ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LIMINAL CRIMINALITY IN POST-CONFLICT CENTRAL AMERICAN CRIME FICTION

Kayla Jean Watson, Doctor of Philosophy, 2018

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Ana Patricia Rodríguez
Department of Spanish and Portuguese

In his article, "Historia Negra, Novela Negra," Nicaraguan author, critic, and recipient of the 2017 Miguel de Cervantes Prize, Sergio Ramírez reflects on the critical and political potential of the crime fiction genre in Latin America, and specifically, in Central America. He comments that, unlike any other literary tradition, detective fiction has become a mirror that reflects transnational corruption (np). Considering crime fiction as a mirror or mimetic vehicle, as Ramírez suggests, allows us to examine how societies are represented through literature and specific genres, to interrogate relations and paradigms of power, and to analyze the power of language itself. The crime fiction or novela negra genre critiques power dynamics through the dissolution and transgression of spatial, temporal, and psychological borders. Taking Ramírez's quote as my point of departure, I argue that crime fiction is the vehicle to critically engage liminal criminality,

which I define as the individual or institutional acts of violence that transgress judicial boundaries and procedures, in post-conflict Central American literature. My corpus consists of five transnational Central American novels – Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* (2001), Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998), Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* (2003), Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* (2012), and Jacinta Escudos' *El asesino melancólico* (2015). In this dissertation, I analyze the novels' protagonists' liminal criminality, which refers to the ways in which they manipulate their positionality as criminals, crime fighters, and victims within current economic and political systems to reflect on and contest post-conflict paradigms of power. I examine individuals who are neither wholly victim nor criminal, but rather are individuals whose prior victimization manifests in displays of acts of violence and criminality in their search for justice. The liminally criminal acts include revenge, misuse of investigative tools and extra-judicial investigations, extortion, and suicide, among many others. The protagonists' liminal criminality has the power to disrupt hegemonic processes and highlights how institutional and political wartime violence is recycled and disarticulates the possibility of achieving justice in truly post-conflict period.

LIMINAL CRIMINALITY IN POST-CONFLICT CENTRAL AMERICAN CRIME FICTION

by

Kayla Jean Watson

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2018

Advisory Committee:

Dr. Ana Patricia Rodríguez, Chair
Dr. Ralph Bauer
Dr. Laura Demaría
Dr. Ryan Long
Dr. Vinodh Venkatesh

For Carlos

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my support system of family and friends. Mom and Dad, thank you for your continual support and encouragement throughout this long and difficult journey. Laura Quijano and Chris Lewis, thank you for your friendship, solidarity, and motivation, and especially, for joining me this summer in our online writing group.

I would like to acknowledge my advisor Dr. Ana Patricia Rodríguez for her support and guidance. Thank you for your suggestions, criticism, and assistance in completing this project. I also want to acknowledge my dissertation committee, Dr. Ralph Bauer, Dr. Laura Demaría, Dr. Ryan Long, and Dr. Vinodh Venkatesh. Thank you for your time and participation on my committee and for the feedback that each of you have provided.

During my time at the University of Maryland, I have had the pleasure of working with each of you in different capacities. Ralph, thank you for your leadership on the ARHU Dean's Graduate Advisory Board and for providing professional development opportunities. Ryan, thank you for your guidance and leadership as both my professor and as Director of Graduate Studies. Your feedback and insight have been invaluable resources. Laura, thank you for providing opportunities and seminars to discuss theoretical texts. Vinodh, thank you for your mentorship, professional and academic advice, and for the opportunities to present alongside you at conferences. I have been truly humbled to work with and learn from each of you.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In his article, "Historia Negra, Novela Negra," Nicaraguan author, critic, and recipient of the 2017 Miguel de Cervantes Prize, Sergio Ramírez reflects on the critical and political potential of the crime fiction genre in Latin America, and specifically, in Central America. He comments that, unlike any other literary tradition, the crime fiction genre may portray the societies in which we live and *la novela negra* in particular may serve as a mirror representing transnational corruption (np). Considering crime fiction as a "mirror," as Ramírez suggests, allows us to critically examine the ways in which societies are reflected, to question relations and paradigms of power, and to analyze the power of language itself. In crime fiction, critiques of these power dynamics are manifested through the dissolution and transgression of spatial, temporal, and psychological borders. According to Lee Horsley "late twentieth-century crime fiction has increasingly shown its readers the physical opening of bodies, the psychological exposure of damaged minds, and the inscription of personal traumas on the bodies of the victims" (112). Taking this quote and series of meditations as my point of departure, I argue that crime fiction is a significant discursive vehicle to critically engage questions of criminality, or acts of violence and common crime, and liminality. At its core, liminality refers at its core to "moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction" (Thomassen 1). The post-conflict period in Central America may be read as a period of liminality, of political transition, and subjective transformation. The period of conflict in Central America spans the decades of the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua.

This dissertation proposes to illuminate the spaces in which liminal criminality, which I define as the individual or institutional acts of violence that transgress judicial boundaries and procedures, emerges as a response to the post-conflict conditions of rampant unemployment, state-sanctioned corruption, and economic inequalities, among others; or rather, it is precisely these conditions of possibility, defined by Frederic Jameson as a new way of thinking associated with a specific class or collective position (*Valences* 217), that opens the dialogic and discursive space for contemporary crime fiction.

Rationale and Methodology

The objectives of this project are two-fold. First, drawing on recent scholarship, this project posits the crime fiction genre as a tool for analyzing the lived conditions of the post-conflict period through the production of criminal/liminal discursive spaces. Second, by decentering U.S.-based transnational readings, this project examines how neoliberal subjects reinsert themselves into society's fabric in order to question mass-criminalization of fragmented post-conflict subjectivities occupying a multiplicity of liminal spaces. The fragmented neoliberal subjects to be analyzed include the criminal detective, the post-conflict ex-soldier reincorporated into civilian life, the complicit victim, and a range of state-actors. The present research draws from close textual analysis of primary source material situated in historical context and framed by theories of neoliberalism, liminality, and violence. Following a broad historical overview of the armed conflicts in Central America and a discussion of the manifestations of violence in crime fiction, especially in the Central American context, I will define the neoliberal condition and liminality in the post-conflict period; identify and critique key generic elements including the role of the detective, the function of truth-seeking, and the

primary agents of crime vis-à-vis delineating the relationship between perpetrator and victim; and briefly outline the dissertation chapters.

Central to the current project are the broader implications of aesthetic choices in contemporary Central American crime fiction published both in the isthmus and outside of it. My corpus of texts include Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* (2001), Hector Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998), Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* (2003), Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* (2012), and Jacinta Escudos' *El asesino melancólico* (2015). I have selected texts produced, for the most part, by Central American diasporic writers who not only contend with the legacy of past wars and civil conflicts, but also serve as a discursive "hinge" between North and South, as Arturo Arias suggests in *Taking Their Word*. These authors of Central American origin dialogue with one another, while remaining conscious of the United States' presence in terms of language production and place of enunciation and publication, in addition to the economic and material aid provided during the period of armed conflict. Extending Arias' metaphor of Central Americans as a corporal, imaginary, and discursive hinge, this dialogue emphasizes the temporal fluidity of violence and criminality transgressing borders. These components provide the extra-literary context which informs my analysis. This brings me to consider the following guiding questions for my dissertation: How does the corpus deviate from and transgress aesthetic and generic conventions to critically engage the transitional period following the decades of armed conflict? In what ways does the corpus question the ethics of transgressing both spatial and symbolic borders? How does liminal criminality disrupt the institutional, juridical, and neoliberal body politic?

My methodology draws on theories of liminality, first formulated by Arnold ven Gennep's investigation on rites of passage and Victor Turner's study of rituals, which provide a critical lens to examine the procedural nature of the criminal and historical investigative practices taking place within the texts. Victor Turner is most credited with the revival of van Gennep's work on transition rites through his study of religious and cultural practices alongside the Ndembu tribe in Africa (Thomassen 75). Of particular interest to this study is Turner's key contribution which elucidates the processual form of a ritual. The ritualistic and procedural components of investigative practices at stake in this dissertation include the fact-finding mission, gathering evidence, techniques of interrogation and the subsequent construction of a police report, the actors carrying out each of these steps, and the underlying motivation of each actor, among others. Taking van Gennep's and Turner's iterations as my point of departure, I will identify the key moments of the criminal investigations studied here which invert or manipulate the formulaic and processual nature. These moments of inversion or manipulation represent moments of liminality in the corpus of Central American crime fiction.

This analysis also draws on Slavoj Žižek's theories of subjective and systemic violence as a framework for understanding the nuanced relationship between individual criminal acts and patterns of violence ingrained in society's fabric. Subjective violence, for its part, is defined as "violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (1), whereas systemic violence is classified as "the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relationships of domination and exploitation" (9). The subjective violence, or individual crimes and acts of violence, constitute the material conditions under investigation in the texts, which include murders carried out by individuals known to their victim, by state

actors, and by serial killers, drug trafficking, emotional and physical abuse in domestic relationships, and extortion. The patterns of systemic violence which permeate the Central American crime fiction texts being analyzed include criminalization of the racialized migrant body, discrimination based on ethnicity and sex, corruption of the judicial system, and the victimization of classes of individuals at the hands of forced conscription into the military, among others. Liminal criminality, therefore, refers to the ways in which the text's protagonists manipulate their positionality within the current economic and political systems to address questions stemming from the period of armed-conflict. Specifically, I refer to individuals who are neither wholly victim nor criminal, but rather to individuals whose prior victimization manifests in displays of acts of violence and criminality in their search for justice. I suggest that this structural manipulation is liminal precisely due to its power to disrupt hegemonic processes and shed light on the bodies occupying the interstices between subjective and systemic violence. These theoretical frameworks provide the critical toolbox to engage the Central American historical context and to elucidate the patterns of criminality which emerge as a direct response to the conditions of armed-conflict.

Many historical and literary critics alike have noted how the conditions produced by the civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador have created discursive and performative spaces through which one can critically engage notions of subjective and systemic violence. In the collection *Post-Conflict Literature,* Stefanie Lehner emphasizes the potentiality that artistic interventions possess: "Artistic intervention, essentially, is a form of displacement – a disruption of one order of sensibility and the creation of a new dispensation. It is about the unveiling of power structures that create and maintain

regimes of understanding but also the reversal and undoing of those logics" (33). Read through Jameson's theorization of the conditions of possibility alongside the displacing nature of artistic intervention, crime fiction provides a productive space to directly challenge systemic violence given the genre's inherent relationship to processes of investigation, interrogation and justice. Recognizing war as a liminal experience, Maria Mälksoo also views the post-war experience as liminal; or rather, "the process of reconstruction can, in turn, be conceived of as a rite of reaggregation – the beginning of coming to terms with the experience of a major collapse of the existing order, healing wounds, and moving on" (236). It is no surprise then that victims of war time violence and perpetrators of war crimes enter the post-war period as liminal criminals. As such, post-conflict Central American crime fiction engages questions of criminality, victimization, and the transition to the post-conflict period. Even though this project does not directly engage texts from Belize, Honduras, or Panama, one could draw parallels given the shared socio-historical and political contexts.

In *Understanding Central America*, Booth et al. trace key historical, political, and revolutionary moments throughout the isthmus, indicating how waves of state terror, revolutionary insurrection, counterrevolution and foreign intervention engulfed the region, resulting in more than 300,000 deaths, countless refugees, and fractured economies and infrastructures (1). Displaced and victimized individuals and broken institutions pave the path to the post-conflict period. William I. Robinson notes that preceding the periods of internal armed conflict multiple struggles emerged across Central America between the two World Wars, from "the Sandino's 1926-33 movement in Nicaragua, the failed 1932 uprising and subsequent *matanza* in El Salvador, to the

CIA-orchestrated overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, marking the end of the reformist period in Guatemala" (67). As James Dunkerley points out, after 1987, "Central America was governed by regimes with quite similar goals […], a fact that encouraged renewed interest in economic integration as progress was made towards political peacemaking under the Esquipulas accords" (14). Specifically, outside of Nicaragua, El Salvador's privatization and free market policies maintained the highest profile (16). The influence of financial and logistical aid from the United States is undeniable, considering the disbursement of $1.8 billion in military aid over a dozen years (26). Given similar, yet distinct contexts, it is important to examine each Central American country's context separately to understand the rise of crime following the period of armed-conflict, which is essential to the current study.

El Salvador witnessed a twelve-year war ending in 1992 which resulted in over 80,000 lives lost and a significant displacement of its population from both internal migration and migration toward the United States (*Dividing the Isthmus* 76). The key actors in this conflict were, on the one hand, the revolutionary forces in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), which threatened state power, and, on the other hand, the National Revolutionary Alliance (ARENA), which was the ruling right-wing power (Robinson 87). The event which served as a catalyst to the war was the coup d'état on October 15, 1979 executed by a group of young officers to put an end to President Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero's regime, which was notorious for its bloody repression of the masses and opposition groups (Martin-Baro and Cardenal 1). Additionally, at the outset of the civil war, death squads assassinated and kidnapped dissidents, priests, and activists, and attacked Church property. Between 1977 and 1982, Booth et al. point out

that eighteen Catholic religious personnel, including Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, were murdered (144). Over time, violence and economic aid became inextricable. During the following years, the Salvadoran army quadrupled its size and financial interests became more concentrated in the bourgeoisie; however, despite its growth, both financial and logistical aid from the United States shaped internal affairs (2). Specifically, between 1981 and 1992, the year in which the Peace Accords were signed, the United States provided El Salvador $6 billion in military, economic and covert aid and another $1 billion through International Financial Institutes (IFIs) (Robinson 89). The staggering amount of financial aid illustrates the imposing nature of the neoliberal project in Central America during this time.

In Guatemala, the civil conflict, which spanned three decades, resulted in the execution of nearly 150,000 individuals, with an estimate of 45,000 *desaparecidos* (Andrews and McGuire 2). An additional 200,000 were sent into exile and over 440 villages were irreparably destroyed in scorched-earth campaigns and indiscriminate terror (Robinson 105). Following President Jacobo Arbenz's attempt to nationalize the United Fruit Company, a corporation based in the United States which controlled the majority of Guatemala's agricultural land, the CIA-backed National Liberation Movement (MLN) invaded Guatemala in 1954 under Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (Booth et al. 174-5). Over three regime changes and repression of opposition parties, including the Democratic Socialist and Christian Democratic parties, among other, the death squads increased activity and political assassinations. From the 1960s onward, the U.S. embassy tracked political murders, the majority of which were committed by government forces and rightwing death squads – the rates rose from approximately 30 per month in 1971 to 75

per month in 1979, and then to nearly 303 per month by 1982 (180). During this time of atrocious human rights violations, the United States' government continued to provide economic aid, totaling over $60 million from 1979-1981 (180). Robinson points out that from 1985 to 1990, Guatemala received aid from the United States in the sum of $847 million, which was double all aid during the preceding forty years (110). Similar to El Salvador, the financial aid and protection of U.S.-based corporate interests fueled the terror and human rights violations during the decades of civil war in Guatemala.

In contrast with the aforementioned countries, Nicaragua's situation is distinct in its two-fold structure: the Sandinista Revolution against the Somoza family dictatorship and the U.S.-funded Contra War against the Sandinistas. When the United States failed to defeat Augusto C. Sandino's resistance, the National Guard commandeered by Anastasio Somoza García orchestrated Sandino's assassination in 1934 and then used the National Guard to seize power in 1936 (Booth et al. 99). Thereafter, the Somoza family dictatorship ruled Nicaragua until 1979 with the backing of the National Guard and the United States. Between August and October of 1978, uprisings led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) units spread across the country. On August 23, 1978, a Sandinista unit seized the National Palace taking over 2,000 hostages, who were used in negotiations for the release of 60 Sandinista political prisoners (103). During this first period, the conflict took 50,000 lives and accounted for approximately $1.5 billion in property losses, while marking the transition to a revolutionary government (104). Despite a fairly stable relationship between the revolutionary government and the United States, the incoming Reagan administration in 1981 provided the CIA $19.8 million to support the anti-Sandinista counterrevolutionaries known as the Contras (106). Growing

displacement, deterioration of living standards, and unfavorable positions toward the war, considering the deaths of 30,865 people by the end of 1989, provided the United States an opportunity in the 1990 elections. Specifically, the plan was to denounce electoral laws and procedures in the event of a Sandinista victory and promoted an opposition victory of the National Opposition Union's (UNO) candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, who won on February 25, 1990 (113). Following this period, however, Nicaragua entered a period of neoliberal violence, characterized by cycles of standoff, negotiation, and compromised alternated with peaceful and violent strikes and demonstrations (Robinson 76).

The Costa Rican context, on the other hand, is distinct from the preceding situations. Of particular interest is how Costa Rica experienced the same global economic forces during the 1970s and 1980s while, at the same time, escaped much of the violence due to its lack of regime change (Booth et al. 75). Costa Rica and Honduras addressed mobilization relatively moderately, as visible in Costa Rica's open, constitutional regime with comparably clean elections and access to officials (78). Costa Rica did, however, serve as the site of the southern command for the Sandinistas and as a buffer zone for the United States. Given the implementation of neoliberal reforms in Costa Rica prior to its neighbors, the social and political unrest stemmed from the developing market. Robinson delineates the evolution of Costa Rica's insertion into the global market, which emerged following the 1948 civil war when landed oligarchy was replaced with industrial, commercial, and financial capitalists. The exhaustion of the dependent capitalist model in the late 1970s experienced a crisis in 1981, when the government failed to fully repay debts and suspended interest payments. This crisis paved the way for a restructuring

through the 1980s and 1990s and reinsertion into the global market (132). The breakdown of the Costa Rican market catapulted the country into political and social unrest, in which homicide rates and drug trafficking increased (Booth et al. 88).

Following the signing of the peace accords in 1992 and 1996, in El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively, and the 1990 presidential elections in Nicaragua in which the Sandinistas were defeated, the Central American countries adopted new political and economic reforms, specifically aligning themselves with the neoliberal agenda. According to David Harvey, "neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2). In "Setting *La diabla* Free," Yajaira M. Padilla has noted with regards to El Salvador, the reforms were not always successful: "El Salvador adopted a neoliberal model of modernization consisting of political democratization by way of open and competitive elections. Despite what seem to be positive changes […], recent studies suggest that the new neoliberal agenda has not only failed to ameliorate existing social and economic problems but has reproduced and, in many cases, exacerbated them" (133). With reform came new challenges, not only within the political and economic arena, but also within the social and ethical sectors of the Central American society.

Ignacio Martin-Baro and Rodolfo Cardenal outline, in their introduction to *Fifteen Years Later: Peace at Last,* the obstacles facing this now post-war society: "The first concern in the economic area is reconstruction, which is treated generically and vaguely in the peace accords; the concept implies that the present government has the capacity to

impose its plan, but there is no guarantee that the plan will be the best for the nation" (8). While doubting the government's underlying agenda, they also note that "there also exists the danger of reducing the construction of the new country to its material aspects, forgetting that it is necessary to solidly establish new ethical principles" (8). Without clearly defined ethical principles from the governing body, the peace accords operate as a discursive space where patterns of corruption and criminality are replicated in the era of reconstruction. Subsequently, the social anxieties of the post-conflict era are examined and critiqued through the materialization of corruption and criminality in discursive spaces. Therefore, the materialization of these principles and post-conflict ethics are best addressed through a study of literature, "which can frame and contextualize those 'neocolonial' forms of subjugation that result from expanding capitalism and globalization" (*Taking Their Word* xii). After decades of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination, the discursive conditions of possibility which lead to the contestation of hegemonic discourse are manifested in literary production; or rather, as Arias points out in "Centroamericanidades," "the words that tried to justify those acts in the name of the U.S.'s 'manifest destiny' became the discursive conditions that enabled a Central American literature to emerge as an imaginary contestation to the regulation of their peoples and economies by the U.S." (13). Under these conditions, Central American literature not only acts as a representation of lived conditions but rather as a discursive space to actively assert one's agency and critically engage hegemonic powers. "The denial of literary representation to Central American subjects," he continues, "has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of economic, legal, and political representation, as shown in the public media during the region's civil wars of the 1980s"

(13). The symbolic potential of Central American literature provides one avenue to recover the autonomy that was lost during the period of armed conflicts. Recent literary criticism has addressed this lack of representation, while emphasizing the potentiality of crime fiction which was derived from the conditions of the armed conflicts.

To understand the ways in which contemporary detective and crime fiction has developed throughout Latin America, and specifically Central America, one must trace its development to its origins. Extensive research currently exists on the evolution of detective and crime fiction from Europe and the United States and its importation to Latin America. Even though crime fiction stretches back to the nineteenth century, academic discourse emerging in the 1970s sought to define a set of conventions and formulas that affirmed a culture's dominant ideology: "this approach […] views detective fiction as a paradigm and an implement of the hegemonic processes of the Western nation-state, tantalizing readers with aberrant, irrational criminality while assuring them that society ultimately coheres through a shared commitment to reason and law" (Pearson and Singer 1). The vehicle through which the text questioned hegemonic processes was the detective, defined by Michael Holquist as an "instrument of pure logic" (141). Not surprising then is that contemporary studies examine extra-literary issues, rather than solely on literary devices and generic conventions.

While the terms detective novel and crime fiction are frequently used synonymously, it is important to denote the key elements of each and trace the evolution of their generic conventions. According to Amelia Simpson, "detective fiction is generally understood to be a type of narrative constructed around the solving of a crime problem, in which a detective, or a figure who carries out the functions of a detective, is

assigned a primary role" (10). The current study focuses on protagonists who, while not classic detectives, fulfill the investigative and fact-finding missions traditionally conducted by the detective. These protagonists are comprised of ex-soldiers, family members of victims of the armed-conflicts, liminal detectives, and the victim-turned-perpetrator. There are two frameworks which inform this study, that of classic detective fiction, the 'whodunit', and the hard-boiled detective novel, or *novela negra*. According to the canonical typology established by Tzvetan Todorov in the late 1970s, classic detective fiction consists of two stories: the story of the crime and of the investigation (44). In post-conflict Central American crime fiction, the protagonists conduct investigations of personal and historical crimes. The ways in which the investigation is presented allows the reader to attempt solving the puzzle, which "provides a reassuring view of society in the mechanistic crime-to-solution sequence" (Simpson 11).

In contrast to the investigative nature of the classic detective novel, "more typically align[ed] mystery conventions with anxieties over contamination, irrationality, and the threat posed to imperial modernity by unassimilated racial and cultural difference" (Pearson and Singer 4), the hard-boiled detective novel emerged in the United States in the 1920s. The hard-boiled novel, or *novela negra*, is defined in Demetrio Estébanez Calderón's *Diccionario de términos literarios* as "a narrative subgenre (related to the detective novel), that appears in North America at the beginning of the 1920s and in which its authors attempt to reflect, from a critical consciousness, the world of gangsterism and organized criminality stemming from the violence and corruption of the capitalist society of the era" (Close 143-4). Crucial to the *novela negra* is the critical consciousness visibilized in the intersections between subjective and systemic violence;

or rather, an overt representation and subsequent questioning of the criminality inherent to the capitalist system which manifests itself through individual, physical violence. This critical consciousness speaks to the reasons why crime fiction is used synonymously with detective fiction, given that crime is the force which drives the narrative discourse and the detective's investigation.

Responding then to contemporary political and historical changes, as critics like Alison Light and Susan Rowland remind us, "detective fiction is, after all, a form of *crime* fiction," which attracts a large readership due to the desire "not by our need for the reassurance that comes with a restoration of order but by our suspicion that there is always 'more to it' than institutionalized accounts acknowledge" (Horsley 19-20). Speaking to the institutionalized accounts following transformative historic moments, which is the foundation to my study, Jameson underscores that, following World War II, there has been an increasingly fragmented societal structure, characterized by the breakdown of family units and cities, among other things (*Raymond Chandler* 6). Similarly, Juan Epple references the 1968 massacre in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico, the first post-Franco crime narrative by Manuel Vásquez Montalván, and the 1960s-hippie movement, accompanied by the civil rights movement, in the United States, among others, as key historical moments preceding narrative transformations (15). Inherent to these historic moments was the confluence of systemic and subjective violence, which is a "constituent part of the social fabric" (Close 149). The transformative potential of socio-political forces is evident throughout the evolution of the *novela negra* in Latin America.

In his introduction to *Latin American Mystery Writers*, Mempo Giardinelli emphasizes the relationship between the narratives produced in the United States and the creation of the hard-boiled novel in Latin America. Elaborating upon a definition provided by Javier Coma, Giardinelli notes that the hard-boiled novel "is a narrative, with origins in the United States during the 1920s and with a typical, primordial North American development, tied to a realist, sociopolitical focus on the contemporary topic of crime, slowly developed as an identifiable genre and practiced mainly by specialists" (xi). In relation to the economic state of the 1920s during which the North American novel developed, Giardinelli points out the variants of crime represented were byproducts of the conditions of hypercapitalism: unemployment, begging, urban crime, xenophobia, corruption, and unstoppable flow of migrants, among others (xiii). In these narratives, the reader encounters the criminal at a more personal level, often times viewing the investigation from the criminal's point of view. The hard-boiled narrative that Giardinelli defines contrasts the conventions of the classic detective novel, which is centered around the investigative process. The key differences between the classic detective novel and the present corpus of hard-boiled narratives are the types of crimes investigated, the protagonist fulfilling the detective position, and the emphasis on representing extra-literary psychological and social conditions resulting from the years of armed conflict.

Referencing the periods of armed conflict in Central America, critics point out how crime fiction has evolved as a direct response and critique to the violence. Ralph E. Rodríguez asserts that the detective novel is better suited than other genres to identify the shifting socio-political terrain solely because of its emphasis on reason, order, justice, and alienation (6). According to Nicaraguan critic and writer, Sergio Ramírez, there are two

primary characteristics that Central American fiction manifest. First, "'Así se observa, la figura del escritor comprometido en el estricto sentido de un escritor que opta por no ser ajeno a la realidad que le rodea. Por ello se encuentra, en muchos casos, un compromiso con una causa que es personal pero se relaciona con lo social'" (cited in Villalta 95). The dynamic relationship between collective and individual manifests itself in complementary ways throughout the present corpus. Second, Ramírez emphasizes that "'el tiempo de post-guerra en Centroamérica y en particular en El Salvador que coincide, además con el fin de siglo, ha dado como resultado un recuento hacia atrás en la historia, un ir hacia el individuo'" (cited in Villalta 95). Ramírez emphasizes the possibility of an individual reasserting one's agency in a post-war society that offers more obstacles than opportunities. Drawing attention to the interaction between individual, or the protagonist in the case of the works of fiction, and extra-literary elements, José Luis Escamilla points out that "la narrativa centroamericana de posguerra civil está determinada por una serie de elementos extraliterarios como el fin de Guerra, la firma de los acuerdos de paz, los procesos de democratización, la implementación del modelo económico neoliberal, el nuevo entorno internacional y la acumulación histórica, política y social" (23). Not only do the extra-literary elements inform the structure of the novel, but rather provides an evolutionary space for Central American literature.

Returning to the discussion of the post-neoliberal or post-conflict criminality, Ana Patricia Rodríguez delineates how similar issues not only permeate post-conflict society but rather form the conditions of possibility which allows the *novela negra* to critically engage this tumultuous period. She notes the following characteristics present in both literary and extra-literary contexts: "la (des)construcción de identidades e imaginarios

sociales, la elaboración de historias oficiales y extraoficiales y la configuración simbólica y real de comunidades locales y globales, así como la imposición de políticas migratorias internacionales y el despliegue de la violencia y la criminalidad transnacional" ("Heridas abiertas" 425). Along similar lines, William H. Castro argues that post-*testimonio* novels possess the potentiality to reconstruct the solidarity trope, which is signified by its inextricable relationship to "radical democracy," which "*actively opposes* the hegemonic instantiation of a now global 'criminal capitalism'" (123). Transnational criminality amplifies the processes now inherent in a criminal investigation. For example, due to increased global communication and technological advances, the individual fulfilling the detective functions must rely on digital media and spaces to fully engage in the investigation.

These new investigation and interrogatory tools distance the current corpus from the days in which the individual detective worked painstakingly to solve the puzzle. Generally speaking, "the detective novel, or better, the police procedural novel, is one genre of literature that rationalizes and systematizes specific aspects of conversation, including such aspects of identification and guilt, but also observation and objectivity" (Olsson 130). The crime novel unveils the violence that is simultaneously present and hidden in everyday conversation and literary dialogue: "Dialogue has always the potential of turning into a form of interrogation and surveillance. And it has always the potential of harming the other, of symbolically 'killing' the other in an act of desubjectification through the denial of the other's integrity" (Olsson 130). Consequently, I propose that criminality surfaces not only in the crime fiction texts of the current corpus but also manifests itself in the desire for personal revenge and the protagonists' personal

investigations that lie outside police jurisdiction. Situated specifically within the Central American context, Misha Kokotovic notes that detective fiction emerged in the aftermath of the Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s (15). Characterized by a noir sensibility of corruption, decay, and disillusionment whereby social order is the source of criminality rather than justice, Kokotovic proposes that these texts form part of a greater Latin American literary phenomenon which he refers to as *neoliberal noir* (15). He states that "since about 1990, most of the continent has experienced something of a boom in narratives that use elements of detective or crime fiction to criticize the effects of the neoliberal, free market capitalism imposed on Latin American societies over the past two decades" (15). He continues that "the strikingly senseless violence and criminality of all these postwar works of neoliberal noir represent a sharp turn away from the revolutionary utopianism of wartime literature, in which violence was employed in the service of social justice or, when exercised by the state, symbolized injustice" (26). Additionally, the current corpus of texts question whether the restoration of order is possible in a post-conflict society.

The phenomenon of *neoliberal noir* serves as my point of departure into the detective novels produced by diasporic authors. According to literary critic and scholar Ana Patricia Rodríguez, "contemporary Central American diasporic writers like Horacio Castellanos Moya, Francisco Goldman, Hector Tóbar, and Marcos McPeek Villatoro, among others, often write in response to various forms of violence" ("Diasporic" 7). She argues that these authors "grapple with Central America as a site of unresolved historical crises that often extend into the lives of Central Americans outside of the isthmus" ("Diasporic" 7). Additionally, Ralph E. Rodríguez points out that "the emergence and

proliferation of the Chicana/o detective novel in the last two decades illuminates how Chicana/os grapple with feminism, homosexuality, *familia*, masculinity, mysticism, the nationalist subject, and U.S.-Mexico borders" (2). These symbolic spaces mirror the liminal spaces from which criminality emerges in the current corpus and are not exclusive to one set of cultural or political conditions; or rather, contemporary crime fiction is the vehicle best equipped at engaging these social, imaginary, and corporal conditions resulting from the periods of armed conflict and displacement due to its positionality as a liminal fiction.

It is telling that when the quarterly literary journal *McSweeney's* dedicated its forty-sixth volume to contemporary crime stories, the editors asked thirteen writers from ten different countries – many of whom write from the diaspora – to contribute a contemporary crime story set in their native country (Galera 20). According to Daniel Galera, the volume's editor, "the choice of that broad and beat-up genre was intentional [in order to] see how each writer would adapt the themes and tropes of outlaw life to suit their own style and sensibility, and how they'd show up their surroundings through it" (20). While individual styles, characters and themes varied, it is important to note that "every author […] managed to use the architecture of the crime story to express their own mix of personal, political, and societal anxieties. The usual suspects have all materialized – murder and love, comedy and tragedy, hope and hopelessness – but so too has a glimpse of the complex world these writers live within today" (21). The fluidity of the genre speaks to the ways in which the authors engage the pre-established and accepted generic conventions, which can be read as the systemic violence which accompanies literary production. These narrative variations, therefore, illustrate the complexity of

confronting the systemic and subjective violence in which the post-conflict Central American society is engulfed, and symbolize the conditions of living against neoliberal forces.

In his critical text, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* David Harvey defines the neoliberal subject as one that emerges from the dissolution of 'all forms of social solidarity […] in favor of individualism, private property, personal responsibility and family values" (23). What this definition lacks, however, is the role that social solidarity plays for oppressed individuals or societies manifested through collective cultural and artistic exploration and reproduction. My comparative analysis will illustrate how neoliberal subjectivity is manifested in the Central American post-armed conflict texts. While the texts chosen recreate the collective history of various Central American countries and the United States from the 1980s to the early 2000s, the authors utilize and manipulate previously established and critically celebrated genres and aesthetics to problematize the "assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by the neoliberal market" (Harvey 7). Following a brief review of neoliberal cultural production and commodification in Latin America, I will discuss how the detective or crime novel adopts innovative techniques in order to complicate neoliberal ideals. Deviating from classic detective novels, the current corpus includes *novelas negras* which intensify the relationship between the reader and the criminal. In order to trace the individual's personal and traumatic journey in the text, the writers, whose work I analyze, blur boundaries between institutional violence, victimization, and liminal criminality. Therefore, in this project I will argue that these discursive, spatial, and temporal transgressions indicate the beginning of the next marked generic transformation, as

previously witnessed following both World Wars, the civil war in Spain, the massacre of 1968 in Mexico and the 1968 civil rights movement in the United States, and the Central American civil wars, among others.

In order to discuss the neoliberal project in Latin America, the United States must always remain in the forefront as a key player, with an emphasis on "its commercial and geopolitical interests [and] hegemonic design" (Haluani 322). Studying this twenty-year time span in Latin America uncovers the immediate consequences and social conditions of neoliberalism. Namely, in Latin America, "the 1980s were known as the 'lost decade' because of the financial burden caused by the rolling back of debt negotiations and the painful toll they took on the subsidy policies of almost all Latin American governments" (326). Stemming from the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, the growth and material aspirations of the urban populations placed tremendous pressure on the government to increase and improve public services, efficiency and management: "Themes like administrative efficiency and integrity, corruption, human rights, decentralization of national administration and strengthening of municipal authority, and better social welfare programs, among others, are the main and most pressing concerns of the vast majority of Latin America" (326-7). These public services are of dire importance following the internal conflicts and civil wars that occurred during the latter part of the twentieth century in order to regain control, offer assistance to the victimized communities and begin the arduous process of rebuilding the country's infrastructure. In addition to these pressing concerns, the complexity of contemporary Latin American societies is characterized in the following ways:

> the growing power of the middle class and its social movements as a limited alternative to the discredited political parties; the changing political role of the military in domestic politics; the influence of the private sector and the labor unions on economic policies; the reintroduction of the Catholic Church into domestic policies; the increasingly sophisticated nature of democratization; and the fact that the lower classes […] can exercise a certain degree of power on the outcome of voting. (327-8)

While not all of these topics are explicitly depicted in the current corpus of Central American crime fiction, the authors provide opportunities for the reader to read between the lines and navigate the intersections that abound between these.

Even though it appears that the neoliberal project has liberated the lower and middle classes from economic and political oppression, critics are quick to point out the paradoxical positions that these classes encounter within the neoliberal system. Considering the consequences produced by free-market capitalism, Kokotovic underscores the production of demodernization proposed by Mary Louise Pratt, who defines the term as the exclusion "[of] large sectors of the population – whose labor and meager capacity for consumption are not required in the new model of capital accumulation – and condemned them to an unprecedented regression in living standards" (26). This regression in living standards, however, offers little hope to those "left or cast outside the market system, [which include] a vast reservoir of apparently disposable people bereft of social protections and supportive social structures" (Harvey 185). For these individuals, Harvey points out that "there is little to be expected from neoliberalization except poverty, hunger, disease, and despair" (185). He continues by

mentioning that "their only hope is somehow to scramble aboard the market system either as petty commodity producers, as informal vendors, as petty predators to beg, steal, or violently secure some crumbs from the rich man's table, or as participants in the vast illegal trade of trafficking in drugs, guns, women, or anything else illegal for which there is a demand" (185); or rather, they occupy liminal spaces of criminality.

As I previously mentioned, and as other critics have stressed as well, the discussion of the neoliberal market needs to explore the potential that cultural production and commodification has to valorize the collective past. In her extensive study on the neoliberal crisis in Latin America, Francine Masiello notes that inherent to neoliberalism is the "apparent neutrality on social contradiction, erasing strands of memory that bound individuals to their past and suppressing discussion of 'value,' literature and art instead cultivate tension, revealing the conflicts between an unresolved past and present, between invisibility and exposure, showing the dualities […] that leave their trace on identitarian struggles today" (3).[1] The tensions between past and present and invisibility and exposure permeate throughout the current corpus, emphasizing social liminality as a neoliberal byproduct, while highlighting the "shifting boundaries between truth and fiction, [and] between the experience of torture and the consequences of its representation" (Masiello 5), which frequently characterize the period following an armed conflict. However, if literature and art provide the space to examine these tensions, one must question the relationship between commodification and memory.

---

[1] It is important to note that Masiello bases the study of these tensions and the "in-between" following the concepts of microspace (Deleuze, Foucault, Perlongher), the *entre-lugar* or in-between (Bhabha, Silviano Santiago), interstitiality and disjuncture (Achugar, Appadurai, Hopehayn) and ungovernable subjects (the subaltern studies groups of Asia or Latin Americanists) (12).

In *The Untimely Present*, Idelber Avelar delineates this conflictive cycle stating that "growing commodification negates memory because new commodities must always replace previous commodities, [sending] them to the dustbin of history" (2). He problematizes this process noting that "the erasure of the past as past is the cornerstone of all commodification, even when the past becomes yet another commodity for sale in the present" (2). In the present study, the commodified past assumes the form of literary and artistic production which has conformed to present market demands, as a result erasing previous literary and artistic conventions. Futhermore, Avelar stresses that the market operates in such a way that "the past must be relegated to obsolescence. The past is to be forgotten because the market demands that the new replace the old without leaving the remainder. The task of the oppositional intellectual would be to point out the residue left by every substitution, thereby showing that the past is never simply erased by the latest novelty" (2). Given the "war fatigue," (*Taking Their Word* 22), the corpus of Central American crime fiction does not directly or explicitly engage the periods of armed conflict, but rather focus on the common and subjective criminality which results. This common and subjective criminality include murders, physical and emotional domestic abuse, corrupt investigations, and drug trafficking, among others.

Following Avelar's notion, these Central American crime fiction authors market their texts in such a way to speak *to* the past without speaking *about* the past. I argue that the post-armed conflict literature of this current study must also confront its new position in the global market, which is defined by fluid boundaries, rapid production, and cultural exchange. To resituate these texts within the ever-expanding market, one must identify the current literary trends in Latin America that pertain to "a new generation of readers

and writers [who are] eager to put the stereotypes of their cultures and literatures behind them" (Galera 20). As Daniel Galera remarks in the introduction to the McSweeney's volume on Latin American crime fiction, "social, political, and economic change, plus our old friend the Internet, have helped foster the so-called 'anxiety of influence': when everything is available as a reference and pretty much everything has been made, unmade, and remade by canonical and contemporary authors […], what the hell should you do?" (20). For starters, literary critics must scrutinize the position of literature in the global market and its relationship to other desired commodities. In relation to the advancement of technology and a tremendous explosion of digital media and popular culture, in *The Ends of Literature*, Brett Levinson questions the privileged position literature once held. He notes that neoliberalism and global capitalism are viewed "as the new fields of domination, leading to the virtual elimination of public, therefore, political space. The death of literature, to the contrary, evidently signals the descent of high or bourgeois culture and the opening to new works, an emerging class of formerly suppressed creators or subjects, and authentically democratic pluralisms" (2). The formerly suppressed creators or subjects in this study refer to the diasporic writers of Latin America who address the political instability and violent past of their home countries while responding to the forces of the neoliberal market.

Even though the new generation of artistic producers and consumers seek new alternatives and practices, Galera notes that the new social, political, and economic commodities are accompanied with wealth and poverty's incessant tortured dance (19). On the other hand, in *The Expediency of Culture*, George Yúdice comments on the pluralizing power of globalization and its problematic effect on cultural production. Due

to expanding borders, migrations and conflicts over citizenship, Yúdice situates cultural capital along a timeline demarcated by conflict: "The turn to cultural capital is part of the history of recognition of shortcomings in investment for physical capital in the 1960s, human capital in the 1980s, and social capital in the 1990s. Each new notion of capital was devised as a way of ameliorating some of the failures of development according to the preceding framework" (14). However, as previously mentioned, cultural capital is evaluated based on its potential to provide "fiscal incentives, institutional marketing or publicity value, and the conversion of nonmarket activity to market activity" (15). In post-conflict Central American crime fiction, physical capital is visible as soldiers return to civilian life while lacking the capacity to seamlessly assimilate due to the lived conditions of the war. Human capital, for its part, is thus recognized in patterns of displacement and migration for both political and economic forces. Social capital is understood as the culmination of the deficiencies of human and physical capital produced from war-time conditions and evaluated in terms of overcoming post-conflict criminality and participating actively in the institutionalized market. Specifically, the collective loss or fragmentation of social bonds and networks illustrates the loss of social capital due to violence.

In contrast to the aforementioned argument, others note current trends, themes and aesthetics that would constitute the foundation of a current literary movement. Situated within the discursive practice of violence and the struggle for representation, Yajaira M. Padilla suggests that "with their often stark and disparaging portrayals of neoliberal society, these contemporary texts suggest that free-market doctrine has created a rather than attenuated disparity and that the transition toward democracy is plagued by

the persistent discriminatory and oppressive practices of the past" (134). Among these peripheral figures present in post-conflict Central American crime fiction that represent those cast outside the market include "ex-soldiers turned drug traffickers or assassins for hire, ex-guerrillas turned 'shady' cops or bodyguards, emigrants disgusted with their fellow countrymen, and corrupt politicians" (134). These figures occupy liminal spaces while actively engaging in liminal criminality, which is evidenced throughout their respective investigative and interrogative procedures.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1: Cyborg Soldiers and Liminal Criminality in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* (2001) and Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998)

Expanding upon the *neoliberal noir* generic conventions (Kokotovic), authors Horacio Castellanos Moya and Héctor Tobar problematize the victimization and post-war criminality of former soldiers. Castellanos Moya explores the demobilization of soldiers immediately following the signing of the Peace Accords in El Salvador and their recidivism into neoliberal delinquents in *El arma en el hombre* (2001). While the reader accompanies the protagonist's transformation from highly decorated soldier to common criminal who steals cars and murders for necessity, hire, and pleasure, Castellanos Moya sheds light on the active institutional agents responsible for these crimes. Héctor Tobar brings to the fore how war time violence transgresses temporal and spatial borders in *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998). Following the armed conflict in Guatemala, ex-soldier Guillermo Longoria relocates to Los Angeles, California, where he is invisibilized alongside former political and military victims and faces one of his former victims. This

chapter examines the post-war transition for ex-soldiers whose victimization at the hands of the state and military has produced cyborg soldiers who perpetuate acts of criminality and violence in the post-conflict period. My analysis draws from Donna Haraway's theorization of the cyborg, which she defines as a "hybrid of machine and organism" (2190). The cyborg becomes a metaphor for the "disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self of contemporary cultural theory suited to the West's late capitalist social order" (2205). I will suggest that liminal subjectivity and criminality resulting from the conflict appeal to the contemporary individual as a means to protecting oneself in a society where institutional violence is hidden. These novels ultimately reconceptualize the crime narrative to expose the societal danger of pertaining to this post-conflict society through the victimized perpetrator's perspective.

Chapter 2: Legacies of Violence and Revenge in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998)

Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* deviates from the established norm by portraying a polyphonic and multi-ethnic Latino community in Los Angeles, California, while simultaneously portraying both the victim and perpetrator's points of view. Following the brutal murder of his wife, an intellectual actively protesting the government, and infant son, Antonio Bernal flees Guatemala in hopes of escaping his impending death, only to find himself unemployed, homeless and captivated by the possibility of revenge. Meanwhile, recognized for his well-maintained appearance resulting from his military training at the School of the Americas, Guillermo Longoria, a retired sergeant in the Jaguar Battalion of the Guatemalan army, also relocates to Los Angeles after the war, seeking refuge from his impoverished and war torn homeland.

Both fractured beings who have been victimized, albeit differently, by political and military violence their chance encounter catapults Antonio on his own personal investigation for revenge, while Guillermo struggles to readjust to civilian life, visible through displays of domestic violence. The tensions between past and present and invisibility and exposure permeate throughout *The Tattooed Soldier*, emphasizing social liminality as a neoliberal byproduct, while highlighting the "shifting boundaries between truth and fiction, [and] between the experience of torture and the consequences of its representation" (Masiello 5), which frequently characterize the period following an armed conflict. In this chapter, I analyze how revenge is the only legal recourse available to Antonio Bernal for the brutal murder of his family. Antonio's liminal criminality results because he is entrapped within a system which protects state institutions and further marginalizes its victims and invisibilizes the state's culpability.

Chapter 3: Broken Law, Law Breakers in Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* (2012) and Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* (2003)

This chapter analyzes how detectives Romilia Chacón's and Don Chepe's liminal criminalities provide a vehicles for assessing justice in broken legal systems in Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* (2003) and Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* (2012), respectively. In McPeek Villatoro's crime fiction series, the protagonist Romilia Chacón engages in multiple investigations that blur the boundaries between legality and illegality. The series opens as Chacón is tracking a Nashville serial killer, "the Whisperer," and the murderer of her sister, Catalina, which is the basis for the series' second installment, *Minos*. Within the homicide department, Chacón's liminal criminality stems from the marginalization she experiences based on her gender, ethnicity and ability to speak Spanish, of which she

is highly aware. In Quirós' *Verano rojo*, Don Chepe is tasked with investigating the murder of his friend La Argentina. In contrast to Chacón, Don Chepe conducts extra-official investigations, assisting the police department in Costa Rica while, at the same time, placing himself in an in-between position. Don Chepe's investigation differs from Chacón because he relies on evidence that his victim left for him. Being the only texts in the corpus to speak from within the judicial system, this chapter explores how Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe's performativity as law protecting detectives reveals that the law-making system is broken. Subsequently, this analysis will focus on their criminality which arises from blurring the lines of justice; or rather, emerges from their conditions as representatives of the systematically violent institution.

Chapter 4: Playing the Victim: Liminal Subjectivity in Jacinta Escudo's *El asesino melancólico* (2015)

In *El asesino melancólico*, Jacinta Escudos inverts the traditional judicial process by emphasizing the victim's desire to escape the emotional and psychological distress produced by a failed relationship. The novel portrays Rolanda Hester's psychological decay resulting from her husband's betrayal and her subsequent journey to hire someone to take her life. After being trailed and emotionally manipulated by Hester, Blake Sorrow considers taking the money offered and fleeing, once the job is done. A moment of lapsed judgment and a brief struggle ends with Hester being shot and Sorrow being incarcerated, leaving the reader questioning if true justice had been served. The conflation of emotional and subjective violence in the novel represents the anguish and desperation characterizing the neoliberal subject in the post-conflict period. This chapter will examine Hester's agency as both "victim" and "perpetrator," and her desire to narrate her own death as

conditions not possible to the victims of the armed conflict. The absence of the investigative process will be shown to be characteristic of a truly and completely liminal crime narrative, while illustrating how the confluence of subjectivity and criminality underscores the neoliberal condition. This novel ultimately reconceptualizes the crime narrative to expose the societal danger of this post-conflict society and opens the discursive space to transgress formulaic constraints and transcend into a new critical mode.

Conclusion

The dissertation will conclude with brief remarks on how the current corpus of post-conflict Central American crime fiction texts provide a discursive map for identifying how post-war violence transgresses spatial, temporal, and psychological borders. My analysis illustrates how conditions of victimization and criminalization are internalized and naturalized in post-conflict societies and reveals how societies are conditioned to violence. In a post-conflict society, therefore, liminal criminality is the most effective means for victims of subjective and state-sanctioned systemic violence to access justice. Ultimately, these texts illustrate how justice itself is corrupted and elucidate the relationship between liminal criminality and liminal justice.

Chapter 1: Cyborg Soldiers and Liminal Criminality in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* (2001) and Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998)

The transition between periods of armed conflicts and post-conflicts presents many social, cultural, and economical challenges. In her introduction "A Farewell to Arms?" political scientist Sarah Zukerman Daly states that "almost half of all countries emerging from conflict relapse into war within five years of signing a peace agreement. Even where civil war does not resume, most post-conflict environments experience elevated levels of violence" (2). Identifying and problematizing the causal relationships between war and post-war violence is the subject of both criminological and literary studies and the subject of this dissertation focusing on the postwar literature of Central America. Within criminological studies, questions of the (il)legitimacy of violence abound. In *Understanding Political Violence*, Vincenzo Ruggiero states that "'crimes in war' and 'war crimes' are central areas of investigation, and while the former are exemplified by conventional predatory offences, interpersonal violence and illicit market operations, the latter tend to be included under the rubric of state crime" (185). The distinction between 'crimes in war' and 'war crimes' refers to the (il)legitimacy of each act; or rather, illegitimate 'crimes in war' refer to crimes perpetrated by an individual without authorization from the states and legitimate 'war crimes' refer to those authorized by state-sanctioned institutions. Furthermore, Ruggiero suggests that "once made legitimate […] violence may also come to be viewed as the only effective tool for the protection of one's well-being, the achievement of one's goals, or the solution of personal differences" (185). In Central America, U.S.-backed government and military forces

perpetrated legitimized war crimes and victims of the systemic, institutional, and military violence are considered the perpetrators of illegitimate crimes in war.

In times of war, violence and criminality are not only legitimized, but are also considered the most viable means of survival. Specifically, victims of military violence actively contest oppressive forces through individual acts of violence and criminality while fighting for both their individual survival and the collective restoration of law and order. The questions guiding this analysis are the following: How are violence and criminality normalized during a period of armed conflicts? What happens to the criminalized following the period of armed conflict? How does legitimized violence and criminality become survival mechanisms? As Daly notes, post-conflict societies experience an elevated level of violence, which tends to suggest that legitimized criminality from the war is recycled and transformed in the post-conflict society, thereby making impossible the existence of a truly post-conflict society. A truly post-conflict society would be free of the remnants of legitimized war crimes, would prosecute the perpetrators of these war crimes, and would provide services and opportunities to victims of these war crimes. In Central America, these victims include former soldiers who were forcibly conscripted into the military, family members of victims of military and political violence, communities who suffered material and immaterial losses, and individuals who were forced to flee their homes, among many others. In his text *Violence and Democracy*, renowned political scientist John Keane refers to these post-conflict societies as today's battle zones, or more specifically "uncivil wars" (114). Contrasting the legitimized and authorized violence of an armed conflict or civil war, Keane states that the most striking characteristic of the uncivil war "is the way in which the protagonists of violence practice

asymmetric violence" (114). Asymmetric violence, for its part, refers to the destruction of people, property, the infrastructure, places of historical importance and nature (115).

In addition to criminological studies, literary works also contend with questions of post-conflict criminality and violence. Referring to the transition to the post-conflict period in Central America, literary critic Misha Kokotovic comments on a similar transitional period in Central American literature. He states that "during the war years, narrative fiction tended to be overshadowed by testimonio and was often influenced by it, giving rise to the hybrid genre of the testimonial novel, exemplified by Manlio Argueta's *Un día en la vida* (1980) and *Cuscatlán, donde bate la mar del sur* (1986), which chronicled the rise of armed struggle in El Salvador" ("After the Revolution" 22). In the postwar period, Kokotovic notes a return to narrative fiction that focuses on "individual desires, passions, and struggles for survival in violent, postwar societies with only a grim future" (23). According to Kokotovic, postwar texts highlight the relationship between the individual, the foundational figure of neoliberalism, and one's lived conditions: "The freedom of the individual is severely constrained by the violence and decay of nations still ruled by corrupt elites, in which it is virtually impossible even to know what is going on, much less to freely act upon such knowledge" (24). For example, in Central America, forcible conscription into the U.S.-backed and funded military stripped individuals of their rights, their identity, and their victimhood as they were manipulated and used as weapons in the armed conflict. Consequently, cultural products and literature of the region responded to military oppression and systemic violence both by problematizing the relationship between the individual victim and institutional forces and by contesting the official historical discourse. In Central America, following the Nicaraguan,

Salvadoran, and Guatemalan civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s, crime fiction was the vehicle used "to criticize the effects of the neoliberal, free market capitalism imposed on Latin American societies" (Kokotovic, "Neoliberal noir" 15). Kokotovic refers to this literary phenomenon as *neoliberal noir* because texts produced during that era "share a noir sensibility characterized by a pervasive sense of corruption, decay, and disillusionment, in which the social order itself, and particularly the state, is the ultimate source of criminality, rather than of justice" (15). In this chapter, I analyze the embodiment and naturalization of violence in two post-war Central American novels, Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* (2001) and Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998), both written and published in the diaspora.

First, in his 2001 novel *El arma en el hombre*, critically acclaimed Honduran-Salvadoran author, scholar and professor at the University of Iowa, Horacio Castellanos Moya follows the protagonist, Robocop, as he returns to civilian life from his tenure as a decorated soldier in the elite Acahuapa Battalion in the Salvadoran armed forces. Forcefully conscripted into the military at the age of 20, Robocop equates the military to his schooling and family, stating that following the signing of the Salvadoran Peace Accords and his disarmament, he feels orphaned. With a meager three months salary as severance, Robocop quickly morphs into a common criminal as he steals cars and murders for hire, necessity, and pleasure. Second, in his 1998 novel *The Tattooed Soldier*, Los Angeles based, U.S.-Guatemalan author, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and professor at the University of California, Irvine, Héctor Tobar focuses on the lives of a victim of war crimes and the victimization of a death squad member in the Guatemalan civil war. Following the brutal murder of his wife, Elena, and his son, Carlos, Antonio

Bernal, the victim, flees Guatemala in hopes of escaping his impending death, only to find himself unemployed, homeless, and subject to revenge following a chance encounter with his family's murderer. Meanwhile, Guillermo Longoria, the victimizer, who was forcibly conscripted into the Guatemalan military at the age of 17 and retired as a sergeant in the Jaguar Battalion of the Guatemalan army, also relocates to Los Angeles seeking refuge from his war-torn homeland. Through their respective protagonists, both ex-soldiers with similar experiences, Castellanos Moya and Tobar disrupt the binary narrative of victim and victimized and shed light on the conditions which produce their criminality.

Post-conflict Central American crime narratives can be said to both portray and problematize the asymmetrical practices of violence and binary of victim and victimizer. As such, I argue that crime fiction is the vehicle to critically engage questions of criminality, or acts of violence and common crime, and liminality. According to Bjørn Thomassen, liminality refers to "moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction, and destruction" (1). The post-conflict period in Central America may be read as a liminal moment because the fabric of society is reimagined as both victims of war crimes and the victimized assume new social positions. In *El arma en el hombre*, Castellanos Moya highlights the processes of self-understanding and behavioral changes as ex-soldier Robocop returns to life as a civilian. In *The Tattooed Soldier*, Tobar problematizes the possibility that both victims of war crimes and those victimized by military forces can coexist in the post-conflict period vis-

à-vis the relationship between Antonio Bernal, the victim, and Guillermo Longoria, the victimizer.

As a consequence, the authors give voice to protagonists whose experiences with state institutions or state legitimized-violence during the period of armed conflict has the potential to disrupt and complicate the relationship between victim and criminal. These protagonists include ex-soldiers, family members of victims, and detectives who work both in- and outside the law. These liminal protagonists – Robocop, Antonio Bernal, and Guillermo Longoria – assume the narrative position, traditionally occupied by an "investigator or detective figure," and critically respond to and question the hegemonic and neoliberal forces at play both during the period of armed conflicts and the post-war period. Therefore, through my analysis of the liminal narrative voices of Robocop in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* and Antonio Bernal and Guillermo Longoria in Héctor Tobar's novel *The Tattooed Soldier*, I demonstrate how in postwar literature violence is inscribed in Central American society and on the bodies of neoliberal subjects across Central America and its diaspora. Remnants of military violence, for example, materialize as ex-soldiers and guerillas return to civilian life, where they redeploy their military training as a means for gainful employment in underground criminal networks across Central American and the disaspora.

The signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords on January 16, 1992 not only officially marked the end of the twelve-year civil war in El Salvador, but also initiated the transition into the non-temporally bound post-war period. In the years immediately following the signing of the peace accords, the death toll was double the average recorded during the civil war. In 1996, it reached a peak of 156 homicides per 100,000

habitants, which had diminished slightly by 2006, in which 56.2 homicides per 100,000 habitants was recorded, still being the highest in all of Latin America at that time (Wieser 205). The visibility of the relationship between war-time and post-war crime and violence is ever present and rapidly expanding in El Salvador. Underlining the causal relationship between the Civil War and post-war criminality, William H. Castro asserts that "in the period following this uncivil Civil War, […] a criminal globalization establishes itself in El Salvador, emerging precisely through the dissemination of the specters of crime, or as […] Ellen Moodie calls them, 'crime stories'" (125). Castro notes that these crime stories "appear at both the popular level of the fear of rampant crime, or rather, the rampant fear of crime, and at the elite or elitist level of media representations" (125).

This criminal globalization is due in part to the United States' military and economic interventions, the expansion of transnational drug trafficking, and the demobilization of the Salvadoran military. In his study on the economic borders, Andrés Aluma notes that "esta asociación económica multinacional ha transformado la región entera, desplazando las fronteras económicas [y a sus habitantes] hacia el sur de Norteamérica, y convirtiéndolos en sujetos móviles del mercado necesarios para el funcionamiento del sistema neoliberal impuesto por los élites políticas y económicas de la región" (np). Instability in the local economy results from the displacement of economic borders and Salvadoran citizens. The local Salvadoran economy has suffered as a result "[del] gran número de remesas que los emigrantes reenvían a su país de origen […]. Esto resulta en que los criminales de la posguerra no persiguen fines políticos, sino económicos" (Wieser 205), as evidenced by an increase number of carjackings, robberies, and drug trafficking, among others. Literary and cultural production, for its part, critically

responds to these changes while simultaneously reflecting the reality which remains following the period of armed conflict, emphasizing the ways in which remnants of the armed conflict permeate the Salvadoran society.

These conditions not only frame political and historical discourse, but also inform contemporary literary and cultural practices throughout the Central American isthmus and diaspora. El Salvador, the context to which Castellanos Moya himself responds and out of which he emerges, is not immune from social, economic, and political issues which plague the post-war society. Aluma asserts that "Horacio Castellanos Moya intenta hacer lo suyo pero adaptado a la realidad sociopolítica y cultural salvadoreña, una crítica a las fracturas históricas, la fuga de personas y las desigualdades económicas de este país centroamericano" (np). Not surprisingly, the recurrence of violence is a thread that both connects and entraps texts and individuals within and across borders. Studying the connections between the armed conflicts and the economy, Sheila Candelario highlights that "después de un siglo de dictaduras brutales, guerras civiles y masacres […] un 55 por ciento de la población vive aún en niveles de pobreza sin esperanzas de cambio dentro de la nueva economía dolarizada impulsada por una ideología neoliberal, excluyente representada por el sector financiero e industrial" (np). The economic violence and inequality visibilizes the violence which accompanied the imposition of neoliberalism.

As such, post-war Salvadoran narrative and cultural production critically responds to and contests the imposition of the neoliberal paradigm, economic violence and inequality, and the mobility of violence across borders. According to literary critic and scholar Ana Patricia Rodríguez, "contemporary Central American diasporic writers like Horacio Castellanos Moya, Francisco Goldman, Hector Tóbar, and Marcos McPeek

Villatoro, among others, often write in response to various forms of violence" ("Diasporic" 7). She argues that these authors "grapple with Central America as a site of unresolved historical crises that often extend into the lives of Central Americans outside of the isthmus" ("Diasporic" 7). As a result, throughout the Central American isthmus and the diaspora, the crime fiction genre has experienced a boom in both production and consumption. Speaking to the critical and political potential of the genre, Sergio Ramírez points out that "el género sirve […] para retratar las sociedades en que vivimos, como una nueva manera de realismo mágico, más eficaz que cualquier otro. O una especie de naturalismo del siglo veintiuno, lo negro, lo sucio, lo desencarnado. […] La novela policíaca se convierte así en un vehículo para contarnos cómo son los países en que vivimos, o para recordárnoslo" ("Historia Negra, Novela Negra" np). Considering crime fiction as a mirror which reflects transnational corruption, as Ramírez suggests, allows us to critically examine the ways in which societies are reflected, to question relations and paradigms of power, and to analyze the power of language itself.

The historical moment from which Central American crime fiction emerges is of crucial importance. Literary critic and scholar Misha Kokotovic notes that detective fiction emerged in the aftermath of the Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s (15). Characterized by a noir sensibility of corruption, decay, and disillusionment whereby social order is the source of criminality rather than justice, Kokotovic proposes that these texts form part of a greater Latin American literary phenomenon which he terms *neoliberal noir* (15). He states that "since about 1990, most of the continent has experienced something of a boom in narratives that use elements of detective or crime fiction to criticize the effects of the neoliberal, free market capitalism

imposed on Latin American societies over the past two decades" (15). He continues that "the strikingly senseless violence and criminality of all these postwar works of neoliberal noir represent a sharp turn away from the revolutionary utopianism of wartime literature, in which violence was employed in the service of social justice or, when exercised by the state, symbolized injustice" (26). Expanding upon these *neoliberal noir* generic conventions, Horacio Castellanos Moya problematizes the demobilization of soldiers as a source of criminality immediately following the end of the armed conflict in El Salvador and comments on their recidivism into delinquency as a component of the neoliberal condition in *El arma en el hombre* (2001).

While the reader accompanies the protagonist's transformation from highly decorated soldier to common criminal who steals cars and murders for necessity, hire, and pleasure, Castellanos Moya sheds light on the active institutional agents responsible for these crimes. This chapter examines the post-war transition whose disarmament processes were accompanied by a recycling of arms and war-time criminality *vis-à-vis* the protagonist, Robocop's, involvement on both sides of the law. I specifically illuminate how Robocop's identity is constructed as a palimpsest of institutional, – both national and international – economic, and political practices in conjunction with an internal struggle closely aligned with his curated and programmed subjectivity as a soldier. This institutional palimpsest embodies Donna Haraway's theorization of the cyborg, which she defines as a "hybrid of machine and organism" (2190. The cyborg becomes a metaphor for the "disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self of contemporary cultural theory suited to the West's late capitalist social order" (2205). Following Haraway, Robocop is a cyborg – half man, half machine. As

such, I suggest that liminal subjectivity and criminality resulting from the conflict highlight the processes which strip the victims of their subjectivity and transform them into criminals. Castellanos Moya's novel ultimately reconceptualizes the crime narrative both to expose the societal danger of this post-conflict society as seen through the perpetrator's perspective, and, perhaps more importantly, to foreground the recycling of legitimized war-time violence by this new protagonist of violence.

The relationship between cultural productions and periods of transition is undeniable. Rafael Lara Martínez reiterates the role that contemporary literary projects assume as vehicles for actively expressing, appropriating, or contesting the disillusionment that overshadows the transition to peace: "Un desengaño, una clara convicción sobre la imposibilidad por renovar un mundo corrupto y vencido, guía buena parte de los proyectos literarios actuales" (np). Presented from a criminal protagonist's perspective, these texts, which can be read as both an extension of and a deviation to the post-war *testimonio*, emphasize the narrative's political power: "Hay que restaurar la lengua: la herramienta del poeta y los únicos útiles que posee toda sociedad para representarse, para pensar sobre sí misma. El texto moyano es tanto una exposición de la violencia igual que un acontecimiento del idioma: una obra literaria" (np). Studies surrounding Castellanos Moya's literary trajectory underscore recurring themes including violence, common criminality, and the decay of urban centers, just to name a few, stylistic and expressive techniques, and the manipulation of the narrative point of view. Sheila Candelario observes that "su obra se lanza a la búsqueda, a la necesidad de confrontar la realidad histórica/política/social de El Salvador desde múltiples voces que se hablan entre sí en diálogos intertextuales, contra-dicen y contra-ponen, se entrecortan

en un juego de signos que apenas toca la complejidad de un referente variable y confuso" (np). This unsteady and confusing or confused referent refers to the post-war neoliberal condition and accompanying upsurge of crime which extends throughout the Central American isthmus and crosses borders into the corresponding diasporas. These shared conditions permeate Castellanos Moya's narrative works through a critical, and, frequently outlandish, commentary on "la pasada tormenta, recuperar la memoria de lo que ocurrió luego de finalizar la guerra interna en el pequeño país centroamericano, el drama de vivir en tiempos de paz" (Vides 21). The contradictory juxtaposition between drama and peace is recycled throughout *El arma en el hombre* through the narrative experience as told by the text's problematic protagonist Robocop, the U.S. trained, institutionally programmed, and highly decorated soldier turned common delinquent and murderer upon disarmament.

The violence which erupted in the period following the signing of the Peace Accords in El Salvador contradicts the document's mission and undermines the country's transition to democracy. Referencing the Geneva Agreement signed on April 4, 1990, the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional reaffirmed that their purpose was "to end the armed conflict by political means as speedily as possible, promote the democratization of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and reunify Salvadoran society" ("Chapultepec Agreement" 2). Prior to examining specific instances of post-war criminality, paying special attention to Robocop's delinquency and violent acts in *El arma en el hombre*, it is important to understand the lingering impact that a war has both on a society and the participants involved. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry points out that "war destroys persons,

material culture, and elements of consciousness (or interior culture) […]. The losing [entity] must erase part of the slate and begin to re-imagine itself, re-believe in, re-understand, re-experience itself as an intact entity, but one not having some of the territorial or ideological attributes it had formerly" (92-3). The Salvadoran society began the processes of re-imagining, re-believing, re-understanding, and re-experiencing itself in the period of disarmament.

These processes were particularly difficult on the soldiers because they stripped the very ideological foundation with which they had been programmed, as evident in the relationship each soldier had with their weapons. Robocop, for example, recognized the economic potential of his stockpile: "Esa primera tarde, tirado en el camastro, con la certeza de que no había regreso a las barracas, pensaba que gracias a Dios se me había ocurrido ir acumulando fusiles y las granadas, porque ahora me servirían para salir adelante" (*El arma* 14). His complete reliance on his weapons as the only source for future success and employment illustrates the ways in which he has embodied the violence from the war. Or rather, as Scarry emphasizes, "although a weapon is an extension of the human body (as is acknowledged in their collective designation as 'arms'), it is instead the human body that becomes in this vocabulary an extension of the weapon" (67). During the war, Robocop, therefore, is stripped of his identity as a Salvadoran citizen and man as he becomes one with a weapon, a soldier who was trained by and among the military elite. Based on this military training and desubjectification, Robocop is viewed only as a weapon whose mere presence infiltrates and terrorizes the post-conflict society.

Considering the transnational military training and intervention, it is entirely possible to view the eruption of violence in the post-conflict era as a symptom of an increasingly global worldview. Lara-Martínez underscores the omnipresence of violence: "La violencia afecta todos los estratos sociales. […] Por años la violencia [era] algo que ocurría únicamente en el extranjero. […] Hace siglos alguien declaró que ése era un tema recurrente de la historia humana. La globalización ha iniciado un mercado mundial, equitativo de redistribución de la violencia" (np). Not only is globalization considered the principal culprit of the recycling and redistribution of violence, but, as Robocop clearly points out, violence is the most direct means of engaging and actively participating in the global market. In El Salvador, the recycling of violence also stems directly from the 1993 Amnesty Law which granted impunity to the perpetrators of war crimes: "Mientras en algunos países se llevaron a cabo juicios en contra de los criminales de guerra, en Centroamérica vemos la ausencia de un dispositivo jurídico-legal que permita a la Sociedad aspirar a una posible restitución, aunque sea simbólica, por los crímenes cometidos" (Pérez 50). Facing legal and judicial inaction, literary production assumes the active role of not only reflecting, or reflecting on, the post-conflict conditions, but rather is the discursive space from which an ethical critique is articulated.

Echoing Ramírez's comments on crime fiction, Lara-Martínez underscores the value that post-conflict literature possesses, specifically in relation to or as an extension of the *testimonio*:

> La literatura es la paradoja que revela un estado de violencia y corrupción, al tiempo que nos confronta con los obstáculos para verificar tal hallazgo. […] La novela como espejo o representación de lo real, nos incita no a descubrir una

> verdad factual irrefutable, como en el testimonio clásico, sino a considerar la duda e indecisión. En lugar de inculcarnos la fe en los hechos narrados, el texto nos incita a la reflexión, a una toma de posición crítica frente a los acontecimientos. (np)

The emphasis on taking a critical stance and the questioning of official histories opens the discursive space to expand social and ethical inquiry of the perpetrators of violence. If the post-conflict novel is the critical space from which to confront and reflect on the events of the civil war, one must consider the critical potential of a narrator who not only executed state-sanctioned acts of violence, but also continues to perpetuate heinous acts of violence prior to realigning himself with the United States' anti-narcotics agency. As Werner Mackenbach points out, then, "muchos de estos textos literarios privilegian sobre todo la mirada de las consecuencias de estas relaciones de violencia en los individuos y sus relaciones personales" (np). In line with Mackenbach, *El arma en el hombre* could, then, be conceived as a novel of consequences, consequences that, perhaps, lie entirely outside the protagonist's control.

Castellanos Moya's protagonist Robocop is an incarnation of the tension between man/victim and machine/criminal; or rather, Robocop is a cyborg soldier, part man, part machine, as his name implies. In her foundational text "A Manifest for Cyborgs," Donna Haraway defines the concept of the cyborg as one which rejects rigid boundaries between material, social and political constructs.[2] Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic

---

[2] According to Vincent B. Leitch, general editor of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, "Like the feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, Haraway is interested in exploring those boundaries, borders, and borderlands where our jumbled personal and collective identities are constructed and contested. […] While Anzaldúa investigates boundary confusion in geographical space and racial identity, Haraway explores and affirms the

organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creation of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" (Haraway 149). The post-conflict social reality in Central America is wrought with tensions between systemic violence and oppression and the recycling of war-time criminality. Not only are the dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, among others, called into question ideologically, they are also inscribed upon and within the cyborg's material and ideological construction: "The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled post-modern collective and personal self" (2205). Both the practices of inscription and dis- and re-assembly rely upon communications technologies and biotechnologies, which Haraway defines as "the informatics of domination," or the industrialization and codification of information (2202).

Furthermore, Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" serves as point of departure for more contemporary articulations of the cyborg soldier and economy. As Melina Pereira Savi points out, Haraway "invites the reader to give in to the pleasure of confusion of boundaries, as well as for the responsibility in their construction" (182).[3] The responsibility in articulation and disarticulation of boundaries emphasizes the presence of external forces, structures, and institutions. Therefore, in reference to modern war practices, Chris Gray underscores how practices have evolved based on newfound

---

breakdowns in […] boundaries that have resulted from post-World War II technoscience" (2188).

[3] In her article "How Borders Come to Matter?", Pereira Savi studies the relationship between Gloria Anzaldúa and Donna Haraway's methods and texts. Specifically, she argues that Anzaldúa "is herself a cyborg writer, as she devises technologies of engagement with both the Mexican and the American side of her" (182).

commitment to technological and scientific innovation, alongside the acceptance of the complete mobilization of a society for war (*Cyborg Citizen* 55). Specifically, he states that "postmodern war depends on a new level of integration between soldiers and their weapons, what are called human-machine weapon systems or, in other words, cyborg soldiers" (56). The dependence upon the trained soldier who is promptly discarded following the end of the armed conflict is palpable throughout Castellanos Moya's text. Furthermore, in his text *Postmodern War*, Gray provides the cases of elite U.S. soldiers invading countries, the training of death squads, the killing of civilians with high-tech weapons, and victims of terrorism as examples of possible cyborg participants in armed conflicts as an entry point into a study of the difficulties in separating the good guys from the bad guys (197). The examples illustrate the relationship between man and machine, whether institutional, ideological, or mechanical, which modifies and codifies the human body. According to Gray, "the basic currency of war, the human body, is the site of these modifications, whether it is of 'wetware' (the mind and hormones), the 'software' (habits, skills, disciplines), or the 'hardware' (the physical body)" (195-6). Robocop's wetware and software are transformed through U.S. backed military training and education, while his hardware is reconfigured following his injury and capture. His hardware is restored in order to carry out the functions and tasks of the United States anti-narcotics agency. The human is not only the basic currency of war but also the material that is most damaged, regardless of how it has been modified and on which side of the conflict it spent.

The protagonist, Robocop, represents both perpetrator and victim, both machine and human, both state-sanctioned and underground criminality. Candelario notes that in *El arma en el hombre*, Robocop "es una máquina aniquiladora desprovisto de conciencia,

engendro perfecto para el nuevo orden del capital globalizado donde toda frontera se desvanece y el crimen se desplaza en la narrativa por México, Guatemala y Estados Unidos a través de una[s] red[es] internacional[es] dedicada[s] al tráfico de autos robados […], de drogas, armas y otros contrabandos" (np). Robocop, therefore, embodies the confluence of a highly trained and programmed killing machine with an individual whose subjectivity and agency have been used up and discarded by the same institutions. As Mark Colvin stresses, "chronic criminals are made, not born. They emerge from a developmental process that is punctuated by recurring, erratic episodes of coercion. They become both the recipients and perpetrators of coercion, entrapped in a dynamic that propels them along a pathway toward chronic criminality" (1). These coercive forces can be direct or interpersonal, which Colvin defines as "the use or threat of force and intimidation aimed at creating compliance through fear," or indirect or impersonal, which is defined as "the pressure arising from structural arrangements and circumstances that seem beyond individual control, such as economic and social pressure caused by unemployment, poverty, or competition among businesses or other groups" (5). Robocop's identity and subjectivity are constructed by both direct and indirect coercive forces, including forced conscription, threat of imprisonment, and impoverished conditions upon his disarmament, among others.

El arma en el hombre both opens and concludes with a reference to the protagonist's identity. The novel opens as the protagonist identifies himself: "Los del pelotón me decían Robocop" (9) and concludes with the exchange between the protagonist and Johnny, an anti-narcotics agent in the United States: "Es tu chance de convertirte en un verdadero Robocop', me dijo Johnny, incorporándose, sonriente" (132).

First, his nickname which is assigned to him establishes an explicit connection to the 1987 film *Robocop* directed by Paul Verhoeven, in which the gravely injured Detroit police officer is converted into a cyborg. Specifically, Calendario situates Robocop's formation within the global political and economic climate: "Este *Robocop* es la transmutación centroamericana del personaje del cine norteamericano, es el producto de la tecnología e ideología bélica transnacionalizada de la Guerra Fría, un engendro puramente humano cuya existencia se define por las armas, la tortura, la muerte y la ausencia del remordimiento" (np). Second, the United States' intervention is made visible not only through this cultural comparison, but also through the anti-narcotics agent's offer of redemption. According to Castro, Castellanos Moya himself meditates on this paradoxical relationship in an interview with Enzia Verducchi: "the United States is responsible for spreading 'máquinas criminales' […] throughout the Americas, and El Salvador specifically" (126). Therefore, Castro elucidates how this relationship is portrayed in *El arma en el hombre*:

> The protagonist of *El arma* dramatizes the fact that, at least in preset-day El Salvador, *there can be no terrorism without the United States* […]. Moreover, by representing this connection through the figure of Robocop, Moya articulates the causal continuities between the terrorist violence of the Salvadoran state apparatus during the Civil War period and the imposition or importation of a law and order regime that would desire to differentiate […] between 'the criminal' and 'the citizen,' between the 'terrorist' and the 'non-terrorist'. (126)

In stark contrast to Haraway's optimism for the cyborg body's survival in a postmodern society, or perhaps, to be more precise, the necessity of being a cyborg to have a chance

at survival, Castellanos Moya illustrates the precarious circumstances surrounding the cyborg soldier's reintegration into civilian life during the post-war period.

Robocop himself admits that "convertir[se] en civil fue difícil" (12). As many critics have noted, and as I will illustrate in the coming pages, it was not only difficult for Robocop to return to civilian life, but rather impossible. For example, Calendalario sheds light on the processes which underwrite this problematic transformation: "*El arma en el hombre* [representa] los engendros y mutaciones de sujetos dislocados, formados y moldeados por la guerra y que ahora navegan la madeja del nuevo orden de la violencia criminalizada en El Salvador" (np). In addition to the relationship between the transformative potential of the armed conflict and its inscription on the cyborg body, it is crucial to delineate the instances in which cyborg criminality emerges by a passive agent, or rather in the absence of human agency as visible through the absorption or erasure of the individual through institutional processes, and as an active agent, or rather, as an agent responding to the institutional forces levied against his being. The tension that arises between passive and active agent of criminality permeates post-conflict crime fiction texts: "Las novelas se abstienen de crear una división maniquea entre bien- y malhechores, sobre todo por la ausencia de personajes decentes, honestos, con códigos morales inamovibles" (Wieser 215). The lack of clearly defined good and bad guys, which are characteristics of the traditional crime fiction text, also produces an empathetic bond between reader and criminal protagonist. This empathetic bond, on the one hand, stems from the reader's ability to discern the state's manipulation and mistreatment of the individual and allows the reader to see these problematic figures, like Robocop, as victims of the state. On the other hand, this bond also forces the reader to confront

varying degrees of heinous crimes, in accordance with their own moral compass. As Ileana Rodríguez points out, these discarded individuals and demobilized soldiers find themselves in a post-war society lacking economic opportunities and have no other option than to align themselves with those who fought alongside the opposition and common delinquents; or rather, "son ellos los que forman el verdadero sub mundo de la transición a la 'democracia'" (np).

Robocop is no exception. Fully aware of his positionality within the institutional hierarchy and its manipulation, Robocop acknowledges how he has been formed and transformed by Salvadoran and transnational military and political systems. In 1983, at 20 years old and employed in the same factory as his mother, the young man who would become Robocop was forcefully conscripted into the military, a memory he explicitly recounts: "Regresaba de mis labores, cuando un retén de soldados detuvo el autobús a la salida de Mejicanos: nos bajaron, exigieron documentos, hubo registro en busca de armas, y a mí y a otros tres nos ordenaron a subir a un camión militar" (*El arma* 13). Robocop, who "medía un metro noventa y pesaba ciento noventa libras" (13) was ordered to the Acahuapa batallion, "la tropa de asalto" (9), based solely on his physical stature. This conscription and assignation, moreover, symbolize the institutional inscription upon Robocop's body and identity and signal the moment in which he loses his agency and his programming begins. The military replaces and redefines Robocop's conceptualization of family, a realization that became all the more clear following the signing of the Peace Accords, which punctuated Robocop's tenure as a decorated soldier:

> Pese a las charlas en las que los jefes nos explicaban los alcances de la paz y presentaban opciones para nuestro futuro, supe que mi vida estaba a punto de

> cambiar, como si de pronto fuese a quedar huérfano: las Fuerzas Armadas habían sido mi padre y el batallón Acahuapa mi madre. No me podía imaginar convertido de la noche a la mañana en un civil, en un desempleado. (12)

His activity in the war and his participation with the Acahuapa batallion further isolates Robocop from his family: "No tengo familia en el país. Mi madre y mis dos hermanas se largaron a Estados Unidos desde el comienzo de la guerra y cuando supieron que yo había ingresado al batallón Acahuapa no quisieron volver a saber de mí" (14). First, family isolation represents a tool of war to further institutionalize the soldiers, as it produces a sense of allegiance to the military. Second, it also represents the educational system within which his ideology is formed: "Llegué a sargento gracias a mis aptitudes; mi escuela fue la guerra. Los instructores me tomaron aprecio: en una ocasión me enviaron a Panamá, a un curso intensivo de un mes; otra vez estuve en Fort Benning, durante dos meses, en un entrenamiento para clases y suboficiales" (*El arma* 9).

Extending the metaphor of the production of the cyborg soldier, this military training and education, therefore, can be read as the coding behind the software and hardware programming, understanding that "*codes*, for example, are attempts to make meaning irrecoverable, or, at the very least, to embed that meaning in multiple tiers of arbitrarily sequenced signs in order to divert the opponent's energies into hours of incomprehension" (Scarry 133). By encoding Robocop with a United States-backed militaristic ideology, the state effectively breaks any cultural and meaningful connection he has with the Salvadoran society and his Salvadoran cultural identity, thereby producing "[una] identidad mutilada" (Colín 94). Ultimately, this coding is the first step to dehumanize the soldiers by deconstructing their very foundation of morals, in addition

to breaking down their communicative capabilities, which expresses one of Haraway's anxieties marking the transition from old hierarchical dominations to new networks which she terms as the informatics of domination (Haraway 2202). Based on this brief passage, it is evident that Robocop is not only utilized as a weapon for and against the Salvadoran state, but rather that he is weaponized, a crucial component of the United States interventionist practices having been trained on U.S. bases in both Panama and Fort Benning, Georgia, a reference to the School of the Americas.

The United States' presence not only informs his military training, but also provides Robocop with an opportunity of salvation upon the condition of his employment as an agent with the Drug Enforcement Agency. As the novel concludes, Robocop, having been captured, is in a Texas hospital recovering from a gunshot wound which physically deformed his face. During his interrogation, the anti-narcotics agent explains his current predicament to him: "Se sentó en la misma silla, junto a mi cama, y me dijo que pusiera muchísima atención, se había abierto una oportunidad única de salvar mi vida. Ellos habían revisado mi hoja de servicio durante la guerra en el batallón Acahuapa y creían que yo merecía una segunda oportunidad" (*El arma* 131). It is clear to the reader that this deserving of a second opportunity refers to the former relationship that Robocop had with the United States, specifically in reference to his military training: "El trato era éste: yo les contaba todo lo que sabía y, a cambio, ellos me reconstruirían (nueva cara, nueva identidad) y me convertirían en agente para operaciones especiales a disposición en Centroamérica" (*El arma* 131). The physical, institutional, and identitarian reconstruction emphasizes the passive position of Robocop at the hands of the corrupt

state, while simultaneously illustrating how easily the state discards these damaged goods.

For example, Robocop describes the state in which he found himself immediately following the signing of the Peace Accords: "Entonces quedé en el aire: mis únicas pertenencias eran dos fusiles AK-47, un M-16, una docena de cargadores, ocho granadas fragmentarias, mi pistola nueve milímetros y un cheque equivalente a mi salario de tres meses, que me entregaron como indemnización" (9). Having been stripped of his family, job, and agency, among other things, Robocop draws his sense of identity from the weapons he was able to stockpile from the war. He also learns that his compensation should have been the equivalence of one year's salary, which highlights how, when his former bosses and terrorists came to an agreement, "[lo] tiraron a la calle" (9). Robocop learns from fellow ex-soldiers that the government withheld a large part of their compensation and that these other ex-soldiers were actively questioning and making demands from the state and the military. Robocop "no quería participar en un movimiento en contra de la jefatura de las Fuerzas Armadas, podía considerarse traición" (15-6). In this moment, his ideological programming is complete as Robocop still abides by the teachings instilled within him regardless of how the state mistreats or takes advantage of him.

The inability to confront his former superiors is just one of the challenges he faces in his return to civilian life. As Wieser notes, "la trama muestra que no sólo fue difícil sino imposible. El término de la lucha armada, que hasta el momento fue su sustento legal, vacía su existencia de sentido. Robocop sigue ejerciendo en la época de posguerra lo único que ha aprendido: luchar y matar" (210-11). As I have previously mentioned,

few economic opportunities were available to the cyborg soldiers returning from war, which catapulted them into the only sectors that were familiar to them. Anne Balsamo reminds us that "cyborgs are a product of fears and desires that run deep within our cultural imaginary," (32) which, in the context of El Salvador, refers to the traumas resulting from the twelve-year civil war, the reconciliation of these crimes alongside the rampant impunity for the perpetrators of the violence, and the return of these perpetrators to the Salvadoran society, among others. Moreover, Balsamo highlights the positionality of the cyborg body within the hierarchy of domination: "Cyborg bodies, then, cannot be conceived as belonging wholly to either culture or nature; they are neither wholly technological nor completely organic. In a similar sense, cyborg bodies cannot be completely discursive. Cyborgs are a matter of fiction and a matter of lived experience" (33). The fiction and lived experience from which the Salvadoran cyborg soldiers, like Robocop, emerge refers to the reality of forced conscription and victimization, and subsequent dismissal from the state while receiving false promises of autonomy and national pride. Following this line of thought, Haraway reminds us that these cyborg soldiers are not entirely innocent within this process. She states that a cyborg body "does not seek unitary identity and to generate antagonistic dualisms without end; it takes irony for granted. […] Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, an aspect of our embodiment" (2219). Acts of violence and criminality, both state sanctioned and personally motivated, not only permeate the cultural, economic, and social tapestry of the post-conflict period, but also constitute the very foundation of the post-war embodiment.

Comparable to Robocop's struggle to readjust to civilian life, in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*, Guillermo Longoria, a retired sergeant in the Jaguar Battalion of the Guatemalan military, finds himself in a similar situation in Los Angeles. Longoria received military training at Fort Bragg and in the Panama Canal zone, specifically the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare, and the School of the Americas (29). It becomes evident to the reader that the psychological and physical preparation he received through his military training stripped him of his identity; or rather, he was no longer Guillermo, the young boy who was forcefully recruited for the military at a movie theatre while watching *E.T.* (33), but now identified himself as Longoria, a trained killer. Returning to the processes which produce cyborg soldiers, it is important to understand the ways in which Longoria is programmed and coded. The coding of his software and wetware are most impacted during his stay at Fort Bragg, where the cleanliness and orderliness of the barracks leaves a lasting impression; or rather, turns into an obsession which is visibilized in the way in which his Westlake Arms apartment is kept: "The apartment wasn't much to look at, just a single room with a door leading to a bathroom. A bare tile floor the color of algae, a dresser, and a set of barbells in the corner. How predictable. […] The place felt like a barracks" (Tobar 174). This obsessiveness which materializes in his daily routine of cleaning his apartment reflects Longoria's ideological programming. His apartment lacks decorations or personalized details, other than the equipment, or tools, used to train his body, which has been converted into a weaponized machine. In his article "Born in the USA," Dale Pattison claims that "Obsessed by cleanliness, a neurosis he evidently learned in 'the antiseptic army base' in North Carolina, Longoria continually remarks on the growing migrant population in Los

Angeles, which he associates with the political contamination of Central America. […] This privileging of institutional discipline shapes his thinking in both public and private contexts" (127). Upon migrating to Los Angeles, Longoria was surprised to find that he was no longer protected by the military institution, but rather that he belonged to the Guatemalan diaspora, and as Oriel María Siu notes, "becomes just another subject of exploitation" (105).

In contrast to the action-packed narrative in Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre,* Tobar employs both chronological and geographical alternations, flashbacks and a free indirect third-person narrator to move between the novel's two protagonists in *The Tattooed Soldier*. While Robocop narrates his return to civilian life and his involvement with an underground criminal network, Longoria's experience unfolds between flashbacks to military campaigns in Guatemala and his mundane, daily routine in Los Angeles. Tobar effectively juxtaposes these flashbacks alongside Antonio Bernal's experience living as a homeless, undocumented immigrant in Los Angeles to illustrate the ways in which violence transgresses both physical and psychological boundaries. Alongside the perpetrator-victim diatribe, the reader must question what motivates the perpetrator. What silent, psychological forces generate such heinous acts? What remnants remain? In *The Tattooed Soldier*, Guillermo Longoria, "a retired sergeant in the Jaguar Battalion of the Guatemalan army" (20), which is synonymous for the death squad, received military training through Fort Bragg and the Panama Canal zone, the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare and the School of the Americas (29). It becomes evident to the reader that the psychological and physical preparation he received through this military training desubjectified him; or rather, he was no longer Guillermo, the young

boy who was recruited for the army at a movie theater against his will (33), but now identified himself as Longoria, a trained killer. However, no amount of training could prepare Longoria for the deafening cries that would forever haunt him: "This was the worst thing to remember, 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. […] Only bullets can stop that sound, only more bullets can stop them moaning for their mothers" (64). According to Longoria, living with the last cries of the girls and boys was the biggest sacrifice (65). However, it was a sacrifice that Longoria fully bought into as he believed in the military's mission of eradicating the political and social contamination which opposed the Guatemalan government.

Reconciling Longoria's peasant background and his involvement in the Guatemalan military in which he shared a social, cultural and economic upbringing with most of his victims, Tobar "exposes the violent social mechanisms that force Longoria to abandon the cultural practices of his childhood […]. As a result, *The Tattooed Soldier* depicts the destruction of indigenous lifeways not as inevitable result of historical progress but as the preventable result of Guatemala's colonial legacy of racialized violence" (Minich 217). The social mechanism responsible for dis- and re-assembling Longoria's identity is the military: "He was called Guillermo when he was a child. In the army he became 'Longoria.' Longoria knew things Guillermo never dreamed of. The army was a cruel place, it was not for the weakhearted people. But the army made you a man. The army made you do terrible, violent things, but they were things that had to be done" (Tobar 63). This passage emphasizes the transformative potential of the military, specifically by highlighting the erasure of young Guillermo. Through this erasure, it

invisibilizes the state's culpability in the forced conscription and victimization of young men across the country. It also underscores the rhetoric which fueled the military campaign and simultaneously acknowledges the responsible agents of the "terrible, violent things":

> This thing they were fighting was a cancer, and sometimes the children were contaminated with it too. You killed the cousins and the uncles to make sure the virus was dead. That's what the officers said, and you had to believe it. The parents passed the virus along to their children. It made you want to kill the parents again and again, even after they were dead, because if it wasn't for the fucking parents you wouldn't have to kill the children. Guatemala was like a human body, that was how Lieutenant Colonel Villagrán explained it, and if you didn't kill these organisms the body could die. (63-4)

For Longoria, this explanation not only justified his participation in the military campaigns, but also perpetuates the ways in which he views social dynamics in Los Angeles. In his Westlake Arms apartment complex, Longoria comments on the presence of "noisy children" who were "rowdy and insolent" and that "there were days when [he] thought the same kind of infection was spreading her in Los Angeles, although the symptoms might be different from the ones in Guatemala. Los Angeles could use a thorough cleansing" (64). Longoria's obsession with hygiene, disease, contamination, and cleansing symbolizes the processes through which the military indoctrinated him by erasing his peasant background through forced conscription, by cleansing his social and cultural connections to his past vis-à-vis military training both in Guatemala and alongside U.S.-forces, and by making it difficult to assign guilt to the responsible parties.

The ideological and militaristic indoctrination is the study of several pointed scholarly studies. In "Mestizaje as National Prosthesis," Julie Minich notes how this indoctrination makes Longoria a compelling character, "despite his brutality, is the fact that his view of Guatemala as a human body in need of violent cleansing requires the erasure of his own Quiché background from the body politic" (220). She also argues how Longoria's personal narrative mirrors that of the militaristic ideology: "Although Longoria is not literally killed in the war, he comes to perceive his own identity as a threat to the Guatemalan national body and to seek the erasure of that identity" (220). As such, Longoria's transformation from a dirty, barefoot peasant to a clean, uniformed soldier mirrors the rhetoric used justify the military's brutal campaigns. However, Tobar underwrites the military presence with the soldier's cultural and social upbringings in a particularly evocative scene:

> Now jaguars were spilling from the church too, and for a moment it was like a game on a playground. Children running in circles around the huts, soldiers chasing after them with clumsy strides because they were so big and the boys and girls were so little. The children were crying, but it sounded like laughter to Longoria, the excited laughter of the schoolyard. *You can't get me, you can't get me*. (247)

The juxtaposition of laughter and crying echoes the scene in the movie theatre the day Longoria's childhood and innocence was stolen from him. It also emphasizes Longoria's waning humanity, as the terrified children resembled a schoolyard game which illustrates his inability to empathize with them. Not only does this fragment refer back to the soldiers' childhoods, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to their backgrounds:

> And then the soldiers looked like *campesinos* again. Because this was hard work, raising the machete to cut and hack. They chopped and grunted like men trying to clear a sugarcane field, strings of perspiration running down their necks. Steel against bone. Hack, hack. This was work you couldn't do without spattering pink and red and brown all over you. The Jaguars looked like camouflage *campesinos*, dirty and sweaty, muscles working in *machetazos*. (247)

As previously mentioned, a crucial component in the military indoctrination is the erasure of the soldiers' backgrounds. Therefore, as evident in this passage, Tobar illustrates the utilitarian employment of the *campesino* background while problematizing the legacy of colonization and exploitation. The young boys forcefully conscripted into the military and brutally subjugated parallels the history of land and labor exploitation that the indigenous communities have experienced throughout history.

Not only does Tobar problematize the indoctrination of the military, but also makes references to the Cold War and *testimonio* literature. As Ricardo L. Ortíz points out, "in one striking passage that recalls Menchú's descriptions in the *testimonio* of atrocities inflicted on indigenous Guatemalans by the junta's death squads, Tobar imagines just such a scene of mass murder, but from the perspective of the perpetrator, not the victim" (81). In this scene, Tobar further questions paradigms of power within the military ranks:

> Setting fire to the church was Longoria's responsibility, the first important one they had given him since he joined the Jaguars. […] If Longoria didn't set the fire, if he didn't get the box to work, the sergeant would laugh at him, he would think that the jaguar on Longoria's arm was a fraud. [...] All the bodies had been

> dragged inside the church. If the people in the church miraculously came to life again, they wouldn't hear the sound of the flames. They wouldn't hear anything, not even their own screams, because one of the Jaguars had cut off their ears to fill a little burlap bag with souvenirs. Screams were the last sounds the people in the church made when they still had ears and could hear themselves. […] Longoria made the walls of the church come alive with his cigarette lighter. (247-8)

The perspective from which this scene is narrated is of utmost importance. As Ortíz remarks, "in rendering such a scene from Longoria's point of view, Tobar presents to the reader a detailed account of the force of ideological indoctrination on the kind of young men the Guatemalan army regularly abducted, as they do Guillermo, into violent service" (81). This indoctrination reveals the depths to which Longoria's wetware, or mind, has been reprogrammed. This passage also describes the victims as lifeless, fragmented objects and souvenirs for the soldiers, while the building and flames are the life which cleanses the Guatemalan countryside. Marta Caminero-Santangelo elaborates upon the reconfiguration of the extended metaphor of contamination and cleansing as the "cancer" becomes a "virus," which is "something not originating within the body but 'foreign' to it. The 'organisms' that they must kill become the people themselves rather than more simply the contaminating ideas. In this re-imagined construct of Guatemala-as-body, the people killed […] are conceived as 'foreign' to Guatemala, not properly part of the national body at all" (186).

While Robocop's "hardware" was reconfigured via a facial reconstruction, Longoria's tattoo of a jaguar, which he had done during his training at Fort Bragg, is a

material representation of his institutionalization and employment as a mere weapon. The jaguar tattoo, from which the novel's title is derived, is layered in meanings. It identifies Longoria as a member of the Jaguar Battalion and connects his indigenous roots to a history of violence. Pattison articulates the connection between the image of the jaguar and its significance with Mayan practices: Even though "the Guatemalan military sought to claim power through the image of the animal, Longoria seems unaware of the irony in the military's campaign to eliminate political opposition in the countryside by murdering indigenous peoples, the very communities most intimately connected to the country's Mayan roots" (120-21). On the other hand, in her reading of *The Tattooed Soldier* as a trauma narrative, Crystine Miller points out "[…] the tattoo also symbolizes the collision of U.S. foreign policy and domestic Guatemalan politics as it is wrought on the body of an indigenous peasant and then made invisible once Longoria immigrates to the United States and simply becomes "Latino/a" (366). The tattoo is a clear symbol of U.S. involvement in the Central American country, as it is immediately known to fellow Guatemalan soldiers that the jaguar is "an American tattoo," a symbol of transgression, fear, and disgust. In agreement with Miller, Pattison notes that Longoria is labeled as a product that is "Made in the USA," a product of the United States foreign policy (121). However, the tattoo's meaning is lost along Longoria's migration. Miller also claims that "when the tattoo loses its meaning through Longoria's immigration, the violence of the U.S.-sponsored civil wars that produced large numbers of emigrants, many of whom tried to come to the United States, is also rendered invisible" (366). As U.S.-interventionist policies become invisible, so too does the victimization of individuals like Robocop and Guillermo Longoria; therefore, through their use of Robocop and Longoria as

protagonists, Castellanos Moya and Tobar actively contest this discourse and problematize the criminalization of ex-soldiers returning to civilian life following the armed conflicts.

In conclusion, Robocop and Guillermo Longoria embody the confluence of highly trained and programmed killing machines with individuals whose subjectivity and agency have been used up and discarded by the same institutions. As Mark Colvin stresses, "chronic criminals are made, not born. They emerge from a developmental process that is punctuated by recurring, erratic episodes of coercion. They become both the recipients and perpetrators of coercion, entrapped in a dynamic that propels them along a pathway toward chronic criminality" (1). These coercive forces can be direct or interpersonal, which Colvin defines as "the use or threat of force and intimidation aimed at creating compliance through fear," or indirect or impersonal, which is defined as "the pressure arising from structural arrangements and circumstances that seem beyond individual control, such as economic and social pressure caused by unemployment, poverty, or competition among businesses or other groups" (5). Robocop and Longoria's identity and subjectivity are manipulated by both direct and indirect coercive forces, including forced conscription, threat of imprisonment and impoverished conditions upon his disarmament, and the interventionist policies of the United States. Through fragmented, polyphonic and filtered narratives, these texts not only complicate the construct of criminality but also make visible the ideological and institutional forces at play in the production of these liminal criminals. These texts ultimately contest the idea of a post-conflict period across Central America and the diaspora as these societies themselves are dissolved, dis- and re-assembled as killing machines; or rather, they are reassembled as societies in which

criminality and the perpetuity of violence result directly from the victimization of the society at large.

Chapter 2: Legacies of Violence and Revenge in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998)

In "Revenge, Forgiveness, and the Magic of Mediation," Kenneth Cloke studies how revenge manifests and the roles it plays in conflicts between individuals. As he states, "nearly everyone, at some point in their lives, imagines, dreams, or pursues some act of revenge, the purpose of which is to balance out some previous harm or injustice. Revenge begins simply with anger, which is universal" (67). Anger is not only a universal feeling, but rather serves as "a kind of map to the source of the conflict" (67). Both emotions – anger and the desire for revenge – are present in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* as the novel's other protagonist Antonio Bernal situates and defines himself in various social, economic, and cultural contexts as he confronts individual legacies of violence and seeks retribution for the crimes committed against his family. In Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*, Antonio Bernal plots revenge on his wife and son's murderer following a chance encounter in Los Angeles. In his study, Cloke suggests that there are many sound reasons for seeking revenge such as obtaining justice and fairness, finding release from anger, making the perpetrator feel like a victim, comprehending the crime, equalizing the "victim" and the "perpetrator," and satisfying the perpetrator's "right" to be punished, among many others (69-70).

The protagonist, Antonio Bernal, in Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* experiences profound anger as he contends with deeply personal legacies of violence and disrupts legal and judicial paradigms. He expresses his anger through his thirst for vengeance which effectively transforms him from victim to perpetrator of justice; or rather, it is

precisely through his liminal criminality that Bernal effectively seeks and receives justice in a system that has all but failed him. In this novel, Bernal is the agent which exposes, disrupts, and redefines the historical, political, and social discourse. Antonio Bernal, for his part, is a homeless, undocumented immigrant living in Los Angeles, California. His legacies of violence are rooted both in historical, political violence stemming from the Central American civil wars and in the practices of racialization and criminalization that he faces in his daily life in the United States. Thus, coinciding with the 1992 riots following the acquittal and mistrial of the police officers responsible for the beating of Rodney King, Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* portrays a polyphonic and multi-ethnic Latino community in Los Angeles, California, while critically engaging the transnational ramifications of the Guatemalan Civil War by employing both the victim and perpetrator's points of view. This backdrop highlights the significant participation of the Latino population in race riots, "from the 'Zoot Suit' Riots of 1943 (characterized by the flaring of Mexican-White hostilities) to the 1992 riots catalyzed by the Rodney King verdict, in which a majority of arrests within city limits were actually from Latino neighborhoods" (Caminero-Santangelo 178). Tobar establishes parallels between Antonio Bernal's individual legacy of violence and the 1992 riots to contest history and acts of violence and inequalities against communities of color.

Historically, various types of revenge have been classified based on the agent in power; or rather, a family member is the agent in power in direct, personal revenge and the state assumes power and possesses the exclusive right to punishment when revenge is sought through legal means (Cloke 69). Antonio Bernal is an agent of direct, personal revenge and his experience of lived violence and revenge represents one of the multiple

narratives which emerge following the period of armed conflicts. Anger and revenge manifest within a cultural, political, and social system of complex relationships. Tobar's political thriller *The Tattooed Soldier* effectively illustrates how crime fiction contests dominant ideologies and historical narratives. In "Crime and Politics," Cathy Cole states that "crime fiction observes and dissects contemporary political issues more openly and unambiguously than do other genres. Its protagonists take sides, expose, and hold forth about not just the crime, but also the social conditions that have formed the criminal" (205). In Central American post-conflict crime fiction, readers encounter both the criminal, or perpetrator of the crimes being investigated or uncovered in the text, and the liminal criminal, or the victim turned criminal through her/his individual quests for justice. Similarly, acts of revenge also reveal the external social or institutional forces which produce both the victim and perpetrator. As Cloke reminds us, acts of revenge produce a reciprocal relationship:

> Revenge strips the actor of the title 'victim' and takes away the mantle of respect due by sympathy to one who is acted on. Revenge cuts both ways. All violence wounds the perpetrator as well as the victim. […] It takes power away from the victim. When accomplished by the state, revenge is inhuman, impersonal, abstract, cruel, and supports a culture of violence. […] Revenge does not acknowledge the prior victimization of the perpetrator or focus on the system that created it. It blames the victim and diverts attention from institutional and social change. Revenge is socially divisive and may be reenacted for several generations. (70)

Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* problematizes the conditions which produce both the perpetrators of the violent crimes under investigation and the liminally criminal protagonists. Antonio Bernal, therefore, not only exposes the historical discourses and contexts which underwrite his individual legacies of violence and the collective legacies of violence across Central America, but rather shines a light on the conditions which produce his liminal criminality.

The personal transformation of the protagonists from victims to liminal criminals or perpetrators coincides with the narrative exploration of transnational political violence. In "There Will Be Blood: *Writing Violence*," Benjamin Percy highlights the political and transformative potential of violence, specifically in a narrative: "Violence is a powerful and simple way to embody conflict. Violence is redemptive. Violence is transformative. But more than that, violence is a necessary reflection of this world and our wounded lives" (64). On the one hand, violence is the vehicle through which a conflict is both deeply inscribed on the parties involved and is resolved. Therefore, violence is the means through which the victim can redeem her/himself and through which her/his liminal criminality emerges. In his pursuit of justice, Antonio Bernal expresses his feelings of anger and revenge through acts of subjective violence. In *Violence*, Slavoj Žižek defines subjective violence as "violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (1). Following their eviction, Antonio and his housemate José Juan arrive at the homeless camp, greeted with a sign reading "Coming Soon: Crown Hill Hotel and Finance Park" (42). The unfinished plans for the finance park highlight the impoverished conditions in which Antonio and José Juan find themselves and the role the market plays in an individual's

life. With their remaining possessions in a Hefty garbage bag, Antonio confronts an older man attempting to steal from him:

> 'Bastard!' he shouted. The thief raised his arms meekly and cried out, 'Please don't hit me!' […] *We have almost nothing, and this man wants to take it from us*. Antonio drove his fist into the man's face, the nose cartilage snapping under his knuckles. Another punch, this one like hammering nails into the ground, a clenched fist to his temple. A weak scream from the thief, and then one more punch, to the mouth. 'Don't fuck with me!' Antonio yelled. '*Hijo de la gran puta, no te metes conmigo*.' (Tobar 43)

This fragment intermingles both Antonio's actions and his inner thoughts, as indicated by the usage of italics. His inner thoughts reflect the anguish and desperation he feels at his current circumstances and his fear of losing his meager belongings materializes through his violent reaction. Antonio's violent reaction is an embodiment of his now emotionally and physically exposed and vulnerable state. His state of homelessness further marginalizes him in a culture which invisibilizes the presence and struggles experienced by undocumented immigrants in the United States.

In contrast to Cloke's emphasis on the reciprocal and transformative potential of revenge, Lynn Mie Itagaki emphasizes the negative relationship between revenge and the justice system. In *Civil Racism*, Itagaki notes that "since revenge is generally negatively regarded as a criminally extralegal and uncivilized justice system, those who commit acts of revenge or acts perceived as revenge are criminals (working against the state) and primitives (working against 'the civilizing mission')" (106). Driven by fear and desperation, Antonio Bernal's acts of violence and criminality highlight his victimization

at the hands of institutional forces and rejects the notion that his criminality is an act of savagery. Tobar also explicitly calls attention to Antonio's humanity and precarious conditions. First, having heard Guillermo Longoria's voice, Antonio is jilted with facing the conditions surrounding Longoria's past:

> The soldier, the killer of his wife and son, was a peasant. This discovery had thrown Antonio off course and derailed his impulse to revenge. […] His rage had fled, and now there was only a vacuum in its place. […] *God knows what led this peasant to join the army, to become one of the army's hired killers. God knows the person he was before and who he has become since*. The easiest thing would be to forget about the man. (163)

Outwardly, Antonio's anger and rage temporarily fade as a response to Longoria's voice. However, his thoughts, presented in italicized text, show an acknowledgement and understanding that Longoria had not chosen to join the armed forces, but rather was a peasant who had been forcibly conscripted and weaponized by the military. Second, sitting around a campfire in the homeless camp, Antonio discusses options for attacking Longoria with Frank, Larry Greene, who is affectionately known as the Mayor, and José Juan. The Mayor suggests hiring a guy for fifty bucks and Frank recommends that Antonio do it himself: "Just club the guy. With a pipe, a hammer, whatever. Push him in front of a bus" (177). While the Mayor and Frank suggest that people get killed "for just any stupid reason," José Juan interjects and states that "Antonio doesn't want to kill anyone […]. He just wants justice" (177). Privy to Antonio's war time baggage, José Juan explicitly distinguishes between murder and revenge for justice, a critique which undermines Itagaki's assertion that criminals who seek revenge are savages.

Returning to his encounter with the thief, Antonio acknowledges how his reaction made him feel: "It felt good to hit this man, to feel his own arms doped with adrenaline, to feel his wrists cut through the air as he pummeled the man's face. […] For a moment he felt strong and free; fury was a much better drug than self-pity" (43). Violence is transformative and redemptive. For Antonio, subjective violence and criminal acts initiate the processes of redemption, reconciliation, and transformation at both an individual and collective level. The individual level refers to how he contests legal inaction, reconciles the violence committed against his family, and transforms the emotional and political fabric of his family. The collective level refers to the ways the national and historical discourse is contested and reconciled by liminal criminals actively seeking and obtaining justice. In Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*, Antonio Bernal seeks justice for the brutal murder of his wife, Elena, and son, Carlos. The text not only questions the source of criminality and violence in the post-conflict society, but rather, and perhaps more importantly, questions the restoration of justice itself, which is defined as "the demand for order" (Feibleman 23). In "Justice, Law and Culture," James Feibleman states that "justice is tied to the defense of social order and therefore to the restoration of order through the rejection of disorder or injustice" (25). In Tobar's text, justice is found extra-judicially as Antonio steps outside the law to track, surveil, and kill his family's murderer and social order is restored through violence and criminality. However, Antonio faces various challenges based on his economic and social positionality. These differences also inform the reader's understanding and acceptance of his liminal criminality as a viable tool for seeking justice in a system where justice is all but absent.

Following the brutal murder of his wife Elena, an intellectual actively participating in protests against the government, and infant son, Antonio Bernal flees Guatemala in hopes of escaping his impending death, only to find himself unemployed, homeless and captivated by the possibility of revenge. Meanwhile, Guillermo Longoria, the killer of Bernal's family and a retired sergeant in the Jaguar Battalion of the Guatemalan army, also relocates to Los Angeles after the war, fleeing justice in Guatemala. They are both fractured by the violence of the war and their chance encounter sets Antonio on his own personal journey of revenge, while Guillermo struggles to readjust to civilian life, subject to acts of domestic violence against his girlfriend. On the one hand, Antonio's quest for revenge serves as a vehicle through which he receives justice for his wife and son's brutal murders, while it also inverts the power dynamic between Antonio and Longoria. Antonio becomes a liminal criminal as he takes matters into his own hands, avenges his family's killings, and confronts the limitations of justice in Guatemala underscoring the ways in which violence is inscribed in the Guatemalan society and highlighting how it has traveled across borders and pervades the Guatemalan diaspora in the United States. On the other hand, Longoria, no longer an elite soldier in the Jaguar Battalion but rather a poor immigrant living in Los Angeles, becomes the object of Antonio's rage and revenge and of the Central American community's disgust. Longoria is, as the text describes him, the "matón," the disliked and disgraced bully.

Noting the judicial entanglements in the novel, Oriel Siu states that "at the most basic level, *The Tattooed Soldier* criticizes impunity in postwar Central America, a reality that forced both victims and perpetrators to coexist in the same social spaces without the intervention of functional legal entities" (103). Antonio and José Juan occupy the liminal

social space of the homeless camp and Longoria resides adjacent to one in his Westlake Arms apartment: "Behind Sergeant Longoria's building was an alley where a group of these heroin addicts lived, adding another layer of scent to the putrid sweetness of the alley's dumpsters. Longoria saw the addicts and breathed in their smell every morning when he took out his trash" (Tobar 22). Even though Longoria lived physically separated from the homeless addicts, their body odors infiltrated his senses and his apartment and blurred the spatial boundaries between them. MacArthur Park represents the social space in which Antonio and Longoria coexist and in which Antonio begins his quest for justice:

> [Longoria] turned and caught a swift movement, the whistling displacement of air by some narrow object, the sound of a man grunting. Reflexively he raised his right arm in front of his face. The object struck his forearm, sending a pulse through his body. *Under attack. Somebody is trying to kill me*. He dove for the grass and rolled away, a flash of military training kicking in. […] The two men were facing each other now, Longoria lying on his back […], Antonio standing on the lawn, […] the tattooed man breathing heavily but still alive. *Finish him. For Elena and Carlos*. (Tobar 208)

MacArthur Park represents the social space shared by communities of politically and economically disenfranchised individuals, homeless drug addicts, and individuals who spend their free time enjoying leisure activities like chess. It also represents the physical and social space in which Antonio assumes a physical and symbolic position of power over Longoria.

The confluence of narrative voices reflects the face-to-face encounter between Antonio and Longoria. The reader is privy to both men's internal thoughts, which subtly

portrays an unspoken understanding between the two: "*Under attack. Somebody is trying to kill me.* […] *Finish him. For Elena and Carlos*. […] *He looks like he really wants to kill me*. […] *I have wounded him. I have him where I want him. Now he will suffer. He will die. The head. Concentrate*" (208). This silent understanding alludes to the invisibilized violent past that forms the foundation of their relationship. The scuffle ends as Longoria flees and Antonio is momentarily handcuffed and interrogated by a police officer: "Antonio said nothing. He didn't know what to say. If he told the police that the tattooed soldier had killed innocent people in Guatemala and that Antonio had found him in MacArthur Park, would they believe him? The police couldn't care less about international politics" (210). Apathetic to international politics and the conditions which produced Antonio's liminal criminality, the police officers had already assumed he was a drug dealer, "because after all this was MacArthur Park" (210). Ultimately, in Longoria's absence, the police officers let Antonio go because "they really didn't feel like doing any more paperwork that afternoon" (210). MacArthur Park, therefore, represents the space where Antonio contests impunity and legal inaction against Guatemalan war crimes and highlights the presence of legal inaction of police officers in Los Angeles.

In addition to historical impunity and current legal inaction, Antonio's status as a homeless, undocumented immigrant further exacerbates his condition of residing outside the law. Questions of the legal, cultural, and social (in)visibility of Central Americans have been the object of many studies. Following Arturo Arias and Claudia Millian's call to question how Central Americans become visible or invisible across social, political and intellectual paradigms, Crystine Miller, for example, suggests that "*The Tattooed Soldier* positions Central American immigrant literature as an intervention that

destabilizes the notion of a collective Latino/a identity, which has been so central to the field" (365). I would add that Central American post-conflict crime fiction, for its part, can be read as an intervention which destabilizes the notion of a post-conflict period because war time criminality and victimization is recycled and reconfigured in the post-period. As Antonio illustrates, remnants of war time violence and his victimhood travel across borders and fuel his quest for revenge and justice upon seeing Longoria in Los Angeles. In her study on the trauma narrative, Miller suggests that Tobar's refusal to resolve the conflict, which originated during the country's civil war, between two members of the Guatemalan diaspora "illuminates the way U.S. imperial forces disparately affect racial and class positions within the Guatemalan diaspora and then seemingly level these differences by incorporating Guatemalan migrants into homogenous notions of a subjugated Latino identity" (371). As Antonio and Longoria's collective past is erased, the Los Angeles police officers assume that Antonio is a homeless, drug addict in MacArthur Park. Left unacknowledged, however, is how Antonio's criminality resulted from his U.S.-sponsored victimhood during the Guatemalan civil war.

Antonio's liminal criminality both functions as his only access to justice and symbolizes a critique of the United States' interventionist policies. Tobar's treatment of revenge in *The Tattooed Soldier* contests the notion that revenge seekers are savage criminals by demanding that readers not only understand the conditions which produced these acts but also, and perhaps more importantly, by evoking an empathetic relationship between the reader and the criminal protagonist. As previously mentioned, José Juan understands the historical baggage that Antonio carries with him and defends Antonio's

quest for justice. Furthermore, Itagaki highlights the complicated relationship between revenge and the legal system: "Revenge is the foundation of the criminal justice system itself […]. Because revenge usurps the authority of the state in its mandate to punish, it is condemned as extralegal tribalism […]. Vengeful acts are perceived to violate the rules of civilization, and avenging agents are seen as harbingers of the end of civilization" (Itagaki 122-3). As acts of revenge are frequently exercised against those deemed unworthy of justice or to whom justice is not accessible, Itagaki argues that "Tobar posits revenge-taking as an alternative justice system, a recourse for overlooked victims and unaddressed crimes. Thus, Tobar explicitly refutes a prominent discourse about the L.A. Crisis that maligns racial minorities as perpetrators of senseless destruction" (120). While Itagaki's argument specifically addresses the riots in Los Angeles, I would add that Tobar's text represents a recourse for the overlooked victims of the Guatemalan civil war and the unaddressed crimes of the Guatemalan government, military, and death squads.

The narrative perspective in Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* alternates between the flashbacks and internal monologues of its two protagonists: Antonio Bernal, victim of political and military violence, and Guillermo Longoria, ex-soldier of the Guatemalan death squads and perpetrator of political and military violence. Elena's point of view is also represented in retrospective chapters set in Guatemala. Itagaki remarks that "Tobar's juxtapositions – of protagonist and antagonist, Antonio/Elena and Guillermo, Guatemala and the United States, people and the state – expose the inner working of U.S imperialisms and global capitalism both within and without the nation-state" (107). Following Itagaki, I would add that these juxtapositions further the critique of neoliberal violence and U.S. interventionist policies as Tobar explores the ways in which the social,

economic, and cultural ramifications travel across borders inscribed on the victims' bodies and disrupt the psychological contours and physical construction and composition of the diaspora. While the nuances of individual legacies of violence and economic misfortune remain hidden, Antonio reflects on the physical condition shared by all living in the homeless camp: "All the people here seemed to have the same vacant expression and hunched posture. They looked like walking question marks. […] Antonio began to imagine that he was somehow responsible for their plight. […] Somehow he had tainted the prosperous Americanos with his condition […], an extension of his tortured past" (Tobar 41). The curvature of the body highlighted the physical demands of sleeping on the ground and rummaging for food and necessities among discarded trash.

Antonio's reflection urges the reader to consider the circumstances leading to each individual's condition of homelessness and the intersections, both national and international, between individual and collective legacies of violence. These intersections influence Antonio's relationship to his current state of homelessness, to the individuals living in the homeless camp, and to his access to justice. As Antonio and his roommate José Juan are being evicted, Antonio reflects on his social status in the United States:

> Antonio took a deep breath and tried to compose himself, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose, a habit of his at moments when he felt close to violence. They were circle glasses, and when he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror he would sometimes remember the day he first put them on, a decade ago, when he was a student at the university in Guatemala. […] Somehow, the ideas and learning that made him strong in Guatemala had slipped away once he crossed the border, lost in translation. (Tobar 4)

Recalling the fear and violence he experienced in Guatemala, Antonio reacts automatically to stressors by pushing up his glasses. While the glasses are associated with his militancy as a student in Guatemala, implicitly revealing his social and economic position, they now represent his undocumented immigrant status and descent into homelessness in Los Angeles. Intellectual, economic, and social standing are invisibilized along with the military and political violence that he, and Guatemala, experienced because of U.S. interventions in Central America.

The psychological contours refer to the memories and trauma resulting from the Guatemalan civil war and the persistent struggle for justice for heinous acts of violence and war crimes committed against them, their families, and their community at large. After arriving to the homeless camp, Antonio sorts through his Hefty garbage bag and reflects on his last day in Guatemala:

> On that day many years ago it was not a plastic bag he carried but a cardboard box tied with dirt-colored twine. As today, it held all of his possessions, although he could not now remember exactly what he possessed at the time. He was standing in the central square of San Cristóbal Acatapán, the box at his feet, because he was fleeing that horrible little village, taking the first step in the journey that would lead, eventually, to Los Angeles. He was leaving behind a house with floors that were covered with reddish black blood. (Tobar 16)

Antonio's journey to and experience in Los Angeles are disrupted by physical and symbolic violence and displacement. Following the murders of his wife, Elena, and young son, Antonio not only confronts feelings of inadequacy, despair, and depression resulting from his inability to protect his family but is also overcome with a sense of

strength to avenge their deaths following a chance encounter with his family's murderer in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. This tumultuous journey for revenge complicates Antonio's victimhood as he transforms himself into a perpetrator of violence.

Commenting on the discursive practice of violence and the struggle for representation, Yajaira M. Padilla suggests that "with their often stark and disparaging portrayals of neoliberal society, these contemporary texts suggest that free-market doctrine has created a rather than attenuated disparity and that the transition toward democracy is plagued by the persistent discriminatory and oppressive practices of the past" (134). Tobar explicitly addresses U.S. backed war crimes, in which "the enemies of the government had to disappear in a fashion that would allow the army to say it wasn't responsible" (136). Antonio and Elena Bernal were just two of these "enemies of the government." For Antonio Bernal, haunting memories of his family's murder follow him as he seeks stability in Los Angeles, a space in which the oppressive and discriminatory practices of the neoliberal agenda relegate him to a space of social, political, and economic invisibility. During his eviction, Antonio himself comments on his invisibility and presumed criminality: "But now Mr. Hwang was threatening to call the marshals, the police of evictions. *To have the police come here and treat me like a criminal. I was a bus boy, but that doesn't make me a criminal*" (Tobar 5). Antonio is aware that others unjustly perceive him as a criminal based solely on his status as an undocumented Central American immigrant and low-wage worker. After fleeing Guatemala, Antonio is doubly invisibilized: first, in Los Angeles as an undocumented immigrant, and second, within the broader United States' social fabric, as a victim of U.S.-backed political and military violence.

Within Guatemala, however, Antonio and his wife Elena are victimized by military and political violence. Elena's legacy of violence is revealed to the reader through a narrative break which disrupts the two protagonists' – Antonio and Guillermo – accounts of daily life and the current political, economic, and cultural climate in present-day Los Angeles. Having been subjected to internal exile for protection, Elena and Antonio sought "refuge from the terror of the capital in a small town where no one would know who they were [because] any fool can see it's only a matter of time until they [came] after [them]. It's too dangerous to be a student in this city. It's a death sentence" (Tobar 107). Being cooped up inside the house, a profoundly bored and pregnant Elena spent many hours by the window, staring into the street, upon which the frequency of funeral processions for young children piqued her interest. After giving birth, Elena had resolved to investigate the source of the children's death – Colonia La Joya:

> Before them was an entire hillside covered with trash, a panorama of filth. Plastic bags, toilet paper, rotting vegetables, animal bones. […]. Yellow lemon rinds, green papaya skins, white eggshells […]. The leftovers of a thousand meals […]. People came here to dump buckets of excrement-soiled paper they kept next to their toilets to avoid clogging their pipes. All this rotting food and shit was becoming a permanent part of the landscape, altering the topography of the slop, killing off the vegetation. […] 'We found it,' she said as much to herself as to Antonio. 'We found what's killing the babies. All this trash is contaminating the river. It's so obvious.' (131-2)

Following the discovery of the town dump and its impact on water quality, Elena attempts to improve these conditions and to protect the children living in Colonia La Joya

by writing an anonymous letter to local officials, wherein she demands the government's attention and remedying of the town's poor water quality. Ultimately this letter leads to her and her son's murder.

Following Antonio and José Juan's eviction, with which the novel opens, the narrator reveals that "Elena was killed three weeks after she wrote a letter. Antonio could still remember it was exactly three weeks. Elena wrote the letter because she could never remain silent in the face of an injustice. Elena was reckless […] Elena's letter caused her death and the death of their son, but Antonio would always love her for her recklessness […]" (55). Elena's demand for clean water and assassination on account of her protest to local authorities prompts Antonio's migration to Los Angeles, a space in which he finds himself living in a homeless camp and watching as others bathe themselves in unclean, contaminated water:

> 'That?' Antonio said. 'That's not a river, that's a sewer.' 'No, it's not that bad,' Chino answered. 'There's sewer pipes that come in with green water that has lots of chemicals and oils in it. We stay away from those. But if you go to the middle the water's cleaner. We don't go all the way in, we just splash ourselves. […] Antonio didn't want to shower in the mission, and he was afraid of being poisoned if he went to the river. In Guatemala rivers were known to be carriers of disease. (Tobar 73)

Both the community of Colonia La Joya in Guatemala and the homeless camp in Los Angeles relied on the only resource available to them – water contaminated with chemical and human waste. The metaphor of contaminated water across the Americas brings to the fore the experience of people living on the margins in Guatemala and the

United States. The connections that Tobar establishes between Guatemala and Los Angeles illustrates how, as Pattison points out, "*The Tattooed Soldier* makes the simple claim that nations are never protected from the violence they export; Antonio, Longoria, and the 11.7 million undocumented immigrants living in [the United States] are political bodies produced in large part by the United States' policies at home and abroad" (115). The sheer visibility of their presence and participation disrupts the United States' hegemonic forces and political and institutional structures. Physical and symbolic violence materializes when victims of national and international state-sanctioned violence find themselves sharing the same liminal space in the diaspora, such as the homeless camp and MacArthur Park in Los Angeles.

In addition to the political and military violence to which Antonio and his family were subjected in Guatemala, Antonio bears witness to the oppressive forces produced by the violence of neoliberalism. As previously mentioned, Antonio's legacy of violence is demarcated by his fleeing Guatemala with his possessions in a cardboard box and his arrival to the homeless camp in Los Angeles carrying all his possessions in a Hefty trash bag. In his essay "The Violence of Neoliberalism," Simon Springer states that violence is both temporally and politically positioned: "The material 'act' of violence itself is merely a confluence in the flows of oppressive social relations, and one that is persistently marked with absolutist accounts of space and time, when instead violence should be recognized as being temporally dispersed through a whole series of 'troubling geographies'" (154). Antonio's mental and emotional preoccupation with the past produces bouts of depression and intense mood swings, as his economic and occupational instability further exacerbates his anxieties about his future.: "*He hates me when I get like*

this. Who can blame him? Poor man, to have put up with Antonio so long. What have I done to deserve such a patient friend? José Juan did not seem to like the Antonio who wanted only to sleep, the friend who seemed to be on the verge of suicide every few weeks" (Tobar 40). At the same time, Antonio further separates himself from his current community: "Not knowing the day depressed him. It was another sign of his withdrawal from the world of normal people, from clocks and calendars, healthy meals and locked doors. So strange to live in a world where the days had no names" (Tobar 73). The reader can intuit that a world without clocks and calendars refers to his condition of unemployment, as Antonio's days no longer revolve around clocking in and out. The world of normal people, of healthy meals, and locked doors, furthermore, refers to one's participation as an active consumer and neoliberal subject.

The legacy of violence which alters the psychological contours of the Guatemalan diaspora in Los Angeles in conjunction with the physical homelessness experienced by many undocumented immigrants provides the lens through which "Tobar explores the psychic and material costs of peace without justice as it affects Latinas/os, undocumented immigrants, and the homeless" (Itagaki 119). The psychic and material costs which burden Antonio materialize through the *baggage* which he must drag around Los Angeles. His baggage contains his few remaining possessions, the guilt of not having given Elena and Carlos a proper burial, anger at his family's killer, and fear of his newfound desire for revenge, among other things. The novel opens with a heated exchange between Antonio, his roommate José Juan and their building manager, a Korean immigrant named Hwang, who was evicting them:

> *Voy a ser uno de los 'homeless'.* It did not seem right to him that man who loved to read, a man with *Crimen y Castigo* and *El Idiota* and countless other works of real literature scattered on the floor of his apartment, would be called this ugly word. And at the same time it made perfect sense, the logical conclusion to years of living in this cold alien country. No Spanish equivalent captured the shame and sooty desperation of the condition, and so this compound, borrowed word would have to do: home-less. (5)

Antonio experiences varying degrees of homelessness three times in the novel. First, he and Elena are forced to leave their home in the capital and to seek refuge from military violence. Second, Antonio loses his home and the hope of returning home to Guatemala following his family's brutal murder. Third, Antonio and José Juan lose their apartment and relocate to the homeless camp in Los Angeles. During his eviction, Antonio realizes that his status as a privileged and educated university student in Guatemala does not translate to economic and social status in Los Angeles, which as Pattison notes, "because of their legal status and their lack of economic mobility, [undocumented immigrants] are in fact cast into an extra-legal space not unlike what they experienced in Guatemala" (118). It is in the precarious space of war induced migration to Los Angeles that Antonio and other undocumented immigrants from Central America must find refuge.

In *Seeking Community in a Global City*, Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla discuss the ways in which Central American immigrants had to adapt to uncertain conditions in Los Angeles during this time. Like other immigrant groups, Central Americans faced many of the same problems as other inner-city residents of low-wage jobs, poverty, interethnic tensions, gangs, drugs, and crime (180). Their status as

new-arrivals in the city further amplified these problems: “Guatemalans and Salvadorans have had to secure a place for themselves within a context of strong anti-immigration feeling and legislation, which aggravated their vulnerability” (181). Lastly, Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla emphasize the ways in which Central Americans living in Los Angeles impact the local economies of their countries of origin: “As a source of remittances, Guatemalans and Salvadorans in the United States have played a major role in the economies of their respective countries, one that the governments have recognized and sought to maintain” (181). The maintenance of family ties and the strain of financially supporting their loved ones in their home countries materializes in the transactions of El Pulgarcito, the remittance service center where ex-soldier Guillermo Longoria works in *The Tattooed Soldier*. During his tenure in the Guatemalan special forces, Longoria’s actions and military missions were responsible for dismembering and separating families. In Los Angeles, at El Pulgarcito, Longoria worked for “Carlos Avilés, who opened every letter to check for political messages, [and] the owner himself, who wasn’t above a little pilfering in the first place” (Tobar 25). Tobar highlights how, even outside the isthmus, Longoria works alongside individuals who perpetuate political oppression, steal from fellow Guatemalans, and invisibilize their shared conditions.

Undocumented immigrants are invisibilized by oppressive economic, legal, and social agents of the neoliberal condition; or rather, undocumented immigrants are invisible to those who exercise the power to invisibilize. Upon finding himself homeless and dragging around all of his belongings in a black Hefty garbage bag, Antonio recognizes that his new state further complicates his liminal state in Los Angeles:

> Antonio was living on the streets, carrying everything he owned in a plastic bag, and no one would look him in the eye. He was used to being unseen. There was the invisibility of being a busboy, of walking between tables unnoticed, a shadow rolling the cart, clearing the dishes. But this was another kind of invisibility. People now made a point of turning away from him, just as Antonio had turned away from the hopeless men he saw in this same condition. Those men pushed belongings around in shopping carts. Now he could see how practical it was to have a shopping cart. (9-10)

In previous interactions with homeless men, Antonio judged the "hopeless men" pushing their belonging in a shopping cart and invisibilized them and their individual legacies of symbolic or subjective violence. In short, there are two types of invisibility of undocumented immigrants living in Los Angeles, one that is accepted and one that is criminalized. Antonio's low-pay material labor is accepted as it fulfills a utilitarian function within the neoliberal market. Yet, as a homeless and hopeless individual, Antonio is excluded from participating in the market; or rather, he is prevented from perusing a local store and filling his shopping cart with bought items and is relegated to using a discarded cart in the street as his only means of transporting his remaining and found belongings. This invisibility inevitably criminalizes the condition of homelessness and makes visible, in Antonio and José Juan's case, their undocumented legal status as they are prohibited from many forms of gainful employment. The isolation and invisibilization underscores the political and economic ramifications of the United States' interventionist policies throughout Central America, whereby undocumented immigrants are relegated to low-wage, dangerous jobs with no access to government assistance

programs to which they contribute through direct and indirect taxes. These neoliberal practices, for their part, undermine the construction of a post-conflict society in Central America as they produce and perpetuate various forms of violence against subjects intrinsically linked to aggravated and impoverished conditions.

Conscious of his own condition and fall from society, Antonio is surprised to find that many citizens of the United States endured the same oppressive economic and social forces. This awareness leads Antonio to consider their plight: "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. *These gringos don't deserve this*" (41). As Antonio imagined that he was responsible for tainting "the prosperous Americano dream" (41) with the legacy of violence, which extended from his past and the murders of his wife, Elena, and son, Tobar makes clear that the violence of neoliberalism not only transcends geographical borders but is also inscribed upon the vulnerable and disenfranchised bodies of immigrants and the poor. Refugees also represent a disruptive force because, as Humphrey explains, "the victims have no effective national citizenship because they have lost the protection by the state or from the state. Their social displacement reveals the boundary of exclusion, the human waste produced by the violent solutions for social renewal based on homogenizing and hegemonizing ideologies" (93).

The individuals living with Antonio in the homeless camp have all lost protections of the state, either due to their undocumented status or to the inability to pay for legal and judicial assistance, as they are unable to collect pay and benefits or fight the charges in court. Considered the homeless community's political advocate, the Mayor

attends the weekly Board of Supervisors meetings and fought the county in court to raise their General Relief Payments, which were currently two hundred and ninety-seven dollars:

> [The Mayor's] got his name on a couple of lawsuits too. *Greene versus the County of Los Angeles*. Has a nice sound to it, like a boxing match. In this corner, Larry Greene, homeless man. In that corner, L.A. County. The county's a real heavyweight. The Mayor's got a good left hook, the county's got the fancy lawyers, the best money can buy. (Tobar 46)

Presenting the process to request and collect government assistance as a boxing match brings to the fore the symbolic and systemic violence that the homeless community faces daily. First, the homeless individuals do not have access to justice since they are unable to pay for legal services. Second, the fees associated with filing a court claim further exacerbate their impoverished conditions and serve as a deterrent for advocating on their own behalf. Third, state agents retaliate against individuals exercising their rights, as seen each time the homeless camp was disassembled and disposed of, and Antonio and his new friends are forced to relocate their camp. In relation to the violence of the market, Itagaki underscores that the homeless community in Los Angeles is a group of economic refugees; or rather, "the people least responsible for their economic exploitation; less obviously, they are internally displaced people whose predicaments and numbers are harder to track since they move within rather than across national borders. Their numbers are acceptable collateral damage of the hierarchies of capitalism" (134). Along similar lines, therefore, I argue that the ensuing violence among these economic hierarchies is directly tied to the violence of neoliberalism and deconstructs the notion that a post-

conflict society is possible, both in the country where the civil war took place and in the diaspora.

Having suffered the political and military violence in Guatemala and the resulting violence of neoliberalism in Los Angeles, Antonio acknowledges and understands his social condition, as well as the responsibility which befalls him if he hopes to receive justice for the wrongdoings committed against him: "The responsibility of bringing him to justice had fallen to him because there was no one else to do it. They lived in an interval of history without courts, without the passionless procedures of official justice, and so this act had fallen to him, a man living on his own in a strange city, a homeless man" (Tobar 229). Rationalizing his plan to avenge his wife and son's death, Antonio considers the relationship between Longoria and himself: "*There is a balance between us. We are opposites balancing a scale, we are mathematics. I am tall, he is short. I live under the sky, he lives under a roof. He has a girlfriend, I am alone. He has a job, I do not. He is the killer, I am his victim*" (229). This realization, along with his desire for revenge, ignites a fire within Antonio which leads him to obsessively surveil and thoroughly investigate his victim, the killer Guillermo Longoria.

Following days of careful observation and memorization of Longoria's routine, Antonio breaks into his apartment searching for evidence that confirms his identity while providing material justification for his revenge. Not quite prepared for what he would find, Antonio discovers such evidence tucked away in a white envelope in the back flap of a photo album:

> He put the album on the bed and scrambled to pick them up. He was squatting to look under the dresser when he saw the bodies, three corpses lined up on a cement

> floor. A morgue had fallen from the album and spilled around his feet. Corpses with their eyes open. Corpses with their pants pulled down, the seahorses of their genitals exposed. Corpses with their arms folded over their chests. Corpses with their hands missing. Peasants in green shirts. Living men, in camouflage, posing with the corpses, as if to say, We're alive and they're dead. And here is the tattooed soldier, the painted killer, standing over a child lying face down on a dirt path. (175)

On the one hand, these photos justify Antonio's desire for revenge given that Longoria lacks remorse for his participation in the violence. Instead, Longoria sees his victims as trophies and relics from his tenure as a decorated soldier. On the other, these photos effectively portray how both parties, the perpetrators and the victims, are reduced to pawns manipulated by the political players. Thus, this sacrifice, the inability of both the victim and perpetrator to escape one's violent past, problematizes the international relationship between Central America and the United States. The reader understands the weight of Longoria's actions as the perpetrator of senseless violence throughout the war. However, the collection of photos emphasizes how the young men were involuntarily forced to assume these roles, stripping them of their identity and humanity, and shipping them to the North for superior training. This training ultimately reveals the United States government's desire to protect its economic and political interests with little regard for the destruction that resulted in Central America.

As Masiello has suggested, the neoliberal market has a tendency to erase the memories of the past that bound individuals together, while literature possesses the power to create meaning in and out of the ruins. So, too, Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* attempts

to make meaning out of past and present violence in the aftermath of the Guatemalan civil war and the 1992 Los Angeles riots:

> The promise of real-life violence or chaos was just about the only thing that could entice the apartment dwellers to break the burglar-proof seals on their doors and venture into public space. Fires, gang shootings, marital slugfests that spilled out onto the street: friendships were made and love affairs ignited in these magical moments when people gathered in the hallway, on the sidewalk or the front steps […]. (8)

It is important to note that the public spaces in this scene – the hallway, the sidewalk or the front steps, the homeless camp or the tunnel – mark the transitional "in-between" spaces. This liminal space is one that establishes connections based on their collectively silent response in the face of violence, and, perhaps more importantly, provides the space to step outside legal and judicial boundaries. For example, in the tunnel beneath Los Angeles, Antonio faces his own violent criminality and obtains justice for the violence against his wife and son by leading Longoria to his untimely death. Contemplating his victim, Antonio ponders:

> Would he ever forget the horror of the eyes, the face of a man at the moment he reached for his last breath? The soldier with the peasant's voice. He would carry this memory next to the image of Carlos and Elena on the steps of their home in San Cristóbal. Twin images, emblazoned on the front and back of a book filled with his wanderings. 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 304)

Living in a liminal state between the violence in Guatemala and Los Angeles, Antonio is caught between defining places and moments in his life: a bus stop in Guatemala and MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, where he has two close encounters with Longoria. When Antonio and Longoria finally meet again in a tunnel beneath Los Angeles, their roles are inverted: the victim and the perpetrator switch places, and Antonio, who leads Longoria to his death, becomes the liminal criminal in the quest for justice. Antonio's liminal criminality will never be brought to light nor will the United States' crimes committed against the Guatemalan society.

Immediately following Elena and Carlos's murder, Antonio knows he must flee Guatemala to save his own life; however, carrying his possessions in a cardboard box, he is aware that he could never fully leave his past behind. Reflecting upon all that he has lost, Antonio remembers the day he left. Confronted not only with this tremendous loss and his forced escape, Antonio comes face-to-face with his family's murderer while awaiting his bus in Guatemala. The paralyzing fear and silence perpetrated by Longoria that day follows Antonio as he flees Guatemala into the diaspora in Los Angeles. Not looking back and confronting the man who killed his family, Antonio replays forever the scene: "*Look at him. Why are you afraid?* […] *Drop the box. Drop it and confront the man*. […] Antonio shuffled along with the other passengers, keeping the vague form of the killer in his field of vision" (19). Unwilling to confront the killer, Antonio's only reaction is to study and memorize every detail of his physical appearance:

> He was dressed like a civilian but looked like a soldier. The shaved head was the giveaway. Antonio memorized the face: the dark features, the long nose, the protruding ears, something childlike in his eyes. […] On the killer's left arm […] halfway between the wrist and the elbow, there was a mark on the skin, yellow and black. A tattoo of a yellow animal with its jaws open. (19)

For the moment, this silent act of observation and memorization is Antonio's only plausible act of defiance against Longoria. Actively confronting him would result in his immediate demise; therefore, Antonio sublimates his threatening capabilities to a single object: the image of a yellow tattoo, representing the power of the "soldier's identity," yet his lack of individual identity. The tattoo will also serve as the ultimate sign of his subsequent surveillance and investigation as Antonio seeks revenge.

Antonio's second public encounter with Guillermo takes place in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. Similar to his experience at the bus stop, Antonio is faced with both silent rage and inaction as his past quickly rushes back. While watching a friendly game of chess in the park, Antonio notices that "everyone else was in sweaters and coats, but the younger chess player was wearing a navy blue T-shirt that clung to his muscular frame. A soldier, Antonio told himself" (77). Recalling this previous memorization, Antonio reflects upon the conformity of a soldier's appearance: "They get their heads shaved when they're in the army, and they never change. […] The former soldiers who were now drug dealers, criminals, and hustlers of all sorts. The younger player lifted his left arm and picked up a chess piece. […] The arm was raised just long enough for Antonio to make out the tattoo of a yellow animal" (77). The prior desubjectification of Longoria transforms his identity from a strong, intimidating soldier

to this single tattoo, which symbolizes his prior military training in the United States. However, Longoria has not lost all of his power over Antonio: "The killer's face. Antonio spun in the flux of decades and countries, time and space distorted. The present, the past, somewhere in between" (79).

Tobar's intentional and affective blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries highlights the lack of protection from the migration and movement of political violence: "Once created, political violence permeates borders, dissolving imagined distinctions between the developed North and the Global South. [Antonio's] temporal confusion provides him with his first opportunity to process political trauma by dwelling in the indeterminate moment" (Pattison 121). This liminal temporality duplicates the spatial tension between public and private, which problematizes neoliberalism's potential to break significant borders. If inherent to neoliberalism is the erasure of memories that bound individuals together, Tobar effectively pushes against this notion in *The Tattooed Soldier* through Antonio's never-ending quest for revenge. The memory linking Antonio and Guillermo together is the propelling force not only behind the narrative action within the novel, but rather behind Antonio's search for personal retribution. This personal search, therefore, symbolizes the collective action of the victimized, albeit at the individual level, in Central America who reject the imposition of the neoliberal market and seek alternative paths for revenge, reconciliation, or justice. Therefore, together the fragmented voice and perspective, alongside the disjointed narrative form, illustrate the effects of the neoliberal market while simultaneously manufacturing new forms of violence which undermine the construction of a post-conflict period.

To conclude, Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* can be interpreted as a revenge narrative that problematizes the construction of historical discourse. Specifically, through Antonio Bernal and Guillermo Longoria, the novel brings to the fore the liminal criminalization of victims of political violence and the victimization of perpetrators of political violence. Distancing itself further from generic conventions, Tobar's treatment of narrative voice creates an empathetic bond between the reader and Guillermo Longoria and forces the reader to endure the emotional and psychological journey which Antonio Bernal must confront in his search for justice. Ultimately, *The Tattooed Soldier* emphasizes how political violence is inscribed on the bodies of victims and perpetrators alike and is the very foundation upon which (in)justice is established. The soldier's tattoo is a visual reminder of his victimization at the hands of the United States and Guatemalan militaries and of post-war impunity. Antonio's anger and fear-driven quest for justice materializes through physical acts of violence and revenge. Antonio Bernal and Guillermo Longoria's relationship illustrates how neither victims of political violence and victimized perpetrators of political violence can truly receive justice, as the judicial system is predicated upon their victimization, marginalization, and disenfranchisement.

Chapter 3: Broken Law, Law Breakers in Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* (2012) and Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* (2003)

While previous chapters of this dissertation examine how individual and collective historical legacies of violence shape neoliberal subjectivities in a corpus of contemporary transnational Central American crime fiction, this chapter focuses on Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* and Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* (2012), two novels that interrogate liminal justice in post-conflict contexts and texts.[4] In *Minos,* Salvadoran American homicide Detective Romilia Chacón aligns herself with a wanted drug runner and fugitive, Rafael Murillo, to access vital information in the investigation of her sister's murder in Atlanta, Georgia. This illegally obtained information not only leads Chacón and the FBI to the wanted serial killer, but also results in Chacón's promotion in the FBI on the case. In Quirós' novel, *Verano rojo,* protagonist Don Chepe, a former insurance agent is contracted extra-judicially by the Costa Rican police force to investigate cases of murder, kidnapping, drug trafficking, and robbery, among other crimes. In *Verano rojo,*

[4] This chapter examines one installment in two crime fiction series. In McPeek Villatoro's Romilia Chacón series, protagonist and Homicide Detective Chacón investigates the murder of her sister Catalina by the serial killer, the Whisperer/Minos. Throughout the series, the individual investigations that Chacón conducts provide further details relating to her sister's case. In this chapter, I analyze *Minos,* the second installment in the series, which highlights Chacón's relationship with criminal suspects, her sister's murderer, and the emotional toll that this investigation has on her. In Quirós' Don Chepe series, protagonist Don Chepe works alongside the Costa Rican police department, but he is not officially employed by them. In *Verano rojo,* the first installment in the two-part series, Don Chepe investigates the murder of a close friend, la Argentina, employs nontraditional and illegal techniques, and uncovers clues leading to his suspect. In both series, McPeek Villatoro and Quirós establish parallels between the individual murder cases and unsolved historical crimes and interrogate how these investigations have been insufficiently addressed.

following the murder of his friend Iliana, referred to as la Argentina, Don Chepe immerses himself in the shady underworld of drug smuggling, illicit international business transactions, and explorative tourism practices in Costa Rica. Chacón and Don Chepe's law-breaking crime fighting techniques reveal and problematize the collution of criminal elements and national and international law-making machines.[5] Through a comparative analysis of these two figures, I argue that their criminality and performativity as "detectives" effectively "break the law;" that is, create liminal criminals of the detectives. For example, Romilia Chacón, legally employed by the Nashville Homicide Unit and the Federal Bureau of Investigations, and Don Chepe, deputized but not formally employed by the Costa Rican police force, carry out the essential detective functions while undermining the legal process through their acts of criminality.

Crucial to this analysis is an understanding of the relationship between the law-making machine and the detective. The parts of the law-making machine are the crimes, the criminals, and the rest of Us, the law-abiding citizens (Sistare 271). Distinguishing between legality and illegality establishes and maintains the social division between society and the criminal other. In "Punishment, Identity, and Difference," Christine Sistare argues that the code of law is created and maintained by this division. She states

---

[5] In *Justice, Law, and Culture*, James K. Feibleman defines the system of laws upon which the law-enforcement machinery operates based upon questions of consistency, completeness and categoricity. He states that "a legal system is consistent if none of the laws conflict. […] [C]onsistency requires that all of the laws in the system belong in the system, and completeness requires that all of the laws that belong in the system are in the system. […] Categoricity uniquely determines the system it describes. […] That the laws of a society are categorical is guaranteed by the fact that they all follow from the same theory of reality and all exist on the same level of analysis" (24). These definitions provide a framework against which the literary analysis will be constructed, specifically regarding Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe's investigations, criminality, and subsequent prosecution of the "criminals."

that the division is between "the legitimate members of the Social Group [and] the pretenders. The offender is one whose criminality sets him/her off from the group as a false member. The criminal is the wolf among the sheep, the player who cheats, the enemy within, the antisocial personality; in every metaphor, it is the Other who masquerades as one of Us" (271-2). Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe work simultaneously as criminal others and agents within the code of law itself; therefore, their criminality and institutionally privileged positionality expose the internal contradictions upon which the law-making machine operates.

In addition to designating the criminal other as one who exists outside societal norms, Mark Colvin underscores the roles that self-image and perception play: "Self-image plays a role in creating criminal behavior; the public's moral stance towards certain criminal behaviors (while greatly influenced by politics and the media) is the context against which self-images of criminals are created)" (2). Romilia's publicized legal indiscretions are overshadowed and overwhelmingly forgiven because in a previous assignment and novel (*Home Killings*), she solved the Jade Pyramid killings. For example, Romilia reflected on how her reputation followed her across borders: Lieutenant McCabe "had my file from Atlanta, which held two incidents that lay like blots of shame on my record. My reputation as a hot-head had followed me to Nashville, but luckily I had a boss who kept that reputation locked in his file cabinet" (McPeek Villatoro 20). Previous legal indiscretions did not prevent Romilia from pursuing all leads, both legal and illegal, in the case of her sister's murder. Don Chepe and his outsider status generates a liminal state where he is simultaneously trapped and defined by his legality and criminality.

The identification, classification, and persecution of, and at times by, criminals reveal the violence which is inscribed in the law-making machine. In "Critique of Violence," Walter Benjamin interrogates the intersections between violence and law, because "the task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relationship to law and justice" (277). Therefore, Benjamin explains how the legal system operates and emphasizes how its actions are historically situated with regards to sanctioned and unsanctioned violence. He states that the legal system "tries to erect, in all areas where individual ends could be usefully pursued by violence, legal ends that can only be realized by legal power" (280). While violence in the hands of an individual is seen as a danger to the legal system, Benjamin points out how the legal system is, by nature, a system of violence because "all violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving" (287). He defines law-preserving violence as "a threatening violence" (285) and law-making violence as "power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence" (295). The police institution and police violence, according to Benjamin, are examples of law-making violence because "its power is formless, like its nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states" (287). The structural and material violence of the police and judicial apparatuses in McPeek Villatoro and Quirós' novels reveal the complexities of law-preserving and law-making violence. The threatening presence of Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe not only leads them to uncover leads and networks of transnational criminality, but also places them in jeopardy as the criminals under investigation seek to retaliate or escape.

Therefore, the process of bringing one to justice and violence of the law are inextricably related. In "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" Jacques

Derrida clearly articulates the origin of law with this threatening violence. Derrida claims that the first characteristic related to law "is 'to enforce the law,' or 'enforceability of the law or contract.' […] Applicability, 'enforceability,' is not an exterior or secondary possibility that may or may not be added as a supplement to law. It is the force essentially implied in the very concept of *justice as law*" (5). Similar to Benjamin, Derrida examines the violence internal to the system of law; however, Derrida emphasizes the external forces through which law itself materializes:

> The word 'enforceability' reminds us that there is no such thing as law that does imply *in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its concept*, the possibility of being 'enforced,' applied by force. There are, to be sure, laws that are not enforced, but there is no law without enforceability, and no applicability or enforceability of the law without force, whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive or hermeneutic, coercive or regulative, and so forth. (6)

The force which will be analyzed in this chapter are the techniques employed and tools utilized, both legal and illegal, by Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe in their murder investigations. Enforceability in these cases refers to their affiliation with police institutions and state apparatuses and the material violence of their law breaking and the structural violence of the broken law. Romilia and Don Chepe's criminality disorders, disrupts, and repositions the power structures within their respective departments and complicates the identification and separation of the "criminal other" from "the rest of Us." Their criminality, for its part, functions in the same way that the law is maintained:

> Once established, law is maintained through force; it is maintained as an apparatus of violence that disorders, disrupts, and repositions preexisting relations and practices all in the name of an allegedly superior order. That order demonstrates its 'superiority' in ferocious displays of force and subjugating, colonizing, 'civilizing' acts of violence. Violence thus may be said to be integral to law in three senses: it provides the occasion and method for founding legal orders, it gives law (as a regulator of force and coercion) a reason for being, and it provides a means through which law acts. (Sarat 5)

If justice is obtained through a system of laws which derives its legitimacy from violence, I argue that Romilia and Don Chepe's criminality and legal indiscretions illustrate how the system of laws is broken; or rather, if an investigation is conducted through criminal or non-enforceable means, justice can never truly be attained. Their criminality and liminal positionality both within and outside the system of laws sheds light on the system's internal contradictions, limitations, and failures to provide justice to victims of both individual and collective or historical legacies of violence.

To argue that Romilia and Don Chepe are disruptive figures that shed light on the institutional failures and shortcomings of national and international state apparatuses, it is important to trace the evolution of the detective figure in contemporary detective and crime fiction. According to Amelia Simpson, "detective fiction is generally understood to be a type of narrative constructed around the solving of a crime problem, in which a detective, or a figure who carries out the functions of a detective, is assigned a primary role" (10). In McPeek Villatoro and Quirós' novels, the protagonists investigate and attempt to solve a series of murders, all the while they uncover or engage in additional

acts of illegality and criminality. There are two frameworks which inform this study, that of classic detective fiction, the 'whodunit', and the hard-boiled detective novel, or *novela negra*. According to the canonical typology established by Tzvetan Todorov in the late 1970s, classic detective fiction consists of two stories: the story of the crime and of the investigation (44). The ways in which the investigation is presented allows the reader to attempt solving the puzzle, which "provides a reassuring view of society in the mechanistic crime-to-solution sequence" (Simpson 11).

In contrast to the investigative nature of the classic detective novel, "more typically align[ed] mystery conventions with anxieties over contamination, irrationality, and the threat posed to imperial modernity by unassimilated racial and cultural difference" (Pearson and Singer 4), the hard-boiled detective novel emerged in the United States in the 1920s. The hard-boiled novel, or *novela negra*, is defined in Demetrio Estébanez Calderón's *Diccionario de términos literarios* as "a narrative subgenre (related to the detective novel), that appears in North America at the beginning of the 1920s and in which its authors attempt to reflect, from a critical consciousness, the world of gangsterism and organized criminality stemming from the violence and corruption of the capitalist society of the era" (Close 143-4). Crucial to the *novela negra* is the critical consciousness vis-à-vis the intersections between subjective and systemic violence; or rather, an overt representation and subsequent questioning of criminality inherent to the capitalist system which manifests itself through individual, physical violence. This critical consciousness speaks to the reasons why crime fiction is used synonymously with detective fiction, given that crime is the force which drives both the narrative discourse and the detective's investigation.

McPeek Villatoro and Quirós' novels, for their part, combine elements of the classic 'whodunit' with elements of the *novela negra*, specifically in the construction of their protagonists' subjectivity. Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe embody and perform the law as they engage in illegal investigative techniques and criminal acts. Therefore, McPeek Villatoro and Quirós' detectives deviate from class detective figures. In her critical study on Roberto Bolaño's work, "La narrativa policial como un género de la Modernidad: la pista de Bolaño," Magda Sepúlveda explains the role of the detective figure: "La novela policial propone un detective que logra desentrañar la verdad gracias a ensayar una conciencia fuera del tiempo y del espacio, que instaura la verdad como un 'saber'" (110). Furthermore, commenting on the relationship between the individual and the society in which one lives, Sepúlveda states that the boundary separating the detective from the criminal "es la tarea del detective, por eso este personaje se esfuerza en examinar los casos sin considerar sus vínculos personales, incluso en la gran mayoría de los policiales negros, el detective debe romper los lazos afectivos que ha ido desarrollando en el transcurso de la investigación para ser capaz de mirar el delito como un objeto de estudio" (111). McPeek Villatoro and Quirós effectively break with this characteristic of the detective or crime fiction novel.

Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe are unsuccessful at distancing themselves temporally, physically, and mentally from the cases they are investigating since some of the victims were family members, friends, and lovers. Their personal and emotional investments in their cases also undermine their ability to establish an objective truth, which impacts how the reader experiences and follows along the investigation. Or rather, as Sepúlveda points out, the reader and the detective share similar conditions: "La

estructura policial tiende a situar al lector en una condición similar a la del detective, pues este receptor también creará un mundo de conjeturas que le permitan explicar lo sucedido. […] La lógica del lector ha quedado tan polemizada como la racionalidad del detective. Estamos todos perdidos" (114-5). Moreover, McPeek Villatoro and Quirós humanize the criminals in such a way that both the detectives and the reader can identify with their lived conditions and develop an empathetic bond with the criminals. This empathetic bond further illustrates how the system of laws is broken by the inability to clearly identify and distinguish between the "criminal other" and "the rest of Us."

In the prologue of *Home Killings* (2001), the first installment of McPeek Villatoro's Romilia Chacón series, the reader is introduced to the protagonist, Romilia Chacón: "I'm twenty-eight, Latina, and a southerner. Atlanta was my hometown. Now Nashville is where I hang the few skirts I own. I'm a bonafide rookie homicide detective, having made the cut only six months ago" (vii). In the opening lines, the complexity of Romilia's identity is revealed with regards to her profession, geographic location, and cultural influences. This opening passage also overtly introduces the series as one of detective fiction while it subtly deviates from these conventions: "I've only seen three murdered bodies in my life, the latest one being this young guy Diego Sáenz. Still, I'm good at this. I know I'm good because I think about murder all the time. I have that right. My big sister's killer gave me the right six years ago. He also gave me obsessive vengeance […]. Used sparingly anger is the best fuel" (vii). In traditional detective fiction, detachment between the reader and the criminal and between the detective and the cases being investigated is paramount to the narrative arc as one does not want the criminal to seem too "human" (Simpson 11).

In this opening passage, Romilia explicitly states what drives her professionally, reveals her personal investment in the investigation, and complicates her desire to bring her sister's murderer to justice by stating that she has an "obsessive vengeance." The questions which I seek to answer are the following: How does the racialization and gendering of Romilia's professional and personal subjectivity impact her agency as a Latina detective in the South? How does her sister's absence shape her investigative and coping skills? How does her obsession with her sister's murderer undermine her professional authority and the processes of justice? I argue that Romilia's liminal criminality is a byproduct of these external social, political, and cultural forces. As she works through the grief and anger following her sister's murder, Romilia's liminal criminality materializes by using her privileged position as a detective to illegally acquire classified information to track her sister's murderer while simultaneously becoming romantically involved with Rafael Murillo, a wanted criminal and former member of the Guatemalan death squads. Her state-legitimized liminal criminality contends with both the legacy of violence stemming from her sister's murder and the collective legacies of violence resulting from U.S. interventionist policies in the Central American civil wars.

In contrast to narratives that trace Central American migration to urban centers, such as Los Angeles in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*, Romilia finds herself among the evolving Latina/o population in the South, a location imbued with problematic race and cultural relations. In his study on Appalachian Latino poetics, "*Andando entre dos mundos*," Michael Dowdy notes that "as Latino and Appalachian, they are 'the other America' twice over" (127). This double-othering stems from the peripheralization of the Appalachian region in discourses of U.S. economic and social progress. Dowdy

subsequently elaborates the similarities between the Appalachian region of the United States and the Amazon and Andes as the national and multinational "sacrifice zones" for corporations: "Sacrifice turns the euphemism of 'development' to 'destruction,' clarifying power relations between 'region' and nation. In some parts of Appalachia, after all, corporations 'control up to 90 percent of the surface land and 100 percent of the mineral resources" (128-9). The relationship between the market and the seemingly isolated region conceal the patterns of wealth that flow from the region: "Neoliberal keywords conceal these consequences in triumphal terms of economic 'freedom,' job 'creation,' energy 'independence,' and 'clean' coal" (129). The growing Latina/o population in the rural South frequently finds themselves employed and trapped within systems of labor exploitation. In "Sleuthing Central American Identity and History in the New Latino South," Yajaira M. Padilla points out that the new Latino labor force is attracted to the South given affordable housing and the demand for low-skilled workers; however, "still subject to extreme forms of exploitation, given the undocumented status of many, this new labor force is a vital element of chemical, automobile, furniture, poultry, and meatpacking factories as well as more traditional agricultural industries and construction" (378). As a result, the surrounding communities evolved to provide "the necessary equipment for survival – *taquerías*, little Mexican markets, immigration paper selling […]" (*Home Killings* 16). Economic privilege, for its part, is an underlying theme throughout the series and underwrites the migratory experience of many Central Americans following the period of armed conflicts and one's access to legal representation and justice, as we witnessed with Antonio Bernal in *The Tattooed Soldier*.

Returning to the opening lines in *Home Killings*, Romilia identifies herself first as a Latina, second as a Southerner, and third as a rookie homicide detective. The complexity of her identity is the subject of several scholarly texts. For example, in "Hot on the Heels of Transnational America," Wendy Knepper examines how Romilia's professional identity mirrors the changing demographic of the U.S. south and the shifts in cultural perspectives. She states that "just as the Latina in the United States represents a hybrid figure, someone who negotiates aspects of her American and Latina selves, the Latina detective novel represents a hybrid discourse, a blend of the feminist detective novel and ethnic detective novel" (157). Moreover, Knepper emphasizes the political potential of the Latina detective novel to give voice to these multi-faceted, transnational and cross-cultural experiences: "the Latina detective acts as a border-crosser [whose] unique transcultural feminist perspective and hybrid socio-cultural methods of detection lead her to uncover and reconstitute a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary America" (158). One border which Romilia continually crosses is the linguistic barrier between Spanish and English.

In *Home Killings*, the reader learns that Romilia is hired by the Nashville Homicide Unit to investigate Diego Sáenz's murder precisely because she speaks Spanish:

> Though his driver's license told me little about this case, it quickly explained why I was the detective put on it. Sáenz was Hispanic. People like Sáenz were the reason the Nashville Homicide Unit hired me. […] Before I arrived, my boss, Lieutenant Patrick McCabe […] and his small retinue of southern white dicks had

> found their deductive reasoning and acumen stunted by their inability to speak Spanish. (16)

Linguistic, racialized, and gendered social constructions define the positionality between Romilia and her white, male superiors: "Take the smartest monolingual gringo in the world and put him in a roomful of Spanish speakers, and you'll have yourself one insecure, frightened, regressive, pissed-off, stupid-feeling individual. It only takes a couple of cases in which language differences become an issue in order for someone like McCabe to throw up his hands and beg for help" (16). The space for Romilia Chacón emerges as a direct response to the department's deficiencies. Or rather, Romilia is hired to fulfill a specific need, one of supporting the "monolingual gringo," which reifies the social and professional positionality between colleagues. This assignment further complicates the relationship between Romilia and her traumatic past; for example, as Ana Patricia Rodríguez notes in "Heridas abiertas de América Central," "el periodista latino asesinado, y sujeto de la investigación de Chacón, ahora forma parte de la intimidad de la muerte con la cual ella vive día tras día. Estas primeras líneas de la primera novela de la serie nos revelan, en breve, la trama y el trauma personal y profesional de Romilia Chacón" (429). Viewing Romilia as a tool of Spanish translation and interpretation for the Nashville Homicide Unit undermines her intelligence, agency, and professional capabilities: "And even with her solving that very big case, the one called the Jade Pyramid Killings, she's still who she is: a Hispanic woman in an all-white force that's not going to make her Lieutenant overnight" (184). This lack of professional mobility reveals systemic and institutional racism upon which the Nashville Homicide Unit operates.

Romilia's linguistic identity is but one site of negotiation of her "multiple subject positions" (Padilla, "Sleuthing" 379). Romilia works within a hypermasculine state apparatus, which in turn impacts the ways in which she performs or underperforms her gender, regardless of the reaction that a situation warrants. For example, after her young son Sergio accidentally overdoses on methamphetamine, Romilia relies on this *performance* to independently track and arrest Peaches, the drug dealer responsible:

> I knocked. A little guy came to the door. Peaches. The fuzz on his chin gave away his nickname. […] 'Oh man, I am in bad need of a hit.' I smiled. My hair was thick over my neck, falling before my shoulder. My voice was as feminine as I could possibly make it. I sounded horny. My dress enhanced the effect: a red skirt that stopped a good five inches above my knees, with a red stretch top over my cupped red bra. All the clothes my mother didn't know I owned. (*Minos* 159)

Similar to her utilitarian function as a Spanish translator and interpreter, Romilia performs her gender in such a way to trap Peaches and legally gain access inside his apartment, the access she needs to make an arrest. However, of great importance is Romilia's awareness of this performance as she consciously makes her voice feminine, a characteristic that would normally undermine her authority as a respected, competent homicide detective. Knepper, for her part, discusses these performances as responses to Romilia's "double colonization" that Latinas experience both within the Latino community and society at large: "Latino and American constructs of gender tend to differ considerably, which can lead to a conflicted sense of femininity. The interplay of gender, ethnicity, and cultural difference plays an important role in the Latina detective's relationships to communities and contributes to her sense of self in a Latina-American

vision of society" (160). Her actions are not without repercussions. Following her encounter with Peaches, Lieutenant McCabe reminds her how her actions are perceived: "Look, I know it's difficult, what happened to Sergio. But it's not going to help you to fly off the handle, taking things into your own hands. They'll say you can't handle the job. And I don't think I need to remind you, how some guys think about women on the force: that a woman lets her personal life get in the way of her work" (*Minos* 166). As Romilia takes things into her own hands and sidesteps legal protocol, a topic to which I will return later, her boss equates her reaction to a mother's and a woman's emotions.

In addition to her linguistic performativity, Romilia must also perform her gender; or rather, she must adhere to the expectations that are born out of systemic violence and ingrained patriarchal standards. As Padilla notes, Romilia "continuously has to renegotiate her identity both on the basis of gender as she struggles to be a 'good cop' and a 'good mother' as well as on the basis of her ethnicity" ("Sleuthing" 379). These processes of re-negotiation evolve as she travels west across the United States as the series progresses. In one encounter in Memphis, Tennessee, Romilia acknowledges how both gender and ethnicity impact her investigative abilities. While following a lead on her sister's murderer, Romilia meets Darla, a young police officer in Memphis: "She was about my age, and still in blue; this could have created jealousy had it not been for the success of my last case. I was also Latina, and she African American. Again, yet another factor to consider here, in the South: one ethnic minority making it before the other. Yet Darla did not act pulled one way or another by that" (*Minos* 127). As this reflection shows, Romilia is aware of how her positionality is socially constructed; that is, as a Latina detective in the South, she earns respect only because of her solving of the Jade

Pyramid Killings. However, she acknowledges the underlying competition between both women and minority populations in the South.

In her personal and family life, Romilia contends with legacies of violence that span generations and cross spatial, symbolic, and temporal borders. Additionally, she works within a system of laws that perpetually fail its most vulnerable communities and simultaneously undermines her cultural and personal identity. These are but two of many conditions which fuel Romilia's propensity to act on emotional, anger-fueled reactions and break laws in her quest to bring her sister's murderer to justice. As Mark Colvin reminds us, "chronic criminals are made, not born [and] this propensity for criminal behavior, defined as 'criminality,' must be distinguished from acts of crime" (1).[6] Romilia's criminality, for its part, is a product of the United States' interventionist policies during the Central American civil wars, of the state's failure to capture her sister's murderer, and of her employment as an agent of these same state apparatuses. While completing her initial police training, Romilia admits in a casual conversation to Bobby, a man who appeared to randomly run into her at a Kroger's supermarket, the true reasons she joined law enforcement:

[6] In *Crime and Coercion: An Integrated Theory of Chronic Criminality*, Colvin also defines the three most frequent categories of criminality. Chronic offending refers to frequent and continual engagement in predatory street crime, including homicide, rape, burglary, and assault, among others. Exploratory offending refers to infrequent, temporary, or sporadic engagement in street crimes, which may or may not be predatory. At times predatory and chronic, white-collar crimes most typically refers to criminal violations of trust by an individual or group who otherwise engages in legitimate and respected activities (2). Romilia Chacón legal indiscretions align most closely with white-collar criminality as she breaks public and institutional trust in the course of her criminal investigations.

> ‘Then you get your uniform?’ ‘Yeah. But I’ll move on.’ ‘To what?’ She did not smile. ‘Homicide. Of course.’ ‘I see. So you want to find your sister’s killer.’ ‘Always.’ He saw Catalina in the hard pools of her eyes. ‘And what will you do when you find him?’ ‘Kill him, of course.’ She leaned over the table. ‘Why do you think I want to be a cop? It puts a gun in my hand legally.’ He shook his head, understanding. She shifted. ‘Oh, you didn’t hear that from me,’ she said. She laughed. But it was uncomfortable. A concern over incrimination, that someone would dig this guy up, and he would bear witness to this conversation in the coffee shop in Kroger’s. (183)

Even though Romilia is unaware of Bobby’s true identity, the reader witnesses an exchange between Romilia and her sister’s murderer, the same serial killer she is hunting. The setting of this conversation also parallels the coffee shop where Bobby and Catalina first met. Additionally, this conversation reveals Romilia’s criminality with two key details. First, she admits that her intention is to kill her sister’s murderer. This admission contradicts her supposed quest for justice; or rather, as fellow officers frequently ask her, is she seeking justice or revenge? In this exchange with Bobby, Romilia exposes that she is driven by her desire for revenge. Second, she acknowledges the protection that being a police officer will provide her since it puts a gun in her hands legally. As Austin Sarat reminds us, “law depends on violence and uses it as a counterpunch to the allegedly more lethal and destructive violence situated just beyond law’s boundaries. But the violence on which law depends always threatens the values for which law stands” (3). This legal protection is subsequently the source of state-sanctioned corruption and police brutality against vulnerable communities. Sarat also points out that this threatening violence,

which forms the foundation of the system of laws, is carried out "directly by legal officials, some by citizens acting under a dispensation granted by law, and some by persons whose violent acts subsequently will be deemed acceptable" (3). Considering the circumstances surrounding Catalina's brutal murder, Romilia's criminal actions are not only deemed acceptable but eventually lead to recognition and a promotion with the FBI.

Once Romilia explicitly acknowledges her intention, it becomes more difficult for the reader to ignore or write-off her propensity for criminality and the tools she uses in her investigations. After solving the Jade Pyramid killings in Nashville, Tennessee, Romilia's obsessive investigation intensified while she was home recovering from a related injury. Lieutenant Patrick McCabe, Romilia's boss, and Jacob 'Doc' Callahan, the Medical Examiner who worked closely with the Homicide Department, gifted Romilia a laptop, which Doc explicitly justifies: "The word is out on how computer illiterate you are, Romilia. Patrick and I have decided to take advantage of your condition. We're bound and determined not to leave you in the past millennium. You *will* learn the Internet" (19). First, their desire to take advantage of Romilia's condition underscores her positionality within the department and emphasizes her lack of agency within the departmental hierarchy. She is not provided time to simply recover; but rather, Lieutenant McCabe and Doc Callahan gift her this computer with the intention that these new skills will improve her utilitarian function for the department. Second, Doc's assertion that Romilia *will* learn the Internet can be interpreted as a friendly jest between colleagues, or, perhaps more importantly, as an official order from her superiors. Tones of masculine power and superiority underwrite the friendly dynamic between colleagues. With this computer, however, Romilia spends the evenings searching the Internet for information

on the Whisperer, her sister's murderer, because as she states, "obsession becomes easier, more fluid, with the Internet" (27).

Alongside the investigation of her sister's murder, Romilia also pursues leads on Tekún Umán, a known drug runner, who previously tortured one of Romilia's confidants in Nashville, Tennessee. Regarding her interest in Tekún Umán, Lieutenant McCabe again confronts Romilia about her intentions:

> 'So this is a vengeance thing,' he said. 'No. It's a legal thing. Tekún Umán tortured that boy, cut him up.' And then the images flashed through me, of a sixteen year old boy who trusted me with information on Tekún Umán, and that same boy, a week later in a hospital with one less eye and the Spanish word for *narc* cut into his stomach, all because I was careless: Tekún Umán had found out about Gato Negro, because of me. (36)

In this case, Romilia's incessant thirst for revenge on her sister's murderer blinds her from the ongoing investigation and leads to grave consequences for her informant, the young boy known by his street name Gato Negro. This mistake becomes another of Romilia's obsessions and fuels both her detective work and criminality, which as Rodríguez points out, "además de sugerir que la detective puede corromperse y caer en la criminalidad, la atracción de Chacón por Murillo también señala las afinidades entre estos personajes, pues ellos comparten más que la trama policial de las novelas: comparten el reciente legado traumático de Centroamérica" ("Heridas abiertas" 435). After receiving access to confidential databases, Romilia acknowledges the work at hand:

> Obsession, it's part of the job, right up there with forensics and psychological profiles. I could focus it: I wouldn't get my boss in trouble trying to use the pass

> code on other websites, such as the Behavioral Science Unit at Quantico. I would be a good detective: focus on Rafael Murillo, aka Tekún Umán. Keep my sight focused, that was the way of keeping me from going under (39).

Romilia's work, for its part, is two-fold. First, the material labor refers to Romilia's investigation of Murillo using departmental and federal databases. Second, the immaterial labor refers to the internal struggle to not misuse these resources at the risk of implicating both her boss and herself.

The relationship between Romilia Chacón and Rafael Murillo is not simply one of Homicide Detective and wanted criminal: Romilia saves Murillo's life, Romilia blames Murillo for her son's accidental overdose on methamphetamine, and Romilia accepts Murillo's unsolicited help in the investigation of the Whisperer/Minos, the serial killer responsible for her sister's murder. Murillo's help was accompanied by a romantic gesture, which complicates the detective-criminal relationship: "After he fled, he sent me the letter and the gold ring, proclaiming his undying love for me. *Mi amor*, Tekún had said. No other man had used that line on me. 'If it were not for you, I would not be alive in this instant, writing this letter. It is because of you that I exist. And now, my existence desires only to think of you'" (27). Referencing this pivotal scene, Padilla points out that "this significant turn of events – as Romilia and Murillo's seemingly frictional relationship also gives way to sexual attraction – is a literary recourse meant to further the detective narrative by providing an open ending and the potential for future encounters" ("Sleuthing" 393). These future encounters, to which Padilla alludes, also includes Murillo's hidden participation and influence in the Nashville Homicide

Department's investigations as his criminal activities provide Romilia with vitally important information.

The second written correspondence and first e-mail, Romilia receives from Murillo arrives via the hacked e-mail account of "Cowgirlx14, or something like that:"

> *Mi amor, How are you? Convalescing? I hear Wilson left you wounded. Nicked in the jugular, and yet you live. Marvelous. No doubt it's that Salvadoran blood of yours. Just too strong, to stubborn, to die that easily. Tell me, are you the one checking in on that horrible Serial Killer website every fifteen minutes? There are too many moments in a day, Romi; too many empty opportunities in which I am driven to think of you. tu* (30)

Referencing "that Salvadoran blood of yours," Murillo alludes not only to their shared collective and traumatic histories, but rather to the strength and perseverance of Central Americans. As I have already noted, this legacy of violence is the driving force behind Romilia's professional path. Rodríguez points out that "en la novela *A Venom Beneath the Skin*, se nos explica que Chacón experimenta su salvadoreñidad como una herida abierta […]" ("Heridas abiertas" 436). This "herida abierta" is transformed and agitated with each new encounter with Murillo. Noticing perfect grammatical structures and accent usage, Romilia meditates on the signature *tu*: "And so the lack of an accent on the final word, the signature, was no mistake: he had chosen to use his nickname, or at least the initials of his nickname, Tekún Umán. Of course, 'tu' without an accent also means 'yours'" (30). This romantic tension underwrites the very foundation of Romilia and Murillo's relationship as they cross legal, cultural, and professional boundaries, and reveals the similarities between the two: "La atracción mutua entre Chacón y Murillo

señala la posibilidad de que ella pueda perder el control, cometer un desliz y caer en el 'lado oscuro' de la ley o, más bien, en el borde liminal de la criminalidad que también es el lugar sin límites de su deseo" (Rodríguez, "Heridas abiertas" 434).

Disguised under the pretense of the investigation, Romilia also actively sought out Murillo. Arriving in New Orleans, Romilia's internal dialogue revealed the contradictory feelings she held for Murillo: "And why was I looking for Tekún Umán? Because the bastard's drug dealings had come home to me, to my son. A lie, or half-truth. I was here because he had given me more information in one book rate mailed package than I had ever been able to acquire in six years. If he could do that, maybe he could give me more" (*Minos* 219-20). Frustrated and dissatisfied with the official investigation, Romilia "was becoming more and more illegal" (234) by willingly and actively associating herself with Murillo, a known felon and fugitive of the law. Perhaps more important, however, is the way in which trust manifests itself. When Romilia handed over the illegal documents to the FBI, she failed to surrender Murillo's letter, illustrating her lack of trust in the FBI. Murrillo also questions Romilia: "You didn't show them the letter because you don't trust them. Do you? You don't trust them because the Federal Bureau of Investigation has failed to bring down your sister's killer. You blame them for letting the Whisperer get away" (230). Romilia's lack of institutional trust perhaps stems from patterns and practices of systemic violence, racism, and oppression, while her trust in Murillo, a wanted criminal, stems from their shared cultural and collective histories. Or rather, Romilia identifies herself in Murillo.

In "Salvadoran-American Sleuthing in the U.S. South and Beyond," Padilla investigates the relationship between the two characters and its parallels with U.S. and

Central American history. She states that "aside from her Salvadoran heritage, Romilia's process of Latina identity formation is heavily influenced by her interactions with Rafael Murillo – another Central American-American – which lead her to 'unearth' a Central American history that is unfamiliar to her, but just as pivotal for understanding her cultural and ethnic identity" (129). Therefore, as Romilia conducts the criminal investigations, she must contend with two legacies of violence: the personal legacy stemming from her sister's murder and the collective legacy of civil wars, systemic violence, and oppression supported by U.S. interventionist policies. Padilla points out that "in essence, then, Romilia and Murillo also evoke the 'two sides' of Central American civil war history: the popular and armed struggle of the people versus the oppression of the oligarchic state" (145). Their shared liminal and, now, criminal state as Central American immigrants in the United States speaks to their shared solidarity and mistrust of institutional forces. However, regardless of her mistrust, Romilia is employed by the FBI and in so works for the "oppressor;" therefore, by received illegal documents and aid from Murillo, Romilia has transformed herself from an FBI agent to an accomplice in federal crimes and further breaks the law-making machine which she is trained to uphold. This shouldn't come as a surprise, considering Romilia admitted her intentions to legally acquire a gun and use all measures necessary to find and seek revenge on her sister's murderer. Is Romilia a law-breaker or is the law already broken? McPeek Villatoro's novel illustrates that justice can never fully be achieved when the instruments used are broken.

Cultural and professional solidarity form the very foundations of contending with personal and collective legacies of violence. As Simon Spring notes in "The Violence of

Neoliberalism," "as members of the assemblage we call humanity, we each have a moral obligation to stand up and speak out as an act of solidarity with those whom the violence of neoliberalism has targeted, and those who have been silenced by the complacency of a stifled collective imagination wherein neoliberalism is considered an inexorable force" (159). As members of this post-conflict, cross-generational collective, Romilia Chacón and Don Chepe represent the intricacies upon which one's social and political subjectivity is founded. Returning to Sistare's argument, she reminds us that each individual is susceptible to becoming the "criminal other," that "then, all that truly distinguishes Us from Them is discovery. Any one of us might have a 'brush with the law;' any might be suspected, investigated, accused, tried or punished" (274).

Romilia and Don Chepe not only risk being discovered as the "criminal other," but rather professionally and socially operate from this liminal positionality. On the one hand, Romilia Chacón stood up and spoke out on behalf of the victims of the Salvadoran civil war, oppressive policing practices against vulnerable communities in the United States, and across cultural and generational boundaries. Problematic, however, was the fact that she was employed by the Nashville Homicide Unit and, later, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, two institutions which symbolize those responsible for systemic and symbolic violence, both within the United States and abroad. On the other hand, Don Chepe investigates the death of his friend, Ilana Echeverri, known as "la Argentina," neither *within* nor *outside* the law, but rather *alongside* the law. Don Chepe, for his part, represents a liminal positionality in which he is both an asset for official investigations and is also left unprotected. The precarity of his positionality provides him the space to pursue all leads and obtain vital information through any means necessary.

The detective figure, we must remember, fully exists in the in-between: between justice and cynicism, between truth and motives, between law and outlaw, between explorer and voyeur (Docker 230). As a figure that exists and operates in this perpetually liminal position, Docker notes that "while opposing the incompetence or compromises of the Law, the detective stands for another liege lord, or rather lady, Justice" (225). Personal vengeance and rampant impunity underwrite the detectives' quests for justice in McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* and Quirós' *Verano rojo*. Romilia contends with and defends herself against accusations of revenge-based actions and Don Chepe reveals his personal and professional history with Costa Rica's institutional powers, which ultimately leads him to knowing the victim of his investigation:

> Nos habíamos conocido hacía muchos años, poco después de que me mudé de la capital a Paraíso, donde construí una casa con los escasos ahorros de un ex agente del Instituto Nacional de Seguros, la compañía de seguros del Estado, la única en el país. En el INS, yo había sido uno de esos tipos que envían a investigar los accidentes de carro y los reclamos de seguro que hacen los clientes. (*Verano rojo* 14)

Having moved to Paraíso, "donde podía dedicar[se] a fomentar el olvido" (14), Don Chepe finds himself fulfilling the roles of detective, without the protection of the state, thereby amplifying the delicate balance between law and justice. In "Force of Law," Jacques Derrida states that law is not equivalent to justice: "Justice is an experience of the impossible. A will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn't be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice" (16). Law is the element of precise calculation, whereby justice is the experience of the

improbable, "that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule" (16).

Both Romilia and Don Chepe embody these experiences in the moments in which they decide to step outside the confines of the law to fulfill their duty as a law-enforcing detective. The murder of Romilia's sister fueled both her desire to work as a law enforcement officer and her propensity for criminality, whereby Don Chepe recounts a starkly different beginning to his detective career:

> Hacía un tiempo, yo había empezado a ayudar con cosas en el pueblo. Todo comenzó un día en el bar de dona Eulalia. Era domingo y yo me tomaba las cervezas de todos los días. Un finquero local, al que siempre le daba la borrachera vaquera, le había faltado el respeto a dona Eulalia y después de rehusaba a salir del lugar. Cuando el Gato llegó, al hombre le pareció una buena idea tratar de partirlo de machetazos. Yo lo había convencido de que soltara el machete después de quebrarle un par de costillas. (20-21)

Similar to Romilia, Don Chepe stepped in to protect not only his friend, doña Eulalia, but also her establishment, a bar which serves as a location of cultural, personal, and, later, professional exchanges. Having protected el Gato, the nickname of el cabo Hernández, corporal in "la Guardia Rural," (19) Don Chepe earned recognition for his quick response and willingness to place himself in harms way for *justice*. Don Chepe also recounts how his past influences his legal and professional mobility:

> Antes de trabajar para el INS, yo había pasado varios años en Nicaragua, luchando en la Revolución, donde había aprendido a hacerme entender. En Paraíso no caía de mal alguien con ese tipo de experiencia. A partir de ese día,

> terminé echando mano en varios casos: robos, drogas, asesinatos, ese tipo de cosas. Todo extraoficialmente, por supuesto. Después también me empezaron a buscar personas del pueblo y del área que necesitaban ayuda con algún asunto personal. Los trabajos no daban mucho, pero aunque sea mataban el aburrimiento y ayudaban a pagar los pocos gastos que tenía. (21)

This passage reveals three vitally important details. First, the Nicaraguan Revolution bolsters his positionality and underwrites the individual investigations which he carries out. Second, the variety and abundance of crimes which he investigates illustrate how the post-conflict society is transformed by a growing presence of violence. In "Centroamericanidades," Arturo Arias affirms that "most Central American citizens were now exposed to the greatest crime wave in their history, with the added caveat that neither individual nor governmental institutions had any control over these mobile, translocal, transnational groups, better armed and financed than the governments of the territories in which they operated" (17). In the case of Costa Rica, Quirós comments on the presence of transnational criminal networks vis-à-vis the expanding drug trade, the presence and treatment of the undocumented migrant population, and the impact of the rapidly growing tourist and capitalist market. Third, Don Chepe acknowledges his liminal positionality and inherent criminality as he states that pay is low, all investigations are "extraofficial," and he works for both the state and individual citizens.

At the scene of la Argentina's murder, Don Chepe's liminal positionality materializes in contrast to el Gato's official status, which is visibilized because "el cabo llevaba el uniforme azul oscuro de la Guardia Rural, que se ponía solo en ocasiones 'oficiales', cuando tal vez tendría que verse con sus superiores" (19). El Gato's dark blue

uniform distinguishes him simultaneously from Don Chepe's liminal positionality and from the privileged positionality of his superiors. In *Power/Knowledge*, Michel Foucault argues that "the mechanics of power" is "the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (39). In both novels, McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* and Quirós' *Verano rojo*, hierarchies of power control distribution of information, cooperation between investigative units, and, at times, disciplinary actions against agents, among others. In contrast to the law-preserving or law-making aspect of power, Foucault emphasizes the productive aspect of power, which he defines as "a new 'economy' of power, that is to say procedures which allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and 'individualized' throughout the entire social body" (119). In this text, Foucault explicitly addresses the establishment of prisons and their transformative economic potential as an instrument both of surveillance and repression, the productive aspect of power provides the framework upon which both Romilia and Don Chepe deviate from institutional and established protocol and carry out their investigations in highly individualized, albeit criminal, ways.

In Quirós' *Verano rojo*, Don Chepe unknowingly conducts two investigations surrounding the death of his friend Ilana Echeverri. In Tzvetan Todorov's foundational work *The Poetics of Prose*, he states that every great book operates between two genres, "that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature, and that of the genre it creates" (43). Quirós' text, for its part, transgresses formulaic constraints of the classic detective story through Don Chepe's liminal criminality and the reliance upon

the victim's input in (re)solving her own murder. This present corpus, therefore, creates a genre in which the victim is ever-present and through which the protagonists explicitly contend with transnational histories and legacies of violence. Todorov also states that the classic whodunit contains two stories, that of the crime and that of the investigation (45). Unlike the classic whodunit, Quirós' *Verano rojo* contains multiple crimes and investigations. Notably, the central crime which Don Chepe is tasked with solving is the murder of Ilana Echeverri, or la Argentina. However, the liminal crimes of interest in this analysis include Don Chepe's criminality, the illegal means through which he obtains evidence, and the police department's complicity. Unlike classic detective stories, however, Quirós' novel interweaves Don Chepe's investigation with la Argentina's, in which she sought to reveal the individual(s) responsible for the 1984 bombing in La Cruz which left four dead and more than twenty wounded. As she followed leads, she feared for her life and ultimately left clues for Don Chepe, leading him to her murderer. While Romilia's sister implicitly fueled her investigations in McPeek Villatoro's *Minos*, la Argentina plays an active role in the investigation of her own murder in Quirós *Verano rojo*.

As previously mentioned, Don Chepe's liminal positionality and criminality stem from his working relationship alongside the police department, without receiving legal protection or full compensation. His mere "extraofficial" presence at the crime scene establishes his criminality and separates him from the law-making machine, or "the legally mismarked person in not, after all, one of Them, as suspected. Still, s/he is also no longer quite on of Us" (Sistare 272). Don Chepe's liminal positionality warrants him the ability to pursue leads and track suspects without direct interference, but at times with

direct assistance, from the police department. For example, Don Chepe identifies the first two suspects of la Argentina's murder as el Pinueve and el Zaguate, considering they had a previous encounter with her: "La cosa entre doña Ilana y ellos empezó un día en que […] se le habían metido a robar a la casa. Se llevaron la televisión y un equipo de sonido que le había regalado un hijo que se le fue para los Estados Unidos. […] Creo que alguien le contó de las cosas que vendieron, por cierto baratísimas, lo más seguro para comprar droga" (29). Even though Don Chepe doubted that el Pinueve and el Zaguate were responsible, because "la manera en que fue cometido el crimen parecía demasiado calculado, demasiado nítido. Necesitarían de un carro, de una pistola, de dinero. Además de que parecía algo premeditado, bien organizado," (30) he and el Gato tracked and violently threatened them:

> Escuché al Gato cargar su automática y abrí la guantera para hacer lo mismo. Tenía una Makarov 9 mm, una antigüedad, que había guardado de los tiempos de la Revolución, tal vez por sentimentalismo. Es difícil dejar la costumbre de siempre andar armado. […] El Gato les tapó la boca y les amarró las manos detrás de la espalda con cinta adhesiva de electricista. Yo los encañonaba, con el dedo sobre el gatillo […]. Después tomé el volante y salimos en reversa a toda velocidad. Sobre la calle principal, hice girar al Suzuki, enfilando hacia el este en medio de un remolino de polvo que lo cubría todo, como un cómplice. (46-7)

In this fragment, it is important to note that el Gato is not just a passive bystander, but rather than he actively participates in this criminal activity with Don Chepe. Specifically, el Gato relies upon his training and heightens the threat of police violence by loading his gun. In "Critique of Violence," Walter Benjamin argues that "police violence […] is law-

making, for its characteristic function is not the promulgation of laws but the assertion of legal claims for any decree, and law-preserving, because it is as the disposal of these ends" (286-7). Therefore, both the systemic and material violence of the law-making and law-preserving machine materializes in el Gato.

As a member of the police force, el Gato's actions reveal the underlying criminality upon which institutional practices and legal paradigm operate. The institutional criminality operates through systemic violence, which Slavoj Žižek defines as "not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (9). Immediately after, Don Chepe intensifies his threats with the hope of getting a confession:

> En silencio me dirigí al carro y abrí la puerta de atrás, donde tenía guardada la gata, unos cables para la batería y un recipiente con gasolina que había llenado en Santa Cruz. […] Apagué los focos del carro y me dirigí hacia el Zaguate con el tanque en la mano. Me paré frente a él y lo abrí despacio, sin apuro. Luego empecé a tirárselo encima con lentitud […]. Su amigo lo miraba de reojo, sus ojos desorbitados por el terror, un tipo de berrido inhumano salía de su boca sellada. Creo que fue en ese momento que el Zaguate empezó a gritar. Pero yo la verdad no lo escuchaba. […] Solo sentía el calor y un deseo de ver ese fuego arder, seguramente tan lindo sobre la oscuridad de los llanos. (48-9)

Don Chepe learns that el Pinueve and el Zaguate had been paid two hundred dollars to surveil la Argentina, by an individual who had left their pay "en un armario en el cuarto número seis de las cabinas Pozo Celeste" (50). The two suspects were not the only ones

fearing for the worst outcome: "-Pensé que le iba a echar ese fósforo encima, Don Chepe. -Yo también, Gato, yo también…" (51). The juxtaposition of psychological fear and terror with extreme physical violence emphasizes how the legitimacy of violence negates, or invisibilizes, the illegality of it. According to Austin Sarat, "to say that law's violence is legitimate is to juxtapose the alleged rationality of legal coercion and the irrationality of a violence that knows no law. […] It is to claim that the force of law serves common purposes and advances common aims in contrast to the atomic or sectarian savagery beyond law's boundaries" (6).

In contrast to the overt threat of physical violence, Don Chepe engages in more subtle, or symbolic, forms of criminality throughout his investigation, including bribery, withholding evidence, and fabrication of the case, among others. The first time this occurs is when he follows el Pinueve and el Zaguate's lead to Cabinas Pozo Celeste:

> Le inventé una historia de una mujer sueca que había conocido en un bar. […] La verdad no sé para qué le inventé la historia, porque ni sé si me escuchó todo el cuento. Sin volverme a ver, me dijo que no podía dar el nombre de los clientes. Después de pasarle un billete de cinco mil, sacó de una de las gavetas del escritorio […] una libreta gruesa en la que estaban apuntados los nombres de todos los clientes desde noviembre del año anterior. La noche del asesinato, el cuarto número seis había estado ocupado por un tal Carlos Gardel… no me pareció gracioso. (55)

This fragment illustrates that the hotel's receptionist was not persuaded by the personal relationship that Don Chepe invented, but rather that he almost immediately revealed the client's information upon seeing the five thousand colon bill laid upon the desk. After

spending ten thousand additional *colones*, Don Chepe gained access to inspect room number 6, which was supposedly occupied by la Argentina's murderer the night she was killed. This exchange clearly illustrates the relationship between economic status and access to justice; or, at the very least, in a broken legal system, money is a more powerful instrument that investigative procedures or established protocol. We must remember that Don Chepe is working "extraoficialmente, por supuesto," which highlights the mechanics of power within the Costa Rican society. On the one hand, it illustrates these corrupt practices have penetrated the society's social fabric of the working class and the institutions responsible for upholding the law. On the other, this symbolic violence materializes through the productive potential of misrecognition and manipulation of power structures, specifically in the misrecognition of Don Chepe as an official representative of the Costa Rican police department. This misrecognition, for its part, opens the discursive space in which to problematize the efficacy and validity of a broken law-making machine.

At the center of Don Chepe's investigation, are the clues, including newspaper clippings and letters, photographs, and an unlabeled key, among other items, left behind by la Argentina prior to her anticipated murder that also leads Don Chepe to uncover historical facts from Central America's past. Within the sealed envelope of evidence, Don Chepe faces parallel investigations: one pertaining to la Argentina's murder and one to the historical legacy of violence. The underlining event of Don Chepe's investigation is the bombing of La Cruz on May 30, 1984: "El recorte decía que el 30 de mayo de 1984, cuatro personas habían muerto, y más de veinte habían sido gravemente heridas, al estallar una bomba en una casona en La Cruz, donde había una conferencia de prensa con

el líder de la ese entonces Alianza Revolucionaria Democrática (ARDE), el comandante Edén Pastora" (Quirós 70). Quirós interweaves the historical and fictionalized legacies of violence to illustrate how violence crosses corporal, spatial, and discursive borders. In his article "The First Draft of History," Juan O. Tamayo establishes the connections between location and U.S. intervention. He points out that the bombing occurred at the La Penca guerrilla base in southern Nicaragua, and that the intended target, Edén Pastora, "had broken with the Marxist Sandinista government and launched a war against it along the southern border with Costa Rica while other 'contras' pushed in along the northern border with Honduras" (52).

Quirós' portrayal of the bombing of La Penca highlights how it was an attack on two borders: the geographical border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua and the discursive border between politics and the free press. In *Verano rojo*, La Argentina's collection of evidence identifies the victims of La Cruz: "Pastora fue herido, pero se recuperó después de haber sido llevado al hospital de Liberia y luego a una clínica en la capital. Sin embargo, otras cuatro personas, entre ellas una guerrillera del grupo de pastora, un chofer, un camarógrafo y una periodista, no habían corrido la misma suerte" (71). In La Penca, the bombing killed three journalists: reporter for Tico Times American Linda Frazier and TV crewmen Jorge Quirós Piedra and Evelio Sequeria Jiménez (Tamayo 51). According to Tamayo, "that the bomb went off during a news conference was a vicious violation of the neutrality that journalists should enjoy to be able to report on all sides of a conflict" (52). In *Verano rojo*, Quirós presents a fictionalized account of the bombing of La Penca, and, as such, manipulates the discursive borders between historical fact and fictional representation vis-à-vis la Argentina's envelope of evidence.

La Argentina's evidence introduces the reader to Peter Olsson, a Swiss journalist, who had returned to Costa Rica to testify against Rodrigo Victor Gandini, the suspected bomber. According to a newspaper clipping, approximately twenty five years following the bombing, "Olsson había sido la persona que inconscientemente, según él, había llevado al autor del atentado a La Cruz. El autor del hecho se había hecho pasar por un fotógrafo alemán llamado Werner Michel, pero luego había sido identificado como Rodrigo Víctor Gandini, un ex guerrillero del ERP argentino" (Quirós 72). Twenty-five years of silence refers to how the reporting of the bombing in 1984 had been intentionally misguided by journalists to protect the United States' involvement. In "Contra coverage – paid for by the CIA," Martha Honey explains how the bombing was not the only attack on the free press. Honey references Dery Dyer, editor of *The Tico Times*, who explains that "untrue stories were planted for political purposes in the local press […] to delay the investigation by days, if not weeks, so that the trail got cold" (32). In this sense, *Verano rojo* can be interpreted as the response to the intentional misrepresentation of the 1984 bombing and the vehicle which brings to the fore the evidence and suspects that were intentionally hidden and protected. This delay intentionally hid the United States and the CIA's involvement in the bombing: "Felipe Vidal Santiago, a Cuban-American, [posed] as a foreign journalist and [worked] to help organize a southern front for the contras out of Costa Rica […]. Vidal admitted to procuring arms and other military supplies for the contras, to recruiting mercenaries and training guerrillas, to participating in raids in Nicaragua, and to coordinating efforts with unnamed U.S. officials" (Honey 32). On a historical discursive level, la Argentina's envelope of evidence breaks the political and

historical silence and directs the attention to U.S. intervention and backing of the 1984 bombing.

On a literary discursive level, la Argentina's evidence breaks with generic conventions of a crime fiction text as the victim, and not the detective, provides the clues which lead to the potential identification and apprehension of the suspect. As previously mentioned, la Argentina prepared this packet of information prior to her murder, which indicates that she had anticipated her death. Within the packet of evidence, she leaves a photo that was taken in Managua in 1979 in which la Argentina appears alongside Gandini and the newspaper clippings lead Don Chepe to Olsson. Olsson, in turn, reveals that La Argentina had visited him:

> Vino a hablarme de La Cruz, ya sabrá que yo vine a hacer una declaración. […] Dejo que aún no estaba muy segura, pero que podría en el futuro tener información que serviría a mis intereses, que me ayudaría con la declaración, que podría usarse como evidencia ante la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. […] Se notaba que había sido buena guerrillera, una verdadera profesional […]. (82-3)

La Argentina meddles in Olsson's investigation because she had been affiliated with Gandini during her tenure in Nicaragua. The evidence she leaves behind leads Don Chepe to Gandini and establishes a connection between the 1984 bombing and U.S. intervention; or rather, la Argentina posthumously conducts her own murder investigation and identifies herself as an accomplice to Gandini, the bombing suspect. Upon learning of Gandini's plan, la Argentina fled Nicaragua and settled in Costa Rica, but she did not alert the authorities. This omission simultaneously places culpability on la Argentina and

comments on the inept justice system, which received international aid to execute and cover up political crimes.

The novel closes as Don Chepe's murder investigation concludes. Upon locating Gandini, he and Don Chepe engage in a brief struggle:

> A Gandini, salir del cuarto con una pistola en la mano, disparando frío, sin decir nada, como una máquina. Un tiro me pegó en el hombro izquierdo […]. [D]isparé en dirección al cuarto. Los contenedores de gasolina se cayeron a mi lado y empezaron a regarse sobre el piso. Disparé cuatro veces […], sé que por lo menos una impactó a Gandini en el estómago y otra en el muslo derecho. […] Finalmente tuve que dispararle. […] Gandini, sin embargo, solo me miraba en silencio. (152-4)

Gandini's silence and machine-like operation indicates the previous training he had which instilled in him the necessary discipline to protect his superiors. In this case, la Argentina's evidence and Don Chepe's investigation allude to the United States' involvement and as the intellectual authors of the bombing. As Don Chepe exits the house, he comments that the last thing he saw was Gandini lighting a cigarette and letting it fall to the gasoline-soaked floor: "Detrás de mí, sentí el calor de las llamas. […] Dos patrullas se estacionaron a mi lado. El Gato se bajó de una de ellas y vino a pararse a mi lado. Encendió un cigarillo y vimos el fuego crecer mientras fumábamos en silencio" (155). The novel closes as Don Chepe and El Gato watch as the fire envelopes the house and the extra-official investigation into la Argentina's murder concludes without justice being served. On an individual level, Gandini will never face prosecution for the murders of la Argentina and Olsson nor for his involvement in the 1984 bombing. On a collective

level, with Gandini's death, the intellectual authors of the bombing are still protected and will never face prosecution.

To conclude, Marcos McPeek Villatoro and Daniel Quirós bring to the fore the relationship between systemic, institutional violence and liminal criminality. In both novels, *Minos* and *Verano rojo*, the protagonists' lack of trust in the police and law-making institutions impede processes of justice as they utilize illegal tools to conduct their investigations. Romilia Chacón receives assistance from a known criminal and fugitive of the law and Don Chepe relies on evidence provided by his victim. Romilia and Don Chepe's liminal criminality compensates for the justice system's shortcomings and emphasizes how, in the face of impunity in the post-war period, justice cannot be received using traditional paradigms. Or rather, the protagonists' liminal criminality corrupts the law-making machine and provides liminal justice for the victims. These novels suggest that, within a broken judicial system, justice can only be achieved in the hands of the "law-breakers" – breakers of the system, breakers of individual laws.

Chapter 4: Playing the victim: Liminal Subjectivity in Jacinta Escudo's *El asesino melancólico* (2015)

In her critical study "De la guerra a la post-guerra: Transición y cambios en la literatura salvadoreña," Nilda Villalta examines how post-war Salvadoran literature privileges stories of the individual and explores the possibility that the individual advances despite social problems and stagnation. Villalta opens her analysis referencing Nicaraguan author Sergio Ramírez's seminar on contemporary Central American literature which he taught at the University of Maryland, College Park in 1999. In this seminar, Ramírez comments on the relationship between Central American literature and its political dimension: "Primero: que la característica más importante es su dimensión política, una narrativa política […] no en el sentido de un alineamiento partidista sino más bien en el sentido de una intencionalidad por retratar la vida pública, la historia pública de la sociedad en la que surge" (Villalta 95). Intentionally portraying the intimate relationships of public life is political in nature because it sheds light on issues that penetrate the social fabric and transform the individual's way of life.

In this way, post-conflict Central American literature explores the relationship between the public and political spheres, and as Ramírez points out, returns to the individual: "Segundo: El tiempo de post-guerra en Centroamérica y en particular en El Salvador que coincide, además con el fin de siglo, ha dado como resultado un recuento hacia atrás en la historia, un ir hacia el individuo" (95). In this return to the individual, narratives explore issues including domestic relationships and violence, psychological and emotional turmoil, and struggles for economic and social mobility. At times, these

narratives make explicit the connection between an individual's circumstances and the period of armed conflicts, as witnessed through the protagonists' perspectives in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* and Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*. Other narratives, such as Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* and Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo*, explore cross-generational legacies of violence through both temporal and spatial distance, and some texts, such as Jacinta Escudo's *El asesino melancólico*, make no mention of the armed conflict nor situate the story temporally or geographically. This marked absence, for its part, leads to the overarching question: What is political about Escudo's *El asesino melancólico*?

Published in the aftermath of the Salvadoran civil war and belonging to the collection of post-conflict crime fiction, Jacinta Escudo's 2015 short novel *El asesino melancólico* breaks with generic conventions and transcends political, cultural, and literary boundaries. The current analysis centers on Escudo's most recent text; however, it is important to note that Escudo's career began during the period of armed conflict in El Salvador. However, in "Una ciudad agresiva e inhóspita," Olivia Elizabeth Amaya points out that Escudo's literary production "no se ubica en ninguna generación o grupo de escritores que compartan una temática definida que los clasifique" (1). Escudo's works are most frequently described as experimental and fragmented texts which critically engage the social and psychological decay resulting from the period of conflict. Referencing Escudo's stylistic repertoire and critical voice, Amaya analyzes how Escudos presents the concrete results of the civil war, political potential of urbanization projects, and the fatigue of the individual in *Contra-corriente* (1993), *Cuentos sucios* (1997) and *A-B-Sudario* (2003): "Dicho deterioro se manifiesta en la psiquis de sus

personajes. […] A través de las voces presentadas en el discurso [del corpus] se puede visualizar a una sociedad que vive en constante ansiedad en el estrés del momento histórico como resultado de la crisis económica y la coyuntura política que históricamente ha afectado a los sectores mayoritarios" (1-2).

Escudo's 2015 short novel *El asesino melancólico* also explores the relationship between life and death, anxiety, and the feelings of emptiness and lack of personal fulfillment, among others. In *El asesino melancólico*, Jacinta Escudos inverts the traditional judicial process by emphasizing the victim's desire to escape the emotional and psychological distress produced by a failed relationship. The novel portrays Rolanda Hester's psychological decay resulting from her husband's betrayal and her subsequent journey to hire someone to take her life. After being trailed and emotionally manipulated by Hester, Blake Sorrow considers taking the money offered and fleeing, once the job is done. A moment of lapsed judgment and a brief struggle ends with Hester being shot and Sorrow being incarcerated, leaving the reader questioning if true justice had been served. To date, Magadalena Perkowska's analysis of intimacy and "la estética de lo banal" is the only study published on this text. In the article "Límites del ser y la estética de lo banal," Perkowska examines this short novel as a post-utopic text and explores how intimacy permits one to investigate social and historical forces (223). Perkowska argues that Escudos' novel explores "un *sensorium* insignificante que, por un lado, recupera lo cotidiano banal como un componente constitutivo y, además, resistente de la experiencia humana y, por otro, visibiliza la fragilidad del sujeto en el mundo contemporáneo, cuya subjetividad es moldeada por construcciones masmediáticas de los valores sociales y culturales" (223).

Taking Perkowska's analysis of intimacy and banality as a point of departure, I analyze three key components – the anonymity of the city, the pragmatics of suicide and the duality of the "victim" – as vehicles to mobilize the liminal subjectivity and criminality resulting from the period of armed conflict. The conflation of emotional and subjective violence in the novel represents the anguish and desperation characterizing the neoliberal subject in the post-conflict period. This chapter will examine Hester's agency as both "victim" and "perpetrator," and her desire to narrate her own death as conditions not possible to the victims of the armed conflict. The absence of the investigative process will be shown to be characteristic of a truly and completely liminal crime narrative, while illustrating how the confluence of subjectivity and criminality underscores the neoliberal condition. This novel ultimately reconceptualizes the crime narrative to expose the societal danger of this post-conflict society and opens the discursive space to transgress formulaic constraints and transcend into a new critical mode.

Post-war Central American crime fiction has been the subject of numerous academic studies, most notably as Misha Kokotovic theorizes the characteristics of the *neoliberal noir*, where texts "share a sense of noir sensibility characterized by a pervasive sense of corruption, decay, and disillusionment, in which the social order itself, and particularly the state, is the ultimate source of criminality, rather than of justice" (15). In relationship to the utopic revolutionary texts, Beatriz Cortez also problematizes the postwar sensibility, whereby "la ficción de posguerra pone frente al lector un espíritu de cinismo. Este tipo de ficción pinta un retrato de las sociedades centroamericanas en caos, inmersas en la violencia y la corrupción" (27). The characteristics most frequently associated with these novels, therefore, are fragmented subjectivity, individual and

societal anguish, chaos, deterioration, and loss. In *El asesino melancólico*, the reader witnesses how these elements are manifested in both Rolanda Hester and Blake Sorrow as symbolic markers of the society at large. Pertaining to the generation of post-war authors, Aymara draws parallels between Escudos and Horacio Castellanos Moya: "Mientras Castellanos Moya analiza la mediocridad y el cinismo de la sociedad frente a la destrucción, Escudos presenta los resultados concretos de la guerra, del desgaste humano y de los proyectos fallidos de las utopías políticas" (1-2). Read alongside post-conflict crime fiction novels, which manipulate the generic conventions of the crime novel, Escudos's *El asesino melancólico* can be interpreted as an anti-detective novel, which Amelia Simpson defines as "those texts which significantly modify, elaborate on, or even radically transgress detective-fiction conventions [where] meaning is generated specifically and intentionally" (14).

Escudos plays not only with content but also with form to such a degree that the reader experiences a disorientation from generic conventions symbolizing individual turmoil in a post-war society. Most notably is the emphasis on the fluidity between victim and perpetrator; or rather, Rolanda is victim to her failed relationship and the failed social order, while simultaneously the perpetrator of extortion and manipulation. In contrast to detective conventions, the investigation process is absent from *El asesino melancólico*. Additionally, as José Pablo Rojas González points out with respect to Escudos' collection of short stories *Cuentos sucios*, "Los temas desarrollados en la literatura centroamericana se movilicen entre 'lo público' y 'lo privado'; [estos] dos ámbitos se confunden, y ello siempre tiene consecuencias en las conformaciones identitarias, conformaciones que […] están marcadas por la violencia: no sólo es una región sufrida, en ella, también, habitan

sujetos olvidados" (2). The forgotten subjects in these post-conflict novels are the victims' families searching for answers or, at times, vindication, ex-soldiers returning to civilian life, and entire cities whose identity has been destroyed.

In *El asesino melancólico* a key component of the reader's experience is trying to identify the city where the action takes place. The novella opens with in a public parking lot and the first encounter between Rolanda and Blake, as Blake leaves his shift: "Al acercarse a la ventanilla del lado del conductor, vio una silueta oscura inclinada sobre el volante. Pensó que la persona estaba enferma. […] La silueta se movió. La ventanilla fue bajando lentamente. Poco a poco vio una cabellera rubia […]. Le molestó encontrarse con su mirada, hacer contacto visual. […]" (9-10). During the first encounter, the following exchange takes place:

> Ahí fue cuando escuchó aquello, cuando le pareció que ella dijo:
>
> ¡Máteme!/¿Cómo?/¡Máteme!/Está loca. Es hora de cerrar. Tiene que irse./¿No me está escuchando?/La que no está escuchando es usted. Tiene que irse. Y rápido, que está lloviendo. […]/¿Podría llevarme a mi casa? No puedo manejar. No estoy en condiciones. Le pagaré./Lo piensa un momento. Nuevamente, no sabe por qué, acepta. (11)

As Blake drives Rolanda home, the narrative lacks any mention or description of the city, the streets, the sounds, or the directions to her home. On the one hand, by erasing the cityscape, Escudos emphasizes the individual's relationship to one another on a more intimate level, while humanizing the conditions which can be experienced regardless of geographic location or social standing, especially in a period of post-conflict. Similarly in *Baile con serpientes* (2001), Horacio Castellanos Moya portrays a conglomerated vision

of Central America as he does not name a specific city where the action takes place. However, Castellanos Moya fills the narrative with vivid descriptions of the city which interact with the violence. In Escudos, this absence is transgressive from the post-war crime fiction generic conventions as the violence is mapped onto the subject's body and psychological state, rather than being mapped onto a specific geographic or cultural space. In addition to their encounters in the unidentified parking garage, Rolanda and Blake also travel three hours to a beach with black sand, which as Perkowska points out, could indicate the presence of a nearby volcano (232). This detail alludes to El Salvador, where the beaches have black volcanic sand, but does not confirm the narrative's setting. These vague details – the distance between the city and the beach, the color of the sand – are the only identifying markers that Escudos includes in the text, which starkly contrasts crime fiction generic conventions that are based upon precision, surveillance, identification, and evidence.

In addition to the anonymity of the location, which undermines the integrity of a traditional investigation, Escudos also deviates from the form of a crime fiction text. Detective and crime fiction texts alike are action driven; that is, the detective surveils and tracks suspects, collects evidence, identifies relationships between the victim and perpetrator, and establishes a motive. As we have seen throughout this study, both form and narrative perspective in post-conflict Central American crime fiction deviate from these anticipated conditions. In Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre*, an ex-soldier drives the action-packed narrative through a monologue in past-tense, which is revealed at the end of the novel to be a testimony provided to a DEA agent in Texas, following his capture. In *The Tattooed Soldier*, Héctor Tobar presents both the victim and perpetrator's

perspectives as parallel and intersecting narratives, while the "crime" is simultaneously being planned and uncovered. In Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* and Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo*, the protagonists embody and perform the functions of the classic detective role but transgress legal and judicial boundaries as they manipulate their instruments to pursue personal vendettas. Even though the narrative perspective varies in these texts, they do anchor their narratives to the investigation and resolution of a crime; or rather, the narratives are anchored by the protagonist's actions. In stark contrast to these texts, Escudo's *El asesino melancólico* lacks explicit narrative action, explores the psychological and emotional states of the two characters, Rolanda Hester and Blake Sorrow, and only briefly mentions the criminal investigation and resolution of the crime. This notable absence of anticipated narrative characteristics emphasizes the political critique and potential of Escudos' text.

In "Crime and Politics," Cathy Cole remarks that "crime fiction invites a politicized reading of its texts, not only through its political content and use of historical and social data, but also because of how it locates readers in its politics" (200). Across the corpus of post-conflict Central American crime fiction, the relationship between reader and criminal protagonist is crucial in understanding their political potential. Moreover, Cole notes that "over the decades, crime fiction has shown itself capable of political resistance […]. It has revealed the practices of race, class, and sexual politics, and has chronicled, first-hand, the effects of economic and social disadvantage, racial discrimination, corporate capitalism and economic rationalism on powerless citizens, be they victims or criminals" (202). In *El asesino melancólico*, Escudos explores the politics of domestic relationships, coercion, and extortion, along with psychological and

emotional manipulation. In Escudos' text, the anonymity of location and lack of reference to a historical moment problematizes the viability of a post-conflict period as a critical construct because it forces the reader to acknowledge and accept that these issues occur across societies. The task at hand is to problematize the political and disruptive potential of this narrative inaction *vis-à-vis* an analysis of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator and the crimes committed and the subsequent judicial process.

In "Post-identidades post-nacionales," Arturo Arias highlights the characteristics of Escudos work which, as he claims, makes her, "en efecto, una de las escritoras más interesantes de la nueva generación de narradores de posguerra": "Escudos, a diferencia de la gran mayoría de ellos, experimenta intencionalmente con la forma, como mecanismo para brindarle a su escritura varias posibilidades de ubicar su textualidad articulando un espacio cultural singular fluido, una matriz simbólica, que recrea el espacio imaginario dentro del cual opera su sujeto" (134).[7] In *El asesino melancólico*, narrative action develops through descriptions from the narrator, written correspondence, and fractured routines, which force the reader to confront the angst and desperation that both Rolanda and Blake experience. Additionally, Escudos plays with the structure of the text, at times dedicating a single page to one sentence or leaving large breaks between paragraphs, to build suspense and to disrupt generic conventions. For example, Rolanda

[7] Escudos' literary, creative, and cultural experimentation extends beyond traditional narrative forms: "El interés de Escudos por la elaboración de espacios alternativos se manifiesta en su blog, denominado *Jacintario*, que ella alimenta diariamente, constituyendo un caso cuasi único en Centroamérica. El mismo es descrito como una 'blogósfera' en la cual ella elabora mapas literarios alternativos, pero el término que fusiona la palabra 'blog' con 'atmósfera', es indicativo de la intención de construir un espacio vital alternativo por medio de las palabras" (Arias, "Post-identidades, 134).

performs the functions of a dutiful wife and this routine is disrupted following the divorce from her ex-husband:

> Disciplinada, Rolanda Hester iba pasillo por pasillo en el supermercado, empujando la carretita, revisando su lista, tachando lo que ya tenía, viendo los productos y sus precios en los estantes, haciendo como que buscaba algo pero en realidad pensando. Así, mientras el observador creía ver a un ama da casa común que comparaba precios y calidad entre algunos productos, en realidad tenía en delante de sí a una mujer que miraba latas de atún mientras divagaba en lo suyo. Pensaba en la vida. Pensaba en la edad. Siempre pensaba en la muerte. Cada día, ahora más que nunca. Pensaba en cómo sería el momento mismo de la muerte. Que se sentiría. Cómo sería el después. Si sería igual que dormir. Si no habría nada. (25)

The depth with which Rolanda contemplates her life, age, and the meaning of death contradicts the expected actions and intellect of the "ama de casa común;" however, as Rolanda later explains to Blake, she listened to and supported her husband: "Es que…hablábamos de cosas domésticas: de la casa, de las cosas que había que hacer. Él me contaba de su trabajo y yo le escuchaba y le daba ánimos…esas cosas" (75). Within the intimate space of her marriage, Rolanda discussed only the matters that pertained to her duties as a wife, which excluded her deepest thoughts on life, age, and death because, as she states, "no le interesaba saber esas cosas" (76). Rolanda, however, shared her most intimate, profound thoughts with Blake as both as a means of evoking empathy for the pain she felt and to entrap him in murdering her. Therefore, Escudos plays with the

tension between life and death to reveal that death, or aiding in someone's death, is more intimate and significant than marriage and sharing a life.

In contrast to Rolanda's internal, private thoughts about life, aging, and death, Blake Sorrow, whose last name evokes his state of existence, accepts his disposition without questioning it:

> El día en que Blake Sorrow cumplió 50 años, emprendió el único acto de valentía del que sería capaz en toda su vida: se admitió a sí mismo que era un fracasado. No tenía parientes, esposa ni hijos. No tenía una amante. No tenía un perro. Tampoco un amigo. No tenía profesión, dinero ni propiedades. […] No tenía eso que llaman 'personalidad'. No tenía aficiones ni intereses. […] No hablaba con nadie. Nunca tuvo suerte con las mujeres. El sexo era para él un trámite penoso, a veces has ridículo. Hacía anos que había renunciado a intentar tener una relación con una mujer. (15)

Blake's perceived masculinity rests upon this single act of courage, of admitting to himself that he was a failure. This failure, however, is based upon external social factors that are considered necessary for a full life: the lack of relationships, connections, wealth and social status, and intimate relationships. Compared to the appearance projected by Rolanda and her anguish and despair following the collapse of her second marriage, Blake made no effort to hide his discontent nor to establish meaningful connections: "Se alegraba de no estar casado, de no tener que tolerar a extraños viviendo bajo su mismo techo. De no tener que hablarles, sonreírles, estar obligados a verles, convivir con ellos" (16). In fact, Blake rejected the very notion of marriage and family life, which he considered an obligation or work. The emotional and mental exhaustion conveyed in the

previous passage, through the repetition of "no tener que," "tolerar", "estar obligado", highlights the emptiness upon which Blake has built his existence.

As the narrative progresses, the narrator builds tension and heightens the impact of Rolanda's presence by placing the two characters in direct contradiction. Blake Sorrow's days consisted of empty, repetitive routines:

> De lunes a viernes trabajaba ocho horas, de 10 de la mañana a 6 de la tarde. Sábados y domingos se levantaba cuando quería. […] Los domingos no hacía mucho. […] Hacía la siesta en el único sillón que había en la estancia. […] [V]olvía a quedarse dormido en el sillón hasta que anochecía. Entonces se metía en la cama y apagaba la luz. […] Sentía melancolía de que el día siguiente fuera lunes y de que tuviera que ir a trabajar. (21)

This melancholy, to which the title of the text also refers, is not only the state in which Blake experiences each day of his life but is also the way the reader experiences Escudos' text. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud defines melancholia and mourning as two conditions which describe an individual's relationship with a profound loss. The distinguishing features of melancholia are "a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition in all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (243). The first encounter between Rolanda and Blake disrupts his very existence for several reasons. First, his solitary bubble is punctured, and he is forced to communicate with someone. Second, his daily routine of working and returning home is disrupted by

Rolanda's nagging presence and correspondence. Third, his thoughts are transformed as he begins imagining the various ways in which he could murder her.

This emptiness not only describes Blake's emotional state, but rather highlights the social and cultural symptoms experienced in a post-conflict society. In *Estética del cinismo*, Beatriz Cortez points out that "la estética del cinismo muestra los síntomas de lo que está ausenta en la cultura de la posguerra centroamericana: la experiencia de la alegría, la lucha por defender el derecho que tiene el cuerpo de actual, el predominio de la vida por sobre la muerte, la inmanencia del poder" (38). Blake Sorrow, therefore, is an embodiment of "la estética del cinismo," in which bodies and subjectivities are transformed or deformed by the political. As Perkowska notes, "Blake Sorrow encarna una negación radical de la fantasía optimista de tener una vida 'normal' y un sentido que la organiza, una trama individual que corresponda, más o menos fielmente, a la trama normativa única que modela cómo es la vida imaginable, válida y narrable" (225). Blake Sorrow is the physical incarnation of these social systems and the text itself provides a discursive space to explore the psychological and emotional symptoms of the post-conflict period. The title, *El asesino melancólico*, implores that the text be read as crime fiction because it reveals that a crime – a murder – occurs. The narrative inaction, for its part, emphasizes the absence of the detective, the investigative processes, evidence collection, and judicial procedures, among other traditional elements of the genre. The political potential, therefore, of *El asesino melancólico* resides in the psychological profiles of both victim and perpetrator and the confluence of these identities, suggesting that, in the post-conflict period, no one has been left unaffected or untouched by the violence. Considering that the location has been left unidentified, the psychological and

emotional turmoil experienced by both Rolanda Hester and Blake Sorrow extend beyond specific geographic or temporal boundaries and symbolize, perhaps, that the effects of a conflict also extend beyond the immediate boundaries of its context.

Both Rolanda and Blake are individuals in crisis; however, as Rolanda tries to persuade Blake to murder her, the relations of power between the two become more clear. Following their initial encounter, Rolanda arrived at the parking lot where Blake worked for the subsequent 23 days, Blake treated her as any other customer and "[ellos] jugaron aquel ajedrez durante varios días" (33). The persistence with which she approached him forced Blake to reconcile the emptiness and lack of intimacy of his life. In addition to her nagging presence at his work, Rolanda penetrated his solitary bubble and disrupted his daily routine through letters in which she delivered to him at work. In the first letter, she shares some of her most intimate secrets:

> Siempre dejo dos o tres tragos de café en mi taza matutina. Nunca he entrado al mar. Le tengo pánico al agua. No me gustan las muchedumbres. Le tengo miedo a los extraños. Soy estéril. No puedo tener hijos. Me gustan las cerezas y granadas. Son mis frutas favoritas. Soy ambidiestra. Esta frase la escribí con la izquierda y esta otra la escribo con la derecha. ¿Nota alguna diferencia? […] No bebo. Fumo poco. Sólo cuando salimos a fiestas mi marido y yo. Mi marido. Se llama Robert y me traiciona con Amalia Long. Y yo pensaba que éramos felices. No sé qué más decirle. No sé con quien hablar. (35)

In this first letter, Rolanda indirectly establishes intimate connections with Blake. He does not want to have children, she cannot have children. He does not like talking to people, she does not like crowds. Rolanda also draws Blake into the conversation by

asking him if he notices a difference in her handwriting. On the surface, the letters appear to be a friendly gesture, to establish a meaningful connection with Blake. However, the function of these letters is more complex. Specifically, they serve as Rolanda's tool of coercion, which can be either direct or indirect. According to Mark Colvin, interpersonal coercion includes the use of threat of force or intimidation and impersonal coercion refers to the pressure arising from structural and social arrangements (5). Even though these letters are not intimidating or threatening, they are coercive due to Rolanda's intent to manipulate Blake's feelings and make him sympathetic for her emotional state. Ultimately, Rolanda's intent is clear to the reader and reveals the power dynamics which exist between the two.

As Foucault points out in *Power/Knowledge*, the mechanics of power refers "to the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (39). These letters not only contain intimate details about Rolanda, but also become a new routine for Blake. Upon receiving the first letter, Blake expresses his frustration with having taken the letter home:

> Leer la carta le descompuso el apetito. Sólo era un papel pero el contenido era una intrusión en su privacidad. Debió haberla leído en el parqueo y tirarla de inmediato. […] No entendía para qué le contaba aquellas cosas. Las cerezas. El agua. El café. Entendía lo de la amante. La traición. Por eso quería morir. Quería que alguien lo hiciera por ella. Porque ella no tenía el valor para hacerlo por su cuenta. Ni siquiera se atrevía a decirlo en palabras, a escribirlo. (37)

The intrusion of privacy created by this piece of paper mirrors that of a criminal breaking into one's property; or rather, the letters assume the role of a criminal accomplice in the relationship between Rolanda and Blake because they are the discursive space which simultaneously transform Blake's mental and existential state. While not immediately clear, Rolanda also piqued Blake's curiosity and appetite, as he later craves the food she mentions. According to Perkowska, "Los significantes de gusto – probar, paladear, sentir, deleitarse – se unen a los significantes de imaginación y afecto – recordar, evocar, visualizar, imaginar, desear, entusiasmarse, rogar – alterando la textura del lenguaje con el que la narración le expone al lector la experiencia de Blake Sorrow" (228).

Ultimately, as these letters awaken a desire in Blake, they also awake the narrative and transform the reader's experience. Blake's new routine consists in inviting these letters into his most private space:

> Leía las cartas acostado sobre su cama. Siempre sobre la cama. Esperaba hasta llegar a su cuarto, quitarse la chaqueta, los zapatos, abrir la ventana para que circulara un poco el aire, acostarse sobre la almohada, abrir con toda calma los sobres con un abrecartas metálico que había robado de la oficina donde hizo contabilidad, sacaba el papel amarillo rayado en que ella escribía, lo desdoblaba, lo miraba, encendía la lámpara de la mesa de noche y entonces, sólo entonces, comenzaba a leer. (44)

Even though Blake is still physically alone, in a bed that he has not shared with a woman, the care and attention he gives to each step mirrors that of foreplay in an amorous relationship. As he deliberately removes each article of clothing and opens the window, he invites Rolanda into his most intimate space. Specifically, this intimate relationship

between Rolanda and Blake *vis-à-vis* these letters is predicated not upon getting to know one another, but rather upon her intention to have Blake hill her. As Perkowska emphasizes that their attachment "reside en el hecho de que el encuentro de Blake Sorrow y Rolanda Hester es, en realidad, un desencuentro y, en este sentido, una suerte de error de reconocimiento de la posibilidad de una intimidad alternativa que se les presenta" (229). Following the breakdown of her marriage, Rolanda's letters transform and become part of Blake's bedroom, the space which typically symbolizes marriage, family, and romantic intimacy.[8]

This intimacy, however, is founded upon a set of assumptions Rolanda has made about Blake's character and the anonymity they maintain. As previously mentioned, Rolanda selects and surveils Blake at the parking lot where he works and manipulates him by fabricating an emotional link between the two. Within this relationship, Rolanda assumes the role as perpetrator who actively and consciously victimizes Blake, who, at first, rejects the notion that he could murder her: "'Tendré cara de pocos amigos pero no soy un asesino, señora'" (37). With this statement, Blake implicitly acknowledges how his demeanor informed Rolanda's decision to select him for this task. After receiving the first letter, Rolanda and Blake explicitly discuss the task in the parking garage:

> -¿No tiene nada qué decirme?
>
> -¿Qué quiere que le diga? […] Mire señora, déjeme en paz. Busque a otro. Yo no puedo. ¿Estamos?

[8] Perkowska also notes how the literary criticism of Escudos' body of work addresses the tensions between public and private space, the narration of erotic and subjective desires, gender stereotypes and the patriarchal ideology, and the anguish and anxiety of the human condition, just to name a few (224).

> […]
>
> -Le consiguiré una pistola.
>
> -No está escuchándome señora. Le dije que no. Búsquese a otro.
>
> -Será fácil para usted, como matar un animal.
>
> -No sé cómo matar un animal. No me crié en una granja, señora. […] En todo caso, yo no sabría cómo matar a una persona. No sabría a qué profundidad hundir un cuchillo, con qué fuerza debería golpear a alguien, cuánto es suficiente veneno, cuántas balas, desde qué distancia debo disparar, a qué parte del cuerpo, eso si acierto porque estoy seguro de que el ruido me haría cerrar los ojos y erraría el tiro, o todos los tiros… (38-9)

In this exchange, Blake's conviction wavers as he reveals his aversion to the task stems from his lack of knowledge of how exactly to kill someone, rather than a moral or ethical aversion. Similar to how the letters pique his appetite and inspire cravings of the flavors she mentions, his curiosity is also awakened as he begins to imagine potential ways of murdering her and Blake "pensó en los detalles que necesitaría saber para planificar el crimen perfecto" (52).

As Blake's mindset shifts, so too does the narrative form. Span across two pages, the narrative takes the form of two parallel, yet conflicting, columns, separated by a black vertical line and each beginning on the left and finishing on the right side of the text:

> Pensó que estaba buscando la manera de planear el asesinato perfecto. Que no era un matón cualquiera de la calle. Que quizás la mataría y luego se iría de la ciudad con el dinero que ella le daría antes. […] Entonces cayó en la cuenta de que no le había dicho su nombre. No conocía el nombre del hombre que iba a matarla. Y él

> no sabía el nombre de la primera persona a la que iba a matar en su vida. Eso le pareció trágico. (52-3)

Presented in third person omniscient, the narrator reveals how Blake has begun thinking like a criminal. If he were to commit this crime, it would need to be precise, distinguished from common street crime, and that he would need to flee the city. The narrator also reveals that he would flee with money that Rolanda has given him. Therefore, the narrative is broken not only in form, but also in content, as the reader is unaware that one of the envelopes that Rolanda gives Blake contains "fajos y fajos de billetes" (65). The narrator, however, does not mention the currency maintaining the anonymity of the location. Additionally, the narrator discloses that Blake and Rolanda did not know each other's names. The anonymity of the city and the characters emphasizes the intimate and fluid relationship that links perpetrator and victim. In contrast to the details that Rolanda shares simultaneously with the reader and Blake through her letters, Blake Sorrow "no pensaba en su pasado. Nada bueno había en los recuerdos de su vida. Nada que le interesara revevir. Había aprendido bien a escabullirse de aquellos fantasmas" (68). Blake withholds information and details about his life, in the present, from both the reader and Rolanda. Moreover, Blake actively distances himself from a past, which as the narrator insinuates, was troublesome and haunting. On a personal level, Rolanda's presence, therefore, symbolizes the materialization of the ghosts from Blake's past. This materialization extends beyond the personal and symbolizes the shared legacies of violence plaguing not just post-conflict Central American regions, but rather contemporary societies across borders.

This narrative break emphasizes the moment in which Blake, who until this point has been victimized, harassed, and manipulated by Rolanda, begins the mental and emotional transformation to criminal perpetrator. Markedly absent, however, is Rolanda's role as criminal protagonist in this dynamic relationship. The inversion of roles culminates on an unidentified beach, three hours away from the city, in which "fueron en su automóvil. Rolanda Hester manejaba. En su bolso llevaba un revólver cargado" (71). During their final conversation, Blake clearly asserts his decision:

> Mire señora, acabemos con esto de una vez: yo no voy a matarla, no soy un asesino. No me interesa matarla. Gracias por el dinero, pero voy a devolvérselo. Se lo llevaré mañana al parqueo. […] Ella lo miró paralizada. Lentamente se quitó los anteojos oscuros. -No, no, no, no… Lo dijo sin interrupción, sin alterar el volumen, viéndole a los ojos fijamente. (80)

Rolanda assumes the position of superiority and of power by removing her glasses and forcing Blake to confront his victim, who, carrying a loaded revolver, had no intention of returning from the beach. Blake continued to reaffirm his position and insisted on driving her away from the beach, citing the rain and poor driving conditions, "aunque en realidad lo que no quería es que ella manejara en ese estado de ánimo que adivinaba en sus ojos y que se asemejaba a una explosión, por lo cual debería manejar él, para controlar la situación y evitar que tuvieran un accidente […] (80). Blake's fear of an "accident" foreshadows the moment in which Rolanda has her wish fulfilled. However, a brief scuffle on the beach, where Blake attempted to wrestle a gun away from Rolanda, concluded with the following brief exchange: "Vámonos señora, sea sensata/Le dije que me quiero morir y eso es lo que pienso hacer, carajo/Pues no la pienso ayudar. Las

últimas dos frases son dichas a gritos. El hombre y la mujer forcejean. Gruñen. […] Se escucha un trueno y luego otro sonido similar pero distinto. Más corto, más seco, más rápido" (82). As the scene unfolds, the reader is left asking who pulled the trigger? Was it suicide or murder, or in this case, is there a difference?

Suicide is a crucial component of working through melancholia. According to Freud, "if the love for the object – a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up – takes refuse in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (25). For Rolanda, she has lost both her marriage and identity as the dutiful wife, her previously defining role. Rolanda's anger at her ex-husband is mapped onto her relationship with Blake Sorrow. Freud further states that "no neurotic harbours thoughts of suicide which [s]he has not turned back upon [her]/himself from murderous impulses against others" (251). Blake is the substitutive object not in place of her ex-husband but of Rolanda's desire to commit suicide. Rolanda's enjoyment and entertainment of self-harming thoughts and harming Blake through her manipulative actions can be interpreted as a post-war social condition, one in which individuals are conditioned for and desensitized to self-harm and harming others. According to Cortez, "el suicidio, como una forma extrema de escapar la normatividad social, se convierte en el máximo acto del cinismo, en el acto culminante de la irreverencia contra la sociedad y contra uno mismo. Es decir, […] llena al individuo de pasiones que no lo llevan a experimentar alegría, sino muy por el contrario, que lo llenan de dolor" (38). However, in *El asesino melancólico*, the ambiguity around Rolanda's murder fulfills both a narrative and political function. In crime fiction, suicide disrupts the judicial process, whereby

inhibiting that a perpetrator be brought to justice and impeding the detective from fulfilling his role within the law-making machine. Suicide represents a potential act of liberation for the post-war society *vis-à-vis* Rolanda's liberation from her failed marriage and allows her to become perpetrator of a crime without repercussions; or rather, in writing her own death, suicide offers to Rolanda the possibility for regaining control of her life and choosing how to conclude her narrative, a privilege not afforded to victims of the armed conflicts.

While Rolanda Hester symbolizes the victimization of the individual subject in the post-conflict period, and subsequently the murder victim within the text, Blake Sorrow is transformed from Rolanda's victim of entrapment and psychological and emotional manipulation to that of her murderer. Having abandoned the unidentified city and gone into hiding, for Blake "lo que se reprochaba era no haber tenido el valor de tomar la pistola y darle el tiro que ella tanto quería. La muerte limpia que ella deseaba. Rápida, indolora, sin complicaciones. Una muerte perfecta" (86). It was neither a perfect death for Rolanda nor a perfect crime for Blake; however, it was a perfect crime for Rolanda. Feeling emotional unrest at not having fulfilled Rolanda's wishes illustrates how he was willing to perform this job for her, which symbolizes the tasks carried out through the Central American armed conflicts by civilians who were manipulated, victimized, and forced into participating on behalf of the state, for example soldiers who were forcibly conscripted. His transformation was complete as "la acusación que alegaba que Blake Sorrow había matado a Rolanda Hester luego de extorsionarla. El dinero encontrado en su apartamento servía como evidencia. Blake Sorrow no entendía la palabra 'extorsión'" (90). In stark contrast to generic conventions which focus and

elaborate on each detail of a criminal investigation, Escudos dedicates one paragraph in which the process is explained: "Morir hubiera sido un alivio frente al castigo que había sido soportar los interrogatorios, las acusaciones, los testimonios, los alegatos, las miradas del jurado, la cárcel, los guardias, la interminable cantidad de gente a la que tenía que ver siempre, a cada momento, a cada minuto" (92). Blake was sentenced to thirty years in prison for the perceived murder and extortion of Rolanda Hester. Absence from the judicial proceedings, however, is Rolanda Hester's perfect crime; that is, the letters did not just establish an emotional bond between the two and the money was not just an incentive, but rather, Rolanda planted evidence and built the case against Blake without his knowledge. The explicit lack of attention to Rolanda as perpetrator problematizes the process of judicial accountability and impunity which reverberated through post-war investigations in Central America. The lack of geographic specificity in the text extends this critique beyond the borders of Central America and amplifies the critique of judicial accountability and impunity as neoliberal institutions.

To conclude, Escudos' *El asesino melancólico* can be read along two levels. First, the emphasis on the individual emotional and psychological deterioration reveals how no sector of society is immune from the war's violence and trauma. As Villalta points out, "el final de la guerra llevó a El Salvador los vicios de la post-guerra. […] Los problemas de pareja, el suicidio, la soledad, la pobreza extrema, el miedo a la vida, la desesperanza, la angustia caminando mano a mano con las historias de guerra a las que aludimos con anterioridad" (99-100). Therefore, these social problems resulting from the period of armed conflict materialize in Rolanda Hester and Blake Sorrow. Rolanda Hester's struggle symbolizes the processural nature of recovering from the wounds – both physical

and psychological – left by the war. Second, referring to El Salvador, the blurring of boundaries between victim and perpetrator can be read as representative of governmental and military accountability and impunity following the signing of the Peace Accords. Similar to how the forcible conscription of civilians to the Salvadoran military converts them into victims of their society, Blake was emotionally manipulated and extorted by Rolanda, illustrating how both victim and perpetrator represent collateral damage of the post-war society at large. However, Escudos' critique extends beyond the temporal and spatial borders the Central American armed conflicts and problematizes the judicial institution itself.

The absence of a detective figure and an investigation in the narrative points to the ineffectiveness and innate corruption of judicial institutions across neoliberal societies. The conviction of Blake answers the narrator's most pointed question: "¿Le dolerá al asesino tanto como el muerto?" (39). In this case, Rolanda, the true perpetrator, has peace and will never be brought to justice, and Blake, the true victim, is incarcerated and serves as the image of false justice. As Perkowska emphasizes, "Blake Sorrow pagará la muerte que no quiso causar de dos formas: con un despertar agudo de su intimidad […] y la pérdida posterior de 'sus silencios, de su privacidad, de sus recuerdos, de su intimidad' en los juzgados y en la cárcel" (224). Blake Sorrow suffers through the awakening and destruction of his solitary life and pays with loss of his freedom. As the novel concludes, Blake Sorrow states out loud, "'La prisión no es un buen lugar para envejecer'. Pero nadie lo escuchó" (95). In their study on transnational detective fiction, Nels Pearson and Marc Singer argue that these transnational detective stories are "united by their common adaptation of the conventions of detective fiction to the cultural work of

understanding ‘transformations of the institutions of knowledge production’ at the local level” (10). Pearson and Singer suggest that these texts represent the interplay of mobility and stability, and identity and justice along borders or margins (10). The same is true of Escudos’ text. Ultimately, in Escudos’ *El asesino melancólico,* the ambiguity of the suicide, the anonymity of the characters and setting, and the absence of the judicial procedures establishes a break within the corpus of post-conflict Central American crime fiction and points to the future of contemporary Central American narrative.

Conclusion

The current corpus of post-conflict Central American crime fiction provides a discursive map for identifying how post-war violence transgresses spatial, temporal, and psychological boundaries. These texts illustrate how post-conflict subjective violence results directly from state-sanctioned systemic violence, individual and collective legacies of violence, and the victimization of perpetrators of war crimes. In this dissertation, my comparative analysis of texts responding to and emerging from different armed conflicts and their aftermaths examines how conditions of victimization and criminality extend across the Central American isthmus and the diaspora. For displaced and fragmented victims, liminal criminality provides a vehicle for seeking and obtaining justice – both symbolic and legitimate – against perpetrators of political and military violence against their families, communities, and home countries. Specifically, liminal criminality differs from criminality as it directly results from victimization and legacies of violence of the armed conflicts across Central America. I argue that liminal criminality is the only viable means of obtaining justice in a post-conflict society that is wrought with invisibilizing the victim's experience and with impunity to protect the national and international political and military institutions responsible.

The individual and collective legacies of violence are reflections of the world in which we, the characters and the readers, live and are conditions to which violence and liminal criminality responds. As this corpus illustrates, victimization occurs across all sectors of society, both during the period of the armed conflicts and in the transition to the post-conflict period. Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* and Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* shed light on the victimization of former soldiers, which

are individuals who are frequently defined by the crimes they committed during the war. By highlighting their indoctrination and weaponization, Castellanos Moya and Tobar contest the official discourse that places blame solely on the soldiers and highlight the national and international institutions responsible for providing military training, psychological programming, and financial assistance, among other things. Daniel Quirós' *Verano rojo* and Marcos McPeek Villatoro's *Minos* illustrate how legacies of violence span generations and transgress geographic borders. Narrated through the perspective of liminally criminal detectives, Quirós and McPeek Villatoro underscore how the legal system is broken and trustworthy as their liminally criminal detectives access justice by breaking the law.

Obtaining justice in a broken system is just one function of liminal criminality. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, violence is a transformative and powerful tool. On the one hand, protagonists have been employed to complete specific detection and policing jobs. In Castellanos Moya's *El arma en el hombre* and Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*, ex-soldiers Robocop and Guillermo Longoria are forcibly conscripted into the military to carry out the military's violent campaign. In Jactina Escudos' *El asesino melancólico*, Blake Sorrow is manipulated and extorted to carry out the murder of Rolanda Hester. These three individuals pay for the crimes of others – namely, the U.S.-backed military forces and societies and individuals seeking reprieve from emotionally and psychologically broken lives – and their subsequent liminal criminality is a consequence of their victimization.

On the other, liminal criminality as a transformative and powerful tool for victims of political and military violence. In Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* and McPeek

Villatoro's *Minos,* Antonio Bernal and Romilia Chacón, respectively, are driven by familial legacies of violence and personally seek revenge against the perpetrators. In Quirós' *Verano rojo*, Don Chepe's employment as an unsanctioned detective highlights how the law-making and law-preserving institution is guilty of breaking the law to protect its interests; or rather, Don Chepe is employed to investigate historical state crimes and represents the individuals who are used by the system to protect its interests. In *El asesino melancólico*, Rolanda Hester's request for Sorrow to murder her symbolizes how post-war violence has penetrated the most intimate psychological and social spaces and forms the foundation upon which relationships are formed. This corpus of post-conflict Central America crime fiction illustrates how violence transforms individuals and whole societies. The internalization and naturalization of post-war violence emphasizes how liminal criminality is an equalizing power and returns agency to previously victimized individuals. Ultimately, the resulting liminal criminality, for its part, stresses how post-war violence is recycled and how it disarticulates the construct of a truly post-conflict society.

Bibliography

Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis Volume I*. Ed. and Trans. Nicholas T. Rand. The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Aluma, Andrés. "El fin de lo salvadoreño en *El asco* (1997) de Horacio Castellanos Moya". *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 25-26, July – Dec. 2012 – Jan.-June 2013. pp. 1-14.

Amaya, Olivia Elizabeth. "Una ciudad agresiva e inhóspita: representaciones caóticas de algunos estratos en tres obras narrativas de Jacinta Escudos". *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 25-26, July-Dec. 2012 – Jan-June 2013. pp. 1-19.

Andrews, Chris and Matt McGuire. "Introduction: Post-Conflict Literature?" *Post-Conflict Literature: Human Rights, Peace, Justice*. Eds. Chris Andrews and Matt McGuire. Routledge, 2016. pp. 1-15.

Arias, Arturo. "Central American Americans: Invisibility, Power, and Representation." *The Other Latinos: Central and South Americans in the United States*. Eds. José Luis Falconi and José Antonio Mazzotti. Harvard University Press, 2007. pp. 101-21.

---. "Centroamericanidades: Imaginative Reformulation and New Configurations of Central Americanness." *Centroamericanidades* vol. 37, no. 2, 2013. pp. 11-26.

---. "Post-identidades post-nacionales: Duelo, trauma y melancolía en la constitución de las subjetividades centroamericanas de posguerra". *Hacia una historia de las literaturas centroamericanas: (Per)versiones de la modernidad*. *Literaturas,*

identidades y desplazamientos. Eds. Beatriz Cortez, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner and Verónica Ríos Quesada. F& G Editores, 2012. pp. 121-39.

---. *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Avelar, Idelber. *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*. Duke University Press, 1999.

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Duke University Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings.* Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978. pp. 277-300.

Booth, John A. et al. *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*. Westview Press, 2015.

Bourgois, Philippe. "The Power of Violence in War and Peace: Post-Cold War Lessons from El Salvador." *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 8, Jan.-June 2004. np.

Caminero-Santangelo, Marta. "Central Americans in the City: Goldman, Tobar, and the Question of Panethnicity." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* vol. 20, no. 3, 2009. pp. 173-195.

Caña Jiménez, María del Carmen and Vinodh Venkatesh. "Introducción. Horacio Castellanos Moya: *El diablo en el espejo*". *Horacio Castellanos Moya: El diablo en el espejo.* Eds. María del Carmen Caña Jiménez and Vinodh Venkatesh. Albatros Ediciones, 2016. pp. 9-20.

Candelario, Shelia. “Violencia, globalización y literatura: O el dilema del Eterno Retorno en El Salvador”. *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 8, Jan.-June 2004. np.

Castellanos Moya, Horacio. *El arma en el hombre*. Tusquets Editores México, S.A., 2001.

Castro, William H. “The Novel After Testimonio: On Rethinking the “Testimonio”, Solidarity, and Democracy in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El arma en el hombre*.” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* vol. 63, no. 2, 2010. pp. 121-35.

Cloke, Kenneth. “Revenge, Forgiveness, and the Magic of Mediation.” *Mediation Quarterly* vol. 11, no. 1, 1993. pp. 67-78.

Close, Glen S. “The Detective is Dead. Long Live the *Novela Negra*!” *Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Detective Fiction: Essays on the Género Negro Tradition*. Eds. Renée W. Craig-Odders, Jacky Collins, and Glen S. Close. McFarland & Company, Inc. 2006. pp. 143-61.

Cole, Cathy. “Crime and Politics.” *Private Dicks and Feisty Chicks: An Interrogation of Crime Fiction*. Curtin University Books, 2004. pp. 199-229.

Colín, José Juan. “*El arma en el hombre*: violencia testimonial y ‘des-identidad’ individual”. *Horacio Castellanos Moya: El diablo en el espejo.* Eds. María del Carmen Caña Jiménez and Vinodh Venkatesh. Albatros Ediciones, 2016. pp. 87-98.

Colvin, Mark. “Introduction.” *Crime and Coercion: An Integrated Theory of Chronic Criminality*. St. Martin’s Press, 2000. pp. 1-7.

Cortez, Beatriz. *Estética del cinismo: Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra*. F&G Editores, 2009.

Daly, Sarah Zukerman. "Introduction: A Farewell to Arms?" *Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. pp. 1-11.

Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.'" *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson. Routledge, 1992. pp. 3-67.

Docker, John. "Fool, Trickster, Social Explorer: The Detective." *Postmodern and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*. Cambridge University Press, 1994. pp. 219-32.

Dowdy, Michael. "*Andando entre dos mundos*: Maurice Kilwein Guevara's and Marcos McPeek Villatoro's Appalachian Latino Poetics." *Broken Souths: Latina/o Poetic Responses to Neoliberalism and Globalization*. The University of Arizona Press, 2013. pp. 122-54.

Dunkerley, James. *The Pacification of Central America*. Verso, 1994.

Eaglton-Pierce, Matthew. "Historicizing the Neoliberal Spirit of Capitalism." *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Eds. Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie MacLeavy. Routledge, 2016. pp. 17-26.

England, Kim and Kevin Ward. "Theorizing Neoliberalization." *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Eds. Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie MacLeavy. Routledge, 2016. pp. 50-60.

Escamilla, José Luis. *El protagonista en la novela de posguerra centroamericana*. *Desterritorializado, híbrido y fragmentado*. Editorial Universidad Don Bosco, 2012.

Escudos, Jacinta. *El asesino melancólico*. Penguin Group, 2015.

Eysenck, Hans J. and Gisli H. Gudjonsson. "Introduction to Personality and Individual Differences." *The Causes and Cures of Criminality*. Plenum Press, 1988. pp. 1-13.

Feibleman, James K. *Justice, Law, Culture*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon, et. al. Pantheon Books, 1980.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. Hogarth Publishing, 1964. pp. 237-58.

Galera, Daniel. "Introduction." *Latin American Crime: Thirteen Stories Selected by Daniel Galera*. McSweeney's Quarterly No. 46, 2014. pp. 19-21.

Giardinelli, Mempo. "Introduction: The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel in Latin America." *Latin American Mystery Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Darrell B. Lockhart. Greenwood Press, 2004. pp. xi-xxxvii.

González de la Aleja Barberán, Manuel. "Se busca: el policíaco perfecto". *El género eterno: Estudios sobre la novela negra y cine negro*. Eds. Javier Sánchez Zapatero and Álex Martín Escribá. Andavira Editora, 2015. pp. 13-33.

Gray, Chris Hables. *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age*. Routledge, 2001.

---. *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict*. The Guilford Press, 1997.

Haluani, Makram. "The Regional Dimensions of the Causes of Conflicts: Latin America." *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States*. Eds. Kumar Rupesinghe Luc van de Goor and Paul Sciarone. St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996. pp. 321-44.

Hamilton, Nora and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles*. Temple University Press, 2001.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991. pp. 149-81.

---. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. pp. 2190-2220.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

---. "Neo-liberalism and the Restoration of Class Power." *Spaces of Global Capitalism*. Verso, 2006. pp. 7-68.

Holquist, Michael. "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction." *New Literary History* vol. 3, no. 1, 1971. pp. 135-56.

Honey, Martha. "Contra Coverage – Paid for by the CIA." *Columbia Journalism Review* vol. 25, no. 6, 1987. pp. 31-32.

Horsley, Lee. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Humphrey, Michael. *The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation: From Terror to Trauma*. Routledge, 2002.

Itagaki, Lynn Mie. "The Territorialization of Civility, the Spatialization of Revenge." *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016. pp. 103-39.

Jameson, Frederic. *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality*. Verso, 2016.

---. *Valences of the Dialectic*. Verso, 2009.

Keane, John. *Violence and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Knepper, Wendy. "Hot on the Heels of Transnational America: The Case of the Latina Detective." *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World.* Eds. Nels Pearson and Marc Singer. Ashland, 2009. pp. 157-79.

Kokotovic, Misha. "Neoliberal Noir: Contemporary Central American Crime Fiction as Social Criticism". *CLUES* vol. 24, no. 3, 2006. pp. 15-29.

Král, Françoise. *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Lara-Martínez, Rafael. "Cultura de paz: herencia de Guerra. Poética y reflejos de la violencia en Horacio Castellanos Moya". *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 3, Jan.-June 2002. np.

Lehner, Stefanie. "'Absent and yet Somehow Still Present': Representing the Irish Diaspora in Contemporary Photography and Fiction." *Post-Conflict Literature: Human Rights, Peace, Justice*. Eds. Chris Andrews and Matt McGuire. Routledge, 2016. pp. 31-42.

Leitch, Vincent B. Ed. "Donna Haraway." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Second Edition*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. pp. 2187-90.

Levinson, Brett. *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American "Boom" in the Neoliberal Marketplace*. Stanford University Press, 2001.

Mackenbach, Werner. "Entre política, historia y ficción. Tendencias en la narrativa centroamericana a finales del siglo XX". *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 15, July-Dec. 2007. np.

Mälksoo, Maria. "The Challenge of Liminality for International Relationship Theory." *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*. Ed. Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen and Harald Wydra. Berghahn Books, 2015. pp. 226-43.

Martin-Baro, Ignacio and Rodolfo Cardenal. "Introduction – Fifteen Years Later: Peace at Last." *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*. Ed. Tommie Sue Montgomery. Westview Press, 1995. pp. 1-9.

Masiello, Francine. *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis*. Duke University Press, 2001.

McCann, Sean. "Uncivil Society: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Idea of a Democratic Culture." *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism*. Duke University Press, 2000. pp. 1-37.

McPeek Villatoro, Marcos. *Minos*. Bantam Dell, 2005.

Miller, Crystine. "Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* and the Latino/a Trauma Narrative." *Latino Studies* vol. 14, no. 3, 2016. pp. 364-83.

Minich, Julie Avril. "Mestizaje as National Prosthesis: Corporeal Metaphors in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* vol. 17, 2013. pp. 211-26.

Olsson, Ulf. “Interrogation, or Forced to Silence: Rankin, Harris, Pinter, Duras.” *Silence and Subject in Modern Literature: Spoken Violence.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. pp. 125-48.

Ortiz, Ricardo L. “The Cold War in the Americas and Latina/o Literature.” *The Cambridge Companion to Latina/o American Literature*. Ed. John Morán González. Cambridge University Press, 2016. pp. 72-90.

Ortiz Wallner, Alexandra. “Ensayar una historia cultural de Centroamérica”. *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 12, Jan.-June, 2006. np.

---. “Escrituras de sobrevivencia: Narrativa y violencia en Centroamérica”. *Hacia una historia de las literaturas centroamericanas: (Per)versiones de la modernidad*. *Literaturas, identidades y desplazamientos*. Eds. Beatriz Cortez, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner and Verónica Ríos Quesada. F& G Editores, 2012. pp. 73-93.

Padilla, Yajaira M. “Salvadoran-American Sleuthing in the U.S. South and Beyond: McPeek Villatoro’s Romilia Chacón Series.” *Changing Women, Changing Nation: Female Agency, Nationhood, & Identity in Trans-Salvadoran Narratives*. State University of New York Press, 2012. pp. 123-51.

---. “Setting *La diabla* Free: Women, Violence and the Struggle for Representation in Postwar El Salvador.” *Latin American Perspectives* vol. 35, no. 5, 2008. pp. 133-45.

---. “Sleuthing Central American Identity and History in the New Latino South: Marcos McPeek Villatoro’s *Home Killings*.” *Latino Studies* vol. 8, no. 6, 2008. pp. 376-97.

Paik, Peter Y. "Introduction." *Aftermaths: Exile, Migration, and Diaspora Reconsidered*. Eds. Mark Bullock and Peter Y. Paik. Rutgers University Press, 2009. pp. 1-12.

Pattison, Dale. "Born in the USA: Breeding Political Violence in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*." *Studies in American Fiction* vol. 44, no. 1, 2017. pp. 113-37.

Pearson, Nels and Marc Singer. "Introduction: Open Cases: Detection, (Post)Modernity, and the State." *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World.* Eds. Nels Pearson and Marc Singer. Ashland, 2009. pp. 1-14.

Percy, Benjamin. "There Will be Blood: *Writing Violence*." *Thrill Me: Essays on Fiction*. Graywolf Press, 2016. pp. 51-64.

Pereira Savi, Melina. "How Borders Come to Matter? The Physicality of the Border in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. *Florianópolis* vol. 20, no. 2, 2015. pp. 181-91.

Pérez, Yansi. "El poder de la abyección y la ficción de posguerra". *Hacia una historia de las literaturas centroamericanas: (Per)versiones de la modernidad*. *Literaturas, identidades y desplazamientos*. Eds. Beatriz Cortez, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner and Verónica Ríos Quesada. F& G Editores, 2012. pp. 49-72.

Perkowska, Magdalena. "Límites del ser y la estética de lo banal: la intimidad en *El asesino melancólico* de Jacinta Escudos". *Letras Hispanas* vol. 12, 2016. pp. 222-33.

Quirós, Daniel. *Verano rojo*. Editorial Costa Rica, 2012.

Ramírez, Sergio. "Historia Negra, Novela Negra". *Sergio Ramírez*. August 2017. //www.sergioramirez.com/index.php/2012-08-27-18-07-32/art%C3%ADculos/10-articulos/496-historia-negra,-novela-negra.

Robinson, William I. *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change, and Globalization*. Verso, 2003.

Rodríguez, Ana Patricia. "Diasporic Reparations: Repairing the Social Imaginaries of Central America in the Twenty-First Century." *Studies in the 20th and 21st Century Literatures* vol. 37, no. 2, 2013. pp. 27-43.

---. *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures*. University of Texas Press, 2009.

---. "Heridas abiertas de América Central: La salvadoreñidad de Romilia Chacón en las novelas negras de Marcos McPeek Villatoro". *Revista Iberoamericana* vol. 76, no. 231, 2010. pp. 425-42.

Rodríguez, Ileana. "Estéticas de esperanza, memoria y desencanto: Constitución letrada de los archivos históricos". *Hacia una historia de las literaturas centroamericanas: (Per)versiones de la modernidad*. *Literaturas, identidades y desplazamientos*. Eds. Beatriz Cortez, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner and Verónica Ríos Quesada. F& G Editores, 2012. pp. 21-47.

---. "Globalización y gobernabilidad: Desmovilización del gestor social nacional en Centroamérica". *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 13, July-Dec. 2006. np.

Rodríguez, Ralph E. "Alienated Eye/I: The Emergence of the Chicana/o Detective Novel." *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity*. University of Texas Press, 2005. pp. 1-13.

Ruggiero, Vincenzo. *Understanding Political Violence: A Criminological Analysis*. Open University Press, 2006.

Sarat, Austin. "Situating Law Between the Realities of Violence and the Claims of Justice: An Introduction." *Law, Violence, and the Possibility of Justice*. Ed. Austin Sarat. Princeton University Press, 2001. pp. 3-16.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford University Press, 1985.

Sepúlveda, Magda. "La narrativa policial como un género de la Modernidad: la pista de Bolaño". *Territorios en fuga: estudios críticos sobre la obra de Roberto Bolaño*. Ed. Patricia Espinosa Hernández. Frasis Editores, 2003. pp. 103-15.

Simpson, Amelia S. *Detective Fiction from Latin America*. Fairleigh Dickerson University Press, 1990.

Sistare, Christine. "Punishment, Identity, and Difference." *Codes and Customs: Millenial Perspectives*. Ed. Roberta Kevelson. Peter Lang, 1994. pp. 269-92.

Siu, Oriel María. "Central American Enunciations from U.S. Zones of Indifference, or the Sentences of Coloniality." *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* vol. 37, no. 2, 2013. pp. 94-110.

Springer, Simon. "The Violence of Neoliberalism." *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Eds. Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie MacLeavy. Routledge, 2016. pp. 153-63.

Tamayo, Juan O. "The First Draft of History." *ReVista* vol. 13, no. 1, 2013. pp. 52-54.

Thomassen, Bjørn. *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between*. Ashgate, 2014.

Tobar, Héctor. *The Tattooed Soldier*. Penguin Group, 1998.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. Cornell University Press, 1977.

Urbina, Nicasio. “La literatura centroamericana”. *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* no. 3, Jan.-June, 2002. np.

Vides, Méndez. “Cataclismos cotidianos y la caída de los pequeños héroes en la obra de Horacio Castellanos Moya”. *Horacio Castellanos Moya: El diablo en el espejo.* Eds. María del Carmen Caña Jiménez and Vinodh Venkatesh. Albatros Ediciones, 2016. pp. 21-30.

Villalta, Nilda. “De la guerra a la post-guerra: Transición y cambios en la literatura salvadoreña”. *Istmica* vol. 5, no. 6, 2000. pp. 94-102.

Weiss, Nerina and Maria Six-Hohenbalken. “Introduction.” *Violence Expressed: An Anthropological Approach*. Eds. Maria Six-Hohenbalken and Nerina Weiss. Ashgate, 2011. pp. 1-18.

Wieser, Doris. “*Whodunit* e intratextualidad en *La diabla en el espejo* y *El arma en el hombre* de Horacio Castellanos Moya”. *Narrativas del crimen en América Latina: Transformaciones y transculturaciones del policial*. Eds. Brigitte Adriaensen and Valeria Grinberg Pla. *Lit*, 2012. pp. 203-16.

Yúdice, George. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. Picador, 2008.