the Chicano Power era worked in solidarity organizations for the Central American revolutionary struggles (*Seeking* 57). Murguía is a good example of an author who took part in the Chicano movement and then took up arms in Nicaragua to support the Sandinista triumph.

Similarly, the growing prominence of feminist analyses that foregrounded the intersection between distinct identities and experiences of oppression, as a more complete framework for analyzing and combating inequalitarian social formations, saw formal and theoretical innovators like Gloria Anzaldúa connect the conflicts structured into the U.S. borderlands to war in Central America.¹³³ In a 1990 speech at California State University, lesbian feminist Chicana Cherrie Moraga urged the Latinos/as in the audience to recognize the ways U.S. imperialism divides them from Central and Latin America, "One of the deepest wounds that Chicanos suffer is separation from our Southern relatives" (cited in Rodríguez 204). According to this line of feminist thought, regimes of border management and control bisect an organic or familial bond between Latinos/as in the United States and other populations in the South.

Solidarity literature's penchant for drawing parallels suggests that a certain acquaintance with the subjective and historical consequences of marginalization, exploitation, and subordination undergirds solidarity narratives. Like other authors with indigenous heritage, Dunbar-Ortiz similarly engrosses herself, her research, and her political work in dispossession by and resistance to settler colonialism, registering what appear to be repetitions of these historical processes in Central America. For example, Dunbar-Ortiz draws broad historical comparisons between the United States' covert involvement in Nicaragua to "'the secret war in Laos,' brewed during the Kennedy administration, a program that used the disaffected Hmong indigenous communities against socialist and nationalist Laos" (*Blood* 11). Within solidarity literature's predisposition for drawing analogies, as I argue later in this chapter, resides its capacity to reconcile solidarity's convictions with its deficiencies.

¹³³ Anzaldúa advocates the unique role of Chicanas/mestizas in finding "broader" common ground with other Latinos/as in the U.S., a process which requires that "The 80 million mexicanos and the Latinos from Central and South America must know our struggles. Each one of us must know basic facts about Nicaragua, Chile, and the rest of Latin America" (*Borderlands* 109). The pairing of Nicaragua and Chile here is telling because both are nations in which covert U.S. logistical support and funding produced extreme violence and profound social tumult.

Solidarity narratives not only portray scenes of solidarity; they also dramatize the internal contradictions of solidarity practice during the 1980s and 90s. Thus the problem at hand is to elaborate how the novels theorize solidarity. The term solidarity derives from the earliest social science, where it describes the webbing that bonds together groups who share a common heritage or the spontaneous ties that arise from occupational interdependence.¹³⁴ Taking cues from these earlier hypotheses, one branch of contemporary solidarity theory takes up problems in the orchestration of democracy and uses the lack of solidarity to explain antagonisms within civil society and between distinct publics.¹³⁵ Because this branch emphasizes solidarity's capacity to build cohesiveness within and between groups, the democracy-oriented scholars lay stress upon solidarity as an emotive and affective capacity, e.g. "brotherhood."¹³⁶

Another branch of recent solidarity theory, one more akin to the work of Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz, begins with the history of workers struggle and Marxist internationalism. Within these traditions, the term solidarity began to carry a more active and purposive political

¹³⁴ David Featherstone traces the term back to Emile Durkheim. Glossing on Durkheim, Featherstone suggests two forms of solidarity. First, mechanical solidarity unites through "similarity" and a common genealogical heritage, in which "a certain number of state of consciousness are common to all members of the same society"; therefore it is a traditional form of solidarity (Durkheim qtd. in Featherstone 19). Second, an organic or "spontaneous" solidarity results from the division of labor in modern societies, specifically from "ties of co-operation between individuals or groups of individuals which derive from their occupational interdependence" (Durkheim qtd. in Featherstone 20).

¹³⁵ For these intellectuals, conflict itself is understood to be anathema to democracy and represents a deficit in the disposition toward and affects of solidarity. It therefore falls to these democracy-oriented critics to diagnose the splits in solidarity and offers means of ameliorating social frictions. In an early version, Hannah Arendt's *The Promise of Politics* seems to fuse politics and the question of solidarity as the solution to the intrinsic plurality of humanity: "Politics deals with the coexistence and association of different men" (93). Seeming to extend Arendt's study of plurality, Juliet Hooker poses solidarity as an issue to do with citizenship, "what it means to be the fellow citizen of persons perceived as radically 'other' and about the kinds of political obligations that extend across difference," but "racialized" forms of solidarity short-circuit this sense of obligation (*Race* 22, 36).

¹³⁶ According to Hooker "Solidarity...involves emotion, but it is an emotion that translates into normative orientation that impels us to collective action on behalf of others with whom we have established certain kinds of relations" (*Race* 31). By contrast, Jodi Dean, arguing for cohesion in movement-building contexts based on universal norms, criticizes affective solidarity: "Because solidarity is viewed as a feeling that cannot be communicated abstractly, and, indeed, for most care theorists abstraction itself is seen as endangering feeling-based ties, it cannot extend beyond the conditions under which it is learned. The solidarity of affection thus results in the isolation of those within the circle of care from those who remain beyond it" ("Reflective" 116).

freight.¹³⁷ British geographer David Featherstone usefully defines transnational solidarity as “a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression” (*Solidarity* 5). Solidarity in this sense is not an automatic result of conventional social and work patterns or the suturing of fissures in the body politic, but a mutual endeavoring toward a shared ambition. The active, “transformative” character of solidarity, as well as its objective of challenging relations of domination, found in Featherstone’s definition, more explicitly articulates Dunbar-Ortiz’s oblique conception of solidarity.

Dunbar-Ortiz, a sometime-revolutionary, scholar, and diplomat, articulates her intentions with regard to the Sandinista revolution early in her memoir. “I cared about the survival of the Sandinista revolution,” she explains, “but cared equally, if not more, for the liberation and self-determination of the indigenous peoples. I knew that an alliance with the United States Contra counterinsurgency would backfire on any group that entered into it” (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 11). Throughout *Blood on the Border*, Dunbar-Ortiz strives to preserve the gains made by the revolution; to defend Miskitu, Sumu and other Nicaraguan indigenous communities from exploitation; and to uphold their claims for autonomy. In the wake of the Sandinista triumph against the Somoza family’s dynastic dictatorship in 1979, the Miskitu, Sumu, and Rama peoples collectively formed MISURASATA in order to demand recognition and support for self-determination, as had previous indigenous rights movements throughout the world. But although the Sandinistas embraced these groups’ languages in their national literacy campaigns they balked at the idea of granting the Miskitu, among others, sovereignty (*Blood* 10). Dunbar-Ortiz’s solidarity is complicated by these conflicts over the meaning of the Nicaraguan revolution: she

¹³⁷ Labor unions historically have used solidarity as a concept to describe active unity between workers within and outside of various industries, particularly during periods of antagonism with industry managers. Featherstone locates precursors to contemporary solidarity practice in the Communist Party’s avowed “internationalism,” a “left political movement [that endeavored] to reshape the world in more equitable terms” (*Solidarity* 8).

attempts to calibrate the FSLN's nationalist-revolutionary aspirations with the emerging indigenous appeals for self-rule, while at the same time obstructing the Reagan Administration's efforts to vanquish the Sandinista experiment by way of the Contras proxy force.

Less driven by specific ideologies, Harbury articulates intentions charged with alternating experiences of horror and empathy, outrage and care in relation to indigenous and impoverished Guatemalans. In the summer of 1990, just as Harbury commits to igniting American public consciousness about Guatemala's counterinsurgency war through a book about the guerrillas, she asserts, “I must see the *frente* [front] for myself. I must understand how it operates, who is up there, and why. I must see it with my own eyes or the book, for me, can never be valid” (*Everardo* 26). This excerpt conveys a powerful call to witness. It is almost as if Harbury wants to convert herself and her story into a conduit for Guatemala's subordinated populations—thus the prevalence of the descriptive over the rhetorical and reflective in her writing. By comparison to Dunbar-Ortiz, Harbury's memoir is less consumed with weighing various historical trajectories and reasoning through her actions, and instead it seems impelled by overwhelming moral and emotional impulses. Harbury's motive to make her experience bespeak the struggles of the guerrillas and ordinary Guatemalans echoes the practices of organizations like Witness for Peace, which intentionally transported delegations of U.S. citizens to battle zones in Nicaragua in order to document destruction and human rights abuses and to discourage Contra attacks (Smith 159).¹³⁸ Out of a dedication to her Guatemalan comrades Harbury refrains from dictating the politics of her memoir, deferring instead to the voices of her Guatemalan companions.

¹³⁸ On a 1983 trip to war-torn Nicaragua by the North Carolina Taskforce on Central America, delegates experienced an utter inability to aid civilian victims of Contra attacks, but noticed their very presence prevented further strikes by enemy forces. “They believed” Smith explains, “that nothing short of a permanent vigil [in Nicaragua] would have any impact on U.S. policy” (76). Out of these revelations, Witness For Peace began to organize a stream of delegations of U.S. citizens to visit Nicaragua's warzones and testify to the public about their experiences of violence, persistence, and the realities of Sandinista-controlled Nicaragua.

A further expression of Harbury's devotion to the cause of social transformation in Guatemala arises in her several hunger strikes. By representing her willful and public abstention from nourishment Harbury illustrates an indispensable principle of solidarity practice in the 1980s and 90s: to brave comparable risks to one's comrades in solidarity. In March 1992, Harbury learns that her husband Efraín Bámaca Velásquez, codename "Everardo," has disappeared in an Army ambush. While the Guatemalan Army admits to the ambush, Army officials insist that they buried the body of a dead guerrilla, widely assumed to be Everardo. But in January of the following year, Harbury learns from an escaped prisoner that a G-2 unit has imprisoned the still-living Everardo, torturing him for information.¹³⁹ Convinced by the lack of insurgent deaths as evidence that Everardo betrayed no one during months of torture, Harbury decides to "shine the largest, hottest spotlight on Everardo that I possibly can," and she reveals their secret marriage in a *habeas corpus* brief to the Guatemalan government. She then presents her case to the Organization of American States, exhumes the buried guerrilla, and then controverts the claim that it is Everardo. Finally, in the course of her several hunger strikes Harbury confronts both Guatemala's Minister of Defense and the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala over the clandestine detention and torture of revolutionaries (*Everardo* 164). But at various points throughout her campaign, Harbury gains little ground in her search for information about Everardo's whereabouts and even whether he is alive or dead. Through the lens of hindsight, Harbury's memoir crafts a politics of representation and conceptualizes the principles of solidarity practice by narrating her hunger strikes.

Harbury's three hunger strikes—at the Army headquarters in Guatemala City, the Guatemalan National Palace, and in the United States at the White House—are the fruits of her

¹³⁹ The G-2 is the Guatemalan Army's intelligence unit, known for "disappearing" supporters of progressive movements in Guatemalan and torturing them.

years spent bearing witness to Guatemalan civil society's traumatic experiences. She explains her reasoning for her second hunger strike: "Maybe if I make it all real enough, if I turn myself into a giant mirror, someone will take action to save his life. If they don't, then at least I will not have acquiesced. At least I will have fought" (Harbury, *Everardo* 260). She conducts her strike not only in the hopes of rescuing her husband and others held captive in secret detention centers, but also as criticism of the Army's impunity in striking out at all civilians. For example, one of her banners reads, "Guatemalan Army, why do you value private property so much and human life so little?" (Harbury, *Everardo* 263-4). Through these demonstrations Harbury helps pry open Guatemala's national conversation about the military's control over civil society. While on the one hand through Harbury's starving body serves as a metonym for the anguish produced and lives extinguished by the civil war, on the other her status as a well-connected U.S. citizen demands the attention of transnational audiences in a way that the demonstrations of Guatemalan citizens cannot. Furthermore, Harbury's hunger strikes and anti-government banners publicize the open secret of Guatemala's counterinsurgency war, acts unimaginable to Guatemalan citizens. As her memoir documents, Guatemala and the U.S. government consider Harbury's strike a "destabilizing" threat, as are crowds that come to speak and hold vigil with her, "telling me of their own missing loved ones, telling me that I must live so that I can speak for all of them" (Harbury *Everardo* 273). Like her memoir itself, Harbury wants to make her starvation the medium of Guatemalans' grievances.

By narrating her self-sacrifice during her husband's captivity, Harbury predicates her story on her material political practice and on her survival. She tells the disquieting details of her body's deterioration during the strikes with a hint of dark humor: the eyelid that seems to seal permanently, the stiffening upper lip, the cognitive static that comes from insufficient caloric

intake: "I learn a trick and pretend to bend over to tie my shoelaces whenever I feel dizzy. This allows the blood to rush to my head and no one ever notices that anything was wrong in the first place" (Harbury, *Everardo* 287-88). Her memoir therefore achieves something her strike cannot by capturing the part of her performance hovering behind her media-oriented determination: the risks she faces to her corporeal existence and to the protection of Everardo's life.

But just as the hunger strike serves as an expressive act of remarkable audacity, it also manifests a key principle of the Central America solidarity movement. Smith specifies the nature of this commitment for Witness for Peace volunteers, writing, "Delegates would be expected to live with Nicaraguans, share the risks of Contra violence, 'face death if need be,' and become first-hand sources of information on Nicaragua alternative to the US government" (76). Harbury cannot undertake the same risks and miseries as her husband and the other detained Guatemalans, but she believes that her public fasts bring her into a certain proximity with him. Dunbar-Ortiz similarly risks a great deal in striving to bear up the promise of revolution in Central America. In 1981, she and other passengers barely escape a U.S.-funded time bomb planted on an airliner between Mexico and Nicaragua.¹⁴⁰ In another instance, Honduran soldiers detain her during observations of Miskitu refugee camps, simulating her execution. The soldiers release Dunbar-Ortiz only after she recognizes that her detention was the direct order of a blonde CIA agent. Thus, Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz illustrate how braving explicit and implicit dangers is an intrinsic part of solidarity practice, on which solidarity literature depends.

Among the *brigadistas*

¹⁴⁰ Of the bomb planted on the December 13th, 1981 Nicaraguan flight, in Mexico City, Dunbar-Ortiz notes "That day...seared my memory with the reality of terrorism and my country's role in state sponsored terrorism" (*Blood* 119). And "Soon, it became clear to anyone paying attention that the bombing of the Nicaraguan airline announced the launching of the Reagan administration's war against the Sandinistas" (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 123).

Despite sharing many goals with the Central American solidarity movement, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz reserves special criticism for the movement's membership. "I found it difficult to talk about the revolution," she remarks of solidarity events and demonstrations, "because the supporters were so wedded to their idea of Nicaragua as a kind of utopia and didn't want to deal with the reality of the place" (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 109). Unlike what she represents as a kind of dogmatic optimism amongst solidarity audiences, Dunbar-Ortiz's experiences in Nicaragua have changed her: "I had learned new things, hard to accept, hard to take, uncomfortable—my first real experience within a revolutionary process" (*Blood* 109). These excerpts denote that for all the value the memoirist places on the idea of solidarity, she has strong objections to some methods of enacting solidarity. Although they might be counted among internationalists or *brigadistas*, as they were called in Nicaragua, Dunbar-Ortiz and Jennifer Harbury represent themselves as not altogether of the movement.¹⁴¹ In this section, I explore the commonalities and differences between the histories and ideologies that bound together elements of the Central America solidarity movement and these two memoirists. As their memoirs attest, although these women conceive of their efforts along similar lines to the solidarity movement, they nevertheless stand apart from the broader mobilization either through critique, as with Dunbar-Ortiz, or through the singularity of the project, as with Harbury. At the same time, they share affinities with CAPSM like their shared origins in the Vietnam Era and civil rights movements and their pursuit of transformation either in Central America or through struggles in concert with its inhabitants.

¹⁴¹ According to the 1984 article "1983-83 Volunteer Work Brigades of the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan people" in *Brigadista Bulletin*, a solidarity periodical from the period, "Brigadistas have a special role as witnesses to the daily reality of the war against Nicaragua that our government is sponsoring. We are witnesses, as well, to the literal meaning of the revolution in the lives of Nicaraguans: to their pride and faith as they defend what they are building" (qtd. in *Peace Call* 109).

Probably Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz's greatest divergence from the majority of the Central America peace and solidarity movement participants is the absence of specifically religious motivations for their activism in Central America. Significant portions of the movement's three largest organizations were grounded in explicitly religiously informed ethical choices. "The movement erupted," Christian Smith explains, "in part, because President Reagan's Central American policy deeply violated the moral beliefs and normative standards of tens of thousands of U.S. citizens" (*Resisting* 134). Smith connects the movement's growing "insurgent consciousness" Latin American liberation theology's growing influence over Catholic social doctrine and U.S. citizens' experience as missionaries to Latin America (beginning with President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in the 1960s). Sanctuary specifically formed as part of an effort by New Mexico's Protestant churches to shelter Central American refugees from INS agents' ruthless hunt for the undocumented and from the immigration courts' morally questionable denials of their appeals for asylum in the early eighties. Of course in sheltering those who the law refuses to recognize as refugees, Sanctuary activist broke U.S. immigration law.

Dunbar-Ortiz and Harbury come from a less predominant but still powerful tendency in CAPSM, what Gosse calls "the self-conscious solidarity 'cadre' who reads Omar Cabezas and spends vacations picking Nicaraguan coffee" ("Reshaping" 15).¹⁴² Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz's stories demonstrate that those with historical ties to the radical left also took up the solidarity cause, flocking to organizations like CISPES and the Nicaragua Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People. This New Left pedigree is most evident in Dunbar-Ortiz, who at the closing of her previous memoir, *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-75* (2001), is miserable,

¹⁴² Omar Cabezas was a Sandinista guerrilla commander as well as an author whose memoir of guerrilla combat against Somoza forces *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* was published in English as *Fire on the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista* in 1985.

on probation, and bereft of the radical milieu that had sustained her for over a decade.

Encouraged by activists from the American Indian Movement (AIM) and their supporters, she embraces her own indigenous Cherokee heritage in 1973. Although in *Blood on the Border* she testifies that AIM "drew me back to open activism and gave me back my life," in her recollections of the organization's slow collapse, under pressure of U.S. government repression, Dunbar-Ortiz recognizes the United States' manipulation of Nicaragua's indigenous Miskitu as a technique of channeling indigenous grievances against the aims of revolutionary struggle (17).¹⁴³ Although readers will not find this continuity between 1960s New Left activism and 1980s and 90s solidarity work in Harbury's life writing, she is nevertheless anchored with Dunbar-Ortiz and the movement at large in the cultural memory and politicization of the Vietnam War era. In Smith's surveys of former CAPSM activists, he discovers that "One third of all Central America activists had prior experience in the women's, anti-apartheid, pro-choice, and anti-nuclear power movements. More than half had participated in civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, environmental, and anti-poverty campaigns. And, two-thirds or more had participated in anti-nuclear weapons work" (175).

Similar to other radical activists who began their political work during the Vietnam War era, Dunbar-Ortiz expresses a certain revolutionary ethos. Her second memoir *Outlaw Woman* depicts the author's captivation by the idea of communal uprising. In 1967, during an African National Congress-support event she remarks on a wholly new experience: "I felt I was part of a community and I experienced its strength...Until that point I'd believed that I had to choose

¹⁴³ Anthropologist Phillipe Bourgois, whom Dunbar-Ortiz meets in Nicaragua, describes the United States' policy as "ethnic liberation opportunism," a strategy that sought to intensify long-standing antipathy between Nicaragua's mixed-race majority and indigenous Miskitus in order to multiply the fronts on which Sandinistas fought, a point I discuss in Chapter 1 (Bourgois 75). *Blood on the Border*, thus, portray's Dunbar-Ortiz's work to delegitimize the campaign to sweep up the Miskitu people into the counterinsurgency effort and to help ensure their new political path.

between individual independence and the suffocating family. Now I'd discovered a third choice—community. But my romantic picture of the perfect revolution began to develop cracks that became windows of reality" (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw* 90). Dunbar-Ortiz's realization at this meeting promises not only the sense that society might be reconstructed around a communal project, but also the feeling of being transformed from lonely stifling in the bonds of the hetero-patriarchal family to someone attuned to reciprocity and collectivity. In spite of the self-criticism evoked by the "cracks" that become "windows of reality," Dunbar-Ortiz carries this experience of community along with its comprehensive realization in revolution into Nicaragua and her second memoir, where she remains caught up in what she calls "the vocation of revolution" (*Blood* 22).

With this wish to experience a transformative moment and in turn to be transformed many U.S. activists travelled to and engaged with the Central America solidarity movement. Witness for Peace's tactic of transporting North Americans to bear witness in Central America became a powerful mechanism for enlisting them in the movement. It "transformed people," Smith insists, and Central America delegation travel "disturbed and electrified US citizens into fervent political action against their own government" (*Resisting* 78).¹⁴⁴ Many returned to the United States radicalized by their experiences in Central America (Smith, *Resisting* 143). Encounters in the United States with Central American refugees drew a comparable response: "absolutely nothing ignited in U.S. citizens the fierce insurgent consciousness for activism more than personal encounters with the traumatized victims of the U.S.-sponsored war in Central America" (Smith, *Resisting* 191). These ardent experiences produced what Smith describes as

¹⁴⁴ In one of Smith interviews with CAPSM members, Phyllis Taylor explains, "People's lives were profoundly transformed. When people sleep on a dirt floor in a sleeping bag for the first time; when very wealthy people, surrounded by kids in a refugee camp sit there weeping, just weeping, over the realization of what our government's doing, that is change" (*Resisting* 374).

"insurgent consciousness," which incites disruptive political action. Susan Bibler Coutin notes that even Sanctuary activists, who saw their work as largely humanitarian protection of Central Americans' lives and pacifist resistance, recognized themselves as a "challenge to institutional imperialism" (*Culture* 176). In *Searching for Everardo*, Harbury likewise comes to consider herself remade into an extension of her husband's uprising. "And somewhere in my innermost core," she reflects, "there is a wild and fiery will to resist, Everardo, to join hands with the other survivors and finish what you began...Now it is your own pure will that burns within me, impossible to extinguish or deflect" (Harbury, *Everardo* 321). Harbury imagines herself irrevocably transformed into an insurgent by her love for Everardo.

Solidarity's Contradictions

Jennifer Harbury's experience of fusion with Everardo's aspiration for wide-ranging social justice represents the depth of love between those whose attachment is borne of significant adversity and a remote chance of survival. By imagining her efforts and extension of Everardo's, Harbury prevents the extinguishing of her husband's legacy even in the case that the Guatemalan government has eliminated him. Yet over identifying with Everardo, or victims like him, also coincides with Harbury's wish to replace her own will with that of her husband's. The activist's penchant for over identifying with the object of solidarity constitutes one of solidarity's greatest liabilities. In moments of over identification, activists risk co-opting the experiences of their Central American comrades by conflating the struggles of their comrades with their own. Consequently, over identification reduces solidarity to acts of compassionate recognition of the suffering of others and then co-opting that suffering in order to transcend personal limitations. This formulation of the North American subject enfranchised by the pain of others also refers to

what Lauren Berlant identifies as the "politics of feeling" inherent in sentimentalist modes of storytelling.

American sentimentalism, a historically feminine mode of emotionally expressive narration and representation, originated with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), in which the author enjoins individuals in her audience to "*feel right*," or to manage their sympathies such that they work in the best interest of humanity and in the name of justice (qtd. in Berlant *Female* 64). But, in order to establish bonds between strangers on distinct ends of the social spectrum, sentimentalism traffics in graphic representations of suffering, a tactic that may draw pity but also contempt. Hence, "feeling right," according to Berlant, implies more than merely appealing to empathy in order to draw support for projects of social emancipation. It also conveys "a kind of soft supremacy rooted in compassion and coercive identification [that] wants to dissolve [violent social] structures through the work of good intentionality, while busily exoticizing and diminishing the inconvenient and the noncompliant" (Berlant, *Female* 6).

Hinging my argument on Berlant's elaboration of sentimental politics, in this section I argue that what Gosse calls activists' "crippling sentimentality" and activists' "illusions of altruism" in the Central America solidarity movement appear in literary form as sentimentalist digressions in the composition of solidarity memoirs. As might be expected, Harbury and Dunbar-Ortiz are not unaware of the possibility that the ostensible selflessness of solidarity practice might actually be transformed into its opposite. For this reason, I begin with a discussion of the ways Dunbar-Ortiz criticizes solidarity practices that further the self more than one's counterpart to highlight the self-critical aspects of solidarity narrative and to substantiate how sentimentalism in the literature correlates with solidarity work. I then turn to expressions of sentimentalism in *Searching for Everardo*, particularly Harbury's clichéd representations of Guatemalans. Although these

representations seems to diminish her Guatemala partners, her account of her own suffering simultaneously bonds Harbury to her Guatemalan comrades and allows her to transcend them. Analyzing the correlations between the sentimentalist attachments of solidarity narratives and the practical impediments to legitimate acts of solidarity illustrates how solidarity narrative is a constructive tool for reflecting on solidarity practice and its problems.

The asymmetrical relationship between the North American subject and the Central American objects of solidarity is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to the ethical horizontalism to which CAPSM aspired. Compared with activists from the United States, who were citizens of the imperial power that sought to orchestrate winners and losers in Central America's conflicts, Central Americans were at a disadvantage. As might be assumed, this lack of parity sometimes resulted in solidarity workers promoting agendas not germane to the broader struggle against U.S. imperialism, particularly the advancement of the self.

Blood on the Border documents a number of instances in which U.S. delegates to Nicaragua crusade for public recognition of their altruism as much as for the cause of solidarity. On the insistence of one Sandinista official, the St. Augustine Committee on Central American requested that Dunbar-Ortiz recommend "an Indian" that they might bring along with them on their delegation to Puerto Cabezas, where they hoped to distribute clothes and food to war-displaced Miskitu. Dunbar-Ortiz convinces her ex-husband's brother, Petuuche, to participate. Once in Puerto Cabezas he receives special recognition from the Miskitu because of their shared indigenous heritage. Unnerved by what seems like undue acclaim bestowed on Petuuche, the other delegates invite him to return to the United States before the delegation's conclusion (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 215-6). In response to this delegation's grudging tokenism and their

irritation at the recognition of another, Dunbar-Ortiz complains, "With friends like that solidarity group, the Sandinistas did not need enemies" (*Blood* 216).

Another instance where subaltern struggles are instrumentalized to bolster the egos of Americans occurs in 1984 when Dunbar-Ortiz joins a fact-finding commission of influential U.S. women to Central America.¹⁴⁵ One delegate, Bella Abzug, a prominent women's rights activist and Democratic Party official, regularly takes issue with another, Jackie Jackson, wife of Rev. Jesse Jackson the competitor to Abzug's endorsed Democratic Party presidential candidate. Abzug, whom Dunbar-Ortiz identifies as "someone who clearly was used to being the center of attention," found Jackson's presence intolerable because of her husband's appeal to Third Worldist movements (*Blood* 190). As the delegation travels from Nicaragua to El Salvador, in an apparently unprovoked attack Abzug begins screaming at Jackson who consequently beats a hasty retreat back to the United States. Dunbar-Ortiz notes that after her opponent's departure, Abzug seemed "unshaken, even triumphant, that she had driven Jackie away" (*Blood* 195). More than simple instances of inappropriate or even counterproductive behavior, these two examples point to one of the Central American solidarity movement's fundamental shortcomings: acts of solidarity could be designed to further the veneration of the North American subject at the expense of Central American subalterns fighting for social justice. Moreover, these episodes illustrate how the desire to appear altruistic and/or to receive praise for one's choices distort solidarity's fragile dynamics by underscoring the disadvantage at which Central Americans stood in relation to their "benevolent" comrades.

¹⁴⁵ This fact-finding commission was called the Women's Alternative to the Kissinger Commission. In 1983, the Reagan Administration established the Kissinger Commission (or the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America) to report on how the United States might best respond to challenges within the region and threats to its security and stability. Dunbar-Ortiz speculates that the Kissinger Commission was largely established largely to justify U.S. efforts in the region, which it did by recommending more aid to the Salvadoran government and continued support for the Contras (*Blood* 184). The Women's Alternative was therefore the Democratic Party answer to Kissinger's findings.

Sanctuary activists, for instance, constructed Central Americans through "culturally laden" images of refugees, reinforcing Central Americans' disadvantaged position in relation to North American activists. Héctor Perla and Susan Bibler Coutin's study of Central American immigrants' place in the Sanctuary movement explains how:

The refugee framing necessarily positioned [solidarity activism] as instances of materially better off North Americans acting strategically on behalf of the ostensibly innocent, authentic, or genuine (as opposed to strategic) Central Americans, [which] constrained Central American immigrant activists' ability to publicly identify as political protagonists or take credit for devising joint strategies for social and political change. ("Sanctuary" 13)

Put another way, the Sanctuary movement's packaging of Central American immigrant activists as "refugees" appealed to the subdued paternalism of some Americans. Although the refugee construct benefited the movement by drawing on citizens' empathy, it nevertheless diminished the contributions of Salvadorans and Guatemalans living in the U.S.¹⁴⁶

In *Searching for Everardo* these asymmetries arise not as objects of conscious self-criticism, but instead through the exoticist conventions of sentimental culture. Throughout her memoir, Harbury goes out of her way to comment on the "sculpted" and "chiseled" appearance of indigenous faces in Guatemala, their "tilted eyes" and their graceful "bird-like" qualities (*Searching* 11).¹⁴⁷ Harbury's admiration for and idealizations of the indigenous Maya approach

¹⁴⁶ Coutin and Perla illustrate the frustration that arose with the "refugee" construct:

Central Americans also sometimes chafed at the refugee role. One Salvadoran living in sanctuary in San Francisco East Bay in the 1980s commented that he preferred relationships that were 'person to person instead of person to refugee.' He added, 'I left my country due to the violence and due to the fear and danger of disappearing, not in order to become a refugee. To me the word 'refugee' implies inferiority and superiority.' (12)

¹⁴⁷ As several *compañeros* escort Harbury up to their volcano camp she notices, "Their voices are soft and somewhat singsong, with the birdlike accents of Mayan highlanders" (*Searching* 30). Similarly, as she sits in vigil outside the army base that is rumored to hold Everardo's remains she wonders, "Or did they drag you here dead in a burlap bag

colonizing platitudes about the inherent beauty of indigenous peoples and their unique relationship to their environment. At times the Maya seem preternaturally wise and aware in a way that far exceeds her own abilities. In his wife's estimation, Everardo typifies the uncanny wisdom of the Maya when and he seems to foresee the "scorched earth" policies employed by the Guatemalan Army in the early 80s: "None of this surprised you, Everardo. You just bent your head into the firestorm and threw yourself forward, knowing only too well what was yet to come" (Harbury *Searching* 13). In sentimental culture, such wisdom renders historically exploited, marginalized peoples worthy of rescue by illustrating that, despite histories of subjection, these people are quite human, generating knowledge, even beyond the aptitudes of a rationalist, modernized United States. Nevertheless, Berlant explains, "The main paradox here too lies in the centrality of cliché and stereotype to the establishment of the expanded terms of the human" (*Female* 36). Hence, in seeming to elevate indigenous Mayan knowledge above the Mayans' subordinate status and even beyond the limitations of Western modernity, Harbury reduces the indigenous Maya by recasting them as picturesque in their folklore-derived wisdom. The difficulty with this line of reasoning arises when we consider that Harbury is also fully aware that Everardo's and his people's apparent foresight must, in part, depend on familiarity with political and labor regimes that treated indigenous life as disposable.

A clearer example of Harbury's sentimentality occurs in her previous book, *Bridge of Courage*, where she collects testimonies from the front in Guatemala. "The Baby Tiger and Jorge Medico" testimony features a *compañero* who finds a motherless *tigrillo* and entreats his unit to help him raise it.¹⁴⁸ Like a war orphan, the *tigrillo* has been abandoned by its mother, who was

and bury you like a magnificent broken bird that they could never fully comprehend or value?" (Harbury, *Searching* 3).

¹⁴⁸ From the description in the testimony "tigrillo" is most likely an ocelot or margay, wild Guatemalan feline species.

perhaps "frightened off by the explosions" of a "bad series of bombings," the *compañero* reasons (Harbury, *Bridge* 220). But rather than reject the *tigrillo* cub as a potential liability during civil war, "The other *compañeros* came running from all over the camp to see the *tigrillo*, admire his perfectly striped fur, and touch his tiny paws" (Harbury, *Bridge* 221). In the face of all their efforts to help him thrive, however, the *tigrillo* dies from dehydration due to diarrhea, and "we all wept and were very unhappy" (Harbury, *Bridge* 224). Guerrillas isolated on a mountain assuredly experience deprivation in various forms, not least of all of affection and the intimacy of touch represented by a dependent animal or pet. But including these testimonies in her book may in fact trivialize the struggles faced by guerrillas by detaching them from combat and struggle, rendering them instead quaint stewards of the defenseless.

By contrast, violence in *Bridge of Courage* receives relatively little elaboration or occurs largely off stage as Harbury's interlocutors find the mutilated remains of their comrades. In the same testimony as the death of the *tigrillo*, the *compañero* also mentions the death of his comrade, Guillermo, who "for me was almost like a son" and who "had been hit by a mortar, and even as I reached out to him his eyes dimmed, and I knew he was dead" (Harbury, *Bridge* 226). This story, although certainly shaped by the drift of recollection and, perhaps, the evasion of memories too traumatic to revisit, also has the effect of elevating the pitiful death of a baby animal over the army's ruthless campaign to wipe out the opposition. The guerrillas' grief over the death of the cub, although perhaps understandable, alludes to another of Harbury's consistent tropes: the Guatemalan people as a populace defined by their suffering.

The trope of an eternally suffering people is of course grounded in the extreme atrocity committed against Guatemalans, but Harbury's recourse to images of their misery also renders them as wretched victims. In a national context where the state mandates socialized terror and

censors any mention of the terror in the press, it is not difficult to imagine a reservoir of repressed grief amongst the population. It stands to reason then that Harbury's hunger strikes become a convenient scene for expressions of public mourning. I have already discussed how these hunger strikes contributed to a temporary aperture in public discourse about the counterinsurgency war. At the same time, in *Searching for Everardo*, numerous representations of Guatemalans publicly and privately mourning also give on the impression of a population crippled by its sorrow. For example, on the final day of Harbury's first hunger strike, a man arrives to the demonstration site and introduces his three children to her. The man explains that his brother was a union-organizer and was perhaps assassinated for his labor advocacy. "My children never knew their uncle," Harbury paraphrases her visitor, "but I want them to site here now with you so that they will understand what it is all about, what it is that he lived an died for. He takes my hands and pulls his wide-eyed children close and we enter into a silent prayer, broken only by the sound of his hushed weeping" (*Everardo* 211). Harbury decides these displays of weeping and ceremonious interaction mean more: "I realize what they are doing, pouring their hopes and energy into me, giving me their warmth and strength like some collective mind-to-mind transfusion" (*Everardo* 273-4). In spite of the weakness of her body, her sacrifice to save her husband, these displays of public support seem to bestow Harbury her with the strength to persevere by building alliances of mutual pain between herself and the Guatemalan people.

Harbury's sacrifice during the hunger strikes confers upon her a further experience of empowerment through representations of her pain and its overcoming. As her second 1994 hunger strike begins to draw attention in Guatemala, the United States, and internationally, Richard Nuccio, a State Department official, is called in to negotiate between Harbury and the

Guatemalan government. The morning of his arrival, Harbury awakens with a strange feeling, "a combination of pain and near euphoria, for though you are not here I have set myself free, flung myself past all barriers in this battle for you. I float now beyond the [Guatemalan] military's furious reach, and whatever it costs I cannot be stopped. It is right, Everardo. It is all so right" (*Everardo* 272). While Harbury seems to revel in the righteousness of her cause, embedded in her reverie is a troubling experience of freedom. Throughout her demonstrations Harbury tries several times to establish the terms for the end of her hunger strike with both Guatemala's Minister of Defense, General Enríquez, and the U.S. ambassador to Guatemala Marilyn MacAfee. She demands to know the status of her husband (dead or alive), his release either to her custody and a third country or that the Guatemalan courts grant him a fair trial. In return, Harbury will publicly admit that the whole thing was merely a mistake. Nuccio's arrival portends the possibility of a break in the stalemate between herself the embassy and government who deliver only allusions to Everardo and stonewall her requests.

In another sense entirely, Harbury's experience of transport and freedom suggests that she revels in her privilege as an American citizen and her ability to evade the brutal and crushing repression faced by Guatemalan citizens who might attempt the same actions. In a way, Harbury's public demonstrations, her life amidst the guerrillas, and her provocations against ministers in the national government give her an experience of proximity to the suffering and travails of Guatemalans above which her citizenship suspends her. Although a few U.S. citizens were killed and several experienced torture in Central America during the 1980s and 90s, the privilege that seems to hold Harbury aloft is exactly what the solidarity movement used to "shield" Central Americans from attacks and certain death, particularly with Witness for

Peace.¹⁴⁹ Thus, through her identification and transference with counterinsurgency's victims, her suffering and her survival, Harbury acquires a profound appreciation for how her citizenship exempts her from Third World misery and death and for the feeling of ethical virtuousness that this position grants her. In this fashion, Harbury's reflections illustrate how the sentimentalist mode "involve[s] substituting for representations of pain and violence representations of its sublime self-overcoming" (Berlant, *Female* 65). In other words, by imagining herself in ethical and political proximity to the structurally underprivileged, Harbury manages to elevate herself above Guatemala's traumas and her own.

Rather than pillory Jennifer Harbury and, by implication, solidarity narrative for employing the devices of sentimental literature to advance their agendas (whether selfish or not) we might observe, as Berlant does, that the "ideal of liberal empathy is so embedded in the [national] ethico-political fantasy that alternative models—for example, ones that do not track justice in terms of subjective measures—can seem inhuman, hollow, and irrelevant to the ways that people experience optimism and powerlessness in everyday life" (*Female* 55). Put another way, drawing the sympathies of sometimes-paternalistic or altruistic-minded Americans requires emotional appeals, appeals that can be made through stories of the sufferings and tribulations of Third World others but not through the didactic explication of human rights reports or strictly ideological treatises.

In the traditionally sentimental text, scenes of extreme pain and vulnerability point at the structural effects of social inequality that, in the narrative's development, are then lost along with "the ethical imperative toward social transformation...replaced by passive and vaguely civic-

¹⁴⁹ While helping impoverished children learn to read in a remote part of Guatemala, American citizen Sister Dianna Ortiz was mistaken for a suspected *guerrillera*, abducted by Guatemalan information services, subjected to hundreds of cigarette burns on her body, gang rape, and participation in another prisoner's torture. She was "rescued" by a North American official who observed the interrogation and immediately recognized the fact that she was a "gringa." The sister's later testimony helped establish the complicity between the CIA and Guatemalan torture.

minded ideal of compassion" (Berlant *Female* 41). Harbury's memoir never follows the conventionally sentimental story to its denouement in the dissipation of the imperative for social transformation, because her life did not. Her memoir concludes with the discovery that a CIA asset/informant in Guatemala, Colonel Julio Roberto Alpírez ordered Everardo's death in 1992 (*Searching* 314). In her postscript to *Searching for Everardo*, Harbury continues to insist that the United States atone for its complicity with Guatemala's atrocities. She denounces the U.S. in at a March 1996 United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva "for routinely paying for information that everyone well knew was being extracted through the cruelest of tortures, thus condoning and abetting serious criminal activities as well as violations of international treaties such as the Geneva Conventions" (Harbury, *Everardo* 323). The revelations of her husband's death did not disrupt her appeals for justice, but instead deepened Harbury's resolve for justice and her admiration of the Mayan radicals' "their unique blend of courage and serenity" in the face of postwar repression (*Everardo* 335).

Analogical Thinking: Aligning Political Aims and Desires

Beyond denouncing U.S. imperialism, solidarity narrative also contemplates the proximity between the experiences of the solidarity activist and her counterpart. *Searching for Everardo* gives form to these explorations of proximity and distance in dreams sequences during which Jennifer Harbury makes contact with her abducted husband. As she and the leadership of ORPA sort out the details of Everardo's disappearance, Harbury dreams pull her into dark, foreboding spaces, where she encounters her husband. In the first, "I am somewhere else, I can see you even though I know you are faraway. You are in a small dark space barely big enough to fit in, and you are huddled up, hugging your knees to your chest. Is that a grave, or a pit, or a

darkened cell?" (Harbury, *Everardo* 117). Everardo's apparition returns to Harbury several times, repeating the words "I am cold," until she seems to "go to him, unbidden and uninvited" (*Everardo* 140). Swimming through a gentle blackness she hears the familiar tread of his combat boots. They embrace, she weeps, and Everardo "push[es] me gently to my feet. Ya, you tell me in that quiet voice. Ya. There, it is done. There, it is over. Words of comfort and yet also of finality. Then he is gone and I am in my small living room again, staring at the burnt out candle" (Harbury, *Everardo* 141). These dreams or visitations seem to provide Harbury with the presence of her longed-for Everardo, whose very life is in question. In this context, his use of the Spanish word "ya" could imply either "it is done, I am gone," or the idiomatic phrase for comfort in English "there there," or "enough, stop crying, stop mourning," as in a call to action. Examined as literary constructions, these phantasmal visions accompany the fulfill Harbury's wish to see Everardo with imaginary explorations of the boundary between her and her husband; how in the absence of knowledge, she must strive to reach him, just as he struggles to communicate with her. These instances in *Searching for Everardo* enact a principal feature of solidarity narrative: the representation of attempts to grapple with differences between partners in a relation of solidarity. Harbury does not, and maybe cannot ever know of or about her husband's existence, but she nevertheless reaches toward him.

Through representations that map the metaphorical distance and proximity between American opponents of U.S. policy and their counterparts in Central America solidarity authors mitigate the liabilities of the solidarity genre and solidarity practice. Concentrating on *Blood on the Border*, this section will examine how solidarity narrative conceives of solidarity through comparative or analogical reflection. "Analogical thinking," I argue, proposes that constitutive moments in an authors' past, personal experiences, and other frames of reference facilitate the

imagining one's relationship to the struggles of others. Analogies reveal correspondences between dissimilar things without merely equating them, which suggests their potential as anodyne for solidarity's acquisitive and sentimentalist roadblocks. This section explores Dunbar-Ortiz's continuous invocation of analogical thinking to make sense of the forces shaping conflicts between the FSLN, the Miskitu, and the United States. This section begins with a discussion of the tributaries of history she envisions running through her life story. I then shift my attention to historiographer Luciano Canfora's "analogical thinking" concept to help explain how solidarity narratives attempt to ethically engage with struggles that are not their own. Circling back, this section then investigates exemplary moments of analogical thought in *Blood on the Border* that allow Dunbar-Ortiz to incorporate a critique of capitalism into her analysis of U.S. imperialism.

Dunbar-Ortiz's agonies as a revolutionary arise from a specific experience of history, an experience that surges forth throughout her life as she develops her awareness of histories of dispossession, subordination, and exploitation. She suffers the recurring legacies of such unresolved processes and events when studying international law in Strasbourg, France, where "I was haunted by echoes of two world wars in which this place had been one of the spoils and losses of German aggression" (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 179). In this moment, as with much of her life writing, she finds herself troubled by these histories and is irrevocably drawn to note correlations and ramifications, and to trace the murmurs of injustice. She then employs her analysis of these traces as a tool to interpret her surroundings. More than a process of knowledge-making, Dunbar-Ortiz finds herself passionately caught up with the currents of history; histories of imperialism and anti-imperial resistance "burn" inside of her, induce "mind-spinning" states, and trigger bouts of alcoholism (*Blood* 20, 12).

One could easily attribute Dunbar-Ortiz's sensitivity to unresolved legacies to her occupation as an academic historian, a career that began in her student days, when U.S. military and economic imperialism became a key motivation for her historical research. Throughout these heady days as a member of the feminist, anti-South African apartheid, and anti-war movements, Dunbar-Ortiz would intermittently take up her dissertation in American history at UCLA, only to abandon it for a new cause.¹⁵⁰ Dunbar-Ortiz roots her political engagements and scholarship in her family history, a history she interprets as "a contradiction or amalgamation of...two forces—[Oklahoman] settlers on Indian lands and resistance by indigenous inhabitants" (*Blood* 20). Given Dunbar-Ortiz's penchant for mapping her academic and political preoccupations through her own life and her long-concealed indigenous heritage, how she plots overlapping histories in *Blood on the Border* is more significant still. The resonances she traces between geographically disparate legacies point toward solidarity's obligation to restrain its proclivities to dominate or overwhelm its other and instead to establish reciprocity, a key feature of solidarity practice.

Out of the hope that the idea of solidarity might be salvaged from critiques about its inherent repressiveness or exclusivity, philosopher Jodi Dean theorizes solidarity based on an embrace of pluralism. Like Dunbar-Ortiz, Dean recognizes how social and political inequalities between comrades in solidarity may distort solidarity's intersubjective ties with the potential of ruining a shared political project. These ties, Dean asserts, as does Dunbar-Ortiz, must endure instances of internal disagreement, not because dissent disrupts solidarity but because it allows negotiation and adjustment "furthering the intersubjective recognition characteristic of solidarity bound members" (Dean, "Reflective" 127). In the interest of this reciprocal accountability, Dean recommends a "reflective solidarity [which] involves the readiness of members to take responsibility for their shared relationship through an attunement to our mutual vulnerability,"

¹⁵⁰ Eventually she completes a dissertation on New Mexico's land tenure system and Native American treaty law.

and our "common need for cooperation" ("Reflective" 133). Put another way, reflective solidarity requires not only communicative efforts to actively negotiate conflict but also reflection toward mutual striving. Here Dean formalizes what Dunbar-Ortiz only enacts when she represents her testing various frames of reference, experiences, and histories that she recognizes as common between vulnerable groups in the United States and those in Central America.

Positioned within this range of concerns, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's *Blood on the Border* usefully frames reflection on solidarity's mutual striving within the analogy, a figure that articulates evolving relationship, rather than perfect unity, with her counterparts. The need for analogy originates, perhaps, with her tendency to anchor *Blood on the Border* by narrating events multiple times, a practice that indicates a desire to not only lock sequences from her life into place, but also to stabilize the events themselves in history and to allow them to persist as resources for the present. "I write," she declares, "so that the younger generation may have access to an earlier generation's political experience and theory" (*Blood* 13). Other moments in her memoir feature Dunbar-Ortiz's reflections on her role as a human rights observer and reporter: "I decided that I must be very careful in writing and speaking about [the Nicaraguan Revolution]. It is so difficult to describe movements without either engaging in mindless support or telling the truth bluntly and then having to watch as your words are taken out of context to condemn the process and become an argument for US intervention" (*Blood* 88). Writing, like solidarity, requires care and some notion of obligation to those whom we represent because representation can produce unforeseen consequences.

The duty of framing history through layered analogies emerges in its least complicated forms early in *Blood on the Border*, primarily in instances where Dunbar-Ortiz correlates the

colonial and imperial aspirations of the United States. Her research allows her to draw correspondences between the two nineteenth-century ideologies: belief in the United States' Manifest Destiny, a mission to expand settlement throughout the continent, and President James Monroe's foreign policy doctrine that forbade European nations from intervening in Latin America, which Dunbar-Ortiz explains as "the early U.S. government's announced intention of controlling the whole Western hemisphere" (*Blood* 20). These coeval developments allow further analogical thinking. "Later," she reasons, "I began to see how Native resistance to settler expansionism in North America was linked to resistance to U.S. intervention in Central America" (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 20).

The "link"—the resemblances Dunbar-Ortiz draws between the fight against settler colonialism and against U.S. hegemony in Latin America—allows her to see the Nicaraguan Revolution as a platform for other liberation efforts, including the Miskitu bid for autonomy within their ancestral lands. If the Sandinistas gave priority to granting indigenous rights, Dunbar-Ortiz suggests, the nation could "become a model for indigenous self-determination amid a world of negative examples," and preserve the Sandinista's socialist gains (*Blood* 96). As a result, Dunbar-Ortiz is a consummate model of imaginaries committed to the project of radical social transformation in Central America because she comprehends the rupture in the reigning social order as capable of remaking Nicaraguan society according to the mandate of justice. To this end, she serves as an informal ambassador between the Miskitu and the Sandinistas. Dunbar-Ortiz's role as mediator dictates the drawing of analogies in order to counteract the demolition of the Sandinistas' triumph. Thus, solidarity's mutual striving, its attunement to the other, is conditioned by comparative historical thought.

In order to more fully develop what's at stake in the idea of analogical thinking I turn briefly to historiographer Luciano Canfora's *The Political Use of Historical Paradigms*. In this work, Canfora designates analogical thinking as the necessary hermeneutic device for bridging the obscurity of the past with the present. In Alberto Toscano's gloss on Canfora for *The New Left Review*, Toscano justifies the historian's seemingly anachronistic approach toward history's ambiguities: "Analogy...involves a calibration of the degree of identity and difference between now and then; a bad analogy can obscure the singularity of the present by subsuming it under some paradigmatic past, or distort the contours of history through rear-projection of the present" (152). The calibration intrinsic in the process of analogical thinking addresses solidarity activism's dual predicament of potentially annexing a counterpart's struggle and the notion that our Third World others are beyond our understanding, a view that necessarily discredits egalitarian political allegiances.¹⁵¹ Solidarity narrative, then, answers its own liabilities by redefining the solidarity in the language of the literary parallel as a means to usefully explore continuities between distinct experiences, histories, and desires without rendering them identical. For Dunbar-Ortiz her desire to partake in a revolutionary process and align her goals with those of the Sandinistas and the Miskitu impels her to diagram continuities between conflicts in Central America and preoccupations about circumstances in the United States.

¹⁵¹ One of the most powerful arguments for the alterity of vulnerable populations in the Third World occurs in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's landmark essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" As the title suggests, beyond anything else the subaltern is defined by her silence, a silence imposed by her complete subordination to social structures, material conditions, and to the knowledge schemas employed by those who attempt to understand her. More than a neatly represented rural peasantry or dispossessed indigenous person, the subaltern in Spivak's work represents the point of almost absolute subordination and absolute alterity. She writes, "the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous" (Spivak "Subaltern" 79). Because the subaltern is somehow both outside of and within our parameters of knowledge, the value of the subaltern for solidarity practices resides in the concept's integral imperative to ethically engage with her even when suffering, disenfranchisement, cultural or gender difference renders the call to ethical obligation unrecognizable. Although it might also be dangerous to treat our ethical counterpart as beyond dialogue and beyond relation, as Spivak seems to do, she nevertheless reminds us that certain social and political differentials between comrades in solidarity may distort that relationship with the potential of ruining the shared project.

In the course of her first visit to Miskitia, the ancestral homeland of the Miskitu people in Nicaragua, Dunbar-Ortiz shuffles between a tangle of analogies. In a Miskitu village across the river from Honduras, where Contra forces trained and armed camps of battle-ready indigenous peoples, Dunbar-Ortiz contemplates the weight of the moment as a dwelling within history. She writes:

I felt that I was inside a moment of history...I had never felt that way before, and always wondered what it would be like to be inside an important historical moment. I had participated in historic events of the sixties...but I never had the feeling of being inside a moment of history, not as I did in that shabby marginal corner of the globe called the Miskitia. (Dunbar-Ortiz *Blood* 83)

The passage renders history as an object of experience, as something inhabited rather than precipitated or halted. In a way, Dunbar-Ortiz experiences this moment in Miskitia as alive with transformative potential.

This capacious feeling brings Dunbar-Ortiz to an analogical set of correlations between her childhood Oklahoma and the Miskitu village she visits. At times, her comparisons magnify the distance between the two places: "Western Oklahoma was dry...with cycles of drought...and rain was a precious commodity," and while in Miskitia's downpours "Land turned to water." In moments others, she narrows their differences: "evocations from my childhood provoked by the ambience" included "the very poverty and ruralness of the place." Furthermore, "Even the Norther, that frigid wind that always brought in its wake my worst asthma attacks, blew into the Miskitia, no longer cold but just as deadly, because it carried in its wake malaria-bearing mosquitoes." In this sequence of speculative parallels, Dunbar-Ortiz inflates and deflates the proximity between the two places, caught in the reverie of a revolutionary scenario that reveals

“a part of my own lost history” (*Blood* 83). The parallels between Miskitia and Oklahoma, call attention to Dunbar-Ortiz's family history and her indigenous heritage. To extend the parallel further, just as *Blood on the Border* portrays the migration of Nicaragua's Miskitu, coerced and otherwise, across the border with Honduras and into war camps, Dunbar-Ortiz's Oklahoma became the site of several Cherokee settlements after the Trail of Tears' cruel thousand-mile trek following the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

As she extends the analogous situations of Miskitia and Western Oklahoma, enveloped in what she sees as an event of transnational significance, a further analogy disrupts Dunbar-Ortiz's trajectory of thought: the creeping presence of consumer capitalism. Along with the increasing rhetoric of anticommunism among the Miskitus, Dunbar-Ortiz encounters a longing “for the good old days of access to products from the United States, products that were no longer available.” She correlates the Miskitu's complaints with her own family's: “I recalled how my family considered only Wonder Bread to be bread. My mother baked the best bread in the county, but sold it in town in order to buy Wonder Bread” (Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood* 84). Through these correlations Dunbar-Ortiz comes to understand how the Miskitu interpret the Sandinista revolution as, at best, deprivation. The realization that appetites for the products of consumer capitalism, that which tolerates no other logic as limit to its ambitions, endanger the transformation at work in Nicaragua puts an end to Dunbar-Ortiz's analogical musings. Like so many trinkets exchanged for Native American pacification or cooperation with early American settlers, consumerist appetites introduce the dynamic that could undo the Sandinista revolution as well as the Miskitu people. Thus, the Sitting Bull quotation, “The love of possession is a disease with them,” which Dunbar-Ortiz cites in *Outlaw Woman*, seems equally relevant in this context (379). The scene from Miskitia also foreshadows the Sandinista defeat by the neoliberal program

of President Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro in 1990, which combined an increase in foreign investment with increasing privatization.

Conclusion

For all of its ardent, sometimes complicated support, the Central America solidarity movement ran aground after the defeat of the Sandinistas's electoral defeat in 1990. However, the movement's role in blunting the ambitions of President Reagan and his neoconservative cohort should not be devalued. "Without the movement's opposition," Smith insists, "the administration's policy actions would have been much more overt, intense, and unrelenting, and the human misery and loss of life in Central America would have been greater" (*Resisting* 368). Smith's insight also points toward the movement's broader cultural significance: the recurring hope of arranging constituencies and their outrage against the mandates of a foreign policy strategy that insists upon the unqualified triumph of its hegemony and social vision over the hemisphere. Similarly, how some of CAPSM's participants tell stories about and compose narrative worlds that incorporate Central American concerns suggests an interrelation between writing, thinking, and practicing solidarity. In its best moments, solidarity narrative resists the reification of peoples into objects of imperialist endeavor and counterinsurgent imperatives, and it charts interests along similar axes to those sought by Central America's resurgent left. Analogical thinking is the feature of solidarity narrative that makes such alliances imaginable.

Meanwhile, just as solidarity's shortcomings find literary expression in Jennifer Harbury's and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's narratives, failures of imagination make their absence felt. In March 1995, at the commencement of Harbury's last hunger strike, in Washington DC, she notes the diverse spectrum of supporters. Besides the presence of movement luminaries like torture

survivor Sister Dianna Ortiz, Harbury refers to how "The Salvadoran community backs us, too, and a Salvadoran band strikes up the free-spirited rhythmic sounds of Central America. Soon people begin to dance and clap, giving us quite a mood of hope and life, a demand for hope and life" (*Everardo* 311). That the Salvadoran diaspora's "support" for Harbury's fight to for the government's accountability for state terror in Guatemala might also manifest some element of their struggles, but that resonance seems lost on the author. The following chapter takes up the issue of the Central American diaspora and its persistence in charting a future for struggles of justice and liberation.

Chapter 4

"Configurations of Justice in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*"

"To be exiled is not to disappear but to shrink, to slowly or quickly get smaller and smaller until we reach our real height, the true height of the self."

– Roberto Bolaño, "Exiles"

Although the dual dilemma of sustaining Central America's uprisings and pursuing justice for violence from the ensuing wars troubled a great deal of the Central American diaspora, their literature produces few narrative representations of what such redress might look like.¹⁵² Héctor Tobar's novel, *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998), prominently features the most problematic realization of justice in the literature of Central American immigrants: revenge against the former commander of a death squad. Set during the 1992 L.A. riots, Tobar depicts the collision of two characters from opposite ends of Guatemala's civil war: Guillermo Longoria, a former death squad operative, and Antonio Bernal, a civilian husband and father of two of Longoria's numerous victims. Haunted by shame and grief, Antonio has fled to Los Angeles, where, after years of struggling in low-wage jobs he finds himself without work or housing. In juxtaposition to Antonio, Longoria works for a *remesas* (remittances) courier service. Like Antonio, Longoria's American existence seems a far cry from the social situation of his childhood as a poor indigenous *campesino*. He too has failed to put the war behind him, as he

¹⁵² Sociologist Susan Biblier Coutin sketches the implicit idealism of Central American activism around residency and refugee issues along these lines: "Through both their manipulations of traditional models of citizenship and their invention of alternative forms of membership, Salvadoran activists and immigrants advocated a moral order in which citizenship and justice would be linked. According to activists, this order would include liberated spaces in which legal citizenship would be irrelevant to the distribution of rights and services. It would include an analysis regarding the connections between neoliberalism and immigration" (161). Hence, Biblier Coutin reconstructs a transnational, utopian ideal at the core of activism around refugee issues that she observed in her ethnographies of El Rescate, or The Rescue, and CARECEN (the Central American Resource Center). According to Hector Perla, the first Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement committees were formed by Central American exiles, whose "primary goal...was to draw the diaspora's attention to the unjust economic conditions and violent repression that their compatriots were suffering at the hands of their home governments with U.S. complicity" ("Venció" 144).

perceives fragments of previous events and their underlying conflict everywhere in his life.

Antonio, unaware of Longoria's residence in Los Angeles, recognizes the former sergeant's jaguar tattoo and his "*cara de maton*," or killer's face, in which "Dead dictators and demagogues lived on" (Tobar 25).¹⁵³ Longoria fails to recognize in Antonio anything more than "*una cara que da lastima*," a countenance that suggests the gullibility and bad luck of the Guatemalan people. Tobar even conveys the rivals' polarity in their names: emotionally and existentially shrunk by his experiences, the narrator refers to Antonio by his first name; while his rival, Longoria, a decorated veteran of the Guatemalan army and author of Antonio's misery, is referred to by his family name.¹⁵⁴ The story unfolds from the unforeseen encounter between the two men, after which Antonio finds a purpose: to avenge his leftist wife Elena and his baby son Carlitos. The L.A. riots provide a context of suspended laws and upheaval that allows Antonio to seek redress. Depending on one's perspective, the novel is a story about securing revolutionary justice or merely getting even.

Like Antonio, this chapter is preoccupied with how to realize justice. By engaging the problem of representing justice for the counterinsurgency's abuses and also attempting to encompass other abuses and exploitations within this formulation, I suggest that Tobar's novel introduces a version of the political imaginary committed toward a future politics of redress. It follows that the storylines of *The Tattooed Soldiers'* exiled and dispossessed characters are

¹⁵³ Tobar places this encounter in the early chapters of the novel, within the first hundred pages. Antonio and his roommate José Juan take temporary respite from their homelessness in MacArthur Park only to happen upon Longoria playing chess.

On his website, Tobar explains how he came upon inspiration for the novel in his work as a columnist at the *L.A. Times*, "In 1989, I wrote a front-page story about Salvadoran soldiers joining the stream of refugees from Central America to Southern California: a social worker at the agency El Rescate told me a story about a client of hers who had spotted a death-squad member in MacArthur Park, which was the central meeting place of L.A.'s Central American community. That anecdote became the germ, many years later, of *The Tattooed Soldier*" ("The Tattooed Soldier").

¹⁵⁴ Throughout the chapter I follow Tobar's choices regarding how he refers to his central protagonists in order to emphasize their antagonism as well as their roles of victim and perpetrator.

occasions for ruminating on the meaning and representation of justice, something reactionary imaginaries write out of existence as a matter of course. The process of conceptualizing the politics of justice or redress is a means of sustaining the legacies of insurrection in Central America, even on the verge of their conclusions

At the height of the riots, Antonio shoots Longoria and drags his bleeding body into an abandoned tunnel. Out of his hunger for vengeance, Antonio requires that Longoria both die and that he recognize why, in whose name, he dies. He asks the bleeding soldier, "Do you remember Elena and Carlos? San Cristobal?" (Tobar 300). Weakened by loss of blood, Longoria fails answer; he recalls killing neither Antonio's wife nor his child because his offenses were so numerous. "There were so many villages, so many people," he reflects (Tobar 300). As Longoria succumbs to the tunnel's darkness, he travels back to a pristine Guatemala, "at the foot of a green mountain, wild plants and shrubs all around them, forlorn palm trees and tall milkweed" (Tobar 300). In what is perhaps a hallucination, a fantasy, or a magical realist fracture in the novel's largely realist narrative mode, Longoria returns to his boyhood state, walking toward his mother through luminous cornfields. "So strange and happy," the narrator suggests, "after all of these years, to be wearing his peasant clothes again" (Tobar 301). His mother whispers, "Balam," the word for jaguar from the *Popul Vuh*, in a language he had long considered lost.¹⁵⁵ In this moment, Longoria analeptically returns to his mother, in an apparently Mayan afterlife, as the boy whose lingering during an errand found him conscripted in the Guatemalan military. This conclusion neatly secures redress for Antonio, but the same time it steals away Longoria, also a victim of circumstance, from the darkness of the tunnel and of his crimes into a suspended and innocent past.

¹⁵⁵ The *Popul Vuh* is considered to be the indigenous Maya's equivalent to the Christian Bible.

Among authors of Central American heritage in the U.S., Tobar offers the most resolute, if not grisly, illustration of redress for war crimes through the killing of the tattooed soldier.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the chapters of *The Tattooed Soldier* focalized through Antonio encourage the view that killing Longoria might serve to redeem him not only for his ostensibly craven flight from Guatemala in the aftermath of his family's assassination, but also for his present state, adrift and homeless in Los Angeles. In several places, Antonio obsesses over Longoria by describing him as a walking embodiment of injustice and at other times his categorical opposite: "*There is a balance between us. We are opposites balancing a scale, we are mathematics. I am tall, he is short. I live under sky, he lives under a roof. He has a girlfriend, I am alone. He has a job, I do not. He is the killer, I am his victim*" (Tobar 234, ital. in original). Prone to flights of fancy, Antonio imagines himself the champion of all Longoria's victims. "I did not bury my wife and child," he admits, "but I can stand and seek vengeance, for them and for the many, for the anonymous dead" (Tobar 183). Read through Antonio's narrative, then, this murder becomes a fantasy of masculine agency—retaliation against the man responsible for his loss in Guatemala and his degradation in Los Angeles. Instances such as these imply that Antonio confuses success in his personal vendetta with justice for all of Longoria's victims.

Critical attention to Tobar's novel has skewed less toward exploring themes of justice and more in the direction of the recovery and recognition of identity. While critics do not explore identity to the exclusion of justice—indeed they see both themes as interdependent—they nevertheless advance the view that the reconciliation of the ethnic self with her proper identity is

¹⁵⁶ Novelists and fiction writers of Central American heritage prefer to take a number of strategies toward historical atrocities by testifying to events, as in Victor Montejo's *Testimony: The Death of a Guatemalan Village*; by highlighting the history of violence's silent persistence in everyday life, as in Sylvia Sellers-Garcia's *When the Ground Turns in its Sleep*; or by imagining the total reconciliation of war's rivals, as in Silvio Sirias' *Bernardo and the Virgin*. Mario Bencastro argues that literature should not undertake a prescriptive mission at all but should serve as a medium for healing: "Nor does literature propose to return to the past and stagnate in it, nor to open old wounds, but rather to assure that those wounds scar adequately through study, meditation and understanding of the facts and their consequences" ("Introduction" 106).

the primary platform for the struggle for justice. Scholarship about identity in *The Tattooed Soldier* concerns itself with whether or not to elaborate identity through an account of constitutive historical injuries, to employ identity as a means of healing historical wounds, or to consolidate identity around the demands for redress of present inequities. Hence, in scholarship on *The Tattooed Soldier*, arguments about cultural identity stand in for questions of politics.

For critic and novelist Arturo Arias, the novel and its characters express the null space of Central American cultural and social identity in the United States. He asserts that the lives of the characters are "unpresentable in this topographical site of migration. [They] have no meaning outside of Guatemala" (Arias 169). Neither of the novel's antagonists "has dreams of reimagining himself, of constructing a new subjectivity," he argues, "The uncanny situation lived in their home country shaped their attitudes forever" (Arias 170). When the broader society will not recognize Longoria and Antonio's histories, pasts that they find impossible to transcend, their narratives exemplify how "Central American-Americans end up in denial of their own beingness," according to Arias (183). Incapable of embracing their inherent being, Central American immigrants' position in American society "negates the possibility for an identity politics" and, by implication, any notion of a struggle for redress (Arias 183).

Ana Patricia Rodríguez questions Arias' pessimism and instead insists that *The Tattooed Soldier's* plot correlates with the processes of healing from the trauma of low-intensity conflict.¹⁵⁷ In *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures*, Rodríguez investigates the novel's occasional references to Mayan cosmology in order

¹⁵⁷ Rodríguez poses a more general critique of Arias' position from the perspective of Central American literatures in the U.S. in her entry for *The Routledge Companion to U.S. Latino Literatures*: "Indeed, it is time that we think of Central American diasporic cultures and literatures not as invisible but as excessible, exceeding, magnifying, and amplifying geographic and cultural locations, pushing the limits of discourses on the Americas, and emerging anew with every novel, essay, performance, poem, and art-work produced. Thus, Central America becomes more visible in its diasporic travels and translocations across the world" (452).

to minimize the mechanistic logic of Antonio's revenge. According to Rodríguez, the novel's allegorical resonance with the liberation and renewal of the mythological hero twins through their death and rebirth indicates that, despite past trauma, "other life narratives are always possible" (126). Thus translated into a mythological register, the story becomes both a cultural reenactment of past traumas, healing, and a mechanism for transcending history (Rodríguez 114). By reconstructing the contest between Antonio and Longoria as a buried allegory from Mayan mythology, Rodríguez restores to these rivals their common origins.

Marta Caminero-Santangelo rejects Rodríguez's redemptive reading of *The Tattooed Soldier*, preferring to underscore its failure to represent the provisional identities that connect the novel's characters with other Latinos/as and other racial minorities groups in the United States. She insists, "Yet, unlike [Francisco Goldman's] *The Ordinary Seaman*, which downplays the politics of 'communism' as an obstacle to U.S.-made 'Latino' identity, *The Tattooed Soldier* is far more pessimistic about how *latinidad* might bridge this fundamental historical opposition," because both novels' characters seem to find past events in Guatemala interfering with their identification with other Latinos (Caminero-Santangelo 185). Caminero-Santangelo insists that a pan-Latino identity would offer a strong means to contest extreme nativist politics in the United States and to foster hope similar to that manifested in the 2006 immigrant uprisings (191).

There are good reasons for examining Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* in light of issues of identity and the politics of recognition. As one of the first novels by a U.S. Central American to reach wide acclaim, Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* certainly offers the possibility of novel configurations of identity through narrator, characters, and forms of storytelling its author disseminates. Furthermore, by unearthing the traumas that Central American immigrants carry with them into Latino metropolises like L.A., Tobar's novel may stimulate efforts to recuperate

wounded psyches and subjectivities, or to question whether adequate circumstances exist such that healing might occur in the first place. Similarly, by excavating the silenced histories of Central Americans in the United States, Tobar's novel repudiates the hypostasis of mainstream American multiculturalism's mosaic of cultures for rendering Central American immigrants culturally unrecognizable .

At the same time, the critical preoccupation with the recognition and/or repair of identity distracts us from the novel's most basic quandary: a prolonged exploration of the boundary between revenge and justice. If much of the novel is engrossed in scrutinizing appropriate means for redress through Antonio and at the same time repressing culpability for past atrocities by way of Longoria, what other configurations of justice does the novel offer its readers? In what ways do Tobar's other configurations of justice exceed the individualist limitations of Antonio's quest to overcome his guilt and personal paralysis? How does an understanding of Central American political movements and organizations in Los Angeles during this period supplement our understanding of justice in *The Tattooed Soldier*? And, more generally, in what ways do calls for justice for the barbarity of war and its attendant traumatic experiences complicate, reinforce, or expand the geographical reach of revolutionary struggles that began El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua?

In order to explore *The Tattooed Soldier*'s other configurations of justice I contextualize the novel in terms of Hector Tobar's anti-imperialism; through representations of Central American immigrant's material conditions in *The Tattooed Soldier* and another contemporaneous novel, Mario Bencastro's *Odyssey to the North*; and through the Central American diaspora's defiant labor and solidarity activism, particularly in Los Angeles. I argue that Antonio's revenge (Tobar's first configuration of justice) embodies the reactionary logic that Tobar criticizes in his

indictment of U.S. counterinsurgency policy. Furthermore, as the effects of counterinsurgency campaigns push increasing amounts of refugees to the United States, their conditions, characterized by "exposure" to danger and exploitation, and legal/cultural "inexistence," cry out for further redress in ways that exceed the novel's moralizing revenge. Evident within his representation of the 1992 L.A. riots, Tobar's second formulation of justice appears to address these issues by encompassing multiple articulations of justice through mass action. However, the riots never resolve into overarching demands or into a specific collectivity, and instead the rebellion subsides into a festival of "settling accounts," a mistaken carnivalesque. The novel's brief allusion to Central Americans' fearless political engagement in Los Angeles, calls attention to a third configuration of justice in the novel—what I will call an interrogative configuration of justice. While less clearly defined, this more expansive form of redress for both the brutality of war and the depredations suffered by immigrants points away from the recrimination of vengeance and transmits the liberatory potential of revolution in Central America to the United States. By underscoring the political valences of the novel, my argument makes common cause with scholars that emphasize the new "criticality of Latino/a literature" for its criticism of what appears to be the U.S. government's commitment to endless war and with scholars who argue for the transnational continuity between political struggle in the isthmus and in the United States.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Theresa Delgadillo argues for the unprecedented representation and critique of war in contemporary Latino/a literature. "This transition in Latino/a literature to the new reality of what seems like endless war," she asserts, "also opens the conflicts, policies, economies, and perspectives driving war to Latino/a critique" (Delgadillo 600). Delgadillo articulates several features of this new Latino/a literature that apply to Tobar's novel, including descriptions of the social divisions and physical devastation of war during and after the conflicts (601). These Latino/a narratives and those like them extend "a uniquely Latino/a critique throughout the hemisphere" by holding up a mirror to contemporary conditions and interacting with the rest of the Americas (Delgadillo 601).

Emphasizing instead discursive parallels between urban Central American youth in the U.S. and guerrilla struggle in El Salvador, Gareth Williams defines a young Salvadoran's narrative fragment as "a localized narrative capable of underscoring and upholding the overarching possibility of insurrectional continuity and perhaps even of transformation; of positioning oneself, in other words, as the effect of an ongoing transborder genealogy of desire that itself opens up and upholds the promise of futurity" (158).

Héctor Tobar's Anti-imperialist Ethic

Despite the fact that he was born in the United States, Héctor Tobar locates his family's homeland at the edges of his everyday consciousness:

Guatemala is there in the extended silences of my severed existence. I walk and play in the dry California air, squint in the desert light, and I think of the empire of metal, plastic and electronics around me. I know I belong here, in this modern, self-confident and brazenly ambitious place; but that I also belong in that less modern other country that's on the other end of a plane ride, a country that's hopeful in a much different way and filled with most of the people whose bloodlines are tied to mine. ("This Is What" 254)

In this passage from a 2013 essay, "This Is What I Carry with Me When I Write," Tobar articulates an experience of proximity between his life in Los Angeles and his heritage in Guatemala, and he folds the history of one country into the reality of another. Born in 1963, shortly after his parents' immigration to the United States, Tobar shares an affinity with more recent Central American arrivals to the United States, whose numbers grew rapidly during the 1980s and 90s, most notably in Los Angeles. Less than an exiled nationalism, and yet more than nostalgic attachment, recognizing how Tobar articulates his relationship to Central America, I argue, reveals his intentions in *The Tattooed Soldier*—particularly, his sensitivity to the aspirations of the disempowered and his ethical anti-imperialism.

Before discussing Tobar's motives, however, it's worth clarifying his role in relationship to the groundswell of other Central American immigrants to the United States. The 1980s saw an unprecedented influx of Central Americans into the United States. According to U.S. Census data, at the end of the decade Los Angeles had experienced an eightfold increase in Salvadorans

and a sevenfold increase in Guatemalans, enlarging the Central American population in L.A. from 125,200 in 1980 to 456,146 by 1990 (Hamilton et al., *Seeking Community* 45, 2). Unlike the thousands of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and, to a lesser degree, Nicaraguans fleeing to southern California, Tobar articulates his family's exodus as largely a matter of choice.¹⁵⁹ "My mother was 19 and pregnant," he concedes, "and my father had saved up enough money for a television or to move to the United States or Europe. He decided the television could wait, and they moved to Los Angeles" (qtd. in McNulty, "Pulitzer"). Arriving much in advance of the 1980s surge in Central American immigrants, Tobar also climbed the ladder of social mobility in ways that were unavailable to the later arrivals, working as a journalist for newspapers that had previously employed his father as a delivery man (McNulty, "Pulitzer").

Still, Tobar shares with Central Americans weighty memories of the region, ones that seem to tangle him up in ethical dilemmas. On a Christmas visit to distant relatives in Guatemala, an eleven- or twelve-year-old Héctor trounces his cousins in a game of kickball, and he comes to understand, "with envious glances and looks of admiration from my second cousins, that I gleam with the healthy constitution of a well-fed US boy, a child who can be anything he wants and who knows it" (Tobar, "This Is What" 254). His relatives reveal to Tobar the ethical liabilities of his departure to the United States, a flight that guarantees a higher quality of life and a purposive sense of his existence in the world, privileges that register on the size and coordination of his body relative to those of his cousins.

¹⁵⁹ In 1997, Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla argued that "The majority of Central Americans (up to a half of million) live in Los Angeles, with substantial numbers in San Francisco, Texas (especially Houston), Washington, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Miami" ("Central American Migration" 91).

Out of a sense of obligation to those left behind and those who suffer as they cross over, Tobar defines his writing with reference to a persistent ethical onus. He describes the writer's task by way of metaphors of travel:

The journey back and forth across the continent, in automobiles and airplanes, and also in my imagination: that's what makes me a writer. It gives me an eye for the absurd, the unfair, the poignant, the magnificent. It gives me an aesthetic, and a sense of literary purpose with altruistic overtones: I feel the need to speak for many. (Tobar, "This Is What" 256-7)

Writing, for Tobar, involves the traversal of different realities such that by juxtaposing their contradictions the writer develops a far-reaching knowledge of human inequity. We might compare this dialectical impulse to the moment when he recognizes that economic inequality, which nourishes his life and deprives his relatives of that same nourishment, is an arbitrary effect of geography. Tobar asserts that the breadth of human injustice demands that he "speak for many," as if through his journalistic, expository, and literary narratives he might stand in for those robbed of a voice. Although comparisons between Tobar's sense of writerly duty and the potential blind-sidedness or paternalism of the ethical tourist are not out of the question, such criticisms fail to grasp Tobar's subtle stance with regard to the powers that perpetuate these radical inequalities.

Raised in the midst of images and heroic stories about Che Guevara, Tobar gained a greater appreciation for the forces that structure the geopolitics of Central America during his undergraduate studies at the University of California Santa Cruz.¹⁶⁰ In his coursework, he

¹⁶⁰ Tobar describes how his father "seethed in Spanish about *imperialismo* in group discussions led by a Guatemalan leftist whose circle of would-be rebels later contemplated hijacking a plane to Cuba—it was a bit of a fad in those days" (*Translation* 9).

learned to associate concepts like empire and imperialism "with the world of the living and not...dead Romans or vanquished Aztecs" (Tobar, "This Is What" 254). Tobar likewise studied the relationship between concepts like "exile, diaspora, displacement," and imperialism, and how the tethering together of these concepts "explain[s] something essential about my existence" ("This Is What" 255).

While Tobar's new awareness does not crystallize around concrete conclusions in "This Is What I Carry with Me When I Write," these statements allude to an understated, ethical anti-imperialism in his writing. As a journalist working throughout Latin America and even in war-torn Iraq, he frequently makes contact with the embodied ramifications of imperialism: malnutrition, shortened lifespans, dismemberment, and disarticulation of family and community. I call Tobar's downplayed anti-imperialism ethical because, in his novels and other writings, he seems to establish transnational chains of causality between agents of U.S. imperialism and the resulting horrors, but prefers to step aside rather than represent any explicit anti-imperialist cultural politics. However, rather than assert that this omission is symptomatic of an ideological blockage in the novelist's capacity to map social relations, one could simply assume that Tobar's transnational scale renders such a project daunting if not preemptory. Throughout the chapter, I hope to press on Tobar's anti-imperialist intent when sifting through the notions of justice present in *The Tattooed Soldier* in order to explore how the narrative extends the reach of insurrection in Central America.

Unspooling Imperialism

Circa 1982, a college-educated Tobar returns to Guatemala and learns from his relatives about the state-imposed terror in the streets of Guatemala City. He perceives, amongst his

family, the lineaments of a socialized mourning over the government's counterinsurgency campaign and a protectiveness of their foreign-born relation. "They wanted to shield me from the murderous and anarchic crimes of the empire," he later reflects, "From the official violence, wielded in a brutish but yet somehow effective manner, imposing silence upon all but a brave few" ("This" 255). Tobar charges neither the Guatemalan government nor a homicidal officer corps but the obscure machinations of an imperialist power with the brutality suffered by the Guatemalan people. In this section, I turn to *The Tattooed Soldier* as a means to connect the United States to the terror and genocide in Guatemala. Through Guillermo Longoria's story, I will demonstrate how Tobar indicts the reactionary responses to Central America's insurrectionary movements explored in previous chapters on counterinsurgency theory and neoconservative ideology. By explicating how these ideologies seep into Longoria's everyday consciousness, Tobar exposes their imperialist essence. Hence, *The Tattooed Soldier* denounces U.S. imperialism by connecting Longoria's cruelty to training programs in the United States, by exhibiting the costs of counterinsurgency measures in Guatemala, and by interrogating the reactionary strand through what I will call a "depopulated imaginary" that indicates a complicity between U.S. reactionary logic and violence in Central America. Ultimately, Tobar's critique of counterinsurgency and the reactionary strand invalidates the interpretation that Longoria's death represents justice for imperialist violence and that *The Tattooed Soldier* thus offers a fantasy of justice and reconciliation.

Indicting Longoria, Indicting Imperialism

According to anthropologist Jennifer Schirmer, human rights observers frequently misunderstand massive human rights violations committed by state forces as "irrational," the

result of "uncontrollable, bloodlusting commanders or poorly disciplined peasant recruits who need to be given a code of conduct—a view that ironically serves as an essentialist rationale by militaries for why they cannot control their own forces" (4). Schirmer begs to differ, "Rather than being irrational and out of control, many of these Latin American militaries are precisely in control and acting in their own best interests" (4). In other words, the consensus about military atrocities ignores how militaries, institutions that aspire toward uncompromising regimentation of their personnel, must systematize brutality through stringent training.¹⁶¹ Consequently, the importance of *The Tattooed Soldier*, I want to suggest, resides in how the novel subverts this mistaken view of military brutality by detailing not only the consequences of counterinsurgency training, but more importantly how such training seems to shape the soldier's perceptions and judgments about the world within and beyond conflict environments. Of equal significance is how Tobar threads together U.S. military training programs in Fort Gulick, Panama, and Fort Bragg's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School with the massacres and assassinations perpetrated by forces trained to serve in Central America.

Throughout the novel, Longoria frequently returns to the diplomas and certificates he received after his many trainings as a way to itemize his accomplishments and to endow his various missions with coherence and purpose. Meditating on the value of his military education, he asserts, "The intellect, strategic vision, and wisdom of great military leaders had been passed down to him" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 20-1). Acquiring the appropriate training for irregular warfare, as Tobar is quick to show, required that Longoria travel to bases in the Panama Canal Zone and to North Carolina. These are not merely passing references, because the location of Longoria's

¹⁶¹ In the abridged Guatemalan Truth Commission Report, *Memory of Silence: The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report*, investigators claim, "In considering the training methods of the armed forces...the [Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico] concludes that extreme cruelty was an intentional strategy used to produce and maintain a climate of terror among the population" (qtd. in Rothenberg 186).

training helps him concretize the meaning of the instruction he receives, a point I will develop in a moment.¹⁶²

Instead, through specific references to Fort Gulick and Fort Bragg Tobar points to the imperial history that underpins Longoria's military education. The United States established the Latin American Ground School at Fort Gulick in 1946 to extend greater influence into Latin America and to fill the vacuum left by European powers after World War II (Gill 62).¹⁶³ Along with the 1947 Inter American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, the School formed a part of a broader hemispheric strategy that, according to anthropologist Lesley Gill, "assigned...Latin American allies the task of guarding against the threat posed by 'internal subversion'" (61). In the aftermath of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, policymakers' preoccupation with "internal subversion increased," and, as Gill explains, "Training the militaries of the Americas to fight communism became [the Ground School's] *raison d'être*, and counterinsurgency instruction evolved as a major new focus of its activities" (74). Further, the program underwent a rebranding with the new name, the School of the Americas, in 1963 (Gill 74). In 1984, the School moved to Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, but its name cannot be extricated from the numerous crimes of several of its Central American alumni, including the assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, massacres in El Salvador and Guatemala, the emergence of death squads, and the use of torture during interrogations.

¹⁶² Longoria seems to credit his service in the military for enlarging his perspective on life and human possibility. Reflecting on his first battle experience, Longoria is allowed to ride in a helicopter with a wounded comrade. During this flight he gains consciousness of "who he had been before he joined the army and what he was now. He could see that when you worked a plot of land there were dozens, no, hundreds and thousands more like it all around you. For the first time, he could see where he fit in the world" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 193). The life of the soldier, in this moment, dwarfs his previous campesino/indigenous reality. At the same time, this consciousness comes at a cost, as Alvaro, a fellow conscript, bleeds out from bullet wounds. He is the first casualty from which Longoria turns his head.

¹⁶³ Devastated by World War II, European powers redirected resources for similar projects in Latin America to repairing their own damaged infrastructure (Gill 62).

Longoria also trained at North Carolina's Fort Bragg, the epicenter of President John F. Kennedy's promotion of counterinsurgency theory and training, an institution where Special Forces instructors continue to train foreign troops (McClintock 187). Ventures to train foreign soldiers, like those portrayed in *The Tattooed Soldier*, received a boost from the 1976 International Military Education and Training program, which subsidized their tuition in the U.S. (Gill 78). In a further effort to address Latin America's 1980s budget shortfalls, Ronald Reagan's administration oversaw the use of Special Forces' Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) and some U.S. intelligence agencies as primary vehicles for training Latin American soldiers in the field (Gill 78, 85). Tobar embeds Longoria's military service and training within this Cold War intensification of counterinsurgency training in and around Latin America.

Guillermo Longoria's extensive career began with haphazard coincidence. The Guatemalan army coercively recruited him as a teenager, ambushing men and youths not having served in the army at a local movie theater. In order to contrast the character of military force with the inclinations of the teenage Longoria, Tobar places him in a theater showing the 1983 film *E.T.*, a movie that depicts the emotive power of a gentle extraterrestrial. This contrast connotes how coercion and regimented brutality—against insurgents, suspected collaborators, and also conscripts—molded soldiers' attitudes and behavior to both tolerate and employ brutality as tool for controlling the populace.¹⁶⁴

Longoria first encounters discussion of counterinsurgency tactics during a class at Ft. Bragg taught by Lt. Sanchez, a Puerto Rican-American soldier.¹⁶⁵ The lieutenant explains to

¹⁶⁴ Tobar depicts Basic Training in the novel as a series of beatings and humiliations for the teenaged Guillermo Longoria: "Calisthenics and truncheon blows seemed to be integral elements of the training...If you slipped in the mud or fell behind in the line of joggers, the soldiers struck you on the shoulders or on the back with their batons, or they kicked you with their boots" (60).

¹⁶⁵ The School of the Americas depends on U.S. Latino instructors to facilitate communication across cultural and language barriers. Yet U.S. military officials regard the dependence on Latino instructors with ambivalence. Lesley Gill describes how "a former SOA commandant, who ran the institution in the late 1980s, believed that the U.S.

Longoria that in order to combat the persuasive power of the guerrillas' promises of a new society, redistributed land, reduced poverty, and racial equality, state forces must undermine the power of such ideas and undo their power to bind together social movements. "To break these bonds of the mind you had to strike at the mind," Sanchez explains, "And the most powerful weapon to aim at the mind was fear. Terror" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 221). As the lecture progresses, Longoria comes to understand that armies slow to employ the social function of fear risk losing the war. "Dispense enough fear," Sanchez continues "and the people will be paralyzed into inaction. And inaction is what we're shooting for here. Inaction is equilibrium, the balance of things, the way things should be" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 222). If fear compels widespread paralysis by way of individual minds, Longoria learns a second principle that governs allegiance: "The peasants would learn through brutality. Longoria understood this because he had been a *campesino* once, until the army rescued him. The peasants would be with you only if you beat them, if you forced them to take your side" (Tobar 222). Filtered through Longoria's recollections, this lecture makes explicit what counterinsurgency documents cannot. According to Sanchez, the key mechanism of what COIN theorists call "psychological operations" is less a calculus of loss and gain than it is the overwhelming power of socialized terror. Likewise, Sanchez distills the various nuances of garnering popular loyalty—including civic action, pursuit of government accountability, and political engagement—recommended by training manuals to the common denominator of coercive force. In this manner, Tobar denudes counterinsurgency discourse of its benevolent technocratic veneer and exposes its violent imperial core. Moreover, Longoria's apparently haphazard association between violence and *campesino* allegiance evokes

Army used the School as a 'dumping ground' for unqualified Puerto Rican instructors" (41). Whatever our assessment of this baldly racist diatribe, it is a testament to Tobar's research that he made Lt. Sanchez Puerto Rican.

a long chain of subjugation that connects the feudal aspects of Central American societies to strong-arm strategy from the United States.

Beyond establishing a web of complicity between the ideologies of foreign policymakers, the American military, and officers in the Guatemalan army like Longoria, Tobar means to inculcate the U.S. in the Guatemalan state's atrocities. He does this by depicting how Longoria, distinct from his classmates, instantly assents to the logic of Sanchez's lecture, "¡Si, mi teniente! ¡Yo entiendo!" [Yes, lieutenant! I understand!] (Tobar, *Tattooed* 223). That Longoria immediately recognizes the truth of his education and that this training later informs his assessments of the phenomena of war and his conduct implicates the ambitions of U.S. government officials with the atrocities he later commits and the politicized violence taking place throughout Central America during the 1980s and 90s.

The range of Longoria's career demonstrates the multi-institutional collaboration perpetuating this violence. Although he begins service in the Guatemalan army, as a teenaged foot soldier, he climbs the ranks to become a sergeant in a Special Operations unit, the Jaguar Battalion, and ultimately retires as the commander of an assassination and interrogation squad. His final assignment commanding the Lorenzo Amaya Anti-Communist Brigade, as a covert agent of the Guatemalan army, points to the customary rapport between military and so-called paramilitary forces, a practice that offered the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and the United States (in regard to the Contras in Nicaragua) pretenses for plausible deniability of responsibility.¹⁶⁶ Incorporating Longoria into these various assignments permits Tobar to portray

¹⁶⁶ Demonstrating the fluid movement of such operatives through official and unofficial security forces, Lesley Gill describes how Honduran School of the Americas graduates helped form the infamous paramilitary Battalion 3-16. Battalion 3-16 carried out 184 disappearances in Honduras between 1979 and 1986. Furthermore, SOA graduate and former 3-16 member Gustavo Álvarez Martínez was later appointed commander of the Honduran armed forces (Gill 85). The Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) documents how, after the 1980s, former Battalion 3-16 troops advised Honduran police forces (UNHCR, "Honduras: Update"). Ivan Molloy notes a

different scales of violence within the narrative: regimented violence and humiliation inflicted on Longoria as a new initiate, targeted assassinations during his stint in the Lorenzo Amaya Brigade, and massacres of whole villages by the Jaguar Battalion.¹⁶⁷

More witness than participant during the Jaguar Battalion's first mass killing, Longoria beholds the irrational slaughter of villagers affiliated with the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, or the Movement for National Liberation, a party strongly committed to the President Efraín Ríos Montt and the army. Even as villagers present their MLN membership cards, the commanding officer directs his subordinates, "No shooting!...Everybody in the next village will know we're here. Knives only," and the troops proceed to hack apart the villagers with machetes (Tobar, *Tattooed* 246). Beyond instantiating the demonstrative violence characteristic of Guatemalan Special Forces units, this scene illustrates that the U.S. military's catastrophic Cold War counterinsurgency doctrines do not distinguish between apparent ally and potential enemy as every villager is condemned to die.¹⁶⁸

Because U.S. Cold War policy produces soldiers habituated to terror and cruelty, Tobar's representations of the field operations Longoria participates in provide him with fertile ground

similar fluidity of roles in order to fulfill government objectives on behalf of the Reagan administration in Nicaragua, a process the CIA dubbed "sheep dipping." Farmers historically "dipped" sheep in an anti-parasitic solution, in the same way that CIA agents might install themselves in a legitimate institution in order to establish clean credentials for penetrating adversary organizations. "Often, CIA and other service personnel," Molloy explains, "including [Special Operations Forces] would resign, or take leave, undertake clandestine operations in a 'private' capacity for the Enterprise [a private *de facto* foreign agency under the National Security Council], and then resume their services" (121). These examples speak to the multi-institutional integration of counterinsurgency policy and the exigency of secrecy in wars where the perceptions of the broader populace are crucial.

¹⁶⁷ During his assignment to the Lorenzo Amaya Brigade, Longoria participated in the assassination of Antonio's wife and child. The Bernal family had fled to San Cristóbal in order to avoid the torture and assassinations that befell their friends in the student left in Guatemalan City. This internal exile, however, ultimately does not protect them as Elena, Antonio's wife, begins advocating for slum dwellers at the edge of town. This advocacy brings her to the attention of municipal authorities who perceive Elena and Antonio as guerrillas hiding in their midst.

¹⁶⁸ Tobar clearly models the Jaguar Battalion after the U.S.-trained Kaibile units that I described in Chapter 1. He also seems to make reference to El Salvador's Atlacatl Battalion by naming the Jaguar Battalion after a symbol of power indigenous to the area. The Atlacatl Battalion was named for a mythical indigenous leader of Cuzcatlán who fiercely resisted the invasion of Spanish forces during the Conquest of Mesoamerica (Christian "Battalion"). The Atlacatl Battalion was also responsible for the brutal massacre of 750 Salvadoran villagers at El Mozoté (Grandin 90).

for condemning the U.S. government. Perhaps the most harrowing of these episodes involves Longoria's abstractions about the experience of murdering children with the Jaguar Battalion. He surmises that "the worst thing to remember [was] the sounds children make when they are dying. The flutter in the throat. Crying because they're bleeding all over the floor and it doesn't make any sense" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 64). In spite of his rationalizations that these children posed a threat to the stability of the Guatemalan government, Longoria cannot fully absolve himself: "And you, in the camouflage skin, are in the room with them, watching this happen. You are the ones who put the bullet in their bodies." He speculates on the children's last moments:

These are the last thumps of the tiny drum in my chest. Their eyes turn dreamy and faraway when they feel the blackness coming. The little boys see the darkness and call for their mothers. 'Mamá.' They don't want to be alone in the dark...To live forever with the voices of boys and girls, their last words...That was the biggest sacrifice. It took a lot out of a soldier to see this and hear this and live with it. You were never the same again.
(Tobar, *Tattooed* 64-65, ital. in original)

Conveying Longoria's ambivalence through these recurrent memories of dying children, moments that foreshadow his own death, Tobar signals to the reader that even those successfully disciplined by COIN doctrines comprehend the ethical abyss into which such practices cast them.

Longoria's equivocations notwithstanding, reactionary doctrines persevere in his experience of the world, influencing his reasoning about life in Los Angeles. More specifically, his expectations about L.A. were shaped by his early impressions of the United States through North Carolina's Fort Bragg, a site Longoria considers exemplary of "civilization." "Being here, in the United States for the first time, he could grasp the concept," Tobar explains, "This was a country where order and cleanliness reigned supreme" (*Tattooed* 216). The "tidy geometry" of

the streets on the base, the highways without garbage, and the spotlessness of his barracks captivate Longoria and give him a sense of the good life. Gill describes this cultural inculcation as a secondary component of U.S. military instruction of Latin American soldiers: "It initiated their incorporation into the ideology of the 'American way of life' by steeping them in a vision of empire that identified their aspirations with those of the United States, a process that...continues today" (65).¹⁶⁹ Much in contrast to Fort Bragg's "insistent orderliness," Longoria constructs an image of L.A. as a diseased and dissolute metropolis, clogged with filth, noise, addicts, AIDS cases, and gang members (Tobar, *Tattooed* 215). He fears that used hypodermic needles strewn in MacArthur Park might poke him and "*my muscles and bones will corrode and I will die here, alone in this room*" like the "skeleton men" perched in front of his building (Tobar, *Tattooed* 22, ital. in original).

Longoria's dread over the enfeebling contaminations of the city becomes an intense yearning for asepsis and silence, pathologies that Tobar ties to the character's military indoctrination. These preoccupations arise, for example, during weekly cleaning rituals in which Longoria scrubs every inch of his apartment and his body. An analogous longing occurs while he reads in his apartment and can't help but hear the dissonance of the building's other residents, particularly the children, kept inside for fear of "free-fire zone" of the streets (Tobar, *Tattooed* 59). "There was great disorder in the voices, too much shouting," Tobar writes, "He wanted all of these voices to go away, he wanted to be left alone. Their voices were like metal in his mouth" (*Tattooed* 60). At the most basic level, readers should understand the unpleasant intrusiveness of this human commotion as echoes of the lives Longoria has taken.

¹⁶⁹ Gill is quick to explain that "Local military commanders express these views to anyone who will listen, but their cultural rhetoric defines, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, what kinds of people count and by what measure" (30). Put another way, "the American way of life" as defined by military trainers is white, middle-class, and heterosexual (Gill 30).

On another level altogether, this passage transposes Cold War anxieties of communist infiltration and contamination onto Los Angeles. According to Longoria, speech itself is a threat; communist subversion is "An infection spread by ideas, a disease carried on the spoken word" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 170). Postulates about the contagion of ideas on missions in Guatemala produced conclusions for Longoria like, "This thing they were fighting was a cancer, and sometimes the children were contaminated too. You killed the cousins and uncles to make sure the virus was dead...The parents passed the virus along to their children" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 63). Through Longoria, Tobar illuminates how the use of a contagion metaphor to describe the insurgency's endangerment of the body politic entails the tragedy of annihilating those exposed to the contagion. Circling back, we see in this logic that Longoria's longing for silence—in response to how the city's disorder, noise, and pestilence crowd in on him—is one and the same as the counterinsurgency's dictate to decontaminate the body politic; it is a dream in which all voices might be silenced so the listener might not feel the responsibility to dominate them nor the burden of nagging guilt for their deaths. Put another way, Longoria aspires not to an absolute silence, but to an absolutist silence. His dream of genocidal silence is what I call the novel's *depopulated imaginary*. The *depopulated imaginary* betrays how reactionary arguments about order as the precondition of all social goods are tantamount to a vision of nations bereft of people and the disorderly noise they produce.

Reactionary Fantasies of Justice

Having arrived at the *depopulated imaginary* as the logical endpoint of reactionary thought, it is worth revisiting Antonio's revenge against Longoria within this framework of annihilation as reformation. As I suggested before, for Antonio, Longoria's death brings some

manner of redress, and for Longoria himself it brings some manner of respite, even reconciliation, through a fantasy of or transport to another world. The downside to this orderly closure, Longoria's death and the deliverance of both protagonists, is that it too exemplifies features of reactionary logic. Rather than declaim eye-for-an-eye reprisals as always inherently reactionary, however, I contend that how Tobar depicts the killing, along with the redemption it seems to offer both characters, reproduces the logic of the *depopulated imaginary*.

To explain this further, I turn to U.S. Ambassador to the UN Jeane Kirkpatrick's 1980s essay "The Hobbes Problem: Order, Authority, and Legitimacy in Central America," which provides an example of the argument that violence can redeem national populations. In this essay, Kirkpatrick turned toward an earlier, corollary moment in El Salvador's history, la Matanza (the slaughter) of 1932, where 30,000 peasants met their end at the government's hands in retaliation for a brief uprising. General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez is the so-called "hero" of Kirkpatrick's history lesson for fiercely quashing the uprising. In her estimation, la Matanza met with the approval of "many Salvadorans" because of the "restored order and the thirteen years of civil peace that ensued" (506). To illustrate the veneration of la Matanza among Salvadorans, Kirkpatrick explains, "The traditionalist death squads that pursue revolutionary activists and leaders call themselves Hernández Martínez Brigades, seeking thereby to place themselves in El Salvador's political tradition and to communicate their purposes" (506). Here Kirkpatrick provides the means by which the *depopulated imaginary* fulfills its promise: in order to rescue civilization and redeem national populations, they must be subjected to all-consuming violence. Hence, in atoning Longoria through his own murder, the novel concludes with Kirkpatrick's gruesome, reactionary logic.

I turn to the day after the novel's climax in order to illustrate this point. In the final chapter, Tobar synchronizes the culmination of the murder-plot with the principal characters' reconciliation to their pasts and, as a result, with their identification with their origins. As he stands above the half-submerged corpse, Antonio speculates, "The blood of Los Angeles was colorless in the black-and-white light of the tunnel. The blood of Guatemala was crimson under a tropical sun. The blood of Los Angeles might soon begin to fade. The blood of Guatemala was indelible" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 304). On the face of it, Antonio's thinking appears ruthless: the blood of his wife and child, murdered in Guatemala, is ineradicable from his consciousness; but any traces of guilt eventuated by Longoria's murder grow dim with the knowledge that he avenged his family. At another level, the passage suggests how Antonio reconnects with his roots in Guatemala. Through blood as metaphor for belonging or heritage, killing Longoria revives Antonio's Guatemalan heritage, characterized by vitality and unobstructed sight and contrasted against Angelino blood, which is characterized by despondent tones or a diminished apprehension of the world. Conversely, Longoria's death also seems to reconcile him with his indigenous identity. More specifically, through Longoria's transport into an idealized past (hallucination or not) Tobar illustrates the falseness of the soldier's identification with the strictures of the Guatemalan military and his lingering attachment to his way of life before the army conscripted him. Vengeance in *The Tattooed Soldier* appears to be the means by which both men become who they really are. As a result, Antonio's revenge—as a configuration of justice and of both characters' redemption,—closely resembles the reactionary formulas for order and civilization that contributed to widespread violence in Guatemala. The revenge is therefore only a fantasy of justice, not its accomplishment.

The paradox of the murder that restores the proper identity of both murderer and victim resembles the questionable dynamic that Wendy Brown identifies with certain forms of identity politics and which she calls "the politics of recrimination." The economy of perpetrator and victim, installed at the center of the "politics of recrimination," seeks not, Brown argues, "emancipation for the injured or the subordinated, but the revenge of punishment, making the perpetrator hurt as the sufferer does" (27). Brown worries that the ways some historically disempowered subjects describe their pursuit of justice imagines an ontological relationship between historical wounds and those who suffer them. In other words, by shifting into a moral register through the victim/culprit dynamic, these subjects cannot imagine a triumph over their pain (Brown 74). Instead, historically disempowered subjects depoliticize social struggle by establishing historical injuries at the very root of being and the very foundation of their communities and identities.

To read *The Tattooed Soldier* as an allegory of identity formation misunderstands Tobar's anti-imperialist slant, particularly his interest in elaborating the paradoxes of reactionary thought. If the novel's antagonists have anything in common, it is their circumscription by history and memory. Understanding Longoria's slaying as a fantasy of justice reminds us that Antonio too is trapped by his history and that he mistakes his act for a triumph over not only his personal vendetta but over the massacre of "unknown thousands" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 208). As the next section will demonstrate the need for justice from these wars transcends retribution in the name of the numberless, anonymous dead but should also include the aggrieved in the Central American diaspora.

Central American Immigrants: Between Invisibility and Exposure

U.S. involvement in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua is in part responsible for the mass exodus from the region beginning in the 1980s and 90s. According to Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz-Chinchilla, "U.S. foreign policy appears to have been more effective in generating refugees than U.S. immigration and refugee policies have been in preventing their entry" ("Migration" 47). Central American immigrants during this period serve as evidence for historian and activist Juan Gonzalez's famous "harvest of empire" thesis, which states that shifts in U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America propel immigrants toward the United States from its southern neighbors.¹⁷⁰ These arguments gain traction when we note that the 1990 U.S. Census ascertained that two-thirds of Central American residents had arrived in the 1980s ("Diverse Populations" 187). In Los Angeles, the Census also determined that, of the city's 301,567 Salvadorans and 159,268 Guatemalans, seventy-five percent arrived in the same period (Hamilton et al. *Seeking* 51). These statistics help establish a strong correlation between the leap in Central American immigrants and the spread of conflict in the region.

Unique among migrants from Latin America at the turn of the century, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans fled to the United States bearing characteristics of both economic migrants and political refugees (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 2). Escaping economic destabilization and violence, these new arrivals encountered a U.S. government unwilling to recognize their claims for asylum, a culture that disregarded the traumas they brought with them, exploitation through undocumented labor, and a persistent fear of deportation. This section asserts that a fuller account of justice in *The Tattooed Soldier* obliges us to examine this generation of immigrants as not merely refugees of national conflicts, but also as refugees of imperialism. The

¹⁷⁰ One of Gonzalez's primary claims in *Harvest of Empire* is "the Latino migrant flows were directly connected to the growth of a U.S. empire, and they responded to that empire's needs, whether to stabilize a neighboring country or to accept its refugees as a means of accomplishing a broader foreign policy objective...or whether it was an economic need, such as satisfying the labor demands of particular U.S. industries" (xii-xiv).

bookish and morose Antonio fits many of the characteristics of the 1980s and 90s generation of Central American immigrants that flooded into the United States as a result of proxy wars. However, because both of Tobar's central characters are perpetually semi-submerged in their histories, they rarely take account of their present in the United States as immigrants, preferring to interpret the misfortunes of life in Los Angeles as recurrences of episodes in Central America. In this section, I pair Tobar with Mario Bencastro, a Salvadoran-American author, in order to better illustrate how the literature of the Central American diaspora represents social conditions in the United States during the 1980s and 90s. The principal value of Bencastro's novel *The Odyssey to the North* (1998) resides in its comprehensive view of Central American immigrants and how it delineates the material circumstances through which Tobar's protagonists walk somnambulant. I organize my observations about how the novels reproduce these social conditions into two prevailing themes: invisibility and exposure.

Invisibility

José Juan, Antonio's former roommate in *The Tattooed Soldier*, disappears for eight days from their homeless encampment while looking for work. Like his roommate, José Juan is undocumented, and Antonio wonders what possible hazards may have befallen him. "Of course," he broods, "it was also possible that he had been mugged or run over by a car or arrested by the immigration police. So many different tragedies could swallow a poor man in Los Angeles. Antonio was always reading *La Opinión* about immigrants who died on the freeway or in factory accidents so far from home and family that there was no one to pay for their funerals" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 254). This moment of lament over José Juan's unknown whereabouts reveals not only the perpetual dangers faced by undocumented immigrants, but also how these immigrants

become socially invisible, lacking families and other networks to defend, support, or identify them. Although José Juan is Mexican, not Central American, his insecure legal circumstances are identical those of many Central Americans immigrants to the United States during the 1980s and 90s.

Despite the risk of accidental and anonymous death in a foreign land, however, American immigration courts rejected Salvadoran and Guatemalan petitions for asylum during the early 1980s almost as a matter of course. Terry Repak explains, "Policies concerning refugees tend to reflect biases in U.S. foreign policy interests" (17). Reagan-era immigration courts "granted asylum to a majority of applicants who were fleeing from Communist countries (such as Cuba), while denying refugee status to those fleeing from countries that were nominally sympathetic to the United States" (Repak 17). In order to illustrate this point, Repak compares the acceptance of 60 percent of Iranian applicants for asylum to a meager 3 percent of Salvadoran applications during the 1980s, and 40 percent of Afghani applicants were granted asylum versus 0.4 percent of Guatemalan applicants (17, 135). Even the landmark 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which included conditional amnesty for those who had arrived before January 1, 1982, discriminated against Central American immigrants because a majority immigrated after the cut-off (Repak 18). Although closure of two noteworthy legal cases against the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the 1990 Immigration Act did offer the possibility to reapply for asylum for undocumented Central Americans in the U.S., for some these laws came after almost a decade of precarity and insecurity (Repak 186).¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹The court case *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh* (1985) challenged the INS refusal to grant asylum to all but a few Salvadoran and Guatemalan applicants (Repak 143). This case was supported by over 80 religious, refugee, and refugee legal assistance organizations (Repak 143). It reopened an unprecedented amount of previously filed cases (150,000), another 350,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalans became eligible to file for asylum under special procedures, and the decision granted temporary legal status until the INS could schedule a new case (Repak 143). Further, the court ruled that discrimination on asylum cases based on presumed nationality or ideology was

Undocumented Central Americans in the Reagan era confronted two forms of invisibility: the possibility that they might vanish from their communities and far-flung support networks, and the state's refusal to recognize the threat to life and limb from which these immigrants escaped. Susan Biblier Coutin describes Central Americans' compulsory invisibility as a kind of "nonexistence":

Individuals who are physically present and socially active in the United States can nonetheless lack legal status in this country. Conversely, individuals who are legally present in El Salvador and who have Salvadoran citizenship can be persecuted in ways that negate both their citizenship and their humanity. I refer to the domains occupied by such legal nonsubjects as spaces of nonexistence. (27)

Barred access to the rights of legal entrants, services, and legal recourse for injury, along with the threat of deportation to death, torture, or slow material degradation, U.S. immigration policy excluded Central American immigrants from the law and the social body (Coutin 29). Coutin relates one instance from her ethnographic work at an immigrant legal aid organization during which a Central American proclaimed, "We need to be here legally or it's like we're not here" (29).

For others, Central American nonexistence in the U.S. has profound cultural implications as well. Arturo Arias observes that U.S. residents frequently deem nonnative Central Americans as "lesser than Mexicans" (178). Arias contends that *The Tattooed Soldier* demonstrates his theory of the Central American-American as an "invisible" and "redundant" identity denied by coercive labels like "illegal" and "Communist" (178). This process of denial extends beyond the

inappropriate, and in the end this was the largest reopening of immigrant cases in U.S. history. Repak explains that "Never before, according to those involved with the case, had the INS agreed to settle a refugee case of this magnitude" (144). The enactment of Temporary Protective Status (TPS), as part of the Immigration Act of 1990, for undocumented Central Americans halted deportation orders as asylum cases were under review and awarded temporary work permits. TPS was expected to affect 500,000 Central Americans nationwide (Repak 219).

renunciation of one's "authentic" cultural identity to how Central American newcomers repress the "nightmare of violence and massacres" from which many escaped (Arias 170). Aversion to public scrutiny induced Central Americans to "mimic" Mexican-Americans, denying themselves "a catharsis that enables them to relieve the trauma of war" (Arias 179). The squelching of psychological trauma certainly might prevent Central American immigrants from attacking the interventionist policies that compelled them northward by forsaking the impact of these policies on their everyday lives. Psychological repression of the past may explain, for example, Antonio's pursuit of a vendetta against the tattooed soldier over choosing a political solution for the condition of impunity that spared Longoria and other former human rights abusers residing in the United States.¹⁷²

Exposure

Mario Bencastro's *Odyssey to the North* opens with a pair of Washington, D.C., police inspecting the corpse of a Central American man smeared across the pavement. Employed as a window washer, the man's safety depended on a single strand of rope that snapped, leading to his death. Bencastro describes the painful-looking body, with its detached limbs, as "incoherent," as if the disfigured body has lost all resemblance to the living (2). The consequence of an accident, the public spectacle of the fallen corpse resembles the psychological function of mutilated bodies deposited in public spaces by death squads and members of Central American Special Forces

¹⁷² For example, Colonel Inocente Orlando Montano, former commander of the Belloso Battalion and participant in El Calabozo massacre of between two and three hundred villagers, took refuge in the U.S. and even claimed Temporary Protected Status (Lakhani, "El Salvador" n.p.). Similarly, while working at the *L.A. Times*, Tobar met "a social worker at the agency El Rescate told me a story about a client of hers who had spotted a death-squad member in Mac Arthur Park, which was the central meeting place of L.A.'s Central American community. That anecdote became the germ, many years later, of *The Tattooed Soldier*" (author's website "The Tattooed Soldier" n.p.).

units during the proxy wars. These carcasses served as warnings against subversion and as operational signatures portending further violence.

The gathered crowd speculates about the window washer's origins, but none know the dead man's name or whom to contact to collect his remains. Standing apart from the scene, the building's superintendent remains silent, fearful of the consequences of not providing the man adequate safety equipment and underpaying an undocumented Central American in lieu of hiring professional cleaners. The novel's protagonist, Calixto, worked with the deceased, but also will not step forward for fear that his undocumented status might be revealed. Vulnerable to exploitation in life and anonymous in death, Bencastro employs this immigrant to illustrate how being legally and socially invisible does not exclude one from dangers and in fact may imperil one further. Exposure, as a theme for representing workplace exploitation and other dangers to physical and psychological wellbeing, is a perennial theme of Central American diasporic literature.¹⁷³

Characters in Bencastro's fiction and Tobar's novels confront their exposure to economic exploitation in the endless stream of menial jobs they work. Calixto, in Bencastro's *Odyssey to the North*, repeatedly loses his job as the result of immigration raids on the kitchens and hotels that employ him. Similarly, Antonio, whose college education in Guatemala counts for little, busses tables in Los Angeles. These fictional representations echo the actual conditions of Central Americans in the U.S. A 1996 study determined that, like new Mexican immigrants, Salvadoran and Guatemalan workers tend to hold blue-collar and service jobs, including janitors, dishwashers, busboys, domestic servants, child-care workers, gardeners, garment and furniture factory laborers, construction workers, and day laborers (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 76). The

¹⁷³ Other examples include the testimonio *Undocumented in L.A.* compiled by Dianne Walta Hart, Gregory Nava's 1983 film *El Norté*, and pieces from the *Izote Vos* anthology.

majority of Central American immigrants remain isolated in these sectors, finding few opportunities for upward mobility. These barriers to mobility evident in the 1980s anticipated the "hour glass economy" of the 1990s, with increases in jobs at the bottom and top of the income ladder, which, according to Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla, offered little hope to new immigrants (*Seeking* 73). Additional problems related to unskilled work included low pay, unhealthy working conditions, fear of INS raids; in industrial settings speed-ups, nonpayment of wages; and social/cultural sequestration (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 104).

We might then suppose that Tobar, Bencastro, and other writers of Central American heritage strive to encapsulate the risks and the immobility of immigrants within the new economy. Many immigrants fled 1980s Central America due to deteriorating material conditions as a result of war and specific policies of "economic sabotage" conducted in both Nicaragua and El Salvador (Molloy 61). Hence, to classify the bulk of Central American immigrants as merely "economic migrants," as the INS frequently did, is to misinterpret the political contexts that generated failing economies and forced people northward to similar or worse economic situations (Repak 135, Pederson 39-40).

Tobar foregrounds the exposure of immigrants to market forces by opening his novel with a scene in which Antonio and José Juan's Korean landlord evicts them. Antonio laments his integration into L.A.'s neoliberal economy as a kind of personal diminishment: "Everyone took a step down, but Antonio had dropped further than most because he carried the unbearable burden of what he had seen at his house in San Cristóbal" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 52). Crippled by depression over the trauma of losing his family, Antonio falls into unemployment and homelessness. As he and José Juan wander the streets, lugging their belongings in a Hefty bag, they notice how passersby refuse to meet their eyes. "He was used to being unseen," Antonio makes clear, "There

was an invisibility of being a bus boy, of walking between tables unnoticed, a shadow rolling the cart, clearing the dishes. People now made a point of turning away from him, just as Antonio had turned away from the hopeless men he saw in the same condition" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 10). This passage combines the two themes I have traced through both *The Tattooed Soldier* and *Odyssey to the North*. Invisibility here takes on a distinctly socioeconomic valence, and exposure becomes the onlooker's unwillingness to see and, by refusing to see, abandoning Antonio to his fate. Eye contact entails ethical engagement and averting one's eyes is tantamount to the rejection of that ethical obligation. In a way, this scene dramatizes the geopolitical ramifications of widespread ignorance amongst the American citizenry of their government's imperial machinations in Central America. However, the parallel to Antonio's invisibility as a bus boy, Tobar offers not a direct indictment of the American people, but a critique of the enabling conditions that make it in one's interest to ignore those who struggle and those who suffer.

Central American immigrants are not vulnerable to dangers only after they enter the United States. In their journeys across Central America, Mexico, and the U.S.-Mexico border they confront numerous situations in which militaries, police, local opportunists, and even their guides exploit, rob, rape, murder, or subject them to violence. Antonio, the son of middle-class Guatemalans, evades the crossing, buying instead a one-way flight to L.A. By contrast, throughout *Odyssey to the North*, Bencastro splices some disturbing episodes from the journey north with scenes in the U.S. On a number of occasions the women travelling with Calixto from El Salvador fortuitously escape rape as if sexual assault was a requisite for women's undocumented travel northward. At one point a *coyote*, an immigrant smuggler, offers to

purchase Calixto's women friends from him. "We'll give you two hundred for each of them. You can't lose," he urges, only to desist once Calixto threatens him with a knife (Bencastro 61).¹⁷⁴

Once immigrants from Central America arrive in the U.S., they face the continuing threat of deportation back to wars that threaten to consume them. A 1983 letter from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs, Alan Paul Drischler, to Senator Edward M. Kennedy downplayed fears that deportation might result in exposure to abuse and torture, or even death, for Central Americans. He was firm that "public order and public services, while under serious attack, are still maintained, especially in San Salvador and the largest cities," and Salvadorans "now present in the United States who were not involved in political or military activities before their departure would not face, upon return, any more danger than is faced by their compatriots who never left the country" (qtd. in Hamilton et Al., *Seeking* 135).

The novels question Drischler's neat and misconceived statement. While Tobar depicts Antonio as despondently allowing his application for political asylum to lapse and only then losing legal status, Bencastro better articulates the dilemmas faced by the majority of asylum-seekers who flee U.S.-"friendly" governments through the character of Teresa. Bencastro intercalates her travels through immigration court proceedings with Calixto's. Teresa hopes she will be accepted into the U.S. to avoid the threats her family suffers at the hands of both the Salvadoran military and guerrillas. The denial of her petition for asylum and subsequent deportation back to El Salvador results in her untimely death, a fact announced by the potentially fictional news clipping that Bencastro includes in *Odyssey to the North*. Cases like Teresa's mirror actual instances where U.S. immigration policy returned immigrants to their executioners,

¹⁷⁴ More recent reporting reveals that the sexual exploitation of women is now part and parcel of the journey. Salvadoran journalist Oscar Martínez, observes that "There is...an expression for the transformation of the migrant's body: *cuerpomático*. The body becomes a credit card, a new platinum-edition 'bodymatic' which buys you a little safety, a little bit of cash and the assurance that your travel buddies won't get killed" (*The Beast* 73).

as in the case of Santana Chirino Amaya. Following a traffic violation, INS deported Amaya in June of 1981, and two months later his body was found decapitated in El Salvador (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 136).

Cases of legal expulsion, like Amaya's and those depicted in *Odyssey to the North*, illustrate how the United States government disowns its role in propelling immigrants northward. Instead, circumstances render Central American migrants legally and socially nonexistent, but simultaneously exposed, defenseless in the face of economic exploitation, dangers to life and limb in the journey across borders, and repatriation to potential injury and death. To interpret *The Tattooed Soldier* as an examination of forms of justice that skews toward anti-imperialism, requires that literary analysts incorporate the struggles of empire's refugees into the formulations of justice explored in the novel. Tobar seems to have something similar in mind when, in his second expository book, he explains that the 1992 L.A. riots manifested a reaction to the Central American experience of exposure. It was a "predictable response of a people with lesser legal and political status, a people who had come to believe...that they lived outside the protective shelter of American democracy" (Tobar, *Translation* 30).

Riots as a Configuration of Justice

Having just detailed the numerous difficulties against which the Central American diaspora struggled—their narrowing avenues for legal residency and citizenship, their limited means to seek redress, and the deeply circumscribed character of Central American immigrant life in the United States—I turn to consider a configuration of justice inclusive of all these heterogeneous grievances. Perhaps the search for a form of restitution that involves justice for injuries suffered and emancipation from those injuries requires turning toward an aspect of *The*

Tattooed Soldier that imagines justice as a kind of free-for-all in which characters improvise collective and individual retributions as compensation for years of subjugation, exploitation, and neglect. In this section, I argue that Tobar's second configuration of justice emanates from the manifold expressions of the 1992 L.A. Riots. In the *Tattooed Soldier*, the uprising's participants express versions of emergent collectivity as a mistaken carnivalesque, in which demonstrations, confrontations with the police, and calls for insurrection occur and then diminish into a mere festival of "settling of accounts."¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, these expressions never coalesce or assume definitive political form in Tobar's portrait; instead, they disperse into divergent pursuits. In other words, the L.A. Riots cannot deliver on the cry for redress that they unleash.

Most understand the weeklong civil disturbances we refer to as the L.A. Riots as a response to the acquittal of police officers accused of brutally beating an unarmed African-American man, Rodney King. However, scholars read the riots as the culmination of economic, racial, and ethnic tensions that were pervasive in late-1980s and early-90s Los Angeles. For example, Mike Davis, in a 2012 article for the *L.A. Review of Books*, argues, "Twenty years after the so-called Rodney King Riot, we can do little more than commemorate the deliberate reign of ignorance that has deflected every attempt to understand the deep causes of the complex events that unfolded in the last week of April 1992" ("Embers" n.p.). The L.A. Riots' "simultaneous tumults," Davis asserts, derive from some combination of desperation about the shrinking labor market, the "accelerated decay of the public sector," impunity for those who commit crimes against people of color, and a larger urban racial crisis ("Embers" n.p.; "Who" 6). Although

¹⁷⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin describes the carnival as a cyclical form at the border between art and life, "it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10). Charted in the development of humorous literature as an expression of "folk culture," Bakhtin argues that the social subversion of the carnivalesque featured a unique utopian character of universal equality by "degrading" the sacred and ideal (12). He writes, "Degradation here means coming down to earth," and the parody and festival laughter of the carnival asserts a common equality (21). The fact that Bakhtin acknowledges that these subversive and egalitarian moments serve the ultimate end of "renewal," rather than transformation, encourages the view that the carnivalesque represents a sanctioned social safety valve.

"Black rage" gained center stage in media coverage of the Riots, the press neglected to represent what Davis describes as "Latino alienation," preferring to endlessly reproduce images of the "Latino looter" (Davis, "Who" 3; Zilberg 188). Latinos/as and undocumented immigrants comprised a significant majority of those arrested during the riots. This fact attests to how the Riots channeled unrest amongst Central American immigrants (whom Chicano politicians fingered for the looting) and other Latino/a groups (Davis, "Embers" n.p.).

As a correspondent for the *L.A. Times* during the Riots, Tobar's perspective cuts close to the grain of events. What began as a "replay" of the 1965 Watts riots, Tobar explains, "evolved into a parallel immigration looting festival that would in a matter of hours become much bigger in breadth and scope than its African-American twin, spreading to places far from the conflagration's point of origin in South-Central Los Angeles" (*Translation* 30). Put another way, the simultaneous disturbances called the L.A. Riots consisted of multiple events released by a suspension in the laws of the city and the status quo that offered participants the opportunity for a festival of minor redresses. As if to reflect the assortment of grievances and mixture of populations encompassed in the 1992 Riots, the multiethnic characters in *The Tattooed Soldier* experience the upheaval as a multivalent expression of social discontent.

One of the novel's more politicized representations of the unrest comes from Antonio's fellow encampment-dwellers, the Mayor and Frank. Having just returned from a violent demonstration at the L.A. Police Department headquarters, Frank proclaims, "Hey, my little Spanish friend, we're back from the war...Back from the revolution." "That's what they'll call it. The historic battle of the Parker Center. When the people got theirs," adds the Mayor (Tobar, *Tattooed* 275). As homeless African-American men recently displaced from their previous encampment, Frank and the Mayor join crowds clashing against the LAPD as a means of

asserting agency and seeking redress for past injuries. While these men celebrate what appears to them as a collective insurrection against established powers, their revolution sours quickly. "The fun was gone after the fourth hour. Right, Mayor?" Frank declares, "The hoodlums took over. No spirit out there. Just me, me, me" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 303). The looters' selfish individualism, to which Frank refers, undercuts his interpretation that the riots manifest a unified insurrection, even as he and the Mayor snatch a transistor radio and underwear to fulfill long-unmet needs.

In another vein, some characters use the riots as a chance to fulfill smoldering vendettas, ones usually suppressed by fear of punishment or habitual subservience. Witnessing the plundering of a Pep Boys auto shop inspires José Juan: "I'm going to get my money from *el Armenio*. Or get even, at least. He owes me five hundred dollars" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 282). Like other undocumented laborers, José Juan cannot take his employer to court for nonpayment of his wages. Instead he finds in the riots a permissive context that allows him to carry out his vendetta against a previous, Armenian employer. "Someone had declared this the municipal day of settling accounts, a day for all vendettas, private and public," Antonio observes, encapsulating the city atmosphere during the riots (Tobar, *Tattooed* 283). Enveloped in an environment of lawlessness where power relations seem temporarily reversed, Antonio, too, partakes in the "settling of accounts" by murdering Longoria. As his resolve to kill the tattooed soldier intensifies, Antonio recognizes echoes of his determination in the crowds: "My madness is everyone's madness" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 294). It would seem that the rioters have become infected with his compulsion to seek vengeance, reproducing en masse his retribution.

The unity of purpose Antonio perceives in crowds of L.A.'s impoverished is not, however, isolated to his interpretation. The novel captures the happy disbelief of looters through disembodied voices that declare, "*No one will catch us. No one will catch us because we are*

hundreds" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 281, ital. in original). This rudimentary form of collectivity convenes on not only the commodities seized by those ransacking the auto parts store, but also the multiple quotidian subordinations experienced by Central Americans in L.A.:

Housekeepers, garment workers, bus boys. Mexican, Honduran, Costa Rican, Nicaraguan. And of course his countrymen, Guatemaltecos. It was a day without submissiveness, a day without coffee to pour or strangers' babies to feed or the whirl of sewing machines in a factory. It was a day to liberate toolboxes and diapers from their glass cages. A day when all the pretty objects in the store windows would mock them no more. (Tobar, *Tattooed* 283)

As with much of the novel, there's a hint of irony in the grandiloquent phrasings about taunting commodities. At the same time, the unexpected opportunity to pillage necessities and non-necessities in ways that don't require the constant calculation and anxiety that poverty brings seems a kind of liberation, or at least a suspension of the downward pressure of racialized and undocumented exploitation. In *Translation Nation*, Tobar explains his interpretation of the classed valences of the Riots' confrontations with the police, looting, and arson, "It was the first Latin American-style class uprising in United States history, the same kind of visceral expression of rage that over the centuries had led peons to burn down the *hacendado's* [plantation owner's] home" (31). Put another way, the expansive public expression of discontent signals an approximate class-oriented collectivity, one that derives from the political culture of Latin America.

However, this suspension of law and what Tobar describes as "the city's stultifying sociological discipline" comes to an end after five days of unrest (*Translation* 31). In the novel, Antonio acknowledges the resumption of the usual state of affairs, "The rebellious waitresses

and nannies and bus boys had gone back to their overcrowded apartments. For the foreseeable future the revolutionaries had retired to the glow of their television sets and the variety shows beamed in from Mexico City." The uprisings do not coalesce into a manifestation of political intention, but instead they pass like atmospheric phenomena—"a fleeting storm gone out to sea" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 306). In Tobar's writing, the rioters' divergent expressions of the need for justice and popular reprisal do not resolve into a viable demand or a common good that might be pursued. Instead, the crowds of the L.A. uprising exhaust their rebellion on settling accounts, seeming to consent to continued submission. Writing about riots in France with similar contributing factors, Alain Badiou characterizes such disturbances as collapsing in on their immediate context, "stagnating in [their] own social space," and failing to extend a political demand out of collective dissatisfaction (*Return* 23-4). Akin to an eruption of the carnivalesque, the riot seems to unchain sociologically determined unrest, only to resume the status quo once the dissatisfaction has found expression.

For all of Tobar's work to salvage the L.A. Riots' liberated climate and to document its multifarious grievances, in my reading, the Riots do not represent a viable form of justice in line with Tobar's anti-imperialist intentions. This has less to do with the Riots' fleeting quality, and more to do with how the short-livedness evolves from the dispersal of its participants into individualized pursuits. Atomized by the prospect of unrestrained consumerism in conditions of salient material need, the rioters lack a common project to address the problems of U.S. imperialism in Central America and its ramifications in Los Angeles as opened up in *The Tattooed Soldier*.¹⁷⁶ With incomplete or inadequate resolutions to its principal dilemmas, the novel presents interpreters with an impasse in the search for representations of justice. Such

¹⁷⁶ In his analysis of the 2011 London Riots, Zygmunt Bauman explains, "These are not hunger or bread riots. These are riots of defective and disqualified consumers" to describe the looting ("Consumerism").

predicaments require that literary analysts move from the content of the text, to the extant political practices of, in this case, Central American immigrants in Los Angeles which point to aspects of *The Tattooed Soldier* in which the possibility of viable redress remains imaginable.

The Interrogative Configuration of Justice

On a walk through MacArthur Park with his girlfriend, Reginalda, Longoria intersects with a massive demonstration held in solidarity with revolutionaries in El Salvador and Guatemala.¹⁷⁷ The protestors hold flags and banners that declare, "ALTO A LA REPRESION EN EL SALVADOR Y GUATEMALA" (END REPRESSION IN EL SALVADOR AND GUATEMALA) and "APOYO TOTAL A LA LUCHA ARMADA" (ABSOLUTE SUPPORT TO ARMED STRUGGLE) (Tobar, *Tattooed* 67). He approaches the center of the demonstration, outraged that these "communists" are allowed to "mouth their hateful ideas freely and openly," whereas "*In Guatemala we knew how to handle these people*" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 67, 68). As the speaker concludes her speech, the demonstrators raise their voices and "a thousand brown-skinned fists rose simultaneously in the air, surrounding [Longoria] like a forest of bare, knobby tree trunks" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 68). This curious image captures Longoria's hostility and profound alienation from the protestors by petrifying them into immovable lifeless stumps, perhaps reminiscent of the scorched forests and villages that remained after Jaguar Battalion operations in Guatemala. Percolated through Longoria's Cold War paranoia the rally sits in the novel like an epiphenomenon, more a hallucination of totalitarian uniformity than a substantial representation of politics. However, as the only outright representation of grassroots politics in *The Tattooed Soldier*, Longoria's tendentious version boils down to a mere mention of the vibrant, creative,

¹⁷⁷ The timing of this rally is ambiguous. While Tobar narrates this event within the narrative present, April 1992, peace negotiations between the guerrillas of the Frente Faribundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) and the Salvadoran government concluded in January of that year.

and resilient engagement by those of Central American heritage during the 1980s and 90s.¹⁷⁸ As I will briefly explain, members of this generation of immigrants to L.A. refused to be cowed by their circumstances and pursued activism that both sustained and extended Central American revolution in the United States, principally through anti-intervention and labor activism. Because the diaspora's opposition to both U.S. imperialism in the isthmus and L.A.'s neoliberal labor practices produced its most visible political mobilizations during the 1980s and 90s, I interpret these political manifestations as representative of collectively recognized grievances and common aspirations. Awareness of these twin calls for redress guide my argument to a moment in the novel where Antonio superimposes the calamities of imperialism with figures of capitalism's failings in the United States, figures he paradoxically identifies as refugees. This image, I assert, represents a question and answer to the injustices suffered by Central Americans and those of Central American heritage in the United States, what I call the interrogative configuration of justice.

One precondition for this increased mobilization might be the upsurge of movement activists, opposition political leadership, and former guerrillas among the many fleeing north beginning in 1981. Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz-Chinchilla note that demographic shifts among these migrants, including higher levels of education, income, and direct experiences of violence, indicate the growing presence of the politicized among the 1980s and 90s generation ("Migration" 92). As governments in El Salvador and Guatemala intensified violent repression against all forms of dissent in the early eighties, members of popular organizations, unions, and cooperatives, as well as the leadership of *campesino* and indigenous movements, joined the current of immigrants escaping north. For many, the decision to join neither the armed struggle

¹⁷⁸ The novel's characters do engage in grassroots political work back in Guatemala, namely Elena Bernal and her cohort at the university, but the government's ferocious repression eliminates almost all of her fellow student radicals.

nor the underground precipitated their migration northward for the sake of survival (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 120). These refugees, Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla explain, "came with experience but were disarticulated from their organization" (*Seeking* 120). Bereft of their previous political networks, some of these Central Americans, Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla continue, "helped turn Los Angeles into a center of Central American-oriented activity, a laboratory for strategies and organizing styles, and an incubator for leadership that later left to organize elsewhere" (*Seeking* 151).

Through their enthusiasm and the power of their testimonies, Central American immigrants catalyzed the anti-intervention and peace movements throughout the United States, particularly in Los Angeles. Although Anglo-Americans and other Latinos/as carried out much of the solidarity work, sociologist Héctor Perla argues that immigrants and revolutionaries from Central America contributed a unique ethos to the anti-intervention movement. According to Perla, these activists inspired North Americans in three ways: by transmitting a "mistica" (revolutionary mystique), which demonstrated a selfless moral attitude against the vices produced by capitalism and dictatorship; by providing a "mobilizing identity," or a positive sense of affiliation and optimism about the success of the movement; and through timely information and testimony that enabled solidarity movements to recruit others or pressure the political establishment to oppose intervention (154-5).

Beyond uniting organizations through ethos and passionate engagement, Central American immigrants founded some of the first solidarity organizations in the late 1970s and early 80s. Salvadoran and Nicaraguan exiles and children of immigrants formed the first solidarity committees in San Francisco, and, in conjunction with Chicano movement veterans like Roberto Vargas and other North Americans, they published newspapers, organized marches,

pushed for Congressional hearings on the prospect of U.S. intervention, and occupied consulates to protest conditions in the isthmus (Perla 145-6). In Los Angeles, some of the earliest and strongest organizing came from supporters of the Popular Liberation Forces of Faribundo Martí, the first guerrilla organization in El Salvador's civil war (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 126). Founding the Los Angeles Comité Faribundo Martí and the Broad Movement in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (MASPS), Central American organizers coordinated a weekly meeting of several hundred people that included teach-ins about the current state of the civil war and updated participants in upcoming protests and demonstrations (Hamilton et al. *Seeking* 127). These organizers also launched fundraisers through beach parties and, during the winter, carpools to the mountains to see snow, something few Central Americans had experienced. They also fostered affiliated committees throughout Southern California (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 127). Similarly, the Guatemalan Information Center (GIC) combined functions of solidarity, anti-intervention, human rights organizing with the promotion of Guatemalan culture, self-help, and L.A.-specific community organizing (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 131). Outreach, vigils, guerrilla theater, civil disobedience, press conferences, film screenings, and cultural events were tactics common to these committees and organizations (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 133).

As the conflicts amplified and human rights violations escalated, immigrants and refugees engaged in what Perla describes as "signal flare activism" to incite further action from Central Americans living in the U.S. and their allies and to provoke the construction of national networks of support. Perla explains that:

like a traditional signal flare is used to draw attention to a castaway's plight in the hope of attracting aid, so too the political signal flare strategy tries to draw the attention of potentially sympathetic actors to the plight of an aggrieved population. By shedding light

on the negative consequences of the policy, the aggrieved population attempts to change the public discourse in the transgressing country around the policy in question. (142-3)

Although Perla's metaphor derives from the distance traversed by revolutionaries' transnational appeals to supporters in the United States, in his argument those who signaled their comrades in the struggle include Central American immigrants who galvanized opposition to U.S. policy through more sustained organizing projects. For example, Salvadoran immigrants associated with the Popular Revolutionary Bloc helped form one of the most successful of such networks, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 130). Within CISPES L.A., Salvadorans found their previous organizing experiences coordinated well with the coalition's Saul Alinsky-style of direct, face-to-face recruiting (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 130). The Network in Solidarity with the Guatemalan People (NISGUA) formed a similar relationship with the GIC, seeking to break the media blackout and change the perception that the United States was not involved in Guatemala (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 131). These national networks, among others, further stimulated opposition to U.S.-supported Contras in Nicaragua, the military occupation of Honduras, a pledge of massive resistance (eighty-thousand strong) on the occasion of troop deployment to Nicaragua, a call for an end to repression in Guatemala and El Salvador, and the exposure of official complicity with human rights abuses in Central America (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 134).

Even the Central American-coordinated mutual aid organizations' (the Committee of Central American Refugees, CARECEN, El Rescate, and the GIC) programs to help Salvadorans and Guatemalans gain asylum were considered aspects of an anti-intervention politics. From her ethnographic work within such organizations, Susan Biblier Coutin remarked, "in the case of Salvadorans, efforts to obtain refugee status during the 1980s were not only intended to prevent

deportation but also to problematize continued U.S. military aid to the Salvadoran government, thus potentially facilitating a guerrilla victory in the civil conflict" (11). This innovative remodeling of a means of survival into a tool of political struggle underscores how Central American immigrants contributed to the anti-intervention movement through organizing strategies and improvisational tactics they learned in their home countries (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 127). In a way, these activists brought the cause of revolutionary struggle from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua into the United States by propagating organizational strategies and skills obtained in their fight for emancipation and social justice.

These strategies extended to Central American participation in L.A.'s resurgent labor organizing. In the 1980s and 90s, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, Mexican, and Mexican-American workers spearheaded industry and service labor activism (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 79). While for some undocumented Central Americans the prospect of a public campaign against labor abuses seemed daunting because in their home countries organizing meant "life-threatening repression," Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla note that, for others, "The worst that can happen is you lose your job" (*Seeking* 74-5). For instance, the success of Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) 1990 Justice for Janitors campaign must be attributed in good measure to militancy among Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Against the backdrop of an increasingly anti-union Los Angeles and the changing composition of maintenance staffing from African-American to Mexican and Central American, employers hired unorganized labor, exerting downward pressure on wages and benefits (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 87). Direct action became a clear component of the organizing drives, drawing upon immigrants' previous militant union organizing (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 88). The turning point in the Justice for Janitors campaign occurred on June 15, 1990, when 500 janitors and supporters marched on Century City, and police officers attacked

the marchers, including a pregnant woman who had a miscarriage. Footage of the event later sparked outrage, drew public sympathy for the campaign, and induced 2,500 supporters to join the street demonstrations (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 89).

Addressing the needs of a workforce dominated by women, Guatemalan domestic workers formed LISTO ("ready" or "prepared" in Spanish), which combined domestic services employment, job training, leadership skills, and advocacy on behalf of workers to their employers (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 95). Similar initiatives occurred in the formation of the Domestic Workers' Association by Guatemalan activists, which advocates against domestic workers' exclusion from federal and state labor law in Sacramento, educates workers in a nine-week training program, and promotes its own political theater group (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 95). Although not exhaustive of the many labor and self-organizing efforts of Central American workers, these instances demonstrate Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla's argument that "the story of the resurgence of the labor movement in Los Angeles is in large part the story of immigrant organizing" (*Seeking* 105).¹⁷⁹

I have suggested that in order to best interpret Tobar's examination of justice in *The Tattooed Soldier* readers must consider the problem of justice through both the character Central American activists' engagement—their militancy, creativity, and resilience that exceed the novel's depictions—and their concerns. More specifically, in Central American immigrant politics we find a convergence between opposition to U.S. intervention and to immigrant labor exploitation, and as a result a commitment to anti-imperialist organizing and to building

¹⁷⁹ Central American workers also served crucial roles in the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union's clinics to advise workers about the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and the 1995 UNITE (United Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees) campaign to organize sweatshops and garment factories (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 83). Similarly, the several thousand Central American street vendors formed the Street Vendors Association to confront rampant police abuse of vendors during the 1980s, and to challenge the laws that kept them from this occupation of last resort (Hamilton et al., *Seeking* 96-101).

powerful workers coalitions. But how does the novel envision the conjuncture of these twin projects such that the localized fight against economic exploitation and the transnational fight to preserve the revolutionary forces in Central America operate as aspects of the same imaginary?

The enormity of this dilemma occurs to Antonio following the decision to seek retribution against Longoria. In this moment, Tobar remarks, "They lived in an interval of history without courts, without passionless procedures of official justice, and so this act had fallen to him, a man living on his own, a homeless man" (Tobar, *Tattooed* 229). This admission appears pessimistic. The passage represents Antonio as stripped of material attachments and demanding justice in a context where no institution could deliver on his appeal. His antithesis, Longoria, exists in a condition of transnational impunity: Guatemala rarely prosecutes soldiers or generals and recently failed to prosecute the president who presided over the genocide.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, to acknowledge Longoria's crimes in the United States also means acknowledging the CIA's and U.S. military's extensive training, arming, and funding of soldiers like Longoria.

Antonio's pessimistic and lonely ruminations point us to an earlier, similarly hopeless, moment in the novel. In this instance, Antonio happens upon an image that encapsulates his experience of precariousness and incertitude and also brings together the transnational with the local, or the lack of justice for economic exploitation and for imperialism's depredations. This image emerges just after his eviction, several chapters before his intentions congeal on killing Longoria, as Antonio first studies the figures of destitution that surround him. Expelled from his apartment into a homeless encampment, Antonio observes, "All the people here seemed to have the same vacant expression and hunched posture. They looked like walking questions marks."

¹⁸⁰ In spite of his conviction on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity, former president José Efraín Ríos Montt, according to Al-Jazeera reporter Lauren Casarik, "The short-lived celebration, however, was extinguished 10 days later when Guatemala's Constitutional Court annulled the verdict" ("Rios Montt" n.p.). Casarik's sources conclude that "Guatemala illustrates the challenges of progress when old power structures responsible for the abuses remain largely intact" ("Rios Montt" n.p.).

Refugees. That was the term for people who lived like this, in makeshift tents, on barren ground. This was something new. He did not know that gringos could be refugees." Antonio acknowledges that in his musings the homeless men and women "*are what I feel*" and are therefore potential fabrications of his depression and self-absorption (Tobar, *Tattooed* 41). However, what interests me about this passage is how it maps Antonio's own condition as a refugee upon L.A.'s destitute, imagining them as refugees in their own right. Stranded in their poverty, these men and women's economic situation reflects his own dispossession, and they mirror his displacement from Guatemala. Moreover, the image shatters Antonio's idealization of the U.S. as "a place of vibrant promises, with suntanned women in bikinis and men carrying ice chests brimming with beer," fundamentally undoing the ideologies about "the American way of life" that so fascinated Longoria (Tobar, *Tattooed* 41).

The critical edge of the homeless/refugee/question-mark image undercuts more cursory readings that misinterpret its significance as a mere symptom of Antonio's despair and disorientation. Tobar composes these figures, simultaneously excluded from the gains of L.A.'s new urban economy and expelled by imperialism, not through their correspondence with symbols of defeat, but through the embodied entreaty of the question mark. These figures seem to ask readers to imagine the conjuncture of anti-imperialist politics with the fight against austerity imposed on urban Los Angeles as much as they register Antonio's powerlessness and destitution. If the insurrectionary energies released by the L.A. riots were spent on giving voice to the material and political lack of the city's underclass, this interrogative moment represents instead a figure for the incontrovertible absence of justice—an image in which the agents of justice recede, as does an immediately guilty party, and justice belongs, however abstractly, to the refugee and the derelict. Hence, the question-mark people allude to an expansive opening for

claims to redress, in which justice must be imagined. This incomplete image is capacious, it is the negative outline of justice, as I suggest above, and encompasses the need to address the history of violence that pinions Antonio's life in the United States and the broader dilemma of capitalism's refugees. Recalling his days as a correspondent for the *L.A. Times*, including his Pulitzer Prize-winning work in the riots, Tobar comments, "I came to see Los Angeles as an imperial capital whose central core had been abandoned, left to the refugees of the empire's wars, the detritus of the empire's failures" ("The Tattooed Soldier" n.p.).

Out of this refuse, Tobar constructs an image of justice that steps aside from each protagonists' wounded attachments to the past and their personal stake in seeking justice. Rather than fixate exclusively on historical trauma, the interrogative mode of justice calls for redress that looks toward future liberation. Scrutinizing Antonio's vendetta from the perspective of this interrogative mode of justice, his reprisal seems a peremptory closure on the imperative to think of more comprehensive forms of restitution. In other words, revenge brings balance by merely inverting the role of victim and perpetrator, redistributing suffering, and liberating both parties by annihilating one. "What if," asks Wendy Brown, "we sought to supplant the language of 'I am'—with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social with moral positioning—with the language of 'I want this for us'?" (75). The image of simultaneously economically destitute and stateless castaways in *The Tattooed Soldier* approximates the function of Brown's "I want this for us" by beseeching us to consider the enduring necessity of transformation, even as it offers neither a sense of its plausibility nor an anticipation of its future form.

Conclusion

The Cultural Memory of Violence

"We are lurching forward out of the Cold War, two steps forward, one step back." (320)

Jennifer Harbury, *Searching for Everardo*.

"The weight of the dead makes the earth turn by night, and by day it is the weight of the living.

When there are more dead than living there will be eternal night, night without end, for the living will not be heavy enough to bring the dawn." (219)

Miguel Angel Asturias, *Nuestro Señor El Presidente*.

In *Searching for Everardo*, Jennifer Harbury describes the Guatemalan army performing exhumations that it declares will uncover the remains of her husband, Efraín "Everardo" Bamaca Vélasquez. Investigations like these would later become a standard postwar experience for indigenous villagers searching for their disappeared relatives, and they provoke Harbury's rage and disgust. Convinced by burial records that the exhumation in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, will not unearth Everardo, Harbury insists, "I am not leaving again without seeing the face of a dead man. They will have to shoot me there, in that miserable stretch of untended cemetery if they want to stop me" (*Searching* 182). Her determination falters when she sees the false-Everardo's body and realizes the indignity of his murder: strangled, stabbed, and bludgeoned to death, the much younger man's body she concludes is a "human sacrifice to help cover up for Everardo's capture and torture" (Harbury, *Searching* 179-80). After two additional years of searching for signs of Everardo's life or death, the memoir depicts Harbury holding a vigil outside Las Cabañas

Military Base, where she believes her husband has actually been buried. She looks upon the disinterring of his body as a means to liberate him: "I want to take you from their hands, free you" (Harbury, *Searching* 3). By placing this second exhumation at the beginning of *Searching for Everardo*, Harbury implies that she unearthed Everardo's remains in Las Cabañas. These two incidents demonstrate the intrinsic multivalence of postwar exhumations.

Exhumation is also a good metaphor for this dissertation, and the disinterring of the two bodies detailed above speaks to the process of sifting through different, but concurrent, histories that surround the transition out of the Cold War. The latter disinterment denotes a freeing from captivity and a reunion. The former points to the machinations of the powerful to protect their prerogative to secrecy, but in concealing Everardo's secret imprisonment they commit a further murder. Indeed, one of Everardo's principal abductors and interrogators was a CIA asset planted in the Guatemalan Army's intelligence units, a fact that Harbury's many contacts in the U.S. government and in the embassy refused to disclose. The revelations produced by unburying the fictional and real Everardo point at the complexities of interpreting U.S. culture borne out of the struggle over Central America. In the one case, there is a hope to assist in liberation, an aspiration toward stewardship and for affinity with subaltern peoples. The other case alludes to the vertiginousness of state violence, how the discovery and identification of one corpse serves as synecdoche for the many disappeared bodies awaiting discovery as even today in El Salvador and Guatemala mass graves are discovered and sifted through.

The two disinterments of Everardo also point to how my project unearths contradictory experiences of historical possibility in a period defined retrospectively by seemingly predetermined outcomes. Americans engaged with Central American affairs the 1980s and 90s imagined themselves engulfed in a moment alive with totalitarian dangers or the emancipatory

potential of revolution. Like the subjects of Carlota McAllister's study of Guatemala's civil war, these authors shared a belief in "revolution as a law of historical motion which dictates that the future will always be radically different from the present and that the task of the present is of mastering the future" (277). The sequence of events in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala galvanized the intellectuals, artists, and activists whose imaginaries coalesced around ideas of insurrection as senseless violence or as the social eruption before transformative justice. To a degree, through conflicts in Central America those in the United States sought political renewal in addition to encountering defeat. Brady Harrison notes a similar desire for "regeneration" through Central America in William Walker, the first American to apply the doctrine of Manifest Destiny in the region (21). Certainly their presumption to interfere in affairs on the isthmus from the powerful vantage of the United States evokes Walker's imperiousness. By contrast to Walker, however, these "age of Reagan" authors do not imagine "the fusion of the self with the nation and continent" as an expression of the "imperial self," but instead saw themselves as auxiliaries, tinkerers, even functionaries in events that to some degree remained beyond their control (Harrison 18).

I have suggested that a good way to understand the commonalities of these visions is to compare them with Alain Badiou's theory of the Event, a descriptor for moments in history in which the state of affairs ruptures and is then reconfigured as a result. Historical ruptures depend, Badiou asserts, on "an interpretative intervention [that] declare[s] that an event is presented in a situation," a conceptualization that lends itself particularly well to narrative (*Being* 181). However, there is a compelling case to be made that beyond the imaginings of distinct groups in the United States, no such event occurred. Many fail to see a rupture that would bear ramifications for either Central America or the United States. The disparity between the

imagined future and the real aftermath of war in Central America illustrates the stakes of my project by underscoring both the historical precedents of the War on Terror today and, by implication, the enduring need to imagine projects of profound social transformation and configurations of justice.

The first historical continuity between today and the "age of Reagan" is the maintenance, even deepening, of the gross inequalities that helped bring about Central American insurrection in the first place. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Honduras, a nation that experienced little of the revolutionary tumult that occurred in other Central American nations during the "age of Reagan." Instead, the U.S. chose to militarize Honduran society, earning it the moniker "the U.S.S. Honduras." U.S. militarization of Honduras continued through foreign policy orchestrated through the War on Drugs and on to today, when Honduras suffers from both underemployment in one third of the population and the dubious honor of "murder capital of the world."¹⁸¹ Human rights groups in Honduras attribute a preponderance of these seemingly arbitrary killings of women, unionists, persons of the LGBT community, indigenous rights activists, *campesino* labor advocates, and leftist youths in good measure to off-duty police officers and soldiers, or death squads. In his description of the region as a whole, Neil Larsen argues, "Violence more and more leaks out of politics and the state, calling forth even more violent state reprisals and policing measures in its turn" (389). Guatemala and El Salvador continue to experience similar bouts of violence.

It must be acknowledged that Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala each emerged from civil war in the 1980s and 90s with democratic and semi-democratic governments. While many

¹⁸¹ This pattern of un/underemployment is a common feature of life in post-Cold War Latin America where, Neil Larsen observes, "[societies are] becoming little more than immense, stagnant reservoirs of 'unexploitable' labor-power crowded into gargantuan, unlivable cities, 'monetary subjects without money' forced to compete in the most violent fashion for the crumbs of globalization" (388).

of the earliest elections in El Salvador and Guatemala occurred under conditions of state-sponsored terror, their quasi-military regimes countenanced the liberalization of political power and transition to civilian rule. In 1995, Guatemalan negotiators achieved an important peace accord titled "The Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples," which ended some forms of institutionalized discrimination against indigenous Guatemalans and recognized all indigenous languages as legitimate. As important as these reforms are, postwar reformers have found it difficult to displace the distorting power of landed oligarchies, foreign investors, and international lending institutions and, hence, to address the underlying extreme maldistribution of land and resources. For these reasons, critics like Edelberto Torres-Rivas have tagged these new Central American regimes "low-intensity democracies." While some former revolutionaries now hold positions of significant power in Central America, specifically presidents Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and Salvador Sánchez Cerén in El Salvador, questions remain as to whether or not their policy choices reflect the popular politics which first led them to rebel. I look to the present-day consequences of the war between insurgencies and counterinsurgency in order to suggest how U.S. imaginaries participate in the legacies of such wars and how the persistence of certain reactionary imaginaries should give us pause.

The second enduring factor to survive the end of the Cold War is the recurrence of the imperialist impulse in American foreign policy. In 2004, when the victory in Iraq appeared to be crumbling as U.S. forces failed to defeat the rebels attacking their occupiers and U.S.-trained Iraqi Security Forces, the Pentagon began discussing what they called the "Salvador Option" (Pedersen 238). For the Pentagon, this option entailed the training Iraqi paramilitary forces by U.S. Special Forces units, in other words "death squads" similar to those in operation in El Salvador during the 1980s. Strangely, while discussing the coming elections in Afghanistan in a

public debate with John Edwards, Dick Cheney compared elections held in contexts of civil war to elections held in El Salvador. "I was there as an observer on behalf of the Congress," Cheney recalled, "And as the terrorist would come in and shoot up the polling places, as soon as they left, the voters would come back and get in line and would not be denied the right to vote. And today El Salvador is a whole of a lot better because we held free elections" (qtd. in Pederson 238). Cheney's comments presaged a strange repetition of history. The previous revelation of images that depicted the torture and humiliation in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and reports of massacres in Fallujah and Mosul only seem to confirm the parallel with Low-Intensity Conflict in Central America.

This repetition of history might be explained, in part, by the return to power of policymakers and defense personnel who formulated ideologies and cut their covert operations teeth in Central America. Figures from the Reagan Administration emerged in more powerful positions within the administration of George W. Bush as key voices promoting war in the Middle East. This list includes John Negroponte, Elliot Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld. Similarly, some of the most important defense intellectuals and administrators of the Bush Administration began in places like El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, including Colonel James Steele, Michael A. Sheehan, and General David Petraeus. These war administrators represent the "unconventional warfare" and covert affairs elite, and their growing positions of prominence during the second Bush Administration only lends further credence to the idea that war in Central America was the "proving ground" for new imperial ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, as both historian Greg Grandin and counterinsurgency specialist Todd Greentree assert. Put another way, looking at the diverse forms of American

engagement with low-intensity conflict in Central America is important because they represent the political, cultural, and strategic bridge between the Vietnam era and the War on Terror.

To return to the exhumations with which I began this conclusion, what the transition out of the Cold War entombed was faith in radical social transformation. In addition to the over 300,000 dead and millions displaced by war, certain ideas seemed to lose relevance even amongst their most profound adherents in the United States. To draw from an example I examined in Chapter 3, for all of its vision of liberation, *Blood on the Border* is also a memoir of mourning. As the Contra war effort and the compulsion toward elections compromises the Sandinistas' hold on power and its capacities to deliver on social reforms, Dunbar-Ortiz's solidarity shifts from active support to a concerted "mourn[ing] for 'strangers' killed in Nicaragua" (*Blood* 284). So overcome by tragedies elsewhere, Dunbar-Ortiz distraughtly flees a family Christmas celebration to find acquaintances from her solidarity work with "the common experience that was still so raw" (*Blood* 284). She also grieves for the idea of revolution. A beloved mentor's suicide initiates reflection on her own life. She writes, "none of the elements of my life had reality except for the vision of revolution. Every minute, whether I was eating or watching television, in meetings or while teaching, my mind was on revolution. It had been that way for fifteen years. Revolution had become my identity" (*Blood* 106). Significant numbers in the solidarity movement shared Dunbar-Ortiz's predicament. According to Christian Smith, because many in the movement viewed the Sandinistas as a symbol of the Central American people's tenacious resistance to US interventionist bullying...The Sandinistas' defeat, for the activists, both marked the end of Nicaragua's 'underdog' resistance and killed the dream of a genuine people's revolution" (358-9).

Dunbar-Ortiz's enervation in the wake of counterrevolutionary's triumph indexes a broader historical process, what Wendy Brown calls "a crisis in political teleology." From this crisis a "moralizing politics" ensues, according to Brown, which is "a symptom of a broken historical narrative to which we have not yet forged alternatives" ("Moralism" 22-3). Evidenced in the collapse of leftist narratives into the discourse of human rights, Bruno Bosteels argues, moralizing politics counterposes "a generalized state of victimhood" to a lurking evil that reappears relentlessly in massacres, genocide, and terrorism (Bosteels 280). If Brown and Bosteels are correct about the broader political crisis, one connected to the end of the Cold War and the triumph of neoliberal capitalism, my project revitalizes and reinterprets the dream of revolution and solidarity sparked and then lost with the defeat of insurrection in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. By exploring visions committed to the project of social transformation in Central America my project asks us to assess their limitations, but also to conserve dreams of far-reaching justice, ones that push us to reexamine how the War on Terror has rearticulated the political landscape into a conflict between liberal and virtuous West in opposition to a jealous and malevolent Islamic world.

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