

Codes of Silence:
Contemporary Family Narratives of the Colombian Armed Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

In the years coinciding with the recent peace processes in Colombia —following decades of civil conflict from the 1960s to the present— initiatives in achieving truth, justice and reconciliation have grown in order to pair peace with the cultivation of historical memory, as reflected in government-funded initiatives such as the *Centro de Memoria Histórica* and the *Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación* in Bogotá. In the push toward realizing a resolution to armed insurgency, the country has witnessed a massive rush to speak out about her history of conflict. Silence, thus, appears as a counterintuitive mechanism for engaging with trauma. Nevertheless, to illustrate the provocative nature of silence as a vehicle of progress, I turn to photojournalist Jesús Abad Colorado (1967-), who in 2018 displayed his photographic collection *El testigo* at the Claustro de San Agustín in Bogotá. The massive exhibit contained more than five hundred photographs taken between 1992 and 2018 during Abad Colorado's travels across the country in his commitment to detail the destruction caused by armed conflict in rural areas. In his eponymous documentary from the same year, Abad Colorado visits the subjects of his most iconic photographs in order to speak with them about the 2016 peace processes that followed an agreement with one of Colombia's most prominent guerrilla groups, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). In a poignant scene, Abad visits the town of Granada to attend a ceremony in which an ex-FARC member, alias Pastor Alape —a member of the high command in part responsible for a massacre of

civilians in Granada in 2000— returns to the town to give a formal apology. Before the ceremony, Abad speaks with townspeople who are gathered in front of a church where the ceremony will take place. As they protest, they explain that they have come to show pictures of family members who have been disappeared and whose remains still have not been located. Angry and sad, they demand answers for their lost loved ones.

Yet, when Pastor Alape gives his speech, the church is completely silent. No one shouts, nor do they stand up to make demands. When Abad approaches Pastor Alape on camera and tells him that the people of Granada need answers, the latter responds, “No hay respuestas porque no hay comunicación.” In the absence of dialogue, the scene evokes sentiments from Shoshana Felman’s “A Ghost in the House of Justice: Death and the Language of the Law” (2003) in which she characterizes silence as emblematic of “the collapse of language in the face of uncontainable and unintelligible suffering” (269). Though her study examines the then-controversial use of live witness testimony in court during the infamous Eichmann trial in Israel in the aftermath of the Holocaust, Felman’s conjecture affirms the importance of bodily gestures and nonverbal cues, which can speak as loudly as words to articulate trauma. Indeed, the scene from *El testigo* depicts a palpable silence that communicates just as much as the preceding cries for justice, as the crowd, visibly distraught, maintains their eyes locked on Pastor Alape as if on the cusp of speaking and yet refusing to do so.

This encounter is one of many that have followed the 2016 peace accords which appeared to bring to an end to over fifty years of violence during which confrontations between *guerrillas*, paramilitary groups, the state and drug traffickers fed an enduring internal armed conflict in Colombia. Though armed insurgency is a phenomenon

experienced across Latin America, the case of Colombia stands out because of its unmatched duration, or what Juana Suárez refers to as the Colombia paradox: despite being the country with the longest tradition of democracy on the continent, it is curiously most recognized for the longest span of internal armed conflict (19). Though peace accords were successfully negotiated with notable guerilla groups such as the *Movimiento 19 de abril* (M-19), *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL) and the *Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame* in the early 1990s, and with the paramilitary coalition the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) in 2004, a peace process with one of Colombia's largest guerilla groups, the FARC, was not finalized until 2016. Colombia's last remaining major guerrilla group, the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), has yet to demobilize. More crucially, peace accords aside, the transnational drug trade lives on across the hemisphere, perpetuating a cycle of devastation in Colombia. Increasingly polarized in the decades since President Richard Nixon's declaration of the War on Drugs in 1971, the market for illicit drugs leaves many unanswered questions about the future of peace in Colombia and across Latin America and the United States.

With state agencies attempting to address the history of conflict in Colombia, *El testigo* helps to illustrate a tangible gap in contact between the state and the Colombian people. Indeed, while there is a political end to the conflict and an institutional mechanism for unearthing silenced acts of violence, state processes for bringing about peace and for facilitating dialogue at the governmental level are not always reflected on the ground, where civilians continue to live with pain, loss and uncertainty. Amid a surge of testimonies, of exchanges and voices that want to contribute to peace processes, narratives plagued by silence and nonverbal communication —as proven by the people of

Granada— draw our attention to how the continued call for acts of listening might run counter to the broader insistence for peace in Colombia. Such forms of alternative speaking and listening are the driving force behind this project.

Codes of Silence studies how civil conflict touches individuals at different stages of their own personal development, consequently affecting the way violence, in all its pluralities, is remembered and shared across generations. To do so, *Codes of Silence* proposes that the long lifespan of conflict in Colombia invites a study of the evolution of violence in tandem with an analysis of multigenerational families as represented in literature and film, more specifically, in the works of Juan Gabriel Vásquez (1973-), Juan Cárdenas (1978-), Héctor Abad Faciolince (1958-), Daniela Abad (1986-), Carolina Sanín (1973-), Pilar Quintana (1972-), Gloria Susana Esquivel (1985-) and Ingrid Rojas Contreras (1982-). This study argues that the representation of loss, absences or gaps in family histories can map onto larger questions of representation in national discourses on violence and conflict in Colombia today.¹ I draw this connection between the family and the nation by giving specific attention to how silenced voices come to life in stories that deal with the absence of an authoritative paternal figure. Works that eliminate the centrality of a patriarchal voice allow for the opening of narrative space in which previously marginalized subjectivities can emerge to reconstruct family identity and retell family history in the aftermath of loss.

¹ This connection between nation and family has been solidified as a scholarly pairing in Latin American literary studies by canonical works such as Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991) and Fernando Unzueta's *La imaginación histórica y el romance nacional en Hispanoamérica* (1996). Beyond Latin America, Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) also treats this connection.

This vital transition highlights how the predominance of male figures in the recent peace negotiations has sidelined the participation of women, children and people of historically oppressed ethnic backgrounds in a country still very much divided both by socioeconomic and geographic barriers. By mobilizing silence within literature and film, the authors and filmmakers studied in this dissertation call our attention to the exclusive nature of the peace accords with the FARC which, in not inviting broad participation from the country's diverse constituents, fails to adequately address the very socioeconomic and political disparities that gave rise to the internal armed conflict to begin with, consequently underscoring lingering tensions that impede the realization of sustainable peace for all. The works studied in *Codes of Silence* offer insight into how processes of recuperation, healing and survival can articulate narratives of violence on a micro-level by granting particular attention to family life within domestic scenes. Consequently, *Codes of Silence* affirms how literature and film can help us to better understand the atmosphere of "post-conflict" in Colombia, where even after the signing of the 2016 peace accords, resonances of the conflict survive in everyday life despite discussion of peace on a national scale.

LA NOVELA DE LA VIOLENCIA

Focusing on literature as a medium for studying memory and trauma challenges the dominant role that testimony, and even photography, have played across Latin America in ongoing efforts to achieve truth, justice and reconciliation. However, in Colombia in particular, the role of literature as a political and historical interlocutor has long been affirmed since the publication of "Literatura y testimonio" by Hernando Téllez (1908-1966) in 1954. Looking at the contraposition of literature and testimony, Téllez addresses

the impact of *La Violencia* across Colombia, not only as a political conflict, but more crucially as a literary turning point in the country's cultural production. To do so, Téllez's article discusses a particular moment in modern Colombian history which roughly began when Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (1903-1948) was assassinated in 1948. In their seminal work, *La Violencia en Colombia: estudio de un proceso social* (1962), German Guzmán Campos, Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña Luna explain how Gaitán's murder provoked a massive wave of rioting in the capital—a night now referred to as the *Bogotazo*—which then spread to the countryside.² The civil conflict that ensued, dubbed *La Violencia*, involved high rates of civilian participation as the Conservatives, backed by state police and military, and Liberals, supported by communist followers, fought for control over rural lands (Guzmán 43).³ While *La Violencia* was brought to an end in 1958 with the formation of the National Front—a coalition government of both parties that alternated presidencies for sixteen years before opening democratic elections—the widespread destruction of rural communities exposed how Colombia's established bipartisan political system was inadequately serving peasant populations given that the National Front did not result from peace processes, nor were there any government-led talks about reparations. Indeed, the central government's failure to realize economic and social reconstruction after decades of destruction and displacement fueled discontent that catalyzed the formation of guerilla movements in the following decades (Guzmán 402-3). Groups such as the FARC and ELN, founded on

² Another notable study on the historical origins of *La Violencia* and its aftermath is *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (1993) by David Bushnell.

³ More recent studies on *La Violencia* by Gonzalo Sánchez and Dora Marteens contribute to a field of study bolstered by anthropologists and sociologists from the 1980s. Dubbed “violentólogos,” Sánchez and his contemporaries sought to analyze the origins of violence in Colombia.

socialist beliefs in 1964, sought to bring greater political power to rural enclaves by taking up arms after they were excluded from participation in democratic elections during the National Front. As guerilla groups took control of more land, their growth coincided with the escalation of the drug trade throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and in turn the formation of far-right paramilitary forces and increased military presence throughout the country.

At the time of publication in 1954, Téllez discussed how his contemporaries were responding to *La Violencia* in their literary works, critiquing them for only relaying information that could already be gleaned from testimonials and thus not constituting “arte literario” (1). While he affirms, “Claro está que toda obra de arte es un testimonio,” he cautions readers to remember “que hay una profunda diferencia entre el acto de testimoniar documentalmente y el de testimoniar artísticamente” (1). For Téllez, the use of nuance, as achieved through metaphor, could distinguish literary work from testimony, offering different insight into the impact of violence in everyday life. Shortly thereafter, in his response to Téllez, “Dos o tres cosas sobre ‘la novela de la violencia’” (1959), Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014) reflected on the pressure that many writers felt to produce political texts, more than ever in a moment of heightened political violence in Colombia. García Márquez emphasized the necessity of using literature for advancing political discourse, yet, he lamented the poor quality of the *novela de la violencia* —a term the author introduced to define the emerging literary genre— claiming that the then-current generation of authors did not possess the nuance needed to discuss the consequences of violence. These sentiments were reaffirmed in his follow-up piece, “La literatura colombiana: un fraude a la nación” (1960). In his essays, García Márquez

argues that writers of the *novela de la violencia* had been so preoccupied with reporting the atrocities of conflict with graphic detail that they failed to realize that merely reporting the violence would not constitute a work of literary value. García Márquez consequently proposes that instead of describing what happened, writers must interpret the events in question and transmit an understanding of their human consequences, thus exceeding the unilateral portrayals of violence readers can already receive in the news.⁴

Contemporary scholarship has reaffirmed the importance and limitations of the *novela de la violencia* in ongoing studies of Colombian cultural production. As scholars such as Rory O'Bryen and María Helena Rueda have posited, lingering tensions from *La Violencia* resonate throughout the second half of the twentieth century, compelling readers and scholars to continue to reflect on the relationship between conflict and cultural production. In his *Literature, Testimony and Cinema in Contemporary Colombian Culture: Specters of La Violencia* (2008), O'Bryen challenges the routinization of violence in contemporary Colombia by examining how fiction holds the capacity to explore notions of non-static revision; the idea that memory and history may no longer serve our studies of the past given how these hegemonic constructs of time minimize society's ability to grow, revise and evolve our understanding of past events (12). Borrowing from Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's contributions to Holocaust Studies, O'Bryen works across literature, testimony and film to affirm narrative's ability to exorcise or "work through" traumatic events, specifically in the works of authors and filmmakers born between 1940-1950, whose childhoods were shaped by *La Violencia*

⁴ García Márquez's two novels from this period, *La hojarasca* (1955) and *La mala hora* (1962), are examples of his own attempts at *la novela de la violencia*. Both texts introduce characters and places, such as the famed Macondo, which later appeared famously in *100 años de soledad* (1967) and grant particular attention to the impact of war and conflict on daily life in tight-knit communities.

(13). Though O'Bryen works within the Colombian context, his multimodal approach to an analysis of specters and hauntings enters into dialogue with prominent memory studies from the Southern Cone, which too began by adapting conceptions from Holocaust studies to Latin American contexts.

In *La violencia y sus huellas: una mirada desde la narrativa colombiana* (2011), Rueda focalizes her interrogation around *La Violencia*, José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924) and García Márquez as she discusses the evolution of *la novela de la violencia* as a literary and cultural phenomenon. Her study focuses on questions of ethics, victimization and their mobilization in literature throughout the twentieth century as a consequence of the rise of mass media. She highlights the unavoidable tension between responding to aesthetic, ethical and political questions and the demands of the global market (69), concerns which Téllez and García Márquez seem to predict in their critiques of *la novela de la violencia*. Rueda's study dialogues with critics such as Erna Von der Walde, Héctor Abad Faciolince, and more recently, Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola, who have expressed concern for the role the global market plays in influencing literary production in Colombia. These tensions appear in *Codes of Silence* through examinations of Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011) and Ingrid Rojas Contreras's *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* (2018), two texts that tackle the question of popular culture's role in disseminating information to the general public. My analysis considers Herrero-Olaizola's *Commodifying Violence in Literature and on Screen: The Colombian Condition* (2021) in which he addresses the increasing popularity of the *narconovela* or *narcodrama*, which drives the "publishing success of dirty realism (*realismo sucio*)—one of the labels that seem to have taken over the legacy of magical

realism—and its appropriation in best-selling Latin American fiction” (9-10). Such success in fiction and film, he posits, has fed the growth of violence as a form of cultural consumption that allows readers and viewers to feel informed, but mostly entertained, thus stopping short of critical intervention.

As drug trafficking in Colombia feeds urban violence, and guides the influence of *realismo sucio*, von der Walde proposes a new genre of literature: the sicaresque. In her seminal article “La novela de sicarios y la violencia en Colombia” (2001), von der Walde explains how, originating in Medellín, the *sicaresca* echoes tropes from the picaresque novel by presenting the *sicario* as the new rogue hero within the world of urban terrorism. Von der Walde studies the *sicario* novel as the newest refraction of the *novela de la violencia*. Though most would associate the genre with Fernando Vallejo’s *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) or even Jorge Franco’s *Rosario Tijeras* (1996), von der Walde notes that the *sicario* began to appear as a subject of literary and sociological interest as early as 1989 with filmmaker Víctor Gaviria’s *Rodrigo D: no futuro*, which depicted the lives of youths in Medellín using local people acting as themselves, a common feature in many of his films (28). The genre made waves by emphasizing the irreversible damage the drug war had inflicted on a society in which victimizers — *sicarios*— were themselves victims, young boys forced into a system made possible by poverty and corruption.⁵

Von der Walde’s study seemingly prefigures Héctor Abad Faciolince’s argument on the drug wars’ role in commercializing violence for mass consumption in “Estética y

⁵ Alfonso Salazar’s *No nacimos pa’ semilla* (1990) also problematizes the cultural impact and economic origins of *sicario* life. Von der Walde credits Salazar’s work, along with Gaviria’s films, for bringing the *sicario* into greater public visibility as a major consequence of the drug trade.

narcotráfico” (2008). Abad Faciolince frames his interrogation by questioning popular culture’s fascination with narco-narratives or “la estética mafiosa” (513), which appear both in fiction as well as tell-all memoirs, particularly in works authored by men. Publishing houses have capitalized on the public’s desire for these narratives, inundating the commercial market with inaccurate, sensationalized texts of poor quality, which, according to Abad Faciolince, corrupt readers’ sense of morality and truth (516). His observations reinforce García Márquez’s concerns in a contemporary context by emphasizing how commercial fiction has grown in influence. While Abad Faciolince does not denounce the publication of “libros, aparentemente testimoniales, escritos por hampones o dictados por éstos periodistas mercenarios” (517), since he does support freedom of expression, he cautions readers not to equate such works to literature, or what Téllez deemed “arte literario.” Though they might continue to buy, read and enjoy such works, Abad Faciolince hopes readers recognize them for what they are: examples of a fetishization of violence fashioned by commercial demands.

In *Residuos de la violencia: producción cultural colombiana, 1990-2010* (2015), Andrea Fanta Castro deepens Abad Faciolince’s concerns by examining growing popular and scholarly interest in violence. She frames her study around a central question: at the turn of the twenty-first century, how do we read, teach and find value in a corpus of literature that is so saturated by violence that, at times, it falls prey to commercial demands? (xvi). This process not only banalizes the conflict itself, but hides the fact that it very much remains alive and unresolved. Her analysis of novels by Fernando Vallejo, Abad Faciolince and Juan David Correa questions how fiction can highlight the

consequences of the drug war on everyday life while additionally critiquing how this economy of “easy money” has likewise shaped the literary market (xv).

Despite what doubts can be raised about commercial literature in the twenty-first century, Abad Faciolince, among others, has continued to emphasize the value of fiction as a medium through which Colombians can face trauma without moralizing, and most crucially, without necessarily proposing a solution to the violence of the internal armed conflict itself. Indeed, this dissertation’s inclusion of novels such as Carolina Sanín’s *Los niños* (2014) and Pilar Quintana’s *La perra* (2017), which refuse to offer readers the satisfaction of resolution at the novels’ close, seeks to underscore the value of fiction in political and historical conversations. As discussed in my analysis of each work’s relationship to the internal armed conflict, the authors’ denial of closure is a defining mark of contemporary cultural production. In all the works studied in *Codes of Silence*, the act of grounding discussion in intimate personal narratives that are invented, malleable and elusive results in diverse modes of communication and dialogue that can parallel, and even expand, peace processes which seek to uncover and unearth past injustices. As institutional mechanisms allow for large-scale conversations on truth, justice and reconciliation, cultural production cultivates a separate space in which literature, film and the arts can direct our focus towards the gaps and silences that continue to impede an investigation of the past; efforts to make visible the previously invisible through rhetorical devices such as metaphor, allegory and ellipsis, without the pressure of successfully filling such voids.

Furthering this call, in *Haunting without Ghosts: Spectral Realism in Colombian Literature, Film, and Art* (2020), Juliana Martínez builds upon O’Bryen’s work on

specters by interrogating the role of literature and the arts in problematizing the notion of “post-conflict” in the twenty-first century. Picking up where O’Byrne left off, her study not only continues to examine present-day iterations of violence in Colombia, but additionally looks at how *La Violencia* serves as a ghostly presence that continues to haunt contemporary cultural production, which itself appears obsessed with spectral presences. Such literary, cinematic and artistic gestures toward haunting voids, as she affirms, draw attention to past traumas that endure in silence, having been erased from official history specifically after the signing of the 2016 peace accords in Colombia. As she problematizes the idea of post-conflict, Martínez reminds readers that “forced disappearances, displacement, and human rights violations of all kinds persist” (1), despite what she identifies as a government-backed rhetoric that circulates “the discourse of progress and development to encourage rapidly overcoming the wreckage of war” (30). The use of the specter, she argues, can reaffirm the importance of recognizing ongoing violence that might otherwise go overlooked or ignored for the sake of progress.

Martínez’s monograph dialogues with seminal contributions to Colombian Studies made by Juana Suárez and María Ospina Pizano whose works continue to shape the field. As with O’Byrne’s research, their contributions approach the study of violence in Colombia by thinking about conflict as an evolving continuum. Thus, they not only discuss the origins of violence across the nation, but also situate Colombia in a hemispheric conversation on the interconnected political and economic histories of American countries. In *Sitios de contienda: producción cultural colombiana y el discurso de la violencia* (2010), Juana Suárez compares the politics of President George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11 and President Álvaro Uribe in Colombia, who held office from

2002-2010. She seeks to understand how and why violence has become such a powerful topic of conversation in Colombia, refusing to entirely attribute the phenomenon to the ongoing presence of violence in daily life. Suárez proposes that Uribe, like Bush in the aftermath of 9/11, used the idea of terrorism as a catalyst for intensifying nationalist policy, which mobilizes mass media to internalize such sentiments in the social imaginary, thus rendering them defining elements of Colombian national identity (22). Her study, consequently, seeks to understand how the portrayal of violence in the media parallels or challenges representations in cultural production through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a line of inquiry central to my interrogation of the representation of gender in contemporary cultural production. Just as Suárez turns to political figureheads such as Uribe, I similarly dissect how the hypermasculine undertones of nationalistic political rhetoric is problematized in literature and film, more specifically in Juan Cárdenas's *Los estratos* (2013), Daniela Abad's *Carta a una sombra* (2015), Gloria Susana Esquivel's *Animales del fin del mundo* (2017), works which address how gender shapes forms of narratives and their respective dissemination through different media.

Additionally, the importance of class struggle is underscored by María Ospina Pizano in *El rompecabezas de la memoria: literatura, cine y testimonio de comienzos de siglo en Colombia* (2019). Her emphasis on the importance of fiction in discussions of loss and violence in collective memory challenges political discourse, and more specifically, Uribe's presidential campaign. Ospina Pizano argues that fiction is necessary as a critical voice and interlocutor not just for helping society to understand the legacies of violence, but also for critiquing the efficacy of national processes in the cultivation of historical memory that have been shaped by neoliberal agendas (24). The continuing need

for fiction becomes apparent in light of Uribe's governmental mechanisms, which propagated false impressions of peace and finality and generated a sense of urgency to move on despite civilian need for further reflection and conversation: "en diversos países en los que las transiciones a la democracia o la paz han sido orquestadas por gobiernos neoliberales, los discursos oficiales de consenso y reconciliación han emergido con fuerza para insistir en la importancia de *pasar la página* y dejar atrás el pasado" (emphasis original 25). As she attempts to illustrate how literature and film use language and form to train society to necessarily complicate the notion of post-conflict—which is perhaps too prematurely being ushered into existence—so too does my own interdisciplinary approach. By examining contemporary iterations of the *novela de la violencia*, *Codes of Silence* tackles critical questions raised by Rueda, Suárez and Ospina Pizano about the utility of violence as an aesthetic construct in order to problematize different forms of narrative and shed light on the way in which conflict is voiced or not voiced by different artistic, political and historical interlocutors.

CODES OF SILENCE

In a 2012 interview, Colombian author Juan Gabriel Vásquez stated: "La violencia obsesiona a los escritores colombianos. ... La novela colombiana siempre ha respondido a la violencia colombiana. Lo que sucede es que no siempre los novelistas han sabido hacerlo" (De Maeseneer and Vervaeke 212). Born and raised in Bogotá, educated in Paris, Vásquez has become one of the most well-circulated Colombian authors around the globe. His third novel, *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011), has been translated into over twenty-five languages and with this success, Vásquez has become an internationally recognized Colombian literary figure. Taken from a conversation with Dutch scholars

Rita De Maeseneer and Jasper Vervaeke, Vázquez's statement responds to García Márquez's famed essay "Dos o tres cosas sobre la novela de la violencia" (1959) by questioning how much has changed. Haunted by García Márquez's comments, half a century later, Vázquez subtly enacts María Teresa Ronderos's proposal of *guerras recicladas*, the cyclic nature by which past conflicts survive, repeat and renew.⁶ In his reflection on how the long lifespan of violence in Colombia that evolved from *La Violencia* into decades of armed conflict and drug wars has challenged authors, filmmakers and artists to continue advancing cultural production in order to respond to the complex consequences of violence in everyday life, Vázquez describes both civil conflict and cultural production as recycled cultural concepts on violence. As his comments affirm, violence has and will continue to fascinate Colombian authors, begging the question of how cultural production in the twenty-first century will compare to, and more crucially, differ from its predecessors.

Approaching how recent generations are confronting these tensions allows for an examination of how violence is addressed by authors and filmmakers whose childhoods were shaped by the most dangerous decades of the Colombian armed conflict—from 1970 to the turn of the century—a period that launched Colombia into the global spotlight and the United States' war on drugs. With commercial success, these authors have become internationally recognized public figures, activists and journalists. Their works' confrontation with repressed trauma, blurred memories and a need for resolution

⁶ From her monograph *Guerras recicladas: una historia periodística del paramilitarismo en Colombia* (2014) in which Ronderos focusses her examination of the internal armed conflict on the birth of paramilitarism in Colombia throughout the 1980s. By examining the social, political and economic paradigms that support paramilitary organization, Ronderos draws parallels between them and the infrastructure of guerrilla groups, thus proposing that shared tactics foster repetition, or the recycling of war, that allows for civil conflict to perpetuate itself across time (27-8).

contributes to a broader struggle for peace in Colombia and for understanding of Colombia abroad. As a result, their works will play a vital role in the years to come by documenting contemporary events and in potentially challenging the notion of an emerging post-conflict era.

In his *A History of Colombian Literature* (2016), Raymond Williams classifies the aforementioned authors as a new generation of writers; mostly born after 1970, they stand out for their extreme awareness of urban violence and the destructive influence of drug trafficking, which became an everyday reality during their childhoods (151). Orlando Mejía Rivera refers to them as “la generación mutante (35),” arguing that as these authors look back at their childhoods in an effort to cultivate an adult consciousness, they seek to move beyond the literary framework constructed by García Márquez’s legacy, which casts a long shadow in Colombian letters. United in a rupture from the authors of the Boom and the symbolic geography of Macondo, they are a mutant hybrid still in development.

Additionally, in their attempts to step out from García Márquez’s literary shadow, contemporary authors and filmmakers are redefining magical realism’s enduring influence. By crafting more nuanced, and in turn, less commercialized depictions of everyday life in Colombia, they begin to transform the fantastic legacy of *lo real maravilloso* into a new genre of representation, what Juliana Martínez deems “spectral realism” (3).⁷ Martínez distinguishes spectral realism from its predecessor magical

⁷ The term “lo real maravilloso” first appeared in the prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (1949) by Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980). The novel, a work of historical fiction, discusses the Haitian Revolution and grants particular attention to local belief systems that challenge European imperialism. In his prologue, Carpentier details his theory of the magical real, which is founded on the belief that the history of the Americans can appear so strange and extraordinary to foreigners that it seems almost magical, and yet, for the region itself, the line between reality and magic is more porous, thus shaping local traditions.

realism by defining the genre as a “mode of storytelling that takes the ghost seriously but not literally. Rather, it formally assumes the disruptive potential of the specter, shifting focus from what the ghost *is* to what the specter *does*” (emphasis original 3). In this way, she not only identifies a literary shift away from García Márquez as literary forefather, but additionally offers spectrality as a means of combatting erasure and silencing, particularly as enacted by conventional, even patriarchal, modes of remembrance and documentation perpetuated by the Colombia state.

A primary example of gaps in patriarchal representation, and even speech, is found in the 2016 peace accords themselves, as Fabio Andrés Díaz Pabón (2018) affirms in his study of transitional justice in Colombia:

However, victims did not participate directly in negotiating the agreement, although the negotiations were informed by the views and needs of a group of 60 victims, which met once with the negotiation teams of the FARC-EP and the Colombian government in Havana to represent the voice of more than eight million victims (Verdad Abierta, 2014). As the agreement did not involve the victims’ consent or approval it could be claimed that their participation was more aesthetic than real. Within the context of a patriarchal society the extent of meaningful participation by indigenous groups; Afro-Colombians; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) minorities; and women in the implementation of the agreements remains to be seen. (7-8)

As heads of state negotiated a ceasefire, the turning over of weapons and reintegration of militants into society, their terms for peace did not require participation from those who suffered the consequences of conflict, despite the promise of reparations. Even beyond the notable absence of such voices, Díaz Pabón emphasizes that diversity itself was not explicitly acknowledged in the processes, leaving many doubts as to their relevance for different constituent groups. This harkens back to the ways in which Martínez’s work encourages readers to question and problematize institutional omission by using ghosts as a vehicle through which to remember what has been lost in conflict even in moments of

triumph. In this vein, her work coincides with my own by using absence, void and silence as entryways into embracing the unresolved in a productive fashion. Though literal ghosts do not appear in any of the works studied in this dissertation, I offer silence as a provocative entryway into questioning how contemporary authors and filmmakers participate in conversations on peace, justice and reconciliation when understanding the impact of violence requires uprooting repressed traumas from the past when they remain hauntingly unresolved in the present. In doing so, literature and film become productive interlocutors for assessing Colombia's upholding of human rights, a discourse frequently limited to the fields of law, political science, history and sociology.

In this rupture of official history and institutional narratives of conflict and violence in Colombia, Martínez embraces the use of “anachronicity” (30) or what Cherlyn Elston has termed “nonsynchronicity” (7); forms of communication that both scholars recognize in narratives of conflict that challenge hegemonic perspectives on violence in Colombia. In their discussion of how fiction can complicate stories of trauma, loss and healing, Martínez and Elston challenge societal and even political adherence to linear chronology as the defining mechanism for documenting national and personal histories. Furthermore, as Ospina Pizano explains, institutional vehicles for advancing transitional justice across Latin America rely on the idea of progress as the most productive result of testimony:

Estos mecanismos codifican el sufrimiento para determinar las causas y los efectos de la violencia con el fin de distribuir recursos y suelen forzar a quien da testimonio a que su relato se ciña a narrativas lineales y causales simples que ignoran los múltiples modos de expresión corporales, sensoriales y narrativos a través de los cuales los individuos y grupos articulan sus recuerdos sobre la violencia. (27)

In positioning testimony as a legal process which advances resolution and closure, hegemonic adherence to linear storytelling has allowed for political and economic motives to dictate transitional justice, rather than the other way around. However, as Ospina Pizano emphasizes, narratives of trauma are meant to be told and heard, rather than serve as a means to an end. Growing interest in the deconstruction of linear time as a tool of narration and as a necessary means for approaching resolution thus situates ideas of anachronicity and nonsynchronicity as viable modes of narration. These other forms of telling embrace unstable chronology in order to unpack diverse approaches to healing as an ongoing conversation rather than emphasize the need for expedient resolution. Martínez's and Elston's focus on the malleability of time is deepened by my approach to the study of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, specifically in my focus on intergenerational dialogues surrounding family identity and family history. These dialogues necessarily embrace movement across past, present and future and back again as a crucial element in the cultivation of transitional justice and historical memory.

To begin, my first chapter examines Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011), Juan Cárdenas's *Los estratos* (2013), Héctor Abad Faciolince's *El olvido que seremos* (2006) and his daughter Daniela Abad's *Carta a una sombra* (2015), a documentary interpretation of her father's work. By featuring sons who confront the loss of a paternal figure, these works address the intersection of personal and national histories, particularly in cases where the death of a patriarch comes as the consequence of political violence. Grappling with the loss of a father figure, these authors feature protagonists whose struggle to assert authority as narrators of family history, and even writers themselves, parallels their emergence as new heads of household. These texts and

documentary thus invite a study of filial obligation, masculine identity and inheritance, which I interrogate by questioning the works' representations of gender, racial diversity (or lack thereof) and cultural appropriation. By problematizing the instability of the founding father figure, both literal and literary, I study how Vásquez, Cárdenas, Abad Faciolince and Abad attempt to craft alternative paradigms for penning familial and national histories by turning toward female interlocutors, albeit with varying success. As each author and filmmaker represents sound, noise and voice, moments of failed listening allow for moments of polyphony and aurality that problematizes normative masculinity and its precarious relationship with power, voice and legacy.

In my second chapter, I analyze Carolina Sanín's *Los niños* (2014) and Pilar Quintana's *La perra* (2017). While Sanín's novel follows Laura, an urban, upper-middle class woman attempting to adopt a displaced child, Quintana turns to the Pacific lowlands where protagonist Damaris, an Afro-Colombian woman living in poverty, turns to her dog for companionship when unable to have children.⁸ By exploring how these female protagonists attempt to form unconventional kinship bonds with non-biological children, I look at how maternal care motivates them to revisit their own childhoods in order to understand how repressed trauma from the past, and from prior failed relationships, informs how they care for their non-biological children. Because past traumas inform present realizations within their narratives, I draw from psychoanalytic frameworks to discuss how each text attempts to document trauma through the formation, or lack

⁸ Forced displacement during the internal armed conflict, and even in its aftermath in present day, is a major topic of debate in Colombia. In addition to the number of people killed in combat, disappeared or still unaccounted for, an estimated five million people were displaced from their homes between 1985-2011, as calculated by the *Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos e le Desplazamiento Forzado* (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 34). These statistics do not account for the massive wave of forced displacement that occurring during *La Violencia* in rural areas as previously discussed.

thereof, of family ties. By additionally examining how Sanín and Quintana respectively depict urban and rural life, my analysis challenges the politics of President Álvaro Uribe, whose controversial strongman politics —aided by the Clinton and Bush administrations— aggressively sought to end guerrilla and paramilitary violence in Colombia at great civilian costs. Standing in as a paternal figure, and often referring to his constituents as *mis hijos*, Uribe relied on unethical tactics in order to silence and withhold the truth of rising civilian casualties from public knowledge. Consequently, the misrepresented results of his campaign against violence propagated a misleading sense of peace and finality in Colombia in the early decades of the twenty-first century. Turning to questions of forced migration, socioeconomic disparity and institutional neglect, the novels question peace when resolution presents as premature, using silence as an experimental space for healing.

The final chapter of *Codes of Silence* dives deeper into childhood by discussing two autobiographical novels, Gloria Susana Esquivel's *Animales del fin del mundo* (2017) and Ingrid Rojas Contreras's *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* (2018). In these texts, urban violence throughout the 1980s in Colombia is told through female child narrators who share stories of civil conflict using their own vocabulary and forms of storytelling during child's play. As little girls reenact scenes from television and the news, the stories they invent with each other and with their toys allow them to create their own narrative of events, which highlight the equally impactful influence of large-scale urban violence and small-scale domestic turmoil. As Esquivel and Rojas Contreras return to childhood through writing, their narratives bring to life the secret worlds of young girls whose relationship with social and political conflicts, so often overlooked, articulate brutally

honest reactions to violence in different forms. In this way, the authors' specific attention to young female subjectivity specifically serves to challenge patriarchal narratives of both civil conflict and domestic life. What is more, Rojas Contreras's novel, which offers a metafictional account of her own exile and experience as an immigrant in the US — complicated by her decision to write the novel in English— emphasizes how questions of diaspora, linguistic assimilation and refuge are essential to discussing the Colombian armed conflict and the potential for reconciliation beyond the country's borders. Her novel, which moves from Bogotá to Los Angeles, along with Cárdenas's and Quintana's, which treat Colombia's Pacific regions, demand greater visibility for the diversity of Colombian peoples beyond her urban centers and even national borders.

Codes of Silence draws literature and the arts into political discussion of armed conflict and transitional justice in Colombia. My intention with this interdisciplinary approach is not to claim to resolve the conflict through the humanities, but rather, to better understand how long-term consequences of violence are embodied and articulated on the ground level. By providing insight into the struggles of day-to-day life while also bringing attention to voices that are still marginalized and underrepresented in national narratives of conflict, my work affirms how literature and the arts inform further conversations on gender, ethnicity and social class in the process of deepening our understanding of the impact of violence and conflict in Colombia.

CHAPTER ONE

The Reimagination of Filial Obligation through Stories of Loss, Aurality and Polyphony

Under the cover of night, a grieving Prince Hamlet is confronted by the ghost of his father. As the ghost proclaims, “I am thy father’s spirit” (I, v, 9), he reveals to Hamlet the “most foul, strange and unnatural” (I, v, 28) truth of his death: he has been killed by his brother Claudius, who then not only stole his wife, but also his throne. This haunting encounter from William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Hamlet* (1599-1601) set in motion an enduring archetype of filial obligation when, upon learning of his father’s murder, Hamlet proclaims: “Haste me to know ’t, that I, with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge” (I, v, 29-31). A father figure who never materializes in corporeal form, nor takes on his given name, the phantasmagorical ghost is both absent and omnipresent. As he attempts to maintain authority, the ghost assures Hamlet that his death can only be rectified once his son assumes his position and restores order on his behalf. Nevertheless, the play’s conclusion sees the end of the Danish royal family; Hamlet dies and his father’s throne is lost to invading Norwegian forces, leaving the audience to question the productivity of the ghost’s vision of filial obligation and his insistence on the perpetuation of a patriarchal line of succession.

This chapter explores the voids left by the loss of a patriarch —often a central and commanding authoritative figure in national and familial histories— in order to

problematize masculine structures of both conflict and resolution through an exploration of sound. By interrogating the use of narrative silence and aurality, I study how the inability to hear, listen and integrate marginalized voices complicates stories of loss in Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011), Héctor Abad Faciolince's *El olvido que seremos* (2006), Daniela Abad's documentary *Carta a una sombra* (2015) and Juan Cárdenas's *Los estratos* (2013). Each work features a protagonist's confrontation with an absent father figure against the backdrop of national turmoil. Across all four works, the absence of the patriarch frees narrative space for the emergence of a plurality of voices. While each literary text introduces a non-patriarchal interlocutor, Vásquez's and Abad Faciolince's respective protagonist's adherence to normative masculinity emphasizes their struggle to listen to and dialogue with complimentary voices while Abad and Cárdenas challenge singular narration in order to experiment with polyphonous modes of storytelling. Moments of failure to listen in Vásquez's and Abad Faciolince's works, paired with narrative and dialogic experimentation in Abad's and Cárdenas's, offer readers insight into how conversations on truth, justice and reconciliation might be revitalized in order to more effectively achieve sustainable peace for all.

In their texts, Vásquez and Abad Faciolince offer multiple instances of aurality. Here I borrow from Charles Bernstein's definition of aurality as "the sounding of the *writing* ... connected to the body—what the mouth and tongue and vocal chords enact" in order to emphasize how the sonorous quality of speech triggers the impulse to hear before anything else (13). Yet, as Vásquez and Abad Faciolince depict, hearing does not always result in successful dialogue, subsequently illustrating how (failed) formal attempts at

polyphony as a narrative tool question the authority of a single male narrator. Trapped within a cyclic return to patriarchal order, the protagonists' confrontation with failure offers a productive problematization of typical routes of filial obligation and inheritance, which is counterbalanced by Abad's and Cárdenas's works. In their struggle with and against vertical structures of power, Abad and Cárdenas offer absence and silence as vital opportunities for listening and reflection in which aurality serves as a disruptive, yet productive force of storytelling that proves the necessity of pause before the possibility of progress. In doing so, these encourage reflection and conversation on the efficacy of a conventional insistence on linear time as the backbone of economic and political progress, which in its push forward can leave lingering civil conflict, violence and trauma unresolved. In this vein, Abad's and Cárdenas's cultivation of horizontal engagement — both within the family and society— frames paternal loss as an opportunity for exploring the productivity of silence rather than viewing absence as a void to be filled. In doing so, their works serve as an alternative model for emphasizing inclusion even when doing so does not ultimately result in expedient resolution for those grappling with loss. By proving the necessity of a more inclusive distribution of power, participation and voice, the works studied in this chapter compel readers to question which voices are excluded from national narratives of violence in Colombia in order to reflect on the potential for peace that is lost with their absence, and to champion a call for more patient and perceptive listening.

Critical Backdrops: Father Figures, Armed Conflict, Acts of Listening

The paternal archetype in its many iterations proves omnipresent in the Western canon and beyond. Such too, is the case of twenty-first century literature in Colombia, as the critical work of Héctor Hoyos makes clear. Notably, in “Novels of Colombia’s Patriarchy” (2020), Hoyos argues that recent Colombian fiction gravitates toward stories of “fathers dead and fathers dying—as well as adult children struggling to leave their fathers’ shadow.” In this struggle, Hoyos identifies “a theme of fraught masculinity” whereby the continued authority of “patriarchal politics” in Colombia appears to beget the same problems over and over again (“Novels of Colombia’s Patriarchy”). Rebellious against domineering paternal figures in literature, fictitious sons challenge traditional pillars of masculine identity in an attempt to emerge from their fathers’ shadow, only to later assume the role of patriarch upon their death. The oscillation between rebellion and compliance, Hoyos argues, reflects Colombian society’s proclivity for traditional social and political structures despite, and at times due to, modernization.

This socio-literary tendency maps onto larger cultural trends explored by Norman Valencia in his book *Retóricas del poder y nombres del padre en la literatura latinoamericana* (2017). Through an examination of paternalism in Latin America, Valencia posits that the push toward modernization across the hemisphere grew from enduring debates on civilization and barbarity, a dichotomy that encouraged the infantilization of native, “barbaric” peoples in need of a forefather to educate them (15). As Latin America achieved independence, stepping out of the paternal shadow of European colonialism, newly formed societies needed to redefine their identity and often returned to political patriarchs for leadership. Consequently, Valencia discusses how the dictatorships across the hemisphere, in an effort to bring societies into civilization

through the figure of the “padre de la patria” (14), inevitably rested upon persisting vestiges of the colonial enterprise, making paternalism a doomed initiative by which Latin America repeats the mistakes of the past (20). While the fall of dictatorships ushered in a wave of democracy that appeared to move away from paternalistic politics in favor of bureaucracy, the growing popularity and success of charismatic heads of state such as Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, and Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva, among others, according to Valencia, prove the enduring influence of paternalism in Latin American societies, and in turn, in literature (10). Addressing the problematic success of these “strongman politicians” in Colombia in particular, Hoyos posits that such politicians capitalize on a surviving attachment to conservative values which cultivates a “yearning for ... the oppressive, yet comforting, certainties of patriarchy” (“Novels of Colombia’s Patriarchy”). This patriarchy-fueled power struggle produces a cyclical repetition of filial strife and loss that inevitably encourages the consolidation of power in a central entity and ends in the restoration of the patriarchal order; a flawed, but familiar, social and political paradigm.

As Valencia’s panoramic analysis of Latin American literature makes clear more broadly, and Hoyos’s discussion of Colombian texts more specifically, male-authored stories that center around masculine figures experience a parallel reversion to traditional and even recycled tropes of masculinity. Rooted in vertical structures of power —of ascension and inheritance— literary archetypes of the domineering yet frequently absent father figure support the cyclic process by which sons attempt to step into newly inherited positions of authority as protagonists and narrators. Nevertheless, by replacing the lost father figure with another male, these texts’ perpetuation of the patriarchal family

structure only assures the inevitable crisis of the next patriarchal absence. As a result, I see in the texts under consideration here a vital call for an alternative paradigm, which answers such problematic vertical structures of power, inheritance and voice with a horizontal distribution of representation that encourages greater participation from previously silenced voices. What is more, this move toward horizontality also deconstructs the traditionally linear chronology and telos so often prioritized by the economic and political motives fueling calls for expedient progress in the context of civil conflict and its aftermath.

Borrowing from the work of Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, in this chapter's analysis horizontality becomes synonymous with listening, which in turn offers a model of inclusion that affirms the importance of storytelling in acts of truth, justice and reconciliation. In *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (2004), Schaffer and Smith explore the interconnectivity between the realization of transitional justice and the act of storytelling. In seeing narration and human rights work as intrinsically connected, they emphasize the necessity of protecting public spaces for the sharing of stories. Consequently, Schaffer and Smith show how what began as the cultivation of testimonial practice for judicial purposes resulted in "legitimizing platforms for stories to be heard" (4), ultimately generating a broader "ethical call to listeners both within and beyond national borders" (3). While marginalized voices have always existed, and continue to reside on the periphery, it is through acts of hearing and listening that their participation becomes activated and productive. The challenge, as a result, comes with promoting acts of listening when institutional acts of silencing seek to maintain control of official history, particularly when expedient economic progress and large-scale

resolution are valued over realizing effective transitional justice for marginalized civilians.

In this vein, I offer aurality as a lens through which to read Hoyos's and Valencia's analyses of paternal loss and inheritance. By exploring the role of hearing and listening in stories of fathers dead and fathers dying, I question how instances of failure, absence and silence can be reclaimed as opportunities for integrating marginalized voices. Acts of listening and deciphering sounds previously overlooked or cast aside cultivate a horizontal organization of power and participation that challenges the vertical underpinnings of both patriarchal inheritance and chronology so entrenched in hegemonic framings of history. In interrupting the directionality of both institutional and familial visions of patriarchy, growth and progress, a horizontal structure invites the participation of subjectivities and voices historically marginalized, overlooked and silenced by conservative purviews.

Furthermore, within this framework, cyclic failure presents a useful metaphor for addressing a crisis specific to contemporary Colombia, a nation that after decades of internal conflict and multiple rounds of negotiations between victims and perpetrators, state and non-state actors, seeks to finally achieve peace. In recent decades, following President Álvaro Uribe's (2002-2010) agreement of ceasefire and demobilization with the paramilitary group, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), and his ensuing campaign of democratic security, his successor Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) signed peace accords with Colombia's oldest guerrilla group, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). The accords outlined processes for the surrendering of arms, reintegration of militants into civilian life and the formation of a

recognized and legitimate political party. Though controversial —the Colombian people voted against the initial draft of the agreement in a national referendum in October 2016— the eventual signing of a revised agreement a month later was celebrated internationally, garnering Santos a Nobel Peace Prize. With great urgency to finally end a long history of violence and turmoil, peace seemed at hand, though it has yet to be fully realized.

In the years since 2016, the Colombian people and the international community have been assessing the efficacy of the accords in enabling a sustainable peace, a process made all the more visible by ongoing national protests throughout spring of 2021. As Colombian citizens cry out against police brutality, they remind their compatriots and the international community of renewed, but lingering, mistrust of state security given its historic relationship with internal conflict. The ambivalent and unfinished nature of these accords suggests that just as stories of paternal loss are doomed to failure by continuously replacing father figures with further iterations of masculine authority, so too are the patriarchal structures of government, institutional power and state mechanisms for addressing violence in Colombia. More poignantly, as Diana Ojeda (2013) emphasizes, despite the great cost to rural populations that Uribe's heightened measures in militarization took to secure a perceived sense of security —mainly for urban civilians— Santos's 2010 presidential campaign championed silence in the face of ongoing human rights violations for the sake of large-scale progress: "the language he used during the campaign was one of silence and impunity: The idea that 'it is time to look to the future, not to the past' became a powerful narrative about the need of overlooking the rampant human rights crisis in the country in order to "move forward"" (767). As responding to

war begat increasingly hyper-masculine rhetoric, political purviews surrounding Colombia's path to peace too became more exclusionary. By rooting stories of violence and their resolution in patriarchal politics, as evinced by the over representation of men in an already highly concentrated and centralized political system, narratives of conflict strive for peace in an incomplete, almost amnesiac, way.

Coinciding in this claim is Juliana Martínez, who has already begun to problematize the notion of a post-conflict era. In *Haunting without Ghosts: Spectral Realism in Colombian Literature, Film and Art* (2020), she posits that economic interests fuel “a rhetoric of postconflict” which dangerously mobilizes “the discourse of progress and development to encourage rapidly overcoming the wreckage of war” (30). Martínez argues that in focusing so intensely on progress, Colombian society attempts to suppress “anachronicity” (30), the tendency to look back and reflect on past injustices before moving on from conflict. As a result, she proposes using the motif of the specter to challenge governmental and even collective insistence on futurity and a potentially misleading “promise of well-being and abundance” (30). Her rejection of “the homogenous chronology of history” (30), which makes expedient closure possible through erasure, runs in parallel to my own problematization of vertical structures of power and the cyclic repetition of patriarchal control, absence and replacement perpetuated in society and reflected in cultural production. As haunting specters remind readers and viewers of what remains lost and unresolved, so too do instances of aurality that seek to fill absence with alternative voices, rather than further patriarchal replacements out of urgency for expedient, yet temporary, resolution.

In this chapter, I begin with Juan Gabriel Vázquez's 2011 novel *El ruido de las cosas al caer* in order to study the turmoil generated by the loss of an authoritative figure to command control over the narrative and stand as a model of masculine power. In the novel, Vázquez introduces protagonist Antonio Yammara, who attempts to uncover and pen the mysterious life of his murdered friend Ricardo Laverde. Throughout the novel, Antonio continuously confronts sounds and aural expressions of emotion that he cannot comprehend or engage with, signaling instances of haptic aurality that consume him and escape cognitive rationalization. Such moments of aurality compel Antonio to assess his understanding of normative masculinity when haptic sounds —noises that trigger a bodily response— are transformed into affective stimuli that produce emotions that he does not associate with masculine strength and control. The very title of the novel itself gestures toward the centrality of sound as it pertains to Antonio's investigation of the past. Focusing my attention on the protagonist's relationship with Laverde's daughter Maya, I show how Antonio's relationship with gender identity interrupts the narration, sparking a crisis of masculinity that impedes his ability collaborate with Maya as a narrative interlocutor despite their shared generational experiences and personal motives.

After problematizing Vázquez's depiction of gendered power structures and their relationship to storytelling, I study the 2006 memoir *El olvido que seremos* in which author/narrator Héctor Abad Faciolince reflects on his upbringing in the aftermath of his father's assassination. Though *El olvido que seremos* confronts a similar crisis of masculinity, I explore how Abad Faciolince's project begins to step away from patriarchy as an absolute force of authority within his family. Though he uses narrative intertextuality to attempt to cultivate a more horizontal and collective understanding of

filial obligation, his project remains constricted by a patriarchal understanding of inheritance, which is problematized by his daughter Daniela Abad, who adapted the book into a documentary film titled *Carta a una sombra* (2015). In her work, Abad highlights opposing images of familial absence in order to deconstruct the hierarchical undertones of filial obligation present in her father's text through increased female representation and polyphony.

Finally, I conclude with Juan Cárdenas's 2013 novel *Los estratos* in which an unnamed narrator is haunted by the memory of his childhood caretaker whom he remembers as *nana*. Turning toward his *nana*, the narrator seeks to rewrite his family history according to her perspective, allowing the female figure to serve as a counterbalance to the traditionally omnipresent patriarch. In this way, *Los estratos* decentralizes the role of the father figure by addressing paternal absence not as a loss but as a discursive opening. However, as the illusive memories of his *nana* become indicative of Afro-Colombian identity —marginalized in society and silenced throughout national history— the narrator's inability to engage with her haunting voice allows Cárdenas to advocate for increased awareness of oppressed voices struggling to be heard at the national level. With Cárdenas, I conclude with a reflection on the role of Colombia's natural landscapes in hegemonic narratives of conflict and resolution in order to introduce a deeper problematization of regional inequality to be studied in Chapter Two.

SOUNDS OF TRAUMA IN *EL RUIDO DE LAS COSAS AL CAER*

Absent fathers take center stage in Juan Gabriel Vázquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011), a novel composed of the multilayered histories of two families. The diegetic narration is relayed in first-person by the novel's protagonist Antonio Yammara as he

resides in Bogotá in 2009. After reading about the shooting of a hippopotamus—one of the many exotic animals formerly housed at Pablo Escobar’s infamous compound *Hacienda Nápoles*—Antonio is reminded of an old friend Ricardo Laverde who died over a decade prior. Reflecting on the symbolism of the dead hippo, Antonio is drawn to the memories of his deceased friend who he first met in 1995 in a bar while watching a news report about the animals in Escobar’s personal zoo.¹ One night while Laverde and Antonio walk through the streets of Bogotá, two *sicarios* on a motorbike drive by and shoot at them, killing Laverde and severely injuring Antonio and leaving him wounded for years to come. While attempting to make sense of the accident years later, Antonio’s loss of control over both his mind and his body contribute to an unstable sense of masculine identity as he is unable to make a full recovery. Subsequently, Vásquez’s use of the hippo to open the novel is mimicked within the narrative by Antonio who, in 2009, decides to write down his memories of Laverde in order to finally close the chapter on an episode of his life that left him permanently wounded and with more questions than answers.

The journal he subsequently pens could very well be the book we are reading as the novel then unfolds as his retelling of the past, which leaves the present diegesis of 2009 in order to explore sub-narratives that detail how Antonio and Laverde first met, the latter’s murder in 1995 and Antonio’s conversations with Laverde’s estranged daughter

¹ Escobar housed his famed zoo at his estate *Hacienda Nápoles* in the middle Magdalena Valley. When he was killed in 1993, his estate was surrendered to the government. Unable to manage the cost of maintenance, the Colombian government sent the animals to other zoos, but left the hippos behind due to their extreme size (Carroll). The hippo that Antonio reads about had escaped from the estate and was killed after being deemed a danger to the public in 2009 (Carroll). Fermín A. Rodríguez has discussed the cultural significance of Escobar’s hippos, which have appeared in other works, such as in artist Camilo Restrepo Zapata’s *Bloque de búsqueda* (2011); see “Sentencia de vida. El retorno del animal a la política.”

Maya who he meets later in 1998. Maya and Antonio's conversations further reveal details about Laverde's young adult life and Maya's childhood during the 1970s and Laverde's family history dating back to the 1930s. In doing so, Vázquez uses Antonio's narration as a vehicle for navigating across multiple temporal planes which unfold like a Russian doll, plunging deeper into the past.

With particular attention to narration, I problematize Antonio's gendered relationship with knowledge and power as he confronts Laverde's enigmatic death through storytelling, consequently befriending Maya, who likewise embarks on an investigation of Laverde's life and death. While Laverde does not represent a paternal figure for Antonio per se—as is the more literal case for Maya—the symbolic nature of his mysterious death leaves an authoritative void in Antonio's life story. When Antonio is unable to explain Laverde's murder, and thus come to terms with his injuries, he begins to conflate regaining control over his body with control over the narrative of events that left him wounded. To understand Laverde's death, thus, becomes one and the same with regaining the strength and virility he associates with masculine identity, strength which would manifest through the reclamation of narrative authority as well as control over his body. The subsequent need to finally tell Laverde's story in its entirety offers the possibility of closure and healing for Antonio: “No sé de qué nos sirva recordar, qué beneficios nos trae o qué posibles castigos, ni de qué manera puede cambiar lo vivido cuando lo recordamos, pero recordar bien a Ricardo Laverde se ha convertido para mí en un asunto de urgencia” (15). To regain control of the story through his own narration means to seize control of his life, finally exorcising the haunting nature of Laverde's absence, and to return to his position at home as husband and father.

Scholars such as Eric Rojas (2018) and Juanita C. Aristizábal (2019) have focused on Vásquez's multilayered approach to narration as a tool for studying the novel's metafictional depictions of memory and trauma as they shed light on Colombia's recent history of conflict.² They discuss how, often read as an autobiographical novel, *El ruido de las cosas al caer* offers a generational perspective on the drug trade in Colombia as told through highly personal stories of loss. María Ospina Pizano (2019) and Luz Marina Rivas (2017) have complicated such readings by problematizing the novel's representation of normative masculinity, which is presented, on one hand, through Laverde's story arc as a central tension fueling the drug wars, and on the other, as a construct in crisis for men like Antonio, who as bystanders strive for greater agency in a society so defined by physical violence.

After Antonio finds himself as an innocent bystander in Laverde's murder, not only must he face the mystery behind the crime, but must also cope with the consequences of the shooting which result in lingering pain, difficulty walking and impotence. Antonio's desire to rationalize the trauma he unexpectedly suffers through storytelling attempts to combat forms of masculine impotence, both in his physical wounding and his inability to make sense of the attack. However, in his effort to uncover, order and absorb information, Antonio confronts multiple instances of both silence and excessive sound that trigger deeply emotional responses that complicate his understanding of masculinity. The instability brought on by such affective reactions

² Rojas explains how the news of the shooting of Escobar's escaped hippo is both catalyst for Antonio's memory work and symbol of memory's convoluted nature. It is an interruption —the literal act of wounding that links the hippo's death to Laverde's— that paradoxically attempts to trigger a process of healing: "Después de que los francotiradores matan al hipopótamo, descuartizan el animal debido a que su peso impide que lo transporten a otro sitio. La brutalidad de la escena presenta una imagen literal de cómo el trauma violento puede fragmentar las memorias del pasado" (320).

subsequently challenge his control over the novel's narration and the role that narrative plays in his ongoing recovery. His inability to hear in these instances is exacerbated by his relationship with Maya, who becomes an interlocutor and fellow narrator. As her voice takes control of the novel's narrative, a crisis erupts in Antonio, whose inability to independently pen his own life story threatens his understanding of masculine identity. Thus, I propose using Vásquez's depiction of sound to problematize his representations of masculinity, and in turn, the formal construction of narration in the novel. Echoing the novel's title, my focus on sound as an epistemological tool highlights how gendered notions of power and control result in cyclic forms of failure that complicate the novel's representation of closure and resolution.

Aurality as Consuming Sound

Looking back on the night of Laverde's death in 1995, Antonio recalls Laverde's urgency to listen to a cassette tape of which he has just come into possession. He subsequently recounts taking Laverde to the *Casa de Poesía Silva*, the former residence of Colombian poet José Asunción Silva (1865-1896), which serves as a cultural center at the heart of *La Candelaria*, a neighborhood in downtown Bogotá. There, visitors can sit and listen to famous poets reciting their work. As Laverde listens to his cassette, Antonio sits beside him listening to a recording of Silva's most celebrated poem "Nocturno" (1892), having been drawn to the piece by the contemporaneous centennial celebration of Silva's death. Aristizábal highlights how amidst all the chaos in Antonio's life caused by crime, violence and physical wounding —and even the destabilizing nature of the narration itself which jumps across time— poetry serves as "el elemento estable al que se

aferra el narrador ante la irrupción de la violencia en su vida personal” (42).³ Indeed, Silva’s poem serves as an anchor in the narrative; a fixed starting point in Antonio’s memory in an otherwise unstable chronology of events, likewise gesturing to the poet’s place in Colombian cultural imaginary as a literary forefather. In “Nocturno,” a melancholic and nostalgic poetic voice details an interaction between shadows under moonlight that give form to lovers attempting to reunite despite being separated by death. Published posthumously after his suicide, Silva’s most celebrated poem aptly speaks to Laverde’s present circumstances. Unbeknownst to Antonio, Laverde has recently learned of his wife’s death in a plane crash as she attempted to return to Bogotá to be reunited with her husband after decades of separation.

Because Vásquez presents poetry in this particular episode as an auditory experience, rather than one of reading, poetry mobilizes auralty to both unify and distance the two men when, as Antonio listens to poetry, he sees Laverde cry while he listens to the contents of the mysterious cassette tape. Ángela González-Echeverry (2020) has studied the role of sound in the novel, which she argues establishes a “paisaje sonoro” in which audible memories of car bombs, *sicario* motorcycles or gunshots establish a collective memory for Antonio’s and Vásquez’s generation (28). Though González-Echeverry here discusses the presentation of sound in text, scholars such as Laura U. Marks have discussed haptic sound more broadly in cinema as a tool frequently paired

³ Aníbal González (2016) has similarly proposed that poetry serves as a rhythmic meter for the novel, which, just as Laverde’s cassette, emphasizes the reoccurring interest in sound throughout the novel, as well as the novel itself as documentation through sound: “El casete, propongo, es un símbolo de la propia novela en la cual se encuentra, específicamente de la poética implícita de la novela que nos propone Juan Gabriel Vásquez en esta obra: se trata de la novela vista como casete, como grabación o registro de algunos hechos, o más precisamente de los sonidos que acompañan a los hechos” (488). The importance of sound, González continues, is replicated in the act of reading, which is both a performative and cognitive act.

with memory work. In *The Skin of Film* (2000), Marks differentiates between optical vision and haptic vision by defining optical vision as the relationship between the viewer who sees an image before him/her against haptic vision, which more precisely mobilizes the image to invoke the memory of an experience “encoded in touch, sound, perhaps smell, more than vision” (129). Rather than linking sight directly to memory, Marks discusses how haptic cinema can use image and sound as mediators between viewers and their bodies by encapsulating the memory of touch. Since Marks, Elizabeth Osborne (2017) has employed haptic sound more specifically to study films that address loss, death and disappearance in the context of Chilean dictatorship in order to explore how silence and non-dialogic sound can communicate absence in cinematic works. In order to do so, she expands on Lisa Coulthard’s (2012) conceptualization of silence as a form of haptic aurality: “In silence we find the loudest call to listen and strongest imperative to interrogate, contemplate and resonate. ... it is in silence that we can begin to approach the self, for it is in the absence of noises, music or voices that the subject’s self can be heard” (Coulthard 19). In line with Coulthard’s proposal, Osborne asserts that haptic aurality uses sound to resonate feeling within the viewer’s body in order to “contemplate that which exceeds rational comprehension” (45), elaborating:

Just as natural soundscapes incite sensuous engagements with memory and reflection, layers of silences and voices provide other examples of haptic aurality in the documentaries’ soundtracks. Silence forces the viewer to reflect on herself and on the film and offers alternative modes of memory and existence that exceed linguistic constraints. (48)

As sound waves engulf the body, they trigger corporeal responses in the absence of words to rationalize or express them. In this way, sound allows cinema to touch the viewer in addition to or instead of cultivating dialogue. In this way, haptic aurality, and in

Osborne's case, the specific use of dialogic silence, proves particularly productive when attempting to communicate circumstances in which loss exceeds language and memory appears evasive. Sound offers a mode of communication when the subject matter escapes articulation. Within a muted space, deeper reflection becomes possible.

The interplay between sound, silence and narration in a moment of attempted interpersonal connection climaxes in Vásquez's scene of simultaneous listening when the recording of "Nocturno" narrates a moment of incommunicable pain. Sitting beside Laverde and unable to hear what Laverde hears, Antonio is left with the sound of Silva's verse, which becomes intertwined with the vision of Laverde in tears:

Y cuando empezó a sonar el *Nocturno*, cuando una voz que no supe identificar — un barítono que rozaba el melodrama— leyó ese primer verso que todo colombiano ha dicho en voz alta alguna vez, me di cuenta de que Ricardo Laverde estaba llorando. *Una noche toda llena de perfumes*, decía el barítono sobre un fondo de piano, y a pocos pasos de mí Ricardo Laverde, que no estaba oyendo los versos que oía yo, se pasaba el dorso de la mano por los ojos, luego la manga entera, *De murmullos y de música de alas*. Los hombros de Ricardo Laverde comenzaron a sacudirse; bajó la cabeza, juntó las manos como quien reza. *Y tu sombra, fina y lánguida*, decía Silva en la voz del barítono melodramático, *Y mi sombra, por los rayos de la luna proyectada*. (emphasis original 46)

The melancholic undertones of the poem fill the silence between Antonio and Laverde in an instance of haptic aurality. As he watches Laverde cry, Antonio is overcome with feelings of compassion and fear, particularly given the poem's melancholic undertones which deal with feelings of love, loss and longing. Consequently, the poem is transformed into an articulation of Laverde's sorrow so powerful that Antonio is nearly moved to tears. The verse resonates within Antonio as a trigger for reflection that links the visual image of Laverde's suffering with the aural sensation of melancholia. Just as Osborne offers haptic aurality as a vehicle for contemplating "that which exceeds rational comprehension" and even "linguistic constraints," the verse offers a narration of

Laverde's sorrow when Antonio cannot explain it himself. In this vein, the poem as voiceover allows Antonio to imagine that Laverde too cries in response to "Nocturno" just as he himself is overcome with emotion listening to the moving melancholic voice. My implementation of haptic aurality here derives from Marks's conception in that the reading of "Nocturno" does not invoke the memory of touch for Antonio. Rather, the haptic nature of the aural experience is found in the way in which the poem itself obliges Antonio to reflect retrospectively on his association of masculine identity with strength and stoicism, particularly as they define the way he relates to his own body.

In order to delineate this connection, it is necessary to underscore the cultural importance of the poem is emphasized by the historical moment. As Ericka Beckman (2009) posits, the centennial celebration of Silva's death in 1996 reaffirmed the poet's fundamental place in Colombian cultural imaginary: "Pero si bien Silva es el fundador (literario) de la deuda latinoamericana, a lo largo del siglo XX ha acumulado un valor significativo como icono literario en Colombia, hasta el punto de que en 1996, el estado colombiano emitió un nuevo billete de 5.000 pesos para conmemorar la muerte de Silva" (769). Antonio appears to allude to this commemorative act as he comments, "ese primer verso que todo colombiano ha dicho en voz alta alguna vez"; indeed, in the same year, verses from "Nocturno" were printed on the reissued *peso* bill alongside Silva's face. Consequently, I read Antonio's characterization of the sentimental turn of the moment— independent of the true source of Laverde's tears —as a shared instance of patriotic love, and in turn, a model of masculine expression and nationalistic filial piety.

His repurposing of the poem allows Antonio to envision Laverde's tears as a demonstration of patriotic love in a moment when a public show of vulnerability and

emotion would otherwise challenge his understanding of normative masculinity. For Antonio, the melancholic voice sets the tone for the scene. Seeped in a deep baritone, he emphasizes the highly masculine cadence of the voice which, while melancholic, is forceful and commanding. The robust baritone contrasts with the image of Laverde in a vulnerable state, which causes discomfort for Antonio when he sees Laverde's body failing to stand against the image of masculinity invoked by the poem. Unsure of how to show compassion for his friend, Antonio rejects the thought of sharing and participating in a public show of excessive emotion or sensitivity:

Yo no sabía si mirar o no a Laverde, si dejarlo solo con su pena o ir y preguntarle qué le ocurría. Recuerdo haber pensado que podría por lo menos quitarme los audífonos, una manera como cualquier otra de abrir un espacio entre Laverde y yo, de invitarlo a que me hablara; y recuerdo haber decidido lo contrario, haber preferido la seguridad y el silencio de mi grabación, donde la melancolía del poema de Silva me entristecía sin arriesgarme. (46)

The sound of the poetic verse is transformed into a buffer; a distraction that retrospectively justifies Antonio's choice to let Laverde remain engulfed in his own recording when the thought of a public display of emotion, particularly between two men, felt risky. Antonio's retrospective confession reveals his understanding of suffering as shameful and indicative of weakness, I propose, given his attachment to conservative masculinity, a pattern of behavior internalized during his rehabilitation. The desire to remain unseen and untouched in a moment of vulnerability echoes his response to physical trauma. In the years following Laverde's death, Antonio struggles to recover from the bullet wounds in his hips and spine, which leave him in pain and with difficulty walking. Antonio's loss of control contributes to an unstable sense of masculine identity as his slow recovery leaves him increasingly resentful of his own body: "el odio a Laverde cedió el lugar al odio de mi propio cuerpo y lo que el cuerpo sentía. Y ese odio

que me tenía por objetivo se transformó en odio hacia los demás, ... expulsé a mi familia del hospital y les prohibí volver a verme hasta que mi situación mejorara” (55). For Antonio, expressions of pain, sadness or trauma are intimate acts that are safer when contained rather than contracted because any form of corporeal debilitation or vulnerability, in his eyes, becomes a sign of weakness. Unwilling to let his loved ones see him struggle to recover from his injuries, Antonio rejects help and support, opting instead to condemn his own body for not recuperating on its own. The sight of Laverde’s breakdown, consequently, becomes tied in his memory to his own physiological shortcomings as Laverde’s body appears to fail to prove his masculinity in public. Thus, “Nocturno” intervenes in an instance of haptic aurality. As the poem reminds Antonio of his own injuries, he comes into contact with his rejected body and responds by wielding sound as a retrospective tool of revision that allows him to suggest that Laverde’s tears manifest as a physiological —and necessarily appropriate— reaction of patriotic piety rather than as a sign of weakness, which would otherwise be deemed too shameful for public display. With sound as his ally, Antonio is able to rewrite both men’s failures under new terms.

Power, Impotence and Repeated Absence

Years later in 1998, as Antonio passes by Laverde’s old home, he finds himself compelled to knock on the door. After meeting Laverde’s former housekeeper, who continues to reside at the residence, Antonio is finally able to listen to the cassette tape, which she recovered from the morgue. He then discovers it to be the black box recording of a plane crash in which Laverde’s estranged wife, Elaine, died on her way back to

Bogotá to be reunited with her husband. The term black box more accurately refers to a flight recorder, which in the novel, offers a fictional account of the fatal crash of American Airlines Flight 965.⁴ As Antonio listens to the pilots while they struggle to navigate the plane through darkness, the voices on the recording fade away when Antonio is consumed by the thought of Laverde's wife in the final moments of her life. The cassette comes to a chilling end with the sound of the plane crashing.

When the housekeeper informs Laverde's estranged daughter, Maya, of Antonio's visit, she invites him to her family estate in the upper Magdalena Valley in order to learn more about the night of her father's death.⁵ Dubbed *Villa Elena*, the house was built by Laverde for his wife, offering Maya a site of memory where she reconstructs her father's past decades later. There, Maya reveals she has been curating a "caja de mimbre" full of documents and newspaper clippings she has collected since her father's death (106). Mimicking the image of the black box —further encapsulated by the cassette tape, which serves as a focal point and symbol of Laverde's past for Antonio— the wicker box is Maya's archive: "Esta caja está llena de cosas sobre mi padre. Fotos, cartas que le escribieron, cartas que él escribió y que yo he recuperado. Todo este material lo he conseguido yo" (107). Because Laverde was arrested when Maya was five years old, and remained imprisoned for the rest of her life, Maya has no memory of her father. Having

⁴ The cause of the plane crash is never explored in the novel. The *Aircraft Accident Report* concluded that the plane crash resulted from poor decision making on behalf of the pilots, who deviated from the flight plan in order to land on a different runway than the one they were designated by flight control in order to save time. The pilots realized they needed to return to their original flight plan too late and crashed into El Diluvio Mountain when attempting to return to their original course (Cabrera 22).

⁵ Luis Henao Uribe (2018) argues that the way in which the novel plays off a center/periphery binary, in which Bogotá is presented as the lettered city (through Antonio) and rural areas as an underdeveloped, natural paradise turned site of violence (through Laverde), feeds into reductionist visions of Latin America: "Al retomar los discursos liberales del siglo XIX, *El ruido* presenta una distribución del espacio nacional, en la cual Bogotá se propone como centro intelectual y las provincias como espacios de las pasiones y violencias" (159).

recently learned of Laverde's death via news clippings, she begins curating an archive that rewrites the "invención" of her father that Elaine crafted like "una novela de carne y hueso" (216). When Maya was a child, her mother repeatedly insisted that Laverde died in a plane crash, inventing a story about how he was lost at sea. Her retelling of Laverde's past to Antonio becomes her own attempt at storytelling by which she rewrites her father's story against the original history she had been fed as a child.

Consequently, the unfolding of Laverde's backstory, as told by Maya to Antonio, is transformed into an origin story for the drug trade in Colombia when it is revealed that Laverde fell in love with an American Peace Corps volunteer in Bogotá, Elaine, with whom he moved to the Magdalena Valley. Through the Peace Corps, he meets American Mike Barbieri who, having previously served in Mexico, begins cultivating and trading marijuana when trafficking across the Mexico-US border slows.⁶ Mike recruits Laverde, who is a trained pilot, to fly contraband into the US, eventually progressing from marijuana to cocaine at the height of President Richard Nixon's war on drugs. Eventually, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) ambushes and arrests Laverde on American soil while Mike is murdered in Colombia. With Laverde in jail, Elaine raises Maya on her own, eventually retuning to the US once Maya is grown. When

⁶ Vázquez's depiction of American participation in the drug trade has sparked controversy outside of Colombia. Jeremiah Norris has condemned Vázquez's novel in *Peace Corps Worldwide* for misrepresenting the Peace Corps' work in Colombia, claiming: "A central narrative theme is that PC ag [Peace Corps agricultural] volunteers in the Cauca Valley, under supervision of a Regional Coordinator, were the originators of Colombia's drug trade with the U.S. His narrative which was limited to a few volunteers has now been conflated by Amazon.com reviewers, via an insatiable social media mechanism, to be applied to Peace Corps as an institution" (Coyne). Norris maintains that no Peace Corps volunteers were ever killed in Colombia, nor convicted of any drug-related crimes. Vázquez, however, is not the only Colombian to draw the public's attention to the role American expats played in the birth of the drug trade. Filmmakers Ciro Guerra and Cristina Gallego's *Pájaros de verano* (2018) similarly depicts American Peace Corps volunteers, who while working in northern Colombia, recruit a local Wayuu civilian as a marijuana provider, first for local consumption and later for illicit trade. These works have contributed to a growing archive of cultural production from Colombia seeking to more openly discuss the dual role of both Colombia and the US in the supply and demand of illicit drugs across the Americas.

Laverde is released from jail in 1995, Elaine decides to visit him only to die in route to Bogotá, leaving newly orphaned Maya to piece together a narrative of events on her own, further explaining Laverde's final feelings of extreme guilt and sorrow.

With her narration, it becomes clear that Maya's wicker box offers a richer archive than Antonio's memory as Maya already has a copy of the black box recording, the only piece of information Antonio has to offer. Not only can Maya narrate a greater part of Laverde's life, more critically, her narration of the past takes control of the novel itself. As they sit together in 1998, Antonio's diegetic narration—which is recounting their meeting from his vantage point in 2009—cedes space to Maya's voice as she begins to narrate her knowledge of Laverde's past in first-person. When it is Maya and not Antonio who answers and explains the mystery behind Laverde's identity to the reader, she forces Antonio's diegetic voice into a secondary role in his own narrative framework.

Looking toward narrative authority, María Ospina Pizano examines Vázquez's novel as material for exploring the representations of masculinity in stories of drug trafficking in Colombia. In *El rompecabezas de la memoria: literatura, cine y testimonio de comienzos del siglo en Colombia* (2019), Ospina Pizano focuses on the representation of normative masculinity in the novel, which she identifies as a unifying element in many narratives of drug-related violence (136). As Antonio learns of Laverde's past, he is confronted with images of normative masculinity: how Laverde, the quintessential Latin lover, seduced an American woman, became a willing participant in the drug trade, amassed a personal fortune to care for his family, built a large estate inspired by Escobar's *Villa Nápoles* and endured imprisonment. Ospina Pizano emphasizes that

Antonio, on the other hand, finds himself permanently wounded by a violent episode in which he was merely an innocent and ignorant bystander.

More specifically, in the years between Laverde's death and his encounter with Maya, Antonio's struggle with sexual impotence as a consequence of his wounding becomes a defining destructive factor in his home life.⁷ In the days preceding his trip to meet Maya, Antonio's partner Aura gifts him a vibrator in the hopes of supporting him despite his impotence, while optimistically encouraging them to find alternative ways to revitalize their sex life. Antonio immediately takes offense to the gesture, admitting to himself: "Sentí vergüenza, una vergüenza infantil y absurda" (95). His trip to visit Maya is thus twofold; he is not simply going in search of answers, but also to flee the discomfort of his crumbling home life that sees his masculinity under scrutiny. After he leaves Bogotá without telling her, Aura lashes out at Antonio when she finds out he is with another woman. As she accuses him over the phone, her insinuation of an extramarital affair presents an attack on his masculinity given she knows his impotence would likely prevent him from having sex with Maya.

Readers might find it surprising, then, that Antonio does in fact manage to have sex with Maya at the end of the novel. After Maya finishes relaying her knowledge of Laverde's past, the two have sex without any mention of physiological difficulty on Antonio's behalf. What is more, Antonio convinces himself that Maya was first to make

⁷ In "El narcotráfico como mundo de machos: imaginarios de lo masculino en *Cartas cruzadas* y *El ruido de las cosas al caer*" (2017), Luz Marina Rivas discusses how a combination of Antonio's impotence, his panic attacks and fear form threats to his masculinity, which is exacerbated by his exclusion from the drug trade itself. He is not part of a conventionally masculine endeavor, and is further excluded from knowing its history of events. Antonio's lack of autonomy, as a result, is symbolized by his desire to uncover the truth of Laverde's identity: "Investigar el pasado, la vida de Laverde, es una especie de búsqueda de la propia curación: la recuperación de un principio masculino cercenado. Pareciera que todo esto metaforiza una sociedad herida" (310).

an advance as she seeks comfort in his companionship: “En mi memoria fue su mano la que buscó la mía, no al revés, y luego Maya pronunció estas palabras: *Estoy cansada de dormir sola*” (242). Given the sudden and almost unnecessary (in terms of advancing the plot) nature of their sexual encounter, Ospina Pizano sees the opportunity to engage in sexual intercourse with Maya as an opportunity for Antonio to overcome his diminishing masculinity through the assertion of renewed virility (140). I contend that, furthermore, by erasing any indication of impotence from his memory of the encounter, Antonio’s reclaimed virility is linked to an effort to regain control over the narration.

After having sex with Maya, Antonio lies in bed contemplating his relationship with her as a paradoxical crossroads of both companionship and solitude. He confesses:

Yo tampoco quise estar solo en ese momento: la compañía de Maya se me había vuelto indispensable, así como urgente se me había vuelto la desaparición de su tristeza. Pensé que los dos estábamos solos en esa habitación y en su casa, pero solos con una soledad compartida, cada uno solo con su dolor ... (243)

Recognizing the parallel act of lying next to each other, both experiencing sadness in silence, Antonio relives the moment in which he sat beside Laverde, the two of them listening to two distinct recordings. Though the initial episode leaves Antonio feeling empathetic, he ultimately rejects the possibility of embracing an unspoken connection with Laverde in the moment given the threat excessive emotion holds over his masculinity. Instead, sound intervenes to compensate for dialogic silence; “Nocturno” allows Antonio to reimagine the scene as a demonstration of Laverde’s patriotic love and his own admiration for the gesture, rather than an episode of masculine weakness in which he is tempted to share Laverde’s vulnerability. Conversely, following his sudden narration of their sexual encounter, Antonio describes the two characters lying in bed, finding comfort in the shared silence that unites them. Here, between a man and a

woman, intimacy and vulnerability become acceptable especially when Antonio is able to use silence to his advantage by denying Maya's voice on the page. His ability to rewrite the encounter places him in a position of power that eliminates any expressions of doubt over his reignited virility while further bolstering his understanding of normative gender roles. When Maya's voice is eliminated from the narration, Antonio finally stands alone as a commanding figure. Her side of the story is no longer deemed necessary to shed light on how the events of the night unfolded. Rather, Antonio claims authority over her unspoken emotions and presents them according to his own motives, which sees him emerging as revitalized and in control. When the following morning Maya and Antonio listen to the black box recording together, Antonio sees himself coming full circle, closing the story that began with Laverde in the *Casa de Poesía Silva* and the fateful cassette tape. With his impotence conquered, and his confidence restored, Antonio decides to return home seemingly freed from his crisis of masculinity, only to find his house empty and abandoned.

As a result, I see the novel's highly ambiguous ending as indicative of a problematizing of the patriarchal order. Rather than remain with Maya, Antonio decides he is ready to go home to reassume his role as head of household. Yet, when Antonio returns to find that Aura has left him, taking their daughter with her, his newfound confidence proves futile. As Antonio sits in his abandoned apartment, he wonders if he will ever see his family again. Not only does the novel end with the image of Antonio as a reincarnated Laverde—in 1998 he sits abandoned by his loved ones with his life in ruins just as Laverde upon his arrest—Vázquez does not return to the diegetic narrative of 2009 in order to allow Antonio to explain what has transpired in the interim. That is,

the voice that initiated the novel with the reading of Escobar's hippo does not return to establish the very closure in search of which he began his narration.

The very silencing of Antonio's retrospective voice demonstrates the inability to voice closure both for Antonio and Laverde, likely because, at the end of the novel, one question remains unanswered, the fundamental question behind the entire text: why was Laverde killed? Still unable to confirm why Laverde was murdered —though she assumes he reentered the drug trade in order to make money after being released from jail— Maya declares, “ya qué importa” (255). While Vásquez indicates that Maya feels at peace with this last bit of uncertainty, he shows how doubt affects Antonio differently. As he leaves Antonio's narration unfinished, Vásquez suggests that Antonio's reliance on Laverde as a model of masculine identity has conflicting consequences. While he rewrites and revises his memory of the past in order to reinforce his understanding of virility, strength and control as cultivated by his relationship with Laverde, doing so only results in cyclic failure when Antonio too reenacts Laverde's shortcomings as husband and father.

Antonio's gendered understanding of how power and control shape his identity leaves him trapped in a repetitive struggle to restore traditional paternal and filial roles, consequently blinding him to the reality that both his and Laverde's legacies rest in the hands of their only offspring: daughters. As Maya comes to terms with paternal absence, her final declaration of acceptance in the face of uncertainty presents the opportunity for a revitalized future freed from the patriarchal constraints of filial obligation and from the previously overbearing burden of knowing her father. Able to let go of her obsessive pursuit of truth, Maya feels satisfied enough with Laverde's life story that she does not

need to resolve his death in order to continue living. Though the ultimate truth of his death remains silenced, the inevitable finality of the silence itself offers Maya relief as it generates natural closure to her investigation. In this way, the presence of her voice as a counterbalance to Antonio's hints at the possibility for healing through an alternative path found in increased female participation, a proposal further explored in the works of the Abad family.

REFRACTION AND POLIPHONY IN *EL OLVIDO QUE SEREMOS*

If Vásquez's precarious representation of normative masculinity in *El ruido de las cosas al caer* results in the impossibility of resolution within the patriarchal order, his subtle depiction of acceptance hints at the productivity of a female interlocuter in a story so concerned with masculine identity. With the introduction of the daughter as a diverging image of filial obligation in my reading of *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, I propose examining Héctor Abad Faciolince's *El olvido que seremos* (2006) alongside the documentary adaptation of the text, *Carta a una sombra* (2015), directed by his daughter Daniela Abad.⁸

In the epigraph to his autobiographical text, Abad Faciolince quotes Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000). Translated from the original Hebrew, the verses read: "Y por amor a la memoria / llevo sobre mi cara la cara de mi padre" (Amichai qtd. in Abad Faciolince 9). Amichai's poem aptly introduces the text, which, written as a product of love in memory of Abad Faciolince's father, is a biography disguised as an

⁸ To clarify, from here forward, I will refer to Daniela Abad as Abad, while using both surnames to distinguish between Abad Faciolince and Abad Gómez. I acknowledge that such a convention erases her matrilineal inheritance in a way that does not occur with her father or grandfather. Notwithstanding, in doing so, I follow her choice to be known professionally by only her paternal surname.

autobiography—the story of one life superimposed over another. Héctor Abad Gómez (1921-1987), father of six and founder of the Colombian National School of Public Health, was killed by *sicarios* allegedly sent by paramilitary Carlos Castaño, leader of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), in retaliation for Abad Gómez’s alleged communist activism that denounced the growing urban violence in Medellín throughout the 1980s. His only son, Abad Faciolince, thus, grapples with the burden of mourning his father’s untimely death while also taking on the responsibility of addressing the very public nature of his father’s murder decades later.

The intersection between personal and national discourses within the novel is concisely articulated by Kristine Vanden Berghe, who in “Duelo por el padre y duelo por la patria” (2015), draws a parallel between *El olvido que seremos* and the national romances discussed by Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991) which see the family as a metonym for the nation. Vanden Berghe argues that despite the evocative association of the father with the nation in a novel that intertwines paternity with political activism, *El olvido que seremos* does not mimic conventional patriarchal story arcs that feature domineering and stern father figures who pose a threat to the individualism and growth of their offspring. On the contrary, Abad Faciolince describes his father as loving, overly affectionate and sensitive; an intellectual so dedicated to his humanitarian work that he allowed his wife to become the family breadwinner. Like Vanden Berghe, Irene Sánchez Sempere (2019) posits that the text’s fascination with father figures diverges from the longstanding tradition of overbearing patriarchal characters: “la pieza subvierte la tradición latinoamericana que literaturiza la figura de los grandes patriarcas autoritarios, represores

y sanguinarios” (277). Because Abad Faciolince characterizes his father in a notably less hyper-masculine light, Sánchez Sempere sees a crucial turn away from the vengeful model of filial obligation linked to normative masculinity.

Notwithstanding, while Abad Faciolince’s work, on the one hand, offers a portrait of an unconventional patriarch that challenges literary tropes of paternal loss and filial repetition, Abad’s documentary, on the other, tests the boundaries of hegemonic patriarchy by further experimenting with modes of narration. A revitalized reading of the text through a (grand)daughter’s perspective problematizes the novel’s dual focus on Abad Faciolince’s life and his father’s by highlighting additional visions of absence, which reside in the limited inclusion of female voices. In addressing the constraints of filially as a masculine endeavor, Abad draws our attention to female collectives, which not only diversifies her family portrait, but also creates spaces for collective healing for the subjectivities excluded from Abad Faciolince’s homage. As Abad features visions of absence beyond the paternal void, she further complicates my study of the central tensions surrounding filial obligation, inheritance and civic responsibility. By mobilizing the polyphony of female voices, Abad’s documentary serves as a counterbalance to Vásquez’s novel which witnesses the failure of the patriarchal insistence on the authority of a singular male voice.

Inheritance, Reproduction and Revision

In the immediate aftermath of Abad Gómez’s murder, Abad Faciolince is tasked with cleaning out his father’s office. As he digs through boxes of “los archivos, los papeles, la correspondencia, las cuentas,” an image of his father begins to take shape

before him as he discovers: “abrir el cajón de un muerto es como hundirnos en esa cara que solo era visible para él y que solo él quería ver, la cara que protegía de los otros: la de su intimidad” (265). The image of a box, literally reflected in the boxes of personal archives before him, recall the visions of boxes presented in *El ruido de las cosas al caer*. Here, opening a box to uncover its unknown contents is symbolic of the intimate interior of a human being, which Abad Faciolince equates to “sombra” (266). The word *sombra*, and more fully, the term *carta a una sombra* which reappears as the title of Abad’s documentary, is consistently used throughout the text in reference to the work itself, which is written to and for the ghost of a father who will never be able to read it: “Es una de las paradojas más tristes de mi vida: casi todo lo que he escrito lo he escrito para alguien que no puede leerme, y este mismo libro no es otra cosa que la carta a una sombra” (25).⁹ Though Abad Faciolince intends for shadow, in the specific case of his father’s office, to symbolize the facets of his father’s life that had previously remained unobtainable to him, his continued invocation of shadows throughout the text is transformed into a synecdoche for a phantasmagorical father, which, as in *Hamlet*, offers the possibility of dialogue despite material absence.

María del Carmen Caña Jiménez (2014) and Andrés Pérez Sepúlveda (2014) are both drawn to this scene of unboxing and uncovering in their studies of the text’s attention to objects and the materiality of memory. Pérez Sepúlveda focusses on the

⁹ For Orfa Kelita Vanegas Vásquez (2016), the multifaceted identity of the author-turned-narrator/protagonist, who himself is both father and son, problematizes Abad Faciolince’s authority given that the novel is at the same time his and his father’s story to tell (4). It is in this confusion that the image of a shadow becomes especially evocative. Because he is the father of the text, but the text is a son’s attempt to resurrect his own lost father, Abad Faciolince’s father’s shadow gives shape to the son who attempts to write: “En tanto que en la identidad narrativa confluyen ambos sujetos en una sola voz, la sombra del padre sería la imagen del hijo. Alegóricamente la sombra para quien Abad escribe es la suya, la propia. Una sombra, que, como la memoria, lo prosigue siempre y le hace ‘escribir cartas’ para hacer presente lo ausente, para llenar con palabras la ausencia añorada” (4).

relationship between death and inheritance in order to show how in going through the papers that document his father's work and research, Abad Faciolince realizes that obtaining greater knowledge and power are part of his inheritance. Because the boxes of personal possessions must be examined and organized before the protagonist can narrate unspeakable loss, Caña Jiménez proposes that the discovery of artifacts discovered after his father's death reflects the narration's contribution to a larger discussion on historical memory through the use of intertextuality (45). Indeed, Abad Faciolince explains: "fui escogiendo poco a poco algunos fragmentos de sus escritos nuevos y viejos, y fui armando un pequeño libro que después publicamos" (264).¹⁰ His inheritance takes material form as he prepares a posthumous publication on behalf of his father, allowing his profession as author to serve as a vehicle for memorializing his father's voice after death.

Maneuvering between his father's personal and professional documents, the love and admiration he feels for his father is constantly punctuated by the reminder of his untimely death. That is, to appreciate his life's work is to inevitably face the very violence and injustice Abad Gómez fought against and that ultimately took his life. Confronted with his grief over and over again, Abad Faciolince struggles to find his own voice. He evades death, reflecting: "No he escrito en tantos años por un motivo muy simple: su recuerdo me conmovía demasiado para poder escribirlo. Las veces innumerables en que lo intenté, las palabras me salían húmedas, untadas de lamentable materia lacrimosa, y siempre he preferido una escritura más seca, controlada, más distante" (296). To write his father's death entails confronting his own grief, which has

¹⁰ The book was published as *Manual de tolerancia* (Universidad de Antioquia, 1992).

left him consumed by an excess of sentimentality that impedes his ability to write.¹¹ A notable turning point occurs, however, when Abad Faciolince learns that his father wished to become a writer while rereading a letter his father once wrote to him expressing admiration for the profession. Relaying the letter in the novel brings forth the father's ghost as Abad Gómez's voice offers a narration when Abad Faciolince himself cannot speak, additionally seeing his father's wish come to fruition on both personal and professional levels.

For Abad Faciolince, confrontation with the absence left in the wake of death is met with the excess of materials in his father's office. Lost in bodily form, words found on paper, later further repeated in his writing, allow Abad Faciolince to conjure a form of literary afterlife for his father.¹² In ultimately reappropriating his silence, Abad Faciolince can exorcise the haunting past through the cultivation of a narrative in the present, which frames the act of writing as the fulfilment of both filial obligation and of a father's dream no longer impeded by untimely death. Furthermore, Abad Faciolince's act of writing situates his metafictional portrait as his father's reincarnation alive on the page, further fortifying the text as both biography and autobiography. The act of writing thus goes beyond truth, justice and reconciliation when the use of narrative intertextuality and textual materiality as tools for combatting silencing constitute an act of healing between

¹¹ Andrea Fanta Castro (2015) posits that Abad Faciolince's impulse to write manifests to combat the institutional silence that failed to condemn his father's murder. The State's inability to write his father's story is thus mimicked in and exacerbated by Abad Faciolince's inability to write, which leads to a spectral presence: "el padre regresa espectralmente a través del fracaso de la escritura metaforizando la injusticia y la impunidad" (130).

¹² Augusto Escobar Mesa (2011) classifies the novel as "un sujeto cultural" given that the palimpsest nature of the text grants space to a plurality of voices that punctuate the novel with a life of its own (169). Escobar Mesa elaborates that because the narration is composed, even interrupted, by materials that contribute to the memories the text seeks to embalm, the novel, as a result, is the product of both construction and deconstruction (171).

father and son through the possibility of continued dialogue and literary afterlife.¹³ It is striking, thus, that in the chapter that follows, Abad Faciolince includes his sisters and mother in finally penning his father's death. As he describes the events that led up to the murder, he details where all his sisters were that day and what they were doing the moment they received news of their father's death. Not quite testimonies, the vignettes maintain Abad Faciolince's voice as an omniscient narrator while he occasionally quotes his sisters speaking directly about their emotional state. In this instance, penning his father's death becomes an act of collective grief in which he allows his family to be reunited in their acts of mourning and remembrance as if to rewrite his father's final moments, which occurred without any of his loved ones by his side. As one of the final moments of the text, their accounts of this fateful day seem to signal a moment of joint closure for the family in Abad Faciolince's eyes.

The Possibilities of Polyphony

While Abad Faciolince does cede narrative authority to his father and to his sisters, the conjuring of his father's voice through transcriptions of his correspondences far surpasses the level of ownership he affords his sisters' quasi-testimonials which are mediated by his narration. Indeed, for the most part, Abad Faciolince maintains control over text in order to adhere to his (auto)biographical scope as violence and loss are read through the lens of paternity and patriarchal formulations of filial obligation.

¹³ Focusing on the personal nature of Abad Faciolince's approach to discussing violence in Colombia, Vanden Berghe coincides with Fredy Leonardo Reyes Albarracín (2010) as both use Tristan Todorov's work on exemplary memory to study how the writing of personal loss is transformed into an act of collective healing through readership, particularly when Abad Faciolince insists on writing not as an act of vengeance, but an act of healing.

Interestingly, Vanden Berghe emphasizes the subversive undertones of *El olvido que seremos*, which does not place his parents in traditional gender roles, often characterizing them in the reverse, “el padre presenta características que suelen asociarse con lo femenino, y el narrador admite que la relación que tiene con él se parece a la que sus amigos tienen con sus madres” (277). Abad Faciolince’s move to frame his family history with the life and death of the patriarch obscures the otherwise unconventional nature of his family dynamics. Born last to a household of five daughters, run by a matriarch who served as breadwinner, Abad Faciolince acknowledges the importance of the strong female figures around him while still adhering to a patriarchal structure of authority, inheritance and filial obligation in writing.

The centrality of the patriarch, both Abad Gómez and later Abad Faciolince, in the retelling of family history is examined by Abad Faciolince’s daughter, who along with Miguel Salazar, adapted *El olvido que seremos* into a documentary, *Carta a una sombra*. In the documentary, Abad Faciolince’s story of paternity and filial obligation is taken up by his daughter as Abad Faciolince, in fact, has no sons. Yet, Abad herself never appears in the documentary, neither physically or vocally.¹⁴ Instead, she steps behind the camera and opens the discussion to other members of the Abad family as well as close friends. The documentary thus distinguishes itself from Abad Faciolince’s text by

¹⁴ Abad is not alone in her directorial decision to eliminate herself from a documentary of personal value. A notable example is *Los rubios* (2015), a semi-documentary in which Argentine filmmaker Albertina Carri (1973-) offers an autobiographical study of her parents’ disappearances and murders during Argentina’s Dirty War. Returning to her childhood home, Carri speculates on the circumstances that led to their disappearance and the enduring consequences of their absence. I term the work as semi-documentary given that Carri opts to cast actress Analía Couceyro to play herself, allowing Carri to appear in the film singularly in her role as director rather than subject.

presenting a dynamic act of collective memory which offers a space for multigenerational conversation.

In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Marianne Hirsch introduces her formulation of postmemory. As opposed to a conventional conception of memory, postmemory distinguishes “the relationship that ‘the generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (5). Susan Suleiman (2002), in coining the term “1.5 generation” to characterize child survivors who were “too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have *been there* during the Nazi persecution of Jews” (277), has also been influential in championing the value of intergenerational memory work, particularly within families. Though postmemory was conceived and pioneered within Holocaust Studies, the term has proved popular and effective in discussing the legacy of conflict and trauma in contemporary Latin America, particularly in the Southern Cone. Nevertheless, more recently, scholars such as Geoffrey Maguire have echoed Andreas Huyssen who cautions against the overuse and generalization of the Holocaust “as a universal trope of traumatic history” (Huyssen 16).¹⁵ In a similar vein, I would argue that postmemory is a difficult term to use in the Colombian context given that Colombia has yet to definitively enter into a post-conflict era, even if Abad’s documentary appears to fit the category of postmemory as she uses stories and images to reflect on an event she was too young to

¹⁵ In *The Politics of Postmemory: Violence and Victimhood in Contemporary Argentina* (2017) Maguire proposes using postmemory to study more specifically the balancing act between private narratives of family grief and public political action in an era of truth, justice and reconciliation (5).

recall. While some may come to view the 2016 peace accords with the FARC as a pivotal moment in Colombian history, it is still too early to hypothesize how prognostic of change the year will be for future generations, with scholars such as Martínez already challenging the efficacy of the peace accords.¹⁶

Though contemporary authors and filmmakers like Abad surely have grown up in a society different than that of their parents and grandparents, such generational shifts are more indicative of an evolution of conflict in Colombia, rather than the product of a shift from conflict to a post-conflict era.¹⁷ In the same vein, while Abad may not remember her grandfather's death specifically, her life has still been shaped by the internal armed conflict. Her choice not to include herself in *Carta a una sombra* is not, as Hirsch might propose, indicative of "having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors" (5), but rather reflects the creative liberties her generational distance grants her. Abad's emphasis on a collective collaboration, which sees her withdrawal as a participant from the conversation, underscores the freedom she enjoys as director in telling a story that she cannot singularly tell. Born a year before her grandfather's death, the generational gap that separates her from Abad Gómez is reclaimed as a tool rather

¹⁶ Indeed, in the spring of 2021 as this chapter was drafted, monumental protests took place in Colombia. The protests began in April in response to a proposed tax reform geared toward mitigating the economic crash and spike in unemployment brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed bill would have lowered the taxable income threshold while increasing taxes on small businesses. Though President Iván Duque withdrew the proposed reform bill, large police presence at the protests aimed at dispersing large gatherings during pandemic-era restrictions led to widespread incidents of police brutality, inciting further rioting. Outcries for justice against police brutality are fueled by a longstanding mistrust of state security agencies which have been complicit in civilian casualties throughout the country's history of internal armed conflict. The protests thus offer greater insight into the ineffective implementation of reform after the 2016 accords, supporting Martínez's claim of ineffective change.

¹⁷ Fanta Castro in *Residuos de la violencia: producción cultural colombiana 1990-2010* (2015) discusses the enduring legacy of conflict in Colombia, further problematizing the role of the global market in commodifying it. She questions whether the excessive depiction of violence in literature and film, while at times may accurately reflect historical and social contexts that lead to a banalization of violence, can be reclaimed to defetishize the violence itself or if such phenomena mask the reality of unresolved conflict still alive throughout the country (30-1).

than viewed as a disadvantage to be overcome. Her documentary, unlike the text, is not a biography disguised as an autobiography. It is, more accurately, the biography of an entire family freed from the burdens of filial, and specifically patriarchal, obligations. As a result, postmemory here can serve as a productive entryway into examining intergenerational memory work when the writer, artist or director can reclaim their own silence as a subject as a productive space for conversation between subjectivities similarly silenced.

Carta a una sombra offers a more concentrated focus on the life and career of Abad Gómez, often mixing radio and television clips of his speeches, class lectures and dictations from his personal journals and correspondences. The documentary begins with Abad Faciolince shuffling through shelves of books and boxes of papers revealed to be his father's personal items. The scene seemingly reenacts the aforementioned scene of Abad Faciolince cleaning out his father's office. Abad repeatedly returns to scenes of Abad Faciolince reading out loud from his father's books and journals in order to paint a picture of who he was in his professional and public lives, which additionally offers a meta-representation of Abad Faciolince in his professional role as writer and storyteller. As Abad Faciolince's reading fades into a recording of his father's voice, the opening credits roll while photographs and media clips move across the screen depicting Abad Gómez throughout his lifetime. The mix of materials presented provide visual references to the archival collection that has fed both Abad Faciolince's and Abad's posthumous explorations of their (grand)father. Just as Abad Faciolince describes his archival acts of unboxing as the conjuring of his father's specter —metaphorizing the human interior as the hidden *sombra* enclosed in boxes— Abad's visualization of the materials paired with

the audio of her grandfather's voice continue to invoke his presence. As the collage ends, Abad Faciolince's voice returns, reading the opening paragraphs of *El olvido que seremos*. The camera then turns to a table around which all of his sisters and his mother sit as the family matriarch recalls the final moments she shared with her husband. As she speaks, the camera pans across the faces of her children as they contribute with their own memories. The sound of the conversation fades as Abad Faciolince's voice-over narration returns to a dictation of the novel.

Abad's diverse use of collage presents multiple instances in which materials are mixed in both visual and aural modes. The variety of stimuli generate a feeling of excess and abundance that allow Abad to frame paternal absence in a markedly different light. While Abad Faciolince struggles to write his father's absence when his words themselves seem inadequate, Abad offers a different problem. As opposed to an inability to produce material—particularly since she herself is not constructing the narrative according to her personal perspective—she has a surplus of archival footage and material to organize and find space for within the documentary. Rather than feel consumed by void, she is surrounded by abundance. Abad's emphasis on the richness of her archive underscores a distinguishing element of the Abad family's history, which is that Abad Gómez was a public figure. He made appearances, gave speeches and often left the lab to work with constituents to have contact with those most in need of help in and around Medellín. The multifaceted aspects of his work not only left behind a rich collection of public and private materials, but also underscores the collective need to mourn him. As his daughters describe in *Carta a una sombra*, Abad Gómez's funeral was a massive affair that drew attendees well beyond their family and acquaintances. Decades later, Abad embraces the

need for a return to the public mourning of her grandfather most immediately through the act of airing her documentary on television, particularly during the peace negotiations that eventually resulted in the 2016 signing with FARC. Furthermore, her inclusion of family photographs with radio and television multimedia gestures toward a reopening of her family story to the public audiences, who a generation later, might not be so familiar with Abad Gómez's story. In her multifaceted composition, she transforms the film itself into a discursive space that allows present viewers to interact with a past that might otherwise appear out of reach or irrelevant.

Just as Maya must turn to newspapers and public record to learn who her father was before his death, Abad tears down the barrier between public and private spheres of circulation in order to show that memory work, for her generation and beyond, is increasingly defined and shaped by the exchange within and beyond the family. While her family must grapple with loss, Abad embraces the opportunity she has for engagement as death, in this instance, reminds society of the necessity to constantly confront the haunting afterlives of violence. In order to do so, Abad features testimonies from all family members throughout her documentary, which offer multiple instances in which the entire family reflects together on the past. Additionally, she interviews Abad Gómez's friends and colleagues in order to further bolster the documentary's narrative polyphony.

When Mikhail Bakhtin (1929) applied the musical term polyphony to literature in his study of Fyodor Dostoevsky, he proposed polyphony as a form of dialogic narrative that opposed the monologic authority of the author as the unifying force behind and within the novel. Rather than read fictitious characters as mere iteration of the author,

Bakhtin affirmed that “Dostoevsky, like Goethe’s Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him” (emphasis original 6). As a result, the use of multiple voices and perspectives not only decentralizes the role of the author, but also underscores the importance of “a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*” as a means of challenging the assumption of cohesion between the author and the world he pens within fiction (emphasis original 6). Bakhtin’s vision of polyphony proves apt for distinguishing between the works of Abad Faciolince and Abad given how the former serves as both author and protagonist in his text while the latter removes herself as a participant in order to feature a variety of perspectives. Unlike her father, Abad allows the subjects of the documentary to speak for themselves, rather than mediate their words through her own narrative framework. Still, directors are not completely detached from their works even when stepping behind the camera as Trish FitzSimmons discusses in “Braided Channels: A Genealogy of the Voice of Documentary” (2009). Examining the question of voice and authority more specifically within documentary film, FitzSimmons advocates for a “braided” rather than singular construction of voice whereby filmmakers relinquish narrative control in order to allow participants to speak for themselves (131). Stepping away from a “hierarchy of voices” (132), braided narrative as a metaphor for polyphony allows documentary film to cultivate a dialogic relationship between filmmaker and his/her subjects rather than presuming to adhere to a completely objective perspective.

Applying the image of an egalitarian society, as proposed by Bakhtin, to a dual study of *El olvido que seremos* and *Carta a una sombra* emphasizes how Abad mobilizes

collage in order to allow Abad Gómez to speak in dialogue with those who survive him. While incorporating supplementary materials into the discussion of Abad Gómez's death allows Abad Faciolince to reclaim his inability to write as a productive force and to combat the institutional silence that failed to condemn his father's murder, Abad's use of materials points towards another form of silence, that of all those previously unable to voice their own grief both in Abad Faciolince's text and more broadly in society. When Abad Gómez's death leaves a void, rather than step into it as her father does, Abad chooses to surround the void with complimentary materials. In doing so, she does not use such materials to shed light on the *sombra* of Abad Gómez's specter, but rather leaves the void intact so as to turn the viewer's attention to all those who remain obscured by the shadows of his absence. In this way, Abad's work is not simply about the loss of a father figure, but additionally, and equally crucially, about the subjectivities that remain lost alongside him.

As a result, Abad's contribution through the returning scene of her aunts and grandmother conversing over the highly intimate and communal space of the dining table becomes a transformative moment for the family, particularly for the matriarch and her daughters. Here, the presence of women in remembering Abad Gómez's death is presented in two ways, offering layers of dynamism to Abad's portrait. Abad offers more formal testimonials in which the Abad Gómez matriarch and daughters describe where they were the day of Abad Gómez's death, repeating accounts that seemingly mirror the testimonies relayed in Abad Faciolince's book, here told through their own voices. These structured, even manicured frames are paired with a more informal conversation around the dining table where the women freely discuss the impact of Abad Gómez's death on

their lives. Though Abad Faciolince sits at the table and participates, he is not leading or facilitating the conversation. As his mother and sisters get emotional, the trembling sound of their voices instills in the viewer a feeling of sorrow and pain as well as a great sense of relief. Rather than subdue their emotions, Abad reclaims gendered tropes of female emotion as a force of reason when finally expressing their trauma and articulating the impact of violence appears cathartic and long-overdue.

I emphasize, consequently, the importance of Abad's directorial decision to repeat the opening scene of *Carta a una sombra* —the family sitting around the dining table remembering Abad Gómez's death— in the second half of the documentary, now with the Abad family remembering their sister Marta. Abad Faciolince's sister was diagnosed with melanoma and died as a teenager. Despite his extensive training in medicine, Abad Gómez was unable to save his daughter from cancer, leading Abad Faciolince to observe: "Estoy seguro de que mi papá no padeció la tentación del martirio antes de la muerte de Marta, pero después de esa tragedia familiar cualquier inconveniente parecía pequeño, y cualquier precio ya no parecía tan alto como antes" (209). Though Abad Faciolince links his recounting of Marta's death to that of his father, particularly when emphasizing that their funerals took place in the same church in his chapter "Dos entierros" (197), he does not articulate this parallel on a narrative level by affording Marta's death the same quantity of accounts he does with his father's. Abad similarly draws a parallel between the two deaths, but rather than merely associate the two, she uses them to bookend the documentary through mirroring scenes.

In this second scene, Abad Faciolince's voice-over reads excerpts from the novel in which he recalls the aftermath of his sister's death as his mother and sisters converse

on camera. Here, the inclusion of women in a story of patriarchy stands out when Abad Faciolince's contribution via dictation underscores the predominance of his voice in his novel. Abad's grandmother's and aunts' voices, which speak candidly and unscripted—a notable departure from their accounts of Abad Gómez's death given how their onscreen testimonies nearly match verbatim those written into the novel—allow for the narrative construction of a story from which they were previously, mostly, excluded. By granting them additional space within the documentary, Abad ushers them into public visibility, freeing them from their secondary roles within the home and within their father's story as told by the family's only male heir. More tellingly, by interpreting Abad Faciolince's equating of the two deaths on a compositional level, she is able to pay homage to her late grandfather without suggesting that his death alone shapes her family history and legacy. Though she does not intend to steer the documentary away from its primary focus, Abad's inclusion of a plurality of voices and images, underscored by her dual focus on untimely death, allows her to share her family's experience of loss and grief without hinging their trauma solely on the absent patriarch.

In this vein, Abad's emphasis on dialogue and exchange presents an image that Abad Faciolince's text does not, that of her family members listening to each other. As Albertine Fox discusses in "The Auditory Imagination and the Polyphony of Listening" (2020), "the process of bearing witness to a trauma must include a listener" (266). Polyphonic modes of bearing witness, as the Abad women do around their dining table, means that not only do multiple people speak, but necessarily, they also listen to each other. Active listening, as Schaffer and Smith affirm in their discussion of human rights, proves vital in the realization of transitional justice. Additionally, as Beate Müller (2012)

asserts, “There is therefore more than a fact-finding imperative behind collecting and giving testimony; there is a moral investment in testifying that defines the survivor witness as bound both to the community of those who perished and to that of those who survived and helped build new ... communities” (184-5). As viewers see the Abad women speaking out, speaking together and, more specifically, allowing each other to speak freely, listening allows space for healing and for the exploration of the evolution of their family identity, not in spite of the loss of their father, but more productively, beyond it as a continuously growing entity with or without a patriarch. In doing so, Abad’s documentary not only allows these women to come together in solidarity, but also gestures toward how their conversations can cultivate an outlook of the future after loss. Thus, Abad shows that their *carta a una sombra* does not seek to resolve the darkness cast by paternal loss, nor to fill it or replace it, but rather to allow women to engage and interrogate absence as an opportunity to emerge from this shadow and to voice their own grief in the light of day.

SPECTERS OF HAUNTING AURALITY IN *LOS ESTRATOS*

Intergeneration exchange returns as a central tension in Juan Cárdenas’s *Los estratos* (2013), a narration in first-person which follows a nameless middle-aged man in an unnamed port city on the Colombian Pacific coast. Unlike the previous works studied in this chapter, *Los estratos* does not confront the death of a paternal figure as its primary focus. Rather, the very lack of paternity as a driving force in the novel compels the narrator to turn to alternative figures of authority when, throughout the novel, he explores reoccurring dreams haunted by the memory of his Afro-Colombian childhood caretaker *nana*. His relationship with her reveals the significance of the novel’s title which literally

refers to geological strata, but within Cárdenas's novel more accurately underscores the social strata that so poignantly punctuate Colombian society throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. As an affluent *mestizo* man, the narrator's memories of his Afro-Colombian caretaker reveal lingering guilt over his family's condemnation of his *nana* when she abandons her job at the same time valuable family jewels go missing. Never to be seen again, the *nana* lives in his family's memory as both thief and traitor. The novel follows his search for the *nana* in hopes of reclaiming the complete memory from his dreams, and as a result, the truth of her disappearance. With a detective hired to help him find his *nana*, the narrator embarks on a journey into the Pacific lowlands. Travelling along rivers into the rainforest, he uses word of mouth to locate the *nana*'s village. As they pass through various Afro-Colombian communities, the narrator finds himself displaced in a world he does not know and a culture with which he has never had contact beyond his *nana*.

The narrator's inability to locate his *nana* or even fully retain the memory of her role in his personal and familial histories becomes indicative of how Afro-Colombian culture, maintained in collective memory, shared orally across generations, escapes the written archives of his bourgeois social stratum, just as the *nana* herself, along with the community she represents, are not given a place to tell their own stories in urban Colombian society. Cárdenas's navigation of questions of both gender and race in Colombia invites a study of how history is recorded, circulated and read both within and outside of hegemonic structures of power and authority. In emphasizing the absences left by socioeconomic, racial and gendered bias in the protagonist's narration, Cárdenas draws the reader's attention to silence, which he offsets with what I term as metanarrative

digressions in the novel. As segments that share a highly colloquial Spanish spoken by an unknown presence, likely the *nana*, the metanarrative digressions counterbalance silence with excessive aurality which combat marginalization and erasure with an outcry of sound. Challenging the narrator and reader alike to pause and listen, these moments of aurality link stories of violence to the environment, shedding light on the role of Colombia's natural landscapes in her history of conflict. Ultimately, I explore the potential productivity, along with the inherent problematic implications, of Cárdenas's spotlighting of the *nana*'s voice as the novel struggles to combine the seemingly opposing and disparate narrative forces of the narrator and the evasive whispers of his *nana* that haunt the novel.

Voices of Excess and Void

In *Landscapes of Freedom: Building a Postemancipation Society in the Rainforests of Western Colombia* (2018), Claudia Leal examines the racial and ecological concerns that distinguish Colombia's western tropics from the country's other regions, particularly the Andean highlands. Her interest in the rainforests that line the Pacific coast is punctuated by a crucial fact: the region stands as "the largest area in the Americas inhabited primarily by black people" (5). In looking at how plantation economies transformed the lowland tropics, leaving a human mark on the landscapes, Leal analyzes the consequences of extraction, dredging and mining in the region, which endured as an industry dominated by imperialistic figures:

... travelers and local elites coupled what they considered semisavage peoples with the alleged inhospitable jungle. It was fate and nature, not hard work after the vileness and misfortunes of slavery, that best accounted for blacks' place in

the lowlands. Contemporaries construed blacks—as they did with indigenous groups in other rainforest settings—as a people without history. (16)

Leal's work emphasizes how ideologically motivated representations of Afro-Colombian communities depicted them as racially fit to inhabit the hot and humid lowlands as a source of cheap and exploitable labor. With eventual abolition came continued conflict when formerly enslaved peoples did not want to make contracts with their former owners, but also did not want to leave the land they had long lived and worked (Taussig 48).¹⁸ As a result, by becoming familiar with the legal framework which previously granted them emancipation from slavery, Afro-Colombian communities strove to build homes and livelihoods for themselves within the rainforest despite being mostly erased from state purview: "Despite being largely illiterate, blacks were well acquainted with written procedures. When they purchased their freedom, the transaction was notarized and they received copies of their *cartas de libertad* (freedom certificates) to prove their new status" (Leal 163).¹⁹ Though they turned to the law to secure their homes and livelihoods,

¹⁸ The confusion over land titling and claims to ownership was, and continues to be, a crucial element of the peace negotiations. In the 2016 accords the national government proposed ending the cultivation and trade of illicit drugs and reducing the gap between rural and urban populations by addressing untitled and illegally seized rural land: "con el propósito de regularizar y proteger los derechos de la pequeña y mediana propiedad rural, es decir, garantizar los derechos de las personas que sean legítimas dueñas y poseedoras de la tierra, ... el Gobierno Nacional formalizará 7 millones de hectáreas de pequeña y mediana propiedad rural" (*Acuerdo Final* 16). By restoring land to its rightful, legal owners while supporting small-scale farmers and rural communities, the 2016 accords sought to support such civilians without adequately addressing, as Leal details, historic problems with land titling in Colombia.

¹⁹ As Mara Viveros Vigoya (2018) underscores, the role of Afro-Colombian women within this struggle warrants particular attention given their intersectional identity in Colombia society: "The armed conflict and capitalist depredation have undoubtedly affected all Colombian women. Black women have paid heavier costs, in terms of displacement, sexual violence, selective assassinations, and political persecution, because of their active participation in the defense of their ancestral lands. This is true especially in the Colombia Pacific region" (102). While political demands for increased recognition of Afro-Colombian peoples often neglects to highlight the specific problems plaguing of Afro-Colombian women who disproportionately suffer from acts of sexual violence and displacement, feminist discourse seeking to support rural women likewise overlooks the significant role that race plays within rural regions, leaving Afro-Colombian women overlooked on both fronts.

Afro-Colombian communities continued to rely heavily on oral tradition for the preservation of their own history and customs, leading to a false sense of ahistorical identity in more affluent and Eurocentric circles.

The lowland tropics' fraught history of marginalization surfaces in Cárdenas's novel through a constant preoccupation with both silence and voice, which erupts initially through the narrator's search for his *nana* and is further complicated by three enigmatic and untitled chapters, each of which conclude one of the novel's tryptic parts. Written as fluid soliloquies, the unpunctuated lines relay phonetic translations of a highly colloquial, oral Spanish. Though neither the narrator nor Cárdenas explicitly explain or introduce these segments—which I term metanarrative digressions—they offer a counter-narrative that attempts to mobilize conversations on authority and narrative control as entryways into thinking of appropriation and historical memory in Colombia.

Though the speaker of the metanarrative digressions is never identified, I hear them as the voice of the *nana*. Haunting the narration, her voice intervenes in order to give presence to her absence from the novel, particularly upon discovery at the end of the novel that she has died. Though the narrator finally arrives to her village, he is too late to speak to her in person. More strikingly, the *nana*'s son explains that in her final days she stopped speaking: “Mi pobre mamá casi ni habló en todo este tiempo que estuvo acá con nosotros. O sea sí habló, cómo le digo, ni explicó, ni nada. Hablar hablaba, sólo que nadie la entendía. ... A veces yo intentaba charlar con ella, para ver si podía sacarle algo de lo que había estado haciendo todos estos años. Pero no se podía” (190). Her speaking becomes incoherent as her voice is transformed into a confused outburst of sounds, which echoes the first episode of metalinguistic digression.

The first digression begins by introducing two figures: “*ej quéramo do negro viejo vivíamos tuavía de cantar caña*” (emphasis original 61). The voice describes sugar cane workers sitting outside in the humid heat, listening to mosquitos buzz around them, thinking about a refreshing sip of Coca-Cola. As the voice speaks in first-person, addressing a “vos” later called “mi amor” (61), the reader is struck by the repetition of the image of a devil:

... vos mi amor me dijiste mi amor que estábamos muertos y que ya no íbamos a volver nunca y abriste la boca para contarme la historia de los príncipes negros y tu boca se abrió y dijiste escúchame bien negro bien negro se abrió tu boca se abrió y todos pujaron para adentro era como un reloj visto desde arriba y desde arriba yo pegué un brinco para dejarme tragar por el hueco que había en cada hora ... (emphasis original 62-3)

Addressing the devil as “mi amor,” the narrator here describes being consumed by a mouth that serves as a protective force against time. The devil’s mouth does not speak, but opens to swallow others into a space that is, as described, a hole in time defined by repetition. The following two episodes of metanarrative digressions reflect a preoccupation with speaking by including the rhythmic repetition of phrases such as “*dijque que dijque que dijque que*” (132) and “*dizque le dice dizque*” (201) respectively.

Though the episodes of metanarrative digression seem senseless when they appear in the novel, by the time the narrator arrives at his *nana*’s village, they offer a supplementary narration of her state before death. As her son describes, the *nana* is transformed into the devil in her final days when she opens her mouth to speak and the noises that emerge sound like multiple voices crying out from within: “*parecía un diablo y la voz era como si tuviera muchas voces, como si un montón de gente hablara por boca de ella*” (190). In their polyphonous cacophony, no single voice is intelligible. These instances of excessive sound differ from those offered by Vázquez in *El ruido de las*

cosas al caer in that the narrator himself does not hear the *nana* speak directly.

Accordingly, I turn to Ana María Ochoa Gauthier's (2014) study of aurality in which she explores the intersection of aural production and written record in Colombia. Proposing that sound has long been present in written history through acts of transcription, Ochoa Gauthier uses Alexander von Humboldt's (1769-1859) travel narratives, and more specifically his description of the *bogas* of the Magdalena River, to show how the production of sound was often at odds with its reception given cultural bias. Listening to the boat rowers who paddled along the river, Humboldt expresses discomfort before the sounds of stamping feet and hissing when he cannot decipher their meaning. Analyzing Humboldt's reaction, Ochoa Gauthier proposes:

We also hear the difficulty of deciphering a generic category of sound. Was this a lament or a joyful type of expression? What about the blasphemy and the racket on the roof produced by the bogas' stamping feet? It was a sound that was impossible to inscribe into a genre or an emotion, its untraceability begging for classification in Humboldt's ears. (33)

Ochoa Gauthier emphasizes the "untraceability" of sound in instances of cultural, linguistic and even racial difference. The efficacy of sound as a mode of communication proves vital when emotional experiences exceed the limits of rational and even linguistic capacities. Sound triggers a bodily sensation that can be at odds with the brain when the sound becomes illegible, and as a result, inarticulable. The root of this failure coincides with Ochoa Gauthier's examination of Humboldt when "what we are able to hear through the pages of history is the contracting perception of those who produced the sounds and those who listened to them, as mediated by potentially radically different interpretations of the same sounds" (34). In a similar vein, the narrator's understanding of the *nana*'s voice becomes mediated by her son's transcription. When the son assumes that she has

lost her ability to communicate —she vocalizes without speaking— so too does the narrator, meaning that he never considers excess as the *nana*'s objective.

In the plurality of her voice, the *nana* cries out as if vocalizing the sound of many people at once.²⁰ Channeling the devil, she mobilizes his magical capabilities, as well as his trickster tendencies to confuse the listener, compelling them to listen more closely. Consequently, the *nana* is transformed into a representative of her community, entrusted with the spoken word. Such an intersection between orality, conflict and survival has been studied by María del Pilar Ramírez Gröbli in *Paisajes sonoros del retorno: palma de aceite, despojo y culturas de paz en el postconflicto colombiano* (2020). As she examines the ongoing problem of forced displacement in Colombia throughout the turn of the twenty-first century through music and oral literature, Ramírez Gröbli discusses how songs from rural areas, though sung at times by individuals, are born from collectives seeking to relay the diversity and history of their communities (17). More particularly, orality is both a product of and safeguard to conflict:

Estas formas de la literatura oral proveen una visión de mundo en cuyos relatos no solo se muestran las dinámicas internas de las poblaciones, sino que revelan historias alternativas y, al mismo tiempo, subalternas. ... Las manifestaciones orales que surgen desde las poblaciones campesinas recogen las cosmologías y los conceptos de espacialidad y temporalidad que han sido amenazados a causa de las confrontaciones. Por ello, no solo se encuentran consignadas las escenas y circunstancias del desplazamiento forzado, sino que se reconstruye la perspectiva futura del retorno y se recupera la historia comunitaria, el pasado y el origen. (19)

Particularly in the Colombian Pacific, where the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations have suffered a history of exploitation, forced labor, displacement and racial

²⁰ In his *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* (2017), Tom McEnaney discusses the use of aurality as a mobilizing force for communicating collective voice. In his proposal of “narrative acoustics,” McEnaney proposes that the use of narrative sound allows for the transmission of popular speech in writing in order to “produce the vox populi” (8).

and cultural oppression, orality offers a space for the preservation of local tradition which relies on the stakeholders themselves for survival. Orality not only features subaltern subjectivities, as Ramírez Gröbli articulates, but more crucially cultivates a memory of the community's origins in order to nourish a hope of return, redemption and reclamation. Yet in her turn away from a legible orality to an excessive aurality, the *nana*'s voice permeates and haunts the narrative, making her presence known while never fully resolving the narrator's inquiries. As Gonzalo Sánchez (2001) proposes, unlike Southern Cone countries in which "past violence, long officially denied, was recognized, dramatized, and exorcised in a great national process of exposure and self-criticism, in Colombia, on the contrary, violence and massacres tend to be routinized and incessantly displaced to a kind of frontier between memory and nonmemory" (Bergquist et al. 9). The *nana*'s vocalization of local tradition places her community's existence within a space of intentional non-memory. Existing between past events and future resolution, the indecipherable nature of her voice points toward an ephemeral present or a space of suspended animation; displaced, but envisioning return. She does not speak to proclaim nor to clarify as the narrator hopes. Rather, her expulsion of confusing and unsettling outbursts stalls his impulse toward swift resolution and closure, compelling further discussion and reflection. In this vein, she offers an alternative form of memory and archive that exists outside of official record and even outside of time.

To propose that Cárdenas, who, like his narrator, is a formally educated *mestizo* man, speaks on behalf of the *nana* by writing her words into the novel is a problematic proposition. To stand in as her spokesperson would perpetuate a tradition of erasure — and of cultural and linguistic appropriation— in a novel that seeks to problematize this

very injustice. Nevertheless, the final scene of the novel is crucial to understanding the novel's nuance. In the scene, the detective feeds the narrator a drink that he has concocted, which he calls "el remedio" (177). Used "para encontrar a la gente que se pierde," the drink once consumed allows one to hear "la llamada" of the afterlife (177). Likely a type of *ayahuasca*, a hallucinogenic spiritual medicine common in the Amazon, the remedy engulfs the drinker in a trance in which he/she may come in contact with the dead. Guiding the narrator like Dante's Virgil down the river and through the rainforest, the detective becomes his spiritual guide. As he descends further into a hallucinogenic trance, the narrator sees the natural landscapes around him transform into a colorful collage and he passes out. When he wakes the next morning, he does not remember what has happened. He has failed to reunite with his *nana*; he has not heard her call.

Consequently, I do not read the metanarrative digressions as an attempt to speak on behalf of a female, Afro-Colombian figure who is denied the opportunity to speak for herself, but rather as Cárdenas's, and by extension his narrator's, intent to listen and hear her after acknowledging that her presence has proven impossible yet still extant. Her voice speaks out, even when he cannot engage with it, both in his trance and in his narration. She stands apart, not silenced, but within another plane of existence unavailable to others, to the narrator or to readers. Opting to maintain her absence from the novel, Cárdenas reflects the reality of the marginalized Afro-Colombian experience—and the even further intersectionally marginalized identity of Afro-Colombian women—which is never given a role in national discourse, but continues to live and speak within their communities even when their participation beyond cultural and racial divides proves unwelcome. The narrator's final assertion that "A nosotros nos protege el

diablo” (200), suggests that his inability to converse directly with his *nana* does not impede his quest for answers, but rather shows him how her lingering voice serves as a protective shield that affirms the survival of their voices even when illegible or untraceable to the outside world. As a result, her voice does not offer him the comfort of resolution, but rather forces him to learn from his failed attempt to find answers through conventional means that have misleadingly become endowed with hegemonic power throughout history.

FRAUGHT MASCULINITIES, NARRATIVE AND THE NATION

In his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), Michel Foucault examines common tendencies to define genealogy as linear, logical and uniform. Challenging this shared notion, he argues that heritage and descent are generated through the “unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or underneath” (146). Heritage, according to Foucault, is not the culmination of a seamless evolutionary move forward in time, but rather the byproduct of conflict and instability. Thus, progress itself must be redefined in order to look more closely at that which interrupts, disrupts and destabilizes societal proclivities for forward movement. Indeed, Foucault’s proposal offers a critical lens through which patriarchal structures of power, voice and control can be examined.

If continuity presents a false sense of peace within hegemonic systems, sound can be reclaimed as a force of disruption that draws our attention to the faults and fissures that, previously hidden within or underneath, wait to be heard. In *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, as Antonio attempts to overcome the lingering physical and emotional wounds left in the wake of violence and death, his grappling with troubled notions of control,

authority and masculine identity leave him turning to Maya for answers. Her presence as a competing narrative authority within the novel challenges patriarchal control both within the family and over the narration, forcing Antonio to reassess his understanding of masculine power and virility. *El olvido que seremos* and *Los estratos* attempt to respond to such crises of masculinity through experimental projects which mobilize intertext and narrative palimpsest to bridge the gaps that can separate generations, genders and cultures. In stepping away from vertical structures of power and control, these works begin to explore the productivity of horizontal distributions of representation.

Nevertheless, as Abad Faciolince's daughter Daniela Abad demonstrates in her documentary *Carta a una sombra*, projects of familial reconstruction, which offer entryways into discourses on national turmoil, remain highly unbalanced in their incorporation of female voices, all the more poignant in Cárdenas's confrontation with marginalized subjectivities in *Los estratos*. Indeed, the *nana*'s resistance leaves readers questioning the process by which notions of control are formalized and written into practice. As both the land and people who inhabit these spaces have been shaped by traditions that resist institutional documentation, both out of necessity and due to their exclusion from official processes of truth, justice and reconciliation, it is clear that greater visibility is still necessary.

In the end, all three novels fail to fully resolve the theme of fraught masculinity identified by Hoyos in his reading of novels of Colombia's patriarchy. Though they identify the difficulty of filling authoritative voids without enabling further perpetuation of patriarchy, their insistence on the possibility of resolution reflects an urgency to achieve peace and finality to a conflict that resists conclusion, and more strikingly, to a

story that still resists completion. So concerned with chronology, linear movement and vertical pathways of inheritance and growth, these stories push toward a future in an incomplete and amnesic way. Unable to hear, listen and fully incorporate female narratives of violence—as represented through counterbalancing figures such as Maya, the Abad women and *nana*—these works prove the failure of the patriarchal order as a mechanism for achieving peace. Contrasting Vásquez's and Abad Faciolince's representations of failure against Abad's and Cárdenas's visions of polyphony and dialogue reveals how aurality can interrupt linear narrative, ironically, for the sake of progress. As acts of storytelling offer moments of pause, they create spaces for listening that challenge conventional understandings of time. By offering an opposing framework for envisioning resolution in the aftermath of loss, the works studied in this chapter invite an exploration of alternative narratives of familial loss and survival, which, having long existing in the shadows, await receptive ears.

CHAPTER TWO

Entanglements of Time and The Disruptive Kinship Bonds of Adoptive Care

While instances of textual sound can disrupt narratives of political and personal turmoil in order to compel readers to listen, so often do stories of loss and recuperation reside in silent and silenced spaces. Having explored instances of failed listening as a means of problematizing the centrality of the patriarchal structures that back national narratives of violence and conflict in the works of Juan Gabriel Vásquez, Héctor Abad Faciolince, Daniela Abad and Juan Cárdenas, this chapter turns to Carolina Sanín's *Los niños* (2014) and Pilar Quintana's *La perra* (2017) in order to explore how unconventional kinship bonds can draw our attention to the difficulty of articulating traumatic losses in family histories. The two novels offer comparative images of rural and urban women respectively grappling with motherhood with particular attention to the significance of silence in their lives; silence here as defined by the unspoken specter of repressed childhood trauma that resurface in the present. *Los niños* tells a story of adoption in the aftermath of forced migration in Bogotá while, in *La perra*, a middle-aged woman living in the Colombian Pacific grapples with infertility as she takes in a stray dog. With particular attention to how internal armed conflict has disrupted family structures—more particularly the hegemony of the nuclear family—this chapter features stories of adoption in order to question how alternative forms of kinship become an

unavoidable element of daily life when territorial violence, forced displacement and isolation impede the preservation of conventional familial structures in Colombia.

As respective protagonists Damaris and Laura experiment with alternative family ties, their attempts to establish normality in the wake of tragedy provides insight into how processes of healing and resolution can prove productive even when unsuccessful. When Laura's and Damaris's attempts to foster intimate relationships with adoptive children is complicated by an inability to dialogue with them in plain terms, subsequent disconnect between mother and child compels each protagonist to reflect on other disintegrating familial ties and how they might be informing identity crises in the present. In this way, adoption becomes a conduit for deconstructing linear chronology, revealing how family structures are formed across time, on multiple temporal planes at once. Thus, rather than focus exclusively on the novels' protagonists insofar as their representations of motherhood, I propose reading both women as adult figures continuing to grapple with childhood turmoil. When loss, abandonment and orphanhood constitute lingering childhood phantoms that persist in their adult consciousness as silenced narratives, Sanín and Quintana illustrate how Laura's and Damaris's repressed pasts are resurrected when confronted with the equally silent figures of adoptive children who offer mirrors into their own selves. While *La perra* and *Los niños* do not explicitly discuss the Colombian armed conflict, I propose that both novels' attention to the lingering consequences of intergenerational processes of loss, grief and mourning can map onto large-scale acts of recuperation and healing in a moment of heightened urgency for peace. By affirming how reconstructing family ties in the present requires a return to the past in order to build a new future, these novels offer ongoing ruminations on the vestiges of violence by

focusing on women's efforts to redefine and reinforce kinship bonds in the aftermath of conflict when resolution presents as premature.

Complicating Female Identities within the Rural Turn

The 2006 report, *VI Informe sobre violencia sociopolítica contra mujeres, jóvenes y niñas en Colombia 2002-2006*, begins with a striking claim against the then current president of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe Vélez¹ The 2006 *VI Informe* is one in a series of reports produced during Uribe's presidency evaluating the efficacy of Colombian law in upholding human rights for all in light of Uribe's ongoing negotiations with paramilitary groups. Uribe's legislation proved highly polarizing in Colombian society due to his populist tactics of engaging civilians in acts of policing for which "He proposed doubling the number of military troops, professionalizing them over the short term, creating groups of 'campesino soldiers' and a national network of 1 million informants, and paying citizens for information" (Palacios 193). Though Uribe did successfully negotiate a unilateral cease-fire during his first term in office with the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), a far-right paramilitary coalition, his success came with a price: he promised political pardon for all paramilitary involvement in drug trafficking in exchange for demobilization and later used sudden extradition as a tool for impeding their participation in judicial processes. Nevertheless, by the end of 2005, the AUC had completely demobilized under the *Ley de Justicia y Paz*. Meanwhile, kidnappings,

¹ The report was generated by the *Comisión Colombiana de Juristas*, a non-governmental organization recognized by the United Nations as a subsidiary of the International Commission of Jurists, another NGO dedicated to assuring respect for human rights through law. This report is the product of *La mesa de trabajo "Mujer y conflicto armado,"* a coalition of organizations formed in 2001 that advocates for greater visibility of women and children in Colombia.

bombings and attacks on civilian populations decreased and Colombians began to feel more comfortable moving freely around the country.² As a result, internal tourism increased, generating employment, allowing citizens to enjoy a period sometimes referred to as the *pax uribista* (Palacios 194).

Yet, the *VI Informe* opens by underscoring that Uribe's policy of increased military presence in civilian life paired with the cultivation of a culture of informants and rural soldiers—his doctrine of Democratic Security and Defense—had negative impacts on society's marginalized populations:

... esta política no ha representado mayor seguridad en las vidas de mujeres, jóvenes y niñas. Por el contrario, la implementación de la política de seguridad democrática ha vulnerado sus derechos, ha fragmentado el tejido social por el miedo y la desconfianza que se instalan en las comunidades, ha estigmatizado las organizaciones de mujeres en diversas regiones del país, y ha aumentado la violencia sexual. (10-1)

As the *VI Informe* underscores, increased policing tactics in the areas most afflicted by the internal conflict have disproportionately affected women and young girls who not only find their rights and bodies violated, but are thrust into an environment in which violence and forced migration rupture the economic, social and familial relationships key to their survival. As a result, it is important to recognize that the peace championed by Uribe's democratic security was not enjoyed at all levels of society. The exclusionary undertones of his political campaign are emphasized, as Diana Ojeda (2013) affirms, by the strategic mobilization of hyper-masculine rhetoric during his presidential campaign, which marketed Uribe as the firm leader and father of the nation that the Colombia public needed to finally emerge from conflict (761). However, while presented as a formidable

² Uribe did successfully double the size of the Colombian armed forces during his eight years in office, though as Marco Palacios points out, the resulting decreased homicide rate under Uribe did not actually include homicides directly related to the armed conflict (194).

war hero, Uribe cultivated a sense of security that was predominantly enjoyed by the urban wealthy. In this vein, literary scholars such as Norman Valencia have criticized Uribe's policy by emphasizing how the false sense of security generated by the *pax urbista* overlooked rural areas of the country continuing to suffer from "la persistencia de la violencia en momentos en que gran parte de la población colombiana estaba convencida de que el país gozaba de mayor estabilidad, gracias a un estado fortalecido por la figura de Álvaro Uribe" (370).³ In using Evelio Rosero's novel *Los ejércitos* (2007) as his focal point, Valencia encourages readers to look beyond hegemonic rhetoric, not simply at enduring violence, but additionally at how writers are mobilizing fiction in order to call attention to the invisible beings hidden within isolated areas of the country.

The increased spotlighting of Colombia's periphery, which María Ospina terms "the rural turn" (248), has been, she argues, a defining hallmark of contemporary Colombian cinema. Indeed, commercial and critical successes such as Ciro Guerra's *El abrazo de la serpiente* (2016), his and Cristina Gallegos's *Pájaros de verano* (2018) and Alejandro Landes's *Monos* (2019) are recent examples of projects that support Ospina's effort to problematize the central government's capitalistic reclamation of Colombia's natural landscapes. Presenting rural areas as now allegedly freed from danger, travel

³ In his article, "Una estética del secreto: violencia, historia y exclusión femenina en *Los ejércitos* de Evelio Rosero" (2018), Valencia examines twenty-first-century Colombian cultural production's common use of secrets, silences and invisibility as an attempt to highlight the voices, subjectivities and communities that political systems, such as Uribe's government, could not or did not want to acknowledge (369). In Rosero's novel, though women's bodies serve as focal points, women's voices are rarely featured. Just as Valencia examines Rosero's graphic depictions of voyeurism and rape—the dehumanization of the female subject endemic in the internal conflict—the *VI Informe* illustrates how common tactics of sexual violence and forced displacement disproportionately affect women and children, and more critically, rural women and children who do not share the same financial, judicial or educational resources available to urban populations.

campaigns marketing Colombia as rich in touristic paradises propagate a misleading image of peace, which the aforementioned filmmakers, among others, are working to expose. In conversation with Ospina, Sebastián Saldarriaga Gutiérrez (2020) contends that the rural turn in twenty-first century fiction, though less prevalent than in cinema, marks a notable departure from popular, but often fetishized, stories of violence from the 1980s that fed the cultivation of the *sicaresca* genre and the *narconovela* (41).

While the diversification of literary tropes may reflect decreasing urban violence at the turn of the century on the one hand, the rural turn offers a critical reminder of the specters of violence in an age of emerging post-conflict, as Juliana Martínez affirms in her conceptualization of spectral realism in *Haunting without Ghosts* (2020). Turning away from magical realism's fantastic depiction of literal ghosts, Martínez focuses on the representation of absences and disappearances as a haunting consequence of conflict: "Spectral realism inhabits and is narrated from within the *lejeros* of Colombia, the spectral sites that haunt the national imaginary because they are spaces in which violence has gorged itself. ...What is recognizable is how *unrecognizable* a space becomes once it has been afflicted by violence" (emphasis mine 26). Such specters call attention to what is left unsaid, unresolved and unacknowledged in order to begin to dialogue with voices whose subaltern identities as well as geographical isolation leave them silenced and excluded from state purview. In similar fashion, in this chapter, I turn to the unspoken violences that occur more specifically within domestic scenes in order to question how greater visibilization of marginalized beings to problematize state and institutional initiatives calling for expedient and enduring peace in Colombia. Rather than overlook or brush past the unspoken, this chapter questions what silence offers as a mode of

communication that can redefine collective visions of healing and resolution through a resurrection of repressed traumatic pasts.

Accordingly, this chapter will approach a study of *La perra* and *Los niños* through a critical interrogation of children and domesticated animals as silent beings. I discuss how animality mobilizes silence to emphasize the complications inherent in nurturing adoptive offspring whose incommunicable interiorities further impede the cultivation of conventional relationships. Silence subsequently problematizes the formation of maternal bonds, and thus the filial identities they shape. Beginning with *Los niños*, I examine how Laura's attempt at adoption problematizes what I term the archival drive, which I define broadly as the impulse to cultivate informative texts or narratives published for public circulation – identification papers, legal documents or material produced and shared by the state or public and private institutions of power. As Sanín shows through her portrayal of bureaucracy and adoption, the materials produced and circulated by the archival drive are often assumed to be indicative of or establishing an accepted truth in collective consciousness. Nevertheless, in attempts to help build and restore familial bonds in the aftermath of destruction, displacement and death, the archival drive inadvertently contributes to the weakening and eventual disintegration of the family by silencing and erasing marginalized histories and identities from urban consciousness.

I then offset Sanín's problematization of the archival drive in the city with *La perra* in which Quintana features rural subjectivities whose existence not only escapes the purview of the archival drive, but even articulation itself. The jungle in Colombia has long been viewed as a site of wounding, both human and natural. From colonial exploration and domination to the exploitation and destruction of mining economies, the

rainforest has historically been characterized as a site of abundance and excess paired with untamed risk and danger to the human body. Stepping into the jungle with Damaris in *La perra*, Quintana continues to problematize the idea of a paradise lost while additionally exposing the complexities of mobilizing the jungle as a space of conflict. As a result, Quintana's depiction of the jungle becomes crucial for combatting erasure by vocalizing and remembering violence and loss overlooked by the archival drive. By focusing on the difficult process of nurturing unconventional kinship bonds, I draw parallels between Quintana and Sanín's acts of attempted healing within the home to acts of restoring peace throughout a country so deeply defined by the violence inflicted on living beings and nature. As a result, Quintana and Sanín's novels respond to the false sense of finality and peace espoused under Uribe's presidency by articulating the slow and ongoing suffering of marginalized voices who continue to confront trauma in twenty-first-century Colombia even when society as a whole is readily looking toward the future.

ADOPTION WITHIN THE ARCHIVAL DRIVE IN *LOS NIÑOS*

In *Los niños* (2014), Carolina Sanín follows Laura, a single and middle-aged woman residing alone in Bogotá during what are assumed to be the years contemporaneous to the novel's composition. When a mysterious boy arrives at her doorstep, Laura must decide what to do. After taking the boy, who she renames Fidel, to a center for children who have been displaced or orphaned, Laura regrets giving him away and decides to locate him once again. Her search for Fidel subsequently forces Laura to confront a disorganized and often negligent bureaucracy that, in its attempts to document and care for children, simultaneously erases and rewrites their personal histories of suffering and trauma. Despite difficulties, Laura is eventually able to locate Fidel and decides to quit

her job as a housekeeper in order to commit herself to raising him. Yet, throughout the novel, as she attempts to bond with the child, Laura is unsettled by how Fidel grows more and more silent and erratic. His increasingly unpredictable behavior, cryptic language and violent outbursts leave Laura questioning his identity as she begins to wonder if he is somehow not the same child she turned over to the state. In the novel's final pages, when Fidel lashes out inexplicably, destroying his bedroom, Laura is left questioning whether or not she should follow through with her plans to adopt him.

As Sanín sheds light on the darker sides of motherhood —the often-unspoken feelings of fear, disappointment, frustration and anger related to maternal care—she also mobilizes the figure of a silent child to underscore the often-inaccessible nature of childhood as haunting state and source of anguish. Through the works of Susan Honeyman, Joanne Faulkner and Gabriele Schwab, I propose reading Laura's paranoia, which sees Fidel become more of a stranger to her, as more accurately a growing estrangement with her own childhood self, alluding to the novel's plural title, *los niños*. In her confrontation with the bureaucratic system that attempts to find a new home for Fidel in the wake of his displacement, Laura becomes frustrated by the gaps in knowledge created by the archival drive; the generalizing and negligent system for documenting civilian response to upheaval and turmoil. Unable to discover where he came from or what his family was like, Laura is left reflecting on her own silenced relationship with her mother and her forgotten family history, which is reflected back to her in her failed attempts to communicate with Fidel. In response, Laura begins to pen her own family history, one that rewrites Fidel's identity into a narrative of blissful filial connection, making her complicit in the very acts of erasure and appropriation she

condemns in the state. As Fidel rejects her acts of revision, Laura begins to understand how her desire to adopt Fidel relates to her own troubled relationship with filial discontent, revealing a connection between her own repressed personal history of displacement with a greater social and political debate over forced migration in Colombia.

The Archival Drive's Haunting Erasures

When Laura first encounters Fidel at her doorstep, she is struck by his appearance of un-belonging as his meager clothing and accent suggest that he is not from the temperate Andean highlands of Bogotá. The boy, however, reveals nothing about where he is from, nor how or why he has arrived at Laura's apartment. The mystery surrounding his origins mimics Laura's own position within the novel, which is relayed by an omniscient narrator who hints at Laura's past without ever revealing any identifying information about her childhood or family. The narrator grants readers little access to knowledge of Laura's background beyond that her family owns a salt mine in an unnamed mountainous region from which she receives a monthly "cheque por su porción de las utilidades y por las porciones de su hermano muerto y de su madre, que la había hecho su heredera en vida" (15). While readers are led to believe that Laura is now orphaned—there is never any mention of her father—Laura later admits to wanting to call her mother, but assumes that the number she has is outdated, suggesting that she and her mother have not spoken in some time. Her lack of family history is thus strikingly echoed in the appearance of a seemingly orphaned child who does not speak of his past or his family.

What is more, Laura appears disinterested in the boy's origins and immediately decides to rename him in a symbolic act of ownership. While she does ask him his name, which he claims to be Elvis Fider, she does not accept him as such, choosing instead to give him a new one: "Como le pareció que *Elvis* le quedaba grande y *Fider* sonaba como un infinitivo, siguió llamándolo, durante un rato, *oye*. No supo cuando le puso Fidel" (31). The name Fidel, reminiscent of the Latin word *fidelis* meaning trustworthy or loyal, offers a more traditionally Castilian sound to the otherwise unconventional name Elvis Fider. More crucially, the renaming symbolizes a moment of baptism, emphasized by the fact that Laura calls the day the two met Fidel's "nacimiento" (17). Laura's negation of the boy's voice mimics prior characterizations of her relationship with her dog Brus, who she cares for like a child. Often worrying that he might be kidnapped, Laura lies to strangers about his name, explaining: "Creía que llamarlo de distintas maneras lo protegía; que así era menos probable que alguien se lo llevara de la puerta del supermercado o de otra parte. ... Al final podía prevalecer y llevárselo, pero no llevarse el nombre verdadero, que la seguiría acompañado solo a ella" (12-3). For Laura, being Brus's guardian means being the only keeper of the dog's name. Particularly because Brus cannot speak for himself, her act of speech—calling his name—establishes his identity. As the only human who knows his real name, Laura asserts control over him.

The commonalities between her treatment of Fidel and Brus invite an exploration of Joanne Faulkner's examination of muteness as a shared state between child and animal in "Negotiating Vulnerability through 'Animal' and 'Child' (2011). By studying the parallels between humans' relationship to animals and our cultural understanding of childhood, Faulkner highlights how shared muteness between child and animal places

both in state of pre-humanity: “The animal monstrously mirrors, or parodies, the child as both are separated from a status of (full-)humanity by virtue of a lack of reason and moral capacity” (“Negotiating Vulnerability” 74).⁴ Faulkner questions the notion that the child and animal are stuck in a state of pre-humanity given how protecting a child in his/her vulnerable state becomes a problematic act of control similar to acts of domestication imposed on animals (“Negotiating Vulnerability” 78). In the novel, Sanín shows how Laura’s desire for Brus to respond only to her emphasizes her belief that the dog is only Brus while within her care; his individuality only exists so long as she is there to shape, nurture and affirm it. Though Laura did not give him life, she gave him his identity, which is not only contingent on her relationship with him as his caretaker and owner, but also humanizes him with the name Bruce. The association of love with power and control becomes a recurring tension throughout the novel as Laura further explores her understanding of motherhood. In naming Fidel so that others would necessarily call him by a different name, she reenacts an impulse of protection and control just as she does with Brus; she becomes the solitary holder of his name and symbolically of his wellbeing as a child. In this way, Fidel becomes her own invention to compensate for a lack of biological connection.

When scholars such as Adrienne Rich (1986), Marianne Hirsch (1989) and Sara Ruddick (1989) initiated a wave of feminist literary scholarship dating from the 1970s onward, they sought to challenge the absolute association of female identity with biological reproduction.⁵ If for Rich, the definition of motherhood is two-fold,

⁴ Faulkner points out the etymology of the word “infant”: from the Latin *in-fans* meaning “without speech” (“Negotiating Vulnerability” 75).

⁵ Looking back at representations of mothers across literary history, Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989) utilizes Sigmund Freud’s work on the family romance —

“the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (13), Laura’s assertion of her maternity through an act of symbolic control and filiation rather than exclusively biological fortifies a vision of motherhood not only as “an attitude, state of mind, a practice” (Benedetti 120), but also as a challenge to paternity as the foundational force fueling familial identity.⁶ As a single mother, she takes on patriarchal duties when upon accepting the child, she is transformed into the head of household. Though Laura intends to assert kinship, the act of naming inevitably problematizes her own identity as it calls into question the power dynamics that feed the formation of familial bonds. As Fidel’s arrival to Bogotá unearths the social implications of appropriation and control with respect to the continuing problem of forced migration in Colombia, Sanín further complicates her vision of adoption by problematizing Laura’s position as a political advocate for Fidel.

After turning Fidel over to the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*, a state entity created for the protection of children, Laura decides to track him down in order to check on his wellbeing.⁷ Consequently, Laura finds herself confronting institutional

familienroman— as a stepping stone for examining the role of the family in shaping personal, physiological and social narratives (9).

⁶ Ruddick in *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1989) similarly differentiates between the labor involved in the act of giving birth and the voluntary act of caring for children. Ruddick’s primary goal is to show that the practices essential to mothering are not necessarily inherent or natural, that is to say, not mindless. Motherhood thus proves woman’s ability to engage in rational thought, morality and responsible decision making, all of which extend her influence beyond the domestic sphere through the children she rears (12).

⁷ The *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* was created in 1979 as a public institution with headquarters in Bogotá. They provide services across the country in accordance with their mission to “Promover el desarrollo y la protección integral de los niños, niñas y adolescentes, fortaleciendo las capacidades de las familias como entornos protectores y principales agentes de transformación social” (“El Instituto”). They provide a number of services in areas such as education, nutrition, family planning and adoption.

disorganization. When the *Instituto* refuses to disclose information to someone who is not a blood relative, Laura reaches out to a family member who formerly worked for an adoption agency, who in turn connects Laura to a goddaughter interning at the *Ministerio de la Niñez y la Juventud*. This goddaughter subsequently agrees to look for Fidel in exchange for payment, ultimately sending Laura a dossier detailing what has been found. The first half of the dossier intertwines fact and fiction in a retelling of how Laura allegedly came to meet Fidel. The uncanny narrative that unfolds falsely claims that Fidel found Laura on Facebook believing that she was his biological mother. Strangely, the dossier states that Fidel believes he is eighteen years old, that he threatened to kill himself if Laura did not let him into her house and that he believes Laura is his mother because he read about how her baby was kidnapped at local café, all of which we know to be untrue. Laura becomes stricken with paranoia, unsure as to why she has been sent this story: “*Pagué para que me asustaran, se dijo, y luego se preguntó si lo que había leído era una burla, una acusación o una amenaza*” (emphasis original 51). Laura even questions if her mother orchestrated this ruse seeking vengeance for something she has done, but no longer remembers: “*¿Qué le habré hecho yo? ¿Qué le habré hecho a quién?*” (emphasis original 51). As readers, we are left equally confused. Due to the lack of information about Laura’s family, we ourselves begin to question what might have happened to provoke such an inexplicable episode. Is Laura’s family playing a joke on her, and if so, why? If the dossier was not sent to Laura as a joke, where did such a story come from?

Laura’s reaction to the dossier sparks doubt in the reader, who is left questioning how Laura’s past is shaping her present circumstances. Laura considers: “*¿Es maldad?* Alguien no quería que ella encontrara a Fidel y había intentado que él quedara perdido

entre una ronda de niños perdidos. *Tal vez no es maldad sino descreimiento*. La practicante no creía que Fidel existiera y simplemente había llenado quince páginas de disparates a cambio de diez billetes” (emphasis original 55). After Laura fails to relocate Fidel, his phantasmal presence in Laura’s life leaves readers questioning both Fidel’s and Laura’s identities. She wants to find Fidel, but not at the expense of revealing her own troubled state of orphanhood. Her ambiguous and seemingly tortured relationship with her family is reflected in her relationship to Fidel, which causes Laura both joy —“Sintió alegría por tener ahí a aquel niño” (27)— but also “enojo y ... un poco de asco” (28) due to the anxieties he provokes given her unexplained feelings of familial discontent as provoked by the dossier.

When Laura reads the second part of the dossier, a response from a third party who is consulted for help, she is confronted with case studies of displaced children further triggering anxiety in her. The response reveals that Fidel’s name does not appear in any official censuses that document cases of abandoned children in recent years, suggesting that he has not been properly documented or perhaps was mistaken about his own name. As a result, Laura has been sent copies of cases dealing with children who went missing on the same day that Fidel appeared. In addition to not knowing the exact source of these documents, Laura is aware that they have been redacted in order to spare her distress: “omitía *comunicar los detalles más escabrosos de la vida desafortunada de los niños, por no abrumar el ánimo de nuestra paciente dama*” (emphasis original 53). The handful of children listed have suffered different fates; some have been abandoned, some have run away, others have been left orphaned after their parents were kidnapped or disappeared by guerillas.

Though of questionable veracity, the profiles paint an ominous portrait of life in Colombia for children from impoverished backgrounds during the period of ongoing internal conflict at the start of the twenty-first century. Indeed, the *Registro Único de Víctimas* estimates that from 1985-2012 over 2.5 million minors were displaced from their homes as a consequence of armed conflict (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 314).⁸ What is more, in her study of the relationship between conflict and tourism in Colombia, Ojeda affirms that Uribe's campaign of territorial reconquest turned to tourism as a measure of safety throughout the country, promoting internal travel and international interest in rural Colombia as a mark of a successfully pacified country (764). However, as Ojeda points out, increased tourism and travel outside of urban centers mostly benefitted wealthy citizens at the expense of more easily overlooked constituents: "the securitisation of tourist routes and destinations has not usually translated into more safety for local communities as evidenced by the growing numbers of forced displacement and selective assassinations, as well as by less visible ways of warfare" (766). As a result, the general public's celebration of greater security on a visible level at the expense of more expendable communities has fed, what Ulrich Oslender (2010) terms, "La banalidad del desplazamiento" (144). Despite the fact that the number of people forcibly displaced by

⁸ As collateral damage from the clash between guerrilla groups and paramilitary forces, children in rural areas face displacement when their parents have been killed, tortured or kidnapped, their homes have been destroyed, towns ransacked, food supplies contaminated or when they themselves have been abused or taken from their families, sometimes forced to take up arms. It is for this very reason that The *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica's Informe General* (2013) has addressed the difficulty of establishing an accurate measure of forced migration given that displacement is often the product of another act or violation of rights, meaning that historically, governmental institutions have failed to recognize forced migration as a crime in and of itself: "muchos funcionarios públicos entendían que un desplazado era víctima si había sido afectado por otro delito, diferente al desplazamiento. Así, las víctimas experimentaron, en su relación con la institucionalidad, que sus pérdidas y desarraigos provocados por la huida forzada no constituían un crimen con complejos y profundos daños" (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 296). The very existence of the limited profiles in the novel illustrates the negligent system for documenting their existence within governmental agencies.

conflict has continued to increase, the implementation of hegemonic forms of security has allowed for the normalization of forced displacement in Colombia. Such banalization is reflected in Sanín's representation of the state's response to such a social phenomenon, which is further emphasized in the dossier's choice to omit the most disturbing aspects of their documentation. Opting to eliminate certain details for the sake of Laura, the *paciente dama*, the officials preparing the dossier appear to feed into bourgeois fragility which grows as a consequence of urban ignorance of rural violence.

In the novel, after being displaced from his home, Fidel is then lost or disappeared again into the system. As Laura confronts this paperwork, she becomes reminiscent of the protagonist of Daniel Alarcón's (1977-) *Lost City Radio* (2007).⁹ Set in a nameless country ten years after a rebel insurrection —meant to mimic the rise of the Shining Path in Peru— Alarcón's novel follows Norma, a radio host attempting to connect disappeared refugees with their families, who is forced to confront the painful memories of her husband's disappearance when she takes in a lost boy from the same village where her husband was presumably killed. More critically, the novel draws our attention to a white, urban, bourgeois ignorance of the violence suffered in rural and decentralized regions of the country, very much reflective of localization of conflict in Peru, particularly as it targeted indigenous communities. Though Norma adopts the boy, her status as a white, urban, affluent woman problematizes her act of salvation. Though Alarcón's use of

⁹ Another intriguing point of comparison comes with Daniel Villabón's (1986-) short story, "La niña," published in both *Puñalada trapería: una antología de cuento colombiano* (2017) and his collection *Nuestra criatura* (2014). The story features Balastro, a middle-aged man who is haunted by a mysterious girl who repeatedly appears at his doorstep at night to tell him, "Eres el hombre más feo del planeta" (259). After leaving behind her mutilated doll, she breaks into his apartment, where he accidentally kills her out of fear and rage, only to find that her body has disappeared by the time his wife returns home. The story's fascination with mirrors and reflection which culminates in Balastro's concluding act of self-mutilation, I propose, point toward a discomfort with urban, middle-class monotony and negligence in the face of rural violence.

allegory more explicitly confronts the ramifications of armed conflict in Peru, I believe that Sanín's novel functions in a similar vein by using subtle hints at political turmoil to discuss the issue of displacement in Colombia.

The question of how to effectively and ethically document the identities of displaced children within the archival drive is further examined when Laura finally does locate Fidel after he is placed in an orphanage. Laura meets with the assistant director who shows her how the center keeps track of the children under its care. The director presents her with a photo album containing photographs of the children living there. When Laura notices that none of the photographs are fixed to the pages of the album, she learns: "A los niños los van adoptando a medida que otros llegan, así que si pusiéramos nombres, habría que imprimir una edición nueva cada rato" (66). At the center, the children are stripped of all identifying information. They are presented as commodities, devoid of an identity so as to highlight their availability for adoption into a new —ideally white and wealthy— family, one which will bequeath them a new name and a clean slate. Here, the archival drive indeed sees the death drive come to fruition as pushing children through the system kills their past selves while ushering them into an urban, middle-class rebirth. Particularly in the case of Fidel, this act of appropriation becomes all the more troublesome given his subaltern identity: his rural origins, his notable accent, his age. The children at the center see their pasts erased as the maritime blue backdrop of the photographs present them as lost and adrift at sea waiting for salvation. In this way, the children become victims of repeated displacement, ushered through the system and redistributed farther and farther away from their homes. By smoothing over the details of their past, these forms of documentation and care appear to silence any acknowledgement

of conflict in the country, opting instead to draw the attention of visitors, like Laura, toward the future, rather than the past. While Laura appears put off by the gesture, she too has become complicit in the process of erasure when she renames Fidel for her own purposes. She robs him of his own birth, ignoring his life prior to the day they met, thus furthering his displacement under the pretense of salvation when she crafts a new identity for him.

Laura's revisionist history not only erases Fidel's past, but as previously discussed, grants her power over his identity by placing him within her care. Laura eliminates the existence of his origins, his parents and his past to create a space for her as his adoptive mother. In this way, the story of adoption as enacted by Laura echoes Sigmund Freud's discourse on family romances, which is presented in the novel through Fidel, who inexplicably finds himself thrust into a new life under the care of an apparently more affluent parent.¹⁰ Leaving his rural and undocumented origins behind, with Laura, he enters an urban upper-middle class life of comfort. In her continued discussion of childhood in "Vulnerability of 'Virtual' Subjects: Childhood, Memory, and Crisis in the Cultural Value of Innocence" (2013), Faulkner proposes that "The 'innocent child' both remembers and forgets *for* the community: first, by representing to the community a past it feels is lost; and, second, representing an unconsciousness, or insouciance, into which adult cares can be invested and expunged" (emphasis original 128). In a parallel concept to Freud's family romance, Faulkner posits that when adults look at children, they are reminded of an imaginary past unencumbered by adult

¹⁰ Freud originally published on the family romance in Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1908). In defining the family romance as a psychological complex, he looks toward coming-of-age as a process during which neurotic children fantasize that their parents are imposters and that their real parents belong to a higher social class (238).

responsibility and disappointment. Thus, Faulkner contends that nostalgia plays a vital role in establishing childhood as a fetishized state. When the child generates nostalgia for the past, it also symbolizes an imagined reality, serving a mediator between adult lived experience and an invented alternate being: a virtual, timeless and “better” reality for which adult yearn.

In light of Faulkner’s examination of childhood as the nostalgic imagination of an idealized past never fulfilled, I contend that Fidel’s entry into Laura’s life can be understood as a reflection of her own inability to articulate the alternative reality that is her lost family history. As she adopts and incorporates Fidel into her life, she enacts onto him a process of erasure that mimics her own attempts to forget whatever tragedies have led to estrangement with her mother. Here we may understand the novel’s title, *Los niños*, as referring to both Fidel and Laura as two child figures equally grappling with their past and its role in shaping their identities in the present. Confronting these unresolved tensions that can no longer be vocalized as an adult, representative in the text itself as gaps in knowledge, or the silencing of her family history, Laura uses Fidel to realize Freud’s family romance of parental substitution; Laura does for Fidel what her subconscious has desired for herself. This revision of history will later play out through her acts of oral storytelling as a way of combatting the unreliable nature of the archival drive, which in its own way, invents and distorts history.

Care and Repair in the Home

The efficacy and ethical implications of the archival drive are further questioned through acts of self-fashioning that Laura enacts in an effort to bolster her maternal

relationship with Fidel. Throughout the novel, Laura's interaction with Fidel impedes her reading of *Moby Dick* (1851) as she continuously returns to her reading of the novel to no avail. Laura never makes it far enough to meet the whale, yet curiously, the void left by the disappearance of *Moby Dick* from her understanding of the novel is filled by the imaginary whales she envisions. Obsessed with the notion of being shipwrecked, Laura researches whales on the internet, reading both real and fictitious stories about their origins and their habits, then sharing these stories with Fidel. Such stories include allusions to the Biblical story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale, and a medieval story of shipwrecked men who disembark on an island only to discover it is actually a whale. She takes notes on her findings and stows them away in a secret drawer.

Inspired by her reading of *Moby Dick*, Laura sees herself as shipwrecked in Bogotá with no family ties to anchor her. This sense of being cast away triggers a fantasy onto which Laura has long held: "Había un lugar que Laura había fundado años atrás. Era una isla y una montaña, otro mundo y otro lado del mundo" (69). Her vision conjures a space reflective of her feelings of isolation —the island— next to which looms the reminder of her familial abandon —the mountain of her family's distant salt mine. In imagining a liminal space between reality and fantasy, she offers herself refuge. The dream resurges after meeting Fidel, whereby the image of the whale unites the two lost figures:

En forma de una gran ballena, la promesa del niño cruzaría el océano hasta el otro mundo. Cuando llegara, resultaría que en realidad ... lo que parecía una isla había sido siempre el cuerpo de la ballena, la superficie de su vida misteriosa. El animal se hundiría en el agua, arrastrando al fondo del mar el otro mundo, y seguiría su camino. Solo quedaría este mundo, y en él se quedarían ella y Fidel. (69-70)

Laura's act of storytelling, more precisely of revision and invention, represents an attempt at crafting an origin story in the wake of both her and Fidel's lack of family history. Her story invents an imaginary world in which only she and Fidel coexist, freed from any ties to the outside world and the truth of their origins.

Furthermore, Laura's occupation as a housekeeper proves to be a vital form of self-fashioning when cleaning and caring for houses allows her to stage the home and family life she desires. Prior to meeting Fidel, Laura spends three days a week cleaning the house of an older couple, where her compulsions for cleanliness and order allude to further gaps in her family history. In explaining that she takes the bus to work so that her employers will not discover that she is wealthy enough to own a car, she herself struggles to understand why she prefers housekeeping:

Le parecía mejor decirse que cuanto había hecho en la vida anteriormente —leer libros, mirar pinturas, ver películas y programas de televisión, trabajar como locutora para comerciales de muebles y para el servicio telefónico que daba la hora, viajar, vivir en casas y apartamentos— le había permitido formarse una idea de cómo debería ser una vivienda, y que esa idea le permitía hacer correctamente el trabajo de limpiar. (17-8)

She admits that she finds great satisfaction in cleaning, opting to do so even though she does not need the money. She hides her financial stability so as not to alienate her employers who might suspect her of spying on them. Furthermore, she avoids telling them the truth because otherwise, “Habría tenido que reconocer que vivía de un dinero que venía del pasado y habría sentido que tenía que renunciar a su empleo” (18). Laura's musings give insight into her past, revealing that she has lived a life of comfort, which communicates a sense of monotony. She speaks in broad terms about reading books, looking at paintings, watching television, traveling, in a manner that says very little of substance as the ennui of her past life is replicated in the repetitive work she enjoys while

cleaning homes and putting everything in predictable and harmless order; this monotony is all the more evident given Laura's previous occupation as a radio personality who read the time to callers. Laura gestures once again to a nameless, mysterious past while seeking to establish a sense of normality executed through acts of housekeeping.

As housekeeping responds to latent repentant impulses, Laura suffers from feelings of guilt. For Laura, her work as a housekeeper gestures toward a sense of culpability or even shame for her family's money. Standing as a reminder of *el pasado*, her inheritance serves as a symbol of absence and her own solitude in the present. Her seemingly corrective attempt at work results in a highly voyeuristic occupation that not only continues to accent her higher socioeconomic standing, but is further emphasized by her obsession with *Moby Dick*, yet another symbol of her middle-class sensibilities. While Laura cannot stage her own home as a joyous family scene, she can do so for others: "Pocas labores parecían mejores que la de cuidar una casa y sacarle brillo" (18). The use of the word *cuidar* is ever more evocative taking into consideration that Laura quits her job as soon as Fidel shows up at her doorstep. As she renounces the job that brought her so much joy in order to dedicate herself to caring for Fidel, we see how the energy put into caring for a home functions as a substitute for her lack of family, whereby being a *housekeeper* makes up for her inability to be a *homemaker*, transforming Fidel into her next escapist project.¹¹

The culmination of her revisionist history comes when Laura invents a birthday for Fidel in order to celebrate him. Though he wants to have a birthday party for the first

¹¹ A similar phenomenon is seen in *La perra*, when Damaris's obsession for cleaning manifests as a coping mechanism for her infertility, a way to put her body to productive use so as not to feel "una vergüenza como mujer, una piltrafa de la naturaleza" (24). When alone in her home, Damaris compulsively cleans in order to distract herself; she makes herself productive when she cannot be reproductive.

time, “Fidel se echó a llorar y no pudo decir por qué lloraba” (109). He cries every day until his party as if suffering from a physiological rejection of his newly imposed identity, signaling the impossibility of his existence as both removed from a past, but thrust into a future. Recognizing his birthday as a turning point, Laura blames herself for what she believes is a sudden crisis of identity: “Ella tenía la culpa por haberle asignado a Fidel un nacimiento al querer darle un futuro. Él había vuelto atrás para ver quien había esperado su llegada al mundo y, al no encontrar a nadie, había sido hallado por todos los extraños” (124). Following his birthday party, Fidel’s behavior grows more and more cryptic. The strangest of his erratic outbursts comes in his insistence in a fictitious room he calls *sala*, which he visits during sleepwalking trances at home. In this “room,” which he imagines as a beauty salon, he sees people who look like Laura and wonder if they are her relatives.

Though she does not realize it herself, Fidel’s descriptions echo Laura’s imaginary island, a structure she uses to connect with those she has lost. On a separate occasion, Laura explains how this imagined space stands as a repository in her mind for the ghosts of her past: “Allá estaban, ni vivos ni muertos, en el filo de la despedida, los que la habían querido y ya no la acompañaban, los que se habían ido. Aquellos a quienes ella había querido y había dejado atrás” (69). Laura’s island fantasy contributes to a literary phenomenon examined by Susan Honeyman (2005) in her study of childhood: “popular adventure narratives, often featuring islands with buried treasure or isolated from adult society, indulge adult fantasies of fortune and escape as much as child fantasies of empowerment” (53). As adults imagine and invent a *locus amoenus*, they do so for their own pleasure in “a common adult desire to reinhabit their own pasts (ideally

remembered)” (Honeyman 57). As Laura recognizes that the island “estaba en el pasado y a la vez era un destino” (107), just as she imagines living on the island with Fidel, she sees her past as inextricably linked to her future by connecting the memory of her lost family with the promise of a new one forged through affective ties with Fidel. Eerily enough, Fidel’s room becomes his personal version of Laura’s island, even though he does not know anything about Laura’s island, just her obsession with whales.

Curiously, it is only when she considers sharing her fantasy that Laura begins to feel it unravel. Within a silent dialogue, she and Fidel appear to communicate, a phenomenon examined by Gabriele Schwab in her study of intergenerational narratives of loss, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010). While exploring the role that children play in the act of storytelling, Schwab recalls listening to her parents, both of whom are Holocaust survivors: “Perhaps my sense of life narratives is colored by my growing up with war stories told night after night by adults around the dinner table. These stories were not addressed to me, not meant for me. They were stories told in my presence as if I was not there, stories that left me stranded in a muted space outside” (42). Children overhear, but are not permitted entrance into the conversation. Nevertheless, as Schwab explains, children listen, and because they cannot partake or may not fully understand what is being shared, they are able to intimate or even feel “a silence covered by words” (43). From an outside space, they perceive what is unspoken from their own position of silence. Accordingly, after Laura tells Fidel fantastic stories about whales and far off lands, because he cannot envision the same space that Laura has conjured, his response highlights what Laura herself cannot articulate: the

solitude of an unobtainable crypt in which she has buried her past.¹² She fails to understand that the island she has invented cannot function as a shared space for her and Fidel because the refuge it presents for children manifests not in response to Fidel's abandonment, but her own. Ultimately, the enigmatic room Fidel conjures becomes more troublesome for Laura when she expresses greater concern for understanding its inhabitants: "le parecía que allá estuvieran los miembros perdidos de su mundo. Su madre y su hermano, por ejemplo" (124). When Laura pushes Fidel for answers about what he sees, she is met with complete silence. His inability to articulate where he is offers a reflection of Laura's silence regarding her family. Thus, her conversations with Fidel provide a vehicle through which she uses his mysterious identity to more accurately study herself; to attempt to obtain entrance into the *sala*, the forgotten recesses of her own memory in which *pasado* and *destino* are one and the same.

Laura's pondering of Fidel's undefined past leads her to consult a fortuneteller, who assures her that his behavior is perfectly normal for a small child: "Pero tú no tenías por qué saber que eso pasa siempre ¿no? Pues al fin no tuviste hijos, ¿verdad?" (137). Laura's alleged lack of understanding for children due to her own lack of biological children obliges her to turn to her next point of reference: her own childhood behavior: "¿Y a ti no te pasó cuando niña? Puede que te haya dado cuando eras muy chiquita y no te acuerdas" (138). Laura's conversation with the fortuneteller reveals that her assumption

¹² In their collection of essays, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994), Hungarian psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok discuss Freudian notions of mourning and melancholia by revisiting Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi's study of introjection, by which love objects are absorbed into the ego, thus extending the ego onto unconscious desires: "intro-jection: casting inside" (111). Not to be confused with the term incorporation, whereby desires are not successfully introjected, but rather incorporated within a lost love object prohibiting contact with the ego (Abraham and Torok 113), Ferenczi's term leads Abraham and Torok to examine the results of a failed process of introjection, which they propose creates a crypt, an unconscious home for unspeakable secrets buried alive within the unconscious (141).

that Fidel is acting out as a result of an identity crisis is more accurately an unspoken reflection of her own inability to remember her younger self. In this way, Sanín shows how the strangeness of Fidel's fantasy reflects Laura's estrangement with her childhood memories. Trying to encapsulate childhood presents an impossible endeavor since the authenticity of the child's voice can never be fully recaptured in adult language.

Fidel thus mirrors Laura's adult consciousness that can no longer articulate her childhood experiences as she lived them, but only as she can remember them once filtered by an adult perspective that no longer wishes to remember. Faulkner underscores how adult perspectives on childhood reveal adult desires for a return to innocence whereby "Childish innocence is a state of reprieve from the perpetual, amorphous guilt adults feel by virtue of having desire" and thus nostalgia for childhood serves as a tool of erasure for forgetting "the conditions associated with adult life: obligation, compromise, work and mortality" ("The Innocence Fetish" 112). For Laura, this tension, or misalignment, manifests in the text as a constant attempt to make the past unnecessary, which clashes with her attempts to understand what Fidel is cryptically communicating. What is more, this impulse toward erasure and repression gestures toward a large-scale eagerness for peace in progress in Colombia, a phenomenon that Martínez defines as a rejection of "anachronicity" (30), the compulsion turn toward the past in reflection rather an acceptance of collective amnesia as a necessary step in moving forward. As anachronicity challenges the acts of silencing inherent in the archival drive, so too does Fidel's presence in the novel as he serves as a mirror through which Laura cannot help but be reminded of her own unspoken past.

In the final scene of *Los niños*, Fidel locks himself in his room in a rage and Laura is left waiting for him to remerge. When she finally enters his room, she finds a complete mess: “Todo estaba hecho pedazos. Fidel había cortado su ropa en tiras. La había transformado en lazos, en una cantidad de serpientes. Los juguetes estaban partidos a golpes, y ... Con cuidado, Fidel había asolado un pobre mundo a lo largo de la noche” (142). As she turns to him, Laura thinks to herself that she will not speak to him for some time and the novel ends. Fidel’s final act of destruction comes as the culmination of an infantile frustration, lashing out at the perfectly staged bedroom as symbol of an imagined childhood experience. He rebels against Laura —against the home she has constructed— so as to illustrate the impossibility of the scene that she has designed. Fidel’s act of aggression and destructive compulsion undermines Laura’s attempt to look towards the future without resolving the past. With the upheaval of the domestic space, Laura is faced with a mess she cannot tidy up and a child that cannot be plucked from his unnamed past. In leaving the reader with an image of total chaos and despair, Sanín mobilizes the process of adoption as a catalyst for reflecting on how ongoing failed attempts to remedy displacement require reinvigoration, since the past can never truly be cast aside.

THE JUNGLE’S DOUBLE WOUNDING IN *LA PERRA*

In conversation with Sigmund Freud in the introduction to *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth offers the story of Tancred as a literary entryway into her contribution to trauma studies. In his poem *Jerusalem Liberated* (1581), Tarquato Tasso tells the story of Tancred, an epic hero who unknowingly kills his lover when she disguises herself as a male knight. After burying

her, he enters a magical forest and, in rage and fear, he slashes a tree. As blood falls from the tree, Tancred hears his lover's voice cry out to him in pain. Caruth reads the scene as an instance of double wounding in which Tancred inflicts pain on his lover first physically, only later to confront his action more symbolically. As he listens to the tree exclaim its pain, Tancred hears the wound speak to what he has done when he himself cannot articulate his grief, leading Caruth to conclude: "Tancred's story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know" (3). This episode of confused human and natural wounding serves as a provocative point of entry into Pilar Quintana's *La perra* (2017), which examines nature's role in encrypting human suffering.

La perra follows the daily life of a childless couple residing in the western lowlands of Colombia's Pacific Coast. In an unnamed town, protagonist Damaris lives with her husband Rogelio. As she enters her forties, after years of infertility, Damaris takes in a stray female puppy who she begins to care for as an adoptive child. Battling her own struggle with solitude and sadness, Damaris experiments with alternative forms of kinship in order to establish normality in the wake of diminishing family ties. Though initially offering comfort, the adoptive dog begins to trigger the memory of childhood trauma related to the abandonment of her family and the death of a childhood friend, Nicolasito. The association of the dog with frustrated desires and sorrows leads Damaris to ultimately kill the animal, leaving Damaris to reckon with her violent act. As a result, Damaris can be read additionally as an adult figure continuing to grapple with childhood

turmoil when lingering childhood phantoms that persist in her adult consciousness are triggered by her exploration of motherhood and mother nature. By examining her attempt at forming familial bonds with an animal, I explore how silence provokes an investigation of repressed trauma from Damaris's past through the works of Cathy Caruth and Joanne Faulkner.

It is worth noting that the complications that result from the archival drive's impulse to document the past do not manifest explicitly in *La perra* as they do in *Los niños*, which offers a more direct engagement with literal representations of documentation. Nevertheless, Laura's confrontation with the ever-changing notions of family, identity and origins against the backdrop of displacement are counterbalanced by contrasting visions of memory and history in *La perra*, which offers an alternative to the archival drive born out of necessity in the Colombian Pacific where urban mechanisms for documentation prove unavailable in the face of loss and absence. Consequently, by analyzing intertextual references from José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924) and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), I read the jungle as an alternative textual and visual archive by which Quintana's depiction of the jungle intervenes in moments of silencing in order to combat erasure by vocalizing and remembering violence and loss in rural areas often overlooked by conventional forms of institutional documentation. In transforming such reference points into tools for articulating alternative family narratives, Quintana reconfigures the national narrative of conflict and violence through the visibilization of previously silenced subjectivities.

Mother Nature's Body of Violence

Before discussing the novel, I begin with an overview of the charged relationship between the female body, natural landscapes and political rhetoric in Colombia, which resonates in the novel's representations of mother and mother nature. In *El revés de la nación: territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (2005), Margarita Serje describes Colombia as a fragmented country divided by zones of conflict and control whose origins date back to the colonial era (15). She frames her inquiry into Colombia's "fronteras internas" with a study of two iconic images of Colombia's natural landscapes (17). First, she examines the historic legend of *El Dorado*, which mythicizes the promise of lost and entrapped riches that fed colonial enterprise. According to Serje, the image of *El Dorado* encapsulates a history of exploitation, consumption, exploration and intrigue in which the dense jungle symbolizes the dangers of the unknown and the uncivilized, paired with the allure of gold and a lost paradise (18). Serje underscores how this dual vision of nature resulted in a system of false dichotomies, most predominantly that of civilization in the face of barbarism whereby underdeveloped landscapes were historically considered reflective of the underdeveloped peoples who inhabited them. As a result, the stratification of Colombian topography came to parallel a social and racial hierarchy with the lowland tropics pitted against the more civilized, temperate Andean highlands (98).¹³

¹³ Felipe Martínez Pinzón (2017) explores the origins of natural and social stratification through his proposal of "the greenhouse gaze," which serves as "dehistoricizing machine that conceives of the tropics as ahistorical and nonwhites as degenerate, corrupt, or infantile idlers dominated by the territory" (99). More concretely, tropical lowlands historically have been imagined as uncontrolled territories characterized by heat, humidity, disease and overgrown nature, which emblemize notions of deficiency as evinced by the lack of productivity, transportation, trade and safety in the eyes of European colonizers (100). Such arguments, later espoused by creole elites such as Francisco José de Caldas (1768-1816), sought to align the creole population with peninsular values and racial identity, consequently reimagining colonial prejudices against native lands and communities predominantly inhabited by indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples. What resulted was the appropriation of European culture and values in temperate Andean highlands, which in their physical mimicking of European climate and landscape, could cultivate the corresponding cultural and societal traits.

As Serje continues, more recently, rural zones have become “tierras de nadie” (18): lawless lands that become sites of torture, massacre, kidnapping and impunity associated with ongoing internal armed conflict hidden under the cover of trees. In her article, “Iron Maiden Landscapes: The Geopolitics of Colombia’s Territorial Conquest” (2007), Serje describes these rural zones as the “Other Colombia”:

Although Colombia has labored under a state of exception for the last forty years, in the regions of the marginalized periphery Colombia has suffered a situation that could very well be considered to be a permanent and uninterrupted state of conquest. Ever since the Spanish occupation, these regions have been conceived and managed as a theater for military operations; what is more, the inhabitants of these regions have typically been treated as little more than war booty. (38)

Serje’s claim highlights how the Colombian jungle constitutes part of the country’s vast territory isolated from the central government and urban metropolises. These marginalized territories have come to represent a powerful and exploitable force of erasure that allows those untouched by violence—in the case of my study, of the internal armed conflict specifically—to turn a blind eye to destruction and to continue with their lives under a false pretense of peace, particularly evident under President Uribe. Furthermore, as Serje affirms, Uribe’s campaign of territorial re-conquest—his siege of lands controlled by drug trafficking and terrorism—establishes a continuum of colonial rhetoric in the twenty-first century, allowing for the othering of the populations inhabiting spaces outside of state control. This othering continues to villainize and barbarize the local inhabitants of the “Other Colombia,” who become associated with the guerrilla groups—groups that are in fact inflicting harm upon them—rather than recognizing local civilians as victims themselves. As a result, the language used to describe and characterize the jungle for political rhetoric is circulated and propagated

often to the detriment of the civilian populations who become collateral damage without proper recognition or reconciliation.

Reading the Jungle as Archive

It is within this fraught socio-political space that we meet Damaris, an Afro-Colombian woman living in a small fishing town outside of the port city of Buenaventura. The depiction of Damaris's unnamed hometown brings to life Colombia's western lowlands, which feature the tumultuous cliffs of the Pacific coast as the meeting point between the roaring ocean and the dense jungle. It is here that *La perra* opens when Damaris learns of the death of her neighbor's dog, who had recently given birth to a litter of puppies, of which, one is a girl that Damaris decides to take home. The subsequent narration of Damaris and Rogelio's struggle to start a family of their own is intertwined with the recounting of Damaris's family history, both of which are marked by absence. Damaris was raised by her aunt and uncle when her single mother was forced to find work as a housekeeper in the nearby port city Buenaventura. She never meets her father, a soldier who impregnated her mother out of wedlock and abandoned them before Damaris's birth. Subsequently, Damaris's childhood is plagued by a string of tragedies; she witnesses her friend Nicolasito's death when he is swept away by an errant wave, her uncle falls into debt and has to sell off his possessions, her mother is unluckily struck by a stray bullet during a celebration and is killed, all before Damaris turns fifteen. As an adult, she is left alone in her hometown with no family.

As she enters her forties, Damaris resigns herself to the fact that she will never be a mother and Damaris devotes herself to caring for her dog. She sees in *la perra* a double

reflection. First, her own solitude in the wake of her mother's death and father's abandonment is mirrored by the likewise abandoned dog, whose mother dies, whose father is unknown and who is born to a litter of puppies all of whom wind up dead besides her. Furthermore, the abandoned puppy in need of a guardian serves as a reminder of Damaris's own inability to become a mother. Consequently, Damaris cares for her like a child, carrying the dog to work with her against her chest: "Durante el día Damaris llevaba a la perra metida en el brasier, entre sus tetas blandas y generosas, para mantenerla calientica" (16). Damaris holds her against her bare skin in an act evocative of breastfeeding as if the puppy were a newborn as Damaris works cleaning houses. The skin-to-skin contact allows hers to nurture and cultivate an intimate relationship with the puppy when she herself cannot share such moments with a baby. In this way, Quintana underscores Rich's two-fold definition of motherhood whereby maternal behavior exists independent of biological maternity, further solidified when Damaris decides to name the dog Chirli, the name of a beauty queen after whom Damaris had hoped to name her own daughter.

Though the novel never makes explicit the reference in the moment of naming, a later comment on the memory of Shirley Sáenz Starnes, Miss Colombia in the 1978 Miss Universe Pageant, suggests that the beauty queen is in fact the inspiration behind the name.¹⁴ Described as "el prototipo de la belleza internacional, con ojos azules, pelo castaño, piel blanca y medias perfectas" (Concurso Nacional de Belleza 168), Sáenz serves as an emblem of universal beauty. For Damaris, the phonetically transformed name Chirli as a metamorphosed Shirley Sáenz represents everything that she is not:

¹⁴ Sáenz was born in 1959 in Bogotá. She began her pageant career at seventeen as Miss Bogotá. As the only Latin American finalist, she was third runner up in the 1978 Miss Universe Pageant.

cosmopolitan, affluent and white. The name Shirley evokes an image of success, progress and opportunity that reveals Damaris's dream of a daughter as, more accurately, the dream of another life; an alternate future she can never obtain. Through the idealization of Shirley, Damaris envisions her hopes incarnated in the image of a child, here projected onto a dog in the absence of biological offspring.

As Chirli becomes fully grown, her independence chips away at Damaris's fantasy. No longer strapped to Damaris's chest, Chirli is left alone while Damaris works, allowing the dog to move about the natural landscape in which they live. Eventually, when Chirli runs away from home, Damaris must enter the jungle in search of her and, as she traverses the wild space, she reveals her troublesome relationship with her natural surroundings. Exclaiming, "Esta selva es horrible" (57), Damaris describes her experience:

Había demasiados acantilados como ese, con peñas cubiertas de lama y olas como la que se había llevado al finado Nicolasito, árboles inmensos que las tormentas tumbaban de raíz y los rayos partían por la mitad, derrumbes de tierra, culebras venenosas y culebras que se tragan venados, chimbilacos que desangraban a los animales, plantas con espinas que podían atravesar un pie y quebradas que se crecían durante los aguaceros y arrasaban con todo lo que encontraban a su paso... Por si fuera poco, ya habían pasado veinte días desde que la perra se había ido, demasiado tiempo. (57)

Damaris's search for Chirli depicts the jungle as a place of abundance and excess, relayed in the language itself through enumeration, repetition and long, run-on sentences. The jungle is an ominous territory, full of wild and overgrown obstacles capable of killing both human and animal. Engulfing, swallowing, devouring, the jungle is presented as two-fold when the delicate vacillation between life and death is reflected back in the abundance of foliage and fertility around Damaris. Here, Quintana's depiction of the

jungle echoes Serje's vision of the jungle as the incarnation of production and destruction in Colombian collective imaginary.

The intricate balancing act between provider of life and holder of death is echoed in Damaris's relationship with mother nature, particularly when remembering how she and Rogelio traversed the jungle together in search of natural herbs to stimulate fertility. While there are animals and plants that could kill, their very existence in excess confirms the possibility of reproduction, which Damaris incarnates when she returns home after searching for Chirli: "Esa noche llegaron directo a tener relaciones y fue como si no hubieran pasado diez años desde la última vez. Damaris se dio permiso de pensar que de pronto esta vez sí quedaría embarazada, pero a la mañana siguiente se rio de sí misma, pues ya había cumplido cuarenta, la edad en que las mujeres se secan" (57). The pain of infertility clashes with the hope of reproduction when Damaris compares her body to the fertility of the jungle. When she does not see the femininity of mother nature reflected in her own body, particularly given her age, she laughs at herself as if to ridicule and denounce her infertility. Richard Angelo Leonardo-Loayza (2020) posits that the social and cultural emphasis of reproduction as a female duty pushes Damaris to depreciate herself when she cannot conceive: "Esta mujer se percibe como un ser imperfecto, torpe, con un cuerpo cuya utilidad es definida en función a su capacidad de procrear" (157). In return, Damaris turns away from nature as a symbol of reproduction, looking instead to the image of chaos and despair that nature offers as a counterbalance, which now appears more reflective of her inner turmoil as she ages.

The liminal space of the jungle thus becomes a reminder of her bareness, all the more poignant when Chirli returns home from the jungle pregnant. Immediately, Chirli's

survival despite the dangers of the jungle remind Damaris of her childhood friend Nicolasito, who would come to town with his family on vacation. One day while playing outside, wanting to touch the water, Nicolasito approaches the edge of a cliff despite Damaris's warning of danger and he is suddenly swept away by an errant wave. He is swallowed by the eruption of an uncontrolled force of nature while she stands paralyzed as a witness to his death: "La imagen quedó grabada en la memoria de Damaris así: un niño blanco y alto frente al mar, ... Y ella ahí, junto a las arrieras, sin poder hacer nada" (30-1). Even though Damaris associates the image of Nicolasito's corpse with the ocean, after Chirli goes missing, the memory of his death is triggered by the jungle as an encrypted space. As she traverses the jungle in search of Chirli, she is reminded of her solitary walk home after witnessing Nicolasito's death.

The image of the ocean and the jungle intertwine as two memories linked to the double wounding of Nicolasito's death on Damaris first as a child and later as an adult. When she is unable to absorb the severity of what has just transpired, young Damaris silently returns home alone. As she traverses the jungle, she begins to make sense of what she has witnessed:

Damaris tuvo que devolverse sola por una selva que le pareció más cerrada y oscura que nunca. Arriba las copas de los árboles se juntaban y abajo cruzaban sus raíces. Los pies se le enterraban en la alfombra de hojas muertas del suelo y se sumían en el barro y ella empezó a sentir que la respiración que escuchaba no era suya sino de la selva y que era ella —y no Nicolasito—la que se estaba ahogando en un mar verde repleto de hormigas y plantas. Quiso huir, perderse, no decirle nada a nadie y que la selva se la tragara. (31)

As Damaris returns home through the jungle, she is stuck in a moment of suspended animation in which she is the only person who knows about what has happened to Nicolasito, meaning that the tragedy has yet to be articulated in a spoken and collective

reality.¹⁵ As the momentary keeper of this secret, the weight of an unspoken truth bares down on Damaris, which she feels as the darkness and density of the trees enclosing around her from above and below. Branches and roots entangle as they ensnare her in a web of foliage that drowns her in a green ocean as she attempts to absorb the reality of Nicolasito's own drowning. Thus, the anxiety triggered by her movement through the jungle is more precisely the tragic fantasy of her own death that she conjures out of guilt, or "the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 2). Fleeing, as she imagines, in the form of being devoured by the jungle means never having to admit what has just transpired and, as a result, avoiding her own guilt. As the sea is for Nicolasito, the jungle becomes the deadly force —*un mar verde*— that she hopes will swallow her in her moment of mourning, triggering a life-long act of self-silencing.

In her study of trauma, Caruth looks at the phenomenon of double wounding by which trauma "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4).¹⁶ Indeed, after she is unable to fully absorb the significance of the shocking death she has witnessed as a child, Damaris's memory of the event becomes inscribed in the physical act of silently crossing the jungle. The image of nature as an engulfing and dominating force resurges when Damaris must return to the jungle in search of Chirli, a second child-like figure

¹⁵ Complicating this silence even further is the fact that Damaris is a child, meaning that Nicolasito's death not only has not been articulated with others, but more crucially, has not been shared or revealed within an adult dialogue or consciousness.

¹⁶ Central to her claim is Caruth's explanation that "the originary meaning of trauma itself (in both English and Greek), the Greek *trauma* or 'wound,' originally referring to an injury inflicted on the body" has grown in medical and psychiatric literature to also refer to wounds of the mind (3).

reminiscent of Nicolasito. When the care and concern Damaris dedicated to looking after Chirli fails to protect her from the consuming forces of the jungle, she relives her failed attempt to protect Nicolasito. Subsequently, in returning and repeating her journey through the jungle, Damaris experiences the double wounding of her childhood trauma as the memory of her childhood anxiety and guilt returns to her after years of repression.

Quintana's depiction is a recent addition to a long-standing literary tradition that has attempted to penetrate the darkness of the jungle as an exploratory space. Perhaps the most celebrated contribution, José Eustasio Rivera's (1888-1928) seminal work *La vorágine* (1924) offers the most internationally recognizable presentation of Colombia's rainforests. In order to examine the tensions between silence and testimony within the jungle, Jennifer French puts *La vorágine* in dialogue with Friedrich Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* (1883) in *Nature, Neo-Colonialism, and the Spanish American Regional Writers* (2005). Her discussion of the novel's depictions of the violent destruction caused by the rubber trade looks specifically at protagonist Arturo Cova's ability, or inability, to understand the devastation around him. Though he is a poet, Cova often lacks the interpretive skills to dialogue with nature, which seemingly attempts to communicate with him during episodes of feverish trances when he contracts a mosquito-borne illness. Rivera's novel has long been used as an entryway into literary discussions of violence in Colombia due to the work's emblematic opening sentence: "Antes que me hubiera apasionado por mujer alguna, jugué mi corazón al azar y me ganó la Violencia" (79). French's interest in Engels's text stems from his discussion of humankind's role in preserving natural resources against the exploitive forces of modernization, the industrial

revolution and capitalism, which French mobilizes for her own analysis of Rivera's representation of the Colombian jungle.

French's contribution via Engels is particularly useful given his instance on humankind's embedded existence within nature, neither "isolated above or against it" (French 145). Consequently, French posits that *La vorágine*'s hallucinatory passages challenge colonial perspectives of nature by allowing the jungle to speak for itself, out and against the violence it suffers: "It may be suggested that by choosing to focus on the most alien and inert of the beings who were exploited by the rubber boom, Rivera makes the trees 'speak' on behalf of the region's other silent and silenced victims: not only the jungle's diverse wildlife, but its human inhabitants as well" (151).¹⁷ Without suggesting that Quintana's depiction of the wild *pacífico* intentionally employs the jungle to speak to a specific form of political or historical violence in Colombia—that is to say, *La perra* is not a novel written in direct response to the country's internal armed conflict—I do see a parallel between French's intervention and my own reading of this particular episode. As Damaris contemplates Nicolasito's death while traversing the jungle, the omniscient narrator observes that amidst the engulfing trees that enclose around her, "ella empezó a sentir que la respiración que escuchaba no era suya sino de la selva" (31). Similar to Cova's interaction with the talking trees in *La vorágine*, Damaris's relationship with the

¹⁷ In his study of the greenhouse gaze, Martínez-Pinzón's similarly examines the image of talking trees in *La vorágine*. Martínez-Pinzón underscores how Cova's white, Andean body falls prey to the long-feared dangers of the lowland tropics, which, however inextricably connected to the highlands through economy and trade, were physically rejected and separated from criollo daily life. Rivera's problematizing of hygiene through Spanish-American modernist poetics "produce what could be called *the voice of the trees*, a de-reifying discourse that allows readers to see the connections between nature and culture, hence demystifying the greenhouse gaze" (106-7). The overlaying of nature and culture made possible by the interwoven discourses of hygiene and exploitation combat the greenhouse gaze, which traditionally "planted an antagonism between the nation and its territory" (107). According to Martínez-Pinzón, through Cova, Rivera is able to force the body, and thus the reader, to see, hear and feel what actually happens in the jungle beneath the cover of trees.

jungle is encrypted in a bringing to life the natural fauna around her so as to make it speak on her behalf, or more accurately, to become the repository for the trauma she herself cannot voice, just as Tancred in the aftermath of his own double wounding.

As Claudia Leal (2018) proposes in her study of Colombia's western coast, "Because of jungles' powerful presence and the fact that they have always been there, they tend to be considered the quintessential 'nature' and as such devoid of history" (230), the jungle itself is rarely read as a source or witness of history. Such an erasure is underscored by the cultural, social and political marginalization of the subaltern communities that constitute the majority population of such regions in Colombia. Quintana's novel thus offers an alternative voice by localizing the jungle in a personal, albeit fictitious, narrative in which the jungle comes alive to serve as an archive. Though the jungle does not speak to Damaris as the jungle does in French's examination of *La vorágine*, the acts of breathing that she hears and feels offer a reminder of life in a moment when the specter of death feels suffocating. As a result, the jungle becomes home to beings who are not alive, yet undead, in a surviving reminder of what young Damaris has witnessed, but the severity of which she was unable to grasp in the moment. Like with Tancred, the trees speak to Damaris through their breathing, thus reminding her of the impossibility of living as a survivor when she was unable to prevent Nicolasito's death. Consequently, she considers staying in the jungle because to remain in the jungle means never having to articulate the tragedy she has witnessed. By allowing the jungle to swallow her, she shares Nicolasito's fate, while simultaneously allowing the two of them to live forever in a liminal space of silence.

Staging The Jungle Book in Memory

The double wounding that links Nicolasito and Chirli continues to haunt Damaris as she attempts to care for Chirli while also looking after his home. In the years following Nicolasito's death, his parents, *los Reyes*, stop returning to their vacation home. Vacant, but never sold, the house is left in Damaris's care. Her work as housekeeper is one devoid of monetary value as she admits she is happy to work without compensation: "No solo se sentía en deuda con los Reyes, también la emocionaba la idea de volver a vivir en el acantilado, que ella siempre había considerado su hogar" (38). Living on the Reyes' land while watching over their home, Damaris returns to her childhood surroundings and takes on the same occupation as her mother.¹⁸ Her return to the past is reflected in the state of the house, which remains frozen in time: "todos se habían esforzado por mantener la casa y sobre todo el cuarto del finado Nicolasito como ellos lo habían dejado, en la medida que el clima, la selva, el salitre y el paso de los años lo habían permitido" (40). Damaris's job becomes one of preservation. She cleans the house, but above all, makes sure that Nicolasito's room stands as a time capsule in which the past remains frozen as if to deny any evidence of his death.

The image of Nicolasito, just as his room, is trapped in a permanent stage of infancy cultivated by Damaris's ritual acts of cleaning and caring. Looking at his curtains, which are decorated with images from *The Jungle Book*, Damaris recalls: "él [Nicolasito] le explicó que los animales y el niño de los dibujos en las cortinas y el tendido de su cuarto eran de su película favorita, que se llamaba *El libro de la selva*,

¹⁸ Her return to the past is multifaceted in that when she steps back into childhood scenes, she returns as an adult who stands in the role of her own mother, diseased prematurely like Nicolasito. Though there is no discussion in the text about how assuming the same occupation of her mother affects Damaris, it is another indication on how her position is continuously shaped by echoes of her haunted past.

también era un libro y se trataba de un niño que se perdía en la selva y lo salvaban los animales. ... Damaris saltó una risotada porque eso era imposible” (97). Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) is a collection of stories inspired by the author’s childhood in India. Made into an animated film by Disney in 1967, the story follows young Mowgli who is lost in the jungle and must confront the dangers it presents, particularly by the animals that seek to kill —interestingly, to consume— him. Through contact with various animals, Mowgli learns the value of relationships, as depicted through the animal kingdom, allowing for his eventual return to life amongst humans. Curiously, it is only once Mowgli renounces his human identity, taking on the name of “man-cub,” that he is able to live amongst animals, free from the threats of nature.

The Reyes’ decision to adorn their child’s room with imagery from *The Jungle Book* gestures toward the enduring vestiges of colonialism alive in the jungle. Kipling’s collection, and his own childhood which served as inspiration, are products of British imperial control in India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Set in the tropics of northern and central India, Kipling’s representations of the unnamed beauty and danger of the jungle find resonances in *La perra*. Like Mowgli, an affluent child from the metropolis, Nicolasito comes to the coast to live in an unfamiliar setting. The Reyes’ decision to bring to life the animated animals of the Disney adaptation, and not the original book, infantilize the story in order to minimize the savage threats the jungle imposes. Rather, the playful images of talking animals who care for an innocent child allow Nicolasito to see the jungle as his home away from home, which adult Damaris finds comical. For her, the curtains in the room carry heavy emotional significance as a reminder of Nicolasito’s death by nature; the reality of living in the jungle as opposed to

a misleading animation. Looking into them, Damaris “volvió a sentir el peso de la culpa como si no hubiera pasado el tiempo” because the memories triggered “siempre la llevaban hasta el mismo lugar. Él [Nicolasio], blanco y esbelto, frente al acantilado” (97). As a result, washing the curtains is presented as an act of repentance by which her physical suffering serves as punishment for allowing Nicolasio to die: “Lavar las cortinas era un trabajo duro que requería dedicación y músculo” (98). Furthermore, the productive act of arduous labor compensates for Damaris’s perceived feeling of bodily insufficiency. Unable to reproduce, she channels her focus into another domestic act that sees her female body serving its gendered purpose.

The association of the curtains, and by extension *The Jungle Book*, with Damaris’s manual labor underscores the colonial undertones alive within the Reyes’ house, further charged by differences in racial identity; Damaris is Afro-Colombian and the Reyes are not. Within this hierarchical dynamic— further accented by the evocative family name *los Reyes*— Damaris volunteers as a domestic worker and subjects herself to exhausting labor without compensation in order to repay a debt to the Reyes, triggering a reflection on the financial inequality between her and Nicolasio’s family. Curiously, though Damaris never acknowledges the connection in present time, the omniscient narrator details how the land on which the Reyes’ home stands once belonged to Damaris’s family. Unable to make a living off of fishing, Damaris’s uncle sold his land to the Reyes family to pay off personal debts. In turn, Damaris and her family became tenants on their own property, the irony of which is further emphasized by Damaris’s return to the Reyes’ home as an unpaid domestic worker, where she is allowed to reside for free. In this vein, Damaris is both interloper and natural inhabitant of the house, which

in and of itself stands as a microcosmic image of the underlying racial and social tensions that define the Pacific region.

Though Damaris knows that many assumed she was jealous of Nicolasito for what he owned due to his superior socioeconomic and racial status, she herself recognizes more profound tensions within their childhood friendship. Revealingly, she confesses: “era verdad que le había tenido envidia a Nicolasito, pero no por las botas pantaneras ni las cosas bonitas que tenía, las camisetas nuevas, los juguetes que le traía el Niño Dios, las cortinas y el tendido de *El libro de la selva*, sino porque él vivía con sus papás” (99). As a result, her caring for his bedroom is not simply the product of her guilt, but additionally the staging of the perfect childhood she has always desired. It is a childhood safe from the loss and absence that Damaris has come to associate with the threats produced by the jungle as well as the comforts and advantages of life outside of her poverty-stricken, rural, Afro-Colombian community. In this way, her fantasy could also be characterized as a reclamation of the family home that would have been her own inheritance under different circumstances. Nicolasito, though initially appearing as the phantom of a childhood trauma long buried in silence, serves additionally as the phantom of her own fantasies.¹⁹ As if preparing a scene, Damaris hangs the curtains in Nicolasito’s bedroom to set the stage for the reenactment of a family history that would not only resurrect Nicolasito, but allow her to see an idealized, almost revisionist, childhood

¹⁹ Abraham and Torok originally proposed the idea of the phantom as a psychoanalytic construct in order to explain how children might inherit silenced traumas by witnessing erratic behavior in their parents. Consequently, as ventriloquized subjects, they intend to correct or speak on behalf of their parents’ silent acts through ritualized compulsions (173). The phantom appears an unlikely vehicle of study because the children presented in *La perra* and *Los niños* are not biological, but I argue that their silent presence in the novels is indicative of encrypted trauma, and as a result, can help us understand the underlying tensions that drive Damaris’s and Laura’s ritualistic behaviors as evinced specifically by their function as domestic workers.

played out in front of her. A childhood that both never existed but also survives outside the passage of time.

When the omniscient narrator reveals that Nicolasito died the same month Shirley Sáenz was crowned Miss Colombia, the narrative explains Damaris's adult association of the beauty queen with the hope of new life in the face of tragedy (30). Chirli not only represents the child Damaris never had, but more painfully, she conjures the memory of a lost child who Damaris hoped to resurrect. Turning back to Faulkner, I reference again her aforementioned proposal of childhood nostalgia as fantasy: "The 'innocent child' both remembers and forgets *for* the community: first, by representing to the community a past it feels is lost; and, second, representing an unconsciousness, or insouciance, into which adult cares can be invested and expunged" ("Vulnerability of 'Virtual' Subjects" 128). If the figure of the child as both fantasy and nostalgic emblem can erase the past through a form of symbolic reincarnation, Chirli offers the idea of a child who can expunge Damaris's guilt over Nicolasito's death through a renewed investment. Yet, when Chirli returns from the jungle pregnant, she serves not only as a constant reminder of the dog's survival in the face of Nicolasito's death, but also of Damaris's infertility and thus her inability to birth a child that would allow her to rewrite the loss of Nicolasito through the rearing of her own biological child. Instead, Chirli defies Damaris's understanding of the jungle. Despite all the dangers she has encountered in the jungle, Chirli emerges from the jungle with new life. As a result, the animal awakens a violent and intimate affective force in Damaris by forcing her to confront the core of her trauma. Chirli is not simply the incarnation of motherhood in the jungle, but more necessarily, the

non-consoling and disturbing memory of a lifelong battle with suppressed trauma initiated by Nicolasito's death.

A Return to the Jungle

The image of an overturned domestic scene from the ending of *Los niños* is paralleled in the final pages of *La perra* when Damaris wakes one morning to find that Chirli has ripped down Nicolasito's curtains, which she had washed the day before and left drying outside her house: "Las cortinas del finado Nicolasito estaban en el suelo, sucias de barro y desgarradas. Damaris se agachó para recogerlas y se quedó con un pedazo en la mano. Estaban destrozadas hasta el punto de que sería imposible repararlas" (100). Enraged at the sight of destruction, Damaris becomes violent and lashes out: "Damaris agarró una soga para amarrar lanchas, le hizo un nudo corredizo, ... lo rodeó, entró por el lado del fogón y enlazó a la perra por detrás" (100). Not only has Chirli destroyed Damaris's preservative work, she has eliminated any possibility of recovery, meaning that Damaris has failed in her act of repentance. In rage and frustration, Damaris strangles Chirli only to realize, in devastating fashion, that the dog is once again pregnant.

Faced with the cadaver of the dog she once cared for as her child, Damaris must confront her crime. She subsequently returns to the jungle and envisions a plan for ridding herself of any evidence of the murder:

El sitio donde la había dejado era perfecto. Quedaba lejos de los caminos, estaba oculto por la espesura y nadie nunca iba para allá. La gente del pueblo, cuando viera los gallinazos, si es que se fijaba en ellos, pensaría que se trataba de algún animal silvestre, una chucha, un venado o un perezoso, como el que se había muerto una vez cerca de La Despensa. Además, en esa selva bastarían tres o a lo sumo cuatro días para que el cadáver quedara reducido a los huesos, que ella

recogería y tiraría al mar sin que nadie se diera cuenta, de noche y cuando la marea estuviera bajando, para que los llevara bien lejos. (105)

In returning Chirli to the jungle, Damaris hopes to once again entomb death in silence. She plans to keep her act of violence a secret by hiding it within a space known for the dangers it encloses. In this way, she makes the jungle complicit in her murder. Then, moving to the beach, coming full circle, Damaris finds herself reliving the opening moments of the novel in which she finds Chirli's mother dead and buries her where she is found, thus transforming the beach into a cemetery where deaths are not commemorated, but hidden and later forgotten. Though she previously lamented the poor treatment of animals, by the novel's end, Damaris finds herself just as culpable as those she once admonished. In giving the dog's bones to the sea, the same body of water that once swallowed her friend, Damaris reclaims nature's force as her own, as an accomplice to her violent acts.

Subsequently, while the jungle still serves as a space of suffering —of mourning and inarticulate loss— it no longer stands in opposition to Damaris, but rather as a potential extension of herself. After crossing paths with acquaintances on the beach after disposing of Chirli's cadaver, Damaris worries that she will be discovered and struggles with her guilt and shame just as after Nicolasito's death. As a result, in the closing line of the novel she envisions imbedding herself in the jungle, allowing her childhood wish to see herself swallowed come to fruition: "Así pensó que tal vez debería irse al monte, descalza y apenas en su licra corta y su blusa de tiras desteñida, y caminar más allá de ... los lugares que había recorrido con Rogelio y los que no habían llegado a conocer, para perderse como la perra y el niño de las cortinas de Nicolasito, allá donde la selva era más terrible" (108). Faced with the shame of her actions, Damaris imagines relinquishing

herself to the jungle as punishment. The repetition of *más allá* emphasizes Damaris's desire to penetrate even further to see herself become one with the haunting jungle; a space so terrible that it offers a suitable home for her in the wake of her crime and her desire to reside in a silenced space.²⁰ As Damaris sees herself relinquishing to the forces of nature, the jungle no longer stands as an overbearing, external presence, but as the extension of her own internal forces of violence, now liberated from her body and embraced by her being for better and for worse. Here, mother nature is a mode of expression that allows her to explore an inner turmoil inextricably tied to her identity while shielding her from the outside world and the admonishing gaze she imagines in the eyes around her. Just as nature becomes the receptacle of her secrets, the jungle becomes the living cemetery where death is not the end, but a medium. It swallows not to kill, but to allow ghosts to live undead in memory; an ecological site in which decay itself becomes productive, even fertile. Though we do not know if Damaris will in fact flee into the jungle, the novel's ambiguous ending does not see her return home, leaving readers to consider her fantasy as a legitimate possibility.

SILENCE IN THE REDEFINITION OF RESOLUTION

²⁰ The image of a murderous woman, in rejection of her inability to mother, retreating into the untamed jungle seemingly echoes the closing scene of Venezuelan author Rómulo Gallegos's (1884-1964) *Doña Bárbara* (1929) in which the eponymous character likewise disappears into the jungle, abandoning her only child, never to be seen again. Though comparisons to Gallegos's novel can be made, I argue that for Damaris there is not a causation between her relationship to the jungle and her presentation of monstrous womanhood or failed maternity in conventional, patriarchal senses, commonly read in Gallegos's novel. Doña Bárbara, born of rape within the Amazon, later victimized herself, is commonly read as the human incarnate of the *vagina dentata* when her hypersexualized and violent tendencies toward men bestow upon her the moniker, "la devoradora de hombres" (141). Rather, for Damaris, nature offers a space for confronting her relationship with motherhood and accepting its relationship to violent tendencies.

Given both novels' ambiguous conclusions that eschew an explicitly happy ending — let alone a depiction of blissful motherhood— we see how Quintana and Sanín avoid taking a stance that clearly advocates for adoption. Rather, both novels' return to silence in cryptically unresolved endings leave the fates of Sanín's and Quintana's characters open-ended so as to underscore the validity of ongoing processes of healing and the productivity, even necessity, of delayed resolution.

In order to understand the highly ambiguous endings of both *Los niños* and *La perra*, I turn again to Martínez who questions in her own interrogation of contemporary cultural production in Colombia, “is it enough to just move on? Is there a way to welcome the future in a more just manner?” (30). Though *La perra* and *Los niños* are not novels explicitly about the Colombian armed conflict, they are studies of human confrontation with the unresolved on a deeply intimate level that gesture to conversations on the possibility of post-conflict in Colombia. As Janneth Español Casallas (2020) has affirmed, *La perra* —and as I add, *Los niños*— opts not to represent or recount historical acts of violence themselves, but rather to focus on the development of female protagonists whose actions are shaped by an environment deeply permeated by violence (254). By exploring human responses to pain, trauma, orphanhood, dislocation and the unknown, Sanín and Quintana diverge from the national narrative of peace in order to share a narrative of violence that, as Leonardo-Loayza affirms, “habla sobre el posconflicto que vive Colombia, sobre su periodo de paz, y advirtiera que no obstante la violencia a gran escala está desapareciendo, la de escala menor, doméstica, microfísica, aún sigue en pie, instalada en el interior de la gente” (166). As Leonardo-Loayza proposes, large scale images of peace are not always reflected in small-scale vignettes of

everyday life. In these scenes that run counter to national narratives of conflict and resolution, striking moments of silence communicate another side of the reality and, as a result, highlight the very work yet to be done and that cannot be achieved within the same (linear) timeframe.

Recognizing the unspoken, as Sanín and Quintana show, becomes particularly necessary for communities who find no outlet in the archival drive as portrayed in *Los niños* or for those living in regions which have been overlooked by the central government as in *La perra*. As Damaris moves through the jungle, she sees her childhood memories infused in the foliage when her search for Chirli and, by proxy, her long desired child, is transformed into the reimagination of her lost childhood friend Nicolasito. By exploring her repressed emotions whilst simultaneously traversing the untamed space, her sadness, anger and frustration are reflected back in the excess around her. As a result, becoming one with the jungle and speaking through the trees allow Damaris to confront her repressed relationship with loss and absence. For Laura, her confrontation with the city's response to displaced children reveals her own conflictive relationship with her forcibly forgotten past; her own erasure of trauma, which, formerly localized in her rural origins, are later made invisible upon her arrival in the city. Her false sense of security or escape is uprooted when Fidel arrives at her door, triggering a disruptive superimposition of marginalized existences over the urban reality she lives. For Laura, such a disruption will compel her to redefine her sense of home by conjuring alternative realities localized in ocean and island scenes, which serve as focal points in her attempt to rewrite her family history, particularly when institutional mechanisms for adoption and the archival drive only further rupture the family ties she hopes to cultivate.

As *Los niños* exposes the fragile nature of a premature declaration of peace, *La perra* as a counterpoint reveals opportunities for engaging with conflict, violence and destruction without necessarily positioning resolution as the desired outcome. In unearthing the unspoken, Quintana and Sanín nourish my investigation into forms of untraditional archival work attempting to fill the gaps in official history, which falls in line with Cherlyn Elston's proposal of "nonsynchronicity" (7). In her study of feminism in modern and contemporary Colombian literature, Elston discusses how women's writing evades "conventional male-centered forms of time and history" that complicate how scholars situate the works of women writers in broader literary, social and political movements (4). While Elston mobilizes the rebellious and subversive undertones of female nonsynchronicity to deconstruct feminist narratives in Colombia, I offer nonsynchronicity as the lens through which to situate Quintana and Sanín's novels within contemporary Colombia's path to peace. Their representations of adoption and conflictive forms of care and healing speak of what continues to remain unresolved in the national narrative of violence. In this vein, they bolster the call for a more horizontal distribution of power and representation, which proves vital in light of the stories of failed listening featured in Chapter One and again here in cases of entangled time and identity. In doing so, Sanín's and Quintana's novels affirm the importance of revisiting the past, of confronting the unspoken and repressed when silence disrupts the impulse to push forward and reinforce hegemonic structures of official history.

CHAPTER THREE

Child's Play, Imagination and Precarious Innocence in the Coded Languages of Coming-of-Age

In the opening pages of *Sitios de contienda: producción cultural colombiana y el discurso de la violencia* (2010), Juana Suárez describes an instance in which she observes a group of five-year-old boys playing. The children, as Suárez affirms, come from comfortable and well-adjusted middle-class families and paint a picture of “normatividad” in Neiva, Colombia (13). Yet, she is struck by their imaginative role play as the boys pretend to fight each other not as “extraterrestres, seres siderales, vaqueros, súper héroes o cualquier fantasía infantil” (13), but rather as guerrilla and paramilitary militants. Even more surprisingly, Suárez describes the indifference with which she is met when voicing her shock to other adults, leading her to problematize the extent to which violence has shaped cultural production in Colombia, permeating everyday life so deeply as to reach the infantile imaginary of children. Particularly as images of violence appear omnipresent in television and popular culture, Suárez questions how “la violencia de pronto parece tanto como un gesto absolutamente cotidiano así como un simple juego” without necessarily demanding deeper reflection or analysis from viewers and civilians (14).

While the child's play she witnesses points toward a banalization of violence in contemporary society, the make-believe game also invites an analysis of how children

dialogue with civil conflict. Thus, this chapter explores textual explorations of childhood agency and voice in works of fiction that reframe family narratives of trauma and rupture through the eyes of a child, particularly against the backdrop of national unrest. More specifically, I focus on how recent publications by young writers whose childhoods were shaped by the most notorious decades of the Colombian armed conflict are attempting to highlight how childhood, being a crucial time for coming-of-age and the acquisition of language, can offer crucial perspectives on the long-term impact of violence on everyday life even years later into adulthood.

Gloria Susana Esquivel's *Animales del fin de mundo* (2017) and Ingrid Rojas Contreras's *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* (2018) explore how exclusion and misunderstanding shape the coming-of-age of child narrators engulfed in domestic and national turmoil. Young, and thus seemingly blissfully ignorant, respective protagonists Inés and Chula often find themselves excluded from adult conversations deemed too inappropriate for children, and more specifically, little girls. Nevertheless, as they spy on their parents, overhear radio news reports and watch television, they learn of the tumultuous urban violence that spreads through Bogotá during the 1980s. Though unable to fully comprehend the intricacies of such conflict and destruction, they still perceive how turmoil external to the home seeps inward and is mimicked by domestic strife. Afraid of what might happen in the streets while simultaneously witnessing distress at home, Inés's and Chula's curiosity and desire for increased participation in adult affairs motivates them to find alternative outlets of autonomy and voice in order to break through the gaps in knowledge shaping their coming-of-age.

In their challenging of adult acts of silence and silencing, these narrators begin to craft their own narrative of events through acts of child's play and imagination. In *Animales del fin del mundo*, Inés envisions herself and her family members as animals in order to equip them with the ferocity necessary to combat the dangers of both civil unrest and domestic strife. Meanwhile, Chula in *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* reenacts scenes of violence she sees on television during playtime in order to use her own storytelling to articulate her confusion and fear. In these instances, it is the child narrators' very lack of an adult lexicon that allows them to read their surroundings, and more specifically, to speak when silence seems to plague the adult dialogues they witness in order to articulate and process violence through child's play, invention and new vocabularies. As Esquivel and Rojas Contreras return to their childhoods as the foundation for crafting their young narrators, the voices they feature through metafictional writing emphasize the dually formative consequences of both civil conflict and domestic turmoil over a generation continuing to confront the impact of multilayered violences in their daily lives both as children and as adults.

The Age of Innocence: Childhood Paradoxes

In the introduction to *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature* (1994), Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle and Naomi Sokoloff begin their exploration of the representation of childhood in literature by examining a central paradox: "the child goes through it [childhood], but lacks the language to convey its reality to others, while the adult writer commands the full resources of language but is largely cut off from children's consciousness" (3). The contradictory nature of childhood makes articulation

difficult when children's language alienates them from adults who wield writing as an epistolary form, and yet the passage of time makes fully recapturing the childhood psyche unobtainable. Offering the Latin etymology of infant, from *infans*, meaning unspeaking, Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff affirm that the "child consciousness requires adult construction and mediation in order to be voiced in written representation" (2). As a result, they underscore that child characters become a form of "domesticized Other" (2) when their voice is mediated or filtered by adult authors.¹ Accordingly, Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff began a crucial problematization of how little scholarly work had been conducted at the time of publication to address this precarious relationship between author and character, adult and child.

The tendency to dismiss or overlook the child's voice is born from a broader understanding of childhood in the Western cultural imaginary as a state of innocence and consequently ignorance. Throughout recent decades, however, scholars, psychiatrists and educators studying childhood have attempted to debunk the common assumption that childhood is merely a state of underdevelopment on the way to maturity in order to emphasize the value of the child's voice even when unintelligible to adults. Notably, in *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* (2005), Susan Honeyman seeks to reverse the common misconception that childhood is not in and of itself a substantiated state of being. Looking at the experience of being a child, she

¹ Similarly, in "Negotiating vulnerability through 'animal' and 'child'" (2011), Joanne Faulkner explores the overlap between the child and animal in dialogue with Giorgio Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002). Turning to the intersection between humans' relationship to animals and to childhood, Faulkner proposes: "The animal monstrously mirrors, or parodies, the child as both are separated from a status of (full-)humanity by virtue of a lack of reason and moral capacity; both also constitute a reserve of life that supports adult humanity, conceptually and materially" (74). Because the child represents humanity in its "underdeveloped" state, childhood becomes a state defined by innocence, but also by a sense of uncontrolled impulses. Protecting a child in his/her vulnerable state thus becomes an act of control similar to acts of domestication imposed on animals (78).

unpacks the seemingly harmless perennial question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” (1). In defining the state of childhood as necessarily in progress and working toward a future being, the question inadvertently negates childhood as a fully formed state of “existing selfhood” (1), consequently silencing the child’s voice. This understanding of childhood, she argues, is born from the Enlightenment, and more specifically, from the normative dichotomy that associates adulthood with rationality, thus framing childhood as an opposing state of vulnerability, innocence and ignorance (2).² As childhood is positioned against adulthood, fascination for the past feeds the cultivation of childhood as an imaginary state:

... we impose “childhood” on those we define as children according to biased standards of adult nostalgia and desire. These standards and impositions reveal a slow backlash from the Age of Reason embedded in both romantic and modern notions of childhood: a need to escape the burden of rationalist epistemologies, their demands for hyperliterate knowledge, and the responsibilities of power. (2)

As Honeyman makes clear, during the Enlightenment, increased literacy, the advent of the printing press and increasing access to public education generated greater access to knowledge while simultaneously associating the acquisition of knowledge with work and responsibility. Childhood, being the counterbalance to rationality, was subsequently transformed into a desired state of blissful ignorance liberated from the burdens of adulthood.

² María Pilar Celma Valero and Carmen Morán Rodríguez discuss further in *La verdadera patria: infancia y adolescencia en el relato español contemporáneo* (2019) that the Industrial Revolution later added to these tensions. As children became more visible in society through labor, and with the decrease in child mortality rates, societal interest in protecting children from adult life increased. With greater literary attention to stories of children entering the work force throughout the nineteenth century (for example in the works of Charles Dickens), childhood was more pointedly defined as a stage different from adulthood (9).

The continued charged relationship between childhood and nostalgic desire has been analyzed in greater detail by Joanne Faulkner. In “Vulnerability of ‘Virtual’ Subjects: Childhood, Memory, and Crisis in the Cultural Value of Innocence” (2013), Faulkner contends that nostalgia plays a vital role in establishing childhood as a fetishized state: “Nostalgia for ‘childhood,’ imagined as a time without worry or care, is possible only by virtue of forgetting the particular social stresses and concerns with which one’s childhood self had had to contend.”³ Nostalgia is memory that forgets the socially diverse and difficult aspects of experience, and as such it is a fetish” (129). If childhood is positioned against adulthood, nostalgia plays a crucial role in steeping the past in escapist desires. By framing childhood as liberated from adult responsibilities, however, these nostalgic undertones erase childhood traumas which are already conventionally overlooked or repressed, particularly in middle and upper-class purviews.

Internalized desire for a past unencumbered by burden in which innocence-inspired- ignorance presents an escape feeds a literary fascination with child narrators even if the child’s consciousness can never be fully reclaimed by adult authors voicing their younger counterparts. Notwithstanding, Goodenough, Heberle and Sokoloff affirm the value of the child in literature by emphasizing the productivity of allowing the child’s voice to be “sounded” as a means more so than an end (7). In particular, they explore metafictional journeys to the past in which “the return to childhood through writing enables a revisiting of the time when they [authors] first began to establish meaning through words. Putting children into texts is thus a way of getting to the truth of oneself

³ Nostalgia’s role in shaping societal and scholarly understandings of childhood specifically in Latin American contexts is further explored in Sophie Dufays’s *El niño en el cine argentino de la postdictadura (1983-2008)* (2014).

as well, and the author's self-recapitulation may be shared by the reader, who was also a child, if never an author" (11). In metafictional endeavors, writing the child allows authors to come in contact once again with childhood when the memory of language acquisition during one's coming-of-age is mimicked in the process of writing as an adult. In this vein, my intervention seeks to illustrate how listening to child figures thus becomes a revealing process, rather than didactic product, which can inform adult understandings of civil conflict and domestic turmoil without assuming an authentic or unmediated recapturing of childhood life itself. As adult authors create younger doubles, they conjure the past in order to explore how the deconstruction of linear chronology can expose unresolved tensions that continue to shape the present and future.

The use of a child protagonist as a vehicle for returning to the past is explored by Caroline Steedman in *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (1995). Discussing how Freudian psychoanalysis brought childhood under scrutiny by positioning one's lost past at the center of identity, Steedman affirms that the notion of the unconscious as another term for forgotten childhood runs in tandem with the idea of interiority, which has become the basis of storytelling. The inner self, often hidden yet rich in subjective material, offers an effective theorization of the memory of childhood, and by extension, the notion of personal history (4). Childhood thus became synonymous with an unreachable inner self, "the story waiting to be told" (11).

Explorations into the past, the repressed or forgotten as it pertains to childhood has been a central line of inquiry in memory studies and post-conflict debates throughout

Latin America, and in the Southern Cone in particular, as well as in Spain.⁴ In both cases, cinema has played a vital role. Since the publication of Marsha Kinder's seminal article, "The Children of Franco" (1983), Spanish film studies has granted particular attention to the child on screen. Scholars such as Sarah Wright (2013), Erin K. Hogan (2018), Sarah Thomas (2019) and Rachel Beaney (2021) continue to question and problematize the prevalence of child protagonists not only during the Franco era, but in the decades since, by mobilizing the child as a means of highlighting how: "These films thematise, then, cinema's 'desire to bring the past to life', as the prosthetic nature of cinema's confrontation with the past" (Wright 17).⁵ Given the Southern Cone's parallel recent histories of authoritarian rule, it is no surprise that Georgia Seminet and Carolina Rocha identify a similar trend: "Since the 1960s, Latin American cinema has produced an impressive number of films that portray the lives of children across the diverse landscapes of the region" (8). For Seminet and Rocha, the child allows filmmakers to challenge normative representations of gender and class by allowing subaltern subjectivities to speak who have traditionally been silenced or made invisible.

In addition to cinema, movements between past and present, silence and speech, have been increasingly spotlighted in writing as a means of connecting cultural

⁴ The critical connection between childhood and past is also discussed in other national and historical contexts, such as in Debbie Pinfold's *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature* (2001). Pinfold identifies similar uses of childhood in fiction as a vehicle for engaging the past: "the childhood theme became popular after the war because writers felt unable to deal with the past or adjust to the trauma of the present, and so adopted the child's point of view as an expression of powerlessness and withdrawal from the problems of the immediate past was the only way to deal with it" (28). Pinfold's work offers a useful construct for thinking about why adult writers speak through child narrators both in her scholarly context as well as others, such as in Marjorie Salvodón's *Fictions of Childhood: The Roots of Identity in Contemporary French Narratives* (2008).

⁵ Works by Wright and Beaney will be discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter. Hogan's monograph, *The Two cines con niño: Genre and the Child Protagonist in Over Fifty Years of Spanish Film (1955-2010)* (2018), and Thomas's *Inhabiting the In-Between: Childhood and Cinema in Spain's Long Transition* (2019) are notable titles that likewise treat the child in Spanish cinema.

production to political activism. In *La cruzada de los niños intelectuales, infancia y modernidad literaria en América Latina* (2018), Alejandra J. Josiowicz discusses how literary representations of childhood from the late nineteenth century evolved from cultural portraits of *criollo* family life to political interventions that linked processes of maturation to civic engagement and childhood to futurity throughout the twentieth century (29). In this way, Josiowicz identifies two fields of childhood studies in Latin America: “una serie de trabajos ha abordado la instauración de mecanismos institucionales y legislativos de protección de la niñez” (33) and “una tendencia que se propone reconstruir y rescatar la ‘voz infantil’, es decir, las experiencias, las acciones sociales y percepciones de los propios niños, no como símbolo de ideales políticos adultos sino como actores sociales y políticos, que intenta volverlos visibles para la historiografía social” (34). Indeed, as second-generation activists in the Southern Cone participate in movements advancing transitional justice in post-dictatorship societies, cultural production has reflected popular attention to the experience of *hijxs* in the aftermath of authoritarian rule and political turmoil.

While postmemory has played a pivotal role in memory studies in the Southern Cone, increasing problematization of generational categorizations of memory, trauma and conflict continue to question how the family intervenes in political, historical and cultural debates. Rather than turn to testimony, my attention to fiction features an interrogation of childhood, which, while rooted in a discussion of familial structures and relationships, attempts to look at child protagonists primarily in their capacity as *niñas* rather than as *hijas*.⁶ By examining the function of child’s play more broadly, I respond to the

⁶ Efforts to move away from a genealogical conception of childhood and children are likewise explored in Cecilia Sosa’s *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina’s Dictatorship: The Performances*

metafictional nature of Esquivel's and Rojas Contreras's texts, which deal more precisely with conceptions of childhood agency and voice, rather than intergenerational familial identities in an era of debatable post-conflict in Colombia.

Accordingly, the two novels studied in this chapter spotlight the child's voice within acts of storytelling in order to shed light on how childhood perceptions of time and space can guide the readers' understanding of conflict and resolution due to adolescent confusion rather than in spite of it. I propose reading Esquivel's and Rojas Contreras's depictions of child narratives as an attempt at recording personal histories that allow for agency, but also for preservation in the face of intentional adult acts of forgetting in a coded language, which rather than be cast aside or devalued, offer insight into the impact of violence through coded languages and symbolism. Not always heard nor understood by the adults around them, these child protagonists create their own universes within the novels they inhabit, consequently sharing their experiences with the reader who listens when adults turn away.

My exploration of childhood acts of narration, invention and imagination begins with *Animales del fin del mundo*. Esquivel's Inés, six years old, is the central witness to growing tensions at home that seemingly parallel the chaos of urban violence outside. As Inés learns of car bombs and political assassinations from television, she becomes convinced of an impending global apocalypse—a reference to the novel's title—which is paired with the stress and anxiety she experiences while navigating the austere and oppressive influence of her domineering grandparents and her parents' divorce, while

of *Blood* (2014) in which she attempts to challenge the “blood normativity” inherent in acts of mourning in post-dictatorship Argentina (xi). Explaining how human rights still champions “a conservative idea of the family” (2), Sosa proposes thinking about forms of transmission other than blood within family relations through queering.

trapped indoors. As the only child at home, she faces suffocating solitude with no one to turn to in order to express her fear until she meets María, the granddaughter of her family's housekeeper. By examining how the two girls invent games, I study how animal symbology generates metaphors that help Inés process visions of violence and destruction, both in society and in her own relationships, through her own lexicon. As she populates her home with fantastic animals, who offer alter egos for her family members, Inés's own animalistic alter egos encourage her to grow more and more competitive with María, in turn implicitly teaching her about socioeconomic prejudice and class disparity, notions which remain inaccessible to her when explained in adult terms by her elitist grandparents. Ultimately, her imagined animals, which Inés initially invented in order to combat visions of danger external to the home, are the very mechanisms that highlight how danger seeps indoors, forcing Inés to see that the end of the world, in fact, begins at home.

Likewise residing in an upper middle-class home in Bogotá, Chula, seven years old, becomes obsessed with watching television, which mediates her understanding of her family's relationship to civil conflict as depicted in *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree*. As Chula's father works away from home, her mother is left to care for their home and children on her own, ultimately hiring a teenage girl, Petrona, as a domestic employee. The novel is told through both girls' perspectives, alternating chapters in which Chula and Petrona each narrate. As the two girls grow closer, playtime allows them to articulate and explain their relationships with violence when they are unable to do so with their adult family members. As they invent stories together through play, Chula begins to confuse these domestic storylines with news of the internal conflict. After she is nearly

kidnapped by guerillas who enlist Petrona as an accomplice, Chula's father, who works for an American oil company mining in FARC territory, is kidnaped and held for ransom, leading her family to flee Colombia for the United States. The girls' invented stories during playtime and their childhood secretive games are continued in letters they exchange across borders, letters in which they continue to explore how class disparity shapes their respective relationships to civil conflict both in Colombia and abroad. In their many attempts at coded storytelling, both girls discover how to dialogue about past and present events too traumatic to articulate in literal terms.

As both protagonists find opportunities for storytelling in which they challenge notions of childhood innocence, ignorance and passivity, they reveal how silence only masks forms of hegemonic control. As child's play is transformed into a powerful force of agency and articulation, invention and imagination become forms of narration that prove how the child's realization of socioeconomic disparity, gender inequality and domestic strife goes hand-in-hand with their understanding of the internal armed conflict particularly when private, domestic violences go unnoticed or overlooked on the national scale. As Esquivel and Rojas Contreras come in contact with their childhood, writing the child's voice reveals how equally impactful these two strands of violence were and continue to be, thus affirming the necessity of addressing small-scale conflict as a means of successfully achieving large-scale peace.

BETWEEN REALITY AND IMAGINATION IN *ANIMALES DEL FIN DEL MUNDO*

The epigraph to Gloria Susana Esquivel's *Animales del fin del mundo* (2017) sets a haunting tone for the novel that ensues. From the Book of Zachariah, the epigraph situates the home as a site of deep wounding: "Si alguien pregunta: '¿Qué son estas

heridas que traes en el pecho?’, la respuesta será: ‘Son las heridas que me hicieron en la casa de quienes me aman’” (7). Indeed, the opening pages of the novel paint a picture of domestic distress as we meet Inés, a six-year-old girl who lives with her maternal grandparents after her mother’s divorce forces them to return home to a highly unwelcoming space. An overbearing grandmother, an austere grandfather and a meticulous housekeeper dominate the house as Inés is left to her own devices to pass the time. Narrated in first-person in the past tense, the novel opens on a fateful day in which a car bomb explodes outside the house, shattering the kitchen windows. As a future-projected Inés remembers, the explosion convinced her childhood self that the end of the world was near when she realized that, despite the tense and tumultuous atmosphere inside the house, the perils of the outside world proved deadlier.

My interrogation of Esquivel’s novel is guided by an interest in the idea of doubles, which draws from Sarah Wright’s *The Child in Spanish Cinema* (2013). Though Wright’s work focusses on a different sociopolitical context, that of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in twentieth-century Spain, her interest in representations of children as “dolls, ventriloquists’ dummies, cyborgs or automata” can illuminate how Esquivel’s similar use of doppelgängers and alter egos affirms how “the child’s confrontation with a monster and, derivatively, the theme of the monstrous child” invites a study of the self and our relationship with the past (17). Caught amidst familial strife, yet unable to escape, Inés refuses to speak to anyone in the house, keeping to herself and often inventing imaginary friends and games to play in the absence of others. Her invention of alter egos serve as vehicles of self-discovery allowing her to play, converse and find herself both literally and figuratively. Interestingly, as the opening line of the novel

signals —“El año que conocí a María vaticinaron el fin del mundo” (11)— her first experience of friendship goes hand-in-hand with inevitable destruction when Inés meets María, the housekeeper’s granddaughter, on the fateful day of the explosion. As her only contact with the outside world, Inés begins to idolize María who she imagines as a fierce tigress courageous enough to take on the outdoors. As she breaks her silence to converse with María through play, admiration slowly turns to jealousy and rivalry. Subsequently, Inés’s alter egos transform into animals courageous enough to challenge María, allowing Inés to explore feelings of greed and pride. Originating as competitiveness triggered by the games they play with and against each other, such feelings of ownership, status and superiority are encouraged by Inés’s elitist grandmother. As Inés comes into her own voice, she articulates expressions of class struggle and socioeconomic disparity between her and María through animal symbology. When their rivalry finally comes to a head at Inés’s birthday party, where in a fight Inés pushes María and the latter falls and cracks her skull, Inés sees the violence she associates with the outside world enter her home, signaling the end of the world, an ending she has long feared.

Symbolizing a moment of unimaginable violence, the declaration of the end of the world after María’s fall more precisely marks the end of a period of childhood innocence for Inés. As violence enters the home, a space which previously shielded her from the perils of the outside world, it is the home itself that proves even more perilous. When fantasy and imagination are mobilized as outlets of self-discovery that see Inés internalizing class privilege, desires for status and wealth. Ultimately in her own expression of violence, Inés breaks not only with conventional modes defining childhood innocence and vulnerability, but additionally with hegemonic gender norms. In this way,

Esquivel emphasizes how common motives that fuel political violence are filtered inwards likewise shaping domestic life and the coming-of-age of the children attempting to bridge both worlds. Thus, Esquivel demonstrates that the loss of innocence is not something to be reclaimed or recuperated, but rather a productive step in transforming young girls into active members of a society in which everyone, including children, must contend with the irrevocable nature of conflict as a disruptive yet formative force.

The House as Site of Exploration

Inés's family home stands as a contradictory space in her imagination. After her parents' divorce forces her mother and her to return to her grandparents' home, Inés finds herself trapped in the large house where none of the adults around her express any interest in tending to her. As a small child attempting to navigate the large and austere space, Inés equates the house to a labyrinth: "yo comencé a crecer dentro de ese laberinto extraño e infinito, velando las largas siestas de mi madre bajo el silencio y la vigilancia pesada de los abuelos y de Julia" (16). As her mother disappears for long periods of time and her grandparents express no interest in Inés, she is left on her own with no one to play with in a house that seems to swallow her into darkness and silence. As she explores the house, avoiding the housekeeper Julia, she describes the space as a barren wasteland, a cemetery devoid of life and liveliness. The world inside the house appears paradoxical given how she feels herself growing older while everything and everyone else remains unchanged: "Nada envejecía en esa casa: ni los muebles, ni Julia, ni los abuelos" (15). Time inside the house remains stagnant, disconnected from the outside world, and just as the people appear unchanged, the rooms themselves blend into one another making it

hard for Inés to remember where she is. As each room looks like “una copia deslucida del salón principal” she begins to wonder if, hiding in far off corners, there are likewise “distintas copias de mí” (17).

In order to entertain herself, Inés starts to imagine doppelgängers around the house, creating alter egos who participate in a game of hide-and-seek in which Inés takes on a central role that bestows upon her an autonomy that the stagnant and oppressive house otherwise represses. She imagines her double as a ghostly version of herself who haunts the halls of the house:

Imaginaba que me encontraba con otra frágil niña rubia detrás de una de esas puertas. Su piel era gris y seca. Sus pupilas, albinas. Vivía en uno de esos cuartos del primer piso. Era una de mis dobles y su posible aparición me aterraba. Pero a pesar del miedo, jugaba a intentar encontrarla. Sentía que en esa pesadilla se cifraba uno de los secretos de la casa y que, con valentía, tenía que enfrentar el rostro de la otra, que también era el mío. (17-8)

The pallid, unanimated doppelgänger is well suited for Inés’s description of the house-cemetery. Ghost-like, the living dead version of Inés mimics the house, which she perceives as un-aging and stuck in time. As her double is trapped in the dark rooms of the house, Inés searches for her. Often reprimanded for making noise by her grandmother, Inés finds a way to play within silence in order to remain unnoticed. As she imagines herself as a huntress, she uses silence to her advantage: “Me aproximaba con el silencio de un cazador que pacientemente observa a su presa” (18). Despite her fear, she strives for “valentía” as she seeks to capture the girl and look into the face that is both hers and not as if to finally know and speak to herself.

The duality inherent in Inés’s imaginary game resonates with Shlomo Ariel’s (2002) characterization of childhood make-believe play as “two-faced” (28). In studying how children use invention in acts of play to navigate between reality and imagination,

Ariel affirms: “On the one hand the playing child creates a false identity between entities which belong to different worlds, the inner world and the outer world. On the other hand the child denies the existence of this identity. This duality is, of necessity, also a duality of time, place and character” (28). The two-faced nature of make-believe play, according to Ariel, is born from the inextricable link between imagination and reality. As children invent, they are necessarily inspired by their surroundings, envisioning unreal entities or settings within a real or lived space and knowledge base. In this vein, make-believe play is both real and unreal, or rather, neither purely fact nor fiction, hence two-faced.⁷ Taking Ariel’s definition further, the sick and pallid girl offers a mirror reflection of what Inés fears she is becoming while stuck inside. The image of a doll-like entity is symbolic of the little girl Inés is constantly told to emulate when her grandmother reminds her to keep quiet, still and obedient.

In this way, the fear but also curiosity that Inés’s doppelgänger inspires aligns with Sigmund Freud’s proposal of the uncanny. In Inés’s case, the *unheimlich* is particularly provocative given that the German word, as Freud explains, means “the opposite of ‘heimlich’ [‘homely’], ‘heimisch’ [‘native’]—the opposite of what is familiar” (220). Her double is born of her family home, yet unfamiliar in that she presents a distorted image of what Inés is and is not, again relating to Ariel’s proposal of a two-faced imaginary. Freud himself offers dolls as a prime example of the uncanny given their ambiguous position between lifeless and animated, just as Inés breathes life into an imaginary friend of her own invention.⁸ The silent, pristine, doll-like version of the girl

⁷ A more expansive study on the duality of female childhood can be found in *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (2000) by Ellen Pifer.

⁸ Freud’s discussion of automata and lifeless dolls is also echoed in Wright’s analysis of the child in Spanish cinema, which focuses on similar instances of uncanny animation and resurrection through the

Inés furthers the house's own cultivation of an unanimated bourgeois way of living, where children exist but do not disrupt. As Inés searches, she must confront her “pesadilla”, a dreaded confrontation with the stagnant life of the house as incapsulated in the image of a ghost, which stands as a vision of the defunct bourgeois life that her grandparents have cultivated indoors. To capture the sick and pallid girl would mean to overcome her fear of the darkness of the house while also proving her strength and virility in the face of decay, to break through and be liberated from oppression.

While her game of pursuit allows Inés to imagine, explore and experience a feeling of agency, fear continues to play a major role in her relationship with both the house and its inhabitants. The day a car bomb explodes on her street, Inés is traumatized by the damage she witnesses as the explosion shatters the kitchen windows leaving debris throughout the house. After the bombing, news of the assassination of a presidential candidate whose campaign headquarters is located across the street from her house engulfs Inés in a state of paranoia:

Todo lo que pasa fuera de la casa me hacía sentir muy tensa. Con cada ruido que se asomaba por las ventanas, ya fuera el ladrido de un perro o el croar ronco de una moto, ya mis huesos se volvían de acero y mi esqueleto se transformaba en una armadura pesada que oprimía el pecho en un ahogo tan profundo. (51)

The outside world becomes synonymous with danger, triggering panic attacks in young Inés who feels threats encroaching on her home. While her games of hide-and-seek appeared to foster courage and strength, the explosion sets Inés back as she feels herself retreating into the very house she wished to escape. With her fear, a new vision of herself emerges: “Inés animal de porcelana, perdida entre los infinitos rincones de la casa y sus

figure of the child: “The cinematic children in these chapters retain traces of their mechanical origins: thus they are dolls, ventriloquists’ dummies, cyborgs or automata. Moreover, developing the monstrous undertones evoked by these mechanical traces (cinema as ‘Frankensteinian dream’)” (17).

silencios” (19). For Inés, the image of herself as made of porcelain echoes the memory of the kitchen windows shattering into pieces, indicative of her own vulnerability to outside forces. Imagining herself as a delicate animal, she manifests more alter egos that mimic the original ghostly figure of a double and doll-like girl. Though austere, the isolating nature of the house now offers a form of protection through isolation. When the street becomes synonymous with the threat of death, the timeless, stagnant nature of the house offers a hint of solace.

The day of the bombing is doubly significant for Inés when, as everyone rushes around to survey the damage, both bodily and material, another young girl emerges from the house. She meets María, the housekeeper’s granddaughter, who has been secretly spending time at the house while Julia cleans. Inés and María immediately become friends with Inés desperate for company and María fascinated by Inés’s “juguetes de rica” (24). Through their companionship, Inés breaks the silence of the house: “Con la llegada de María, la casa había renunciado a su mutismo” (25). The opportunity to engage with another child entices Inés who can now converse with someone willing to respond and interact. Though Inés’s grandmother objects, cautioning Inés that María’s lower class status will make her envious and ultimately untrustworthy, Inés rejects her prejudiced opinions: “con un tono muy seco, me decía que no estaba de acuerdo con que yo le prestara mis muñecas a María y que debía estar atenta a que nada quedara faltando después de que se fuera. No le hacía mucho caso” (26). Rejecting her grandmother’s prejudice, Inés relishes in having a playmate her age who tells her of games she plays outdoors with other children. María’s stories of games, exploration and freedom outdoors, however, seem like a fantasy to Inés who remains terrified after the explosion:

“yo consideraba peligroso todo aquello que se encontrara en los confines de la casa y me aterrorizaba pensar en lo que había afuera. Le tenía miedo a la calle y jamás me había ocurrido que podía ser un escenario de juegos” (50). The memory of the bomb explosion haunts her understanding of the street where María insists that other children play. Though she now has a playmate of flesh and blood to replace her imaginary double, Inés does not yet feel that her practice has truly taught her how to be brave.

When she does leave the house with María to go to the circus, Inés witnesses a performer get attacked by the tiger in his act, leaving her fearful but also in awe of María who does not seem shaken by the event. Inés remembers that as she herself screamed and others ran away, María remained in her seat with her eyes fixated on the tiger. Calm and collected, María appears to communicate with the tiger, convincing Inés that she must also be an animal, another feline: “Frente al tigre, María fue feroz. ... intuí que lo único que podía explicar la obediencia del tigre frente a María era que ella también era un animal. Una rara especie de niña gato que conocía el lenguaje secreto de los felinos” (48-9). In contrast to the fragile, porcelain vision Inés has of herself, María’s ferocity offers her something to strive for and to imitate. These visions encourage Inés when María, fed up of playing in the house, insists that the girls go outside to the corner store to buy candies without an adult. Though terrified, Inés believes that María’s inner feline will protect them from the dangers of the outside world, more specifically, a stray dog that roams the neighborhood: “Afuera necesitaríamos de los poderes animales de María para que se comunicara con el lobo y le pidiera que no nos molestara mientras íbamos a la tienda” (54). When she finally agrees to leave the house, she puts blind faith in María: “No tuve más remedio que confiar en ella” (55). When the girls see the dog approaching,

María plays a joke on Inés, pushing her toward the dog and running away. Falling to the ground in front of the animal, Inés's fear is overshadowed by anger as she sees María's actions as a deep betrayal of her trust.

When the two girls arrive back home, Julia chastises María for her actions in a scene which sees Inés socioeconomic position as a powerful shield against her humiliation. Though María is her age, she is the granddaughter of the housekeeper, whereas Inés is the granddaughter of the house's matron. When Julia and Inés's grandmother see the scrapes on Inés's knee, the grandmother rebukes Julia claiming that María distracts her from her housework: "[la abuela] le reprochó que María siempre estuviera en la casa. Si la niña era una excusa para no hacer su trabajo, era mejor que no la trajera" (57). Despite previously avoiding any conversation with her grandmother, after hearing her grandmother chastise Julia, Inés smugly declares: "Tranquila, abuela. Yo no quiero que María vuelva más a la casa. Me cansé de jugar con ella" (57). In this moment, Inés feels her confidence renewed, not because she has necessarily conquered her fear of the outdoors, but rather, because she begins to understand that her socioeconomic standing over María grants her power even when María's perceived bravery previously appeared to do the opposite. In other words, María stands as the dominant force outdoors where her greater exposure to and knowledge of the outside world make Inés feel inferior. Nevertheless, while indoors, and more specifically, within the confines of Inés's bourgeois home, the roles are reversed and María becomes her inferior. In this instance, imitation of adult behavior plays a vital role in shifting the power dynamics between Inés and María.

In her study of child's play as a form of cultural exchange, Joyce E. Kelley (2013) turns to plantation life in the American south as a case study for examining instances in which children of different socioeconomic background, and even racial identity, learn about social dynamics through play. At the foundation of her analysis is German psychologist Karl Groos who, at the turn of the twentieth century, began to study play as a form of instinct enactment in which children practice life skills for adulthood (Kelley 148).⁹ Notable work by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky later expanded on Groos's findings by exploring how imitation allows children to act out behaviors they witness in adults "as a child's way to learn about rules and social order and to teach himself to bend to social pressures" (Kelley 148).¹⁰ Vygotsky in particular in "Play and its role in the mental development of the child" (1966) discusses how children's imitation of adult behavior allows them to practice social norms through their interactions with other children (10). Kelley draws upon these studies in order to question how child's play can actually challenge social norms when children of different socioeconomic or racial backgrounds engage in egalitarian play despite the social hierarchies they are taught to respect and uphold.

Indeed, when Inés initially rejects her grandmother's cautioning against sharing her toys with María, she appears to fall in line with Kelley's assertions. Despite witnessing her grandmother's prejudice, she chooses not to assimilate her point of view, opting instead to embrace María as a companion. Not only does she welcome María's

⁹ In his seminal works *The Play of Animal* (1896) and *The Play of Man* (1899), Groos champions the utility of play as practice for adulthood, a process he observed in both humans and animals. His evolutionary theorization of play was one of the first attempts to formally study child's play within psychology.

¹⁰ In *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (1945), Piaget discusses the processes of assimilation and accommodation that allow children to internalize (assimilate) behavior they witness and integrate (accommodate) it into their own actions and relationship to the outside world once again (72-3).

company, she even elevates her standing by admiring her courage. Yet, after returning home after her humiliation in the street, when Inés sees her grandmother rebuke their housekeeper, asserting control over someone of lower socioeconomic standing, Inés imitates her grandmother and similarly dismisses María. She rejects María publicly as if to erase the memory of María rejecting her in the street, a scene in which the power dynamics do not match the conventional roles Inés's grandmother has reinforced through her own behavior. As she breaks the silence between her and her grandmother, announcing that she can return to playtime as a solitary, newly independent act, Inés also rejects the notion of sharing with María and the image of the two of them interacting on equal footing. In this vein, she enacts her grandmother's cautionary remarks to keep her toys to herself lest they be coveted by someone else. Inés's toys —her “juguetes de rica”— are transformed into weapons with which she can confront María. Though she previously paid no heed to her grandmother's comments about María's inferiority and lower socioeconomic standing, Inés's interjection reveals the emergence of a class consciousness whereby growing confidence feeds her independence.

When Life Imitates Imagination

As the novel continues, Inés's animal alter egos evolve into stronger beings as she learns to gain confidence from socioeconomic superiority. Months later when María returns to the house for the first time after their separation, Inés assures herself:

María debía entender que no era la niñita débil que había conocido. Ahora era Inés animal valiente. ... Era Inés fiera. Inés submarina. Inés halcón-tiburón martillo. ... Si íbamos a jugar juntas iba a ser bajo mis reglas, pues cualquier acto de desobediencia haría que fuera a acusarla con Julia y con la abuela y eso causaría su exilio. (78)

As further iterations of herself, Inés's imaginary animal counterparts offer visions of a more assertive self; replicas that embody the fierce huntress that once prowled the house in search of her *doppelgänger*, now reincarnated as animals so as to combat María the feline. Her choice of words, particularly with *exilio*, signals her desire not merely to punish María, but to banish her from the family home as someone who does not belong according to the *reglas* she has learned. No longer merely iterations of her own image, the animalesque alter egos allow Inés to envision her socioeconomic standing over María as a force that can compensate for her otherwise debilitating fear of the outside world. She begins to understand how the privileged lifestyle within the house as enforced by her grandmother produces social norms —*reglas*— to which all must adhere. As Inés looks for opportunities to seize power at home, she discovers she can get María in trouble while intuiting her own privilege as cultural capital. Inés reflects on markers of her personal growth since she last saw María, noting that she has lost three teeth, learned to swim, hold her breathe underwater and has begun reading while “María a duras penas podía escribir su nombre” (78). Furthermore, she begins to see differences in their treatment at home that previously went unnoticed. Observing how Julia serves them different snacks, she enjoys her special treatment: “Le entregaba a su nieta un paquete de galletas que había sacado de su bolso, y frente a mí ponía un plato de papas fritas, maní, fruta y chocolates que dejaba a medio comer, pero que tampoco le compartía a mi amiga” (39). Feelings of pride, thus, evolve into greed as Inés experiences the perks of her status, no longer wanting to share.

Her competitiveness and rivalry with María come to a head at Inés's seventh birthday party. As they dance, Inés feels jealous of the attention María receives and

becomes determined to beat her in a game of musical chairs in front of the other party guests. She declares: “Cuando comenzó la competencia me transformé en Inés guerrera. Inés dientes de sable. Inés zarpazo certero” (122). More than simply wanting to be the center of attention at her own party, Inés’s jealousy for María manifests in response to seeing María as an imposter and interloper in her world: “Al otro lado del salón se encontraba María. Bailaba trepada sobre los pies de mi padre y reía con cada uno de sus movimientos toscos. Yo era quien le había enseñado a bailar y ahora ella tomaba mi lugar como una intrusa” (121). After her parents’ divorce, Inés increasingly idolizes her father who does not share joint custody and thus becomes a figure associated with intense feelings of love and longing for Inés. As a result, after initially relishing in her friendship with María, sharing her toys, teaching her dance moves, Inés now condemns María for ingratiating herself, stealing attention from the person Inés most idolizes. Having overstepped her socioeconomic standing within Inés’s family home —what Inés previously identifies as an “acto de desobediencia”— María must be punished for not realizing her place: “Mi misión era ganar la contienda, vencer a María. Alejarla de mi padre y hacerla llorar frente a todos esos niños desconocidos de la fiesta” (121). As Sally Jenkinson in *The Genius of Play* (2001) affirms, “Play embraces children’s total experience. They use it to tell their stories; to be funny and silly; to challenge the world; to imitate it; to discover and understand it; and to be social” (42), the game of musical chairs itself becomes a vehicle of socialization by which children like Inés understand and imitate social norms. With María as her opponent, the game offers Inés an opportunity to reestablish the status quo if Inés can emerge victorious.

However, when the two girls lunge for the final chair, María pushes Inés to the ground and wins. With María receiving applause and attention after an act that nearly mimics Inés's first literal fall from grace at María's hands, Inés attacks her in anger, calling her a "sirvienta" and "tramposa" (125) in front of everyone. Similar to her rejection of María before her grandmother, Inés lashes out, diminishing María in order to counterbalance her own embarrassment in front of an audience. In her anger, she equates María's inferior socioeconomic standing with a moral condemnation, declaring María's win to be unethical, just as she views her presence at the party. Seeing how she draws attention to herself, Inés continues to act out believing she is winning her battle against her competitor: "Sentí que ellos eran el público de un circo y estaban ávidos de espectáculo, entonces comencé a escupirlos y a exagerar mi pataleta" (126). Recalling her trip to the circus in which the dramatic and violent confrontation between tiger and audience generated such a profound sensation of admiration in Inés, she attempts to recreate the moment to do the same for herself. Indeed, in the chaos she generates, her parents and grandparents begin to argue when Inés's grandmother blames her parents for Inés's improper behavior. Animosity grows between her parents as all the adults begin yelling at each other in front of Inés and the other children. As Inés witnesses the adults fight, their turmoil reinforces her own animosity toward María.¹¹

¹¹ This tendency to relate competition with social hierarchy is discussed by Brian Sutton-Smith (1997), who contends that children attempt to make sense of adult relationships through competition. Proposing that "play's cultural function is to mediate social conflict," Sutton-Smith examines how play allows children to interpret the power relations that dictate the "rules of society" (74). Sutton Smith's arguments are founded on Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1949), more concretely in his "position is that there is a morphological parallelism between playful contests and the actual contestive conduct of politics, the law, scholarship, and the arts" (Sutton-Smith 78), thus imbuing competition with a civilizing affect in society.

Indeed, when Inés lashes out at María and the adults around her react by arguing with each other instead of punishing Inés for her actions, she sees the escalation of conflict as a viable response. As her parents argue, her grandmother becomes hysterical and her grandfather emerges with a rifle, Inés, in a final attempt to take back the prize she feels María has robbed, throws herself at María like an animal attacking its prey: “[María] Había aprovechado que mi atención estaba ahora en los adultos, para hurtar el premio que me pertenecía por derecho. Me puse en cuatro patas y enfilé camino hacia donde estaba mi contrincante” (127). Angry and frustrated, Inés believes that her wealth grants her the right to the prize. With impact, María is pushed to the ground, hitting her head against a glass table and cracking her skull. Inés’s father then rushes to bring her to the hospital, marking the end of a tumultuous day. Coming full circle, Inés announces, “La noche en que mi padre se marchó con María anunciaron el fin del mundo” (133). In a shocking turn of events, violence penetrates the home. The end of the world in the final pages of *Animales del fin del mundo* is signaled by a violent episode that problematizes the often-blurred line between imagination and reality so inherent in child’s play as Inés must face the consequences of her actions.

In spite of all her efforts to conquer her fear of the street, in the end, it is inside the house where Inés experiences the deepest violence in which she herself plays an active, albeit accidental, role. As she lashes out at María, who is never confirmed dead or alive at the end of the novel, Inés enacts her most powerful form of violence, far surpassing any of the fantasies she ever imagined. As Inés inflicts violence onto María, she shatters the image of docile femininity that was so strongly imposed onto her at the start of the novel by her grandmother. In this vein, just as Rachel Beaney affirms the role

of play as a form of resistance that challenges patriarchal definitions of femininity, so too does Esquivel in the final scenes of the novel.¹² In her analysis of Spanish cinema, “Orphans at Play in *Cría cuervos* (1976) and *Estiu* (2017): Reconsidering the Playspace” (2021), Beaney proposes that as female child protagonists act out violence through play, they challenge hegemonic assumptions of both childhood innocence and female passivity (374). Similarly, in “Subjectivities in the Making: Tales of Transformation in Recent Central American Cinema” (2014), Holmfriour Gardoarsdottir discusses how the representation of young female agency can subvert patriarchal gender norms that reinforce female subservience. As female characters challenge social norms through play and other social interactions, “they can be said to take part in the demystification of traditional power structures, the deconstruction of predominant ‘truths,’ and the promotion of alternative formulations of young women’s personal and social identities” (115). As young girls, like Inés, act out, they challenge the intersecting imposition of docility, passivity and fragility on both children and more specifically girls, who are trained by hegemonic gender norms to mature into subservient women; a pattern of behavior reinforced by Inés’s grandmother. Yet, in her act of violence, Inés is herself an instigator of conflict. Barrowing from Wright’s language, her “confrontation with a monster” as metaphorized by the ghostly doppelgängers and animal alter egos she invents for play, ultimately reveal “the theme of the monstrous child” in Inés herself (17). If for

¹² In *Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Childhood and the politics of Play* (2018), Michelle Beiseel-Heath discusses how ideas of childhood became entangled with citizenship, further complicated by normative gender roles in the nineteenth century. While young boys were taught how to become ideal citizens, “For girls, in fiction dedicated to them, such conceptualizations bring to the fore an impossible dual nature: never able to develop into full citizens, girls are already as ‘womanly’ as they can be in their citizenship positions and yet, as girls, they are still envisioned as ‘in-between’ or lacking, still in need of being taught to adhere to and internalize societal expectations of childhood coded as girlhood” (11). In Esquivel’s novel, playtime appears to challenge these notions of gender-based citizenship.

Wright, “the themes of the child and the monster and the monstrous child come to stand in metonymically for the confrontation of the self with the horrors of Spain’s recent past” (17), then I contend that monstrosity, here in the Colombian context, allows for Esquivel to mobilize Inés as a symbol of internalized class warfare that gestures toward one of the most pervasive and enduring sources of violence in Colombia throughout recent history.

In concluding the novel with María’s accident, Esquivel not only sees Inés’s vision of “el fin del mundo” come full circle by framing the novel with these two scenes, but also subtly returns to the image of Inés’s ghostly doppelgänger who she chased throughout the dark confines of the house. To deepen my proposal, I draw a connection between Wright’s discussion of the child’s relationship to monstrosity within film with Franco Moretti’s analysis of Frankenstein in his essay, “Dialectic of Fear” (1983). For Wright, visions of childhood on screen are plagued by images of doubles that underscore a symbolic contact with one’s self. As she affirms, to confront the monstrosity inherent in childhood is to face the horrors of the past which have been internalized and perhaps repressed. This metacognitive act proves particularly striking when it is reenacted through the medium of cinema itself, which “born out of an unholy alliance between the human and the scientific/technological” (3), mimics the creation of Frankenstein’s monster in addition to framing adult relationships to childhood as paralleling that of Frankenstein to his monster. Surely, this act of complex doubling appears in *Animales del fin del mundo*, between Inés and her own Frankenstein-like creations that she conjures in her own image. As she pretended to chase after ghostly doubles despite her fear for the sake of becoming more courageous, Inés saw her doppelgängers as a reflection of what she might become if she could not find a way to push back against the anachronistic

oppression of the house, both in literal terms but also in symbolic, social terms. To challenge the climate of the house would be to push back against the stifling and rigid bourgeois lifestyle enforced by her grandmother who attempted to inculcate Inés in docile femininity. Subsequently, her visions of an animalistic hunt allowed Inés to see herself empowered, strong and assertive as opposed to a delicate, silent doll.

Yet, as companionship with María slowly impedes the realization of her goals, pride, greed, the pursuit of status and recognition become entangled with Inés's coming-of-age as she transforms herself into animals capable of challenging María, which ultimately culminates in a successful, yet fatal, realization of her original pursuit. Here, her invocation of a monstrous double is reincarnated in María, who after her accident, stands as a physical manifestation of the destruction inherent in class prejudice, which comes to life within Inés's bourgeois home. Moretti draws a link between Frankenstein's monster and bourgeois mentality by proposing that the fear of Frankenstein's monster reflects a bourgeois fear of a split society in which the middle-finds itself out of place and attempts to assert dominance over the working-class, a monstrous entity (101). For Inés, seeing María in her home, threatening her own position, invokes a fear that results in a burst of violence that seeks to shatter the image of María's imposition into a bourgeois space. Indeed, as María falls unconscious, she is transformed into Inés's ghostly double: the fragile, pale, porcelain girl. She is the monster Inés seeks to overcome; a monster that is evoked by María, but originates within Inés. While Inés succeeds in her conquest, forcing her rival into the role she once occupied, and in turn rejecting the image of a doll-like figure for herself, this pursuit for power and recognition is all but victorious.

Though her irruption sees Inés breaking with gender norms, it also shatters the notion of childhood innocence when the end of the world signals the end of Inés's childhood universe. As María is injured, the literal image of shattering from the opening pages of the novel are repeated symbolically as the accident reveals how the uppercase dream of a shielded life as metonymized in the bourgeois home is broken. The home, as Esquivel affirms, is in fact, a deeply wounding space in which money, power and prejudice become weapons as destructive as those causing explosions and death in the street. Awakening from her world of fantasy and imagination, Inés must confront the violence of the outside world as it collides with the domestic space. In the final scene of the novel, Inés runs outside, throwing herself to the street, turning to look up at the sky. Her act is striking as she looks neither at the street nor at the house, the two constructs that have dominated her world view. Instead, she looks elsewhere and as she admits she is no longer afraid of what might happen to her outdoors, she seems to have finally conquered her fears having witnessed a violence more traumatic than anything she could have imagined.

Particularly because the future-projected Inés who narrates in past tense cannot be situated within a specific moment in time —this is, readers do not know how much time has passed between the end of the world and the narration itself— Esquivel suggests an ongoing need to return to the past in order to reflect on the pivotal moment when a young girl realizes that violence is an inevitable element of life. In closing the novel with this final image of Inés, Esquivel offers a divergent framing of childhood innocence whereby coming-of-age is remembered for its ruptures rather than a nostalgic desire to return to a past unencumbered by adult burdens. Rather than yearn for a return to a blissful state of

childhood ignorance, Esquivel redefines the loss of childhood innocence as a necessary and transformative moment that continues to demand reflection well into adulthood particularly for young girls. In a society so irrevocably marked by conflict, the loss of childhood innocence becomes a necessary stepping-stone to be articulated for young girls seeking to play an active role in confronting the violence they inevitably face. As Esquivel illustrates, these violences take many forms, not just domestic and civil, but even internal and deeply personal.

SECRETIVE VIOLENCES IN *THE FRUIT OF THE DRUNKEN TREE*

In Ingrid Rojas Contreras's *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* (2018), the family home once again stands in as a buffer that both separates and bridges urban violence and domestic turmoil. For seven-year-old Chula, her upper-class home offers a safe-haven protecting her from the urban violence she sees on television and overhears in her parents' conversations. Because she cannot venture out on her own, media serves a gateway to the outside world, framing Chula's understanding of political conflict in Bogotá throughout the 1980s. Fascinated by melodramatic telenovelas, Chula's viewings are constantly interrupted by news reports following Pablo Escobar. The story arc of his political pursuits, his arrest, subsequent escape from jail, his family's fall from grace and his eventual death, as seen through her childhood eyes, tells the story of Colombia's current events as a dramatic plotline mimicking those of her favorite telenovelas. In this way, the reality of the outside world imitates fiction in Chula's childhood imaginary until she meets Petrona, a thirteen-year-old girl hired as her family's new housekeeper. Arriving from the improvised slums of Bogotá where guerrilla activity threatens the safety of her family, Petrona interrupts Chula's fiction and forces her to see through her blissful

ignorance into the reality of political violence as experienced by less affluent families, especially when the tables are turned and Chula's family is forced into exile.

Narrated in first-person, alternating between chapters told from Chula's and Petrona's points of view, Rojas Contreras's novel tells the coming-of-age of two very different childhoods that come into contact in a secret relationship. As their complimentary narrations reveal, both Chula and Petrona confront forms of isolation and powerlessness at home when, as they attempt to make sense of how armed conflict intervenes in their lives, both confusion and fear impede dialogue with the adults around them. Unable to grasp the news she hears from media or secondhand from her parents, Chula struggles to find a place for herself in the political discussions around her. Desiring greater participation, Chula attempts to intervene, but is often unable to find the right words without the proper adult lexicon. Meanwhile Petrona finds that discomfort, shame and deceit impede truthful dialogues about the threat of guerrilla warfare in her community. Her mother's denial and her boyfriend's manipulation leave Petrona's questions constantly unanswered. Turning to her employers for support, she begins to learn how wealth and status allow them to hide behind class privilege. As a result, Chula and Petrona look to each other for support and develop a relationship in secret. As they find ways to communicate, their exchanges are defined by coded language that allows them to process images of violence through child's play rather than explicit discussion of current events.

When the girls hide their interactions from others, secrecy permeates their relationship as both girls believe that hiding Petrona's personal life from Chula's parents constitutes an act of protection that inevitably backfires. Once bestowing Chula with a

sense of empowerment and agency, secrets ultimately reveal how her class privilege buffers her from the very dangers Petrona deeply desires to articulate to anyone who will listen. Bound by the threat of death to her and her family, Petrona's complimentary narration in the novel exposes how silence allows for socioeconomic disparity to perpetuate violence until it inevitably becomes complicit with destruction. As the two girls face hardship in their respective lives, ongoing secretive communication reveals how coded language evolves into a precarious form of forgiveness and survival for them both once separated.

Processing Trauma through Play

When her family hires a thirteen-year-old-girl as a housekeeper, Chula is immediately fascinated by the new presence in the house. Having herself grown up in an *invasión*, a term used in Bogotá to refer to a commune or slum, Chula's mother makes a point to employ young girls like herself from impoverished backgrounds. With her mother and younger siblings to support in a guerrilla controlled *invasión*, Petrona is forced to enter the workforce while still an adolescent as she cares for children who are nearly her age.¹³ Diligent and mild-mannered, she goes about her work in silence, preferring to fade into the background of Chula's large upper-class home where she feels

¹³ In "Articulaciones de la violencia contra la mujer en el marco de narrativas del conflicto armado colombiano" (2020), Wilmar A. Ramírez López discusses the intersection of female identity and childhood within the context of armed conflict and sexual violence, with particular attention to the representation of age in *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree*, among other novels. Ramírez López explores how political violence afflicts the human body, not only in cases of sexual violence, but also in case studies of adolescent females. Citing Petrona as an example, he underscores how her proximity to violence forces her to grow up too fast. In an emotional sense, Petrona takes on the role of caretaker and breadwinner for her family after her father's disappearance. But more profoundly, as Chula notices in her appearance, Petrona's body is forced through a process of rapid aging, making her appear older and tired beyond her years, perhaps also playing a vital role in Petrona's silence before other children (225).

out of place. Despite her intentions, Petrona becomes a source of fascination for Chula, who seeks companionship. Suffering from a feeling of isolation, Chula sees in Petrona's detachment an aspect of her own experience: "We knew what it was like to feel different. There were kids who didn't play with us because their parents forbade it. There were rumors that Mamá had *Sold It*. ... Cassandra knew what *It* was, but she wouldn't tell me, and the tightness of her face kept me from insisting. That was why Cassandra and I played alone" (emphasis original 18). Having grown up in an impoverished area of Cucutá, a city along Colombia's northern border with Venezuela, Chula's mother fled her home for Bogotá when paramilitary forces invaded. In the capital, she married well and ascended into the upper echelons of *Bogotano* society. Surrounded by allegations of impropriety—seen as *nouveau riche*—Chula's mother is looked down upon by her neighbors, leaving her children outcasts. With only her sister to play with, Chula struggles to connect when she cannot fully comprehend the innuendos that Cassandra can, despite being only two years younger.

Chula's desire to participate in adult conversations is fed by the active role that media and political discourse play in her home life, particularly amidst Luis Carlos Galán's (1943-1989) presidential campaign which infamously ended in his assassination.¹⁴ Having denounced Pablo Escobar and declared his support of extradition to the US, Galán was shot publicly at a campaign rally in 1989. Though the investigation into his murder remains unsolved, it is widely assumed to have been ordered by Escobar

¹⁴ Galán was a Liberal politician and journalist who ran for president during two elections. He founded the New Liberalism movement in 1979 during his first campaign. He later rejoined the central Liberal Party in order to run for president but was killed before securing the nomination for the 1990 election.

or his associates.¹⁵ For Chula, television mediates her access to information. As she observes her parents read newspapers and listen to the radio, she attempts to emulate their interest in politics, but finds herself unable to keep up:

That's how come I was interested in politics myself. Someday, I wanted to be just like Papá. Papá was like a walking encyclopedia. He boasted that he could name at least a third of the 128 paramilitary groups in Colombia ... I tried hard to be like Papá, but no matter how much of an effort I made, I couldn't even grasp the simplest of concepts—what was the difference between the guerrillas and the paramilitary? What was a communist? Who was each group fighting? (17)

As she becomes overwhelmed by the intricacies of civil conflict, Chula is unable to participate in the conversations around her, leaving her further isolated. With so many active players, the internal armed conflict in Colombia involves too many moving parts. Comparing herself to her father, Chula believes it is her age that sets her behind, just as it does when she tries to keep up with her older sister. Though Chula desires to play a more active role in the conversations around her, she ultimately turns away from talking about politics to focusing on TV where images feed her understanding when words often confuse her.

While TV feeds her curiosity, it also represents a source of unease when, as Chula notes, viewings are constantly interrupted by images of violence: “When Mamá changed the channels we were regularly disturbed by the graphic quality of the news reports. I could piece some things together from the news—massacres in the countryside, common graves found in farms, peace talks with guerrillas, but I didn't understand who was responsible for what or what any of it meant” (34). As she sees images of violence appear

¹⁵ Though the novel never names him explicitly, and there were other presidential candidates during the 1980s and 1990s who were likewise assassinated, the cultural impact of Galán's death, as discussed by Rojas Contreras in her novel, suggests that Galán is likewise the presidential candidate whose murder is referenced in *Animales del fin del mundo* the day of the pivotal car bombing outside Inés's house.

on the screen in front of her, Chula begins to envision political violence before she can fully comprehend its significance in an adult lexicon.¹⁶ Graphic images communicate when words cannot. Yet, even without the necessary vocabulary to dialogue about the violence, Chula notes the desensitizing effect of viewing so much violence on a daily basis: “there were so many massacres and common graves and disappeared and kidnapped persons, that after a while, I lost interest” (34-5). Watching the news regularly, Chula recognizes herself becoming desensitized to the once impactful and disturbing “graphic quality of the news,” leaving readers with insight into the nature of conflict at the time.

Indeed, the impact of the circulation of violent images in Colombia and beyond has been a contentious source of study throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Noting how Colombia is often marketed for its violent past, Andrea Fanta Castro in *Residuos de la violencia: producción cultural colombiana, 1990-2010* (2015) questions if the excess of such violent imagery leads to the banalization of horror after what has been a long period of fetishization of violence (30-1). Her concerns are echoed by Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola in *Commodifying Violence in Literature and on Screen: The Colombian Condition* (2021). This dramatization of violence in Colombia, and in Latin America more broadly, began in news broadcasting and has expanded its influence into “narco-dramas,” which Herrero-Olaizola posits “undermine their supposed

¹⁶ Rojas Contreras’s use of language in this instance is particularly striking given how Chula’s narration seems to mix both a childhood voice and an adult vocabulary. While the narrative expresses a confusion tied to Chula’s age, the use of particular expressions such as “the graphic quality of the news” signal an adult voice, which simultaneously gestures toward Rojas Contreras’s as metafictional authority as well as the more immediate question of the narrator’s temporal position. Given that the novel is told retrospectively, readers can assume that the narrator is looking back on childhood from a future-projected position, though this temporal space is never defined. In this way, Rojas Contreras subtly reminds readers of her use of childhood voice not as an effort to recapture a younger state, but to wield this voice as a vehicle for reflection.

documentary value with melodramatic over-performances and an emphasis on the recreation of passions that are more closely related to the *telenovela* genre” (50). Chula herself seems to perceive this permeability as she conflates all televised programming, both factual and fictitious. Colombia’s violent past, still very much alive in the present, has become a commodity for global consumption —particularly, as Rojas Contreras shows, and as Herrero-Olaizola affirms, through figures such as Pablo Escobar— which not only banalizes the conflict itself, but hides the fact that it very much remains alive and unresolved through dramatic reenactments. This blurred line between reality and fiction is perceived by Chula herself, first through the literal interruption of her favorite telenovelas by breaking news and then more pervasively by the overstimulating and sensationalized nature of news.

More tellingly in Chula’s particular case, her growing ambivalence is facilitated by her socioeconomic status as she is able to enjoy the comforts of a highly shielded lifestyle. She does not feel threatened by the violence she sees on TV because it seems to only happen elsewhere: “War always seemed distant from Bogotá, like niebla descending on the hills and forests of the countryside and jungles” (35). Echoing the impact of regional disconnect across the country discussed in the previous chapter, Chula recognizes how urban life is buffered by nature, allowing violence to appear distant. In this vein, the intermittent news reports appear nearly one and the same as the fictitious TV programs they interrupt, with both telling fantastic and sensational stories of the rise and fall of different villains. The comfort that accompanies the remote nature of violence, however, is shattered when Chula learns of a bombing on a street she recognizes in the city. Watching the breaking news report of a car bomb explosion that leaves several dead

including a girl Chula's age, she is struck by a particular image: "The camera zoomed its shaky lens at a heap of burnt car parts and then a blackened red shoe and a smoky white sock filled with leg came into focus" (36). Awakened suddenly from her ambivalence, Chula begins to differentiate between reality and fiction. The image of a young girl's leg pulls Chula out of apathy, as she is forced to confront the reality that violence occurs in her city, and more shockingly, to little girls just like her without rhyme or reason: "Of all the years of watching the news and all its images of death, this was the worst by far. The girl's shoe, like my size shoe, glimmered in my mind" (38). As she struggles to understand, berating her distraught mother with questions, Chula finally gets Petrona to speak. Intervening to comfort Chula, Petrona breaks her silence to comfort her in a moment of fear and despair, assuring Chula that nothing bad will happen to her despite the dangers they see transpiring on TV.

From this moment forward, Chula and Petrona become friends, convening to play in secret when Petrona is not working. In a striking episode of child's play, when Chula shares her collection of Barbies with Petrona, the latter is struck by their state, having been dismembered and broken down by Cassandra, who "had a habit of chewing the limbs when she watched television or took long showers or did her homework" (60). Rather than discard the toys, the sisters use the Barbies' dilapidation as a source of inspiration: "we invented elaborate stories about how our Barbies had come to their paraplegia. But later, our favorite game became pretending they were war veterans and victims. And this is the game we invited Petrona to play" (61). The dismembered Barbies offer an image reminiscent of the dead girl previously viewed on TV. With her leg left in

the street, the dead girl remains imprinted in Chula's memory only to be reenacted in her play with dismembered Barbie dolls.

More specifically, when play intervenes as a form of explanation, Chula mobilizes the Barbies to process traumatic experiences, which Jenkinson recognizes as a fundamental function of play:

Children's play is determined by their experiences, both good and bad. Freud argued that the playing child uses objects to re-create pleasurable and unpleasant experiences from the real world. Seeking to compensate for painful encounters and to establish a return to equilibrium and pleasure, children determine their own play world to gain mastery of events, events over which in life they may have little or no control. (10)

After seeing herself reflected in the dead girl on TV, Chula struggles to process the shocking truth that violence hits closer to home than she previously assumed. As her mother refuses to answer her questions, playtime offers a form of release from her anxieties whereby dismembered Barbie dolls allow Chula to tell stories she cannot fully resolve through conversation with others. As she explains, "My Barbie, Lola, had been the boss of guerillas in Putumayo, but her men revolted against her and chopped her up and left her for dead in the jungle" (61), Chula invents a backstory that might seemingly explain the little girl's death when Chula herself receives no answers other than the news' hypothesis that guerrillas were responsible for the car bomb. Unable to discuss the violence with the adults around her, or comprehend the adult discourse on the news, Chula engages in child's play as a means of acting out the violence in the form most accessible to her, creating a world in which she controls the narrative of events.¹⁷ More

¹⁷ In "Yo no soy invisible" (2014), Sarah Thomas discusses the use of imagination in Rosario García-Montero's *Las malas intenciones* (2011), a Peruvian film that follows eight-year-old Cayetana as she navigates family life against the backdrop of Shining Path violence during the 1980s. Proposing that play offer spaces for Cayetana to work through emotional distress, Thomas explores how imagination can be mobilized for the development of agency: "The film's depiction of Cayetana's imaginative realm—in

particularly, her use of Barbie dolls specifically is striking. As Jenkinson proposes, Barbie dolls wield significant cultural influence as a symbol of female perfection (110), which are deconstructed in Rojas Contreras's novel. As Chula handles their broken-down bodies, she seeks not to rebuild or restore them, but to endow them with renewed utility in their dismembered form. Furthermore, the Barbies themselves offer a mark of Chula's wealth and consumerist lifestyle. The very act of destroying the dolls without regard to their cost or value gestures toward Chula's initial ignorance until she begins to reinvent their purpose. In this way, Chula's acceptance of the Barbies' fractured forms can reflect her coming to terms with the break-down of her own image of urban safety, tranquility and perfection. With the disruption of her naïve and sheltered relationship with violence, she begins to fill in the gaps of a newly emerging story.

When Chula invites Petrona to play, the latter's participation continues to unknowingly teach Chula about the reality behind political violence through coded conversations. Living in an *invasion*, Petrona knows firsthand the threat of guerrilla presence; her younger brother is recruited and she subsequently starts dating Gorrión, a guerrilla member who is drawn to Petrona because of her connection to wealthy employers. When asked to invent a backstory for her Barbie, Petrona decides to participate: "Petrona's Barbie Bianca bounced on her stubbed thighs and said she already had a guerilla army of her own. Lola wanted to start a war against Bianca's army, but Bianca said that wasn't how guerillas worked. Their real enemy was the rich" (62).

Unbeknownst to Chula, who has yet to discover Petrona's personal ties to guerrilla

dreams, fantasies, games, and superstitions—offers a complex and nuanced representation of child subjectivity, presenting a rich inner world standing in marked contrast to the external events that surround the protagonist in her daily life" (67). In this way, the film provides contact with child perspectives, challenging simplistic assumptions about the child's ability to understand domestic and world events.

groups, Petrona uses child's play to speak of her own circumstances without explicitly doing so as the two girls engage in sociodramatic play.

A form of play defined by Sara Smilansky, sociodramatic interaction involves children taking on fictitious roles together in order to act out situations they have witnessed particularly when "Imitation combines with make-believe and imagination as children fill in the gaps of their experience and begin creating stories" (Jenkinson 17). What is more, their collaborative play allows the girls to create narratives in which their distinct Barbie personas reinforce a means of contact in which both girls can act out behaviors that would not be allowed in real life. As Amal Treacher contends in "Children's Imaginings and Narratives: Inhabiting Complexity" (2006), the use of invented narratives in female child's play offer various outlets of expression:

These narratives become a means of avoiding threat, and rescuing themselves from the same fate. Or, the narratives might represent the girl's last chance to be wild before they have to enter the confines of more socially acceptable femininity and they are stretching the bounds of possibilities for themselves. The narratives can also be a means for the girls to assert their autonomy. (111)

Chula and Petrona invent stories to justify female participation in armed conflict, which encourages them to fill gaps in knowledge, but also to participate in conversations from which their age and gender might otherwise exclude them. With the Barbies, Chula not only processes trauma, but she also narrates. She reclaims language and wields it as her own when she cannot do so in conversation with adults while further demonstrating the need for increased female participation not only in conversations about violence, but about how violence equally affects women and children.¹⁸ In her response, as vocalized through Bianca, Petrona does the same.

¹⁸ The notable absence of male figures in Chula and Petrona's child's play echoes the central tensions studied by Sophie Dufays in "From the Child who Dies to the Adolescent who Kills" (2014). Turning to the

As she proclaims the rich to be the enemy, Petrona reinforces how poverty is a major force of motivation for her family. When she refuses to steal from her employers to feed her family, Petrona's brother joins the guerrillas, trafficking arms in exchange for payment. Shockingly, following her playtime with Chula, Petrona returns home to discover that her brother has been found dead, allegedly murdered by paramilitaries. The image of her brother's body is one of many in Petrona's memory of young boys found in the hills surrounding her *invasion*; a real-life enactment of the Barbies at play.¹⁹ At home, conversations about Petrona's brother are masked in intentional ignorance. Wanting to believe that her son is an honest and hardworking boy, Petrona's mother refuses to admit that he has been recruited even though "everybody knew Ramón was guerrilla, that he had been packing dynamite and explosives, that the money he gave us was guerrilla money" (65). Even Petrona herself preferred to pretend without any concrete evidence of Ramón's allegiances until she smells gunpowder on his hands when she prepares his corpse for burial. Unlike Chula, Petrona does command the vocabulary to discuss

depiction of young girls in Argentine cinema, Dufays challenges the use of children as an allegory of the nation through nostalgia for the past (19). With family so highly metaphorized as the nation, Dufays affirms that many post-dictatorship films focus on the absent father figure as a metonymized image of Juan Perón (1895-1974). As children were thus tasked with addressing this void, finding other authority figures and voicing the loss, Dufays argues that such representations of young girls should catalyze conversations on the present condition of children and families in Argentina, rather than reverting to a patriarchal insistence on a nostalgia for the past so associated with lost father figures (20-1).

¹⁹ Though Rojas Contreras never names the phenomenon explicitly, her description of the killings of young boys around Petrona's home, and her community's discussion of the circumstances surrounding their deaths, alludes to the scandal of *falsos positivos* during Uribe's presidency. In his study of false positives, Gregory J. Lobo (2017) emphasizes how misleading data were used to generate Uribe's high approval ratings. These results relied on the phenomenon of "falsos positivos" which referred to state-backed attacks in which civilians were "gunned down and counted as terrorist kills, either by military or paramilitary agents" (83). These civilians, who tended to be from working class and impoverished communities, make up Petrona's *invasion*. As they discuss the deaths of Ramón and other boys, many people such as Gorrión argue that they were killed by paramilitaries and falsely accused after death of illegal activity. The cases of false positives remain one of the most controversial and contested aspects of Uribe's presidency, with mothers in particular containing to demand justice for their children.

political violence, but finds at home that fear and shame prevent her friends and family from having honest conversations about what they witness.

Simultaneously surrounded by clandestine political activity, yet unable to discuss such matters in plain terms, Petrona too turns to sociodramatic play in order to process violence through coded language. Play thus offers her an opportunity to process trauma and loss under the cover of invention and imagination just as it does for Chula even if under more directly impactful circumstances. In this instance, child's play allows the young girls to enact violence that problematizes hegemonic adherence to gender norms; the narrative of violence that Chula and Petrona cultivate together allows them to break with social norms on multiple levels. As the two girls enact stories in which they seize control, they determine their Barbies' interactions and fates in violent scenes which would otherwise see not only children excluded, but women more broadly. As a result, play allows both girls to fight back and challenge exclusion on multiple levels through newly founded narrative agency.

Secretive Silence as Coded Communication

As child's play presents an opportunity for Chula to process the reality of violence, it is likewise a medium through which Petrona can dialogue about her own predicament when no one else will listen. Subsequently, the two girls continue to cultivate an intimate relationship particularly after Petrona starts dating Gorrión and her mother kicks her out of the house. One day when Chula returns home to find Petrona and Gorrión in her home, Petrona lies, claiming Gorrión is there to inspect the carpet. Though Chula assumes he is Petrona's boyfriend, she decides not to tell her mother in retaliation

for not being left home when her mother and sister go out together. When Chula and her family go on vacation, she calls the house at night while everyone sleeps. Discovering that Petrona is secretly staying at the house, Chula again decides to lie for her, feeling empowered by the ability to keep secrets from adults: “I always cut Petrona off when she thanked me, like I was embarrassed by it, but I relished the feeling of having responsibility, of taking care of Petrona in some way, of knowing things that only I knew” (119). Through her relationship with Petrona, Chula learns how secret-keeping can combat feelings of exclusion and rejection. Holding onto a secret, Chula celebrates finally having knowledge that no one else possesses, after countless occasions of feeling unable to participate in conversations that felt out of reach. Shunned by other children, put down by her sister and placated by her parents, Chula sees in her relationship with Petrona an opportunity for control.

When she returns home, Chula creates more lines of secretive communication, leaving notes and drawings around the house for Petrona to find as she cleans, further enforcing the playful undertones of their relationship. Chula’s and Petrona’s exchanges offer instances of doubly encoded communication. On the surface, the secrets they keep from adults —about Gorrión coming to the house, Petrona staying when no one is home, their playtime when Petrona ought to be working— offer moments of interpersonal connection when both Chula and Petrona feel isolated from their families. These instances additionally empower Chula who desperately yearns for more responsibility and control. Yet, particularly after Gorrión threatens Petrona about Chula, worried Chula might expose his identity, the stakes of secret-keeping are raised. When Petrona asks Chula to keep her secrets without going into detail, she allows Chula to continue to relate

to political violence as a romanticized fiction in order to understand what is really happening in Petrona's life when she is not at work: "he [Gorrión] is like Romeo and Petrona is like Juliet and they could only meet in secret" (122). As Chula equates Petrona's circumstances to dramas she has seen on television, she prefers to be kept in the dark about their true gravity: "I didn't bring up our secret. I figured it didn't matter, Petrona was staying at our house now, what difference did it make. Mamá seemed to always be within earshot so I couldn't ask Petrona about the danger she'd be in" (142). The severity of the situation is lost on Chula who once again has the luxury of relating to the impact of civil conflict in a distanced and mitigated way. Even as Petrona draws social class into the conversation, Chula has yet to fully grasp how the difference in their socioeconomic standing changes their relationship to violence, both in theory and in practice.

This form of coded communication in which both girls know the underlying circumstances but choose to avoid discussing it proves unequally impactful given the socioeconomic disparity between them. Chula believes she is protecting Petrona by not telling her parents about what is going on. Chula's act of feigning ignorance is mimicked by her parents when Petrona comes to work one day having been beaten up. Though they know that Petrona's injuries are serious, Chula's parents do not ask her what has transpired, but rather nurse her back to health and offer to host her first communion. Avoiding conversation on the root of the problem, Chula's family masks violence in a celebration, buying Petrona a new dress and a cake.

Yet for Petrona, this act of purposeful ignorance proves damning when it is revealed she allowed herself to be attacked on purpose after Gorrión and his friends

threaten to rape her little sister if she refused to help them kidnap Chula and her sister in order to hold them for ransom. Attempting to find a solution, Petrona hypothesizes: “I said, *Hit me as hard as you can*. I said, *If the family sees me beat up they’ll have me stay through weekends, and then I’ll be there every second* ... I hated Gorrión and hated the Santiagos too for not seeing what was happening to me” (emphasis original 175).

Petrona’s pleas reveal how, according to her understanding, Chula’s family turns a blind eye to her precarious circumstances. In this instance, Rojas Contreras illustrates the importance of including Petrona’s point of view alongside Chula’s in order to expose key shortcomings in the latter’s perspective. Indeed, Chula’s own confession shows that she herself is complicit, preferring never to ask Petrona about what is going on despite their more intimate relationship. Unable to broach the subject with others directly, Petrona believes she must force them to unequivocally see her distress. These tensions escalate when Gorrión attempts to kidnap Chula, who she manages to escape with Petrona’s help. Returning Chula home, Petrona is forced to break her silence and tell Chula’s mother what has happened:

I told her, *I saved your girl, protect me*. She took the rings off her fingers and put them in my pockets and told me to escape. She pushed cash into my hands and told me to get away. I said, *There’s nowhere, they’ve threatened my family, who knows what they’ll do*. She took a cross from the mantel and pushed that into my hands too. She said, *I’ll pray*, and I understood that I had risked everything for another woman’s daughter, and nobody would do the same for me. (emphasis original 223).

The powerful and provocative scene in which Petrona finally vocalizes her pain is met by a communicative disconnect. Petrona cries out for help and, while there is a response, there is no communication. Rather, the exchange reveals the futility of Chula’s mom’s reliance on money and religion in the face of tangible crisis. Petrona, thus, understands

the significance of Chula's mother's refusal and the profound impact of socioeconomic disparity and prejudice that defines their relationship beyond the surface level.

Ironically, it is not until Chula experiences extreme loss, both personal and financial, that she is able to understand the impact of her silence. As Rojas Contreras explains in the novel's afterward, the events that ensue are roughly based on her own experiences. After her near kidnapping, Chula and her family are further thrown into distress when her father is taken captive by FARC militants while working for an American oil company in the jungle. Unable to pay his ransom, they are threatened and ultimately flee Colombia for the US. Rojas Contreras's own experience of leaving Colombia as an adolescence and her relocation in the US informs Chula's narrative, and more broadly the novel as a whole, which is written in English and Spanglish. Here, the novel sheds light on how the internal armed conflict in Colombia was not contained to her national borders, but also contributed to the growth of a Colombian expatriate community abroad. Forced to resettle in Los Angeles without her father, distress frames Chula's experience as a refugee as she realizes: "I thought of Petrona. I understood her silence in a way I never would have been able to when I was a little girl and nothing had gone wrong" (279). In exile, Chula falls into depression as she grieves for her father, his unknown fate, her family's descent into poverty and her fear for Petrona's life. Consumed by guilt, she adopts silence as a form of punishment, denying herself lines of communication that might bring her support just as she had once denied Petrona. Realizing that she has lost her opportunity to speak up for Petrona, Chula drowns herself in silence as if to allow herself be consumed by the reminder of her mistake.

Years later, regretful of having left Petrona behind, Chula writes to her from LA to find out what has transpired since her departure. With her reply, in which she reveals she still lives in the *invasión*, Petrona sends a photograph of herself holding a baby. From Petrona's narration, we learn that after she failed to help kidnap Chula, Petrona was gang raped and left for dead. Saved by an elderly neighbor, she temporarily loses her memory due to post-traumatic shock. When she realizes she is pregnant, she marries Gorrión, who lies to her in order to erase the truth of her abuse, claiming the baby is his even though both of them know it is not true. When Petrona recovers her memory, she chooses to remain living the lie: "I needed a father for this son, who I knew was not his. I took his guilt. His guilt that got him out of bed, to go to work, to bring back money from an honest job, to get us food" (298). Rather than explain to Chula everything that has happened, Petrona sends her a family photograph. In the image, she poses with her newborn son and now husband Gorrión, believing that the photo would not give any indication of distress. Rather, by depicting a seemingly peaceful image of family life, Petrona hopes she can spare Chula any guilt by once again concealing the truth.

Contrary to Petrona's intent, when Chula sees the photograph, which is dated nine months after her departure from Colombia, she intimates everything that Petrona leaves unsaid. Seeing the family portrait, Chula deduces; "Petrona had made a home with a man who had betrayed her, that she had chosen to keep the baby" (293). The discovery of Petrona's fate triggers meaningful reflection for Chula. Though secret-keeping once empowered her, it is only in her own fall from grace that she understands the cost of her power: "If I had said something to Mamá and Papá back when I could, could I have spared Petrona the choice that was forced upon her? ... Now the same silence that had

been her undoing was the only thing I had left that I could bestow upon her, whom I loved” (292). Thrust into her own experience of upheaval, marginalization and poverty, Chula realizes that her while secrets generated feelings of power and agency, they came at great cost to Petrona, who subsequently became further debilitated and isolated by the very same secrets. Her realization, which comes in the final chapter of her narration, signals a defining moment in her coming-of-age. Now as an adolescent —ironically, the same age that Petrona was when she last saw her— Chula looks back on her childhood and realizes how her ignorance became entangled with complicity. Yet, once again, she decides to remain silent. Burning the photograph, she does not tell her family about Petrona, affirming: “I had to make it up to her and the only think I could do was keep silent about what I knew. After all, who am I to judge?” (293). In destroying proof of her communication with Petrona, Chula’s uncertainty leaves readers wondering how she will move forward while also questioning again the productivity of her silence given that she does not force her family to confront the truth as she has done. Instead, she chooses to allow Petrona to live in peace within the narrative she has crafted for herself, rather than within a story that Chula has written for her. Meanwhile in Colombia, Petrona secretly plans for her future with the hope of one day leaving Gorrión, likewise facing uncertainty. As the two girls reinforce an unspoken connection between them, Rojas Contreras concludes with an image of silence as a question mark for the future. Unable to change the past, yet also unsure of the long-term impact of their choices, both girls accept their shared need for ongoing healing before vocalizing any form of resolution.

READING THE PAST, WRITING THE FUTURE

Esquivel's *Animales del fin del mundo* and Rojas Contreras's *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* tell stories of childhoods defined by awakenings in which young girls grapple with enigmatic and haunting violences that entangle their understanding of past, present and future. As Inés, Chula and Petrona make sense of conflict —its effect on their family lives and their own role in confronting it— they craft languages for articulating their relationship with others and with their surroundings. As they construct the young protagonists that bring voice and identity to their novels, both Esquivel and Rojas Contreras come in contact once again with their childhood selves in order to hear, as Steedman affirms, “the story waiting to be told” (11) by their younger, metafictional counterparts. As Esquivel and Rojas Contreras mobilize girls as their narrators, their dual focus on childhood and the family home offers a doubly impactful study of interior spaces, both literal and emotional. Though other contemporary Colombian authors have likewise turned to interior spaces —particularly in stories that address urban violence during the 1980s— authors such as Jorge Franco, Santiago Gamboa and Juan David Correa do not address the specific framework of gender in their discussion of domestic scenes.²⁰ While girls at play may not appear to speak of complicated matters, their storytelling, once deciphered, reveals different dimensions of the impact of violence within domestic scenes otherwise lacking in novels such as *Todo pasa pronto* (2007), *El mundo de afuera* (2013) and *Vida feliz de un joven llamado Esteban* (2014), which do not

²⁰ The parallel interiors of women's psyches and domestic spaces is studied by Chris Jenks in his comprehensive study, *Childhood* (2005). As Jenks explains, the child is often associated with notions of discipline, which are typically localized in physical spaces such as schools and homes (81). As women were increasingly relegated to domestic spaces and out of the public work force, so were children. This process of “privatization of the child” fostered a social understanding of interiority which reinforced societal associations of care with the child and this with the home (86). Consequently, the desire to keep children indoors, and thus safe, cultivated not only a fear of seeing children outdoors, but also a deepened need to keep children's emotional states unspoken and repressed.

feature young girls as primary narrators. In this way, both Esquivel and Rojas Contreras mobilize female childhood voices in order to come in contact with the past while simultaneously unlocking alternative subjectivities.

The struggle to define and implement a nuanced language for articulating the evolution of violence and conflict in Colombia is a debate notably initiated by Hernando Téllez in “Literatura y testimonio” (1954) in which he discusses the role of testimony and literature in the aftermath of *La Violencia*. In this piece, Téllez critiques contemporaneous literary publication by distinguishing testimony from “arte literario,” which he affirms ought to offer more insight into the impact of violence than documents that simply recount or relay historical events. Shortly after, in “Dos o tres cosas sobre ‘la novela de la violencia’” (1959), García Márquez emphasizes literature’s role in highlighting the human impact of historical events rather than in detailing chronology itself.

As Juana Suárez continues more recently in her aforementioned study *Sitios de contienda: producción cultural colombiana y el discurso de la violencia* (2010), discourse on violence and conflict in Colombia have become entangled with the cultivation of national identity. Turning to contemporary culture, she problematizes the US’ War on Drugs and Uribe’s mobilization of popular fear of terrorism as a catalyst for intensifying nationalist policy, which sees a politically-charged vocabulary of violence so intensely circulated by the media that it filters down to children who then mimic and adapt such political rhetoric in their own imaginary play. As Esquivel and Rojas Contreras demonstrate in their novels, the processes through which children absorb, replicate and remember the violence around them continues to shape their relationship to

conflict throughout adolescence and adulthood, proving the utility of revisiting childhood perspectives as a means of bridging the gap between past and future throughout processes of truth, justice and reconciliation.

Indeed, as Esquivel and Rojas Contreras return to childhood, their journeys underscore formative moments in which children's confrontation with political turmoil is punctuated by their realization of the underlying social tensions generated by class struggle, gender inequality and the collapse of normative family structures. As they speak when no one else will, these child protagonists' inability to understand the social stigmas of political violence, socioeconomic disparity, divorce and gender normativity means they are not afraid to vocalize what is transpiring around them. It is precisely because of their age—and ironically not in spite of it—that they do not share the shame or fear adults feel in discussing topics of conversation deemed too inappropriate or controversial. Through play and imagination, Inés, María, Chula and Petrona wield metaphor and approach the craft of *arte literario* championed by critics such as Téllez and García Márquez, offering the child as a distinct literary construct for communicating the presence of violence in everyday life.

In this vein, though Esquivel and Rojas Contreras present their relationship with childhood as rooted in an obsession for uncovering or decoding the past, their stories are necessarily oriented toward the future by proving the productivity of ongoing retrospective reflection, particularly when childhood memories underscore the lingering impact of violence on their present. More particularly, both authors choice to narrate their novels from the point of view of future-projected versions of their child protagonists is striking. In both texts, readers become intimately acquainted with Inés, Chula and

Petrona in their adolescence, and yet, all three narratives are told by older selves, in a diegetic space that is undefined. Thus, these vignettes of young girls as told by adults, both interior and exterior to the novels themselves, depict how imagination and play intervene as modes of communication that grant children narrative agency while also deconstructing conventional notions of linear time. As Inés, Chula's and Petrona's narratives make clear, the process by which they make sense of the external world and the multiple forms of violence in their lives emphasizes the importance of featuring child voices as a means more so than an end. Listening to their stories provides an entryway into reflection as a model for envisioning the future while remaining mindful of unresolved tensions from the past. As the child's voice places small-scale violences hand-in-hand with national civil conflict, the child reaffirms the importance of resolution at all levels. The novels' attention to domestic scenes stand as a reminder to readers to reflect on what remains out of frame in order to continue to uncover trauma in its many forms, particularly given how hidden violences feed large-scale conflict even when, and crucially because, society, government institutions and the international community only see the bigger picture. Just as their protagonists narrate, write and collect personal archives of family history, Esquivel and Rojas Contreras use the act of metafictional writing to present the figure of the child as a symbol and catalyst for fostering opportunities for greater dialogue; and more crucially, dialogue within gaps and voids often lost to institutional and cultural marginalization.

CONCLUSION

When the 2016 Peace Accords were signed between the FARC and Colombian state, it was agreed that the weapons turned in by the guerrilla group during the ceasefire would be used to create three monuments; one in Colombia, one at the UN headquarters in New York and one in Havana where the peace negotiations took place. Doris Salcedo (1958-), renowned Colombian artist, was commissioned to design the first piece, now located in downtown Bogotá under the title *Fragmentos: espacio de arte y memoria*. The exhibit space stands on a five thousand square-foot plot of land that hosts the ruins of a seventeenth-century colonial home, which has been partially rebuilt to form a structure that mixes both indoor and outdoor spaces. The resulting semi-new structure is made up of both glass and white plaster walls, allowing for visitors to see through certain rooms, giving the space an open and airy feeling, which is accentuated by the fact that the walls remained bare and the space completely empty when the building opened. Though *Fragmentos* now serves as an exhibit hall for temporary art installations, Salcedo's creation is not a sculpture or a wall installation; it is, in fact, the floor. With the thirty-seven tons of rifles turned in by FARC militants, Salcedo melted down the metals and shaped the steel into over a thousand rough-surface, black tiles that now line the floor of *Fragmentos*. To shape the tiles, Salcedo invited women who suffered from sexual violence—not only at the hands of the FARC, but of any armed forces involved in the internal conflict—to help her in hammering sheets of metal that were used as molds to

shape rough textures on the tiles. Salcedo had envisioned these women working alongside female combatants, but ultimately the *guerrilleras* declined to participate (Rinaldi). This process is explained in a twenty-minute documentary film about the construction of *Fragmentos* that is displayed on-site for visitors to view.

In the documentary, Salcedo explains her intentions in designing the piece, which she calls a counter-monument. She explains how in war there are attacks and counter-attacks and thus in peace there are monuments and counter-monuments. When war uses weapons to advance violence, destruction and death, peace takes these same weapons and re-formulates them, countering with a symbol of collaboration and remembrance that does not glorify the conflict, but literally tears them down to the ground.

Fragmentos, consequently, is offered as a response to the conflict, with the word “counter” as an invitation to dialogue. As I listen to Salcedo’s comments, I am reminded of Isaac Newton’s third law of motion, which states that when two objects collide, they apply an equal and opposite force onto each other. Indeed, as Salcedo depicts in the documentary, the consequences of armed conflict on the lives of the women featured are replicated with the women themselves exorcising latent emotional distress by hammering steel. As they confront the weapons that perpetuated destruction and abuse in their lives, they show viewers the very impact such violence had on them by literally applying force back onto the metal. The back-and-forth motion of their hammering symbolically calls for a similar exchange between past and present, between war and peace. What is more, Salcedo’s act of laying the metal tiles onto the ground of *Fragmentos* compels visitors to see the past—the weapons of war—as the very foundation upon which future reflection, dialogue and progress is built. Just as the colonial house stands in a state between ruin

and reconstruction, so does Salcedo's image of peace and post-conflict. With the rifles melted, reshaped and presented anew, we see how the remnants of internal armed conflict in Colombia never truly disappear, yet, as Salcedo hints, this truth can invite optimism.

As Salcedo's counter-monument emphasizes the importance of continued dialogue and exchange, her work speaks to arguments made by Alejandro Castillejo-Cuéllar in his essay, "La paz en pequeña escala: fracturas de la vida cotidiana y las políticas de la transición en Colombia" (2019). In his analysis of the possibility of peace in Colombia, Castillejo-Cuéllar opts to move past an affirmation of post-conflict in order to advocate for an alternative vision of peace, what he terms, "la paz en pequeña escala" (6). For Castillejo-Cuéllar, long-term sustainable peace for all can only be achieved through small-scale acts. In this way, he envisions peace not as a grand, one size fits all declaration, but rather as multifaceted and ongoing acts that must be affirmed and reaffirmed. His proposal of "la paz en plural" situates post-violence or post-conflict as a question of *convivencia* (6). In other words, Castillejo-Cuéllar insists that peace cannot be achieved through governmental mechanisms, but in fact through the ability to live in close proximity with the Other in daily life. Like Salcedo, he sees contact, exchange and ongoing dialogue on the ground level as the key to realizing tangible change.

The vignettes of family life studied in *Codes of Silence* explore these small-scale points of contact that both disrupt, but also define, narratives of conflict, trauma and loss in twentieth-century Colombian literature and film. Such fractures, fissures and points of contention arise by problematizing the centrality of male figures in narratives of conflict, and consequently, of alleged post-conflict. The death of a father figure in Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (2011) and Héctor Abad Faciolince's *El olvido*

que seremos (2006) creates voids that allow both authors to address how the loss of a patriarch can destabilize narratives of family history, legacy and inheritance for sons who must emerge as new heads of households in moments of heightened political violence. As Vásquez and Abad Faciolince show, episodes of sound and dialogue between male protagonists and their female counterparts do not always result in successful instances of listening and deepened understanding. These moments of disconnect in turn perpetuate cyclic traditions of flawed patriarchal authority within the family, and through parallel processes, in the nation. Notwithstanding, attempts at polyphony and aurality can allow for alternative forms of listening that broaden the scope of civilian participation in conversations on violence, first in cultural production, and perhaps as a consequence, in political discourse. As Daniela Abad affirms in *Carta a una sombra* (2015) and Juan Cárdenas in *Los estratos* (2013), willingness to diversify family narratives through not simply the inclusion of, but also an emphasis on women can bring greater visibility to the complexities of familial identity while also crafting images of family life through diverging forms of filial obligation and inheritance.

These reimaginings of kinship bonds are expanded in Carolina Sanín's *Los niños* (2014) and Pilar Quintana's *La perra* (2017), two novels that feature visions of non-biological motherhood. In their exploration of unconventional family ties, Sanín and Quintana emphasize how the construction of kinship bonds —fostered out of desire and necessity in the aftermath of displacement and loss— underscore lingering questions of inclusion across Colombia's urban and rural regions. As their female protagonists work to connect to children and animals likewise marked by conflict, their inability to successfully communicate verbally compels them to seek out alternative modes of

expression found in their respective surroundings. These processes result in forms of narration encoded in nature, which speak of traumas otherwise omitted from institutional archives. The power of narrative in bringing to light the unseen and unspoken is deepened in Gloria Susana Esquivel's *Animales del fin del mundo* (2017) and Ingrid Rojas Contreras's *The Fruit of the Drunken Tree* (2018), which mobilize child narrators in order to speak of the pervasive nature of civil conflict on family life both in Colombia and for Colombians abroad. As young girls confront domestic turmoil within a framework of national unrest, their stories of violence make a strong claim for the importance of small-scale peace as a necessary precursor to large-scale resolution. Together these works advocate for continued dialogue between past and present in an effort to affirm the realization of peace in plural, which once explored in literature and film, can guide deeper and more informed reflection within readers.

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