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Representation, Reflection, and Reconciliation: The Evolving Depiction of Violence in the Committed Literature of Manlio Argueta

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REPRESENTATION, REFLECTION, AND RECONCILIATION: THE EVOLVING
DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE IN THE COMMITTED LITERATURE OF
MANLIO ARGUETA

A Dissertation Presented

by

GLADYS E. VASQUEZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2017

Hispanic Literature and Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATION, REFLECTION, AND RECONCILIATION: THE EVOLVING
DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE IN THE COMMITTED LITERATURE OF MANLIO

ARGUETA

MAY 2017

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This dissertation focuses on the life and works of the committed Salvadoran author Manlio Argueta. It traces pertinent themes in four of his novels, *El valle de las hamacas* (1969), *Caperucita en la zona roja* (1978), *Milagro de La Paz* (1994), and *Siglo de O(g)ro* (1997). This project traces how Argueta's representation of violence markedly transitions from a mimetic representation of violence that appeals to the senses and raises awareness of the exacerbating circumstances to a subdued and psychological representation of the consequences of the violence in the face of new violence and changing panoramas. It highlights three major moments of El Salvador's history that directly impacted the life and career of Manlio Argueta and other artists of his generation: *La Matanza*, the takeover of the University, and the Civil War. Argueta survived the initial periods of violence of the sixties and seventies and lived the entire Civil War period from afar. He had the time and distance needed to zoom out of the daily confrontations with violence in order to view and represent the circumstances from a different viewpoint. His exile allowed him to write with a distanced perspective of El

Salvador and include different groups in his imagery of the nation. Argueta's writing has developed with him and with the Salvadoran society.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY OF EL SALVADOR AND MANLIO ARGUETA

After years of violence and strife in El Salvador, the need to write has persisted. Individuals and writers have to cypher through memories, process traumas, and reconcile events that the government has attempted to solve with peace accords. Literature in the postwar serves as a vehicle for remembering, for healing, for coping, and for reflecting about the past, present, and future. Although the physical violence of the wars has ended, we are left with the emotional and mental consequences of that violence and are faced with the present violence that includes but is not limited to political corruption, drug cartels, and gang violence that flourish in the current state of impunity. In their text *On Violence: A Reader*, Lawrence and Karim note that when one is first exposed to violence, it is experienced as unique, but if “given time and repetition, however, it becomes routine, part of the air, and one learns how to breathe it without being asphyxiated. One no longer seeks to eliminate it, nor even to understand it” (5). In Central America, where violence has had time to repeat itself and become part of the social fabric and discourse, literature acts as an agent that interrupts this normalcy and breaks with the routinization of violence. Literature represents the everyday in such a way that it makes us realize that what is commonplace should not and cannot continue being so. It provides the tools and sets the stage for us to reflect upon violence and its origins, its persistence in society, and, most importantly, it represents the different realities, discourses, and imageries of postwar societies attempting to reconcile with their past in their uncertain present.

This dissertation focuses on the life and works of the Salvadoran author Manlio

Argueta. It takes an in depth look into his commitment not only to the literature but the people of El Salvador. It traces pertinent themes in four of his novels, *El valle de las hamacas* (1969), *Caperucita en la zona roja* (1978), *Milagro de La Paz* (1994), and *Siglo de O(g)ro* (1997). These novels were handpicked in an effort to shine light on his lesser-studied works and show the transition and evolution of Argueta's themes and techniques within his writing. As the needs and dangers of Salvadorans change so too do the author's and this is represented in his narrative techniques. This project traces how Argueta's representation of violence markedly transitions from a mimetic representation of violence that appeals to the senses and raises awareness of the exacerbating circumstances to a subdued and psychological representation of the consequences of the violence in the face of new violence and changing panoramas. As the nation of El Salvador undergoes transitions and changes, the author's representations of that imagery do too.

It is crucial to highlight three major moments of El Salvador's history that directly impacted the life and career of Manlio Argueta and other artists of his generation: *La Matanza*, the takeover of the University, and the Civil War.

For a greater part of the twentieth century El Salvador was a coffee economy that was run and owned by the oligarchy. This led to poor working conditions for the peasant laborers and an economy that depended on foreign capital, mainly from the United States and Germany who were the largest purchasers of the coffee crop. The strong presence of the oligarchy in El Salvador was manifested in the elite group's influence in the government. From 1898 to 1911 three generals were president in El Salvador. In 1911 President Manuel Enrique Araujo had a short-lived presidency in which he established the first workers' protection laws; he was assassinated in 1912. From 1912 to 1927 the

presidency was passed among the Melendez family. During this period, El Salvador had relative political stability that relied on “massive suppression of dissidence and oppression against the poor majority” (White 71). From 1927 to 1931 Pío Romero Bosque was president. Bosque differentiated himself from the “dynastic rulers” (72), and promoted a free and fair presidential election at the end of his term. During Bosque’s term, the great depression of 1929 greatly impacted the Salvadoran coffee economy and affected the already low wages of the working peasants of El Salvador. By the 1931 elections the people were ready to revolt, specifically the left and the indigenous groups.

The Communist Party in El Salvador was growing in number; on International Worker’s day of 1930 the party marched in San Salvador with 80,000 members and supporters (73). Agustín Farabundo Martí led the dissident movements and the revolutionary Miguel Marmol also played a prominent role in fomenting the rebellion. Farabundo Martí was the Salvadoran representative of the Socorro Rojo Internacional (SRI), a social service organization established by the Communist International. He assisted prisoners and their families and drew attention to mass imprisonment as a human rights issue. Many of those imprisoned were there for distributing political propaganda which was deemed a crime in 1930 (74). Farabundo Martí travelled in and out of El Salvador to countries such as the United States, Mexico, and Nicaragua in an effort to build momentum for his movement.

Arturo Araujo, the candidate of the new Salvadoran Labor Party, who campaigned for social welfare and land reform, won the 1931 elections. His presidency was short lived, in December of that same year opposition officers took control of the capital. Araujo was forced into exile in Honduras and the vice president, General

Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, was captured and later named president. It was during his presidency that the massacre titled *La Matanza* took place. This event marked the beginning of an era of extreme state sponsored repression and has also been the inspiration for revolutionary activity and literary and artistic production. Farabundo Martí returned to El Salvador in 1931 and was able to rally a large part of the Salvadoran population, namely the indigenous people. He scheduled a rebellion that was to take place in January of 1932 but was arrested prior to enacting it, allowing the police to discover all of the details of his plans. Farabundo Martí was tried, convicted, and executed by a firing squad on February 1, 1932 (Harlow 101). The planned rebellion still occurred but on a much smaller scale. The rebels ransacked two towns and killed less than 100 people. They were soon pacified by the peasant massacre *La Matanza*, enacted by the military. This massacre resulted in the death of anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 people, a number that has not been established, the majority of whom were indigenous. “The result of the rebellion was a heightened culture of fear of the government forces that lasted until 1992” (White 75).

General Hernández Martínez was president for twelve years and solidified the military state in El Salvador. During his rule, he imposed that every person must carry an identification known as the *cédula de vecindad* with him or her at all times in order to identify enemies of the state. He also declared the Communist Party illegal, prohibited dissident literature, and restricted political freedoms. Furthermore, the General drafted a new constitution in 1939 which granted the state an unprecedented role in controlling the economy, communication, and media (White 78). In the same year, his civilian officials resigned in protest against him. General Hernández Martínez’s downfall came in 1944 as

a result of a mass movement led by students. He fled to Guatemala, the same year that General Ubico was ousted from that country (79).

Before fleeing, General Hernández Martínez placed General Andrés I. Menéndez in the presidency and elections were to be held in the summer of 1944. The military led by Colonel Osmin Aguirre y Salinas overthrew the Menéndez government and in 1945 the Castañeda regime was recognized. Between 1948 and 1972 the military governed the country and used violence and intimidation to protect the oligarchy, resulting in death squads such as the *Organización Democrática Nacionalista* (ORDEN). ORDEN was used to spy on, intimidate, and liquidate the opposition, chiefly in the countryside. This organization received United States' military assistance (White 87). The United States sought to undermine the spread of leftwing revolutionary ideologies and activities by providing funds to Latin American governments that would fight against them.

Government and military repression only increased in 1972 when Colonel Arturo Molina came into power. Molina set in "motion a wave of Anti-Communist nationalism that spun out of control to the point that it dominated federal policy for the next two decades" (91). This period was a turning point for the state sponsored violence and its targets as well as for the civilian response to the violence. The government began to target the center of free thought and expression which was the university and its students. Meanwhile, the guerrillas gained control in much of the countryside. The military occupied three campuses of the University of El Salvador from 1972 to 1973, "fully instilling fear into the minds of left-leaning professors and students alike" (92). Students were accused of being communists and subverting the system. Molina ended the University's independence when its campuses were occupied by the military and he

placed a government official in charge. These measures taken on by the Molina regime led to active protests from the University students in Santa Ana and in San Salvador. The students were placated by military force that resulted in 37 deaths in the city of San Salvador (92). This situation is represented in Manlio Argueta's literature and was responsible for many of the drastic changes in his personal life as well as that of his generational counterparts. As the repression and violence escalated the revolutionaries were forming a more cohesive plan while the government responded by creating yet another death squad, *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Anticomunista – Guerra de Eliminación* (FALANGE) (92), along with others that surged during the Civil War period.

As a response to the repression in 1970 the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (FPL) were formed and in 1972 the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP) came into existence. The ERP had young revolutionary and communist members and many members of the clergy. As John Beverley states in his article "El Salvador," it was a "fusion of Liberation Theology activists and young college-educated Guevarists" (62). The ERP suffered from internal divisions that resulted in the murder of Roque Dalton and the loss of followers who then formed the *Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional* (FARN) (62). In 1977, the military assassinated Rotulio Grande, a popular priest and activist. This shed light on the fact that many priests and other clergy members had been killed defending the poor majority of people in El Salvador. The country's beloved Archbishop Romero was assassinated in 1980. The guerrilla armies and popular organizations along with the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS) and the Revolutionary Party of Salvadoran Workers (PRTC) eventually joined in forming the

coalition of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN), named in honor of the 1932 leader, in October of 1980.

The violence of the 1970s and 80s is evidently linked to the earlier period of repression. Between 1972 and 1987 there were at least 47,927 government initiated political killings and 4,385 disappearances (Lauria-Santiago 96). The Salvadoran military with United States military and CIA support implemented terror tactics, scorched earth campaigns, collective killings, and death squads against the guerrilla and those involved with or supporting them. The U.S. military and CIA executed a counterinsurgency program designed to identify and eliminate the rebels. The problem with this intervention was that the U.S. army was “a ‘blind giant,’ powerful enough to destroy the enemy, but unable to find him” (Kalyvas 109). “Of the 22,000 denunciations of human rights violations investigated by the United Nations Truth Commission¹ only 5 percent were found to have been committed by the FMLN compared to 85 percent by the army and 10 percent by army-linked death squads” (Bourgeois 432).

The Civil War officially came to an end in 1992 with the signing of the Peace Accords. The Government of El Salvador and the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) were the parties involved in signing the Salvadoran Peace Accords. These agreements put an end to armed conflict and both parties agreed to a

¹ The Commission on the Truth for El Salvador (Comisión de la Verdad para El Salvador, CVES) “was mandated by the January 16, 1992 U.N.-brokered peace agreements that ended the war. The commission was set up in July.” It operated for eight months from July 1992 to March 1993. It presented its report, “From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador”, on March 15, 1993. (United States Institute of Peace)

process of “purification²” and reduction of the armed forces (“Peace”). The peace accords also recognized the need to end impunity, “particularly in cases where respect for human rights is jeopardized. To that end, the Parties refer this issue to the Commission on the Truth for consideration and resolution” (“Peace”). This Truth Commission was “mandated to investigate serious acts of violence occurring since 1980 and the nature and effects of the violence and to recommend methods of promoting national reconciliation” (“Peace”).

1.1 Manlio Argueta and his Generation

The poet and novelist Manlio Argueta was born and came of age in the previously described social and political context. He was born in the provincial region of San Miguel, El Salvador in 1935, three years after *La Matanza*. Argueta later relocated to the city of San Salvador to study law at the University. Throughout the period of increased repression, a generation of university students, writers, and artists arose in El Salvador, among them was Manlio Argueta. Argueta situates himself as part of this generation in an interview with Zulma Nelly Martínez, “Yo pertenezco a la promoción del <<Círculo Literario Universitario>> que surge en 1956; desde las aulas de la Universidad nos constituimos en un activismo cultural y político” (41). According to Tomás Arce’s article “Pobrecito poeta que era yo...” published on June 5, 2010 in *El Nuevo Diario* newspaper of Managua, Nicaragua, in 1955 a group of university student writers began to be known

² According to chapter one section three of the Peace Agreement, “purification” of the armed forces should be undertaken to secure the objective of national reconciliation. All members of the armed forces are to be evaluated by an ad hoc commission taking into account each officer’s service record, observance of the legal order with emphasis on human rights, professional competence, and capacity to function in the new context of peace. The evaluation can result when necessary in change of duty station or discharge of the officer.

in El Salvador. Almost all of the works published by this group were polemic and were attacked by the clergy, the reactionary writers, and those who were still servile to the regime during this time in El Salvador (Arce).

The “Círculo Literario Universitario” functioned as the nucleus from which revolutionary activities took place and from which artists were able to invade the pages of the regional press. These writers occupied the pages of local newspapers and magazines and permeated the social and literary spheres as they gave conferences and recitals, spoke out about controversial topics, had round table discussions, and initiated and partook in protests (Dalton, “Su ejemplo” xxv). The main topic of this generation’s discussions was the social responsibility of the writer and artist in the present conditions of their countries. The group was composed of intellectuals not only from El Salvador but also from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Argentina among other Latin American countries. The Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias, was respected among this circle of young writers for being as Dalton says “un creador y un honesto revolucionario” and from him they coined the phrase, “el poeta es una conducta moral.” The writers of this generation improvised on this phrase, “el poeta es una conducta moral, debe escribir como piensa y vivir como escribe, está comprometido con el pueblo, con sus luchas liberadoras, con la revolución” (xxv). Argueta places himself and his generation in a dictatorial context, one in which culture is not stimulated or promoted. It was because of the military dictatorship that the University became the only space where active and free expression took place in the fifties and sixties. According to Argueta, Salvadoran society only knew repression and injustice, and for him the premise of the generation that “el escritor es una conducta moral” signifies that the writer cannot

“permanecer callado, no puede hacerse cómplice con el silencio de una dictadura que en esos momentos cumple 25 años (1956)” (qtd.in Martínez 42).

Otto René Castillo, Roque Dalton, and Manlio Argueta were founders of this group along with a vast array of young artists such as, Roberto Armijo, Tirso Canales, José Roberto Cea, Ítalo López Vallecillos, Armando López Muñoz, José Napoleón Rodríguez Ruiz, Jorge Arias Gómez, René Arteaga, Mercedes Durand, Mauricio de la Selva, Hildeandro Juárez, Martínez Orantes, Rafael Góchez Sosa, Waldo Chávez Velasco, Irma Lanzas, Eugenio Martínez Orantes, Alvaro Menéndez Leal, Jorge A. Cornejo, Danilo Velado, Alfonso Quijada Urías, and Claribel Alegría. These young writers formed various groups including the “Grupo octubre” and the Literary Circle mentioned above. After much debate and discussion, it was Ítalo López Vallecillos, a Salvadoran poet, essayist, playwright, journalist, and historian, who named this group “Generación Comprometida”. Although the literary aspect of this generation was the most predominant, “La Generación Comprometida estaba integrada por poetas, cuentistas, ensayistas, novelistas, actores, pintores, periodistas y músicos” (Hernández 134), it included a vast array of personalities working towards a common goal. Roberto Armijo in his “Apuntes sobre la Generación Comprometida”, a conference given on February 22, 1963 in El Salvador, says that the most interesting thing that they offer is a sincere preoccupation to care for and defend just and humane conceptions that were being run over and stepped on (Cea 152-4).

Manlio Argueta along with his generational counterparts manifested the need for this Generation to be close to the people and for their art to serve a social function. Angel Rama acknowledges that this generation did in fact accomplish many goals such as:

la renovación, forma, actualización y puesta al día de la literatura nacional, coordinándola con las restantes de América; la asunción de una escritura militante, tanto filosófica como moral, que implicó el esfuerzo por ampliar el público lector al que se dirigía estableciendo modos de comunicación más directos de su mensaje; la recuperación del entorno cotidiano que postuló tanto la sensibilización de una realidad nacional como la apropiación de un habla, una sintaxis, un léxico, que parecían prohibidos para la literatura culta; la beligerante actitud crítica respecto al medio, a sus valores provincianos, a sus jerarquías desuetas, con la tumultuosa confianza en un futuro orden social y cultural que recogía y acrisolaba las tradiciones regionales. (187)

Argueta keenly appropriates himself of colloquial Salvadoran speech and the reality of his generation within his novels. His writing reaches broader audiences both abroad and within the region.

Argueta's commitment is evidenced in the production of *De aquí en adelante*, an anthology published in 1967 by five poets of the Committed Generation as a way of attracting the attention of the other poets of their time. Manlio Argueta, José Roberto Cea, Tirso Canales, Roberto Armijo, and Alfonso Quijada Urias were the authors who collaborated in the writing and publishing of this book. *De aquí en adelante* was published independently of the publishing companies and especially independently of the Editorial Universitaria (Cea 92), the mainstream publisher. In an interview by Mercedes Durand in December of 1967, Roberto Armijo explains that he and the other four writers sacrificed their own money in this endeavor. Their objective was to establish a foundation for their own publishing house where they could freely publish without the obstacles and censure that existing publishing companies imposed (Cea 102). This was part of Argueta's commitment and part of his new project to publish and disseminate his work independently.

These writers fought to publish and circulate their works knowing that they were faced with a largely illiterate population and audience. They published their more involved works for the elite of their countries and largely for an international audience while reaching the masses with other strategies. They found different ways of writing in order to show their people that they were writing in their favor. They wrote very concise poems or short stories that could be easily shared and disseminated in newspapers or public places and that people could memorize and transmit orally to others. The Committed Generation reached out to the masses with their jester-like parades in which they comically protested and reproached those in power, and with their journalistic radio (77). They also held completely free events for the public to attend, such as poetry recitals and art expositions (117), where being literate was not a necessity as the people could listen to or see the art that they were producing.

This generation was complex and composed of many different personalities and egos but through the minutiae it can be discerned that, above all, the members of the Committed Generation set an example. They reached out to those in power not only with their writing but with their way of living and acting. Most lived by what they wrote and wrote according to what they lived by, their principles and beliefs were tightly intertwined with the messages they were conveying. Many experienced firsthand the violence that was battering their homes and this same violence put an end to their lives. They had a different vision and ideal of what they wanted Central America to be and they reached the limits in order to express it and attempt to achieve it. In his piece “The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War”, Stathis Kalyvas notes that,

Because indiscriminate violence targets people independently of what they both did or could have done, it is perceived as deeply unfair. Unfair and immoderate punishment may trigger an intense emotional reaction [...] making people more risk seeking and hence more likely to play an active role in the rebellion under a previously unacceptable risk. (115)

Misery and disregard engender violence in those that otherwise might not have reacted, they are taken to a breaking point. These writers were forced to live and witness unbearable circumstances. Two of the main leaders of the generation and close friends of Argueta, Otto René Castillo and Roque Dalton, chose to join the revolutionary movement. The circumstances forced them to take risks not only with their writing but also with their lives, risks that they might have never taken had they not been driven to their limits. Unlike them, Manlio Argueta escaped the violence of El Salvador and exiled himself in Costa Rica after the university was violently occupied by the military. Argueta is the only one of the three writers who was not murdered in the revolutionary movements and who chose not to take up arms. He lived in Costa Rica from 1972 to 1993 and continued his own struggle with his writing and alternate actions.

Argueta questions taking risks with his life, he takes risks within his literature and as a writer but criticizes those intellectuals who join the armed struggle. He avoided risks by staying abroad in exile. This view is one that he incorporates into his writing, especially in his first novel *El valle de las hamacas*. Argueta has shown his commitment through his writing and by continuing to make art accessible to the general population even while in exile. He began as a poet and later on in his career he transitioned to writing novels.

Manlio Argueta won his first two literary prizes in 1956 for his poems “Canto a Huistaluxit” and “Canto vegetal a Usulután”. It was with these poems that he became a

known author in El Salvador. “Canto a Huistaluxit” won first prize in the *Juegos Florales de San Miguel* in November of 1956 and the poem was then published in *La Prensa Gráfica*, on November 18th. A few days later, his poem “Canto vegetal a Usulután” won first place at the *Juegos Florales de Usulután*, and was published by *La Prensa Gráfica* on December 9th. (artepoetica.net)

During his years as a student he also won the “Premio Centroamericano de Cuento” from the Guatemalan University of San Carlos and the Central American Rubén Darío poetry prize. His poetic works include *En el costado de la luz* (1967), *Las bellas armas reales* (1975), and *De aquí en adelante* (1968). His fictional works include his novels *El valle de las hamacas* (1969), *Caperucita en la zona roja* (1978), *Un día en la vida* (1980), *Cuzcatlán donde bate la Mar del Sur* (1983), *Milagro de la paz* (1994) and *Siglo de O(g)ro* (1997). He has also written plays, children’s books, and Salvadoran folktales. This project aims to explore and shed light on Argueta’s lesser studied works and therefore I will not focus on *Un día en la vida*, one of his best-known and most widely translated novels. *Un día en la vida* takes place in a northern province of El Salvador near the Honduran border and narrates the reality of one day of pain and horror in El Salvador from five thirty in the morning to five in the afternoon. This novel was banned in El Salvador after its release because of its negative portrayal of the Salvadoran Government.

Argueta has been an editor and university professor in Costa Rica, the United States, and El Salvador. He has also been the director of various publishing houses including Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana (EDUCA) in Costa Rica and the Editorial Universitaria of the University of El Salvador. While in exile in Costa Rica,

Argueta founded the non-governmental organization *Instituto Cultural Costarricense – Salvadoreño*, which is an organization that focused primarily on the cultural and artistic exchange between El Salvador and Costa Rica and also between Central America and Europe. The organization held events for the Salvadoran immigrants and war refugees in Costa Rica. “Lunes Cultural,” for example, was an event held every Monday and for which the refugees received free tickets (Basok 49). Argueta was extremely active and, as he states in an interview with Claudia Milian Arias published online by Lehman College, “I did everything I could not to feel like an exile, taking into account that I was in Central America where I felt the solidarity of artists, particularly from the theater, university academics and professionals from civil society.” He also founded and directed a similar project, “Teatro de la Calle 15” in San José, Costa Rica, which is dedicated to the Salvadoran war refugees in that country. During his exile in Costa Rica, Argueta published *Caperucita en la zona roja*.

In 1993 Argueta returned to El Salvador, one year after the Peace Accords were signed. Unfortunately, many of his triumphs were lost upon his return. When he attempted to replicate his experiences from Costa Rica in El Salvador, he “realized that it was not possible, that the propitious or emotional conditions... do not exist” (qtd. in Milian Arias). He returned to El Salvador while the country was transitioning to the newly signed peace and still in the process of working through the consequences of twelve years of Civil War. Although the conditions did not exist at the time of his return, he has not let that impede his activism, he is working within his present conditions and limitations to try and make a change. He is extremely active in disseminating his message of hope for a brighter, literate, and socially active Central America.

Argueta currently feels the need to continue writing simply so that ordinary people, not just the specialists, will read him. During a visit to El Salvador, where he was preparing to return after twenty years of exile in Costa Rica, Argueta happily noticed that his novels *Un día en la vida* and *Cuzcatlán* were being read over the radio to people who could not read. (Craft 109)

Although his novels are very complex in the topics and techniques that he uses, he writes using the colloquial language of El Salvador, something that the “ordinary people” are drawn to. Manlio Argueta has continued to write and has also founded and collaborated with numerous initiatives. He is proving that even though he chose exile and nonviolent dissent, he continues putting to action what he pledged to do: be proactive and incite change. He aims to break the silence. He continues to work towards the goal of a better, more literate, educated, and prepared country and Central America. The reality of the circumstances has forced him to reimagine his strategies and work with what he can in the present dystopia.

Argueta’s new focus is on educating the masses; he is the president of the “Fundación Innovaciones Educativas Centroamericanas” (FIECA), which focuses on literacy in the indigenous zones of Guatemala and the most vulnerable zones in Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. On November 29, 2011, I had the honor of attending a talk by Manlio Argueta at Boston University titled “Mirando hacia el futuro: reflexiones sobre el papel de la cultura y del arte en el desarrollo de la sociedad civil centroamericana”. Argueta spoke about rebuilding civil society in Central America and how “la palabra” is what should be used in order to transform the countries of Central America. Argueta noted that his generation was looking for a utopia in the midst of all of the violence and now it is a process of rebuilding with what they have and by using “la palabra”. “La palabra tiene poder para incidir” (*Mirando*). He emphasized how after

twenty years of “peace”, El Salvador is still the most violent nation and reiterated how important it is to transform society by inciting and influencing change. “Tolerancia”, said Argueta, “hemos sido intolerantes” and it is time to tolerate, to be tolerant of one another (*Mirando*).

Since 2000 Argueta is the director of the Biblioteca Nacional de El Salvador. Denunciation and rebellion are no longer his key goals, his commitment is exemplified through his incessant involvement in promoting culture, art, and learning, as well as using technology to help him attain his goals of creating awareness and consciousness. While he has been the director of the National Library of El Salvador he has collaborated with international initiatives such as the *Agencia Española para la Cooperación Internacional (AECID)*. This agency aided in projects such as installing the first wireless Internet network in the national library that all library users have free access to. The library also received computers that are available for public use.

As discussed earlier, writers of the Committed Generation had to find alternatives to speak to their people; their reading audience within their countries was limited at the time of writing. However, Manlio Argueta was able to write and be read by the people of El Salvador and has partaken in a process of constant dialogue with his readers. His novels are being read during his lifetime and he has even edited and reprinted *Caperucita en la zona roja* multiple times to clarify parts of it that were not intelligible to its readers. Argueta is currently a columnist for *La Prensa Gráfica* in El Salvador and as he commented during his recent talk “Vida y compromiso del poeta Roque Dalton” at Boston Univeristy, he finally has a window to write to his people. He communicates in simple and plain language so that they can understand what he writes and so that his

writing serves the purpose of clearly informing and educating the people of El Salvador. It is indeed a different time, a time when one of the founders of a dissident literary generation can be the director of the National library of El Salvador and be invited to give open talks at universities in the United States. It is a time when the Internet and social media have revolutionized the way we communicate with each other. Argueta has progressed with the times and utilizes the technological advances to better the modes of communication with his readers and followers and has put the technologies to use for the advancement of the education of the people of El Salvador.

Manlio Argueta has been able to transpose his life experiences to his writing process. Argueta survived his Committed Generation comrades by exiling himself in Costa Rica and distancing himself from the physical violence and persecution that was rampant in El Salvador. The death of Dalton awoke in Argueta the need to continue fighting his battle in his own way. Even though Argueta did not partake in the armed struggle, he resisted the violence and injustice with his literature and his example. Argueta survived the initial periods of violence of the sixties and seventies and lived the entire Civil War period from afar. He had the time and distance needed to zoom out of the daily confrontations with violence in order to view and represent the circumstances from a different perspective that is more encompassing of the different members of society. His exile has allowed him to write with a distanced perspective of El Salvador and include different groups in his imagery of the nation; his national image is not an androcentric one. Women and children play a central role in his narrative. Argueta's writing has developed with him and with the Salvadoran society. A change is evidenced in his writing from *Caperucita en la zona roja*, a novel in which violence is the

protagonist and antagonist, to his later novels in which violence is a latent theme. The characters of the more recent novels are not preoccupied with living in the violence and deciding whether to partake in it or not. Instead, they are living with the residue and consequences of that violence and attempting to figure out how to deal with it and what to do with it in order to live and move on. A study of his works allows a deeper understanding of his life, of Salvadoran community, and the different and evolving representations of reality and violence.

CHAPTER 2 VIOLENCE IN THE VALLEY

El valle de las hamacas is Manlio Argueta's first novel. Published in 1970 while he still resided in El Salvador, it depicts the reality of the time so that the reader can be aware and conscious of what is happening. It is representative of the Committed Generation and symbolic of their beliefs and differences, but especially of their common goals for change and hope for a better country. The main thread in the novel is violence, presented as crude, targeted, and physical. Themes include cross-border unity in Central America (specifically between El Salvador and Nicaragua), the role of men, and the role of women in Salvadoran society.

The novel primarily focuses on the mimetic representation of the violent reality. There is no dedicated space in the text for reflection on the consequences of the violence or the onset of fear caused by the repression and violence. The focus is on graphically depicting the present violence and horror. Argueta attempts to call attention to the region and to the injustices that are occurring in El Salvador. This chapter is divided into sections that study how *El valle de las hamacas* portrays violence, men, and women in Salvadoran society.

2.1 El valle de las hamacas

El valle de las hamacas won the 1969 Premio Único from the Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA), Costa Rica. Editorial Sudamericana in Buenos Aires, Argentina first published the novel in 1970 and later editions were published in Costa Rica in 1976 and in Nicaragua and Cuba in 1983. According to Roy C. Boland *El valle de las hamacas* originally began as a poem and later developed into a novel. Boland

states, “The novel could well be described as a Salvadorean *nouveau roman*, with its quick-fire sequence of flashbacks, interior monologues, speeches, radio transcripts, police reports, prose poems and contrapuntal chronicles of the conquest by both conqueror and conquered” (68). It is divided into three parts and each part is divided into four, three, and two chapters respectively. The narration generally occurs without any transition, primarily in the first and third person and occasionally in the second person both singular and plural. The reader is not notified that the narrator or the setting and time have changed, the author utilizes this technique as a way of representing the chaos of the context being represented. Argueta appropriates El Salvador’s nickname of *El valle de las hamacas* as the title to his novel, giving the impression of a work that represents the instability of a hammock swaying amidst an earthquake.

This work seeks historical reality in its representation of the events. Although the narrator states that “Centroamérica es una mierda porque está habitada por el hombre invisible” (27), the novel is an attempt to make that man visible. The main characters struggle to be visible, to be heard, and to make an impact. Argueta seeks to articulate the reality of El Salvador and Central America in such a way that it will make the people of El Salvador heard and make its reality perceptible to an outside audience. *El valle de las hamacas* delves into the social and political situations of El Salvador and Central America; it critiques the ignorant and sad state of the political system and evidences the corruption and violence inflicted by the governmental institutions that are meant to safeguard the wellbeing of their citizens. The turmoil of society and of the minds of the main characters is represented in the structure of the narration, the lack of transitions and punctuation, and the swaying between present, past, and future.

The main axis of the story is the violence in El Salvador and the complexities of a group of young Salvadorans in search of a change in their country in the 1960s. This group is comprised exclusively of men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The novel showcases the disagreements and differences in strategies among the group. To most, the path to change means becoming directly involved in the revolutionary movement, sympathizing with their neighbors and their struggle, and participating in student rebellions even if that results in torture, prison, and death. To others in the novel, such as El Decanito, although the ideals sound attractive, they do not partake in the revolutionary activities because they take on a “realistic” approach. They believe that their actions will have no direct impact on the country and instead of risking their personal wellbeing they find a niche within the dominant political groups of the country and secure a position. The young men are represented as having intellectual discussions at every encounter, beginning with their morning coffee to their afternoon beers, discussing the role of politics and of each individual man in the country. This group of intellectuals³ recognizes that they are people made of “carne y huesos provista de una carga cerebral un poco más desarrollada que el común de la gente...” (27). They are organic intellectuals who fit Gramsci’s definition of the “new intellectual” whose mode of being no longer consists solely on eloquence “which is an exterior and momentary

³ When speaking of intellectuals, I am using the term as Antonio Gramsci discusses “The Intellectual” in *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci claims that all men are intellectuals by nature but not by social function. When I refer to intellectuals I am referring to those men who are intellectuals as defined by their function in society. Gramsci refers to “organic intellectuals” as those of the working class who assume a conscious responsibility and work in some type of directive role and can organize masses of men and society in general. Gramsci states that school is the instrument through which intellectuals are elaborated and that what matters is their directive, organizational, and educative function in society.

mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator” (10). They are aware of their function in society and they ultimately decide to join the armed revolutionary movement even though most of them are the weakest and ineptest guerrillas imaginable. Argueta incorporates a subtle critique of the involvement of these young men in the armed resistance. The narration of their interactions is intertwined, vignette style, with the romance between Raúl and Rosaura, the story of student rebellions, the violent occupation of the University by the military, evocations of historical moments such as Pedro de Alvarado’s conquest, and the childhood memories of one of the main characters.

One of the intertwined stories within the novel showcases cross-border unity and solidarity in Central America. The guerrilla group that the University intellectuals form travels from El Salvador to Nicaragua by way of Honduras. The majority of the main characters join the revolutionary forces in an effort to cooperate with the Nicaraguan Sandinista movement and find the location of buried firearms. This story portrays how the Salvadoran youth sympathizes with the Sandinista⁴ movement and looks to that movement for inspiration and guidance to their situation in El Salvador. In every mini-story of the novel there are three main threads that can be identified: violence, the role of men, and the position of women. The following three sections will further explore these topics in detail.

⁴ The Sandinista National Liberation Front was founded in 1961 and was a political-military organization that succeeded in overthrowing President Somoza in 1979. Its formation and motivation were similar to the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. The Sandinistas later supported the Salvadoran rebels by sending weapons and spreading socialism.

2.2 Violence

Throughout *El valle de las hamacas* the violence that is present is an immediate physical and mental violence that causes pain, death, and chaos. In his attempt to make the reader aware and raise consciousness among broader audiences, Argueta graphically represents violence in the text with details of the happenings, descriptions of the actions enacted paired with the reactions of pain, cries, torture, and panic that result. Erich Auerbach in his book *Mimesis* refers to similar descriptions, specifically in Chapter three “The Arrest of Peter Valvomeres”. Auerbach analyzes an excerpt from Ammianus Marcellinus’ description of a riot in Rome and discusses how instead of stating the sensory, there is gestural and pictorial vocabulary that “serves sensory vividness”, “We are forced to picture the scene” (58). This is an effective technique for making the reader understand and empathize with the situation and one which Argueta repeatedly applies in this novel. In *El valle* the mental and physical violence represented is an intricate part of every major occurrence; there is grotesque, inescapable violence that the reader is confronted with and has to read in order to advance in the story. If you decide to read this novel, it is impossible to turn a blind eye to the violence, you are obligated to read and picture the graphic episodes of violence.

Philippe Bourgois in “The Continuum of Violence in War and Peace: Post-Cold War Lessons from El Salvador” distinguishes between four types of violence: direct political, structural, symbolic, and everyday violence. Of these four types of violence the two most pertinent in the analysis of *El valle de las hamacas* are direct political and symbolic violence. In this section, we will focus on direct political violence and will discuss symbolic violence in section 2.4. Bourgois defines direct political violence as

“Targeted physical violence and terror administered by official authorities and those opposing it, such as military repression, police torture, and armed resistance” (426). In the novel direct political violence is the main type represented. The official authorities are the ones who enact the violence against specific groups of people, namely the revolutionaries, the students, and women. Argueta also represents the interactions of the young guerrillas; the armed resistance that surges as a reaction to the violence enacted by the state. The violence is represented as urgent, graphic, and physical; the author does not go into detail representing the psychological or full communal effects of that violence. Argueta does not dedicate space to any reflection on behalf of the victims or the enactors of the violence. We read the suffering of the victims during the violent events but we are not allowed into their intimate thoughts or feelings after the actions have occurred. We are in progress, the violence is in progress, and the victims of that violence are also in progress, there is no time to reflect on the consequences; it is a matter of action and reaction.

Direct political violence is most visible during the student rebellions and the occupation of the University by law enforcement. The officers use strong and profane language when addressing the students and civilians, and the scenes that transpire are aggressive and chaotic. The scenes depict pushing, shoving, gas bombs, brutal beatings, and humiliation.

Era terrible ver cómo un grupo de muchachos de veinte a veinticinco, con las manos en alto decían “piedad ya no nos peguen somos humanos, déjenos ya” y caían, y caían, y siempre les decían “aquí están sus

cuilios⁵, ya ven que pegan duro, sus chuchos, como ustedes nos llaman, tal vez así dejen tranquilo al pueblo, comunistas”. (54)

This is one of many examples in the novel in which the official authorities carry out targeted physical violence against the people. The scene showcases the extreme brutality on behalf of the authorities and the resentment towards the students who are working towards change. The young men are pleading and appealing to the humanity of the officers based on a common ground. However, the young men are dehumanized and are simply seen as “comunistas” who deserve the treatment they are receiving. There is a systematic dehumanization of the other presented in Argueta’s novel, which is fundamental to the army in order to indiscriminately attack their fellow men. Linda Green in “Living in a State of Fear,” acknowledges that although not much is known about the actual training that young soldiers received, anecdotal data suggests that “the training is designed to break down their sense of personal dignity and respect for other human beings.” As a young man described it to her, “Soldiers are trained to kill and nothing more. [...] Another said he learned to hate everyone, including himself” (188).

Direct political violence results in the lack of any space that is safe. The University, the place that is considered the safest and that the students respect is precisely the place that is targeted by the authorities; they attack the physical space of safety and the key figures and role models of the students. The authorities systematically use the top-down approach in order to dismantle the student organizations. They attack the entire University and then specifically target the office of the *Rector*⁶ and publicly beat and

⁵ *Cuilio* is what police officers are commonly and colloquially called in El Salvador.

⁶ The *Rector* is a position in Latin American universities whose closest counterpart in United States’ universities is a University chancellor or president. The *Rector* is voted

humiliate him, causing those who support him to come forward in his defense and become targets of further repression and violence.

...en el momento que corrían hacia el patio vieron que el Rector salía despacio con las manos en alto y en actitud suplicante les decía “retrocedan soy el Rector”, a lo cual contestaron “viejo hijo de puta, usted es mierda para nosotros, ya va a ver cómo pegan de duro los cuilios, los perros como ustedes nos llaman”; estas palabras acompañadas con garrotazos tras garrotazos en el cuerpo del Dr. Nolasco Luis hasta dejarlo en el suelo donde lo cogieron a patadas ... (45)

The students and the secretary of the University who are witnessing the scene attempt to intervene in defense of the *Rector* only to be attacked by the enraged officers, “en gran número llegaron al lugar donde se encontraba y fueron recibidos con miles de garrotazos y ellos caían como moscas pues los gases casi nos habían enceguecido a todos y ellos apenas podían defenderse por eso caían fácilmente abatidos por los leñazos...” (45).

These scenes awaken in the reader a sense of injustice for what is occurring in El Salvador, specifically in a place that is internationally considered the mecca for progress, enlightenment, and academic freedom such as the University. In the chaos of this scene, Argueta writes “y ellos caían como moscas pues los gases casi nos habían enceguecido a todos...”. There is a significant change in the narrative voice from them to us, creating a sense of solidarity with the students who are being attacked by the military.

In addition to the group violence, the novel also contains scenes of more individual and crude violence enacted by those in power, specifically police officers, to civilians who are being interrogated or questioned and whose criminal actions do not

into office either by general University vote, which includes the students, faculty, and staff, or is elected by an appointed committee. He or she is elected for a term that is generally for four years but varies by country and is the maximum authority of the University. The Universidad de El Salvador has created a gallery of its *Rectores* that can be found at: <https://www.ues.edu.sv/content/galer%C3%AD-de-rectores>

merit the severity of the punishment they receive. The novel depicts how petty crimes are punished excessively, a small theft results in severe torture, public humiliation, and even death. The violence we read is palpable, the pain although excruciating is conceivable. The following is an excerpt from when the protagonist is in prison and being interrogated for suspicious revolutionary activity. “Se consideraba montado en el lomo del tigre y había que esperar los resultados. Sintió asco. Toda su piel comenzó a dolerle, sus ojos, su garganta como si hubiese estado al borde del llanto” (92). The pain is physical and we witness the torture that he is being put through as he continues describing how his eyes are burning from the bright light that the police officers are shining above his head during the interrogation. To the protagonist, the torture is an expected consequence for his actions. We will delve further into the violence in the following sections.

2.3 The Villain and the Hero

Within *El valle de las hamacas* the concept of nation is depicted as androcentric; men are in control, men are responsible for the backwardness of society, but men are also the only ones who can save the nation and construct a better one. The main occurrences in the novel revolve around the intricacies of the group of young men who represent the Committed Generation of El Salvador. Most of them migrate from the rural areas of El Salvador to the city of San Salvador in order to attend the University. They rent an apartment together and spend their days reading, writing, having discussions, smoking, and playing classical music. Alcohol has an important presence in their daily endeavors and some of the members are concerned that others might suffer from alcoholism⁷. This

⁷ Alcohol is a theme that is commonly present in works of this Committed Generation such as in Roque Dalton’s novel *Pobrecito poeta que era yo*. Alcohol is presented as an

group is appealing to other young men such as their neighbor Mauricio. He spends his days in his home listening to their music and pondering ways of accidentally bumping into them or coincidentally being where they are so that he has an excuse to introduce himself to them. Argueta points to how being an intellectual revolutionary is seen as fashionable; young men are attracted to the idea of being part of the elite groups. Although Argueta is part of this Committed Generation he also utilizes his text as a way to criticize and question the seriousness behind the commitment of some of his generational counterparts who may be joining the movement simply because it is the trendy thing to do.

The young men have a news radio show and a newspaper, which they use to reach and inform their community. The group partakes in intellectual conversations about the current state of affairs of their country and Central America in general and ultimately decides to become rebels. The scenes of the intellectuals in the jungle making their way to Nicaragua allow a glimpse of Argueta's personal take on the situation and showcase one of his recurring criticisms of the Committed Generation. Argueta depicts how the young men struggle to live and depend on an experienced guide to take them to their destination because they have no idea how to survive in those circumstances. They are injured along the way, worried about the rain, and some, including Mauricio, die from imprudent accidents that could have been avoided with better preparation or strategy. Argueta does not disguise the foolishness in his descriptions using adjectives that clearly show his opinions "...después te diste cuenta que Jorge por su lado había salido ileso, y Mauricio, el Chatío, pereció tontamente al despeñarse y caer en una hondonada, casi llegando a Estelí, y todo por la chiquillada de ir a casa de don Ramón López..." (136).

illusory escape for these intellectual who are struggling with the situation in their societies.

Argueta illustrates how these young men's deaths are not justified and are completely unnecessary. Their deaths have no valor or merit, they are due to foolish and childish mistakes. These men are much better intellectuals than they are guerillas. It is their job to aspire to change (27), to build something great (28), to use their brains and build. In their early discussions Raúl stresses that the country cannot return to uncivilized acts and that they are responsible for the way the country is governed in the present because they must keep the government accountable. "La probidad ofrecida por Lemus, su pronunciamiento sobre el apego a las leyes, todo eso se lo hemos sacado nosotros cuando no silenciamos atropellos y cuando estamos martillando sobre sus errores..." (76). The labor that they do with the *radioperiódico* is just as, if not more, important to Argueta than the botched attempts at participating in the armed resistance.

Men in *El valle de las hamacas* are depicted as both heroes and as villains. Raúl, the protagonist, is the idealist who firmly believes that he can save his country and even the world. He is the leader of the group. There is a passage that allows us to witness his inner dialogue, "...tú lo has querido desde el instante que te ponés al frente se supone que sabes para dónde vas y las consecuencias bien vale la pena porque si no somos nosotros quiénes entonces y si nadie se atreve cuándo comenzará esta mierda a caminar ..." (67-8). They want the country to advance, to be an educated and modern country of the twentieth century (68). These young men feel responsible for inciting and provoking change in El Salvador and are well aware that someone has to do it and believe that they are the chosen ones. They are conscious of the risks that this involvement entails and willingly opt to become involved anyway. They risk their lives travelling clandestinely to Nicaragua and those who survive that endeavor choose to continue the struggle in El

Salvador with the hope that the situation will become better. “Tan jóvenes, engañados por nadie. Sólo para que en el palacio de los dictadores no brillen más las luces en las salas de torturas, suficiente motivo para ir a morir en una selva ...” (137). This group of idealists firmly believes that their actions will transform El Salvador and Central America. They are aware that men who make change make history and it is their job to change the history of El Salvador. Their youthful exuberance is what will transform El Salvador, “El motor que mueve a ese ferrocarril que llaman historia no es lo que aprendes en tus inercias intelectuales; lo que transforma al mundo es esa adolescencia en función social que mueve sus aspas en contra del viento y a favor del viento, como el viento del mar que viene del mar y va a dar al mar” (100). Argueta uses his novel not only as a tool for denouncing the situation in El Salvador but also as a way of documenting this generation’s belief that they were the saviors of the country while simultaneously highlighting and critiquing their shortcomings, specifically in the tactical and guerrilla arena.

Juxtaposed with the vision of men as saviors and heroes, is the image of men as villains and the ones responsible for the extreme acts of violence within the country. In the previous examples on violence provided we are able to see how the male police officers are the ones mainly guilty for the atrocious acts committed. The men who enact the violence are a direct reflection of those that are in power and that the novel critiques. Manlio Argueta captures the grotesque and brutal side of the violence in the figure of “El Gato” a type of human sewer rat that serves the police department. He is a gross figure affiliated with the police who commits atrocious acts, such as taking a man’s heart out because he owed money to his boss. This scene is depicted in detail by Argueta, “abrió

con un cuchillo el abdomen del Viejo, metió la mano hacia arriba, sus uñas rompieron las vísceras hasta llegar al corazón y lo extrajo con fuerza” (107). The unjust and ruthless direct political violence that was ensuing in El Salvador is exemplified in the actions of El Gato and is made palpable to the reader through the author’s choice of illustrative language.

El Gato is mainly depicted as a savage. However, Argueta allows us to read about El Gato’s life and motives for being the ruthless man that he is. He does not justify him for his present state but he does show how he is a product of his environment. The character of El Gato is an example of “everyday” violence which is defined by Philippe Bourgois as:

Daily practices and expressions of violence on a micro-interactional level: interpersonal, domestic and delinquent. Concept adapted from Scheper-Hughes (1992, 1996) to focus on the individual lived experience that normalizes petty brutalities and terror at the community level and creates a common sense or ethos of violence. (426)

We learn that he and his family live in extreme poverty and starvation. His mother is an unauthorized street vendor who gets harassed by law enforcement, their home has holes in the roof through which water comes in every time it rains, and his children have to live in precarious conditions. The narrator says that El Gato compensates for his perilous life by “aparentar ser una fiera porque tu sueldo va directamente proporciona [sic] a la ferocidad. Y poco a poco llevas el crimen muy adentro, muy adentro como un placer” (107). El Gato exemplifies how violence has had time to repeat itself in Salvadoran society and has become a part of him. Although there is no dedicated space for reflection on the consequences of the violence, the persona of El Gato represents the psychological effects that violence has. The more brutal he is the more he gets paid by those in power. It

turns into a vicious cycle because the more feared he is the more respected he is by his superiors and eventually he finds pleasure in the violence he enacts which makes him even more violent. With this character, Argueta also denounces the impunity and corruption of the legal system in El Salvador. No matter how atrocious El Gato's crimes are he never faces any charges or appears in court, he simply seeks refuge in the basement of the police department, "era una especie de asilado en el cuartel de policía... era una especie de fantasma nocturno o de cucaracha..." (108). The police officers take him in and make sure that he is not prosecuted; they keep him as their secret weapon that they use to torture and intimidate students, criminals, and civilians. Everyone knows of his existence and fears his appearance because they know that he will not restrain himself from performing the most inhumane actions against them. El Gato is worth more as a man in the eyes of the state and government institutions than the university students and intellectuals. He is valued for being a man without regard for the life of others and as a tool to obliterate the obstacles in the way of the dominant group.

2.4 The *puta* and the love interest

El valle de las hamacas is a reflection of how misogynistic Salvadoran society is during this period and exemplifies how women and girls are belittled and objectified sexually. Women are not only the victims of direct political violence but they are also subjected to symbolic violence. In his definition of symbolic violence Bourgois references Bourdieu's 1997 work, "the internalized humiliations and legitimations of inequality and hierarchy ranging from sexism and racism to intimate expressions of class power" (426). In the novel, the two main roles of women are as the victims of violence enacted by official authorities and as the love interest of men.

During the scene of the takeover of the University the author focuses on a couple who is running errands and ends up in the middle of the riots and violence. The couple seeks refuge in the building of the University *Rector* believing that it would not be attacked. However, it is targeted by the *cuilios* and the *Rector* is beaten and taken prisoner. From the moment the soldiers see the couple they address the woman as “puta” and “vieja puta”. After using tear gas and beating her husband almost to the point of unconsciousness, they are able to separate her from him and drag her into an ambulance. Inside of the ambulance they use profane threats to intimidate her and attempt to rape her multiple times. The men are unable to fully violate her because they have a hard time removing her undergarments which frustrates them tremendously, “qué tiene esta puta que no le puedo tocar la pupusa” (55). This episode exemplifies how women are completely dehumanized and only serve a sexual purpose to the law enforcement officers.

The woman is left there almost completely naked and hurt and is soon after joined by a group of very young girls from a nearby religious school that the soldiers also took and violated. The young girls were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen and were crying and yelling “...‘si nosotras no somos universitarias, mire señora que nos han quitado los calzones y nos han tocado’ y una de ellas me mostró su calzón hecho jirones y manchado de sangre...” (55-6). The perpetrators show no regard for the age of the girls, they are female and therefore are treated with the same disrespect and cruelty as the older woman. This context of political violence against women and girls that Argueta represents in his novel relates to one that Begoña Aretxaga studies in Northern Ireland. In

“Dirty Protest: Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence” Aretxaga acknowledges that in the case of Northern Ireland,

Sexual harassment by state forces has been a systematic complaint during the last 20 years that reappears in informal conversations with women as well as in their narratives of encounters with security forces. For the prisoners, the assault was as much a political attempt to discipline through punishment as a humiliating assertion of male dominance. (246)

The case of Northern Ireland is relevant to other contexts of political violence against women including the one in El Salvador that Argueta represents in his novel. Sexual abuse and humiliation based on their gender is used as a tool against all women no matter the age to exemplify the power of the law enforcement officials. In a later scene, the woman and girls are transported to the police station where they are put in cells without any justification or explanation. This process illustrates what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant say in “Symbolic Violence”, “Male order is so deeply grounded as to need no justification: it imposes itself as self-evident, universal” (273). Women are the dominated, and therefore the recipients of symbolic violence due to their gender.

In prison, they meet Dalia, the girlfriend of a politician who was also taken prisoner. Dalia is different from the scared group of women; although also scared, she knows what she faces in the prison cells. She knows that “la condición mía y la suya son completamente distintas, a mí creo que no me van a respetar pues me han dicho, y me han hecho cosas aquí en la policía, que usted no se imagina ...” (65). It is obvious that it is not Dalia’s first time in this horrific situation. The men who are supposed to protect the citizens are the ones to do the most damage to them. Dalia serves as an example of this repeated violence; this is not an isolated event but a cruel reality. Aretxaga regards “gender not just as a dimension of violence but as an intrinsic component of it, crucial to

the understanding of its meanings, deployments, and ends. My analysis suggests that political violence performed on and from the body cannot escape the meanings of sexual difference” (252). Gender is the main component of the symbolic violence enacted in El Salvador that Argueta represents in *El valle de las hamacas*.

There is a subtle critique of the system utilizing Dalia in the prison. The police officers are shown abusing the women, ill-treating them, and sexually assaulting them. In order to continue the abuse, the prison guards take Dalia to a cell full of criminals to be raped and violated. “¡Dalia! y la sacaron y la condujeron a otra celda en donde se encontraban reclusos los ladrones y luego después oímos unos gritos de esa mujer que aún me martillan en la mente” (66). We are first led to believe that Dalia suffered terribly at the hands of the criminals, however, we learn that she uses a defense mechanism and is able to fake the sounds of agony in order to fool the policemen and guards into thinking that she was raped when in reality she was not abused by the criminals in the cell. Dalia was able to reach an agreement with them, “ella se les había arrodillado pidiéndoles que no la tocaran y que, por suerte de ella, entre éstos había uno que había sido ordenanza del ex canciller y que la conoció y les dijo a los otros que la respetaran y que ella les daría algo, por lo que se quitó las joyas y se las repartieron” (66). Common criminals and delinquents are able to rationalize and strike a deal with Dalia to not abuse her and they allow her to scream and pretend as if they are doing what the guards expect them to. There is a direct relationship between the authorities and the criminals. The police officers grant them the authority to commit further crimes while in prison, they use the criminals as tools to act out their own brutality and exercise their power. The criminals

are an accessory of the police department and are a part of and consequence of the broken system.

Aside from the representation of women as “putas”, victims of the symbolic and political violence, women are also depicted as the love interest and fall of man. “Por otro lado, el alcohol y las mujeres son el infierno de los filósofos benignos, me refiero al alcohol que te emborracha y a la mujer que te pierde a vos, por ejemplo...” (27). Women are equated to the vices of men and as the ones responsible for their perdition. *El valle de las hamacas* is a reflection of the androcentric society of the time in El Salvador and also evidences misogyny. Argueta attempts to rescue the intellect and humanity of women with the only woman in the novel who has any real importance, Rosaura, the sister of Mauricio, one of the young intellectuals of the group. However, Argueta still relegates her to the status of romantic interest, as that is what she is to Raúl, the leader of the group. Even though she is presented as Raúl’s love interest or Mauricio’s sister, her intellect and independent personality are evidenced in her discussions with the young men and the clashes with her mother over her independence and ability to do things when and with who she wants. She is intelligent and is portrayed as having deep conversations with both her brother and Raúl.

Although Rosaura expresses strong and relevant opinions and ideas she is not a part of the group nor is she ever asked to be included in the movement for change. Her closest encounters with the violence are during the Independence Day parade and rebellion where she was present only because she was supposed to meet Raúl. She and her friend are trapped in the middle of the upheaval and her brother Mauricio finds and rescues them. As intelligent as she may be, she is still depicted as a woman who needs

saving. Her second encounter with the violence is not as direct; it is when she suffers the loss of her lover and of her brother. Although Raúl does not die and is able to come back from the trip to Nicaragua, he is lost to her and she admits that “‘Pensar que llegué a la muerte.’ Sí, ella había muerto aquel día; ahora se consideraba transformada en otra persona, más hecha a comprender las cosas difíciles” (131). Her life was Raúl and when he left she felt as if she were dying, something that repeats itself when her brother leaves to join to guerrillas. When Raúl returns, she asks him, “¿Has notado algo raro en mí?” To which he responds, “Tal vez no raro pero te veo distinta, sos una verdadera mujer” (141). In Raúl’s eyes she is now a real woman because she has endured suffering and difficult times. To her, she has been reborn and is finally able to live without him and without her brother, she is an independent woman who now cares for her sickly mother. This is a theme that precedes Argueta’s later novels in which women are at the forefront of his writing.

2.5 Conclusion

El valle de las hamacas is a novel of immediate violence enacted by the state against students and the civilian populations both male and female. As Fernando Zaldívar notes, the purpose of the novel is “evidenciar las lacras y degeneraciones y sacudir la conciencia del lector” (683). It is a chaotic and graphic narration, with different events occurring at the same time. The emphasis of the novel lies in depicting the present group and individual violence and the simultaneous responses to that violence. Argueta focuses on the generation’s beliefs and their urgent actions in response to the dire situation in their country, while also criticizing their inability and unpreparedness as guerrillas. Direct political violence is enacted on behalf of the state and it targets the University and the

students. Men are the enactors of the direct and symbolic violence as well as the victims of it. The author also represents the direct and symbolic violence against women that takes place in the androcentric society that he represents in the text. *El valle de las hamacas* is not a novel that focuses on the lasting impact or consequences of violence; it does not preoccupy itself with trauma, lasting fear, or memory as Argueta's future novels do. Our closest approximation to the consequences of the violence is with *El Gato*. The novel is a denunciation of current events and a documentation of a time and a generation, it seeks to represent the world with a "gestural and pictorial vocabulary" (57) to use the words of Erich Auerbach. Argueta calls attention to the region and attempts to make the issues visible to an international population by appealing to their human sensibilities and their sense of what is just and right. In the following chapters, we will see the evolution of the violence in the region and also how Manlio Argueta's writing evolves within the context of violence. Argueta not only showcase the atrocities but also delves into the lasting impacts of violence and offers different options for progress.

CHAPTER 3 MANLIO ARGUETA IN THE ZONA ROJA

Manlio Argueta has been a committed writer from the onset of his career and continues to be one to this day with his literature and projects. His exile and the work produced there are a fundamental aspect of his trajectory. This chapter specifically focuses on studying the novel he published during his exile in Costa Rica, *Caperucita en la zona roja* (1978). It is a novel that denounces the violence of the seventies while offering an intimate and more comprehensive panorama that allows the reader the liberty to think and reflect upon the situations which it represents. The author begins to move away from the mimetic representations of physical violence of *El valle de las hamacas* to representations of the psychological and internal effects of the violence on the characters of the novel.

Caperucita en la zona roja is mainly situated in *La zona roja*. This red-light district primarily refers to the poor and violent city of San Salvador in the late seventies. The novel centers around the romantic relationship between Alfonso (Al) and Hormiga (Horm) who live in fright, fear, terror, and hope in the city. The novel looks into the anguished existences of the two lovers during this time period. Alfonso is a university student and poet who runs an illegal printing press along with his friends in order to disseminate literature. Alfonso eventually joins the guerrilla and abandons his clandestine printing press and his pregnant lover. Argueta attempts to incorporate fairy tale elements and attribute the alter egos of “the wolf” and “little red riding hood” to Alfonso and Hormiga respectively. This novel is situated between fiction and truth, between individual and collective circumstance, and the recreation of situations in an interior

dialogue with a tacit interlocutor (Vallecillos 6). Although Hormiga and Alfonso's relationship acts as the axis of the novel, as JoAnn Conrad states in her review of the work, "there is, paradoxically, no center to the text. The very subject and the narrative voice of the novel are decentered in a constant rearranging of the first, second, and third person, sometimes within a single paragraph" (180). The novel is divided into six sections: "En el bosque", "Los lobos", "Caperucita", "Zona Roja", "Otra vez en el bosque", and "Otra vez la Zona Roja", which are then each divided into smaller numbered chapters. The novel denounces the injustices and grave circumstances of the people of El Salvador, expressly the intellectual sector of the city, the university students. As Linda Craft points out, the novel takes place in an urban setting and experiments with different forms and voices while denouncing political authoritarianism (Introduction ix).

Within *Caperucita en la zona roja* topics such as the role and place of the writer and intellectual, exile, and fragmentation and deconstruction of the plot appear. Argueta incorporates the use of colloquial language and humor into the novel. In *Caperucita* there is no explicit plot, but, rather, a fragmented and jumbled pseudo reality of sorts. This chapter is divided into sections that analyze how the author narrates the violence, the themes of exile and cross-border unity, the place of the writer in this society, and the shift in his representation of violence, fear, and the role of women.

3.1 *Caperucita en la zona roja*

Caperucita en la zona roja is the first novel that Argueta wrote and published while in exile and away from the violence and repression of El Salvador. It is also a novel that was published after Castillo and Dalton, Argueta's comrades and two critical figures of his generation, were murdered. In an interview conducted by Eduardo Muslip in

Antigua, Guatemala in April of 2007, and published on the virtual journal *Istmo*, Argueta recognizes that Roque Dalton inspired him to finish writing this novel. He admits to having begun writing *Caperucita* in Costa Rica and also abandoning the novel until the death of Dalton; a death that served as a wakeup call to Argueta to finish what he started. He says that he had thought of abandoning literature as a whole, “estaba exiliado, no tenía trabajo, tenía una familia, la literatura no me había ayudado... Y cuando recibí la noticia de Roque Dalton me dije no es posible, está muerto Roque y yo retirándome, una traición a mi hermano, a mi amigo, y entonces la escribí.” Dalton’s death provided Argueta with the necessary impetus to finish what is now one of his most read novels within El Salvador. *Caperucita en la zona roja* won the 1977 Casa de las Américas Award in La Havana, Cuba in the Latin American novel category. The novel was published in 1978, two years before the Civil War was officially declared in El Salvador in 1980, an environment that differed greatly from that of the initial phases of the Committed Generation. By this time, the repression and violence enacted by the government forces was overt, the university had been taken over, the founding members of the Committed Generation had been persecuted and some assassinated, and the revolutionary forces had also suffered from internal conflicts as discussed in Chapter I. There was no longer a safe haven within El Salvador from which to produce resistance literature and denounce the actions of the government and military forces. *Caperucita en la zona roja* marks the culmination of an era and is an indication of a shift from literatures of denunciation and commitment to the struggle, to literatures of consciousness, introspection, and reflection.

This novel has been reprinted numerous times and has even been edited and revised by the author in an effort to clarify certain aspects that were not clear to its reading public in El Salvador. In 1996, by the time *Caperucita en la zona roja* already had eight print editions, Argueta revised and edited the novel. *Caperucita* was first translated into English as *Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District* in 1998 by Edward Waters Hood based on the 1996 revised edition in Spanish.

The major theme of the novel is violence; there are two different and specific periods of violence around which the novel is centered. The violence of 1932 is included as a reference point within the novel, often conjured as the point of departure for the contemporary violence. The peasant massacre of 1932 is evoked with the death of Alfonso's father, a death that is oversimplified in the public's eye as something that his father deserved for being a thief. "Lo mataron por ladrón. Le pegaron el tiro por detrás...Murieron más de cien personas sólo ese día. Ladrones dijeron, pero todos habían sido honrados hasta que se les ocurrió asaltar las casas" (33). The situation was more complex than a simple robbery; the peasants were starving as the rich had taken the staple crop "maíz" from them. This period of violence is also referenced with another one of the characters, Pichón, whose parents were hung during the violence of 1932. However, *Caperucita* primarily centers on a different violence, the new violence that begins in the sixties with the influence of the Cuban revolution and the rise of the popular struggle, student protests and manifestations, and the ambiance of a country in the late seventies on the eve of a civil war. It is a time when the population faces a violence that is palpable with every breath "Por las cunetas comenzaron a correr hilos de sangre, luego se hicieron más gruesos, un ovillo rojo desmadejándose, huyendo de algo" (128). This new and

tangible violence confronts the population with the decision of joining the military or the revolutionary forces, as being a bystander was a luxury that not many could afford.

3.2 Narrating the Violence

Argueta's text falls within the Central American narrative transition that occurred in the 1970s that also coincided with the Latin American Boom. According to Arias, in the realism of the previous literature the works "determine their readers' response by the use – and – abuse of an authoritarian discourse; that is, by the use of a language that employs conventional and static symbols in order to convince, to indoctrinate" ("Literary Production" 20). Argueta's text is part of the transition towards a new narrative that as Arias points out, "involved the substitution of that authoritarian discourse by an internally persuasive one." Whereas in the previous literature content was more important than style, the new narrative employs a variety of techniques and styles. The technical resources that the author employs are part of a new fiction that requires the active participation of the reader and "does not offer predetermined explanations to help them. It is the readers who must produce the meaning of the text" (20). According to Arias, the text provides the reader with information and presents an array of possible scenarios and alternatives to the reader who is then free to think and choose. When comparing *Caperucita* to *El valle de las hamacas* it is evident that a change has occurred, the author not only presents the urgent situations but now offers a space for reflection and alternatives.

There is consensus among critics that Argueta's novel combines testimonies, juxtaposes episodes with different time frames and different points of view, has a fragmented and deconstructed plot, and destroys all concepts of linear time as a way of

echoing the chaos of El Salvador. Waters Hood says that it mirrors “the chaos and uncertainty of the physical and psychological space in which the novel’s characters operate” (“Caperucita” 107), while Conrad says that it “reflects the chaos of El Salvador in the late twentieth century, torn apart by military oppression, political instability, economic crisis, and popular revolt. Moreover, events unfold in a cacophony of voices, all intensifying the horrors and anxieties of the time” (182). Although the novel is organized into sections and divided into chapters, there is obvious fragmentation in time and narration. The narrator is primarily the protagonist Al, however, other characters such as Hormiga often narrate, and the reader is not notified of the change, instead, the reader perceives it from subtle deviations such as the use of masculine or feminine adjectives. There are no clear transitions from section to section or from time to time, the novel is a collage. In addition, the characters in the novel take on different identities at different times, for example Hormiga is also Caperucita.

Eduardo Muslip in his essay “Caperucita en la zona roja, de Manlio Argueta: La propiedad de la literatura” focuses on the multiple resources that Argueta draws on, including language, intertextuality, and the elements of children’s stories. Muslip states that the reality that Argueta was interested in portraying was that of the popular sectors of El Salvador and their exploitation on behalf of the oligarchy and the military. Part of his technique for denouncing the situation in El Salvador is his use of the fairy tale, beginning with the title of this novel. The use of the fairy tale and the appropriation of techniques from children’s literature are resources used by Argueta to soften or disguise the critique and denunciation that he includes in the novel, a type of *captatio benevolentiae* or an allegorical technique to show good versus evil in Salvadoran society.

Conrad claims that Argueta uses the classic fairy tale in order to make this novel seem familiar to its audience. He by no means writes in a familiar fairy tale manner in *Caperucita* but rather conjures certain characters and themes within the Salvadoran context. Conrad says that Argueta radicalizes the traditional fairy tale as an act of resistance “reworking and subverting the tale and thereby offering alternate systems of meaning which require active engagement on the part of the reader” (182). The reader is part of the construction of the novel, an idea that echoes that of Barbara Harlow in *Resistance Literature* when she says that “Essential then to the narratives of resistance is the demand they make on the reader in their historical referencing and the burden of historical knowledge such referencing enjoins” (80). Readers are forced to participate actively and are confronted with the responsibility of their reading and knowledge.

Manlio Argueta turns everyday oral vernacular into literature. In an interview with Zulma Nelly Martinez, he emphasized how important it is to not be ashamed of one’s own language, local language; the language of the people is a form of rebellion, a rupture with what is established. It is a necessity for Argueta to rescue the reality of his country (48-9). Writing and incorporating the vernacular language is a way of promoting the wealth of El Salvador and reaffirming its own local values and existence. Argueta uses words in varying and unique ways; he incorporates an array of literary devices into *Caperucita*. His most common technique is dysphemism “‘Abajo la dictadura’. ‘Gobierno pura mierda’. ‘No hagan olas cerotes, hagan la revolución’. ...Hijos suyos nos pudiéramos llamar, pero ellos nos llaman hijos de puta, váyanse a la mierda, hijos sin patria...” (83). His characters both male and female express themselves with expletive colloquial language, favoring the popular *puta*, *cerote*, and *mierda*. These expletives

serve multiple functions, they make the discourse familiar to a Salvadoran or Central American reader, they portray the use of everyday Salvadoran vernacular to an outside reader, and they denounce the oppressive sectors of society with disdain. The language he uses is strong yet playful. For example, when a military captain is persuading one of the characters to continue spying and reporting on his brother Manuel and his friends, “- Puta – grita alguien- ya te hiciste caca – me reclaman porque permanezco cavilando bastante tiempo en el W.C. de cerdos. – Es que tengo mal diorín” (189). In this previous example, Argueta not only utilizes profanity but also uses dysphemistic epithet, referring to the W.C. of “pigs”, expressing his disdain towards the oppressive military factions of Salvadoran society by equating them with swine. He also incorporates techniques of oral discourse when he writes “diorín” instead of “de orín”. Words are written how they sound and he joins words. Instead of reading a description of what can be heard in the scene, the reader actively reenacts the sounds. “La abuela abrió la puerta y el lobo sacó la cuarenticinco vaciándole todo el cargador, ta-ta-ta-ta-ta” (55). Argueta tends to employ onomatopoeia when writing scenes of violence with a weapon, “Chas-chas, le hacían los dientes de los hombre. Guau-guau, los perros enanos a lo lejos... A estos dos cabrones amárrenlos bien y chas-chas, culatazo contra el Pichón, chas-chas culatazo a Feliciano” (67). Reading the sounds moves the action along, reenacting the harsh sounds such as “ta-ta” and “chas-chas” the reader hears, feels, and to a certain extent partakes in the violence of the events. This implicates the reader; the reader is also responsible.

Another wordplay technique that Argueta employs in his text is rhyme. The main characters Horm and Al speak to each other in rhymes, as can be discerned in the following lines, “Si supieras todo lo que pasa. ¿Y qué es lo que pasa, gasa? [...]

Lloramos que damos pena por amor a Magdalena” (17). The author makes their dialogue lighthearted amidst horrific circumstances. In another instance Horm is lonely and desperate, and at the end of her monologue the author incorporates a popular and playful tongue twister full of alliteration into her text, “Invento cosas para no sentirme triste como los tres tristes tigres que comieron trigo en un trigal” (101). He also modifies adages by utilizing yet another technique, that of malapropism, “‘Cuando la vida hermosa es un martillo lo mejor es marcharse para siempre,’ parodiando de memoria una frase que dice ‘martirio’, pero vale verga” (11). He consciously replaces “martirio” with “martillo”, and it results in a humorous expression. Argueta incorporates these resources that are reminiscent of oral cultures into his written text. Orality was a key tool in disseminating information and literature in Central America where illiteracy pervaded many sectors of society. His writing is a reflection of the techniques of wit, humor, and playfulness that the people used in order to withstand the violent and oppressive circumstances.

Argueta also includes and appropriates himself of words in English that are making their way into Salvadoran culture due to the United States intervention in the country. He writes them as they sound in Spanish. For lack of a better categorization, it is the onomatopoeic writing of English in Spanish, for example words such as “yip” (107), and names like “jon guayne” (126) appear in the novel. The author makes use of this technique particularly when writing about the accessories or tools used in the violence, “Máscaras de marcianos, gases para hacer llorar y vomitar y cagar, enemigos nuestros dánoslos hoy y perdona nuetros [sic] pesados fardos; máscaras escandalosas que los hace sentirse importantes, yentlemen; máscaras meid in di yunai estei. Culios culeros” (115). A similar example is included when the narrator is reflecting on his imprisonment in

“Guatemala de la eterna primavera y van pasando los cadáveres envueltos en papel celofán o bolsas de polietileno, *meid in usa*” (161). There is a direct critique and denunciation of the involvement, assistance, and role that the United States played in the violence in El Salvador and Guatemala during this time and it is expressed in the distortion of the English language.

3.3 Exile and Cross-Border Unity

As previously discussed, exile was a reality for members of the Committed Generation and something that Manlio Argueta experienced multiple times throughout his lifetime; exile is also a theme that is represented within the text. Throughout *Caperucita*, Al, the protagonist, has uncountable disappearances and exiles, making this topic palpable for the reader. “Chistoso – dice el nica -, un chocho y un guanaco en una cárcel que no es la de ellos... Imaginate, un salvadoreño y un nicaragüense en una cárcel guatemalteca, algo así como la integración regional de tres divinas personas y un sólo Dios verdadero” (162). Al reflects on his time in a prison cell in Guatemala City, where it was unbearably cold and dark and his cellmate was a man from Nicaragua. This instance not only exemplifies exile as a theme but also the complicity of the repressive governments of Central American countries and the cross-border unity that existed. Two individuals from two different Central American countries find themselves within a prison in a country that neither of them is from.

The interactions and connections among writers of this generation are represented in the intertextuality of *Caperucita*. References to three intellectuals, Roque Dalton, Otto René Castillo, and Pablo Neruda are clearly incorporated into the novel. Aside from the prison in Guatemala, there are also products from Guatemala and people from Guatemala

living in El Salvador. There is an episode where one of the characters is asked to spy on and inform against the “enemigos del gobierno” and one of the ones they are after “Tiene uno setenticinco de estatura, acento guatemalteco, pelo castaño, estudia en la Universidad” (58). This is a reference to Otto René Castillo, the Guatemalan poet who lived and studied in El Salvador and was a part of the Committed Generation. In addition to Castillo, Argueta also incorporates references to Pablo Neruda with his word play techniques, “Qué diera yo porque tú también me dijeras sinceramente todas estas cosas que yo te digo, es decir, todo lo que callas cuando estás como ausente y estás como elefante, despidiéndote para hacerme sufrir” (26). The Chilean revolutionary poet influenced the writers of the Committed Generation and Argueta alludes to his work with his famous poem and line “me gustas cuando callas porque estás como ausente” (Neruda 37).

Allusions to Roque Dalton and his work are the most common, “Chillando y con grandes lagrimotas y puteadas al escoger. Lo que me has hecho no tiene nombre. Y yo, pobrecito poeta” (12). Argueta references Dalton’s novel *Pobrecito poeta que era yo*, and distorts the words, a procedure that is not an isolated happening; the new “Daltonian” phrase “y yo, pobrecito poeta” appears later on in the novel and specifically in discussions of the revolution. Argueta also explicitly mentions Dalton as a poet and revolutionary, “‘Deberían dar premios de resistencia por ser salvadoreño’, dice recordando al poeta Roque Dalton” (100). Dalton not only appears in the discourse of the characters but is also quoted directly: below the title to section IV “Zona Roja”, Argueta writes, “‘Los muertos están cada día más indóciles’ (Roque Dalton)” (107). Cooperation

and friendships among writers as well as collaboration among legal institutions in Central America were prevalent during this time and are represented within the novel.

3.4 Position and Role of the Writer

Caperucita questions the role of the intellectual in the revolution and also explores the problematic of access to literature. “Interviene Al: me extraña que un proletario como vos sepa esos poemas de memoria. ¿Por qué? Le pregunto lindamente. Porque en este país de mierda creía que sólo los estudiantes conocíamos a estos poetas” (73). This scene depicts the preoccupation of the Committed Generation in terms of literature being accessible only to a select and elite few within the country. Argueta shows that because of the labor of the Committed Generation this was not exclusively the case, as “el panificador” has access and knowledge of the literature of the time because of the literary supplement published in the “*Diario Latino*, ahí donde publican ustedes” (74). The circumstances are not ideal as they are still in “un país de mierda”, but the work they are doing as a generation is fructiferous as some of the working class has access to the literature.

When it comes to the position of the writer, Argueta explores the topic of national authors being read within El Salvador. Al is reading the *Obras Escogidas* de Salarrué with Caperucita by his side “...poné atención para que le tomes la gracia a los cuentos que están escritos en idioma salvadoreño” (194). The importance of having and appreciating national writers and national language variety is emphasized. Another moment when national writing or the lack thereof is mentioned is when “Pichón en la cama, lee la edición Farabundo. ‘¿Por qué este Farabundo nunca escribió nada?’, dice en voz alta. ‘Es un misterio que se repite con los salvadoreños’, le respondo” (48). In this

previous example, the lack of national literature is critiqued and Argueta attests to the lack of and need for national writers. *Caperucita* as a novel is responding to these voids, as it is a novel written by a national author that uses national language variety.

The role of the writer differs slightly in *Caperucita* from that in *El valle de las hamacas*. The author divides the writer-fighter between the two of the main characters, Alfonso and Manuel, who are both revolutionaries but in different aspects. Alfonso, one of our narrative voices and protagonist is “El poeta, el que tiene por misión recordar a sus compañeros a través de la propia acción, que dará sentido a la palabra” (Montoya 172). Al is the intellectual and the writer who is committed with his actions but his actions are not necessarily committed to an armed fight. He writes and also runs a clandestine printing press along with a community of young writers who conform a family of sorts. Al is juxtaposed with Manuel, who is the militant and guerilla leader, the gutsy fighter, ready to take up arms. Al eventually does join Manuel in the revolutionary fight once the government censure, repression, and violence become unbearable.

Publishing while in exile allowed the author to incorporate and explore themes more explicitly in his novel, not fearing the immediate repercussions of the violence within El Salvador. Exile not only allowed the space to be more unguarded, but it also allowed the time and distance needed to reflect on the situation from outside and develop new perspectives about the conflicts and new courses of action to denounce and react to the violence and injustice. Through his literature and his personal life Argueta demonstrates a commitment to protesting the injustices and violence with the word, he illustrates and represents the violence within his texts but does not explicitly call for

action in the armed sense. His view on the revolution and call to the people are different from that of his Committed Generation comrades.

There are instances in *Caperucita* where the characters overtly express their differing opinions about how to approach the revolution, “Ustedes creen que para ser revolucionarios hay que ser analfabetas” (47). The revolutionary in Argueta’s view should be educated, a problematic that is echoed throughout the novel and best exemplified in the dichotomy of the characters Alfonso and Manuel. In the following instance Al reflects on his conversation with Manuel,

Doce años después, el panorama ha cambiado, no somos ocho, ni diez los que estamos enfrentando el cataclismo. Es necesario que todos activen. Ese es el problema. Y el mío en particular. Manuel sostiene que la revolución debe hacerse con los cojones, yo digo que debe ponerse un poco –para ser modestos, una migaja– de cerebro, entrar en onda. (114)

Al, the poet and thinker, recognizes that times have changed, therefore, so should the measures taken to confront the violence. It is a time to strategize, think, and reflect on the current circumstances and the best solutions and outcomes.

Todo pueblo es una mierda si no tiene un fusil en la mano –dice Manuel; a quien se le nota su rostro cansado de tanta jefatura y heroicidad, tantos compañeros y discípulos muertos o desaparecidos. Los ojos apagados. Le refuto haciendo ver que tiene concepciones ridículas, que se está quedando en los años sesenta y cinco o en las cavernas. ¡Pensá cabrón! –le digo–, el fusil no lo es todo. Que se desatara el cerebro. ¡Pensá cerote! En palabras un poco más poéticas, por supuesto... es demasiado tarde para rebelarse o demasiado temprano. Su única defensa: que sigo siendo un poeta mierdero. Me río en su cara. Pobre Manuel. Pobrecito yo, poeta. (117)

Manuel represents the revolutionary fighter who witnessed, experienced, and exercised firsthand the violence used by the oppressive forces and against the oppressive forces. Through his character, Argueta makes it a point to illustrate that undoubtedly the violence has not ceased and the people continue living in constant anguish. He uses Alfonso and

Manuel to present the balance that is needed between thought and force in the revolution and his bias for the former is evident.

To think is crucial and vital, yet it is also a dangerous and condemned act within the violent society of the time.

Me pongo a pensar tonteras. Pensar es un acto fisiológico, sólo que no hay residuales, es encontrarse en esta ventana viendo pasar el entierro de los estudiantes muertos por la policía. Y me doy cuenta que es terrible (no el entierro) pensar.

Requisitos para convivir en el país:

1°. No pensar

2°. Ni pensar.

3°. Pensar nada. (160-1)

The circumstances are oppressive and repressive, far from ideal, yet Argueta incites the people to think, because thinking is what is truly revolutionary in this society. The people must realize that the violence that is the terrible norm, should be replaced with thought, which is the exception. The narrator of the previous passage goes on to question what “they” would like “us” to do with that magical box that we carry in our heads and how nice it would be if “we” could sit on it, “¿no les parece?” People’s thoughts and opinions are shunned and chastised by the government and their repressive and censoring forces in these societies; the only way to live within the country is to be a silent fool with your brain in your rear and not be a nuisance to those in power. The author’s emphasis on and preoccupation with thought is a trait of his literature that becomes more explicit in this novel. “Los muertos queridos, sumarse a ellos... No puede existir poesía válida si antes no recuerdo a mis hermanos, imitarlos, no con la muerte, sino con las acciones. Salir vivo para continuar hasta que nos alcancen o hasta que lleguen los años” (117). There is a strong commitment to remembering the fallen comrades of the Committed Generation and more importantly to live enacting those commitments. Their actions should be

imitated but not their specific paths, as the goal is to live enacting the commitment for as long as possible.

3.5 Violence and *Miedo*

Violence in *Caperucita* is not just a latent theme or backdrop, it is everywhere, and it has permeated every aspect of the characters' daily lives. The government has imposed a state of fear and it uses the military and violence as ways to exercise its control over the people. This is illustrated in an interaction between a soldier and his general that includes the following passage, "...para decretar ley marcial... Decretar ley marcial... Decretar ley marcial... cambio. Torre. Está bien, hay que hacerlo, decretar toque de queda a las ocho de la noche, no puede andar nadie en la calle después de esa hora, disparen a matar" (176). The oppression is palpable and violence and fear are a part of the characters' everyday lives.

Argueta writes undisguised episodes of violence and goes beyond simply exposing and denouncing the horrific acts to depicting how this violence results in a constant and terrible state of fear. Fear is part of the consequences of violence and Argueta's focus and inclusion of fear in this novel illustrates his shift in the representation of violence. The author exemplifies the transition from a physical violence to the psychological effects of that violence. As Salvador Montoya points out in his review of the novel, the atrocious historical and political events are not seen as a framework of this novel but rather as an experience, the experiences of the protagonist Al (171). It is not the same type of violence portrayed in *El valle de las hamacas* with cries of anguish and desperation, but rather, an internalization of the violence that has occurred over time and its effects on every day existences and interactions of the characters. Fear

impregnates the novel as is evidenced by numerous inclusions of the word “miedo”, “Y con el miedo que me da ...” (112). “también sentí miedo, ahora sí, miedo de verdad” (123). “Y me va entrando un gran miedo” (137). “...y siento miedo” (165). “Y el miedo” (197). The characters both male and female are afraid, they feel fear in almost every circumstance, they are even afraid of the dark. This “miedo” is predominant in the second half of the novel after we have been exposed to the dangers of living in their environment, the censure that exists, and the constant violence that ensues. It is a fear that prevails throughout the novel, a fear that seems impregnated in the lives of every single person. In “Violence and Fear in Latin America”, the introduction to *Societies of Fear: The Legacy of Civil War, Violence and Terror in Latin America*, Kruijt and Koonings define the term:

Fear is the institutional, cultural and psychological repercussion of violence. Fear is a response to the institutional destabilization, social exclusion, individual ambiguity and uncertainty. In Latin America, a latent though sometimes open ‘culture of fear’ has obtained institutional characteristics, induced by systematic yet at the same time arbitrary violence, often organized from above by the state apparatus or by central authorities and reproduced within the *fuerzas del orden*. (15)

The “fuerzas del orden,” the government and military, are depicted in *Caperucita* as institutions that cause instability, oppress, and attempt to control the lives and liberties of the people, and that ultimately generate violence. They are responsible for the censure that has taken over the media outlets and they are responsible for the death, disappearance, and torture of university students and other civilians.

In the section of the novel titled “Otra vez la zona roja”, a civilian is asked who they think is in charge in the country, to which he or she responds that it is “la imposición.” The civilian then describes “la imposición” as “estos que imponen, digamos

los gobernantes, digamos ellos que usan metralletas y por ese medio ya uno no puede decir lo que siente, ¿verdad?” (179). Fear is a tactic used in order to control the people. The people are silenced with violence, with soldiers who kill, and oppressive tactics that have also silenced the sectors of society that are meant to represent the people such as the media outlets. There is complicity in the media that censures the public and the writers, “Todo esto lo hemos visto...en una interminable cadena de abusos e injusticias, con la ... complicitad de una prensa lastimosamente atada ante la amenaza económica, y la presión impuesta por una oficina que se ha burlado y jugado con la ética periodística” (163). The complicity is obvious and the people know and are frustrated by their reality in this oppressive atmosphere. This situation is further illustrated in a conversation between Feliciano and Manuel about an article that Feliciano wrote for their publication, “Creo que esto no pasará la censura. Casi se te ha salido la caja de lustre Feliciano, estás ofendiendo a la clase política, a la élite de nuestra nacionalidad comemierda...Si el tribunal de inquisición, digo consejo de redacción, me lo bota...” (71). The people are silenced with violence and fear and the intellectuals take on the risks of being the voice of the silenced even though they also face censure. Writers, intellectuals, and students are silenced and disappeared so that they do not cause a problem for the “fuerzas del orden”.

“Es la nueva táctica, hacer que desaparezcan” (122). The possibility that they will be murdered, disappeared or incarcerated is very real for the characters of *Caperucita*. The characters know that something terrible is bound to happen and although this reality is frightening it is not surprising; they are expecting and foreseeing that an atrocious act will occur in their lives. Violence has become a part of their lives to the extent that it has been normalized. Kruijt and Koonings recognize that this state of “routinization, ...

allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a façade of normality...Ambiguity becomes institutionalized. The people live under constant surveillance...and the villages have been transformed into a kind of micro-cosmos of fear” (19). The characters are accustomed to the violence that occurs, “Sí, porque ya uno se acostumbró a que maten estudiantes, pero ahora nunca me imaginé que iban a ser tantos muertos y heridos” (130). The people are so accustomed to terrible happenings that they begin to believe that is the normal way of life and nothing causes astonishment unless it is something so extreme that it breaks with the routinization for that moment. This routinization of violence within the text exemplifies the role that literature has in breaking with this normalcy, the reader has to be an active part of not only reading but he or she also has to piece together the events, realize the tragedy and injustice, and reflect on possible better outcomes.

3.6 Women. Mothers.

In the previous literature of the Committed Generation, the revolutionary struggle was presented with an almost exclusive masculine façade. Women were not predominant characters if they were included in the works at all. Argueta’s work attempts to open up the panorama of the revolution with the inclusion and significance of women in *Caperucita en la zona roja*. Linda Craft points out that, “Women began to assume more visible, more responsible roles in the consciousness-raising and liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s” (111). Times are changing and Argueta has to keep up with the changing panorama in which it is nearly impossible to deny the increasing role of women. It is difficult to decipher whether the changing times lead to his inclusion of women in the text or whether he takes advantage of the new climate to reflect his attitude and views. In *Caperucita*, there are female characters that express their thoughts,

opinions, and concerns. There are women who actively participate in the intellectual and revolutionary movements. One of the main characters is a woman, Caperucita, who is also Horn. Alongside her there are other female voices present in the novel. A secondary theme of the novel is the reflection about the role of women in society, specifically mothers. The tension between the traditional patriarchal discourse and the author's attempt to break away from it are evidenced in the text as Argueta showcases women's virtues and abilities, but still succumbs to the patriarchal view of women as mothers or *putas* in society.

The novel depicts how women and mothers in El Salvador are the foundation of the family because a woman withstands birth, childrearing, and the responsibility of the child. She also does the most arduous jobs and yet lives in the saddest conditions; even within her own class she is still a subordinate who is exploited. Manlio Argueta includes a passage structured as a prayer dedicated to the multifaceted mother in all of her diverse roles. He opens with "Mamá querida. Oración por todos. Mamá llena eres de gracia. Vendedora en los mercados. Mamá comprando botellas de puerta en puerta. Mamá puta. Mamá que corre por las calles con los policías detrás. Mamá ¿Cómo estás?" (65). He continues with the same structure referring to the difficult jobs mothers do, the functions that mothers serve, and the various responsibilities that they hold. Argueta celebrates mothers as part of every sector of society and how they perform any job under the grimmest and most inhumane conditions in order to secure the wellbeing of their family. However, in his celebration of women he frames them according to the interpretations of patriarchal discourses of women as the self-sacrificing mother or prostitute.

Mamá suplicadora para que suelten a mi hijo, él no ha hecho nada, cálese vieja puta. Mamá voy a regresar tarde. Mamá en la morgue. Mamá mía. Mamá

buscando entre los muertos. Mamá Virgen María a secas. Mamá diciendo es el cuerpo el que me tiembla no el espíritu. Mamá devuelvan el cadáver de mi hijo. Mamá hombre, abuela, abuelo, mamá mamá. Tu madre. Buenos días universo entero. (66)

The role of a mother is malleable and transposed within society; a mother can be equated with the purest expression of love and devotion like a virgin or the greatest insult that you impart on someone with a simple “tu madre”. A mother is presented as someone who is strong, resilient, unyielding and unbreakable, yet a mother is the greatest victim of the violence within the country and is treated atrociously by her society and community members just as the homeland is. She is disrespected and disregarded even though she is the glue that keeps families and society from completely falling apart.

Although in certain representations of women the author portrays them according to the dominant discourse, women are not depicted as meek or apathetic beings. The following excerpt is from a conversation between Caperucita and her mother before she heads out to visit her grandmother, “Y le dijo la mamá: tenga cuidado con el lobo que si se aparece en el bosque se la come; pero caperucita que era desobediente, respondió: si me sale el lobo me lo como yo” (55). Caperucita is a strong and courageous young lady who even the big bad wolf does not intimidate. Although she is presented with these traits, the author still equates these strong traits in a woman with being “disobedient”. As Caperucita is on her way to visit her grandmother, she encounters the Wolf disguised as a cop

...con su cuarenticinco en la mano y que si no le daba la cesta se la iba a comer a balazos. Ella le responde: a mí no me andés con amenazas de Juan Charrasqueado, si querés hacé lo que considerarás correcto. El lobo responde que lo correcto era disparar, pero que no quería gastar pólvora en zope y mucho menos en una bichita culo cagado. Entonces le dijo Caperucita: que comiera mierda con la mano izquierda para que no se te pierda, cuilio hijuelcaite. (55)

Argueta's narrative decentering is evidenced in the above passage as he switches from the third person to the second person without any transition. Caperucita is a woman who speaks out against the injustice and oppression of the legal institutions with the same vernacular that men utilize. She does not display fear even when faced with an armed degenerate who could harm her. She confronts violence with words and is able to walk away seemingly unharmed, although, later in the novel the cop murders her grandmother as retaliation for the previous incident. Caperucita's character serves a twofold purpose: through her Argueta exemplifies the ability of Caperucita to challenge social norms and women's strength, character, and importance, equating her discourse to that of any of his male characters; he also simultaneously exemplifies and criticizes women's inferior status within Salvadoran society, depicting how they are objects of harassment, persecution, and violence by the institutions that exist to protect and guarantee their wellbeing.

In a later section Horm writes a letter about the student demonstrations that resulted in an attack and massacre by the police. It is Horm, a female university student and leader, who narrates the violent events and the immense fear that she and those around her experienced.

Supongo que te diste cuenta de la masacre del 30. Pensaba enviarte recortes... En una de esas fotos me verás con una pancarta. Voy a ser sincera, todos llevábamos temor ese día, pues en los diarios nos amenazaban con reprimir la manifestación...Al principio yo iba al frente con un compañero que se llamaba Carlos Fonseca. (121)

The police murder Carlos Fonseca along with many other student leaders who were marching ahead of the crowd. Argueta makes a reference to the Nicaraguan Carlos Fonseca (1936-1976), the founder and guerrilla leader of the Frente Sandinista de

Liberación Nacional (FSLN) who was murdered before the FSLN took power.

“Murieron quince estudiantes, entre ellos algunas mujeres” (122). Argueta highlights the fact that women were also victims of the repression but more importantly that they lost their lives as agents of change, women have agency. The author no longer includes female characters solely as the love interest of the male protagonist or as the victims of the violence as in *El valle de las hamacas* but as active protagonists. Horm embodies those women involved in the intellectual movements of the revolution. She actively protests and witnesses the violence enacted by the governmental institutions on the students and is able to escape physically unscathed because “una señora que tiene una pupusería me jaló y me metió cerca del fogón, junto con otras dos cipotas” (122). A complete stranger risks her own safety in order to save Horm. Although the woman does not have many resources, she uses what she has in order to protect her and the other two women which exemplifies female solidarity and the importance of women in Salvadoran society.

3.7 Conclusion

Caperucita en la zona roja marks a turning point in Manlio Argueta’s literature. The novel presents the underlying themes of exile, preoccupation with the position and role of the writer and women, and the representation of violence and its psychological effects. There is a shift from the vivid representations of physical violence to the representation of the psychic and internal effects of the violence. *Caperucita* goes beyond the immediate denunciation and vivid representations of violence of *El valle de las hamacas* and focuses on the message, on thought, and reflection. Argueta utilizes an array of literary resources of the new narrative and his unique style to expose the violent

and chaotic reality of El Salvador while engaging the reader in an active process of realization and reflection. As Elizam Escobar points out in his essay “Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom”, “What is important is not the didactic pretension that we possess the solutions, but the idiosyncratic ways in which works of art can bring out the real aspects of the human condition in particular and specific contexts or experiences” (249). Argueta’s purpose is to evidence the real and daily struggles of a couple, whose relationship we might not be interested in, if it were not for the violent and oppressive conditions in which they live that result in different and extreme experiences. Art, specifically literature in this case, provides the possibility for a real exchange. *Caperucita en la zona roja* exposes the reading public to the inner thoughts and interactions of characters living in fear and violence. As Nicole Caso argues, “Literature, in its many forms, becomes a potential agent for change, as the imaginary realms it stirs up and the permanence of its written words resist the heavy burden of official accounts built upon ever present fear or homogenizing complacency” (15). The reader is confronted with the private realities of the violence beyond the statistics and death counts and is able to enter the intimate spaces of male and female characters living in these horrific conditions. The reader, whether willingly or not, partakes in the violence. This participation and confrontation with the violent reality disrupts its normalcy and leads to the epiphany that the current state of affairs should not and cannot continue being the norm.

CHAPTER 4

“TRAGEDIA DE LA PAZ”

This chapter will focus on the two novels that Manlio Argueta published in El Salvador after almost twenty-one years (1972-1993) of exile in Costa Rica. Argueta's work has evolved with the times in an effort to represent the realities of El Salvador. He has been continually involved and dedicated to continue working towards his original goals in a very different present and place of production. I will trace relevant themes in his two novels *Milagro de La Paz* (1994) and *Siglo de O(g)ro* (1997).

His narrative representation of violence is drastically different in his two most recent novels from that of *Caperucita en la zona roja*. His focus shifts away from the onomatopoeic writing of the violence to violence now being in the background of the story. Violence does not take center stage, yet it is an omnipresent force that influences and, at times, controls the quotidian routines of every single character. In these two more recent novels, denunciation and the immediacy of violence are no longer the center of the narration. The focus is on how violence has affected and continues to affect the daily lives of people. The consequences of the violence and repression are represented in the daily activities of the characters, in their thought process, and in their memories. I study three central topics in Argueta's novels, his approach to the violence and current state of fear, his discussion of the importance of memory, and his focus on the marginalized members of society. He shifts away from the violence that took place in the city of San Salvador, where the intellectual dissident movements originated, to write about the rural

areas inhabited by destitute women and children where most of the violence by the government was enacted.

Argueta's writing follows the recent Central American narrative trends, specifically that of the "nueva novela histórica". Kohut and Mackenbach explain that the new historical novel that has arisen in Central America focuses on reformulating the genre and constructing new definitions of national identity (182). In addition to seeking a rereading of history and providing multiple perspectives it emphasizes "la predominancia de la ficción sobre la historia y la representación mimética" (182). In both of the novels analyzed here, fiction dominates the narrative, focusing on the details of the characters' lives, emotions, and experiences instead of the mimetic representation of the historical time period in which they occur.

Within the novels, it is evident how Argueta has changed his approach to representing the violence and extreme situations in El Salvador. His narration is now more focused on the intimate spaces of his main characters in contrast with the public spheres of society. The city has been replaced by the rural areas of El Salvador and the center of his novels is a matriarchy. The author has shifted away from the patriarchy of his previous novels and writes with women and children as protagonists and narrators. The first novel, *Milagro de la Paz*, revolves around the voices of a family of women in which a small boy is growing up in silence. *Siglo de O(g)ro* is about a small boy who is raised by women and who narrates the story. Argueta's writing is transitioning as El Salvador is also undergoing a transition phase with peace negotiations, the signing of the peace accords (1992), and the consequences of all that ensued. Argueta focuses on the marginalized of the marginalized, not just women and children, but poor women and

children in the rural and most poverty-stricken parts of the country. Monique Sarfati-Arnaud in “Estrategias paratextuales y determinaciones extratextuales en ‘Milagro de la Paz’ de Manlio Argueta,” states that the location where the novel takes place had a bad reputation, “en la zona periférica de la ciudad de San Miguel: allí vivía la gente más pobre de la ciudad y tenía fama de ser muy peligrosa, particularmente de noche en la calle de Las Angustias” (113-14). Sarfati-Arnaud also situates the novel’s action during the years of 1987 to 1989 up until the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, “cuando todavía el país sufre los estragos de la Guerra” (114).

The Civil War in El Salvador officially came to an end with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 after twelve years of strife. The Peace Accords were to bring about a process of “purification” of the armed forces, which included an evaluation of the officers’ history and their ability to function in the new environment; as well as a reduction of the armed forces in El Salvador. The Truth Commission for El Salvador was established by the United Nations from July 1992 to March 15, 1993 in an effort to end impunity and investigate and report human rights abuses. Manlio Argueta moved back to El Salvador in 1993 and published his novel *Milagro de la Paz* in 1994. This is his first novel published since his return to his native country and the first novel published in a “peaceful” El Salvador.

4.1 *Milagro de La Paz*

The novel focuses on the intimate spaces and thoughts of a family of women while simultaneously incorporating the changing circumstances of El Salvador during the transition from wartime to peacetime as a backdrop and axis of movement for the story. The novel is composed of many short unnumbered and untitled sections where the first

letter of the first word is inside of a box and in a different font. In this novel, the author incorporates various narrative techniques such as temporal and spatial shifts and jumps, multiple perspectives, the inclusion of small dialogues, direct speech, and inner thoughts. The family initially consists of Latina (the mother), her two daughters (Magdalena and Crista), and their dog Plutón. Forced migration due to the underlying violence is evidenced in the novel as the family of women was forced to migrate from Usulután to Milagro de la Paz in the *barrio* of Las Angustias. It is a small village in the Department of San Miguel that is located in close proximity to the Chaparrastique volcano. The reason for their migration is never discussed in detail but it is due to a terrible tragedy and the reader can draw the conclusion that Latina's parents and possibly the father of her daughters were murdered. From the start of the novel, it is clear that violence will be in the background and the majority of the narrative focuses on the daily chores, lives, memory, and struggle of these women to survive. The family sews clothes and sells them on the streets to make just enough money to eat and live with the most basic necessities.

4.1.1 Fear and the Backdrop of Violence

Milagro de la Paz illustrates the consequences of years of violence in the countryside of El Salvador. Constant worry and paranoia, which fill the pages of the novel, are clearly evidenced in the insomnia that the protagonists suffer. Fear is presented as a direct result of the violence, oppression, and control described in Argueta's previous novels. The author now represents and focuses on the internalization and psychological effects of years of violence. The protagonists fear everything that is out of their ordinary routine; even books and learning are seen as a dangerous and pointless activity. Chele, a male family acquaintance, brings various books to Latina's house for her daughters to

read. The books are about diverse topics including anatomy and the human body; Latina disapproves of the books and hides them forbidding her daughters from reading them. Books and the information that they provide are seen as something secretive, sinful, hidden, dangerous, and unnecessary to their survival. Latina fears that her daughters will be drawn to the naked bodies in the books and become interested in men. She also shuns anything that does not provide a tangible and immediate solution to their present situation.

The women are always worried about something. They worry about the unknown beings that wander around their town, the men disguised as animals or animals disguised as men, the possible eruption of the nearby volcano, the dead bodies that are being deposited at the end of their street by the soldiers who are there to protect them, and about one of them dying. “Se interrumpe al pensar si los perros aúllan de miedo a la noche, a los hombres que trotan o a los seres desconocidos que en los últimos días han ido a tirar cadáveres en la Calle de las Angustias” (9). This excerpt from the novel reveals that there is violence in the world around the women. However, the violence is never discussed in depth, it is only mentioned with the terrifying figures and the dead bodies that appear. Throughout the novel, in addition to the frightening images that are evoked, there is an emphasis on sounds and the paranoia that these sounds provoke in the characters. Not only are the women living with the consequences and trauma of years of violence but also with the uncertain present as the Civil War nears its end and the military is consistently patrolling their streets.

Magdalena and her mother have a conversation in which Magdalena tells her mother about a feeling that she has. Magdalena feels that she will always be fearful of something.

“¿Madre, madre, por qué los hombres son valientes y nosotras no?” Me contesta: “Ellos se han inventado que son valientes, pero a la hora de la verdad son más cobardes que nosotras”. Le digo: “A veces me das más miedo vos con las cosas que se te ocurren, porque mi experiencia me enseña que nuestras vidas están en manos de ellos”. Me contesta: “Así parece, pero las ilusiones engañan, lo que ha estado en manos de ellos es la muerte”. (16)

From the fear expressed in this conversation, the reader is able to discern the continuity of violence in the lives of the main characters. Magdalena feels as if she has no agency and that their lives depend on the will and volition of men. These women have survived and continue to live in violent environments in which men are responsible for the oppression and death of other beings.

Although there is a constant preoccupation with death and it is constantly a topic of conversation, death is simultaneously ignored. Death is never concretely addressed or further delved into in the novel; we do not know the identities of the deceased or the reasons for their deaths. Our closest encounter with human violence is the murder of Magdalena. When Latina takes her daughter's dead body home she is “Llena de rabia y pena, había sentido el olor característico de la pólvora. Los hombres que se disfrazan de animales” (89). There is no investigation, no case, and no guilty party is found or accused of her death. Magdalena's murder along with that of the cadavers at the end of the street is also unresolved and speaks to the impunity that exists within the country.

It is in these excruciating periods of violence, in this era of impunity, paranoia and fear that the women of La Paz struggle to survive. The family lives, in their day-to-day, always fearing that something terrible will happen at every turn. Latina is conscious that

she has been subjected to fear and has, in the process, subordinated her family to the same condition, as well as oblivion. It is not until the end of the novel that Latina realizes that she will no longer lead her life in the same manner, “Latina, casi dormida, roncando, redondea su idea: ‘Pero eso sí, no vamos a ser esclavos del miedo’” (171).

4.1.2 Women, Children, and Intimate Spaces

In *Milagro de La Paz* the role and place of women differ greatly from the marginalized and secondary position of women in *El valle de las hamacas* and the “mothers” and rebellious women of *Caperucita en la zona roja*. Women in *Milagro de La Paz* are the center of the story, they are independent, they are the main characters and narrators who provide their perspectives on the conditions in El Salvador. The novel’s main characters belong to a matriarchy far removed from the patriarchy of *El valle de las hamacas*. The voice of children also becomes an important aspect of the narration and perspective. In *Milagro de La Paz* women and children are presented as a fundamental part of a community that has suffered the devastation of the war and violence, has to confront the present reality and has to devise ways of living with their baggage and the effects of the past. Their day-to-day experiences are their way of survival and our window into their internalization of violence. As readers, we witness their struggles to survive in the most mundane instances. Men are not the center or the protagonists in the narrative; there are only two important men in the novel and their role is secondary. The only other men who are mentioned are the doctor, the soldiers who patrol the town, or evil unknown beings. Men are talked about as evil and unnecessary, although, men are still needed to procreate and possibly to do some handy things around the house. Men are now relegated to the spaces that women held in Argueta’s earlier novels, that of

sexualized, domestic, and secondary beings. The author's narrative now represents an alternative imagery of the Salvadoran nation.

From the first page, *Milagro de La Paz* takes the reader into the most intimate of spaces of the women, their bedroom. The story begins in complete darkness with two women, mother (Latina) and daughter (Magdalena), sleeping in the same bed while the younger daughter (Crista) sleeps in the bed next to them. The reader is introduced to their nightly ritual of insomnia and fear in which they talk each other to sleep. We learn that what is most important are their thoughts and reactions to everyday occurrences. There is constant communication among the women about their situation and their preoccupation with death. Sleep is their most desired activity because it is their only moment of rest and peace, “y en el sueño no hay dolor” (9). It is the only time that the women feel like they are in a better and safer place. There is pain in being awake and living, and by reading about their nightly rituals we can discern the mechanisms that these women have developed in order to work through their fear and traumas. Speaking and communicating are a key tool for survival. By constantly speaking to each other about everything from the most minute detail of their day to their most intimate thoughts, the women break with the silence and censure that have been imposed on society.

Latina's daughters grow in an environment where there is a shared disdain for men inculcated by the mother who considers that all men are evil and nothing good can come from them. Men are not allowed in the house with the exception of Chele Pintura, the only man Latina trusts to occasionally do some handy work in her house. In spite of the countless warnings from her mother, Magdalena falls in love with their neighbor Nicolás. Their relationship starts off as an innocent young love full of curiosity that

eventually leads to her pregnancy. Even though both Magdalena's and Nicolás' families are poor, Nicolás' family is less poor and refuses to accept Magdalena who has nothing to offer. They shun her because she comes from a family of women who keep to themselves. Yajaira Padilla in *Changing Women, Changing Nation*, discusses the portrayal of women in Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran texts dating from 1980 to 2005. She explores how the representations of women in those narratives brings into focus women's actual roles and agency within the national and transnational contexts. Padilla argues that the civil conflict led to the weakening of the patriarchal structures and allowed women the possibility of integrating themselves in the public sphere from which they had traditionally been excluded (2). However, "depictions of women rendered in these narratives underscore the centrality and agency women have acquired in national and transnational enterprises while also showcasing or affirming their marginality" (6). This is clearly evidenced in the discrimination that Magdalena and her family face in *Milagro de la Paz* simply because they are independent women. Argueta shows that women are able to function on their own, yet they are still marginalized by other members of society. The narrative depicts how women are fully capable of governing themselves but in this society, they can only be sovereign in the private spaces.

Magdalena and Nicolás continue living in their separate homes and she continues selling clothing on the street until the day of her murder. Latina finds her daughter dead in the corridor of a house in a different town. She had gunpowder and gunshot wounds around her neck that are depicted as having the pattern of coyote marks. The wounds are recognizable and easily linked to the "men disguised as coyotes," which hints to a systemic way of killing in this society. Latina takes her daughter home in an oxcart,

holding her dead body with her dead grandson inside her. Ten days after this incident Nicolás hangs himself from Latina's well. Tragedy has befallen the family of women, and Argueta uses them as a microcosm to represent the tragedies that have affected the majority of Salvadorans in the countryside. The author makes a play on words with the title, "La cultura común es la tragedia. Milagro quiere decir tragedia, suena mejor: Tragedia de la Paz" (94). Through his representation of common tragedy, Argueta presents a Salvadoran national imagery in which tragedy is a part of everyone's identity. Latina believes that the best way to cope with the tragedy is to completely eliminate it from their memories.

There are many elements of magical realism in *Milagro de la Paz* that are used to explain or cope with the inexplicable or those events which the women simply cannot understand. For a moment we are led to believe that Magdalena's child survived in her womb even after her death and that he is Juan Bautista, the five-year-old child in the novel. However, we later discover that he is in fact Crista's son, the son she had with Chele Pintura. Crista had this child so that she and Latina would not be lonely. Crista never wanted anything to do with Chele other than to procreate. Juan Bautista is born and raised in an atmosphere full of secrets, paranoia, and fear. As a result, Juan Bautista is a child who is extremely fearful and strikingly silent.

A few years after Magdalena's death, Lluvia a young girl from the volcano appears in their home looking for her *madrina* to take her in because she lost her parents to the violence. Although she is a complete stranger to both Latina and Crista, they adopt her as their own because she reminds them of the dead Magdalena. When Lluvia gets her menstrual period for the first time, Latina cares for her and it is then that she,

“comprendió que de ahora en adelante todo sería distinto, tres generaciones de mujeres eran un gran poder frente a la inhumanidad” (178). Women and children are presented as possible agents for change in the post war times. Through them, we experience the consequences of the past and the pain of poverty, loneliness, displacement, and death in the quotidian. It is also through them that we are presented with possible avenues for change and hope for a better future.

4.1.3 Memory

Following the death of Magdalena, we are in a space in which forgetting is the focus of the novel. Latina takes it upon herself to do anything in her power to forget. “Latina estaba satisfecha porque había vencido la memoria de la vida para que su hija sobreviviente no sufriera los dolores del pasado” (57). Ridding themselves of the past is the matriarch’s safest solution to their problems; the best way to deal with the issues of the past is to remove them from their lives. Latina and Crista go as far as taking a “remedy” to erase the tragic events of the past including Magdalena from their memories.

“Dejame a mí, yo sé cómo olvidar sin culpas”, le había dicho la madre. Fue a Los Ejidos, cerca de Quelepa, el mismo pueblecito donde había muerto Magdalena, a visitar al único doctor en el que ella creía ...La vida no se solucionaba con llantos ni con exculpaciones. “Vamos a borrarlo todo”, hasta que Dios quiera. Aunque a veces la memoria despertaba en los sueños nocturnos. (57)

Doctor Febles, a male doctor, prescribes a medicine for the women and teaches them how to make it at home so that they do not have to travel so far to obtain it. Latina and Crista faithfully take the medication on a daily basis. The women begin to believe that the remedy actually works as their memories are hazy and it is difficult for them to remember what Magdalena looked like or even if she had existed. “[D]e todas maneras Magda no existió nunca... Aunque no existió nunca vamos a olvidarla” (61). This is an example of

the many internal battles that Latina and Crista have, fighting to forget but somehow always failing. This also resonates with what we discussed earlier when Magdalena made reference to men being in control of their lives; the male Doctor prescribes this medication in order to “erase” their memories. The women come to the realization that the remedy does not work when Lluvia appears, “Crista piensa que es posible olvidar lo que produce dolor, excepto si alguien llega a despertarlo. Después de varios años, Lluvia ha revivido, a las dos mujeres, el recuerdo de Magdalena, algo que habían logrado superar con infusiones de hierbas” (104). Although Lluvia is a new member in the house, she brings with her the memories of the past and reminds them of the dead Magdalena and of their very existence. Lluvia not only makes the women relive their memories but brings the women back to life. She is the stimulus in the process of remembering. As Maurice Halbwachs would argue, remembering is a process of fitting piecemeal impressions together under suitable stimuli. He highlights that we remember when some new reminder helps us to piece together small, scattered, and indistinct bits of the past (5). As much as the women have fought to forget, under the proper circumstances they will remember.

Latina and Crista realize that “La medicina ha sido un engaño benigno” (185), but they still attribute their survival to it, believing that if they had not taken it, their outcomes would have been much more tragic. Lluvia acts as the propeller for further introspection in the novel, as she forces the women to question and reflect upon the role of memory beyond causing pain. “‘Madre, si no tenemos recuerdos nadie va a querernos’. Es como vivir en agonía permanente. Somos solas pero existimos. Y que bastaba ya de temores ocultos. El día que no tengamos memoria vamos a estar muertos” (185).

Following the stern preoccupation with forgetting, at the end of the novel they realize that they remember, that they have always remembered, and that memory is what allows them to live, they are alive and they should remember. The novel ends with the family going to sleep comfortably. Crista is the last one to fall asleep, as she lays awake listening to her mother snore and caressing her son. “La hija menor está feliz porque recuperar su memoria es volver a existir” (190). Memory plays a huge role not only within the novel and the lives of the protagonists but also in rebuilding a nation. Argueta writes the story of El Salvador through his female characters and, as Padilla says about the texts she studies, “by revealing how Salvadoran women have participated in and have had their lives impacted by recent national and transnational developments, these literary depictions also afford insight regarding a changing Salvadoran nation” (5). It is clear that the inclusion of women and the shifting national paradigms in literature is an inclination of Salvadoran writers, including Argueta.

In *Milagro de La Paz* there is an emphasis on what one does with memories and a vast preoccupation with doing anything in ones’ power to erase them in order to forget the pain. This process is followed by the tragic realization that forgetting is impossible and that the practice of trying to forget causes one to remember even more vividly and painfully what one is trying to forget. *Siglo de O(g)ro*, in its entirety is a novel based on memories. The emphasis is no longer on whether forgetting or remembering is the best option but on how each individual has his or her own memory, how every person remembers differently and what those memories mean to her or him.

4.2 Siglo de O(g)ro: Bio-no-vela circular

Siglo de O(g)ro: Bio-no-vela circular, was published in the postwar period in 1997, five years after the peace accords were signed in El Salvador and one year after they were signed in Guatemala. The novel consists of many very short “chapters”, 111 in total; some continue where the last one left off and some simply jump to a different memory, a different age, or a different event. In the introduction to the English translation of the novel, Linda Craft explains that Argueta “characterizes his work as a ‘circular-bio-novel,’ a combination of fiction and biography ... The structure of the memoir is ‘circular’ in that he returns to his home after years of exile and rediscovers his roots as a poet” (Craft, Introduction xi). The title Siglo de O(g)ro can be interpreted in two ways, first as the century of the ogre relating to the horrors and violence in El Salvador and the two World Wars. Second, it can be interpreted as the golden age, a time of education and advancement. The novel works through memory and as Linda Craft notes, it “re-encounters a nostalgic past, re-creates paradise, and re-acquaints the writer” after years of exile with the country he fled. “At the same time, we read the story of Alfonso who matures to the violent reality of the twentieth century. The paradise that remains is in the text” (xiii).

The novel centers on the life and memories of Alfonso and his family of women and starts off when Alfonso Duque the Thirteenth is three and a half years old. It is a novel that penetrates the intimate spaces of a young boy, his feelings, his thoughts, his adventures, his perverseness, his attraction to the morbid and, mostly overall, his desire to read and learn. The novel moves quickly and abruptly, it does not follow a structured timeline. The memories and the writing jump around in age and years, time and space.

This novel incorporates humor in the daily occurrences and the innocence of this child. As Linda Craft points out, “Like its predecessor, *Milagro de la Paz*, *Siglo* is more introspective and lyrical, less overtly political, signaling perhaps the end of the era of political crisis in El Salvador” (xi).

4.2.1 Fear and the Backdrop of Violence

In *Siglo de O(g)ro*, the violence, politics, and current events take a back seat; they become simple chatter or backdrops in the memories of Alfonso XIII. Although there are clear references made to Civil War in El Salvador, the military, and violence, these are not the main stories or memories of this novel. The reality of the violence that has ensued and the power structures that are in place in Salvadoran society are represented within the child’s life and not through mimetic representations. We do not directly read stories of war or violence and are instead entranced in learning about the strength of lion ants and how they catch their opponent off guard by creating a curtain of dust and then attacking with their tiny claws “Ahí, escondida en el polvo, está la hormiga león, que en verdad es un elefante enano gordote, tanque de guerra, tenazas delanteras que son las palas para hacer los agujeros y para lanzar polvo y enterrar a su presa” (89). We are completely immersed in the childhood experiences of Alfonso XIII and see everything through his memories, his perspective, and his experiences. Argueta’s novel focuses on Alfonso’s seemingly innocent childhood activities, games, and intimacies instead of attempting to represent the vivid images of violence that he sought in his earlier novels.

Throughout the novel, Alfonso’s memories take us to the spaces that he occupied during his childhood, rooms or homes that he lived in that were always near sickness and death. These spaces were in close proximity to “el pabellón,” the colloquial name for the

tuberculosis hospital, and the cemetery. Alfonso was always surrounded by the “muertos vivientes” and the “cadáveres con vida” and was inculcated with a fear of the living dead but a veneration for the actual dead. He was repeatedly told by the women of his life to steer clear of “el pabellón”, except by Herminia, who shared his curiosity and attraction for the morbid. Herminia who would visit the forbidden places with him and would even raise him to the height of the windows of the building so that he could look in and tell her what he saw. Although the memories do not focus on the deprivation and hardships of the protagonist, we can clearly see the poverty and hunger that were a part of daily life and the marginalized neighborhoods in which he lived. Alfonso and his family lived in fear and even slept with kerosene lamps lit because they were “atenaceados siempre por el miedo, explicable por vivir en un suburbio, donde nuestra casa era la última y sólo teníamos el volcán como acompañante en el valle de Siramá” (146-7).

Alfonso’s five mothers use and adapt folktales and other storytelling mechanisms to their circumstances in an effort to inject fear into the children in order to protect them from dangerous situations. Argueta incorporates ten folktales into the novel, “La gota de coral,” “El basilisco,” “El misterio del Pájaro del Dulce Encanto y el espíritu de la Coyota Teodora” I and II, “La Siguanaba” I and II, “El Cadejo,” “La Chinchintora,” “La Carreta Bruja,” and “El Cipitillo”. These stories flow with the narration and have a dual purpose, they are used as a way of inculcating fear and teaching a lesson to the children and they also allow the reader to experience the backdrop of violence and fear in the story. For example, the story of “La gota de coral” is included in a chapter in which Alfonso is talking about his love for reading and his attraction to texts of blood and violence. “La gota de coral es una amenaza que envía a las personas a que vayan a dormir

temprano” (52). The story of “The Drop of the Coral Snake” forces everyone to seek refuge by nine o’clock at night because if they are outside after that time they incur the risk of having a drop of the coral snake fall on their heads and kill them. Alfonso admits that no one ever died due to the snake, yet it was something that he feared immensely. “Los serenos armados que cuidan el orden nocturno en esas épocas de horrores, reportan a los muertos en las calles como víctimas de la gota de coral. Pero nadie sabe más, nadie pregunta, nadie protesta, nada más nos encomendamos a Dios” (52). This folktale is used to represent the times of war when censure, silence, and curfews were imposed on the people and the deaths that resulted for those who did not abide by the curfew. This situation is presented as something of the past because in the present day no one talks about it anymore, “apenas es un recuerdo de tiempos difíciles, de cuando éramos medio muertos y medio vivos habitando la muy noble y leal (a España) ciudad de San Miguel” (52).

As in the previous example, there are small windows in the text that allow the reader to discern the violence that existed and the consequences of that violence. An autobiographic instance in the novel is when Alfonso’s mother tells him, “Te prefiero en el exilio antes que muerto, Alfonso Trece” (37). This quote exemplifies the very real and violent circumstances of the people of El Salvador and of Manlio Argueta who had to go into exile in order to save his life. The risk of death is not a farfetched possibility. Alfonso XIII like Argueta has a thirst for learning through reading; he loves reading newspapers and any literature that he can get his hands on. He reads comic strips, as well as texts about the blood and violence of the wars. His love for reading is apparent, as is the lack of books and money to buy any. Alfonso reads what he can, what his friend Don

Chico lets him read, and later the day-old newspapers that his mother is able to buy him.

The following quote refers to Don Chico and also exposes biographical elements while subtly including the war and the gap between the generations and their beliefs.

Siempre lo reconocí, ya anciano, en mis visitas a San Miguel, cuando fui estudiante universitario perseguido por extremista, rebelde, ideas-social-románticas y antimilitarista y otros pedos, con más de un premio nacional o centro-americano de poesía; aunque no le hablaba, para no romper su tranquilidad o quizás porque temía que su vejez me diera una imagen distinta a la que me había formado de él en mi niñez. No sé. (67)

Alfonso as an adult, does not speak to Don Chico because he does not want to be reprimanded for his actions or beliefs. Even though Don Chico supported his love for knowledge, he was not necessarily in agreement in how Alfonso later used that knowledge.

Siglo de O(g)ro references times of war, but it is Argueta's first novel to depict the contemporary violence that exists after the Peace Accords have been signed and the consequences, trauma, and internalization of violence that have occurred. The violence of peacetime is a different kind of violence than that of the military and guerrillas.

Herminia's son Miguel was able to survive the war only to be killed after the Peace Accords are signed.

Dos años después de firmada la paz, que también ha fundado tantos sepulcros como la Guerra, mientras estaba sentado en una cervecería le negó una cerveza a un desconocido. Este sacó una pistola y le pegó un balazo en la cara. Miguel apenas tuvo tiempo de darse cuenta, como medio siglo atrás, que la muerte no era un juego de la imaginación, sino realidad, producto de los grupos enfermos que dejó la guerra. (84)

Violence has not ceased to exist simply because papers were signed declaring peace. The school of violence persists in the minds of people who have lived through the atrocities of war; trauma and mental illness are also factors that affect the reality of the population. As

Padilla points out, Salvadoran narratives do not depict a better and peaceful society after the wars, but instead they point to how dominant political and social orders have “given way to a precarious reality plagued by violence, injustice, and growing economic disparity. The Salvadorans who inhabit this disaffected world – ex-soldiers, ex-guerrillas, migrants, and women – continue to exist on the edge of the mainstream, destabilizing the fiction of an all-inclusive Salvadoran nationality” (9). Much of this is represented by Argueta in *Siglo de O(g)ro*. The repeated violence of the war has serious traumatic consequences in the post war period. It is in this post war “peacetime” period that the people have to confront their reality and reconcile it with the events of the past in order to move forward.

4.2.2 Women, Children, and Intimate Spaces

In *Milagro de la Paz* the child Juan Bautista is unable to utter any words, something that changes drastically in *Siglo de O(g)ro*. Now it is a child who narrates the story from his perspective, although women are still important figures, as in the first novel. We learn of the nature of Alfonso, a child who when faced with the violence and aggression of the male dominated public spheres, shies away because he was brought up differently by the women of his life who taught him to despise violence. The text presents Alfonso’s upbringing in a matriarchy as something completely normal that is not questioned and does not need justifying.

Nunca acepté la escuela de violencia que se inculcaba al varón para responder a la agresividad de los demás. “Si alguien te golpea una vez, golpéale vos dos veces”. Toda una apología a quien es más “vivo”, más cachimbón, más vergón, en pocas palabras más hijueputa que los otros. El hecho de criarme muy cerca de mujeres no me permitió adquirir recursos de autodefensa, era una educación que no va con ellas. (263)

Women are the center of his life and therefore the axis around which all of Alfonso XIII's memories revolve; he is surrounded by his mother, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers. His averseness to violence is attributed to the women that he was raised by and with and from whom he learns his entire value system. The main themes of the novel are the early years of Alfonso's life and his mother Crista as the center of that life. Valeria Grinberg Pla sees this as a metaphor for the search of personal identity through the maternal figure (89). Grinberg Pla also points to an identity conflict that the protagonist faces because of the two worlds he has to function in, one in which women and literature live and the other which is the public sphere dominated by men. She attributes this conflict to the role men play in El Salvador and to the definition of the country that is being aspired. Alfonso cannot identify with the nation as it is and as the men in charge propose it to be because he has been formed according to a different concept of nation and individual (91). The women are responsible for his view of what a nation is and what a man is. The women of the family are also bearers and transmitters of knowledge, reciting from their memories the readings of their youth.

Throughout the novel, we are in the intimate spaces of Alfonso XIII, we experience almost everything from his perspective. Everyone and everything else in the novel is secondary, their emotions or thought process are never described in detail. Our closest approximations to the secondary characters in the novel are through Argueta's depictions and focus on their eyes. Eyes are an important part of the author's narrative technique; they are windows into the characters' personalities and how we get acquainted with them. Robert P. Newton carries out an extensive study of the significance of eyes in literature in his piece "Eye Symbolism and German Poetry." Newton highlights that

“Within the human face the eyes are certainly the most riveting feature. No other organ of the body is so powerfully informed with thought and feeling, and none so generally captures the poet's attention in his fellow man” (101). We must remember that Argueta is a poet and this is evidenced in the importance that he gives eyes in *Siglo de O(g)ro*.

Argueta describes the color or shape of the eyes but he emphasizes much more what the eyes are transmitting, whether it is sadness, worry, or happiness. For example, the narrator has inherited Grandma Lastenia's black almond-shaped eyes, “sus ojos adormilados como expresando tristeza profunda, pero sólo significa que se puede morir a edad temprana...” (21). Or when comparing Rosita with the ghosts that he “veía en la casona de ventanas tétricas, que [l]e daba el conocimiento de la desnutrición y del hambre reflejada en los ojos ajenos” (23). The author uses eyes to illustrate the scene when Alfonso sees Rosita again after a few years and tries to “buscarla con la culpabilidad de mis ojos” (48), and not knowing “si acaso había reconocido los adormilados ojos del futuro poeta que escribía una bio-novela circular” (48). When Alfonso's mother sees him throw a knife and drive it into a board she says to him “‘A veces me das miedo’, me decía y veía el horror y tristeza en sus ojos” (175). Eyes are a central part when Alfonso is speaking to his mother twenty-five years later and he sees the “dignidad en sus ojos” (138). Newton explains when discussing the symbolism of eyes in folktales that “the eyes are closely linked with the character or moral nature of a person” (105). Eyes and what they transmit is a leitmotif of *Siglo de O(g)ro*. Eyes are the only gateway we are given into the other characters' emotions or thoughts, they reveal the “spirit” of a person, a trope that Newton also discusses in his work. Eyes “reveal the inner nature of their owners” (105). The eyes of the characters of *Siglo de O(g)ro* allow

us as readers to gain a greater perspective of what is happening around Alfonso; they paint a picture of reality, a sad hungry reality, and are a window for introspection. Eyes permit the reader to enter a space where emotions exist, where the characters are sorting through their past experiences and the consequences of such experiences.

4.2.3 Memory

Whereas in *Milagro de la Paz* the protagonists were fixed on eliminating memories, in *Siglo de O(g)ro* memory is the absolute most important theme. The words “memoria” and “recuerdo” in their different forms explicitly appear countless times throughout the text. We are reading a set of memories of both the writer Manlio Argueta and of the protagonist and narrator of the novel, Alfonso. Memory is presented as an intrinsic part of each human being, “la edad de la razón descansa en la primera memoria” (10). Humans’ age of reason coincides with that of their first memory, once we are able to remember then we are capable of rationalizing. Although *Siglo de O(g)ro* centers around Alfonso XIII and his community of women, the novel emphasizes individual memory over collective memory. By doing this, Argueta subverts the official and homogenizing accounts of the war and violence in El Salvador and represents individual and humane perspectives of the situation. This allows the reading public to see not only the statistics of the casualties but the internal effects on human beings.

Memory is represented as what each person wants or needs it to be; each person chooses to remember or to forget based on the individual meaning of each memory in his or her lives. This novel confronts all of those involved in its creation with the importance of memory and the enormous weight that memories play in living; memories are an intricate part of processing past events. Upon his return from a long exile in Costa Rica

Alfonso XIII talks to his mother about the death of his dog Muñeco and realizes that she does not remember anything, that “quizás nunca tuvimos ese perro; y que yo debo poseer una gran memoria para describir los detalles ... O quizás forma parte de tus sueños” (33). This further emphasizes individual memory; memory is different for each person and his does not correspond to hers. “La madre no recuerda, o no quiere recordar, las imágenes que Alfonso Trece había guardado desde sus tres años. Lo cual indica que uno fija en su mente lo que considera significativo” (37). The event meant more to Alfonso than it did to his mother. In this novel full of memories, we learn that memories are things that are recorded differently for each person and that memory is selective. Olivia Elizabeth Amaya in “Memoria individual y milagro nacional en las novelas *Milagro de la Paz* y *Siglo de O(g)ro: Bio-no-vela circular* de Manlio Argueta” analyzes the two novels in an attempt of showing how Argueta incorporates personal and collective memory into the novels. Amaya focuses on the importance of memory as a tool of preservation of Salvadoran identity and as a way of transmitting this identity to new generations.

The novel is a post war novel, published in a space where people are attempting to understand and reconcile the violent and tragic events of the past in their uncertain present. These tragic events of the past are transposed to painful childhood experiences. The novel delves into depicting how the tragic and traumatic death of Muñeco affected Alfonso’s life and more importantly how he processed the event.

La respuesta de mi memoria fue tardía al escribir a los veinte años un poema, que perdí y apenas recuerdo el primer verso. Nunca revelé a mis mujeres que yo había levantado la baranda. Desde entonces aprendería a aprehender el valor de los silencios y la importancia de saber administrarlos con sabiduría; para la literatura es fundamental. Necesité escribir poemas para pagar las deudas de infancia, entre ellas el accidente de Muñeco o el amor efímero de Rosita. (31)

These lines represent Alfonso's way of processing trauma and dealing with the feelings of guilt. It represents how memory takes time to surface after such a traumatic event. As Cathy Caruth points out, events are not assimilated fully in the moment that they occur but are experienced later on in the repeated possession of them. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event (4). Alfonso uses poetry and literature as a way of experiencing and assimilating the traumatic events of his childhood.

Pero leer, como enamorarse, no implica llegar a un estado de reposo, sino entrar en un proceso; implica entrar en un ciclo de comunicación, de comunión, de compartir. El poder curativo de la lectura es en muchos sentidos comparable al proceso psicoanalítico conocido como "transferencia", mediante el cual el analista y el analizado comparten un proceso mutuo de reconstrucción y de reinterpretación del pasado del analizado. (González 30)

Time does not erase guilt from Alfonso's memory, but working through the memory is something that he needed to do in order to come to terms with the past and the feelings associated with it. Similarly, the people of El Salvador will need time to process the tragic events of the war and they are now in a space where they can process the traumas, work to end the silence associated with the fear of the past, and fully assimilate the events in order to reconcile them. The Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) Project of Guatemala emphasizes in its report the importance of memory. It states, "Memory has a clear preventive function. Preventing a recurrence of tragedy is largely dependent on dismantling the structures that made such horror possible" (REMHI 177). Therefore, coming to terms with one's memories and processing one's traumas is essential in order for society to advance and to avoid the same atrocities from reoccurring.

Alfonso XIII admits to using literature as a way of dealing with his guilt and as a way of managing the trauma of his childhood. The role of literature and memory is explicitly brought up in this text.

...hipersensibilidad por lo que se ama y se pierde, que sería irrecuperable si no fuera por la literatura que nos da la posibilidad de redimir seres perdidos, rescatar la edad dorada que se califica con aspereza como “hechos del pasado” ... A todos los seres vivos. Lo necesitamos. Los fastos están escritos en el papel de los periódicos y en el aire, se trata de rebuscarlos, sacudirles el polvo, revelarlos como una fotografía para prolongar el recuento de la memoria. (38)

Literature recovers and allows an understanding and a proximity to events and truths that no other medium of expression or study can accomplish. As Nicole Caso notes, “fiction serves to expose the open-ended and the unresolved. It thus helps interrupt, in a self-conscious manner, any attempts by other forms of discourse to smooth out inconsistencies in favor of a homogenous recounting of events” (3). It is through literature that we can approximate ourselves to intimate spaces and from there we are able to reflect on the overarching topics in relation to groups, communities, and countries. This novel focuses on the intimate memories of a child, the processing of traumas that are not explicitly mentioned, and the daily lives of those who have lived in an environment of oppression, poverty, and fear.

4.3 Conclusion

There is a certain echo in Argueta’s two novels *Milagro de la Paz* and *Siglo de O(g)ro*; both novels center around the lives of women and children and present an alternative face of Salvadoran society. The importance of women in the author’s life has been transposed to the female characters in his novels; these characters play an extremely important role, especially when it comes to memory and forming an inclusive nation. Including children and emphasizing their childhood and innocence while juxtaposing it

with the violence and fear in the world around them is also a new way of narrating for Argueta. This focus on different narrators and perspectives when writing about the violence in the modern day is a practice that has been adopted by other Central American writers and also in films such as *El Silencio de Neto* and *Innocent Voices* which take on the perspectives of children and women. Argueta's most recent novels move away from the city of San Salvador where the main intellectual activity against the violence took place to the outskirts where most of the violence against the people was enacted. These two novels represent the violence of the past but also of the present. Simply because the Civil War is officially over, does not mean that everything is said and done. There is a different violence that the characters are faced with in addition to the trauma, fear, silence, and memory that the violent past has left behind. The novels represent the conflicting present of Salvadorans and presents alternatives for redefining El Salvador as a nation. Argueta is part of this present and continues to work towards a Salvador that provides people with the space and resources to educate themselves and learn from the past in order to prevent falling into the same traps. His narrative offers a way of putting a stop to the violent practices and established norms by breaking with the normalcy of violence and offering mechanisms to move forward.

CONCLUSION

This project hopes to fill a void by bringing attention to this too often and too easily ignored region and its literary production. It is by no means all-encompassing but it is a start and contribution to this discussion. These events and literary works cannot continue to be ignored; it is imperative to close the gap that exists in United States academia with respect to Central America in departments of literatures and cultures. Argueta's contributions to Central American literature are immeasurable. He has made the area visible to a worldwide audience and has denounced the injustices and violence that have afflicted the people of El Salvador. He has also taken on the arduous task of reflecting on the traumatic consequences of the Civil War on the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. His writing has transitioned with El Salvador and has followed the literary trends of the region. Through his novels, we have seen differing representations of violence, beginning with the mimetic representation of the circumstances to descriptive and literal transcriptions of violent sounds and chaotic narrations to the intimate and personal accounts of the aftermath.

This dissertation has traced the evolution of Manlio Argueta as a writer and a committed Salvadoran. It has introduced the political situation in El Salvador, highlighting the peasant massacre of 1932, the overthrow of the University by the military, and the twelve-year Civil War that began in 1980 and wreaked havoc on the country until 1992. The violence not only led to the formation of the armed guerrilla *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, but also to dissident literary groups such as El círculo literario that evolved into the Committed Generation. Manlio

Argueta began his literary career as part of these movements for change and justice and has worked incessantly his entire life to ensure that Salvadorans have a voice that is heard. His ideology differed from that of his *compañeros* and he chose not to follow them into battle but instead to fight for justice and transformation with his words and his writing. What differentiates Argueta from other Salvadoran writers is that he had the time and distance necessary to reflect upon the situation from afar. This distanced perspective with time made his narrations more inclusive and reflective of the traumatic consequences of the war and the violence.

We have studied four of his most poignant and telling works. Chapter Two delved into the details of his first novel *El valle de las hamacas* (1969). This work, written before his exile to Costa Rica when repression and violence were escalating in El Salvador, raises consciousness around the complex circumstances in the country. Argueta represents the situation within the city of San Salvador in the early seventies as well as the neighboring country of Nicaragua from the perspective of young male university students. He denounces the violence against the university and its students by the government forces while simultaneously depicting the intellectual activity aimed at solving the situation. Argueta criticizes the decisions of his generational counterparts to join the armed resistance instead of using their intellect and knowledge in a different capacity. The male perspective dominates the novel and women are relegated to secondary roles. *El valle* represents direct political, symbolic, and everyday violence in El Salvador through its main and secondary characters. Argueta confronts the reader with the chaos of this suffocating environment through mimetic representations of the violence afflicting the characters.

In Chapter Three I have highlighted shifts in Argueta's narration from his writing in *El valle* to his writing in *Caperucita en la zona roja* (1978). As we know, he wrote this novel during his exile in Costa Rica, at a distance from the violence within El Salvador, motivated by the death of his dear friend Roque Dalton. I consider this to be Argueta's most chaotic novel. His narration is markedly different from that of *El valle* as he now begins to utilize new and disordered narrative techniques that require the active participation of the reader. Violence is permeating every inch of society and Argueta begins to offer a space for the exploration of the effects of that violence such as widespread fear. Readers are now expected to participate in and reflect upon the present reality and the alternatives available. Argueta questions the role of the writer in society and begins to represent women in different roles. He shifts away from a completely androcentric perspective and includes women as a central part of the action. Women are not yet presented as complete individuals with agency but they are no longer represented as solely the *puta* or love interest of *El valle*; women play an increasingly important role.

The final chapter of this dissertation analyzed *Milagro de la paz* (1994) and *Siglo de O(g)ro* (1997), Argueta's most recent published novels. The author published these works after his return to El Salvador from his two-decade exile in Costa Rica. His narration moves away from the city of San Salvador to the rural regions of the country and his characters represent the marginalized of the marginalized, poor women and children. There is a complete shift from the androcentric perspective of *El valle* as we are now in spaces almost exclusively controlled by women. These novels represent the transition from wartime to peacetime and the long-term consequences of the violence such as trauma and inherit fear are illustrated in the lives of the main characters. Argueta

presents literature as a viable alternative for dealing with traumas, sorting through memories, and facing fears. Each character in the novel is haunted by his or her past in some way and Argueta shows us that they should not ignore or dismiss this past. Every character is composed of his or her individual memories and these memories should not be relegated to the past because they are a means for creating a peaceful and reconciliatory present and future to live in.

It is evident that Argueta's writing has shifted from the initial urgent denunciation to the more recent reflections and attempts of reconciliation. Manlio Argueta experienced the violence and repression first hand and then exiled himself for the duration of the Civil War to later return to El Salvador during peacetime. Throughout his journey, he maintained a firm commitment to the people and the importance of education and knowledge. A more educated and inclusive people, not a more violent population, has always been the answer for Argueta and the message he conveys in his novels. His exile in Costa Rica afforded him the distance and the time to reflect upon the circumstances from a more panoramic view and move away from the androcentric representation of the nation to an inclusive one. With time his writing represents less of the violence itself and more of the consequences of the violence on the psyche of his characters. Argueta's approach allows the reader a window into the everyday and intimate lives of his characters; a means of witnessing the real and often overlooked effects of the great events.

Violence has had continuity in Central America. It is part of the discourse and part of society. Today, the violence of the Civil War is over but Salvadorans are faced with new forms of violence. Violent gangs, powerful drug cartels, and migration are a

direct result of the displacement and violence caused by the armed conflict. Writers have to find new ways to represent the realities of their nations in an effort to make a positive difference. At “Recordando a Roque Dalton”, an event held at Boston University on April 8, 2015, commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the poet, Manlio Argueta gave a talk titled “Vida y compromiso del poeta Roque Dalton”. In this presentation, Argueta emphasized that “nos hicimos conocidos por la guerra” because of a photo published in Newsweek in 1978. Argueta highlighted that he and his generation were poets who used their voice when there was no voice. He proudly stated that he now has a window to freely write for and speak to his people in his role as columnist for *La Prensa Gráfica* in El Salvador. Argueta said that in order to reach the people of El Salvador he tries to write in simple language so that the majority can understand and be informed. Argueta has found a way to communicate more directly with the general population and his commitment to their education is as strong as ever. His life has changed, his jobs have been different, his techniques and representations in his writing have evolved and transitioned with the changing times, but his commitment has been steadfast and unwavering.

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