

Stasis: Border Wars in 20th and 21st Century Latin American Literature and Film

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines literature and cinema about 20th century border wars in Latin America, namely the Chaco, Soccer, and Falklands/Malvinas Wars. I present a paradigm for considering these wars that moves beyond the dichotomies of the border—in or out—and war—friend or enemy—in order to reflect the contemporary challenges of regional and global integration. Replacing the Greek term *polemos*, meaning war with an external enemy, with *stasis*, meaning stagnation and civil uprising, I show how textual, historical, and philosophical interpretations of the linked concepts of hypostasis, stasis, and ecstasy resonate with contemporary conflicts over sovereignty and borders.

In particular, regarding the 1932-1935 Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay, I analyze works by Augusto Céspedes, Adolfo Costa du Rels, and Augusto Roa Bastos, arguing that borders present an incomplete enclosure of the national political body. I show how the Chaco border creates the conditions for contemporary siege, re-configuring the mouth as site of cannibalist consumption in a novel by Wilmer Urrelo and speech in a film directed by Paz Encina. Regarding the 1969 Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras, I analyze the late poetry of Roque Dalton and a novel by Horacio Castellanos Moya, considering literary texts compared to documents of property and citizenship for migrants, citizens, landowners, and poets under stagnant regional integration. Finally, I consider the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War between Argentina and the United Kingdom through analysis of a poem by Susana Thénon and novels by Rodolfo Fogwill and Carlos Gamerro. I argue that Malvinas cultural production draws

on repeated metaphors from the conquest and dictatorship, interrupted in ecstasy. Together, I show that cultural production about these three border wars contributes to the conceptual reconfiguration of Latin American and border studies when considered as part of the conflicting stagnation and uproar of stasis.

Introduction

“El concepto de frontera es temporal y sus límites se conjugan como los tiempos de un verbo.”¹

—Ricardo Piglia, *La ciudad ausente* (122)

Lately, politicians seem obsessed with the border—defining it, protecting it, reinforcing it. Proposals to lengthen the existing border wall between the United States and Mexico or build a new wall between Argentina and Bolivia to prevent migration appear in news cycles in both North and South America. They reveal an increasing return to identity—conservative populism in the United States and nationalist neoliberalism in Argentina. But news stories about borders tend to ignore one key fact: these contemporary borders are static. They are not in dispute, and they do not change. The border is not the problem. It is how people treat the border, what it means politically and culturally, how it affects a contemporary image of the nation as it undergoes the changes that accompany global integration. Following Ricardo Piglia, the problem is how the border is inflected, especially over time.

After all, the borders that divide North and South America were not always clearly defined. They emerged from colonial land distribution, sovereignty disputes, diplomatic negotiations, and wars. This dissertation analyzes literature and cinema about wars that took place over Latin American borders during the 20th century. It provides a historical view of how conflicts shaped cultural production, but also tracks the emergence of a model of static bordering

¹ “The concept of borders is temporal, their limits conjugated like the tenses of a verb.” Ricardo Piglia, trans. Sergio Waisman *The Absent City* (103)

in the 20th and 21st centuries, defined as violence deflected from the territorial limit and reflected in cultural texts and politics. This introduction presents precursors to this paradigm in order to show where static borders come from, especially focusing on the concepts of border and war from legal, historical, and philosophical perspectives. These perspectives establish the basis of the key elements at work in each dispute and trace the limits that, in turn, traverse and define literature and cinema about war.

Toward a Definition of the Border

Border: a boundary, limit, line, or frontier. It is the place where one territory ends and another begins. Contemporary Latin American borders first emerged from Spanish colonial administrative divisions. During the early 19th century wars of independence and later 19th century international wars, notably the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) and War of the Pacific (1879-1883), Spanish American territory became further divided. By the turn of the 20th century, Latin American territorial limits were substantially the same as they are now, with one exception that we will see in Part I. The colonization and armed conflict that characterized the definition of the border subsided, and territorial disputes were largely confined to the diplomatic sphere. The borders became static.

Long before these borders were established in Latin America, however, Europe had its own fixed limit—the Rock of Gibraltar. In Roman times, the rock represented one of the two Pillars of Hercules and the end of the known world, marked on Renaissance maps as “non plus ultra,” or *no más allá*, nothing farther beyond. After Columbus’s voyage, however, Gibraltar turned from a border into the threshold to the new world. The Spanish made their imperial motto “plus ultra,” or *más allá*, farther beyond. European exploration and colonization of the American

continents transformed the myth of Hercules into one of sea travel and world domination, visible especially on the coins the Spanish minted with the “plus ultra” wrapping around the Pillars of Hercules and a map of the world over open waters (Figure 1). Legend has it that the symbol \$, often used for dollars and pesos, derives from the banner wrapped around the column. The silver mined from Spain’s overseas territories, including the famous mine at Potosí in present-day Bolivia, circulated as liquid assets marked with Herculean symbols.



Figure 1: Real de a 8 (1739)

Yet the legal instruments of colonization did not create openings, instead crafting borders in the Americas. Beginning with the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, the pope divided the Americas between the Castillian and Portuguese crowns. Expensive wars and financial difficulties eventually chipped away at the Spanish empire’s geographical and economic reach. Spain relinquished territory in treaties at Westphalia in 1648 and Utrecht in 1713, in which it ceded control of Gibraltar to England.² These treaties laid the framework of the modern international legal system. In particular, the Treaty of Westphalia established the idea of sovereignty as non-interference in domestic affairs. The nation-state came to be seen as a “bordered power-

² The coin pictured above from 1739 bears the image of the Pillars even though by then Gibraltar belonged to Britain at the time it was minted. Later, amid rising pressure on his regime in the 1960s, Spanish head of state General Francisco Franco stirred Spanish nationalist sentiment, inciting the people to reclaim Gibraltar for Spain. When that effort failed, he closed the border between the Rock and the Iberian Peninsula in 1969. The wall-turned-threshold of colonialism remained sealed until 1984. Cut off from Spain by Franco’s orders, Gibraltar was re-opened and partially absorbed into a suprapstate during European integration, surprisingly almost a decade after the start of Spain’s transition to democracy. Both the UK and Spain regularly dispute land and maritime rights around the Rock. In 2016, Gibraltarians voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union even as most of the UK sought to withdraw. Today, the border at Gibraltar bears a monument to the site as “cradle of history,” alongside the emblem of the Pillars of Hercules. On a clear day, Morocco and the Spanish territory of Ceuta appear across the blue waters, looking toward the peaks of the southern Pillar, disputed between a mountain in Ceuta (Monte Hacho) or Morocco (Jebel Musa). Both UK and Spanish military bases are poised on either side of the mouth of the Mediterranean. Hundreds of years later, the link between empire and war, territorial division and colonial incursion survive. In recent years, a Gibraltarian nationalist movement has arisen, affirming a linguistic and cultural specificity worthy of EU recognition. For more information on recent Gibraltarian nationalism, see the legal study by Keith Azopardi *Sovereignty and the Stateless Nation: Gibraltar in the Modern Legal Context* and recent documentaries *La Roca* (2011) and *Gibraltar* (2013).

container” (Giddens, cited in Elden *The Birth of Territory* 3) in which the state had a monopoly on violence.³ The border defined the limits of power, both at home and abroad in colonial territories.

European treaties not only settled wars on that continent, but became the basis of colonial administrative and legal systems. German jurist Carl Schmitt traced a history of this concrete legal order in his landmark study *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950). Taking account of sovereignty theories from Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes alongside treaties and legal precedent, Schmitt sought to explain how the world had come to be dominated by European powers, which subsequently lost influence to the United States in the wake of World War II. He noted that this European legal system was disappearing. By 1955, Schmitt wrote that the emergence of a new world order would be “la obra de un nuevo Hércules” (“La tensión planetaria” 28).⁴ Europe needed its mythical heroes to impose order on its legal system, broken down by the planetary Cold War and large-scale decolonization.

Unsurprisingly, Latin American states inherited many European legal principles at independence, or as Schmitt puts it: “The Latin American states that arose [during the nineteenth century] assumed that they, too, belonged to the ‘family of European nations’ and to its community of international law” (Nomos 286-287). This legal inheritance resulted in border disputes even long after independence, such as the Beagle Conflict in 1978 between Argentina and Chile. The dispute was a bizarre almost-war that took place over three islands at the frigid tip of the continent, which were largely used as sporadic pasture land. Queen Elizabeth II, Pope John Paul II, and two of South America’s most infamous dictators, Jorge Rafael Videla of

³ The term first appears in Jean Bodin and is popularized in Max Weber. Brown’s *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* discusses the erosion of Westphalian sovereignty under globalization. Elden’s volume historicizes the idea of the “bordered power-container.”

⁴ “the task of a new Hercules”

Argentina and Augusto Pinochet of Chile all intervened at different moments during the conflict. The Beagle Dispute displays the main principles used to define borders during the 20th century in Latin America, and so offers a glimpse of the key problems at work in the other wars that compose the rest of this project.

For most of the twentieth century, both Argentina and Chile sporadically claimed the islands of Picton, Nueva, and Lennox at the eastern edge of the Beagle Channel. In 1971, both countries submitted arguments to a binding arbitration court overseen by a neutral mediator, in this case Queen Elizabeth II. The case hinged on the interpretation of two key issues. The first, *uti possidetis juris*, is an international law principle that provides for the transfer of territorial limits from colony to nation-state when a colony becomes independent. In this case, whatever territory had been administered by the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata would pass to independent Argentina and whatever had been under the Captaincy General of Chile would pass to independent Chile.⁵ The definition of sovereignty became important in the midst of an Antarctic land grab and with the constant threat of encroachment by the US and UK—two powerful countries that might argue that the islands and surrounding territories did not belong to anyone, *res nullius*, and so claim them.

A second principle presented to the courts was the bi-oceanic principle, which did not come from European law but rather from agreements made during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) between Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. In exchange for Argentine neutrality in the dispute, Chile ensured Argentine dominance in the Atlantic while maintaining its own dominance in the Pacific. Almost a century later in the 1970s, Argentina argued that if the court agreed that the Beagle Channel flowed eastward past the three islands, Chile would have an outlet to the South

⁵ These divisions were not always as firm as the principle suggests. To take the most pertinent example, the treaties that determined the conduct of the War of the Pacific fed directly into the Beagle dispute (see below).

Atlantic. This Atlantic outlet would violate the agreement, and Argentina risked losing the established equilibrium—one nation, one ocean.

In 1977, the British court handed down its binding decision; all three islands were awarded to Chile.⁶ Argentina withdrew its support from the mediation and planned to invade the islands and other strategic locations in Chilean Patagonia. Fittingly, they called the attack, set to begin December 22, 1978, *Operación Soberanía*.⁷ In a desperate effort to avoid bloodshed on the verge of war, Pope John Paul II sent an emissary to arbitrate the dispute under the auspices of the Vatican. The two clearest incarnations of sovereignty—queen and pope—had been called on to settle this dispute that came from the continent’s imperial past. The pope’s arbitration was ultimately successful in avoiding armed conflict between the two military governments under Videla and Pinochet. The pope’s court gave the same result with the important difference that the decision was announced after Argentina had lost the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War. Both countries signed and ratified a Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1984. In 1983 electoral democracy returned to Argentina and in 1990 to Chile.

The brinkmanship staged in this near-war in the Beagle Channel shows that decisions about bordering—the extent of sovereignty—often do not consider factors like the people governed. The relationship between governors and governed is rarely portrayed from its “human side” at the outbreak of war. As such, cultural production such as literature and film supplements legal principles, fostering dialogue about the problems at work in a given historical political situation. A recent film about the Beagle Dispute, for instance, tries to put a human touch on the planned invasion. *Mi mejor enemigo* (2005), directed by Alex Bowen, follows a group of

⁶ Meticulously documented in over 400 maps and other documents submitted to the courts of arbitration, the collection *Relaciones chileno-argentinas: La controversia del Canal Beagle, Una selección cartográfica* provides beautiful documentary evidence of the claims over the years from cartographers of Spanish, German, Argentine, and Chilean origin.

⁷ Operation Sovereignty

Chilean soldiers tasked with trying to find an old border fence along the seemingly endless flat grasslands.⁸ Their compass breaks, and they lose contact with their regiment—a trope that will appear in a novel in Chapter 1. The lost soldiers come across a similar group of Argentines, and both dig trenches on either side of what they imagine to be their territory. The officers on both sides are finally forced to admit, in the words of the Argentine to his Chilean counterpart: “ni tú ni yo sabemos dónde está la frontera.”⁹ Like the states they stand for, they feel threatened without a border between them.

The officers agree to create their own border, enacting in miniature the process of arbitration. As they divide the territory, the Chilean officer confronts his exaggeratedly arrogant Argentine counterpart about selfish and unfair treatment, stepping up to the Argentine officer in a face-to-face shot that reduces the scale of the impending war down to a duel. Even though they had only just decided which territory belonged to him moments before—the audience serves as witness—the Argentine explains tersely to the perturbed Chilean: “Usted está invadiendo mi territorio.”¹⁰ Moments later, he begrudgingly concedes, ordering his subordinate to take “dos pasos *chiquitos* hacia el Atlántico...” clarifying to the obviously confused soldier: “¡para allá, hombre!”¹¹ To seal the pact, the soldiers burn a line of fire, but the wind picks up and carries the fire across the dry grass. Panicked soldiers hurriedly stamp it out. The officers’ efforts at delimiting territory ridicule the system of state bordering and their own pathetic place in it; nature curbs their weak attempt. The film later shows the two sides becoming friends, before admitting defeat and powerlessness in a final scene in Santiago. The surviving members of the Chilean regiment remember one of their own who dies in a spectacularly fictional yet heroic

⁸ *My Best Enemy*

⁹ “neither you nor I knows where the border is”

¹⁰ “You are invading my territory”

¹¹ “two *small* steps toward the Atlantic” / “that way!”

scene in which shots are fired because the Chileans are unaware of the pope's offer to mediate. The survivors note that the dead of "the war that never was" will never be remembered, a ghost unit deployed in a ghost land for the glory of the *patria*.¹² But the line sounds hollow, since they know that they effectively did nothing for Chile; they couldn't even find the old border fence. From this perspective, the film shows that their service to the nation was never about them, or even about Chile, but instead about maintaining a territorial order that the film itself reveals as manifestly absurd yet immensely powerful.

Cultural production inserts itself at the intersection of the people charged with defining, patrolling, maintaining, and fighting for these borders, and the legal structures that lead them to physical and emotional limits of their own. Over time, this intersection has become less about creating a heroic narrative like Homer's *Iliad* or the epics of antiquity. Increasingly, 21st century literature and cinema about border wars show that the principles of the past and old-fashioned modes of combat have become ridiculous. For instance, the bizarre Argentine novel *2022: La guerra del gallo* by Juan Guinot (2012) imagines a future in which, still irate about the loss of the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982, the protagonist stows away on a cargo ship headed across the Atlantic in order to claim Gibraltar for Argentina in the year 2022.¹³ In one fell swoop, he expells the Spanish and British imperial overlords of yesteryear. The quixotic pastiche—and references to *Don Quijote* figure prominently—heavyhandedly shows that military might and blind nationalism are the stories of combat and honor that drive the protagonist mad. The absurd romance of war and chivalry in *Don Quijote* becomes more absurd by the 21st century, when resentment over centuries-old disputes lingers anachronistically.

¹² nation, homeland

¹³ *2022: The Rooster's War*

While literature and film ridicule the real and imagined anachronistic border wars in the Beagle Channel and Gibraltar, cultural production historically takes the concept of the border very seriously. Since Gloria Anzaldúa's landmark *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), the subfield of border studies has combined Latin American and American cultural studies, Spanish and English, economics, migration, and politics. Anzaldúa argues that the border can serve as a metaphor, traversing categories of race, ethnicity, language, and sexuality to create a new *mestiza*. Since Anzaldúa, *mestizaje* and cultural hybridity have undergone heated debate in Latin American and American studies.¹⁴ For instance, Alberto Moreiras's *The Exhaustion of Difference* (2001) argues that the assertion of difference traps both hegemonic and subaltern subjects in an identity-based dialectic.¹⁵ Arguments for alternative or resistant positions reinforce the dominant position in the very act of rebellion.

This dissertation carries Moreiras's idea into border studies. It departs from the idea that transgression—crossing, re-crossing, and interrupting the metaphorical borders between categories of identity—ultimately reinforces the divisions these borders create. The coming chapters instead consider contested borders in Central and South America that expand the field of border studies beyond the US-Mexico line and toward the political and philosophical concepts that underpin 20th century notions of sovereignty. At each border, I consider the relationship between politics and culture, focusing not on the representation of national, racial, or sexual identities, but rather on the manipulation of political and philosophical concepts that inform the

¹⁴ *mestizaje* / *mestiza*: mixed ethnicity and/or race; the female mixed race subject

¹⁵ See especially Chapter 9 “Hybridity and Double Consciousness,” pp. 264-300. Moreiras presents “savage hybridity” as exceeding the dialectic between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic orders, also expressed in the development of a concept of posthegemony in Gareth Williams's *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America* (2002) and Jon Beasley-Murray's *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (2011).

border's overwhelming physical force.¹⁶ Rather than viewing the border as a rhetorical device, I endeavor to keep this force in view at all times. After all, the border has physical and political as well as cultural and psychological effects on those whose bodies it organizes in space. I view the border, even if its physical location does not change, as different by the very nature of the passage of time, following Ricardo Piglia in *La ciudad ausente*: "El concepto de frontera es temporal y sus límites se conjugan como los tiempos de un verbo" (122).¹⁷ The border, like narrative, changes in time. Both can be conjugated and inflected. Each border in the coming chapters will be inflected through the concepts that make them move in time.

Toward a Definition of War

War: armed conflict, violent uprising. Unlike the border, which developed conceptually over the course of centuries mainly in Europe, war is often considered one of the constants of history. This is not to say that it has not changed. Indeed as far back as ancient Greece, philosophers and historians have struggled to define and classify types of war and their effects on politics. Thucydides, for instance, laid the foundation for a differentiation between civil wars and external wars in his account of the Peloponnesian War.¹⁸ In the *Republic* Book V, Plato likewise distinguishes between war among the Greeks and war with barbarians. The former is considered *stasis*, a civil war that manifests an illness in the polity, whereas the latter he terms *polemos*, a war against a true enemy. Aristotle considers and modifies this distinction when he elaborates on

¹⁶ In Chapter 1, for instance, we will see that politicians and historians try to overcome the divide that the border imposes through fraternity, a category predicated on the exclusion of women. This is just one example of how these categories of identity reinforce certain borders even as they try to overcome others.

¹⁷ "The concept of borders is temporal, their limits conjugated like the tenses of a verb." Trans. Sergio Waisman *The Absent City* (103).

¹⁸ Thucydides's Melian dialogue presents an early model for the oral arguments to reach an agreement, similar to the stasis procedure in rhetoric, discussed below. In the Melian case, negotiations failed. Scholars of international relations often consider the Melian dialogue the foundation of political realism (see below and Chapter 1).

its opposite, friendship, in the *Politics*.¹⁹ Centuries later, Thomas Hobbes's famous *Leviathan* (1651) describes the condition of humanity as a savage "war of all against all" prior to the imposition of order under the sovereign. For Hobbes, the distinction between internal and external becomes less important than the control of violence in an essentially anarchic world. The border served the key function of dividing the ordered polity from its barbaric exterior.

By the nineteenth century, the distinction between internal and external war was well established, and theorists of war began to focus more on the reason for the outbreak of hostilities, on one hand, and military strategy on the other. Carl von Clausewitz's treatise *On War* (1832) famously describes war as "politics by other means." Whereas Hobbes saw the sovereign and the law as forces of peace, Clausewitz highlights the link between politics and violence. In the 20th century, Clausewitz's idea would appear in an even more radical form in Walter Benjamin's 1921 "Critique of Violence," which argues: "If ... conclusions can be drawn from military violence, as being primordial and paradigmatic of all violence used for natural ends, there is inherent in all such violence a lawmaking character" (283).²⁰ Violence creates the law. War is not just at or beyond the border; it has saturated political organization. Benjamin's observation would receive later development in Michel Foucault's 1975-1976 lectures, which invert Clausewitz's proposition: "politics is the continuation of war by other means... Politics ... sanctions and reproduces the disequilibrium of forces manifested in war" (15).²¹ The legal order has become the unquestioned violence that undergirds society. Force is now inscribed in the hierarchies of everyday life.

¹⁹ For a more detailed examination of the development of the term stasis in ancient Greece, see Kostas Kalimetzi's *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease: An Inquiry into Stasis*, particularly Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-31.

²⁰ See also: Jacques Derrida's commentary on Benjamin in "Force de loi: Le 'fondement mystique de l'autorité.'"

²¹ Foucault's inversion transforms the link between violence and order into a network that permeates society as his lectures gradually draw the focus away from sovereignty and toward more diffuse power relations in the form of biopolitics.

While these theorists saw violence naturalized in the law, Latin American political scientists reflecting on the 20th century note that the region tended to avoid international warfare, especially compared to the turbulent 20th century in Europe and North America. In spite of other political and economic problems, war among the states was rare. In *Violent Peace: Militarized Interstate Bargaining in Latin America* (2001), political scientist David Mares investigates low and high levels of violence in order to determine if there are specific factors that contributed to the ongoing low-intensity insurgency and civil warfare—Latin America’s “violent peace”—compared to higher intensity conflicts elsewhere. Departing from assumptions of international anarchy and rational, self-interested behavior by leaders, he proposes a model in which strategic balance and leader accountability are fundamental.²² Mares considers these factors in his explanation of why Argentina did not go to war with Chile in 1978 but did go to war with Britain in 1982. In his view, war is always possible in international relations, but the considered decision about whether to use violence to obtain calculated, strategic ends and to escalate or deescalate conflict lies with the leader of a given state.

Other political theories account for territorial wars by placing less emphasis on rationality and more on the shared history of the territory in dispute. Especially in the case of intractable disputes, Ron Hassner writes that “as these conflicts mature, the perceived cohesion of the disputed territory rises; its boundaries are perceived as becoming more clearly defined; and the availability of substitutes for the territory appear to decline” (110). The gradual process of entrenchment sharpens the disputed territory’s borders and enhances its perceived value. By the time war erupts, the territory already has political, economic, and affective valences. As we will

²² Mares, along with many of the theorists cited below from Thucydides to Schmitt, are all grouped as political realists, meaning that they see the international order as essentially anarchic and believe states to be the main actors. One of the most problematic arguments that Mares’s book makes that does *not* form part of his initial realist assumptions discounts the US role in inter-Latin American relations in his chapter “The Myth of Hegemonic Management,” pp. 55-83.

see, these valences become clear in literature and cinema.²³ As Fredric Jameson writes: “War is ... the potentiation and becoming-actual of ... occulted virtualities: the presence of those absent enemies which peacetime and daily life confined to newspaper or television news when their existence intersected at all with my own” (*Valences* 595). With the outbreak of hostilities, latent conflicts spring into view. They disrupt the order, which Benjamin and Foucault point out is already inscribed with violence. In interrupting this order, conflicts also make the connections among previously disparate people appear alongside the violence inherent in the law. As such, wars over disputed borders offer a unique moment to carry out “the interpretation of society and its visible order [in] the confusion of violence, passions, hatreds, rages, resentments, and bitterness” (Foucault 54). This confusion reveals the underlying problems of the law as violent status quo.²⁴

In Latin America, intractable territorial disputes were uncommon and by the 20th century, international wars were infrequent. Nevertheless, the legal framework that defined international relations in the region changed in negotiations with world powers, especially as a result of US influence and under European peacekeeping agreements. In the wake of the destructive First World War, Euro-American politicians created the League of Nations to encourage cooperation

²³ Novels about the Chaco War in particular have numerous references to the hostile and oil-rich nature of the territory, and the silhouette of the Falklands/Malvinas Islands circulates as a symbol in Argentina into the present.

²⁴ Another earlier example shows the emergence of a dialectical understanding of war in G.W.F. Hegel’s controversial pronouncements on war. Hegel sees war as a dialectic of state state and change, showing that war brings welcome disruption to prevent complacency: “War is not to be regarded as an absolute evil ... by its agency as I have remarked elsewhere the ethical health of the peoples is preserved in their indifference to the stabilization of finite institutions; just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a long calm, so also corruption in nations would be the result of prolonged, let alone ‘perpetual’ peace” (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 324). Hegel also writes of disruption against static elsewhere: “In order to prevent them from taking root and becoming static, resulting in the disintegration of the whole and in the evaporation of its spirit, the government has, every now and then, to disturb them by wars in their innermost” (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, quoted in ten Bruggencate). The sea breeze metaphor, often criticized as a celebration of war, could be read alongside the second, as recognition of the upheaval and subsequent re-emergence of order that this dissertation presents as characteristic of war. However, it is also important to keep in mind that at the time Hegel was writing, wars were more effective at changing the order of states than they became gradually over the course of the twentieth century as territorial form stagnated in Latin America and elsewhere.

and discourage armed conflict. By the end of the Second World War, Schmitt shows that multilateral peacekeeping formed part of the early erosion of the critical division between friend and enemy he had proposed in *The Concept of the Political*. As a consequence, peacekeeping played into the erosion of the political order as well as the European spatial order. In his discussion of what he calls the “Geneva institution” in *The Nomos of the Earth*, he points out that the League shifted decisively away from a concrete order held in place by the principle of sovereignty as territorial integrity:

Every legal system, every unity of order and orientation requires some concept of property guarantees, of *status quo* and *uti possidetis*. The Geneva institution also appeared to guarantee the territorial integrity of each member ... Yet other, not formally recognized, but nevertheless effective principles, such as the right of free self-determination of peoples, stood in the way of the legitimacy of this territorial *status quo*, and essentially jeopardized its unproblematic and unequivocal nature. ... The essential difficulty ... lay still deeper, and concerned the question of what the *status quo* should be. (Nomos 245)

Once principles such as self-determination become effective, the primacy of property weakens, creating a fracture between historically bounded territory and democratically oriented self-determination. A staunch opponent of both communism and liberal democracy, Schmitt hears the threat of war in the voice of the people. The status quo must be preserved on the old sovereign model or risk devolving into a form of anarchy without property guarantees.

As wars expose the limits of the legal system, they also reveal the “violence, passions, hatreds, rages, resentments, and bitterness” that question this established order—not only in the League of Nations but also in the later Organization of American States and United Nations. All

of these political bodies reveal what Schmitt feared, namely, that sovereignty—and with it inherited concepts of borders and war—would be irrevocably eroded. As international cooperation grew, borders weakened and warfare became subject to international alliances and treaties. War became more difficult to locate precisely and define. The old optics of international against civil war no longer functioned along the lines of the sovereign state.

From Polemos to Stasis

The division that the ancient Greeks established at the borders of their city-states between war against a barbarian or true enemy—*polemos*—and war or illness within the state—*stasis* became much more diffuse by the 20th century. The rise of supra-national peacekeeping organizations alongside transnational capitalism made it more difficult to determine the “true enemy.” At the same time, however, *polemos* became a target of post-World War II philosophy, as we will see in more detail in Chapter 3. In an effort to explain the repeated outbreak of warfare and destruction in Europe, Emmanuel Levinas in particular began to view war as the basis of the Western philosophical tradition. His critique of *polemos* draws on two fragments by Heraclitus, which sustain that war is the basis of existence.²⁵ Martin Heidegger’s work on *polemos* in the years leading up to the Second World War makes the connection between war and philosophy appear even more sinister. Heidegger had been a member of the German National Socialist Party, and he initially translated *polemos* into German with the word *Kampf* before abandoning it for its Nazi resonances, not least with Adolf Hitler’s autobiography *Mein*

²⁵ The two Heraclitean fragments in question are 53 (“War is the father of all and the king of all; and some he has made gods and some men, some bond and some free”) and 80 (“We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife”). The translations and interpretations are subject to dispute; see especially, Fried’s *Heidegger’s Polemos*, Chapter 1 “Polemos and Heraclitus,” pp 21-42.

Kampf (Fried 30-32). Levinas argues that ethics must supersede ontology to avoid Western philosophy's reliance on a constant state of *polemos*.²⁶

More recently, Latin American studies scholars have turned to Levinas's critique of *polemos* as the conceptual underpinning of contemporary decolonization. In *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (2008), Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes European modernity as originating in and expanding through a "paradigm of war," where:

By paradigm of war I mean a way of conceiving humanity, knowledge, and social relations that privileges conflict or *polemos*. ... The paradigm of war can be characterized in terms of the privilege of conflict or the celebration of the reduction of the singularity of individual entities and subjects to the generality of the concept, to Being, to an ethnos, or to a totality in philosophical reflections. (3)

For Maldonado-Torres, war manifests violence intrinsic to the Western philosophical tradition, especially as it has been translated to the Global South. Maldonado-Torres argues that philosophy is polemical by its very nature, and ontology is violence. More than a mere correlation, Maldonado-Torres claims that philosophy causes physical violence, and empire is a machine for eliminating difference. Imperial remnants in the Global South, which he conceives of in terms of philosophical concepts rather than legal structures, must be decolonized. The problem with Maldonado-Torres's approach is that the oppositional—polemical—structure of war is inscribed in the book's title: *Against War*. In order to circumvent this problem, Maldonado-Torres proposes an "ethics of love" that approaches all others as singularities. The world is not knowable through a universal concept of humanity nor a central division of friend

²⁶ Chapter 3 returns to Levinas, Heidegger, and the difference between *polemos* and stasis in the context of the 1969 Soccer War and developments in Latin American studies and decolonial theory.

and foe, but rather through a universality of difference.²⁷ As in the case of the border, however, claiming resistant differences always runs the risk of reinforcing these differences.

This dissertation departs from the idea that conceptual work that opposes war cannot, paradoxically, argue against war.²⁸ It cannot make war the enemy. Instead, such conceptual work must consider the philosophical, legal, and historical factors that come to bear on specific conflicts. As we have seen, in the past century armed violence has changed; the difference between friend and enemy, interior and exterior is no longer as clear as it was in the Greek city-state. In contemporary border wars, the very distinction between within and without is the cause of violence. And the border itself is no longer as clear, as Giorgio Agamben explains in the introduction to *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*. In 1963, the near-simultaneous introduction of the concept of “global civil war” in both Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution* and Carl Schmitt’s *Theory of the Partisan* revealed that the nature of organized violence was changing. Transnational networks that now regularly cross nation-state borders have also changed and expanded.²⁹ As a result, I propose to examine the 20th century border wars in this dissertation through the paradigm of stasis rather than *polemos*.

The ancient Greek *stasis* has evocative valences that classical scholars explore.³⁰ Beyond civil war, Nicole Laroux considers *stasis* an important precursor to Athenian democracy in *The Divided City*, describing how an originary amnesty overcame the conflict and formed the basis of the political order. In *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease*, Kostas Kalimtzis describes

²⁷ Maldonado-Torres’s usage of this term is very different from Giacomo Marramao’s in *The Passage West: Philosophy after the Age of the Nation State*.

²⁸ For particularly a trenchant critique of liberal pacifism in anti-war movements in the US during the 21st century, see the editorial of *UMBR(a): A Journal of the Unconscious* on war by Alexei di Orio and Roland Végső, which employs a psychoanalytic perspective.

²⁹ Giorgio Agamben also cites Wendy Brown’s *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* is once again a critical point of reference here. Giacomo Marramao’s *The Passage West* also provides a framework for examining the interruption of the border under globalization.

³⁰ For the sake of clarity, I italicize *stasis* when referring to the ancient Greek definition and leave it unitalicized when using the combined definition I propose here for the Spanish and English.

stasis as a disease that disrupts Aristotle's idea of political friendship. And in Schmitt's late writings, he considers *stasis* an uproar or rebellion of the One against itself in political theology (*Political Theology II*).³¹ In rhetorical theory, *stasis* refers to the process of argumentation that leads to the determination of a truth, such as in a property dispute. The word passed into Latin, Spanish, and English, including semantic fields associated with standing, stability, stagnation, *status quo*, and the state. It has passed into English and Spanish as "civil strife," "a period of inactivity or equilibrium," or "a stagnation or stoppage of circulation... especially of the blood" (OED).³²

I use *stasis*, including its rich field of meanings and associated words, as a key for analyzing the literature and cinema of 20th century Latin American border wars. In rhetoric, *stasis* examines arguments from both sides to determine the truth, for instance, the location of a border. The coming chapters take a different approach. Instead of looking for the truth at the heart of a given dispute, I trace the development of the emergence of *stasis* in Latin America, which I define as stable geographic borders contested in politics and culture. As I analyze narrative, poetry, and cinema about three border wars, I study the changing meaning of the concepts of war and border through key ideas I find in cultural texts.

Specifically, in Part I about the 1932-1935 Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay, I focus on the establishment of the border in hostile territory. I borrow the term *hypostasis* from

³¹ The theorists of *stasis* cited above all explicitly draw from and re-interpret Aristotle and/or Plato. In readings of Aristotle, *stasis* seems to be valorized as something like an agon, poised between its disruptive model and the public space in which the disagreements of democracy appear. According to Dimitris Vardoulakis, for example: "Stasis solicits a politics of friendship. This is a politics that views as central the intertwining of the ethical and the political" ("The Ends of Stasis" 155). In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida meditates on the pitfalls of a politics of Aristotelian friendship *as well as* Schmittian enmity. For Vardoulakis, however, *stasis* becomes an ideal, where "the limits of friendship and justice share a common ground, and that ground is, precisely, *stasis*" ("Stasis" 140). Curiously, *stasis* has the potential to disrupt political theology: "there is a close connection between interpretation and disease and [...] this connection designates a different relating, one that disrupts the separation between politics and theology presupposed by political theology" ("Stasis" 131). The text in which Schmitt mentions *stasis* is subtitled *The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology*.

³² The Spanish definitions carry the same meanings and connotations from Greek, including the medical definition.

philosophy and theology, where it means underlying substance and metaphysical union, respectively. Chapter 1 shows the anxiety associated with the lack of a national limit in the 1930s, especially through realist stories and novels, such as Augusto Céspedes's "El pozo" and "La paraguaya" (1936) and Adolfo Costa du Rels's *La laguna H.3* (French 1938, Spanish 1967).³³ It also examines the physical and metaphysical ground at the indistinct border between life and death in Augusto Roa Bastos's *Hijo de hombre* (1960, revised 1993).³⁴ Chapter 2 shows the violence of consumption in the 2000s through the novel *Hablar con los perros* (2011) by Wilmer Urrelo Zárata about ritual cannibalism during a wartime siege, linked to the contemporary body politic and human trafficking.³⁵ It also considers a future-oriented alternative to this embodied siege in the film *La hamaca paraguaya* (2006), directed by Paz Encina, about storytelling displaced in time.³⁶ Part II about the 1969 Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras directly addresses stasis. Chapter 3 discusses how Cold War attempts to suppress communism and conflict and encourage regional economic integration backfired. I examine a selection of Roque Dalton's late poetry, specifically from 1969-1975, about contested political representation and Horacio Castellanos Moya's novel *Desmoronamiento* (2006) about the war's effects on Central American integration and migration into the 21st century.³⁷ Finally, Part III examines the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War between Argentina and the United Kingdom from the perspective of ecstasy, meaning literally standing outside, exceeding the nation and its borders. Chapter 4 analyzes how literature about Malvinas portrays the war as a traumatic event, tracing connections to the conquest in Susana Thénon's "Poema con traducción simultánea español-español" (1987) and to the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Rodolfo Fogwill's *Los pichiciegos*

³³ "The Well" / "The Paraguayan Woman" / *Lagoon H.3*

³⁴ *Son of Man*

³⁵ *Talking to Dogs*

³⁶ *The Paraguayan Hammock*

³⁷ *Breakdown or Collapse*

(1983).³⁸ The chapter then shows how these traumatic events reappear in translation and in virtual spaces in the 1990s in Carlos Gamerro's novel *Las Islas* (1998) before being ecstatically overcome.³⁹

Through these three wars and three parts, I trace the emergence of the border, its stagnation, and its deflection as they appear in cultural texts. Together, these three movements follow a pattern of geographical status quo accompanied by cultural and political dynamism. Throughout the project, I refer back to the colonial moment as constitutive of a legal and discursive order that continues to operate but also changes throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries. I gesture to a constant tension between a variety of forms—legal, textual, philosophical, political and embodied—and what escapes them as nothingness, lack, omission, or undocumented vacancy.⁴⁰ Through these tensions, I argue that replacing *polemos*—tied to the binaries of border and war—with stasis allows a richer portrait of the border's complexity as portrayed in literature and cinema.

³⁸ "Poem with Simultaneous Spanish-Spanish Translation" / The *Pichiciegos*, published in English as *Malvinas Requiem*

³⁹ *The Islands*

⁴⁰ The conceptual development of the formless in Jaime Rodríguez Matos's *Writing of the Formless: José Lezama Lima and the End of Time* serves as a key reference from the perspective of the formless rather than form.

Part I: The Chaco War and Hypostasis

“Es responsable, joven esqueleto, toda una organización diplomática burguesa que bebe sangre en copas de champán, y toda una organización imperialista que en América hace subir y bajar bonos conforme a su *stock* de cadáveres.”⁴¹

—Augusto Céspedes, “Opiniones de dos descabezados” (263-264)

Piercing the Archive

In the novel *Hijo de hombre* (1960, revised 1993), Augusto Roa Bastos creates a narrative collage of Paraguayan history, examining the Chaco War with Bolivia (1932-1935) in the final sections.⁴² In one of these chapters, Roa Bastos prints the diary of Miguel Vera, a military prisoner stuck in a jail that seems so far outside of the flow of time that nothing happens: “Los días transcurren monótonos, iguales... Estamos fondeados en medio de la lenta y atigrada corriente, de más de un kilómetro de anchura... Cuando se la mira fijamente, a ciertas horas, parece también detenida, inmóvil, muerta” (221).⁴³ Even the river seems to stand still. In the midst of this dead time, news begins to filter in of students massacred in a pro-war rally in the Paraguayan capital of Asunción and rising tensions with Bolivia.

⁴¹ “Responsible, young skeleton, is a whole bourgeois diplomatic organization that drinks blood from champagne flutes, a whole imperialist organization that makes bonds rise and fall according to its stock of corpses.”

⁴² *Son of Man* / All references to *Hijo de hombre* are from the 1993 revised edition unless otherwise noted.

⁴³ “The days pass by monotonously, the same... We are anchored in the middle of the slow and tiger-stripe current, more than a kilometer wide... When you look at it fixedly, at certain times of the day, it also seems halted, immobile, dead.”

Vera and the other prisoners speculate on the reasons for the increasing likelihood of war, each presenting a theory about the true nature of the conflict. El Zurdo Medina, called “Lefty” for his Marxist views, claims that Paraguayans have been forced to fight for the vast expanses of land held by the likes of Argentine farmer and cattle rancher Carlos Casado: “En mitad del Chaco, todavía estamos en sus latifundias. Ahora tendremos que pedirle permiso para ir a morir por sus tierras” (245).⁴⁴ According to Martínez, however, Casado has nothing to do with it: “¡Vamos a pelear y morir por patriotismo!” (245).⁴⁵ In response to Martínez’s patriotism, el Zurdo offers another theory; while Paraguay defends Casado’s lands, Bolivia pushes into the Chaco under pressure by oil companies. As el Zurdo replies to Martínez, “‘Pero nuestro patriotismo va a acabar teniendo olor a petróleo,’ replicó el Zurdo, frunciendo mucho la boca. ‘Las grandes empresas tienen buen olfato. Huelen de lejos el mar mineral enterrado en el Chaco’” (245).⁴⁶ Another soldier notes that the Bolivian attacks aim east toward the river: “Evidentemente, la irrupción boliviana cierra sus dispositivos para cortar el río Paraguay, nuestro vulnerable espinazo de agua. Si llegan a tener su control, podrán doblar en dos al país y metérselo en el bolsillo” (246).⁴⁷ Landlocked Bolivia aimed for the river through the middle of Paraguay and out to the Atlantic Ocean.

Roa Bastos gives a snapshot of the most common explanations for the war that dragged on for three years and caused the death of tens of thousands in South America’s poorest countries. Bolivia suffered more losses in its eventual defeat, while Paraguay, initially hesitant to fight, greatly expanded its official territorial reach into the northern Chaco. This was the first war

⁴⁴ “Halfway through the Chaco, we’re still on his land. Now we have to ask him for permission to go and die for it.”

⁴⁵ “We’re going to fight and die for patriotism.”

⁴⁶ “‘But our patriotism is going to end up smelling a lot like oil,’ replied Lefty, scrunching his mouth. ‘Big companies have good noses. They smell the mineral sea buried in the Chaco from pretty far away.’”

⁴⁷ “Clearly, the Bolivian incursion aims at cutting off the Paraguay River, our vulnerable, watery spine. If they get control of it, they can fold the country in half and put it in their pocket.”

in which modern military armaments like tanks were used on the American continent, yet more soldiers died of thirst and poor infrastructure than in direct combat. As a consequence the war has been called, alternately, *la guerra del petróleo* and *la guerra de la sed*.⁴⁸ Roa Bastos exaggerates the soldiers' frustration when one of them notes that they're more likely to find kerosene when they dig a well than water.

However, there is another theory proposed by another prisoner, Noguera, that seems more historically based, if impressionistic or even poetic. Half jokingly, Noguera says that hundreds of years before, the Spanish mapped the border between what would eventually become Bolivia, or Alto Perú, and what would eventually become Paraguay. But a bug infestation in the archives at the Audiencia de Charcas rendered the documents illegible: "Esos bichos [las polillas] agujerearon las Cédulas Reales. Se comieron las demarcaciones primitivas, la línea de hitos, el *uti possidetis*, se bebieron los ríos. Todo. Ahora nadie entiende nada. Ni nuestros doctores en límites. Ni los de ellos..." (245).⁴⁹ The royal record succumbed to the tiny bookworms. Imperial enclosures were rendered useless by bugs who ate through the representational suture of the map to its territory, making the decay of the legal limit literal and irrecoverable. War became the chosen instrument to fill in the lacking information.

Yet an exact continuity with imperial limits was always impossible. Since the Spanish map was drafted, both areas had gained independence, but also suffered severe losses in late nineteenth century wars with neighboring countries. The War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay decimated Paraguay's population. Bolivia lost its sea coast in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) against Chile and Peru. Paraguay was hesitant to

⁴⁸ war of oil / war of thirst

⁴⁹ "Those bugs bored holes through the Royal Documents. They ate up the primitive border signs, the landmarks, *uti possidetis*, they drank down the rivers. Everything. Now no one can figure it out. Not our scholars of borders. And not theirs..."

fight after enduring such major losses, while Bolivia was landlocked and eager to find a port. The attempt to recover the borders from the Audiencia de Charcas and therefore ensure *uti possidetis* was impossible from the start but nevertheless remained a legal priority. The proper shape of the American nations, mapping clearly and without holes onto the Spanish idea, sustained the illusion of continuity with the past. Conveniently for both countries, it also held the promise of resource exploitation near the border.

The war has been seen as part of a broader continuity between colonialism and neocolonialism as well as the stunted promises of modernizing infrastructure and progress. Roberto Querejazu Calvo's *Masamaclay: Historia política, diplomática y militar de la Guerra del Chaco* emphasizes that Bolivia in particular suffered from a disastrous combination of weak, fumbling politicians and cunning businessmen.⁵⁰ This combination allowed commercial and particularly transnational oil investors to start a race into the Chaco. In different versions of this story, Standard Oil of New Jersey is portrayed as Bolivia's backer, while Royal Dutch Shell is seen as Paraguay's. After the end of the peace negotiations, it became clear that the Paraguayan Chaco lacked significant oil deposits.⁵¹ In his fictional account, Roa Bastos prefers to point the finger at large landholders, especially foreigners like Casado, on the Paraguayan side, who were more certain to lose from a Bolivian occupation than oil speculators.

Paraguay greatly extended its reach into the Chaco territory after three years of combat. The principles of *uti possidetis* and *status quo*, which, as we saw in the Introduction, Schmitt claims confer property guarantees and concrete spatial order, were powerless to resolve the dispute diplomatically. Nor could the newer League of Nations with its more liberal ideals of

⁵⁰ *Masamaclay: Política, Diplomática, and Military History of the Chaco War*

⁵¹ Recent research suggests that even before the war the presence of exploitable petroleum was dubious, likely embellished by warmongers. For recent historical investigations into the case, see Stephen C. Cote's *Oil and Nation: A History of Bolivia's Petroleum Sector* and Bridget María Chesterton's *The Grandchildren of Solano López: Frontier and Nation in Paraguay, 1904-1936*.

self-determination manage to avoid bloodshed.⁵² Bolivia, its back to the Andes once again, negotiated to keep the oil fields it had before the war but endured international humiliation. Finally, the border between the two countries was agreed upon in peace negotiations, settling one of the largest territorial disputes in twentieth century Latin America.

The Chaco War's literary archive portrays the war as unrelenting violence that made promise and idealism impossible. In *Hijo de hombre*, the most canonical novel about the war, Paraguayan history appears in fragments held together at the nexus of myth and reality, progress and destruction, the Spanish and Guaraní languages. Roa Bastos places a hole rather than a shape to mark the Chaco as an unknown or unrepresented point. The tension between the unknown or void and the emergence of form appears in the Chaco more broadly, where politicians at the time imagined an untamed wilderness or state of nature, both formless and eternal. Like the colonizers before them, representatives of the nation-state were sent to enclose it, to tame this unruly space at the heart of the American continent. The old problem of civilization against barbarism returned with colonial fervor thanks to the hope of exploitable oil.

The two chapters in this section on the narrative and cinema of the Chaco War follow the emergence of form in geographic, political, and embodied enclosures.⁵³ The cultural texts ironize the violent transition from undifferentiated ground to bordered territory at the moment these forms, from imperial and national mappings to metaphysical hypostases, present themselves in the anarchic Chaco. The border is set precisely at the moment when such an enterprise seems

⁵² The League would soon meet its own demise when it failed to keep Europe from another bloody war. Bolivian author Adolfo Costa du Rels served as a diplomat in the League of Nations up until its final session.

⁵³ In using the word form, I refer broadly to the metaphysical tradition extending from ancient Greek philosophy, especially Plato's theory of forms and Aristotle's division between form and matter. Here again, Jaime Rodríguez Matos's recent *Writing of the Formless* provides a key point of reference, although from the side of the formless. Chapter 1 takes the Heideggerian *Destruktion* and post-Heideggerian deconstruction of metaphysics as its theoretical background, while Chapter 2 examines the legacy of Hegel. Though not specifically referenced in the chapters, Catherine Malabou's interpretations of Hegel and Heidegger are also very influential, especially her books *The Future of Hegel* and *The Heidegger Change*.

more suspicious than ever, and so the Chaco War becomes a privileged historical moment from which to observe the consolidation of shapes in bordered sovereignty while the intellectual basis of this consolidation crumbles in the face of cyclical violence in interwar Europe and the Americas. The literary texts reflect on the foundational uncertainties rocking European philosophy, combined with the legacy of the Spanish colonial past and contemporary economic and political exploitation by European and US companies and politicians.

Departing from the multiplicity of origin and foundation stories that authors relate to the Chaco, Chapter 1 examines an idealist, cooperative model against a realist, conflictual one. It focuses on narrative published during and just after the war, including Augusto Céspedes's short stories "El pozo" and "La paraguaya" from the collection *Sangre de mestizos* (1936), Adolfo Costa du Rels's novel *La laguna H.3* (French 1938, Spanish 1967), and *Hijo de hombre* (1960, revised 1993).⁵⁴ Often realist in nature, these works describe skepticism borne of violence and a subsequent break with foundational fictions. The chapter argues that Chaco War narrative presents the simultaneous appearance of sovereignty and its unworking, enclosure and opening from the very moment sovereignty assumes a territorial form. This simultaneity undermines hypostasis as incarnation or assumption of form—the word becoming flesh in Roa Bastos's Biblical title. The introduction of unintelligibility in enclosure, ciphered in the map's unreadability, calls into question the nature of representation in literature and art as well as in idealist and fraternal models of politics.

Chapter 2 treats the legacy of the conflict in more recent cultural production, including the novel *Hablar con los perros* (2011) by Wilmer Urrelo Zárata and the film *La hamaca paraguaya* (2006), directed by Paz Encina.⁵⁵ The chapter investigates what happens when

⁵⁴ "The Well" / "The Paraguayan Woman" / *Mestizo Blood* / *Lagoon H.3* / *Son of Man*

⁵⁵ *Talking to Dogs* / *The Paraguayan Hammock*

enclosure appears complete and irremediable, as Bolivia and Paraguay's fates as landlocked nations were long ago sealed: Bolivia in its perennial reclamation of an outlet to the sea and Paraguay in its isolation as an "island surrounded by land" according to Roa Bastos. Departing from this claustrophobic, besieged space to time, Chapter 2 reads Urrelo's fictional account of the storied 1932 siege at Boquerón. Focusing on the mouth as it eats and speaks, Urrelo's novel re-works the Brazilian avant-garde model of anthropophagy, the indigenous American cannibalism of European culture. Continuing the theme of incarnation through *carne*, flesh or meat, he re-takes Roa Bastos's hypostasis as the war's legacy collides with 21st century consumerism. Finally, the narrative deceleration in Encina's film re-frames the war's legacy as narrative future in the sound and image of the asynchronous mouth.

Chapter 1. Holes in the Ground and the Chaco Archive

“¡Dios! ¡Siempre Dios! Un Dios sordo y mudo que nos deja reventar sin esperanza.”⁵⁶

—Adolfo Costa du Rels, *La laguna H.3* (47)

“Viejo vicio, este de la escritura. Círculo vicioso que se vuelve virtuoso cuando se cierra hacia afuera. Una manera de huir del no-lugar hacia el espacio estable de los signos.”⁵⁷

—Augusto Roa Bastos, *Hijo de hombre* (237)

Roa Bastos’s archive bookworms demonstrate how the Chaco War comes from texts—the perforated maps and royal decrees—and returns to the fictional text. Both types of texts contain a surprising number of holes, the literal holes in the maps and in fiction, holes drilled into the ground in this hostile territory, whether in the soldiers’ thirst for water or industry’s thirst for oil. Absence and thirst combine in Chaco narrative to illustrate the encounter between soldiers and a hostile state of nature, as well as between the soldiers and the modern violence of the state. Tending toward realism to expose the extreme situations the soldiers faced during the war, Chaco War authors draw a picture of the microcosm of society that the military draft displaced into the wilderness as part of an exploitative push toward modernization. Stark contradictions emerged from the attempt to enclose, once and for all, the land at the heart of the

⁵⁶ “A deaf mute god who lets us hopelessly shatter to pieces.”

⁵⁷ “An old vice, this writing. A vicious circle that becomes virtuous when it closes itself outward. A way of fleeing from the non-place toward the stable space of signs.”

continent. On the Paraguayan side, for instance, soldiers were forced to fight shoeless in defense of the lands of a man so wealthy that he named the city from which they embarked: Puerto Casado. On the Bolivian side, soldiers fought with little water and in the case of dramatic sieges, like the long battle at Boquerón, almost no supplies whatsoever. In Bolivia, the works of the so-called Chaco generation spurred returning soldiers into politics. Critical of combat conditions, racial inequality, and government neglect, the authors who recounted battle scenes began to foment a political consciousness that would set up the long track to revolution in Bolivia in 1952.⁵⁸

Two contradictory foundational myths appear in narrative about the Chaco War: those of paradise and those of war. Throughout *Hijo de hombre*, Roa Bastos balances the two, mentioning a seventeenth century treatise, *El paraíso en el nuevo mundo* (1656) by Antonio de León Pinelo that affirms that the lost Eden lies in the heart of South America.⁵⁹ For the soldiers in the Chaco, “éstas serían las cenizas del Edén, incinerado por el Castigo, sobre las cuales los hijos de Caín peregrinan ahora trajeados de kaki y verdeolivo ... De aquellos lodos salieron estos polvos” (265).⁶⁰ The war represents a return to paradise after expulsion, a return to the site of creation after the punishment of sin. A people emerges from the ruins of Eden, site of creation and incarnation, but, as we will see below, it is a return that makes faith falter.

The other myth that Roa Bastos mentions resembles the political origin story in Hobbes: the state of nature, a chaotic and unbearable war of all against all. In exchange for protection, people submit to hierarchical organization, and the Leviathan is born. The return of war is an unfortunate resurgence of primordial violence that temporarily suspends sovereign protection. It

⁵⁸ For more on this process, see Herbert Klein’s *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society*.

⁵⁹ *Paradise in the New World*

⁶⁰ “these must be the ashes of Eden, burnt by Sin, over which the sons of Cain make pilgrimage now dressed in khaki and olive green ... From that mud emerged this dust.”

also introduces doubt into the validity of the state's protective promise. For Schmitt, this fiction of political origin can be supplanted by an axiom: friend or foe. This distinction forms the basis of the political. Both Hobbes and Schmitt emphasize the conflictual or oppositional aspects of politics, especially in inter-state relations, rather than an idealist or liberal view that emphasizes cooperation.⁶¹ Displaced into the Chaco, this school of European thought converges with the post-World War I German military strategy when the Bolivians hire a German general to advise them on strategy: "Del otro lado está Kundt, el mercenario teutón. Dos escuelas europeas van a enfrentarse en un salvaje desierto americano, con medios primitivos, por intereses no tan primitivos. Es también una manera de actuar la civilización sobre un contorno inculto, encallado en el atraso del primer día del Génesis" (253-254).⁶² Roa Bastos shows the unusual combination of mythical time, old stories of civilization and barbarism, and modern military might.

The tension between the opposing views of conflict or cooperation heightened during the interwar period. In response to World War I, Europe sought to foster international cooperation in the League of Nations. Yet in the case of the Chaco, as Schmitt mentions in a footnote, the League accomplished little but the twin prohibitions of conquest and war.⁶³ There was a desire to create a coalition against the incipient war but no mechanism to enforce it. This would become the League's perennial problem: the incompatibility between a cooperative model and the inevitable resurgence of conflict, between an idealist and realist understanding of international relations. At the same time, European philosophy experienced a crisis of faith in many of its

⁶¹ In Thucydides's Melian dialogue in *The Peloponnesian War*, the Athenians presented the Melians with an ultimatum. When the Melians failed to agree to the terms, the Athenians killed and enslaved them. In essence, the political realism that takes the Melian dialogue as its source is a tradition that emerged from an imperial mindset.

⁶² "On the other side is Kundt, the Teutonic mercenary. Two European schools of war will come face to face in the savage American desert, with primitive means, for less than primitive ends. It is also a way of enacting civilization on an uncultured periphery, stalled in the backwardness of the first day of Genesis."

⁶³ "In a declaration dated August 3, 1932, 19 states in the Americas declared with respect to the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay that they 'would no more recognize a territorial regulation of the present (Chaco) conflict that was not brought about by peaceful means than they would the validity of territorial acquisitions brought about through occupation by armed conquest'" (Nomos 307).

assumptions and foundations, and the Chaco War too caused a lasting crisis on the other side of the Atlantic. Like their European counterparts, Chaco generation authors pursued the nature of existence, metaphysical ground, and the nation in the aftermath of brutal violence. Unlike the Europeans, however, Chaco War narrators were dealing with borders that were less precise, less populous, and more subject to disputed demarcations. However, both sides emphasized the fruitless destruction of war with such insistence that some critics considered the authors condemned by war to be realists.⁶⁴

The peace negotiations resulted in the definitive territorial shapes of both Bolivia and Paraguay. Although during the war the land seemed untamable, burying, disappearing, and otherwise consuming the soldiers, by the end, national enclosure was complete and lasting. This enclosure, in turn, holds another origin story; in Marxism, enclosure forms a key part of the origin of capitalism: primitive accumulation. Criticizing Adam Smith, Marx writes that, without a historical basis, the phase of wealth and resource accumulation “plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology” (873).⁶⁵ For Smith, according to Marx, the phase represents the mythical fall from grace, introducing economic inequality, which, for Marx, must be historicized and placed into context.

⁶⁴ The relationship between realism and the vanguard is explored further in Chapter 2. However, in the view of Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá, Paraguay found itself paralyzed in the past and unable to project itself into the future as a result of the violence it had suffered: “La atención que exigieron [los conflictos paraguayos desde la Guerra de la Triple Alianza hasta las primeras tres décadas del siglo XX] de los intelectuales paraguayos explica no sólo que «la historia devorara la literatura», sino que el país se pusiera como de espaldas a lo porvenir y viviera un tiempo decapitado, sin esa dimensión esencial de la existencia humana que es el futuro.” (243) (“The attention that [Paraguayan conflicts from the War of the Triple Alliance through the first three decades of the twentieth century] required from Paraguayan intellectuals explains not only that ‘history devours literature,’ but also that the country would place itself with its back toward the future and live a decapitated time, without that essential dimension of human existence that is the future.”) Roa Bastos, though he comes after the historical period Rodríguez Alcalá considers, has been identified with the Boom and magical realism, although this classification does not fit with the readings in this chapter.

⁶⁵ David Harvey redefines primitive accumulation more broadly as accumulation by dispossession to indicate that it can happen at moments other than during originary accumulation of capital.

Many Chaco generation authors take on this task in their writings to raise political consciousness. Some of the Bolivian authors of the Chaco generation show the vast inequalities in the system based on accumulation by dispossession.⁶⁶ Others choose to focus on the material difficulties the soldiers faced on the battlefield, writing of a constant conflict, whether among the troops, against nature, or against the enemy. In what follows, I draw parallels between literary and political conflicts, presented in literary and political realisms, to track the emergence of artistic, national, and embodied forms in the Chaco archive. I begin with and repeatedly return to hypostasis, the moment at which form emerges. Whether under the guises of metaphysics, incarnation, or ontology, the hypostatic moment suffers a post-war skepticism that questions the nature of ground and consequently territory and territorial war. The hypostatic key of this chapter responds directly to the enclosure that the Chaco War seeks to effect and the realist responses the war elicits. My readings focus on incomplete enclosures and representations, examining the places where the foundational fictions of God, sovereign, and—to a lesser extent—capital hold and where they falter. The readings below show how the change in presentation affects representation, or on the contrary, resists it as Chaco War narrative exposes both the hollow foundations of the state at its moment of greatest crisis and greatest strength, confronting “the suspicion that war is ultimately unrepresentable” (Jameson *Antinomies* 233).

The Archive and the Ground

In spite of the dubious representability of war, numerous Bolivian authors and several Paraguayans wrote works based in and around the war. In his book *La literatura boliviana de la Guerra del Chaco* (1969, re-issued 2013), Jorge Siles Salinas presents a contextualized study of

⁶⁶ For more on primitive accumulation in the context of *Hijo de hombre*, see Pous, *Beyond Incarceration: Prison Literature and Political Subjectivation in Cold War Latin America*, Chapter 1, especially p. 67.

the war's effects on Bolivian letters.⁶⁷ He remarks that there is a broad tendency in the stories, novels, and testimonies of the time to claim that the true Bolivian enemy is not the Paraguayan, but the Chaco itself. In fact, in much of Bolivian Chaco literature, the enemy rarely appears. Occasionally the authors give a glimpse of the battlefield, but on the whole, the novels bear more resemblance to survival than war stories.

Siles Salinas, along with much popular historiography, political speeches, and media reports to the present day, refers to the war as an absurd, tragic event that should be remembered as an unfortunately lethal family row rather than a truly international war, noting “la ausencia de todo sentimiento de odio hacia el paraguayo enemigo” (28).⁶⁸ He calls the Chaco War a civil war, even a fratricide, carried out by people too ignorant or easily manipulated to realize that Latin American nations are, in fact, brothers. He accuses other critics who find enmity between the two sides of being unable to recognize “en el caso de los países de habla hispánica de nuestro continente una comunidad de sangre basada en la realidad de la cultura y de la historia” (78).⁶⁹ He continues: “La guerra entre ambos pueblos es, pues, una guerra civil, una guerra fratricida, como podría serlo la lucha entre dos provincias de una nación” (78).⁷⁰ The blood, culture, and history of the continent form the basis of a borderless American bloc.

In reading the cultural production that emerged from the war, Siles Salinas tends to find cooperation foiled by misunderstandings. He believes in the texts' capacity to reveal the best of intentions, constructing a literary archive that attempts to recover a lost Spanish spatial order under threat of warring anarchy. Considering Spanish domination a pre-political condition, Siles

⁶⁷ *Bolivian Literature of the Chaco War*

⁶⁸ “the absence of any sort of hatred toward the Paraguayan enemy”

⁶⁹ “in the case of Spanish-speaking countries on our continent, a blood brotherhood based on historical and cultural experience”

⁷⁰ “Consequently, the war between the two peoples is a civil war, a fratricide, as if a conflict between two provinces of the same nation”

Salinas emphasizes the limits of the Hispanic, of the sphere of colonial language rather than national divisions within the former Spanish imperial inheritance. Nevertheless, as we saw above with Roa Bastos, the historical archive thwarts the search for authentic, original, recoverable borders. Continuity with imperial enclosure is impossible, and Siles Salinas presents a creole heritage that ignores linguistic difference—most obviously the Guaraní language spoken in Paraguay and parts of the Chaco—and re-affixes itself on a Hispanic brotherhood.

A similar strategy of displacing conflict from the city into a broadly defined family dates back to ancient Athens. Giorgio Agamben, drawing heavily on Nicole Loraux, finds confusion between the intimate and foreign, especially in the threat of civil war, during which “the killing of what is most intimate is indistinguishable from what is most foreign” (Agamben 14). In the case of the Chaco War, the retrospective inscription of kinship attempts to confound Bolivian and Paraguayan nationalisms.⁷¹ As in ancient Athens, the civil war, *stasis*, creates leaps “*through which the house is exceeded in the city and the city is depoliticised in the family*” (16, emphasis original).⁷² This process “functions in a manner similar to the state of exception” (22) as inclusion through exclusion. If war makes the house indistinguishable from the city, represented in national and textual forms, then Siles Salinas’s reading merely depoliticizes the borders between members, appealing to a genealogical sense of cooperation.

Son of the Bolivian president in power just before the outbreak of open hostilities (Hernando Siles, in office 1926-1930), Siles Salinas was also a longtime diplomat who worked extensively on brokering a deal for a sea port with Chile approximately twenty years after

⁷¹ Loraux also finds that the displacement of the axis of xenophobia (associated with *polemos*) onto the family (associated with *stasis*) relies on amnesty, the necessity of forgetting. Amnesia (in the form of aphasia) are explored further in the next chapter alongside the threshold between city and family in the twenty-first century legacy of the Chaco War.

⁷² The city here might also be considered alongside Ángel Rama’s *La ciudad letrada*, especially given the intersection between intellectual and political work in the biographies of the major figures studied in this chapter.

publishing his Chaco War compendium.⁷³ His goal was to solve the various historical quarrels between Bolivia and its Spanish American brothers. And yet, his argument in the Chaco book, in addition to finding no enmity towards Paraguayans, finds no culpability on the part of diplomatic and business interests that many authors blamed for the war. Siles Salinas considers this view part of an “excessive politicization” of the war authors. He writes that Marxism plays an overly influential role, linked to increasing secularization among the Chaco generation:

ellos consideran ... que el conflicto se ha desencadenado como consecuencia de las oscuras maquinaciones de los consorcios internacionales y de las grandes empresas capitalistas y no como resultado del proceso histórico de las dos naciones en lucha, que se vieron arrastradas hacia el desastre en virtud de una miopía secular que alimentó en ellas un torpe y desviado sentimiento nacionalista, incapaz de advertir el absurdo trágico de esa guerra entre hermanos. (42)⁷⁴

Siles Salinas describes a lack of faith that leads these “overly politicized” authors to espouse a “pacifismo [que] responde a una concepción, por decirlo así, abstracta y universalista que considera hermanos a *todos* los pueblos de la tierra” (31, emphasis original).⁷⁵ The authors’ secular myopia leads them to translate class struggle universally without regard to cultural and linguistic heritage.

⁷³ Hernando Siles was president during the initial Bolivian push into the Chaco. The fort at *Vanguardia*, discussed in the next chapter, was site of an initial skirmish in 1928, during his tenure. Nevertheless, the dedication to *La literatura boliviana de la Guerra del Chaco* reads “A la memoria de mi padre, el Presidente Hernando Siles, quien supo evitar, con resolución y energía, una guerra que nunca debió haberse producido” (“To the memory of my father, President Hernando Siles, who knew how to avoid, with conviction and vigor, a war that never should have happened.”) Later in his diplomatic career, Siles Salinas wrote the book *Sí, el mar* documenting the failed negotiation process between Bolivia and Chile in 1986-1987.

⁷⁴ “they believe that the conflict was triggered as a consequence of the dark machinations of international consortia and large capitalist businesses and not the result of a historical process of two nations at war that found themselves pulled into disaster thanks to a secular myopia that fed awkward and misguided nationalist sentiments, unable to notice the absurd tragedy of this war among brothers.”

⁷⁵ “pacifism [that] responds to something like an abstract and universal idea that considers *all* peoples of the earth brothers”

The problem with scrapping enmity in favor of absurdity or tragedy is that, traditionally, war and fiction both depend on conflict. The cooperative and fraternal model of international relations that Siles Salinas posits in his textual and diplomatic roles differs from the political and literary realisms of the Chaco that this chapter examines. Whether against nature, evil, enemy combatants, or an economic model, the soldiers that go into that hostile land rarely emerge with an understanding of an extended family or a common space of dialogue. Rather, they question their captivity within a model of sovereignty rooted in political theology, layered with class conflict, and weighed down by imperial inheritance.

While emerging in concert with European responses to violence in the skeptical and increasingly secular global interwar context, as Siles Salinas mentions, the Chaco texts use the coincidence of conflict in political and literary realism to reinterpret the foundational fictions upon which war depends, starting with enclosure—variously, the relationship between ground and territory, void and form, open and closed, or the Spanish unbinding of *non plus ultra* and *plus ultra*. The texts that emerge from the war develop an understanding of ground as undifferentiated space or ontological foundation and its subsequent delimitation into territories. The authors likewise introduce skepticism that resonates with their European counterparts after World War I. Their responses and re-working of this dynamic become key to seeing how conflict cannot be so easily dismissed as a collapse of the Bolivian or Paraguayan polity into a Hispanic family, as in Siles Salinas, nor can ontology be pushed aside, as in Maldonado-Torres, toward a cooperative ethics. Instead, examining conflict involves examining hypostasis, looking for the ways in which this stasis is created and moves in time, even as it remains spatially stagnant, like the border between Bolivia and Paraguay in the wake of the war.

Anxiety in the Dark Chamber of “El pozo”

Some of the most celebrated accounts to emerge from the war come from Bolivian author Augusto Céspedes, who fought in the Chaco and whose writing and later political career were profoundly shaped by the war. His reports from the battlefield are collected in *Crónicas heroicas de una guerra estúpida*.⁷⁶ His story, “El pozo” from the 1936 collection *Sangre de mestizos* takes the form of a diary of soldiers who spend months excavating the earth in search of water, “con más sed que odio” (22).⁷⁷ The deeper they dig into the dry earth, the more desperate they become. After months of work, the supervising officer reaches the conclusion that, in spite of excavating meters and meters of soil, they will never find water. The frustrated officer repeatedly asks the men if they’ve found anything, and they inevitably return a negative: “Siempre nada, igual que la guerra... ¡Esta nada no acabará jamás!” (42).⁷⁸ Céspedes’s well is a bottomless pit, the fruitless labor of men slowly dying of thirst and a symbol of the infernal Chaco: endless, dry, empty, hot, hopeless.

Céspedes’s story also seems to lend itself to Siles Salinas’s interpretation of war, using the well’s emptiness to present a straightforward metaphor for the meaninglessness of war. For the soldiers on the ground, the push into the empty and unyielding land becomes frustrating, and abstractions such as title and right to property quickly fade. Historian Roberto Prudencio writes that the experience of the Chaco more broadly injected soldiers with a tragic anxiety: “Dice Martin Heidegger que la angustia es el encuentro con la Nada. Yo diría que la tragedia del Chaco ha sido la tragedia de la angustia, con que los hombres se han encontrado con la nada” (quoted in

⁷⁶ *Heroic Tales of a Stupid War*

⁷⁷ “The Well” / *Mestizo Blood* / “with more thirst than hatred”

⁷⁸ “Always nothing, same as the war... This nothingness will never end!”

Siles Salinas 19).⁷⁹ The nothingness of the Chaco might demonstrate that war bases itself on a nihilistic forging ahead under senseless orders without hope of victory or salvation. This nihilism proves that wars use inadequate means to achieve their often-impossible ends, showing that the Chaco is merely an exemplary case of the lack of substance at the heart of violent confrontation.

More than merely declaring war empty, however, both Céspedes and Heidegger circle the same question, borrowed from the philosophical principle of sufficient reason: why is there something instead of nothing? The principle of sufficient reason represents a particular encounter with a constitutive nothingness and anxiety, as Prudencio describes the Chaco alongside Heidegger. This question appears in Heidegger's interwar essay "On the Essence of Ground" (1928), in which he follows the history of metaphysics from Aristotle through Leibniz and Kant as ground is inextricably linked to being and truth.⁸⁰ Heidegger turns toward the more encompassing questions of ontology and epistemology, especially the ontological difference. Yet in wartime, Céspedes inverts the old question: why is there nothing instead of something?

For Céspedes, the Chaco's deepest well points to a precarious convergence of abyss and ground, reason and unreason. The point of contact between the soldiers and the ground undercuts the territorial distinctions of the state as the deeper the soldiers dig, the more elemental and less differentiated the earth becomes. As they come into contact with the ground and the nature of their existence, they find themselves stuck between a war subject to the modern interstate framework, with its multiple and conflicting national anchoring points, and the ground of the

⁷⁹ "Martin Heidegger says that anxiety is the encounter with the nothing. I'd say that the tragedy of the Chaco has been the tragedy of anxiety, that the men encountered nothingness."

⁸⁰ In Heidegger's words: "*The essence of ground is the transcendental springing forth of grounding, strewn threefold into projection of world, absorption within beings, and ontological grounding of beings.* And it is for this reason alone that even the earliest questioning concerning the essence of *ground* shows itself to be entwined with the task of shedding light upon the essence of *being* and *truth*." (132; emphasis original).

Chaco as an anarchic underbelly of the more ordered progress taking place in urban centers.⁸¹ Céspedes then uses the metaphorical, literary ground to approach the philosophical ground that Heidegger traces, digging into the idea that nothing is without reason or that, terrifyingly, thanks to war, everything is without reason.

In one of the most enigmatic episodes of “El pozo,” the rationality of war comes to a breaking point. At a depth of 41 meters, the soldiers begin hallucinating light, water, and serpents. The narrator describes the well becoming the dark room of a camera obscura, the distant top its aperture that allows the soldiers to see or at least imagine another world. With the help of this tiny opening, the soldiers develop their visions like photographs:

Sucedan cosas raras. Esa cámara obscura aprisionada en el fondo del pozo va revelando imágenes del agua, con el reactivo de los sueños. La obsesión del agua está creando un mundo particular y fantástico que se ha originado a los 41 metros, manifestándose en un curioso suceso acontecido en ese nivel.

El Cosñi Herbozo [...] se había quedado adormecido en el fondo de la cisterna, cuando vio encenderse una serpiente de plata. La cogió y se deshizo en sus manos, pero aparecieron otras que comenzaron a bullir en el fondo del pozo hasta formar un manantial de borbotones blancos y sonoros que crecían, animando al cilindro tenebroso como a una serpiente encantada que perdió su rigidez para adquirir la flexibilidad de una columna de agua, sobre la que el Cosñi se sintió elevado hasta salir al haz alucinante de la tierra. (37-38)⁸²

⁸¹ To borrow an image from Lacanian psychoanalysis, the *points de capiton*, are the points of convergence of signified and signifier that structure systems of linguistic meaning. They confer the stability that Roa Bastos mentions in the epigraph and to which I return at the end of the chapter.

⁸² “Strange things happen. That camera obscura imprisoned in the depths of the well reveals images of water, reacting with dreams. The obsession with water is creating a peculiar, fantastic world, starting 41 meters below the surface, that has manifest itself in a strange occurrence at that depth.

El Cosñi Herbozo's mirage fills the well, lifting rather than drowning him as he rises back to the level of the ground. He ends up so far down in the earth, plunged into his desire for water that he finds himself in a state of "groundless floating" (Heidegger *Being and Time* 170). When he reaches the surface, he tells the other soldiers about the vision, sparking what the officer declares an "epidemic" of water delusions. Cosñi's vision reveals how Céspedes's story treads a fine line between lack and plenitude, where, alongside Heidegger, the soldiers discover the region in which "excess and withdrawal become transcendently attuned to one another" ("On the Essence of Ground" 129). The soldiers hallucinate openness in water and light in the midst of their underground imprisonment. The hallucination stages an encounter with plenitude at the same time that it injects the soldiers with the anxiety that begins to take hold of them as the ground entraps them and the world recedes.

Rather than turning to idealism, the narrator mentions nothing but frustration; the war that aimed at complete territorial enclosure has been re-oriented in space—from the horizontal push into the Chaco onto a vertical push into the ground, from the superficial to the transcendental. Yet as the men continue to dig down into the bind between sovereignty and territory, they discover an unbreachable void, a lack of closure precisely at the point where closure should be sealed in violence. They become more literal versions of Roa Bastos's bookworms. This abyssal gap conditions their hallucination—a gap both in presentation, where beings come into contact with Being, and representation, where reality and hallucination converge.⁸³ The hallucination might be read as symbolic of the emptiness of war or the metaphysical grounding of nationalism:

"El Cosñi Herbozo ... had fallen asleep at the bottom of the cistern when he saw a silvery serpent flash up. He grabbed it and it disintegrated in his hands, but others appeared and started to gush up until they formed a spring of resonant, white bubbles, growing, filling the dismal cylinder like an enchanted serpent that had lost its rigidity and become as flexible as a column of water, upon which Cosñi felt himself lifted up until he was poured out onto the resplendent face of the earth."

⁸³ For Heidegger, the encounter between beings and Being is the ontological difference. Early Levinas uses the term hypostasis to describe it. These approaches are discussed in further detail below.

an absent center of an imagined community to carry us through dark times. The well might also provide a metaphor for the lack of water that structures the Bolivian state in its frustrated search for a port. Yet again, the vision might be cast as an aberrant discovery that emerges from the dredging of ground, somehow creating an impossible conversion of dirt and a sliver of light into serpents and water.

In these interpretations, the well becomes a version of the Platonic cave, the realm of ideal forms. The author of the diary entries likewise repeatedly returns to the image of a camera obscura in which the light at the top projects moving but distorted and inverted images of what happens above.⁸⁴ As the supervising officer explains when he finally decides to descend into the well himself: “He procurado trabajar, dando furiosos golpes con el pico, en la esperanza de acelerar con la actividad veloz el transcurso del tiempo. Pero el tiempo es fijo e invariable en ese recinto. Al no revelarse el cambio de las horas con la luz, el tiempo se estanca en el subsuelo con la negra uniformidad de una cámara oscura. Esta es la muerte de la luz” (37).⁸⁵ The Chaco itself becomes the still point of modern progress. The reign of the image appears in the stagnation of time, or what Roland Barthes calls the stasis of the photographic image. The paradoxical still point at the heart of modernity becomes visible in photography, where modernity records movement through immobilization and interiorizes its contradiction. The photo stops time, and death appears in the “image’s finitude” (90).⁸⁶

The inelegant dance within nascent modernity’s stillness over an emptying ground, keeps “El pozo” from repeating the maxims of metaphysics—the cave and its ideal images—turning

⁸⁴ See Susan Sontag’s classic essay “In Plato’s Cave” from *On Photography*.

⁸⁵ “I’ve tried to work, striking furiously with the pick, in hopes of accelerating with quick work the passage of time. But time is fixed and invariable in this place. Failing to reveal the change of hour with light, time stagnates underground in the black uniformity of a camera obscura. This is the death of light.”

⁸⁶ The photographs of the Chaco War dead are, as might be expected, particularly brutal, depicting emaciated bodies, ripped open and consumed by animals and the elements.

instead to the point of slippage between fantasy and reality. Once the water has appeared for the first time, the officer concerned with the contagious hallucinations asks rhetorically: “¿Tanto dolor, tanta búsqueda, tanto deseo, tanta alma sedienta acumulados en el profundo hueco originan esta floración de manantiales?” (39).⁸⁷ The soldiers’ hallucinations reveal that the well weakens their grasp on reality and perverts desire. The project increasingly overwhelms them, especially since they have invested so much libidinal energy in it, as the earth—mother earth, *Pachamama*, or another of the versions of that idea—threatens to devour them.⁸⁸

Their fear is realized in the final lines of the story. The narrator describes the fate of the well from a hospital in the rearguard where he’s recovering from a severe malaria relapse. Remembering the last time he saw the well, the officer recalls a sudden attack on the Bolivian lines. Thirsty Paraguayans, referred to as *pilas* because their distinguishing feature was their barefootedness, hear rumors of the legendary well and make a push toward the water: “Creció el tiroteo de los pilas y se oía en medio de las detonaciones su alarido salvaje, concentrándose la furia del ataque sobre el pozo. Pero nosotros no cedíamos un metro, defendiéndolo *¡como si realmente tuviese agua!*” (43; emphasis original).⁸⁹ The hallucination penetrates reality. Thirteen men die in the battle for the empty well, and their bodies are tossed into it, “engullidos por sombra” (44) and covered over with dirt.⁹⁰

These 13 soldiers fuse with the ground. In a curious twist, they die, not for their country or even to save themselves, but to protect the empty well that holds the unfulfilled promise of water in the midst of drought, and the accidental discovery of madness in the midst of the

⁸⁷ “Such pain, such searching, such desire, so many thirsting souls concentrated in the deep hole give rise to these burgeoning springs?”

⁸⁸ The “devouring mother” metaphor resonates with later Lacan’s analysis of anxiety. In his early accounts, Lacan describes anxiety as arising from a fear of fragmentation, which I portray here as the fear of the sovereign state, but by the time the soldiers arrive at the well, the anxiety is one of being swallowed up, ingested, and buried.

⁸⁹ “The *pilas*’ gunfire grew and between explosions we made out their savage cry, the attack’s rage intensifying around the well. But we didn’t retreat even a meter, defending it, *as if it really had water!*”

⁹⁰ “swallowed up by shadows”

battlefield. They only discover this promise thanks to the extreme thirst in their own bodies, which forces them to act and, symbolically, unbind ground from territory, hollow out an empty space in which the accidental encounter with nothingness and anxiety, hallucinatory desire and the devouring mother, becomes possible. The accident, then, causes a mutation in which the *raison d'être* passes from the state to their own survival then to the preservation of the empty promise that lies deep in the well.⁹¹

La laguna H.3 and the Laughing Tree

In another of the classic Chaco War stories, *La laguna H.3*, a group of Bolivian soldiers, under attack by legions of Paraguayans, manages to escape a siege in the nick of time.⁹² Their task is to supply the fort they abandoned with water, using only a compass and hazy memories of the maps they left behind in their rush to retreat. Originally written in French in the immediate aftermath of the war, the novel by Bolivian diplomat Adolfo Costa du Rels, was later amended and published in Spanish in 1967.⁹³ The soldiers have only a vague notion of the location of their water source, a lake called H.3, presumably based on its coordinates on the lost map. Much like in “El pozo” the soldiers always expect to find water soon, but they never actually get to the lagoon. Rather than being trapped in the ground, the men wander through the desert, following commanding officer Borlagui, who eventually reveals to his subordinate Contreras that the instrument he has been using to guide them is actually a pedometer instead of a compass.

Borlagui periodically consults it, shielding it from view, as if it were a compass. Similarly, the

⁹¹ The soldiers’ fight to preserve this constitutive emptiness does not preclude the possibility that the absence might be subsequently recovered by the state. Especially in the case of Bolivia, the lacking seaport and exploitation of natural resources in mining and oil drilling recover a historical lack in the service of the state, further developed in Chapter 2.

⁹² *Lagoon H.3*

⁹³ The versions differ substantially, especially toward the end. Here I refer to the Spanish edition, published in La Paz. Unfortunately, it has a number of typographical errors.

men defending the well in “El pozo” did so as if it had water; those reading the decaying maps in the Spanish archives did so as if they were complete. In each case, there is a measure of belief and a measure of deception. Borlagui has lost all sense of direction but tries to keep up appearances to maintain order in the ranks. He eventually succumbs to the Chaco, and Contreras is left guarding the fake compass and leading a diminishing number of increasingly fractious men in search of water.

Like in “El pozo,” *La laguna H.3* stages a crisis of faith, particularly overwhelming at the beginning of the novel. Borlagui, the superior officer whose Christian faith and military career make him seem almost monastic, argues with Contreras, whose religious and, to a lesser degree political, skepticism make him the cynical counterweight, exemplar for Costa du Rels of the modern, rational subject. As Contreras and Borlagui try to convert each other, tests of faith in the unseen, transcendent powers of God and the unifying powers of the state punctuate Costa du Rels’s novel, pushing the officers to consider proofs of politics and onto-theology, proofs of the borders that contain them and the hierarchical structures that create order in their lives.

At the forts along the border, Borlagui begins to doubt: “Bórlagui sintió el primer pinchazo de la duda. Sometido desde el comienzo de su carrera a la existencia precaria de los fortines, en territorios despoblados y malsanos, montando guardia entre fronteras inexistentes, causa de futuros conflictos, Bórlagui se había revestido de deza [sic] e impassibilidad” (59).⁹⁴ Yet, apart from this short lapse, Borlagui generally maintains faith in the cohesion that the inexistent borders offer. He explains that belief-trickery pairs, such as the compass and the

⁹⁴ “Borlagui felt the first prick of doubt. Accustomed from the beginning of his career to the precarious existence of forts in dreadful, uninhabited territories, standing guard between inexistent borders, cause of future conflicts, Borlagui had coated himself in cool impassivity.” Borlagui’s surname is sometimes written with an accent and sometimes without.

border, are the only things capable of maintaining order. They turn his men into well-handled puppets thanks to an air of authority and the men's desire to believe in an organizing structure:

Mi autoridad, aquí, no proviene de dones ni grado, sino de mi saber y de la confianza que él inspira. Pues bien, toda mi ciencia consiste en esta ilusoria brújula. Al precio de una... superchería, ella ha podido mantener la disciplina, la cohesión y cristalizar la esperanza de cada uno. Ante la inminencia del peligro, todo ser busca el objeto o la imagen que fijan y retienen el destino. (67)⁹⁵

The men cling to the objects that might save them. Unable to recover the map, they imagine that Borlagui's memory of the coordinates along with his compass represent survival, salvation, order and orientation.⁹⁶ Between them, with a measure of imagination and luck, the lagoon takes on shape and weight; it can be discovered and exploited. Without the compass, the *laguna* is empty, purely figurative, and lacking, as its other definition suggests: a lack or lacuna.

As the need for water grows dire, the Chaco becomes more unbearable. Its vast openness in the day contrasts with the bright, menacing eyes shining in the scrub at night. Man and beast turn on each other and among themselves, drawing together the pre-historic war of all against all and the conquistador's eye toward nature as anarchic space awaiting enclosure and exploitation. In the wilderness, Costa du Rels stages a reverse discovery scene in which Contreras acts as one of Columbus's men, on the lookout for water instead of land. From high in a tree rather than the

⁹⁵ "My authority here doesn't come from talent or rank, but from my knowledge and the confidence it inspires. True, my power consists of an imaginary compass. At the expense of a... swindle, it has maintained discipline, cohesion, and shaped the hope of all of my men. In the face of danger, everyone looks for the object or image that solidifies and retains fate."

⁹⁶ There is an undeniable opposition between indigenous and European epistemologies. Costa du Rels portrays the indigenous characters as understanding the unpredictable landscape more clearly and calmly, whereas Borlagui goes on to explain that the fake compass provides him with a scientific, paternalistic superiority: "“aquellos pícaros no me perdonarían nunca el no saber más que ellos. La autoridad no dura sino cuando deriva de cierta superioridad reconocida por todos. ... Yo no puedo destruir esta verdad... Ella es fundamental... Nuestra superioridad sobre ellos es indispensable a su salvación. Y a la nuestra...” (67) (“Those soundrels would never forgive me for not knowing more than them. Authority only lasts when it comes from a certain superiority everyone recognizes. ... I can't undo this truth... It's fundamental... Our superiority over them is indispensable for their salvation. And ours...”).

crow's nest of a ship: “[Contreras] Se apresuró a bajar, pero se detuvo en una de las últimas ramas. Allí recuperó fuerzas y, haciendo de su mano, una bocina, gritó, como los marineros de Colón, en vez de tierra: —Agua! Agua!” (155).⁹⁷ Costa du Rels re-writes Columbus's diaries into his Chaco war novel; centuries later, the conquest's ever-inward drive has exhausted itself. The Latin American states, now independent, have yet to escape the farcical repetition of their colonial history or rid themselves of the view that science will lead to salvation.

Costa du Rels draws this continuity through the instruments of spatial representation, pairing the fake compass with the memory of the lost map. A high-ranking diplomat, active in the League of Nations at the time of its dissolution, Costa du Rels himself was tasked with preserving the spatial order set in previous centuries with compasses and maps. In order to prevent warfare, in practice, the League was forced to preserve the status quo in the name of diminishing loss of life through rational dialogue in a common space. The organization tried to tame the anarchy with something like a swindle, making the low-level violence inherent in the preservation of order invisible.⁹⁸ Reading Costa du Rels's novel against his biography, the fraudulent compass might correspond to the League of Nations, over whose final session he presided. With Contreras as a new Columbus in the Chaco, the novel makes clear that there is no peace in the Chaco and never has been.⁹⁹ The League, a purely figurative compass tasked with organizing space and fostering dialogue, cannot do anything other than make limp declarations

⁹⁷ “Contreras hurried down, but stopped on one of the last branches. There, he gathered strength and cupping his hands like a megaphone, shouted, like Columbus's sailors, instead of land: Water! Water!”

⁹⁸ In another strange story on the frustrated legacy of diplomacy in the Chaco War, Argentine diplomat Carlos Saavedra Lamas was awarded the 1936 Nobel Peace Prize for his role negotiating an end to the conflict and creating a South American anti-war pact. His medal surfaced years after his death in a pawnshop, apparently sold for its weight in gold because the owner did not recognize its symbolic import. It was later sold at public auction. See Withnall, “1936 Nobel Peace Prize,” *The Independent*.

⁹⁹ Recently documented testimony of the process of Mennonite settler colonialism just before the outbreak of war proves that the Chaco, while a latecomer to some European modes of colonization elsewhere in the continent, was very much inhabited at the time of the war by both indigenous and European groups. For a collection of documents related to the Chaco before, during, and after the war, see *The Paraguay Reader*, eds. Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson.

that cite past precedent and encourage peace. Powerless to stop the subsequent three years of bloodshed in the Chaco, it is similarly powerless to stop rekindled war in Europe, which Costa du Rels observed first-hand from Paris.¹⁰⁰

Echoing the frustration of Céspedes's well and the futility of diplomacy, the discovery of water again proves to be a mirage. As the men keep looking, the Chaco becomes one of the circles of hell. Having barely escaped the impending Paraguayan counter-offensive at Boquerón, the land entraps them. The Chaco makes them feel that they move forward, but they merely walk in circles. Turning the tricks of Borlagui and Contreras against them, the men finally realize the futility of their erring through the desert when they come upon the body of a comrade, swarmed by buzzards and insects and stuck high in a tree like a prize of war. They imagined themselves walking away from him, but realize they are unable to escape the eternal return of the damned. In spite of the limitlessness of the desert, it imprisons them.

Contreras, representative of modern rationality, eventually has his own crisis of faith, but in his ability to reason rather than the nature of the state or God. After he has definitively lost his mind, the other men consider killing him to save his ration of water, but Borlagui keeps them at bay. Stuck out in the sun, Contreras sits near a bulging *toboroichi* tree with a cut in the center of its trunk:

Hacía una hora que tenía la mirada fija, entre sus pupilas semicerradas, sobre el viejo árbol hierático, preguntándose por el origen de aquella extraña herida. Le hallaba un aire de tristeza majestuosa. Un rey destronado, tal vez humillado por la

¹⁰⁰ Most notably, his son died fighting for the French resistance. The edition of *La lagune H.3* (in French) published in Buenos Aires in 1944 is dedicated to his son.

vejez y la ingratitud de los más jóvenes. Contreras le habló con tono
compadecido, queriendo conocer las razones de un [sic] infortunio. (121)¹⁰¹

The injured majesty of the tree at first inspires compassion with its natural sovereignty, its power and age. But then it inspires violence. Contreras:

da dos vueltas el [sic] *toborochi*, como si esperara el momento propicio para
hacerle una pregunta o asestarle un golpe. ¿Posee toda su razón, esta razón de la
que siempre hizo el árbitro de sus pensamientos y de sus actos?

Bruscamente, se pega al árbol y, con sus dos manos crispadas, en un
esfuerzo del que ya no parecía capaz, se obstina en transformar esa cavidad en
una inmensa boca entreabierta. Poco le falta para dejar allí todas sus uñas.

(124)¹⁰²

He sculpts a mouth into the tree, scratching the bark with his fingernails to liberate its form. Reason stands in question. In his madness, rather than dig a dark chamber in the ground or bore a hole through a map, Contreras wants to know about its misfortune, so he carves out an opening for speech, turning his madness into the possibility of conversation with the deposed *toborochi* king.

Contreras's fascination with the humanoid form he liberates from the tree trunk places him in a quasi-religious ecstasy: "Todo vibra. Todo resplandece en la fantasmagoría del amanecer. Contreras se siente como proyectado fuera de sí, al ver que por fin, la boca, la

¹⁰¹ "He had had his gaze fixed, between semi-closed pupils, on the old hieratic tree for over an hour, wondering about the source of its strange wound. He discovered an air of majestic sadness in it. A deposed king, perhaps humiliated by age and the ingratitude of the younger generation. Contreras spoke to it pityingly, wanting to tease out the source of its misfortune."

¹⁰² "turns twice around the *toborochi*, as though waiting for the exact moment to ask it a question or deliver a blow. Is he really in his right mind, constant arbiter of his thoughts and actions?"

"He strikes the tree brusquely, and with his hands tensed, in an effort of which he no longer seemed capable, he insists on transforming the cavity into an immense, half open mouth, nearly leaving his nails behind in the bark."

horrible bocaza, obra de sus manos, toda chorreante de luz, — ¡ríe!” (126).¹⁰³ The laughter is meaningless, conveying mocking, madness, confusion, and thirst but without substance. Later in the novel, in a part heavily amended from the original French publication, Contreras identifies this as the moment in which part of his personality stays behind in the tree and another continues on through the Chaco.¹⁰⁴ Contreras’s ecstasy has placed him at the limit between rationality and ecstasy, connecting him to forces beyond the rational and visible world, once again beyond the reality and realism of the Chaco.

Contreras’s encounter with madness can be understood as an encounter with the beyond, a religious ecstasy brought on by extreme heat and thirst. Under this lens, the novel has been considered “una novela católica desarrollada en torno a aquella tragedia” (Siles Salinas 131).¹⁰⁵ Biblical allusions, as in Roa Bastos, are undeniable, especially as the men wander in the desert. Later, the *toborocho* is also likened to the Tree of Jesse. Likewise, there are references to Columbus’s *Diaries*, Dante’s *Inferno*, and other works from the varied web of the European Christian tradition. Presumably, the Catholic nature of the novel comes from its author’s personal convictions alongside the salvation scene, in which a sudden providential storm drops pebble-sized hail that the few remaining soldiers, including Contreras, gather and eat. Yet, the novel also seeks to modernize the religious problem, presenting the war’s brutality as an inflection point at which skepticism and deception become part of the modern state.

In the Christian interpretation of *La laguna H.3* Contreras’s skepticism might be seen as a modernized test of faith, which is reaffirmed when, in the second edition, he returns to war having recovered his sanity. Nevertheless, there is an undeniable breakdown between

¹⁰³ “Everything vibrates. Everything gleams in the dawn phantasmagoria. Contreras feels shot out of himself, upon seeing that the mouth, the horrible gob, work of his hands, dripping with light, laughs!”

¹⁰⁴ In the second edition, Contreras eventually dies risking his life to give water to a thirsty man dying in the no man’s land between the trenches.

¹⁰⁵ “a Catholic novel built around that tragedy”

superstition and reason at the moment that the sculpted mouth laughs. The illusion of realism and transparent representation disappears. Costa du Rels abandons his realist style as Contreras loses his grip on rationality. The missing lagoon, or lacuna, coincides with the formless kernel of madness inside the tree's swollen trunk. Where realism fails because of the weakness of the body or mind, there is a hypostatic encounter, and Contreras recognizes the moment as pivotal because it disrupts his self-identification. There is already heterogeneity and unintelligibility in the sculpted, totemic form of the mouth emerging from the tree trunk. Yet the story of sovereignty and enclosure quickly swallows it up, so that skepticism and a degree of self-criticism and heterogeneity become integral to the enclosure.¹⁰⁶

The war gradually moves down to smaller scales. Like nesting dolls, Bolivian narrative shows how the conflict's toll pushes further down, from the level of international conflict to the Bolivian troops among themselves to the individual soldier who no longer identifies with himself. The ever-smaller scale and split self-identification appear at the narrative level as an interruption of representation, making way for a kernel of unintelligibility that exceeds the intentions of communication and pacification that Costa du Rels represented as a diplomat.¹⁰⁷ Centuries after the conquest, the Chaco still holds elements unintelligible to compasses and maps, a hypostatic node and representational breach not yet understood as speech.¹⁰⁸ In spite of

¹⁰⁶ The simplest way of avoiding the difficulties that the novel presents at this moment is to discount the moment as a scheme with universal pretensions. Such transitivity is impossible if heterogeneity preexists the encounter with ontological lacunae.

¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that this interpretation attempts to open Costa du Rels's text to ambiguity, at times willfully and explicitly resisting the text. For example, Siles Salinas's reading of the novel fits very well with passages such as the one in which Borlagui dies and his last word is "fraternity" (187) and a final passage: "Tornadizo, el viento llevaba y traía aires de ambos países, tan semejantes los unos a los otros, que la guerra parecía más bien pendencia de familia, por una cuestión de linderos" (212) ("The fickle wind brought and carried away the air of both countries, so similar to each other that the war seemed more like a family quarrel over a matter of boundaries.") Yet there are also moments when the text opens itself to the difficulty of understanding this war, and it is to these moments that I turn.

¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere in the novel, this phenomenon is described as an indigeneity that adheres to the landscape: "Contreras ignoraba que existen aún en América meridional ciertos lugares secretos donde hallan refugio los grandes mitos

the ideal of cooperation, it is impossible to recognize the tree as a subject or its laughter as communication. The tree's laughter exposes wrinkles in the smooth, selfsame space that the compass presupposes, revealing the space of rational dialogue as a fraud.

Under this lens, the novel functions as much more than a mere rewriting of Biblical stories. It is critique of the state and interstate systems from the very moment of enclosure, from the time a thirsty Columbus stumbles through the ashes of Eden in the Chaco. Diplomacy and literature stretch and falter at the imperfect seam between narrative realism and political idealism. Both modes fail: the literary deviating into fantasy and ecstasy and the political degenerating into open warfare. The mouth in the tree, instead of consuming the representation of territory like the mouths of the archive bookworms, becomes the mouth of the man-eating, madness-inspiring Chaco in which ants and beetles swarm abandoned bodies and buzzards pick at the war's festering human carrion. The Chaco becomes more menacing than the enemy, capturing its victims like in the classic *novela de la tierra*, *La vorágine* by José Eustasio Rivera (1924).¹⁰⁹ Costa du Rels could have easily included Rivera's famous last line: "y se los tragó la selva," modifying it slightly to "y se los tragó el Chaco" (Solé Zapatero, cf. Fuentes).¹¹⁰ The liberation of the sovereign shape, unintelligible and hidden in the tree trunk, becomes the voracious mouth of the Chaco, consuming the soldiers while sealing Bolivia and Paraguay's landlocked enclosure in the South American continent.

Captivity and Spectral Transparency in "La paraguaya"

incaicos, sustraídos a la voracidad de los conquistadores" (36) ("Contreras did not know that in South America there still exist secret places where the great Incan myths find refuge, having avoided the voracity of the conquistadors").

¹⁰⁹ novel of the land / Published in English as *The Vortex*

¹¹⁰ "and the jungle swallowed them up" / "and the Chaco swallowed them up"

Céspedes and Costa du Rels’s narrative realism could not contain the outburst of the fantastic, just as the soldiers cannot stop their creeping captivity in and captivation with the Chaco. As the empty well fills with silver serpents and Contreras finds himself absorbed in ecstasy, the stories reveal that enclosure necessitates escape. It is this same enclosure, ciphered in sovereignty, that vexes contemporary political theory: “A picture holds the study of politics captive. It is a picture of politics organized into sovereign states” (Havercroft 1).¹¹¹ Political theory can identify, but not fully escape, the matrix established in wars like the Chaco; it can hear but not make sense of the unintelligible cries that escape it. It bears repeating that the two disputed motives for Bolivian aggression adhere exactly to the conflicting desires of enclosure and release: on the one hand, the desire to seal off and guarantee resources in order to facilitate primitive accumulation and modernization and on the other hand, the exit to a viable port to ship primary materials and other resources.

This static picture, whether in the form of a map or an institution like the League of Nations, marks the failed mediation between openness and closure. The problem, in other words, is not just that there is a modern European mode of warfare playing out in a mythically primitive desert as German General Kundt directs Vickers tanks sinking into the mud of Eden. Nor is it that the hallucination interrupts the real. Rather, the problem is that the encounter between void and form that Chaco narrators portray—the problem of the assumption of form or hypostasis—is the terrain over which the “picture of politics” captures and combines affirmation and skepticism, theism and atheism. This split drives Contreras mad and makes self-identity

¹¹¹ In *Captives of Sovereignty*, Jonathan Havercroft analyzes the ways that modern political theory seeks to undo the model of sovereignty without ever fully escaping it. Havercroft admits that his portrait paints with a broad brush, clarifying: “despite numerous attempts to move beyond sovereignty or re-imagine political community, ... scholars of politics remain captivated by this picture of politics because it continues to set the terms according to which we debate our political ontology” (1). Havercroft also writes that, even during globalization, there is a tendency to look for some type of international sovereign. He uses skepticism to undo the bind between sovereignty and captivity. Skepticism hints at the incompleteness of enclosure, but the broader questions of what lies outside, even if that is nothingness, and how this exterior appears, remains.

impossible. It is a contradictory, even perverse, combination of the origin stories of conflict (Hobbes), enclosure (Marx), paradise (Eden), and the metaphysical beyond.

In wartime, the “picture of politics” distills this muddle of fictional origin stories into the order of sovereign states, condensing representation to freeze it in time. From the primitive camera obscura Céspedes finds in the “deepest well in the Chaco,” the technology of the state creates an unmoving image of borders, citizens, and soldiers, mimicking photography. One could replace the word “photograph” with “sovereign state” in Barthes’s remarks on the frozen time of the photo: “That the Photograph is ‘modern,’ mingled with our noisiest everyday life, does not keep it from having an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an *arrest*” (91; emphasis original).

Such immobile capture appears alongside the captivation with the nation state appears in a story about a photograph and mistaken representation. “La paraguaya,” also from Augusto Céspedes’s *Sangre de mestizos*, follows a photograph of a mysterious woman recovered from a Paraguayan soldier’s body.¹¹² From the opening line, the story suggests the question of property and the proper: “Aquella fotografía de mujer pertenecía a un paraguayo muerto” (233).¹¹³ The picture belongs to the dead Paraguayan. The rest, whether the woman depicted is Paraguayan or even the dead soldier’s lover or wife, is up to conjecture. The Bolivians inventory the dead Paraguayan officer’s possessions, taking what they see fit, including the picture of the mysterious woman and a lock of hair wrapped in silk. These objects become a sort of talisman for the Bolivian officer, Lieutenant Paucara, who takes them. He refuses to relinquish the photo to a comrade who snatches it out of his hands, insisting that it brings him luck. At the end of the story, Paucara is gunned down in battle, and the picture again crosses enemy lines and passes

¹¹² “The Paraguayan Woman” / On peripheral modernity and the photographic aura alongside a reading of “La paraguaya,” see Paz Soldán.

¹¹³ “That photograph of a woman belonged to a dead Paraguayan”

into the hands of two Paraguayans, who remark to one another, “Linda, la mujer del bolí...” (251).¹¹⁴ They note that she’s a widow now, and Céspedes closes the story: “Y siguieron la marcha por el bosque, llevándose el retrato de la «viuda»” (251).¹¹⁵ The reader is left wondering how many times her photo has crossed from cadaver to talisman, possibly as long as the war has gone on, and whether she is Bolivian or Paraguayan from the beginning.

The story might easily be integrated into the larger narrative of tragic warfare among people who, at heart, belong to the same fraternity of Latin American nations, unwittingly wrapped up in a modern disaster. The woman might be Bolivian or Paraguayan, her portrait and strands of hair moved to the bodies of officers from either side. She is a widow many times over on both sides of enemy lines, representative of unnecessary heartache inflicted on the home front. Her image always lands on the wrong side of the friend-enemy line, which the photo easily crosses. Deprived of contact with the opposite sex, the men on the battlefield fetishize her as exotic other. Yet she always escapes their grasp. She stands outside of their fraternity.¹¹⁶ She cannot be pinned down and becomes a wandering signifier of national fluidity as her image gets plucked from the bodies of dead soldier after dead soldier.

The photo promises to represent the person pictured transparently and more specifically, the portrait promises to represent her beautiful face: “cabellos densos, negros y sueltos ... rostro ligeramente redondeado ... ojos inmensos” (235).¹¹⁷ The physical proximity of the photograph’s stillness to the dead body is evocative. At the same time, however, the index fails; the woman cannot be identified except contextually in association with a corpse. The portrait is supposed to form part of a stable system of signification anchored in reality and experience. Yet there is a

¹¹⁴ “She’s pretty, the Bolivian’s wife...”

¹¹⁵ “And they marched on through the woods, carrying off the portrait of the ‘widow’”

¹¹⁶ To take the most obvious case of the state’s intentional exclusion, women achieved full enfranchisement in Bolivia in 1952 and in Paraguay in 1961.

¹¹⁷ “dense, black, flowing hair ... softly rounded face ... immense eyes”

disconnect between Paucara's title, *teniente*—literally, one who possesses, or lieutenant, literally a place holder—and the spectrality of his possession: “Su vida en incendio admitió, sin sentirlo, el hecho de su romántica relación con esa mujer incógnita y muda, con la lejana paraguaya alojada en la intimidad de su cartera como única mujer en el vacío que las otras no habían ocupado” (239-240).¹¹⁸ The woman is a phantasm in the void. The system of signification has become unmoored on the battlefield, and the woman's image occupies the emptiness that opens up at the intersection of sexual difference and war. More than representing the deep similarity between warring nations, the photograph reveals that when violence intervenes in the system of signification, even the most transparently indexical and modern forms of representation escape into the unknown and mute.

If in Céspedes's “El pozo” there was a radical presentation, failure of reason, and the near impossibility of representation, then “La paraguaya” approaches the war from another angle. The image's ambiguous belonging is ill suited to the typical explanations for war. In the photograph, the war appears neither meaningless nor meaningful. The war is not a tragic fratricide, given the officers' cold approach to the spoils of war, unfeeling toward the dead enemy and possessive of the woman pictured. Nor are the men truly enemies, but rather they are traversed by a shared traitorous desire. In short, they are neither brothers nor friends nor enemies. All they possess is the promise of an illusory and impossible relationship with an excluded, desirable other. The photographic capture proves inadequate to anchor signification, holding a representative captivity, which, while seemingly indexical, can easily be unchained from its signified.

This point is the threshold of politicization in Agamben's theory of *stasis*, briefly mentioned above. For Agamben, following closely in the steps of Laroux, civil war, or *stasis*,

¹¹⁸ “His life in flames accepted, without feeling it, the fact of his romantic relationship with this unknown, mute woman, with the distant Paraguayan lodged in the intimacy of his wallet as the only woman in the void the others hadn't been able to occupy.”

mediates between *polis* and *oikos*, city and family, public and private, politics and economics (23-24). This woman's portrait in "La paraguaya" indicates this space between *polis* and *oikos* as something that can bring together or pull apart the home and the nation, catalyzing or depoliticizing conflict. Agamben argues that, given the existence of the nation, etymologically linked to birth, the only way that life can be politicized at the moment of *stasis* is in its exposure to death through "bare life" (24).¹¹⁹ Similarly, the woman's image in "La paraguaya," standing in for the threshold of politicization, is only released from its captivity, its "possession" by the *teniente*, lieutenant, in death.¹²⁰

Meanwhile, the woman never appears in relation to a body, so she is never exposed to death. Rather, her image exists at the point where spheres of enclosure meet but fail to signify. The photographic capture, most real of realisms, has divorced representation from the hallucinatory void encountered in "El pozo" and the sculpted liberation of form seen in *La laguna H.3*. The woman's "immense eyes" stare out of the portrait unflinchingly at each officer and at each exchange across enemy lines, through all of the slippages between *polis*—in this case transformed into nation state instead of the city—and *oikos*—part of ongoing primitive accumulation rather than the household economy. But the woman is absent from the birth pangs

¹¹⁹ "It is no coincidence that the 'terror' should coincide with the moment in which life as such — the nation (which is to say, birth) — became the principle of sovereignty. The sole form in which life as such can be politicised is its unconditional exposure to death — that is, bare life" (Agamben 24). Historically, the Chaco serves the function of immediate politicization after the exposure to death. Authors like Céspedes and especially Óscar Cerruto with his novel *Aluvión de fuego* (1935) create immense political activity based on the inequality they witnessed in the Chaco, as documented, if disparagingly, in Siles Salinas.

¹²⁰ In Cristóbal Jara's segment of *Hijo de hombre*, Salu'í, a nurse, decides to abandon the camp and join Jara's suicide mission to bring water to the lost regiment behind Bolivian lines. She is not recognized when she approaches the water truck in the dark: "'Mävaiko-nde?' gritó Aquino el clásico santo y seña guaraní, repitiéndoselo de inmediato en castellano" (292) ("'Mävaiko-nde?' Aquino shouted the classic Guaraní call for a password, repeating it immediately in Spanish"). To this question, which Roa Bastos then offers in Spanish as "amigo o enemigo" ("friend or foe"), there is no response. Salu'í is another of the women who escapes Schmitt's axiomatic political divide. She is a friend, Paraguayan, but also a deserter and traitor, having abandoned her post as a nurse without permission. It is important to note that these women who confound the political divide do not cling to some other type of signification, such as a feminine essence; instead, they vacate sexual difference altogether. For more, see Malabou's *Changing Difference*.

of the border between these two nations and spheres of enclosure. While the enclosures create the “picture of politics” that captivates the soldiers like the picture of the woman, in the borderlands of the Chaco there is no identifiable referent for either picture. Both stutter at the edge of realism. Again, representation fails. Stuck in a cycle that signifies only in relation to corpses, the moment of capture recedes into the past. Agamben assumes that the division into city and family is sealed prior to the *stasis*, even as it remains at the service of a more fluid politicization. Exhausted by the closure of the frontier, the only way to escape the captivity of this image of politics in the Chaco is by examining how the fraternal articulation comes undone.

On this account, the soldiers’ fixation on the Paraguayan woman’s portrait resonates with the emphasis on the face of the other and temporality in Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy, especially in his early lectures collected in *Time and the Other*. Levinas likens hypostasis to the experience of the ontological difference, defining it as the moment when an existent comes into contact with its existence in an evanescent present that prepares for an encounter with the other (51-54). In setting out from the self and returning to the self, the subject performs the “work of identity” (52) from which temporality arises. Based on this progression, Levinas arrives at an ethically inflected critique of Heideggerian ontology.¹²¹ In “La paraguaya,” however, the work of identity, ciphered in identification, is impossible because the woman exists merely as light and shadow on paper. As in each of the stories in this chapter, contact with enclosure is disrupted by a gap, a space vacated by the existent. Again and again, the Chaco seems to present the

¹²¹ In broad strokes, while both Heidegger and Levinas place emphasis on time, Heidegger sees Being in relation to death while Levinas relates it to the pre-ontological, ethical encounter with the Other. Using Levinas as a source in the first part of *Against War*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres discards ontology, and largely ignores temporality in favor of fraternity and Levinasian fecundity.

inscrutable anxiety of this vacancy. It can be covered over with the veil of fraternity, but the suture comes undone in the face of sexual difference.¹²²

Consequently, the realism of war literature cuts more deeply than mere representation. Chaco literature passes through territory and enclosure to the very question of ground and the moment of hypostasis, grappling with the articulation between birth and death, hypostasis and the stasis of war—no longer the Greek civil war, but rather stasis emptied of identitarian terms and in all of the meaning it acquires in this project: war, equilibrium, status quo. Returning to Jameson’s “suspicion that war is ultimately unrepresentable” (*Antinomies* 233), we find that there is always already a disjuncture in sovereignty, an atheism in political theology, an imperfection in hypostasis. Unrepresentability at the threshold creates a static time that takes on the form of an arrest at the border. Hypostasis is lost in a seemingly sealed, atemporal state like the picture of politics, but stasis is not the same as stillness. Stasis must have a temporal vector or risk reproducing the alleged timelessness of sovereignty. This timelessness is what literature exposes as a fraud like the fraternity of enemies, the compass in *La laguna H.3*, the rational space of dialogue in the League of Nations, or the simple transit between house and city in Agamben’s *stasis*. Instead, constructions and disarticulations of time, birth and death have to be made to appear, and thus we return to Roa Bastos’s fragmentary portrayal of Paraguayan history in *Hijo de hombre*.

The Fragmented Passage of Time in Hijo de hombre

In many ways, *Hijo de hombre* echoes the Bolivian stories of the 1930s, including the struggle against nature, lack of water, and the overall hopelessness of the troops.¹²³ In the lead up

¹²² The critique of fraternity in Siles Salinas might be extended to Levinas’s much more developed and subtle understanding of the term, which nevertheless relies on this “work of identity.”

to the war, Miguel Vera is a military prisoner charged with subversive activity. Stigmatized for having leaked a plan of rebellion during a night of excessive drinking, Vera is forgiven when, soon after the conversation the prisoners have about the destroyed maps from the Audiencia de Charcas, he is released back into the ranks to fight in the Chaco. Eventually, he and his men get lost somewhere near the ongoing siege at Boquerón. They come upon a clearing that seems to be the meeting point of several well-traveled paths, and so they haphazardly decide it has “cierta importancia operativa” (263).¹²⁴ Like a miniature Chaco, the clearing seems to have a sort of ambiguously defined significance for both sides; the men fumble upon something perceived to be valuable but in the end worthless.

Trapped behind enemy lines with scarce provisions and a demagnetized compass, Vera and his men await the slow “white death” of thirst. They send out scouts who never return, but by connecting two sections of the novel, the reader sees that these scouts must have made it back to camp and given the officers information about the lost detachment’s location. The officers send Cristóbal Jara at the head of a water convoy, considering his task at best a suicide mission. Vera holds out until the very end while the men around him gradually die. He sees Jara’s water truck approach, having driven through hell, tires aflame, Jara’s hands tied to the steering wheel. Vera, weak and tired, thinks the truck is a hallucination and shoots at it “sin poder destruir ese monstruo de mi propio delirio” (272).¹²⁵ Unlike the Bolivian narrative written in the immediacy of war, in which hallucinations destabilize reality, Roa Bastos’s version sees Vera confuse reality with hallucination. Reading his journal entry along with the story of Cristóbal Jara in the next chapter, the reader sees that Vera has killed his savior, sealing his fate as a traitor.

¹²³ *Son of Man*

¹²⁴ “a certain operational importance”

¹²⁵ “without managing to destroy that monster of my own delirium”

For his part, Cristóbal seems unfazed by his suicide mission. He considers the biblical dust in the weight of the earth, covering the bodies of two fallen men with dirt, “pensando quizá que toda la tierra muerta del Chaco no iba a alcanzar a cubrirlos, a tapar esos agujeros del tamaño de un hombre” (304).¹²⁶ Expanding like a map folded out to match the ground, the holes have grown from the small ones eaten into the paper in the archive to the size of men, so expansive that they cannot be filled with all the dirt in the Chaco.¹²⁷

Of all of the pieces missing from the fragmentary story, however, perhaps the most obviously absent in a novel that treats the transition from mythical to modern times is the story of salvation: the moment of tragedy and triumph in which Jara saves Vera.¹²⁸ By the time the water convoy is on its way, Vera is desperate and on the verge of suicide, writing in his journal: “Es preferible acabar de una vez... Pero ¡qué difícil es morir!” (272).¹²⁹ When he remarks on it years later, it is as if his escape from the edge of the abyss remains inexplicable:

Me hallaba sentado a la mesa de un boliche, junto a otros despojos humanos de la guerra, sin ser su semejante. Como en aquel remoto cañadón del Chaco, calcinado por la sed, embrujado por la muerte. Ese cañadón no tenía salida. Y sin embargo estoy aquí. Mis uñas y mis cabellos siguen creciendo, pero un muerto no es capaz de retractarse, de claudicar, de ceder cada vez un poco más... Yo sigo, pues,

¹²⁶ “thinking perhaps that all the dead earth of the Chaco wouldn’t be able to cover them, to fill in those holes the size of a man”

¹²⁷ This passage echoes the broader motif of holes and craters in *Hijo de hombre*, recalling the holes left by an explosion meant to kill revolutionaries. In that episode too, the earth seemed insufficient to cover the hole ripped into the railways, which also served as a mass grave; Roa Bastos writes that the earth never seemed quite level with the edge of the crater.

¹²⁸ In the two main characters, Roa Bastos presents a battle story (Miguel Vera) and a travel story (Cristóbal Jara), invoking the epic poems the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*, as well as suggesting a latter Schmittian concern with the conflict between land and water, now displaced into the desert. There is also an abandonment of other mythical stories such as the return to Eden or the arrival at the Guaraní “tierra sin mal” (“land without evil”).

¹²⁹ “It’s better to just end it once and for all... But how difficult it is to die!”

viviendo, a mi modo, más interesado en lo que he visto que en lo que aún me queda por ver. (361)¹³⁰

There is a literal and temporal ellipse, the latter covered with “Y sin embargo” during which Vera escapes and survives.¹³¹ Curiously, though, a part of him seems to have died there while his body lived on.

Vera survives the ordeal and makes it back to the town, where he becomes a politician. He continues writing, haunted by the past, insistently returning to the shame of his betrayal and trying to justify his survival. He gradually falls back into increasing desperation. By the final pages of his manuscript, he writes: “Alguna salida debe haber en este monstruoso contrasentido del hombre crucificado por el hombre. Porque de lo contrario sería el caso de pensar que la raza humana está maldita para siempre, que esto es el infierno y que no podemos esperar salvación. Debe haber una salida, porque de lo contrario...” (369).¹³² The sentence is left unfinished, and Rosa Monzón’s note, included with the text, reads “«...Así concluye el manuscrito de Miguel Vera...»” (369).¹³³ Vera dies of a gunshot wound to the spine, and his words are subsumed into a legal document testifying to his death. In drawing up the report, there are two versions of what happened: the first, that the gun fired while Vera was cleaning it and the second, that a boy playing with the mayor’s gun accidentally shot him.

In a fragment excised from the edited and reissued version of the novel, Roa Bastos writes in the final note from Rosa Monzón that Miguel Vera, “Era un torturado sin remedio, su

¹³⁰ “I found myself sitting at a table in a bar, next to other human spoils of war, without being like them. Like in that remote ravine in the Chaco, scorched by thirst, bewitched by death. The ravine had no exit. But nevertheless I’m here. My nails and hair keep growing, but a dead person cannot withdraw, give up, relinquish a little bit more and more... So I keep living, in my own way, more interested in what I’ve seen than what I have left to see.”

¹³¹ “And nevertheless”

¹³² “There must be some escape from this monstrous nonsense of man crucified by man. Because otherwise one would be forced to think that the human race is eternally damned and that this is hell and we can no longer expect salvation. There must be some way out, because otherwise...” The ellipses are all in the text and do not indicate omissions.

¹³³ “... Thus concludes Miguel Vera’s manuscript...”

espíritu asqueado por la ferocidad del mundo, pero rechazaba la idea del suicidio. «Un paraguayo no se suicida jamás... —me escribía en una de sus últimas cartas—. A lo sumo se dejará morir, que no es lo mismo...» (402, Editorial el perro y la rana).¹³⁴ And yet, Vera was on the verge of suicide when Jara arrived and again as he scribbled his final words on the freshly inked pages found near his mortally wounded body. History has embittered Vera, whose manuscript, the “espacio estable de los signos,” where the thoughts of the generation that suffered the relentless war, the archive of the “viejo vicio” of linguistic capture, falls short.¹³⁵

The terrestrial translation of a Christian salvation story onto the accursed repetition of “man crucified by man” causes Vera to feel cornered. He is caught between a desire to resolve into time, to write and re-write the past making it palpable and representable, and away from time, obscuring betrayal and salvation to make his pain disappear. He is caught in the failed “incarnation of speech” referenced in the novel’s epigraph from the Guaraní hymn of the dead and resonant, again, with the Christian tradition of the word made flesh.¹³⁶ Once incarnation has taken place, there seems to be no exit. Even suicide, “the final mastery one can have over being” (Levinas 50), appears to offer an, at best, ambiguous solution, and the reference to suicide, even to refute it, is put under erasure in the revised edition.

Against Heidegger’s focus on anxiety and nothingness, Levinas emphasizes the limitless: “The notion of irremissible being, without exit, constitutes the fundamental absurdity of being. Being is evil not because it is finite but because it is without limits. Anxiety, according to Heidegger, is the experience of nothingness. Is it not, on the contrary—if by death one means

¹³⁴ “He was an incurably tortured man, his spirit disgusted by the world’s ferocity, but he rejected the idea of suicide. ‘A Paraguayan never commits suicide...’ he wrote to me in one of his final letters. ‘At most he lets himself die, which isn’t the same thing...’”

¹³⁵ “stable space of signs” / “old vice”

¹³⁶ The epigraph from the Guaranía hymn of the dead, translated into Spanish, reads: “Y haré que vuelva a encarnarse el habla... / Después que se pierda este tiempo y un nuevo tiempo amanezca” (31) (“And I will make speech incarnate once again... / After this time is lost and a new time dawns”).

nothingness—the fact that it is impossible to die?” (Levinas *Time and the Other* 50-51).¹³⁷

Between “¡qué difícil es morir!” and “un paraguayo no se suicida jamás,” Vera’s diaries hesitate between the finite and infinite.¹³⁸ Roa Bastos makes Vera’s testimony a gesture toward this threshold at which philosophical foundations and mythical certainties, shaken and dislodged by bloody wars, rework the relationship to ground, even as the ground sinks away into bottomless pits.¹³⁹

This process is only visible at the edge of the text, in the connections between fragments, versions, and revisions, but eventually, it comes into view, returning us to the question of representation. Just as after the war, there is a treaty, a line, a final enclosure, so in the text, the story arrives at an uncertain stability in portraying the war and its consequences. In the heat of battle, Vera writes in his diary: “Nuestras líneas se han estabilizado de una manera muy precaria. Es más bien un equilibrio inestable” (258).¹⁴⁰ Perhaps the lines are not just the trenches, but also the lines of writing in Vera’s diary, the lines that pass into the novel, and eventually, with the publication of the revised edition, achieve an equilibrium that both includes and suppresses ellipses.

Here, we return to a concept of stasis that is shot through with a temporal vector, that incorporates the ambiguous temporality of hypostasis, undeniably related to the emergence of form, that enclosure which seeks to be complete even if it never is, and death, poised on the edge

¹³⁷ Levinas explains further: “I want to stress ... the consequences of this conception of the *there is*. It consists in promoting a notion of being without nothingness, which leaves no hole and permits no escape. And this impossibility of nothingness deprives suicide, which is the final mastery one can have over being, of its function of mastery” (Levinas 50). Jean-Luc Nancy reinterprets the Levinasian focus on alterity by generalizing and expanding it: “We might also say that [thinking a secret in which thinking becomes secret onto itself] is a matter of the other—this time, considering a Levinasian source—but of the other insofar as he or she outstrips any assignation *as* or *in* an other of some kind, whether with a capital or a lowercase *o*. This means not only the *alter*—the other of two—but also the *alienus*, the *allos*, everyone’s other, and the senseless” (*Dis-enclosure* 6).

¹³⁸ “how difficult it is to die!” / “a Paraguayan never commits suicide”

¹³⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy considers this part of the constitutive dis-enclosure of metaphysics: “In truth, metaphysics deconstructs itself constitutively, and, in deconstructing itself, it dis-encloses [*déclôt*] in itself the presence and certainty of the world founded on reason” (*Dis-enclosure* 7).

¹⁴⁰ “Our lines have stabilized somewhat precariously. It’s more of an unstable equilibrium.”

of anxiety and nothingness. It reveals time as crisis, conflict, and decay, as fragment and multiplicity, as well as impalpable lack. In the final pages of his manuscript, reflecting on the toll of war on its survivors, Vera points out that: “En guaraní, la palabra *arandú* quiere decir *sabiduría*, y significa *sentir-el-tiempo*” (368).¹⁴¹ This feeling the passage of time keeps stasis from becoming frozen, lodged in the past like the human spoils of war.

What is at stake in reading the literary archive of the Chaco War, then, is not only peering into the depth of the well with a grave nod to the inevitable forces of unreason, the insufficiency of realism, or the uncontained void at the heart of representation. Rather, the task of reading the forever-incomplete-because-fragmented Chaco archive is to identify the convergence between literary and political enclosures, to recognize their resemblance through representative functions that lay claim to the region. It is to exploit the breach to undermine its enclosure in the face of sexual and linguistic difference, unrepresented in the liberal diplomatic social field. It is to become the bookworms wrecking the maps in order to deal with the ground, all of this without falling into a facile pacifism that assimilates the violence of enclosure through fraternity.

¹⁴¹ “In Guaraní, the word *arandú* means wisdom and indicates feeling the passage of time.”

Chapter 2. Cannibalism and Vanguard Consumption

“Boquerón es un hueso difícil de digerir. El movimiento peristáltico de nuestras líneas trabaja inútilmente para deglutirlo. Hay algo de magia en ese puñado de invisibles defensores, que resisten con endemoniada obcecación en el reducto boscoso. Es pelear contra fantasmas saturados de una fuerza agónica, mórbidamente siniestra, que ha sobrepasado todos los límites de la consunción, del aniquilamiento, de la desesperación.”¹⁴²

—Augusto Roa Bastos, *Hijo de hombre* (262)

Chaco War narrative shows the shifting border between Bolivia and Paraguay infested with anthropophagous creatures. Mouths from buzzards, mosquitoes, ants, gaping holes in the ground and tree trunks threaten to consume, infect, and swallow the soldiers as they attempt to reset firm national borders. This chapter focuses on these and other mouths that intersect with the history of the long siege at the Battle of Boquerón. *Boquerón*, after all, indicates a large mouth but also the bite-sized anchovy, and the verb *boquear* can mean to gape or gasp, as in the harrowing stories of the “white death” of thirst in the Chaco. Early in the war, Bolivian troops captured the Paraguayan fort in order to advance their position into what is today Paraguayan territory. The Paraguayan army planned a counter-attack in which they laid siege to the fort for

¹⁴² “Boquerón is a hard bone to digest. The peristaltic movement of our lines work on swallowing it to no avail. There’s something magical about this handful of invisible defenders that resist with a bedeviled, blind obstinacy in the wooded stronghold. It’s like fighting against ghosts saturated with a dying strength, morbidly sinister, that’s surpassed all borders of consumption, of annihilation, of desperation.”

weeks in September 1932. The resistance of the vastly outnumbered Bolivians became the stuff of heroic lore. As the siege wore on, the Bolivian soldiers ran short of every possible supply, even killing and eating the mules that had carried weapons and heavy machinery to the remote fort. By the end, the remaining soldiers were taken prisoner, and Bolivia was defeated. Paraguay achieved a decisive, albeit extraordinarily bloody victory, igniting hopes for a swift end to the conflict. The battle was also future Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner's first major battle at the age of 19. In Bolivia, stories of Boquerón echo into the present, perhaps because the besieged, waterless fort resembles Bolivia's territorial siege by its neighbors.

Trapped in the mountains, Bolivia has long been economically dependent on its underground resources, and the Chaco War has been written into this history as part of the peoples' reclamation of these resources. During and after the war, Standard Oil was accused of incitement, and in 1937, the Bolivian government appropriated the company's assets, accusing the firm of tax evasion and undermining the war effort.¹⁴³ The landmark 1937 declaration set a precedent for Mexico's nationalization of oil the following year. In the decades to come, Bolivia alternated between privatizing and nationalizing oil until, in 2006, Evo Morales's government declared the most recent nationalization of oil and gas. The text echoed popular demands from the Bolivian resource wars, notably the 2000 Water War and 2003 Gas War, to get rid of exploitative transnational corporations, and so echoed the anti-corporate sentiment of 1937. Accordingly, Morales named the decree for the "Heroes of the Chaco," who are described as representatives of the collective defense of hydrocarbon resources. The declaration begins: "Considerando: Que en históricas jornadas de lucha el pueblo ha conquistado, a costa de su sangre, el derecho de que nuestra riqueza hidrocarbúrica vuelva a manos de la nación y sea

¹⁴³ Standard Oil of New Jersey's responses to the Bolivian government's accusations appear in the propaganda pamphlets *Bolivia Takes What It Wants* and *Confiscation: A History of the Oil Industry in Bolivia*.

utilizada en beneficio del país” (“Decreto Supremo 28071”).¹⁴⁴ The declaration, while ambitious, resulted in a modest public-private hybrid, rather than full nationalization.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it reinforced the Chaco War as a critical turning point in Bolivia’s consideration of the use and exploitation of its natural resources.

The contemporary legacy of the Chaco War, and especially the Battle of Boquerón, connect entrapment—territorial and military siege—with consumption—the mouth, but also hydrocarbon use and exportation—on both material and symbolic levels. In contemporary cultural production, this combination appears in Wilmer Urrelo Zárate’s 2011 novel *Hablar con los perros*.¹⁴⁶ The novel is a thought experiment that casts the Battle of Boquerón as the origin of contemporary ritual cannibalism in Bolivia. Trapped in the fort for weeks without supplies, one of Urrelo’s characters bludgeons another soldier to death and eats his flesh. In the following decades, he continues to practice ritual cannibalism and recruits a cannibal “family,” which becomes one of La Paz’s many crime organizations in the novel.

The text of *Hablar con los perros* likewise figuratively cannibalizes everything from underground pop culture to canonical literature. In particular, the novel echoes Brazilian author Oswald de Andrade’s famous avant-garde “Manifiesto antropófago” of 1928.¹⁴⁷ Transferring the innovative impetus of the European aesthetic avant-garde to the Americas, Andrade famously

¹⁴⁴ “In consideration: That in previous periods of combat the people have obtained, with their bloodshed, the right for our hydrocarbon wealth to return to the hands of the nation and be used to benefit the country.”

¹⁴⁵ In *From Rebellion to Reform: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales*, Jeffery Webber is even more emphatic in his condemnation of the decree: “Three months into the new MAS [*Movimiento al Socialismo*, Movement for Socialism] government Morales announced the nationalization of hydrocarbons through presidential decree 28071. However, it quickly became apparent that ‘nationalization’ amounted to little more than rhetorical flourish and populist theater” (80). He goes on to say that, after an initial period of legal and practical confusion, the situation became clear: “Under the new contracts and export agreements there has been an undeniable increase in state revenues, which brings to an end the unadulterated giveaways of the Sánchez de Lozada years. It is also clear, however, that the new contracts do not amount to a nationalization of the industry. They reinforce the primary-export model of development and militate against the development of a serious industrialization policy and reconstitution of YPFB [the state-owned oil and gas company]” (82).

¹⁴⁶ *Talking to Dogs*

¹⁴⁷ “Cannibal Manifiesto”

uses American symbols and customs, especially the much-mythologized indigenous cannibal, to incorporate, digest, and sublimate European literature and history. This consumption occurs thanks to the cannibal's entrapment of his victims, and it binds consumption with a declaration on how past and future, Europe and the Americas influence each other.

In reworking cannibalism, the vanguard creates a bridge between military and artistic vocabularies; an early skirmish between Bolivia and Paraguay at a fort aptly named Vanguardia took place in 1928, the same year Oswald published his manifesto.¹⁴⁸ It was one of the early, presciently named incidents that would lead to war, along with others that marked the methodical Bolivian occupation of the Chaco amidst tentative but growing Paraguayan resistance (Querejazu Calvo 25-29). In Paraguay, conventional wisdom goes, the War of the Triple Alliance dealt the country a decisive blow so that it closed in upon itself. In the military, this manifested as a hesitancy to resist Bolivian occupation of the Chaco; in art, it manifested as a lack of participation in region-wide aesthetic vanguards. Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá describes the phenomenon, echoing the words of Josefina Plá, as part of a bellicose history that “explica no sólo que «la historia devorara la literatura», sino que el país se pusiera como de espaldas a lo porvenir y viviera un tiempo decapitado, sin esa dimensión esencial de la existencia humana que es el futuro” (243).¹⁴⁹ These very different instances of artistic and military vanguards suggest an emergent link between culture and the nation just before and after the Chaco War, linked to the

¹⁴⁸ Incidentally, the skirmish took place during the presidency of Hernando Siles, father of Jorge Siles Salinas. The clash at Vanguardia is generally considered indicative of early Bolivian aggression, but his son remembers him as the president who knew how to avoid war.

¹⁴⁹ “explains not only that ‘history devours literature,’ but also that the country turned its back to the future, living a decapitated time without that essential aspect of human existence that is the future” / Rodríguez Alcalá explains further that, in his view, the trauma of war forced Paraguay into the past: “El Paraguay, entonces, en vez de inventarse un plan de vida para el mañana y de ponerse al día en lo atinente a las letras y las artes, regresaba espiritualmente en el tiempo para asistir, imaginativamente, a sus orígenes” (“Thus Paraguay, instead of inventing a life plan for tomorrow and keeping up to date in matters of arts and letters, went back in time spiritually to attend, imaginatively, to its origins”) (243). He goes on to say that the generation around the 1930s “no podía vacar al ocio creador y consagrarse a experimentos literarios” (“could not take leave to dedicate itself to creative leisure or devote itself to literary experiments”) (243).

desire to break free of entrapment—the closure of the frontier—and the consumption of history by literature and literature by history.

The Chaco War knots together these conflicting, modernizing strands: siege and entrapment; consumption and incorporation; the artistic, military, and political vanguards. In this chapter, I analyze these groups as they are salvaged and reshaped in the 21st century legacy of the war. The chapter shows how two contemporary reinterpretations of the war discredit the traditional story of a heroic fight for progress. Inflected through the mouth as a site of consumption and speech, enclosure and narrativity, Urrelo's *Hablar con los perros* along with director Paz Encina's film *La hamaca paraguaya* (2006) force us to confront the war's more sinister legacies.¹⁵⁰ If in realist, contemporaneous accounts of the war, the attempt to enclose the land lay incomplete over holes and gaps that interrupt identity and fraternity, this chapter examines what happens when spatial and embodied enclosures seems so complete as to be besieged, with forms so static that they consume themselves.

The Consumption of Difference

Re-writing the history of the Chaco War through cannibalism invokes the conflict between civilization and barbarism that the earliest Chaco generation authors confronted, as well as theological, philosophical, and aesthetic traditions developed over the course of centuries. Arguments about cannibalism formed part of Christian theology before the advent of natural law. Theologians considered the relationship between body and soul, asking questions such as: during the promised resurrection of the flesh, whose body will God resurrect if one person eats another? And what will happen if this person dies and his/her body is in turn consumed by worms and beetles (Avramescu 41-69)? Once God creates one of his creatures, especially a human with a

¹⁵⁰ *The Paraguayan Hammock*

soul, its identity must remain constant. The gradual physical dispersion of flesh in other flesh makes this impossible. The consumption of flesh, whether by a person or animal, threatens the integrity of the border set at the skin.

Later, as a tool of European political philosophy, cannibalism helped justify the colonial edifice as an imposition of civilization (cf. Castro-Klarén, Avramescu). The creation of the cannibalistic other through European taboo helped explorers and conquistadors establish cultural difference in the Americas. An important example in arguments about the insular, primal community, cannibals, whether real or imagined, became the perfect testing ground for natural law, either to prove a point about the innocence of “natural man” or to make an argument about indigenous monstrosity.¹⁵¹ Although at odds with each other, both served to justify religious conversion and political domination, especially through doctrines of just war. At the edges of European theological and political thought on cannibalism, it becomes clear that the fear of cannibals stems from their destabilization of the distinction between self and other. The cannibal’s perversion is not his or her otherness; rather, s/he is marked as “other” because s/he threatens to destabilize identity.

Centuries after the natural law debates, the “Manifesto antropófago” (1928) radically reworked this tradition into an aesthetic movement that valorized rather than scorned cannibalism. In the manifesto, Andrade, a central figure of Brazilian modernism, makes a typically vanguardist gesture, suggesting that cannibalism might be the “Única lei do mundo. Expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os coletivismos. De todas as religiões. De todos

¹⁵¹ For the former case, see Michel de Montaigne’s famous essay “Of Cannibals” and other portrayals of “the noble savage.” For the latter, see travelogues, the European colonizer, defeated in battle, would be fattened up then killed in a meal of ritual sacrifice; see especially Hans Staden’s account. The frequent mention of cannibalism in colonial mishaps and disappearances, alongside questions of whether the explorers could legitimately, i.e. legally and ethically, kill and eat a companion (cf. Avramescu), also converges with the European tradition of just war.

os tratados de paz.”¹⁵² Peace appears when the cannibal takes the nutrients from the other body to nourish his or her own, creating a violent link between individualism and collectivism. This process is all consuming, as seen in the repetition of the word “all.” It functions through a dialectic in which the cannibal—thesis—consumes the enemy—antithesis—strengthening the body—synthesis.

If the dialectic is important to Andrade’s cannibalism, so too is the question of the future, as in *vanguardias* more generally. For instance, the 1909 Italian Futurist Manifesto threatened to “destroy museums, libraries [and] academies of every kind” and “glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism.” It exalted speed without history and violence without object. In comparison, Oswald’s manifesto seems mild, calling for a reconfiguration of history that, while violent, assimilates the historical object. In this sense, cannibalism is past- rather than future-oriented. The manifesto remedies the problems of the global periphery by announcing that from now on, art will cure American exclusion through incorporation; modern art will be subsumed to its American instances. The future of *antropofagia* as an aesthetic idea is more *antropofagia*, a violent marriage of the past with the future in consumption.¹⁵³

In the manifesto, this combination of past and future holds the possibility of artistic creation. Oswald works through this temporal union as another conflict: “A luta entre o que se chamaria Incruido e a Criatura - ilustrada pela contradição permanente do homem e o seu Tabu. O amor cotidiano e o modusvivendi capitalista. Antropofagia. Absorção do inimigo sacro. Para transformá-lo em totem.”¹⁵⁴ There is a contradiction between uncreated and creation, negated in

¹⁵² “The world’s single law. Disguised expression of all individualism, of all collectivism. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties. / All English translations of the “Manifesto antropófago” are by Leslie Bary.

¹⁵³ Cannibalism or anthropophagy are used interchangeably here, although cannibalism indicates humans eating human flesh and anthropophagy indicates animals of any species eating human flesh.

¹⁵⁴ “The struggle between what we might call the Uncreated and the Creation—illustrated by the permanent contradiction between Man and his Taboo. Everyday love and the capitalist way of life. Cannibalism. Absorption of

the taboo or exalted in the totem. The possibility that the creature might come into existence emerges from the circumstances of the present, specifically its capitalist *modus vivendi*. As with peace treaties, these laws made of cannibalism express their tension in the language of statecraft, where *modus vivendi* refers to an informal treaty or armistice, a way to continue living with the enemy, of assimilating enmity without outright hostility.

This *modus vivendi* in the cannibal dialectic is also geographically inflected. Taking the canonical travelogues of Europeans that claimed to witness Tupi cannibalism, Andrade makes indigenous American elements consume classical European culture, especially in the most quoted line, in which the Tupi “cannibalize” Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “Tupi, or not tupi, that is the question.”¹⁵⁵ The historical and textual cannibalism in this line combine to destabilize European identity formations as well as the European literary canon, staging the complexity of the developing relationship between Europe and America from the colonial period to the early 20th century. Depending on how the consumption of difference takes place, the line can be read in three ways. In the first, American cannibalism reverses the Eurocentric view of culture and history. The American supersedes the European, and civilization and barbarism become inextricably melded. Anthropophagy issues a counter-hegemonic corrective to history. In the second, the manifesto might be an argument for an inclusionary, syncretic nationalism. Under this reading, the “cannibal” would be the Brazilian state, assimilating ethnic difference into a heterogeneous, hybrid melting pot. From this nationalist perspective, the state is capable of a violent, yet witty, assimilation that operates according to logics of completion and wholeness. Finally, in the third, Oswald’s manifesto might be read as a failed attempt at transvaluation in

the sacred enemy. To transform him into totem.” Note that the tree’s face in *La laguna H.3* also resembles a type of totem.

¹⁵⁵ In English in the original. This famous line in which Hamlet contemplates suicide is the same that Levinas discusses when talking about the absurdity of life without exit, briefly discussed at the end of the previous chapter.

which the Tupi, representatives of subjugated subaltern knowledges, disrupt the avant-garde proposal; ironically, they cannot be assimilated into the project that emerges from their ritual cannibalism (cf. Castro-Klarén). This view represents radical incompleteness.¹⁵⁶

Reading identity and difference through cannibalism has drastic consequences, not only for the way we interpret cultural production but also how cultural products function with and against the state and capitalism. Since Oswald's manifesto appeared, the capitalist *modus vivendi* has morphed, as have enmity and war. With the end of the Cold War and the rise of finance capital, Francis Fukuyama, drawing on Alexandre Kojève's seminars on Hegel, famously declared history over.¹⁵⁷ The capitalist *modus vivendi* allegedly settled into a history without enemy or future, even as increasingly decentralized, technologically advanced resource wars like the Chaco War proliferate. The rest of this chapter offers variations on the three themes presented in the "Cannibal Manifesto" as a starting point to examine how enmity, synthesis, and fetishism appear when looking at the war in retrospect, and whether it is possible to recover a sense of the future under contemporary conditions of siege.

Cannibalism and Antithesis: On the Repetition and Rotting of History

Hablar con los perros sets up Boquerón as an inflection point in the political and economic context of consumption. The novel takes a generally critical view of contemporary Bolivian society, especially in La Paz, following another of the texts from the literary canon that

¹⁵⁶ Schematically, the first represents a type of counter-hegemony with priority given to the antithesis, the second hybrid nationalism with priority given to the synthesis, and the third a type of trace or fetish that drops out of the dialectic altogether. The chapter follows a parallel arc with a conclusion on the exhaustion of the vanguard model through differential and asynchronous temporalities.

¹⁵⁷ Catherine Malabou, whose work on futurity informs the last part of this chapter, writes against Kojève. Malabou's work will be used to recover a concept of futurity below, drawing on theorizations of that concept from Derrida and Nancy. See also Jean-Paul Martinon's *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*.

it can be seen “cannibalizing:” Cervantes’s *El coloquio de los perros* (1613).¹⁵⁸ The novel has a critical focus on the stories passed from generation to generation, including the dark secret of ritual cannibalism that Urrelo describes emerging from the siege of Boquerón. It combines five narrative threads with stories from 1932 to 2007. The stories come together around protagonist Alicia Soriano’s investigation of the past after her grandmother’s funeral. Together with her band-mate Perro Loco, the pair navigates the city of La Paz following what turns out to be an elaborate scheme designed to bring them closer and closer to Papá, patriarch of the cannibals. The closer they get, the more information they discover about the hidden stories of the past.

As it follows the broad arc of a detective novel, *Hablar con los perros* combines stories of war, kidnapping, sex trafficking, rape, murder, and corruption, alongside more banal stories of family quarrels, unrequited love, teenage malaise, and metal bands forming and splitting up. The novel slips between first, second, and third person voices, talking to living, dead, famous, and fictional figures, as the reader begins to see the convergence of its characters. In Urrelo’s contemporary version of the Chaco War novel, the anxiety of nothingness becomes a more banal adolescent angst, full of fretting about friends, lovers, and suffocating families, but also strange details like Alicia’s job as a taxidermist. Religion enters through the back door of Satanism, and the body is the site of immense violence but also a physical, even metaphysical freedom. A street war fueled by violent criminals and corrupt police fills Urrelo’s ironically named version of La Paz, literally meaning peace.

The relationship between war and peace comes into view at the heart of the novel. Even 75 years after the siege, Urrelo explains, peace has not arrived. Papá describes the supposed peace as silence, one of the war’s worst and most lasting consequences:

¹⁵⁸ *The Dialogue of the Dogs*

...era la guerra. la guerra nunca termina cuando se firma la paz. no termina tampoco con nuestro alimento. continúa aquí. como esas enfermedades que consumen a los viejos. en los corazones de los excombatientes. vuelven a sus casas y la guerra que cargan en sus cuerpos se dispersa. ¡plaf! contagia como una enfermedad a quienes viven ahí. ataca a las esposas. las sacrifica. mata a los hijos. a las hijas. la bala paraguaya ya no es la que mata. ya no es la fiebre. ya no es el paludismo. ya no es el calor del chaco. ya no es el hambre. ya no es la sed. ahora lo que mata es el propio excombatiente y lo hace en su propio hogar. su fuerza es el odio. ahí matan esposas. crimen. era el odio. era el miedo. era la guerra que seguía viva. y aunque se nieguen a creerlo pervive hasta nuestros días. los jóvenes de 1935 ahora ancianos como yo. o casi muertos. o muertos. ahora la guerra mata a los nietos, a los que no saben o no quieren saber del sufrimiento de sus abuelas. esa historia está cerrada. muerta. ahora la guerra es la hipocresía, señorita, y esa mata peor todavía. (332-333)¹⁵⁹

The war's violence has returned to the city, its legacy engrained in Bolivian society where it disproportionately affects veterans' families. Hatred and trauma-induced aphasia in subsequent generations form central thematic axes throughout the novel. Papá builds his cannibal group around those he hates and wants to kill; Alicia becomes mute after her parents die in a car crash. The enemy has become internal, hypocritical, the silencing and stifling of the more sinister

¹⁵⁹ "...it was the war. the war never ends when the treaty is signed. and it doesn't end with our food either. it keeps going here. like the illnesses that eat away at old people. in the hearts of the veterans. they return home and the war they carry within them spreads. plaf! it infects everyone that lives there. it attacks the wives. sacrifices them. kills the sons. the daughters. the paraguayan bullet doesn't kill anymore. not fever. not malaria. not the heat of the chaco. not hunger. not thirst. what kills now is the veteran himself, and he does it in his own home. his strength is hate. they kill wives. crime. it was hate. it was fear. it was the war still living in them. and even though they deny it, it's still alive to this day. the boys of 1935 now old like me. or nearly dead. or dead. now the war kills the grandchildren. those who don't know or don't care to know about their grandmothers' suffering. that story is closed. dead. now the war is hypocrisy, miss, and that's even more deadly."

aspects of the war to replace them with stories of heroism, but as Papá says: “¿por qué a los que fuimos a la guerra nos dicen héroes si sólo matamos gente?” (332).¹⁶⁰

Instead of making Boquerón represent bravery or honor, *Hablar con los perros* makes Boquerón stand in for contemporary Bolivia with no maritime or fluvial exit, no hope, and no narrative except a hollow and patently false story of heroism. Urrelo’s turn stands in direct opposition to Chaco generation authors who exposed the horrors of war in chronicles and fiction during the 1930s. Their chronicles and fiction were later incorporated into the political movements that led to oil nationalization and, eventually, the Revolution of 1952, for instance in Augusto Céspedes’s case. Chaco narrative made indigenous exploitation visible to the cultured elite in fictional and non-fictional representations, and society’s excluded elements became key in transforming political consciousness. For instance, another classic Chaco novel, Óscar Cerruto’s *Aluvión de fuego* (1935), follows a young bourgeois army deserter as he awakens to political and social consciousness in the tin mines.¹⁶¹ In the aftermath of an accident, the novel evokes a “grito [que] pareció subir del fondo mismo del cerro” (230).¹⁶² This unidentified voice speaks for the excluded miners, many indigenous, whose voices began to be heard in the wake of the war. With this shriek, Cerruto’s novel makes the connection between the war and coming revolution explicit. The cry is inarticulate and muffled, but indicates the presence of the uncounted actors upon whose lives extraction is founded. Subsequent political changes forced the widening circle of the state to consider these silenced voices, and so the Chaco War became aligned with a narrative of progress through social transformation, inclusion, and revolution.

Urrelo’s novel takes a different approach. The external war has not morphed into an uprising or revolution, following the logical progression anticipated by Cerruto’s strain of

¹⁶⁰ “Why do they call those of us that went to war heroes if all we did was kill people?”

¹⁶¹ *Barrage of Fire*

¹⁶² “shriek that seemed to rise from the very depths of the mountain”

Marxist narrative. Rather, the war has become an undeclared civil war, as if a besieged Bolivia turned inward, not to take in a widening swath of citizens, but rather to endure the silenced consequences of the internal conflicts that the Chaco War both responded to and generated. In Loraux's study of ancient Athens, *stasis* required amnesia as the foundation for democracy, but in Urrelo's novel there is not necessarily amnesiac silence. Memory is key but suffers from silencing and the inability to narrate.¹⁶³ By the third generation after the war, Urrelo shows that the violence has faded into the background. Alicia and Perro Loco comment on how little they learned about Bolivian history in school because they were more interested in the histories of their favorite bands (63). Gradually realizing that the historical episode is critical to the mystery Alicia is trying to solve, Perro Loco finally looks up the Chaco War and the Battle of Boquerón (151-152). Meanwhile, the characters travel La Paz's streets, some named for major battles, in their search to understand how the war affects the present. The war has become part of the city's peace, marked with reminders of war.

As Alicia and Perro Loco begin to find out more, and especially when Papá recounts his life before and after the Battle of Boquerón, the novel reveals the inward turn of the monstrosity encountered during the siege. Urrelo substitutes a positive progression—inclusion associated with 1930s Chaco narrative—for a negative one—decadence in late capitalism. In the words of Alicia's grandfather: "Lo que pasa es que en este país todo empeora con el tiempo" (79).¹⁶⁴ Even in music, everything revolves around decay; Alicia's ex-boyfriend's band is called Sifilis.¹⁶⁵ Alicia and Perro Loco's metal band, Aguas Putrefactas no longer reclaims an exit to the sea but rather celebrates the stench of stagnation.¹⁶⁶ In Urrelo's version of the war's legacy in the

¹⁶³ See a more detailed development of aphasia below in the section "Cannibalism and Metaphysics"

¹⁶⁴ "What happens in this country is that everything gets worse over time."

¹⁶⁵ Syphilis

¹⁶⁶ Putrefied Waters

present, there is a celebration of physical and moral decay—a spectacular embrace of the imagery of death and disease.

As Papá says, it is no longer bullets and malaria that kill. Instead, it is the spirit of hypocrisy, embedded in abuse and exploitation that passes unremarked, silenced in popular culture. If in Kalimtzis’s interpretation, *stasis* indicated an illness in the ancient Greek polity, seven decades after the war in Bolivia, this illness is less literal and more figurative and spectacular. In the decadent, post-modern La Paz, the spirit of hypocrisy and celebration of death are de-narrativized, like memes taken out of context and shuffled into popular culture, albeit in one of its underground branches. Perro Loco obsessively cites Mexican grindcore band Brujería, whose lead singer Juan Brujo and emblematic decapitated head Coco Loco the character Perro Loco addresses in the second person, as if they were demi-gods listening to his story.¹⁶⁷ A cultural pull toward violence in Brujería’s album *Matando güeros* (1993), whose tracks are about killing U.S. Americans, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, narcos, and Satanism, reveals the sinister persistence of a transnational enemy: the *güero* for Brujería or a version of the Yankee capitalist in the post-Chaco years.¹⁶⁸

For Urrelo, this spectacular enemy has become part of culture. Embedded in society, the enemy—the antithesis—has become ubiquitous but also dispersed. Perro Loco sees the imagery of death and decay in his own life. He talks to the bodyless head, for instance, and uses the words “gore” and “slime” along with names of various venereal diseases as part of a metal lexicon.¹⁶⁹ All of these names are non-specific and transitive; the narco-Satanist-metalheads substitute one term for another because the important part is the striking display of physical decay and violence.

¹⁶⁷ Brujería literally means witchcraft. Brujo is a sorcerer or male witch. Coco Loco means crazy coconut.

¹⁶⁸ The band and album are real, not fictional. The album title means roughly “Killing Whiteys.”

¹⁶⁹ For more on the metal lexicon, see Aspasia Stephanou’s “Black Metal and the Mouth: *Always Serving You as a Meal*, or, Infected Orality, Pestilential Wounds, and Scars.”

It is the concrete nature of violence that makes it frightening, but in the proliferation of de-narrativized decadence, causality slips away. When this spectacular death is taken out of context, it seems flat and infinitely re-appropriable, like in Perro Loco's version of events, in which almost everything relates back to Brujería. Ringing with Perro Loco's metal soundtrack in his first person narrative, the enemy—in this case the cannibal—has become less menacing.¹⁷⁰ In the end, this is where Perro Loco makes a critical mistake; Alicia and Papá kill and eat him. This decadence has no purpose. It represents the violence of an absolute and unintelligible present, here and now.

If the enemy has been assimilated and made part of a cultural spectacle, is s/he still an enemy? In Schmitt's *Concept of the Political*—incidentally originally published in 1927, just a year before the “Cannibal Manifesto,” with significant revisions in 1932 with the ascendance of Nazism—an enemy must exist as a condition of the political. There is no need to account for temporality in Schmitt's axiomatic since temporality begins from the decision. Schmitt specifies that the possibility of killing the enemy must exist as in war; one must contemplate “the existential negation of the enemy” (*Concept 33*). Schmitt strips the political of the possibility of a future reconciliation, at least not without another enemy. In Urrelo's novel, Papá's enemies are the rich, more specifically La Paz's millionaires. By the end of the novel, Papá decides that the group's cannibalism will transform from the opportunistic murder and consumption of indigents to a calculated, class-based cannibalism, killing and eating a wealthy banker. By the 21st century, the capitalist enemy has likewise become internal and thus consumable: Bolivians working within the market logic that spawned the war's need for resources and transportation are consumed by the cannibals that the war created.

¹⁷⁰ One of the novel's five sections is entitled “Biografía musical o algunos pasajes en la vida del Perro Loco” (“Musical Biography or a Few Passages in the Life of Perro Loco”).

The illness that has returned to La Paz with the veterans thus bears a tense relationship to the Marxist novels of the late 1930s. On the one hand, Urrelo's novel follows in their footsteps. Papá's litany of laments about his life include his mother abandoning him as a child in the market, his abuse by wealthy bosses, and the death of his dog Rayo, his only companion throughout his miserable life. His former bosses account for much of his rancor toward the rich. The class distinctions that became visible in the wake of war form the basis of targeted violence toward a structural enemy. In the case of the banker, this enemy is a minion of the capitalist *modus vivendi* that the "Cannibal Manifesto" describes. On the other hand, on his deathbed Papá makes plans to bring Alicia closer to the group, where she will become their next leader as they begin making enmity toward the rich the basis of their cannibalism. This is Papá's legacy; he bequeaths a long-awaited revenge to the next generation. Yet because the vengeance is not specific but instead aims at a structural target, it is doomed to remain forever unsatisfied. In this respect, Papá's cannibalism fits with ritual cannibalism as "social *poiesis* ... the ritual production of collective temporality (the interminable cycle of vengeance)" (Viveiros de Castro 149).¹⁷¹ Cannibalism represents the nagging antagonism of history, caught between a painful past and its vengeful repetition. Together, incorporation of class struggle into the group makes its history an unending cycle, a history without exit just as Boquerón was a fort without exit.

After incorporation, the enemy lingers. Papá's story goes back time and again to the pains he has endured, mimicking Berganza's tale of woe in *El coloquio de los perros* and so repeating, with difference, the Cervantine dialogue.¹⁷² Anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who theorizes ritual cannibalism in the Brazilian Amazon, describes incorporating the enemy in

¹⁷¹ In interviews and press releases about the novel, Urrelo refers to vengeance above justice, specifically in the case of eating the wealthy. See Marcelo Paz Soldan (*Ecdótica*) and Marcela Ossio Lazcano (*La Prensa*).

¹⁷² Perro Loco's section might also be similar to Berganza's story, though it is more based on stream of consciousness than dialogue.

Cannibal Metaphysics, an account of the cannibal's becoming-other in the contemporary Brazilian indigenous Araweté group: "[I]f it is always necessary to imagine an enemy—to construct the other as such—the objective is to *really* eat it... in order to construct the Self as other" (149, emphasis and ellipsis original).¹⁷³ In Papá's case, this other pays reparations for the damage done to him. In the next section, I argue that the erasure of difference that Viveiros de Castro signals also covers up an erasure of time, tending toward a metaphysical present. In the fusion of the capitalist *modus vivendi* with ritual, the enemy becomes difficult to see as a *constructed* alterity from the past and so it is difficult to move beyond the "collective temporality ... of vengeance," or to build a future beyond repetition of this past. In repetition, the antithesis cannot be incorporated into a progression, as in Hegelian dialectics, nor can it become part of a regression, as in the metal focus on rot and decay. The antithesis is merely an instance of the enemy at a moment in time. But cannibalism also has meanings that exceed a specific victim or enemy, recalling rituals and community symbolism that characterize Brazilian Amazonian cannibalism according to Viveiros de Castro. In Urrelo's novel, these rituals approximate a religion that challenges the Christian tradition of metaphysical flesh associated with speech, especially in the word of God, and silence.

Cannibalism and Metaphysics: Corpus and Speech

Ritual cannibalism is not about eating for sustenance, but instead about using meals to establish and cement social and divine relationships. Under a nationalist lens, Oswald's famous

¹⁷³ Viveiros de Castro argues that the "substance" does not matter, at least in Tupi-group cannibalism. He explains Araweté cannibalism as both real and symbolic: "what was really eaten in this enemy? The answer could not be his matter or substance, since this was a ritual form of cannibalism where the consumption of (a quantity of) the victim's flesh was effectively insignificant; the extant sources, moreover, only rarely offer testimony that a physical or metaphysical virtue was attributed to the victim's body" (142). While this metaphysical aspect may be lacking in the Araweté or Tupi-group cannibalism more generally, it is present in Urrelo's novel.

manifesto might be read as a version of a Brazilian melting pot, concerned with how cannibalism occurs within the “friend” group composed of European and indigenous elements. However, cannibalism also carries divine connections. For example, in Catholic transubstantiation, Christ becomes the bread and wine that the faithful consume. The idea of cannibalism in the Mass was declared heresy, but the symbolism of this process still represents communion between human and divine. In the long history of colonial travelogues in the indigenous Tupi area of contemporary Brazil, cannibalism is about a relationship with alterity. Especially in Viveiros de Castro’s account, cannibalism is about becoming one with the enemy. In *Hablar con los perros*, Papá combines the figures of friend and enemy, human and divine as part of the modern story of cannibalism, which eventually becomes unspeakable. Papá’s version of Catholic and indigenous traditions shows how cannibalism disturbs the war’s friend-enemy difference as the enemy gradually becomes more difficult to identify.

Papá’s section of the novel records his half of a lengthy conversation with Alicia. They tell each other about important events in their lives, and Papá explains how he was waiting in the wings as Alicia grew up. He wanted her to go through enough heartache and sadness to become mature enough to lead the group. His section mimics his speech, but is also typographically marked by a lack of capitalization. In the section, Papá describes his first cannibal meal, explaining that, toward the end of the siege at Boquerón, he was extremely hungry. Another soldier came up to him begging for food, which Papá found infuriating and, enraged, Papá bludgeoned the other man to near-death with a rock in the graveyard. Then he cut out pieces of his body, still alive, kicking and screaming. Papá’s first meal came out of hunger, but more importantly out of anger. Less about food and more about power, Papá might have overcome his temporary madness if human flesh had not become codified and correlated with meaning:

unadulterated happiness. Papá explains that he had been miserable and had enlisted in the army to face what he saw as almost certain death, a half-hearted attempt at suicide. But from his first bite, he recovers the will to live. He discovers pure happiness in that first meal, as he explains to Alicia, referred to throughout the section as *señorita*: “...ahí, en ese momento, abriéndose las puertas que siempre estaban cerradas ante nosotros. la paz invadiendo su corazón. tanto amar para qué. tanto sufrir por amar para qué. y de pronto se abre la puerta. y detrás de ella está la felicidad. ... la nueva vida. 28 de septiembre de 1932, señorita. el nacimiento de todo” (249).¹⁷⁴ The consumption of his comrade—the enemy within—strengthens him and causes him to fully recover his will to live. It represents freedom and endless possibilities. He experiences re-birth, baptizing himself Papá and declaring Ananías Paredes dead at Boquerón. Re-birth then becomes a motif throughout the novel.

Two aspects central to Papá’s account of cannibalism, fatherhood and re-birth, also draw on cannibalism’s metaphysical pretensions. While cannibalism might be interpreted as nationalist—within lies the friend, outside the enemy, in *Hablar con los perros*, cannibalism creates a family that bridges a more complex gap between the individual and the collective. The cannibals in Papá’s “family” have returned from the front lines to a society that, while at peace, feels as besieged as Boquerón: “los que llegaban siempre personas solas. solitarias. arruinadas por la vida. gente con un vacío que no sabían cómo llenar y la carne los ayudaba, los rescataba, los sacaba de ese pozo” (379).¹⁷⁵ The war has shattered the interpersonal relationships that these people had, and so Papá decides to include them in his growing family. With a wink toward

¹⁷⁴ “...there, in that moment, the doors that were always closed to us opening up forever. peace overwhelming the heart. so much love for what. so much suffering for love for what. and suddenly the door opens. and behind it is happiness. ... new life. september 28, 1932, miss. the birth of everything”

¹⁷⁵ “the ones that came were always lonely. solitary people. ruined for life. people with an emptiness they didn’t know how to fill and the meat helped them, rescued them, pulled them out of that well”

Céspedes's famous story, cannibalism begins to fill the space left by the anxiety and desperation in the wake of the war.

By the time Alicia arrives, Papá has been practicing cannibalism for 75 years. Through practice and observation, he can describe more fully the mechanism through which cannibalism creates an almost addictive, metaphysical ecstasy, bringing strength, words, and freedom:

¿qué cosa da la carne, señorita? ¿qué le da a uno que le abre nuevos caminos? ¿qué cosa contiene que todos renacemos? ¿por qué si antes éramos miedosos y estúpidos después somos la otra cara de eso?

después de tragar aparecen las palabras. las mismas que le dije a usted antes que pase lo de su amigo perro loco. iguales. sin modificación. como nunca antes las palabras despertando en mí como después de un sueño. cuál estúpido. cuál ignorante. ahí explotando las palabras sabias. toda mi soledad. todo mi sufrimiento. todo ese amor mentiroso por la señorita eugenia huyendo. evaporándose. yéndose de mi cuerpo. entonces era eso. entonces pensando todos estos años había estado esperando la carne. (249)¹⁷⁶

In the enlightenment and re-birth that comes from eating flesh, cannibalism connects with the word, a spoken, repeated scripture, the same after the death of the petulant soldier at Boquerón as at the death of Perro Loco. In the phrase “después de tragar, aparecen las palabras,” Papá

¹⁷⁶ “what does flesh have to offer, miss? what does it give us that opens up new paths? what's in it that revives us all? why, if before we were timid and ignorant, afterwards we're the opposite of that?

“after swallowing the words appear. the same ones I said to you before what happened with your friend perro loco. exactly the same. without a single change. like never before words awaken in me like after a dream. whatever the fool. whomever the moron. there the wise words explode. all my loneliness. all my suffering. all of that false love for miss eugenia vanishing. evaporating. leaving my body. that was it. thinking all these years I'd been waiting for flesh.”

exposes his union with some sort of muse, a divine power that transforms consumption into narrative production through the mouth.¹⁷⁷

As Papá initiates Alicia into these secrets with their first victim, she describes the overwhelming love she feels in a similar moment of ecstasy: “Papá abre la boca de nuevo y ahí la calidez, el infinito amor desinteresado, masque, señorita: ahí, el único, y el auténtico amor que valía la pena en este mundo y yo lo estaba sintiendo en vivo, Papá” (627).¹⁷⁸ As Alicia eats Perro Loco, who has spent most of the novel pining after her pathetically, she finds this pure love. This love resembles what Oswald describes decades before as an authentic “antropofagia carnal”—a high, carnal *antropofagia* that eludes Freud’s distinction between totem and taboo:

Porém, só as puras elites conseguiram realizar a antropofagia carnal, que traz em si o mais alto sentido da vida e evita todos os males identificados por Freud, males catequistas. O que se dá não é uma sublimação do instinto sexual. É a escala termométrica do instinto antropofágico. De carnal, ele se torna eletivo e cria a amizade. Afetivo, o amor. Especulativo, a ciência. Desvia-se e transfere-se. Chegamos ao aviltamento. A baixa antropofagia aglomerada nos pecados de catecismo — a inveja, a usura, a calúnia, o assassinato. Peste dos chamados povos cultos e cristianizados, é contra ela que estamos agindo. Antropófagos.¹⁷⁹

The difference between high and low cannibalistic instincts is the difference between Alicia and Perro Loco. The latter’s desire for Alicia remains frustrated, and his would-be lover betrays him.

¹⁷⁷ “after swallowing, the words appear” / Following Derrida’s *écriture*, I’m considering writing and speech to form part of the same process here and below.

¹⁷⁸ “Papá opens his mouth again and there’s the warmth, his infinite, unselfish love, chew, miss: there, the only and the authentic love that was worth anything in this world and I was feeling it in the flesh, Papá”

¹⁷⁹ “Yet only the pure elites managed to realize carnal anthropophagy, which brings the highest sense of life, and avoids all the evils identified by Freud, catechist evils. What happens is not a sublimation of the sexual instinct. It is the thermometric scale of the anthropophagic instinct. From carnal, it becomes elective and creates friendship. Affectionate, love. Speculative, science. It deviates and transfers itself. We reach vilification. Low anthropophagy agglomerated in the sins of the catechism—envy, usury, calumny, murder. Plague of the so-called cultured and christianized peoples, it is against it that we are acting. Anthropophagy.”

She instead chooses this family, united around the “love” of high, carnal anthropophagy, which stands for values that come from the metal subculture, secularism, and Satanism, rather than the high culture and Christianity that Oswald describes in the European tradition.

While on the one hand, this high anthropophagy seems to be an autochthonous American practice in both the *vanguardia* and Urrelo, it engages the Christian tradition through the connection between word and flesh. As Derrida describes the history of philosophy:

The figures of incorporation in hermeneutics and speculative philosophy are what I call the ‘tropes of cannibalism.’ Nowhere is this clearer than in Hegel, but these tropes are at work everywhere in Western thought. Eating is, after all, the great mystery of Christianity, the transubstantiation occurs in the act of incorporation itself: bread and wine become the flesh and blood of Christ. But it is not simply God’s body that is incorporated via a mystical eating—it is also his words.

(“Limits of Digestion”)

In his novel, Urrelo inverts speculative philosophy. In Christianity the word was made flesh; here, the flesh provokes words. Incorporation of the common elicits sacred speech, making the novel itself a testament to blasphemy.

Urrelo then plays on the slippage between speech and writing. While in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the word of God is codified in the Bible, Alicia’s search begins with her grandfather Valentín’s scripture-like account of his first meal with Papá at Boquerón. Reading the account piques her interest, propelling her toward Papá. Alicia finds a photograph with the journal, and in another thread of the novel—a flashback to Alicia’s parents’ wedding day—we find that the photo represents Valentín’s paradoxical condition as prisoner of war but also a

soldier who has just been freed by his first taste of human flesh. Valentín explains to his son, Alicia's father Julián, that he wanted to keep the photo as a memento:

Después nos sacaron del fortín formados en una fila y cuando creía que nos fusilarían nos perdonaron la vida. [...] Nos dieron de comer, y sacaron fotos a todos los oficiales. Ya cuando estaba prisionero en Asunción un official paraguayo me mostró la mía, ... y yo pensaba ¿cómo no querer [tener la foto]? ¿No era un bonito recuerdo?, ¿no sería lindo tener algo que me recordara cuando conocí lo que era ser feliz en serio, hijo? ... A partir de ese momento, todos éramos prisioneros. (584-585)¹⁸⁰

The photograph freezes Valentín at the moment of his paradoxical release and imprisonment. Like the cannibal scripture, the photograph freezes this moment in time. Both photo and narrative create the visual and symbolic representations of consumption. Unlike Céspedes's photograph, the picture of Valentín directly indexes a body, but it is a body that contains another body, and later more bodies. The photo fuses with the infinite digestion of the cannibal corpus, and presents an icon of rebirth as incorporation of the other, connected to a sacred text passed down through generations.

Between the notebook and photo, the vanguard concept of cannibalism pushes ever inward. It becomes a kind of metaphysics. By the time the legacy of this modern-day metaphysics arrives at Valentín's granddaughter, however, it has become unspeakable. Alicia, entrusted by the end of the novel with the direction of the cannibal group, is mute. Her muteness is a direct result of the car crash that killed her parents, but according to the doctor, it has no

¹⁸⁰ "Afterward they lined us up and led us out of the fort, and just when I thought they were going to execute us they pardoned us. ... They gave us food and took pictures of all of the officials. When I was a prisoner in Asunción, a Paraguayan official showed me mine, ... and I thought, why wouldn't I want to have that picture? Wouldn't it be a nice souvenir? Wouldn't it be nice to have something to remind me of the moment I found out what it meant to be happy for real, son? ... From that moment on, we were all prisoners."

physical cause; as the doctor explains to her grandmother: “pues no tiene nada, señora Zoila [abuela de Alicia], nada físico, quiero decir ... para mí que no quiere hablar, ese es el problema” (571).¹⁸¹ Her muteness, however, is far from a lack of communication. After the accident, she goes to a sign language school called Renacer.¹⁸² Throughout the novel, she communicates with Perro Loco in sign language or writes in a small notebook she carries with her. Once she assumes control of the cannibal group from Papá, her own re-birth into language will mark the new phase of consumption of the capitalist without oral narrative.

Given what Papá says, however, the reader can't help but wonder if Alicia will be able to speak again after her first meal. Thankfully, such a mawkish turn fails to appear. Alicia is still mute after having eaten her would-be lover Perro Loco, so, in spite of everything, her speech never appears, at least not as a transformation of consumed human flesh into divine narrative. Her words are instead a written echo of Papá's. Alicia's aphasic silence completes the enclosure of Boquerón as production from the mouth when speech, the inverse of consumption, disappears in the wake of the cannibal's incorporation. This aphasia is not amnesia, however; it avoids the new foundation of the people on forgetting thanks to its written and photographic history. Urrelo instills the venom of the Chaco in the heart of society as the enclosure of Boquerón finally reaches the metaphysical pretension that it aspired to at the beginning of the war. The siege allows a passage to freedom through violence. Yet the status of the literary artifact as trace remains at the edge of this pretension to metaphysical closure. Is it scripture? History? Record? It is to the literary artifact, especially as fetish, that we now turn.

Cannibalism as Fetish and the Siege of the Vanguard

¹⁸¹ “well there's nothing wrong, Zoila ma'am [Alicia's grandmother], physically, I mean ... seems to me she doesn't want to talk, that's the problem”

¹⁸² Re-birth

Main characters Alicia and Perro Loco often appear alongside a two-bit criminal called Vallejo. In one scene, the three of them converge on a basement bar called Petr6leo—the beating heart of La Paz’s underground music scene.¹⁸³ Vallejo is laying low between jobs and agrees to help Alicia and Perro Loco in their search for information. Alicia shows him her grandfather’s notebook. At the same time, however, she can’t help remember her ex-boyfriend Axl with whom she first discovered the bar and the musical world beyond pop. Alicia recalls mocking Axl for reading poetry that she claimed deadened him. At Petr6leo, Alicia remembers Axl’s obsession with Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik and French surrealist Andr6 Breton. This memory coincides with her quest to find out more about the cannibal diary with Vallejo, whose name might be a wink at Peruvian poet C6sar Vallejo (269-271). We learn that Axl had disappeared one day without a trace, and Alicia suddenly realized the negative influence that these poets had had, thinking to herself: “Pizarnik y Breton, par de cabrones” (101).¹⁸⁴ Once Axl is gone she can finally admit that she carries on in “el mundo dark,” “no creyendo en la vieja bruja Pizarnik ni en el tarado de Breton” (110).¹⁸⁵ *Hablar con los perros* thus cannibalizes the literary tradition, its proper names and written artifacts—all in a place named for the hydrocarbons that, in the wake of Morales’s declaration, also connect to the political and economic legacies of the Chaco War.

The cluster of literary and political references in Petr6leo offers an entry into the analysis of how Urrelo manipulates and portrays writing and storytelling in the novel. This, in turn, brings us to the third way of reading cannibalism, outlined in the context of the “Manifiesto antrop6fago.” From the first—antithesis and difference, repeated in the cycle of revenge—to the second—synthesis and metaphysics, the union of body and sacred speech—I now turn to cannibalism as fetish or remainder. In particular, Urrelo uses cannibalism, writing, and history as

¹⁸³ Petroleum, Gas

¹⁸⁴ “Pizarnik and Breton, couple of bastards”

¹⁸⁵ “the underground” / “not believing in that old witch Pizarnik or that idiot Breton anymore”

part of a symbolic economy of wandering signifiers, alternately taken out of context and placed in circulation. Caught between fetishism and equivalence—two terms borrowed from Marxism—the novel offers resonances with contemporary Latin American studies and contemporary Bolivian politics and economics.

In the first place, ritual cannibalism might suggest a way of understanding difference after the age of identity politics and hybridity. Instead of reading cannibalism as part of the hybrid, unifying nation, Sara Castro-Klarén for instance analyzes the more dissonant elements of Euro-American relations in Oswald’s manifesto. Ultimately, she writes that Tupi praxis, if it were capable of being truly acknowledged, would “destabilize” and “subvert” the manifesto that Oswald wrote about it.¹⁸⁶ It appears, but it cannot be understood. Tupi cannibalism undoes the fluid and violent Euro-American cultural exchange. It fails as a metaphor for cultural exchange because of an unbridgeable epistemological gap. The practice of ritual cannibalism offers nothing more than a trace of indigeneity. It destabilizes the dialectic and signals the loss of this particular praxis from the time of conquest into the present.¹⁸⁷

However, Urrelo’s novel takes a slightly different approach to ritual cannibalism. Most importantly, his cannibalism is literal rather than metaphorical. Ripped out of an indigenous context and emerging from war, he makes it decidedly urban and *criollo*, part of an ascetic lifestyle. As Alicia begins to piece together Papá’s influence, she realizes that he has been the

¹⁸⁶ In Castro-Klarén’s words: “Read within its Tupi origins and relocated in the underbelly of Oswald’s own claims, the mother lode of the anthropophagic metaphor of the Caraïbe drags in with it powerful forces of alterity and dissemination. The force of the discourse of Tupi anthropophagy, a subalternized knowledge, begins its work by destabilizing the very “Manifiesto antropófago” and its revolutionary claims. It subverts the smooth surface of the prose of the world and pulls it into the trenches, thus creating the uneven furrows of the aphoristic text. Despite the fact that the European root system suffocates the Tupi anthropophagic metaphor in Oswald’s deployment, one must ineluctably acknowledge that the answer to the disjunctive ‘Tupi or not Tupi?’ must indeed be not Tupi on all counts: The nation and the ‘sentido ético’ as well as the epistemological dimension” (313).

¹⁸⁷ In Latin American studies, such a reading falls under the broad label of subaltern studies. This is consistent with Castro-Klarén’s involvement with the Latin American subaltern studies group. The readings presented here and until the end of the chapter should be seen in conversation with this disciplinary moment, with the goal of understanding how to move beyond some of the barriers that the subaltern perspective and methodology encountered.

master puppeteer pulling at the threads of her life to make it more miserable. Papá believes that healthy doses of suffering, especially poverty and unrequited love, make the ecstasy of cannibalism possible. She finds out that Papá had asked her grandparents to mistreat her when she went to live with them after her parents died in the car accident that left her mute. She also discovers that Papá had a hand in making Axl disappear so that she suffered heartbreak at a young age. After these traumatic experiences, he tells her, she can fully participate in their ritual. In short, Papá makes a measured attempt at re-creating the trauma of inequality, injustice, siege, and warfare in Alicia's daily, banal battlefield in La Paz.

The shift in context from besieged fort to city also reflects a historical change. The borders that were agreed in the post-Chaco peace treaties remain the same into the present. Yet these borders have also undergone economic erosion under contemporary conditions of globalization. In *Hablar con los perros*, this breakdown appears through the crime ring known as *Los Infernales*.¹⁸⁸ Vallejo, another of the damned poets in Urrelo's literary anti-corpus, forms a core part of this kidnapping and human trafficking ring. They abduct beautiful, wealthy women to extort money from their families with the help of ominously named police chief Lucio Lobo.¹⁸⁹ Vallejo, who is Bolivian but fakes a Mexican accent and shares a surname with the famous Peruvian poet, is responsible for arranging these border crossings. The group transfers the bodies of abducted women to Peru, using the border to avoid police pursuit and launder money across international lines. Depending on their success at extracting ransom, the gang either rapes the women or forces them into sexual slavery in the neighboring country. In the *Infernales* mindset, the Bolivian border with Peru serves as a convenient mechanism through which men circulate women's bodies in a brutally misogynistic economy of sexual exploitation.

¹⁸⁸ the infernal ones

¹⁸⁹ His name literally means Lucius Wolf.

Vallejo's job depends on the exchange of female bodies for cash. For most of the time that the *infernales* are working, exchange is fluid and equivalence uninhibited. The more lucrative the business becomes, though, the more careless and violent the *infernales* are toward their victims. Interspersed with stories of the many moving parts of the business and its personal dramas, Urrelo presents a particularly gruesome scene in which two of the group's underlings gang rape a television presenter they were tasked with taking over the border, leaving her dead body by the side of the road (293-316). This transnational, savage hypercapitalism creates an underground market of bodies, a corporal corporation based on a straightforward exchange of cash for those it considers weak, namely the wealthy women they abduct because they see them as naive and unaware.¹⁹⁰ But as they destroy the women's bodies they depend on for the extraction of wealth, the exchange fails. The group sees the resource they sell, the female body, as virtually unlimited. But the kidnapping ring nevertheless falls apart, not because of their failure to perform their gruesome task, but because of infighting. Vallejo's wife Nancy steals his money and runs away with his partner Villagrán. The pair end up in Buenos Aires where they spend all of their money trying to fit into *porteño* superficiality, and Vallejo visits the city to kill his ex-partner and maim his ex-wife. Out of cash and out of a job, Vallejo starts working for Alicia in search of the mysterious people who start harassing her after her grandmother's funeral. Together with Perro Loco, the three find out that Papá and his group of cannibals were responsible for ransacking Alicia's apartment in search of Papá's notebook.

Vallejo's career change marks a transition from this market of general equivalence, which undoubtedly continues without him, to a procurement of materials for the Chaco fetish. After

¹⁹⁰ On general equivalence and war, Nancy writes: "all the modern transformations of the concept and practices of war: 'partisan' war, guerrilla warfare, 'total' war, 'world' war, police operations called 'wars,' and so on — the systematic development of both heavy and light armaments that favor the proliferation of war and its effects on so-called civilian populations as well as on cultures, herds, soil, and so on. Not to ignore economic warfare, which constantly agitates the system of general equivalence from within" (*After Fukushima* 6).

becoming an unwitting bystander to the murder and consumption of Perro Loco, Vallejo, stone-cold criminal though he is, blames Papá and his “family” for a sudden digestive indisposition: “Por su culpa casi me vuelvo vegetariano” (321).¹⁹¹ In spite of his objections, however, Vallejo agrees to help the cannibals, who are looking for a thug to get them their meat. While still doing the same job—kidnapping—Vallejo refashions himself in the service of a different libidinal market. From profiting from the cash-equivalence of the female body, he now profits from the fetish, removing flesh from circulation instead of putting it into circulation, as the group consumes it for its own decadent pleasure.

The fetish recalls Oswald’s manifesto, where cannibalism is not a sublimation of the sex drive. Instead, in Urrelo’s novel the sublimated—or not so sublimated—sex drive appears in Perro Loco’s obsession with Alicia.¹⁹² Yet, in Papá’s words to Alicia: “la carne de los débiles como la de ese muchachito es necesaria para nosotros, señorita” (74).¹⁹³ Less about the sex drive, cannibalism more closely resembles the fetish. Freud describes this as a particular object or situation that excites desire. The fetish stands isolated, at a distance—or in Andrade’s more moralistic terms, a deviation—from the general sexual economy. In *Hablar con los perros*, the fetish draws peculiar resonances with Marx’s commodity fetish: a material concept secularized from the “misty realm of religion” that dissociates products of labor from their human relationships.¹⁹⁴ The commodity fetish makes materials seem to float around in the marketplace,

¹⁹¹ “I almost became vegetarian thanks to you”

¹⁹² As Derrida says in an interview: “To love without wanting to devour must surely be anorexic” (“Limits of Digestion”). See also Jean-Luc Nancy’s “‘Eating Well,’ or The Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida.”

¹⁹³ “the flesh of the weak like that boy is necessary for us, miss”

¹⁹⁴ The full description from Marx: “As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race.

severed from all human relation. In the novel, the cannibals remove the banker from the broader economy to achieve the libidinal pleasure of the fetish. Freud and Marx converge in a new way in this fictional legacy of the war when, in preparation for Papá's final meal, Vallejo breaks into the banker's home, threatens his family, kidnaps the man, and brings him back to the cannibal house. He helps them consume the agent of surplus value, helps them fetishize and remove the excess capital skimmed off the top by reducing the banker to the constituent parts of his body.

In the character of Vallejo, Chaco ritual cannibalism, resonant with “primitive” conquest stories and vanguard aesthetic ideas, converges with the brutality of general equivalence exposed in human trafficking and fetishization. This curious mixture of past and present, material and aesthetic elicits parallels with and divergences from the philosophical tradition it draws on. If traditionally speculative philosophy could account for everything with no remainder—we have seen that Derrida writes that “nothing is inedible in Hegel's infinite metabolism”—then the conquest of the Americas would have been complete with no remainder. Yet, cannibalism becomes a systemic excrescence, akin to an appendix or some vestigial, cultural organ; it points to places where the metabolic system's progress becomes inoperative.¹⁹⁵ Paul Ricœur's labelling of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as “masters of suspicion” fits with their attention to the moments when apparent fluidity conceals other, more ambiguous dynamics, such as the commodity or sexual fetish. This vestige questions progress. On the other hand, if the vestigial trace is inconvertible then it resembles a fetish beyond exchange. This fetishism or inconvertibility mimics the hypercapitalism of the *infernales*, who traffic in women's bodies until their market

So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.” (Marx *Capital* Vol. I, Chapter 1, section 4)

¹⁹⁵ In the panel “Escrituras de guerra” (“War Writing”) at the 2014 Festival Internacional del Libro de Buenos Aires, Urrelo told an interesting story. The final days of writing the novel had drained him so much that he started having horrible abdominal pain. A bursting appendix turned out to be the culprit, but he couldn't be treated because the city of La Paz was paralyzed by the *gasolinazo* protests. The *gasolinazo* marks a limit in the Chaco War legacy in the next section.

functions are no longer relevant and they become nothing more than sites of corporal violence.¹⁹⁶ It likewise mimics the cannibal group's turn to capitalist victims as retribution for systemic historical injustice. This contradictory point marks a critical, if ambiguous, knot in the novel, but also in contemporary Latin American politics and Latin American studies at which the "manifesto" model arrives, at long last, at an impasse.¹⁹⁷

The Gasolinazo: Creative Tensions and the Exhaustion of the Manifesto

In contemporary Bolivia, the Morales government has branded the Chaco War a fight for hydrocarbons in its proclamation, which was, as mentioned above, less nationalization and more public-private hybrid that exported gas for profit while subsidizing national consumption. Just a few years after the announced nationalization in 2006, as Urrelo was finishing *Hablar con los perros* in late December 2010, Bolivia's vice president Álvaro García Linera signed "Decreto Supremo 0748," the so-called *gasolinazo*, that ended government subsidies of most hydrocarbons in order to block subsidized gas from seeping out of Bolivia's porous borders. The decree amounted to an immediate and massive price increase, ostensibly, the government said, because it was not interested in supporting smugglers who profit from gas and oil consumption

¹⁹⁶ There are many possible connections to the Juárez femicides in Roberto Bolaño's *2666* as unintelligible violence at the border enacted on the female body. See especially Kate Jenckes's analysis of the mouth in *2666* in her book *Witnessing beyond the Human: Addressing the Alterity of the Other in Post-coup Chile and Argentina*. On the mouth, see also Sara Guyer's "Buccal Reading."

¹⁹⁷ This passage is heavily indebted to Malabou's *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, where she challenges Levinas's interpretation of the Derridean trace with her own plastic reading of the trace: "I comment on Levinas's expression 'the trace is inconvertible into forms,' stating that if the trace is inconvertible, then it acquires the status of a substance or a fetish. The assertion of inconvertibility lies, for Marx, at the heart of fetishism. On the face of it, the fetish always occurs outside the operation of exchange, outside the market. From then on, when otherness is fetishized by its resistance to plasticity, when hospitality continues to be thought as the 'counter' to plasticity or, in other words, against form, it is no longer possible to distinguish cosmopolitanism rigorously from hypercapitalism" (*Plasticity* 76-77). Malabou tries to push beyond the trace toward a "new materialism" (77) and non-messianic conception of time, a new conception of hospitality alongside the possibility of deciding the future. Malabou has also been accused, unjustly in my opinion, of the very thing she accuses. According to Alexander Galloway, her plastic ontology mimics global transnational capital by being flexible enough to accommodate almost anything, a critique that overly simplifies her use of the term "plasticity." See Galloway "Catherine Malabou, or The Commerce in Being," *French Theory Today*.

in neighboring countries. Several days of intense protest in Bolivian cities forced the government to rescind the declaration a few days later and reinstate the subsidies (“Decreto Supremo 0759”), but the experience laid bare the precariousness of the government’s market- and border-controlling abilities. It revealed the practical limits of the state’s powers of incorporation at the point where ground and resources are territorialized along lines established in 20th century wars and eroding, at least economically, in the early 21st century.

The recent history of the Chaco War still seems to converge on the nexus of the state and capitalism, especially as it relates to hydrocarbon consumption. When these two come into conflict, as in the *gasolinazo*, there is a brief furor until they arrive at a truce, a *modus vivendi* within the pulse of modernization that neutralizes the threat that the border poses. This truce, then, places us back in the frame of the “Manifiesto antropófago,” back within the traditional dialectic and the possibility of state mediation and truce. Within the Bolivian government, this type of truce has become a part of the contemporary contradictions of the revolutionary process that began with Morales’s historic election. García Linera writes in *Las tensiones creativas de la revolución: La quinta fase del Proceso del Cambio*—published in 2011 after the *gasolinazo*—that there are impasses in socialist theory that were not considered by Marx, Lenin, or Mao.¹⁹⁸ These contradictions form part of Bolivia’s current predicament. The country’s specific spatio-temporal coordinates provoke conflicts between: the state and social movements, hegemonic flexibility and social firmness, general social and specific or private interests, and the so-called communitary socialism of *vivir bien/buen vivir*, “living well” or “the good life.” García Linera casts these tensions as creative, even necessary to keep the revolutionary process in check. Yet each amounts to a tension between the state apparatus and a way of living that escapes it. The creativity, then, definitively falls on the side of the state, which hopes to be able to better capture

¹⁹⁸ *Creative Tensions of the Revolution: The Fifth Phase in the Process of Change*

the effervescence of social movements. At heart, this tension is one of incorporation. Can the state incorporate that which is outside of it and sometimes escapes it?¹⁹⁹

There is a limit to the state's incorporation, still configured by its borders, even as these become weaker. And it is precisely this tension at the border—a tension of form—that brings into focus the questions of time, progress, and the movement of history—critical to reading the legacy of the Chaco War. So many of the ways that the war has been taken up involve declarations about the past that intend to alter or reclaim a certain history by implementing a future program, whether an avant-garde manifesto, a declaration of war, or a decree of nationalization. Yet, now, the argument is that late capitalism bears a specificity that frustrates our understanding of the past, even the theories of the likes of Marx. In other words, García Linera finds a theory-praxis divide spread across history. This divide accounts for contingency and change, yet attempts to remedy the problem in the heart of the contradiction by establishing a truce between state and capital. In the case of national oil subsidies, the state prevents multinational corporations from enacting their own spatial fixes, from de- and re-territorializing capital for maximum profit—“desvia-se e transfere-se,” as Oswald says in his manifesto. This type of nationalization stops circulation in order to stem the tide and soften the blows of an otherwise savage and all-consuming capitalism that ravaged Bolivia with the help of elites for centuries. But this new definition of ground still struggles with its past, with the border drawn after the war. In short, it is not necessarily the present moment that is the problem; it is, rather,

¹⁹⁹ It is important to note that these social movements also gave rise to the radical transformation of Bolivian politics that culminated in the election of the MAS government. Increasingly over time, however, different blocs of this social movement coalition have tended to express discontentment with the government's administration, especially visible during the TIPNIS conflict of 2011. For more, see Javier Sanjinés's *Embers of the Past: Essays in Times of Decolonization*, especially “The Dimensions of the Nation and the Displacements of Social Metaphor in Bolivia,” pp. 143-182.

the more complex knot of a territorial system inaugurated with interstate war, haunted by the abyssal trace of the loss of the sea, and vexed by contemporary capitalism's fluidity.

In each of the manifestos we have seen, violence inheres in form. Whether in the state form in the wake of the Chaco War or the corporal form as it experiences ritual and economic violences, especially femicide and cannibalism. From the Battle of Boquerón to the *gasolinazo*, equivalence and fetish exhaust the vanguard paradigm of issuing a corrective to the past to announce the future; these examples each show how the vanguard paradigm amounts to helping the community consume, whether itself, its culture, or its resources. The traces of history, meant to spur on the declarations, partake in the temporal structure of war in the legacies of reparative material or the cycle of vengeance—here, in oil—and impossible desire—ciphered in the outlet to the sea. Whether these traces might be transformed into something else—a conflict that unbinds friend and enemy, the sea that provides release, or oil that opens the possibility of a more just and equal society—remains handicapped by the manifesto model, which already shapes a relationship to time bowed to a linear view of progress and an unwitting debt to consumption, whether of the enemy, the mercantilist seas, or the black gold of oil.

Under this all-consuming model, the past and the future disappear; if the manifesto or declaration cannot remedy the past, not even rhetorically, then it cannot plan a program for the future.²⁰⁰ In the dialectical progression, an emphasis on the antithesis or enemy marks a cyclical vengeance and present-focused dehistoricization; a re-writing of metaphysical union or capture collapses speech and body in the sacred and aphasia; and the fetish blends into a hypercapitalist drive to remove and place objects into the market and to use and evade the territorial and subterranean borders that are the legacy of war. As Urrelo experiments with and manipulates

²⁰⁰ This is Malabou's critique of Kojève, though it might apply more generally to the exhaustion of dialectics and any of the manifestations of decadence or the "End of History."

time into split but converging narratives that create a snowball effect, he disarticulates the stories of heroism and progress typically associated with the Chaco War. In this cannibal and cannibalized fiction, we can glimpse the future of literature without the manifesto's progressive *telos*. Under the capitalist conditions of siege that appear so entrenched to everyone from the fictional *infernales* to García Linera, one wonders if there might be a way of revisiting the legacy of the war while imagining an a-teleological, un-besieged future.²⁰¹

Urrelo provides hints. Following the title's emphasis on inter-species speech, there is a small stray dog, who at the end of the novel, goes to live with Vallejo. After Vallejo gets his comeuppance from his ex-wife Nancy—she castrates, mutilates, and stabs him as revenge for the murder of her lover—the dog ends up living with the ex-wife and her new lover Anita. They name him Kaiser. The dog thus embodies the sovereign's becoming-animal. He is a happy, nomadic observer whose thoughts the audience reads but who can only translate his feelings of anxiety or contentment as different types of barking.²⁰² The novel portrays the challenges of communication registered in written and oral speech, sacred text and aphasia, while the title stages the semi-permeable barrier of communication between human and animal. Nevertheless, Alicia's aphasia, for instance, seems like a permanent and inevitable dead end. Difficulties with communication remain poised on the ambiguous border between consumption of flesh and production of speech. In order to explore time and posit the question of a future without the manifesto, I turn now to a different portrayal of the 21st century legacy of the Chaco narrative in Paz Encina's *La hamaca paraguaya*.

²⁰¹ If we follow Malabou further, the conception of a plastic future may help advance a materialist deconstruction. The objection that might be raised, as often between Marxist and deconstructive traditions, is that such a turn neglects materialism in favor of idealism. As these two chapters on the Chaco War demonstrate, the cultural and political legacies of this war constantly mediate between these two poles.

²⁰² Here again the connection to Cervantes's *El coloquio de los perros* appears; it might be productively analyzed through Viveiros de Castro's post-humanist, Deleuzian lens, though the role of metaphysics would be very different.

La hamaca paraguaya: *From Aphasia to Phase Difference*

The recent experimental film *La hamaca paraguaya* (2006), directed by Paz Encina, revisits the war in a different medium and from a vastly different perspective.²⁰³ Instead of focusing on the Battle of Boquerón as Urrelo does and where future Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner would experience his first major victory, the film approaches the everyday life of two people near the end of the war. Specifically, the action takes place on a single day: June 14, 1935, two days after the ceasefire.²⁰⁴ Filmed in the Paraguayan countryside and in Guaraní, the movie takes a much slower pace than the fast-paced urban crime stories in Urrelo's novel. Its protagonists are a couple, Cándida and Ramón, who are the parents of a soldier, Máximo. They are so far removed from the front that they do not even receive news about the war. They are left waiting to find out what has happened, hoping for the safe return of their son, a change of season, and a better life.

The film's thematic center relies on the twinning of *esperar*—"to wait" but also "to hope"—with *desesperar*—"to despair" but also, transitively, "to exasperate or infuriate." As Cándida and Ramón wait for their son, there is very little action. Ramón works the land; Cándida washes clothes. They talk to each other about the weather, commenting on the heat and lack of rain, about the war and its depressing effects, about their son and when he will return, and about a dog's irritating barking. Otherwise, there is nothing much more than waiting. As such, the film bears a strong resonance to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Indeed, Encina claims to draw inspiration from Beckett along with Roa Bastos and Juan Rulfo (Courthès). Like the work of

²⁰³ *The Paraguayan Hammock*

²⁰⁴ Cynthia Tompkins sees this timeline as potentially more dispersed in her analysis in *Experimental Latin American Cinema: History and Aesthetics*, pp. 232-244, while Eva Karene Romero in her *Film and Democracy in Paraguay*, pp. 27-54, generally agrees with my interpretation.

these authors, her story is elliptical. It relies on dialogue, and yet uses film to interrupt the synchronicity of this dialogue. Throughout the film, Encina dissociates voice and image, at times inserting close shots of the main characters in profile that reveal motionless lips against voiceovers in Guaraní. At other moments, the camera shoots from behind, obscuring the face entirely. The mouth, which was so important in *Hablar con los perros* and even back to realist narrative in the 1930s, no longer holds even the representative function of speech. The conversation between Cándida and Ramón likewise seems disconnected, often as if they were talking past each other or as if their conversation had somehow become jumbled, out of sync, or out of order. They constantly ask each other what they can hope for, what they can do, whether there has been any news. Cándida is much more cantankerous than her husband, trying to act undisturbed by the prolonged wait for news, though she often lashes out saying things like “no one can avoid death.” In contrast, Ramón seems mostly hopeful, explaining that he is a farmer and therefore knows that rain, and consequently relief, has to come sooner or later.

The non-coincidence of word and image makes *La hamaca paraguaya* a meditation on the relation of self to other and story to image (cf. Courthès). It reflects the disarticulations between the stories we tell and the way they are received, between the history of the war lived on the battlefield and recorded in books and the one communicated to contemporary audiences. In order to do this, the film creates images of openings or apertures. In its carefully constructed scenery, the eponymous hammock with which the film opens and closes hangs between two trees in a clearing. The shots tend to be long and show the trees arching over the hammock to form an oval. During one of the few sequences of events, the persistently irritating dog stops barking. Cándida begins to worry that the dog is sick and asks Ramón to take the dog to the vet. It turns out the dog is dehydrated, but since the rain hasn't come yet, there's no water for the people

never mind the dog. During his visit, Ramón finds out from the veterinarian that the war ended two days ago but that not everyone has found out. In a moment of hope, Ramón says that he must cure the dog because she belongs to his son, and Ramón imagines his son will be back soon for her. As he waits outside the veterinarian's house, a light shines through a dark passage; the door frame and another open door behind it creating a chamber caught between two sides. It is an opening of hope—the hope that end of the war might bring back his son and his old life.

In a visual echo, Cándida sits next to a domed brick oven that also has openings on either side. Both sit in profile facing right, and they are both alone, suggesting simultaneity. Cándida hears the voice of a messenger looking for the Caballero family. The messenger himself never appears, and she is not welcoming to him.²⁰⁵ He says he is looking for the family to inform them that Máximo Caballero died at the front. But Cándida says that her son's name is Máximo *Ramón* Caballero, and then she tells him that everyone in the area has the same name anyway so he probably means someone else. In her denial, she refuses the indexicality of her son's name. Then she says that her son can't have been killed by being shot in the heart, off to the left, because her son's heart was in the center of his chest. As the messenger insists on delivering his news, repeating himself in spite of Cándida's evasiveness, Cándida withdraws into herself and the camera pulls in with her, shot by shot closer to her face, the profile making her unmoving lips stand in striking contrast to her words. As the viewer is drawn closer to her, the news from the disembodied messenger's voice seems to sink in.

When Cándida and Ramón finally meet again in the hammock, they do not want to ruin each other's hope, so she doesn't tell him about the messenger—or perhaps she imagines the messenger or wishes she has imagined the messenger. Similarly, when she asks him about news

²⁰⁵ She is inhospitable to the presence of this other as described in Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle's *Of Hospitality*.

of the war, he tells her that it stopped. “The war?” “No,” he says, “my chest pain.” They tell these half-truths to make the waiting more bearable. Rather than a war story, *La hamaca paraguaya* ends as a love story based on partial lies and omissions, memories and habit. It recovers a rural past in place of a vanguard future, but there is no pretension to certainty through mimetic representation; even Cándida and Ramón agree that they can’t really know anything, whether when Máximo or the rain will come. Interspersed shots of a dark sky, heavy with clouds and rumbles of thunder make it seem as though the characters are looking up toward the possibility of salvation. But there is no salvation; we are confronted with two characters stuck waiting—or waiting and hoping as in *esperar*—whose enemy is none other than history, whose messiah is the promised rain, whose sacred trace is Máximo’s shirt that the messenger brings as a remembrance and Cándida burns, and who lack horizon since Ramón refuses to watch the sun set. One by one, the film discards the typical structures of the war declaration or manifesto and its metaphysical pretensions, and a brief resolution comes only in the sound of a thunderstorm that plays behind the rolling credits.

As the film thwarts causality, it substitutes a different temporality: one of contingency and phase difference.²⁰⁶ It translates the photographic capture, such as the indexically ambiguous image in Céspedes’s “La paraguaya” in Chapter 1, into a narrative mesh, so that the images of apertures mimic the hammock netting, holding the film together in a porous form. At the beginning, the hammock is unfurled and tied. Then the couple separates, each to their daily chores during which they intimate the death of their son; then they come back together. At the end, the couple gets ready to bring the lamp and hammock in for the night. Without having recounted their secrets, they say that in spite of everything, they have each other. Thus, the

²⁰⁶ García Linera’s work, mentioned above, relies on establishing the characteristics of each phase of the revolution and stating that the revolution is currently in its fifth stage. Encina’s film undoes all traditional notions of what a phase might be.

hammock of the title forms the netting that supports the alternately close and distanced relationship between Cándida and Ramón. Its holes stand in for the many images of openness in the cinematography and the gaps of what remains unsaid. They also reveal Máximo's uncovered and uncoverable absence. Fragile like the old hammock, the story itself might rip apart along its asynchronous seams at any moment during the wait for better days. During this wait, the image of the hammock stands in for a *modus vivendi*, coming-together-apart, suspended over a different kind of ground—the ductile mesh of finitude and futurity without salvation or messiah.

The exit from the historical condition of siege, then, is not the capitalist *modus vivendi*, remedied by ritual or proclamation. Whether there is an exit is, in fact, the central question, and, I have argued, it is a question that must be framed temporally as a nexus of past and future, rather than spatially, given that the demarcated space of territory is precisely the abyssal and haunted trace of this war. *Hablar con los perros* and *La hamaca paraguaya* avoid the mimetic relationship of culture to war. This, Urrelo's novel suggests, would confine future generations to aphasia and, eventually, amnesia. Instead, the focus on the mouth, the desire to consume, the circulation of blood and capital, the subsumption of form, the inability to speak, and the asynchronous word and image, converge in the contemporary Chaco archive to portray the stuttering and irregular transition to a brutally violent transnational capitalism. In the relationship of this past to the present, framed as the coming-together-apart of two times in the malleable form of a hammock; the moment of capture that the war attempted to seal is, in fact, unworked in this final phase difference between netted singularities and between their time and our time. Against stories of progress and heroism through the body as *corpus*, political body and its limits, literary body of work about the Chaco, even the ousted corporations and state incorporation, this

mesh leaves open the question of the wait—*espera*—for the future.²⁰⁷ Its malleability beckons Cándida and Ramón and those that come together with them to decide on the future incorporation of this war beyond archival certainty, state incorporation of its legacy, and the capitalist model that has always besieged it. It beckons us toward the cultural trace of war so as to recover, tentatively and with care—not that history devours literature or literature devours history—but rather that beyond cannibalism—devouring our own past—there exists that essential dimension of time: the future.

²⁰⁷ On these associations with the body and many others, see Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus*.

Part II: The Soccer War and Stasis

“Los muertos están cada día más indóciles.”²⁰⁸
—Roque Dalton, “El descanso del guerrero,” *Taberna y otros lugares* (6)

From July 14-18, 1969, El Salvador and Honduras engaged in a short border war, sensationally dubbed the “Soccer War.” According to the story broadcast in the international press, fans kept the opposing side’s team awake all night before World Cup qualifying matches in hostile territory. Losses were attributed to the interference of overzealous fans, and a firmly held sense of national pride that fuelled antagonism both on and off the field. The war itself baffled commentators and political scientists who found it difficult to classify because it was fought over “issues that could not be easily labelled as racial, religious, ideological, linguistic or anticolonial and which had their immediate origin in a soccer match” (Cable 658). Even more perplexingly to one commentator at the time, “the two protagonists are participants in one of the very few examples of successful economic integration amongst developing countries, which as such, has been held up as a prototype of the kind of arrangement which could well be emulated by the large and growing number of very small states” (Cable 658). The war put this regional economic integration on hold for several years. That a few soccer matches might interrupt a widely lauded example of successful regional integration seemed puzzling, at least from afar.

²⁰⁸ “The dead become more unmanageable by the day.” (6)

Closer to the border, however, the war's outbreak was less mysterious. Since 1958, the U.S.-backed Central American Common Market (CACM) had been progressing toward integrating markets, distributing labor, and diversifying Central American economies. Yet each country struggled with its own domestic problems in the process. As Vincent Cable explains in his October 1969 analysis, the majority of Salvadoran land was in the hands of an infamously small elite while much Honduran land was in the hands of U.S.-owned fruit companies. El Salvador also had a much larger population density than its neighbor. The combination of relatively little land and its uneven distribution gave the country a large diaspora throughout Central America but especially in Honduras where Salvadorans were drawn to fruit company labor and unsettled tracts of land (Anderson 71-73). Added to underlying demographic and economic pressures, the uneven process of integration created a pressure cooker of economic tensions primed to explode at the first sign of trouble—in this case, World Cup qualifiers.

Combat was brief, earning the war its less sensational nickname, the Hundred Hour War, but in spite of its brevity, it claimed the lives of many and displaced many others, including tens of thousands of Salvadoran refugees (Anderson 141). Prior to the war, the border was vaguely defined and laxly guarded. In its aftermath, the Honduran government expelled Salvadorans, and both sides increased border security. The Central American Common Market project was placed on hold, eventually grinding to a halt for over two decades—the rest of the Cold War—before being revived in the early 1990s. During that time, El Salvador descended into a bloody civil war between the state, right wing paramilitaries, and communist militants. Writing in 1981, historian Thomas P. Anderson explains the 1969 war's effects: “The question remains as to how far the social and political deterioration of El Salvador over the last decade has been the product of the Soccer War, but certainly this much can be said: the war removed a major safety valve from a

potentially explosive situation” (155). By removing the possibility of migration and equitable land distribution, the war stagnated the already poisoned relationship between land and people.

Later, geographers observing the civil war noted that, by expelling inhabitants, destroying infrastructure, and cutting off relations between the two countries, politicians created an uninhabited border area. Robert Thomas and Don Hoy describe how, from this “no man’s land,”



Figure 2: “Areas of guerrilla activity and area outside the migration fields of major Honduran cities” (Thomas and Hoy)

guerrillas opened a stateless training zone for themselves in the wake of the 1969 war (Figure 2). Writing in the late 1980s at the height of the civil war, the demographers comment on the state’s creation of a space from which to mount armed insurrection against it. The 1969 war thus had a long, bloody afterlife.

Part II explores the legacy of the Soccer War in culture. In particular, as it has been dubbed a “demographic war” (Durham vii), this part examines the relationship of territory to people in times of conflict. While Part I considered the enclosure of national borders and their resonance with the body politic, this part focuses on how multiple modes of warfare intersect at the border. The border war itself was only a one hundred hour period, but it condensed the

tensions of the prior class struggle on both sides, inflected the Cold War during which it took place, and established key conditions for the later Salvadoran Civil War (1979-92). As such, this was a demographic war that showed an unrelenting back-and-forth between international and domestic contexts, between the *polemos* that set anti-aggression policy in the wake of World War II and the stasis of civil war that became all too common in Central America during the Cold War.

As U.S. political influence and expanding transnational capitalism interrupted the lines between domestic and foreign, regular citizens, military officers, and soccer fans began clinging to nationalist modes of belonging. They cut off ties from regional units. Recent theorists of globalization have noticed a similar trend in the present; as the world becomes more economically interconnected, there is often a backlash that involves building walls (Brown), reverting to identity-based modes of belonging like nationalisms and fundamentalisms (Marramao), and cutting off migration flows (Duffield).²⁰⁹ In El Salvador in 1969, an early form of these “reversions” appeared at the outbreak of war. Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski documented Salvadorans’ hearkening back to colonial politics, when from the front lines they called to colonize, not only Honduras, but also the traditionally colonizing powers of Europe: “The Salvadorans were moving to order: push through to the Atlantic, then to Europe and then the world!” (Kapuscinski 171). This call to colonialism took place, perhaps most ironically, at the same time the Apollo 11 crew headed toward the first moon landing. Authors Roque Dalton and Horacio Castellanos Moya both cite the Salvadoran president’s jibe in their writing on the Soccer War: “Es más seguro ya caminar por la luna que por las veredas de Honduras” (Dalton

²⁰⁹ From Duffield, see in particular *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (2001) and *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (2007).

Las historias prohibidas 222; Castellanos Moya *Desmoronamiento* 99).²¹⁰ In the face of supposed progress, whether economic or scientific, the Soccer War proved nationalism maintained a strong enough political pull to go to war.

According to Clausewitz, war is the continuation of politics by other means, and for Salvadoran poet and militant Roque Dalton this continuation of politics in the 1969 Soccer War was actually a continuation of demographic and economic repression. Dalton's poem "La guerra es la continuación de la política por otros medios y la política es solamente la economía quintaesenciada (Materiales para un poema)" shows that the war, while ridiculed in the international press, emerged from severe economic inequality. At base, his title argues, the war is a continuation of economic exploitation by other means. At the same time, anti-aggression pacts and anti-communist policies disrupted national, territorial authority in the name of integration and security. These two circumstances lent themselves to an easy reversion to armed nationalism and an extremely costly war that would feed the cycle of violence plaguing the region. This part analyzes the Soccer War as a key point on the continuum from internal to external war as represented in Central American literature. In particular, in poems by Roque Dalton and the novel *Desmoronamiento* by Horacio Castellanos Moya, we will see the shifting relationship between territory and people before, during, and after the war. This change also appears in the literary text's reflections on its own tricks and tools of representation, especially in the face of political crisis and, as Dalton says, the dead becoming increasingly restless. Through these two authors, Part II shows the sedimentation of war and an early example of "global civil war," a globally integrated stasis.

²¹⁰ "It's now safer to walk on the moon than through the paths of Honduras."

Chapter 3. Demography, or Writing the *Demos* in Movement

“Luego de la guerra, viene el poema”²¹¹
—Hernán Ronsino, *Lumbre* (204)

The name “Soccer War” has been attributed to Ryszard Kapuscinski, whose rich description of the war from the ground made it world-famous. In his account, Kapuscinski draws parallels between the spectacles of sport and warfare. In spite of its media portrayal, however, Kapuscinski writes that the reality for the soldier on the ground is bleak: “War becomes a spectacle, a show, when it is seen from a distance and expertly re-shaped in the cutting room” (179-180). In both war and sport, there is a territory or field on which both take place; spectators cheer one side or another. Its narrative can make compelling television, like the global offshoots of the Cold War, in which the world was mapped onto the division between capitalism and communism. But, Kapuscinski insists, this division does not hold up in experience: “In reality a soldier sees no further than his own nose, has his eyes full of sand or sweat, shoots at random and clings to the ground like a mole. Above all, he is frightened” (180).²¹² And the soldiers’ vision is not the only one clouded by proximity to the ground.

The Soccer War frustrated the unfurling of a capitalist paradigm in the Americas under the guidance of the United States. Unlike other wars in the region, especially the guerrilla conflicts of the 1970s and 80s that mapped onto the division between left and right, this war was

²¹¹ “After war comes the poem.”

²¹² On vision and perspective, see Paul Virilio’s *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*.

a conflict between two right-wing governments.²¹³ Both sides struggled to balance landed elite and transnational business interests against the rising claims of landless peasants, leading to a crisis situation. The crisis between people and land mirrored the political crisis of representation between the oligarchy and the poor majority. In the face of expanding and increasingly diffuse power networks, soccer fans and soldiers turned toward their immediate circumstances, rather than the overarching problems. For instance, when Kapuscinski asks one of the men why his country is at war, he responds that he doesn't know what the war is about, but wants to keep a low profile: "A man has to live in such a way that his name never reaches the ears of authorities" (180). This man defers to authority so that he can attend to his farm, so that his plot of land won't go untended, and so that he will pass unnoticed.

The appeal to anonymity—escaping "the ears of the authorities"—echoes a historical event that would take place several years later: the summary execution of Roque Dalton (1935-1975). Dalton, whose poems about Salvadoran history and politics this chapter analyzes, was accused of being a CIA informant, or literally an ear, *oreja*. The farmer did not want his name to reach the ears of the authorities, but Dalton was condemned to death for being an ear, in particular by his comrades in the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP, People's Revolutionary Army). They accused him of being a traitor and executed him while he was fighting in secret in his home country of El Salvador. The accusation proved groundless, and Dalton's execution is still remembered as one of the dark moments of left-wing armed struggle in Central America. He had been one of the poets of the Committed Generation who linked literature directly to leftist politics. His poetry, especially in the collection *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* (*The Little Thumb's Forbidden Stories*, 1974), illuminates a persistent

²¹³ All of the wars in this dissertation follow a similar pattern, broadly, border wars between right-wing governments that affect little substantive change.

tension in Salvadoran history—on one hand, strong authority from the conquest of the Americas onward, and on the other, the indigenous and *campesino* populations that challenge this authority. It is a cruel poetic justice that the authority of his own armed group prevented him from fighting for the latter.

Dalton's poem on the Soccer War examines the ways in which this most recent conflict reflects the broader theme of Salvadoran history. The poem, entitled "La guerra es continuación de la política por otros medios y la política es solamente la economía quintaesenciada (Materiales para un poema)," appears toward the end of *Las historias prohibidas*.²¹⁴ It presents a collage of news fragments and pithy, sometimes ironic or mocking observations. Among the poem's "materials" Dalton includes a clipping from a student newspaper that describes El Salvador's overpopulation problem succinctly: "Por diversos motivos (la masacre de 1932, el desalojo de sus tierras, el desempleo crónico y el hambre), una profunda corriente emigratoria ha salido de El Salvador superpoblado al extranjero. ... En Honduras, la población salvadoreña ha llegado a más de 350 mil, la mayor parte campesinos pobres, ocupantes en precario de tierras vírgenes de la despoblada Honduras" (210-211).²¹⁵ As Salvadorans squatted on underused lands over the border, Hondurans decided to enact land reform. Dalton explains this move in another citation from a news clipping of a Honduran official:

Para llevar a cabo la Reforma Agraria que la Alianza para el Progreso demanda, debemos repartir algunas tierras. El problema está en *cuáles* son estas tierras a repartir. Afectar las propiedades de la United Fruit Company norteamericana es

²¹⁴ "War Is the Continuation of Politics by Other Means, and Politics Is Merely the Quintessence of Economics (Materials for a Poem)"

²¹⁵ "For various reasons (the 1932 massacre, land evictions, chronic unemployment and hunger), an enormous wave of emigrants has left overpopulated El Salvador for other places abroad. ... In Honduras, the Salvadoran population has risen to more than 350,000, the majority poor peasants, precarious occupants of virgin lands in under-populated Honduras."

tabú. Si tocamos las propiedades de la gran oligarquía terrateniente hondureña, la Reforma Agraria sería comunista. Echar mano a los bosques nacionales, sería muy caro. No quedan, pues, sino las tierras explotadas por los inmigrantes salvadoreños, que son 370 mil hectáreas. Si expropiamos a los guanacos [salvadoreños], mostraremos sentido patriótico, pues recuperaremos para los hondureños tierras en manos extranjeras. (214)²¹⁶

Instead of depriving the United Fruit Company or wealthy oligarchs of their land, thus risking the accusation of communism, the government decided to enact reform by expelling Salvadorans without legal title to the land. Officials began strategically applying previously unenforced laws on land ownership and citizenship.

In another take on the Soccer War, Honduran author Eduardo Bähr writes of a Salvadoran father, drawn to working on United Fruit Company plantations in Honduras. The story “El cuento de la guerra” explains how the man lost his job after a 1954 strike (14).²¹⁷ As he tells the story, he mourns the loss of his two sons, who fought for Honduras against the father’s home country of El Salvador during what he repeatedly refers to as “el cuento ese de la guerra.”²¹⁸ The father’s life story links a series of tragedies that uprooted him and led to the loss of his family. On the Salvadoran side, Dalton repeatedly turns to the 1932 massacre of *campesinos* during an uprising. Throughout *Las historias prohibidas* once again about the Soccer War, the massacre shows that the people of El Salvador are never taken into account. Even in a news clipping from early June 1969, Dalton cites a Honduran minister says: “Los salvadoreños ilegales deben salir

²¹⁶ “To carry out the Agrarian Reform that the Alliance for Progress demands, we must distribute lands. The problem lies in *which* to distribute. Taking the holdings of the North American United Fruit Company is taboo. If we touched the property of the great old Honduran landholding oligarchy, the Land Reform would be communist. Laying our hands on the national forests would be very expensive. So, there’s nothing left but the land being used by Salvadoran immigrants, which amounts to 370,000 hectares. If we kick out the Salvadorans, we’ll show patriotic spirit, since we’ll be recovering land in foreign hands for Hondurans.”

²¹⁷ “The War Story”

²¹⁸ “This here war story”

de Honduras. Que cargue El Salvador con su demografía” (216).²¹⁹ The demographic problem is the problem of the relationship of people to territory that has plagued Salvadoran history for decades.

This chapter considers the Soccer War a privileged moment for examining this relationship between people and territory, especially the logic of representation by which people correspond to national territorial units and private property. The documents of citizenship and deeds to property proved contentious during the Soccer War and exposed a faltering process of regional integration. Taking a strongly etymological understanding of demography as “writing the *demos*,” I present readings of a selection of Dalton’s late poems, including his work on the Soccer War in *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* (1974), along with Horacio Castellanos Moya’s more recent novel *Desmoronamiento* (2006).²²⁰ I argue that the Soccer War offers a glimpse into the slippage between territory and *demos* that, even after the enclosure of frontiers as in the Chaco, continues to challenge representation. I follow Dalton’s approach in *Las historias prohibidas* to suggest that there is a persistent low-level violence in Central America with occasional flares. This view, in turn, challenges the widespread assertion that war causes “crises of representation” in literature, philosophy, and politics. Instead, I argue that Dalton and Castellanos Moya point to the failure of an attempted suppression of warfare, through integrated power networks, proper names, and national borders. More than literature’s representative failure, their work suggests that the destruction of war exposes an underlying stasis—ongoing conflict at dynamic equilibrium.

Naming the Sovereign

²¹⁹ “Illegal Salvadorans must leave Honduras. Let El Salvador deal with its demography.”

²²⁰ *Breakdown or Collapse*

Although the Soccer War manifested decades of political and economic tension, it ended quickly thanks to forms of political organization developed in Europe after the Second World War. In the wake of Hitler's aggression, European and American diplomats redoubled their efforts to ensure international cooperation and anti-aggression more forcefully than the League of Nations. The Soccer War offered a key success of such efforts, as it came to a swift end thanks to the intervention of the Organization of American States (OAS; *Organización de Estados Americanos*, OEA). The organization was created as the mechanism for pan-American peacekeeping beginning with the 1945 Act of Chapultepec and reinforced in the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, unofficially called the Rio Treaty. The Organization formed part of the international legal structures of "hemispheric defense," including security and cooperation pacts among member states to quash the possibility of another war. Regional defense became a central tenet of trans-American anti-war doctrine.

However, anti-war policy also coincided with strengthening US influence in the Americas in general and in Central America in particular. US neo-imperialism saturated security policy and made it synonymous with anti-communism. Dalton points to this trend in the poem "O.E.A." from a collection published the same year as the Soccer War:

El Presidente de mi país
se llama hoy por hoy Coronel Fidel Sánchez Hernández.
Pero el General Somoza, Presidente de Nicaragua,
también es Presidente de mi país.
Y el General Stroessner, Presidente del Paraguay,
es también un poquito Presidente de mi país, aunque menos
que el Presidente de Honduras o sea
el General López Arellano, y más que el Presidente de Haití,
Monsieur Duvalier.
Y el Presidente de los Estados Unidos es más Presidente de mi país,
que el Presidente de mi país,

ese que, como dije, hoy por hoy,
se llama Coronel Fidel Sánchez Hernández. (*Taberna y otros lugares* 23)²²¹

Dalton's poem makes the slippages from leader to leader visible as he runs down, one by one, their names and level of involvement with El Salvador.²²² Dalton describes the laws of inter-American peacekeeping as ironic since they rely on a fluid arrangement of military personnel; all leaders are colonels and generals with the exception of the Haitian and US presidents. The US president remains unnamed; whether he was referring to Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon matters little. The organization amounts to a many-headed hydra as the acts of international peacemaking in the wake of the Second World War fed into civilian-military control of the Americas. Between the proper names of each leader Dalton points to a coalescing power around the United States, which exerts more influence in Central America than the relatively weak, puppet-like presidents, whose disposability Dalton emphasizes in the repetition of "hoy por hoy," "these days" or "for the time being." The leader who lasted longest in the list, Stroessner, began to rise through military ranks in the wake of the Battle of Boquerón and served as President of Paraguay from 1954-89, thanks in part to his strong alignment with the US during the Cold War and repressive anti-communist policies. As Dalton makes the heads of state into transitive cogs in a US-run machine, he lays bare the link between war making and peacekeeping. Dalton's poetry pokes fun at this anti-aggression policy, especially the belief that the Euro-American cycle of destruction had to be stopped at the cost of democratic representation.

²²¹ "The President of my country / these days is called Colonel Fidel Sánchez Hernández. / But General Somoza, President of Nicaragua, / is also President of my country. / And General Stroessner, President of Paraguay, is also a little bit President of my country, although less / than the President of Honduras, which is to say / General López Arellano, and more than the President of Haiti, / Monsieur Duvalier. / And the President of the United States is more President of my country, / than the President of my country, / the one that, as I said, these days, / is called Colonel Fidel Sánchez Hernández."

²²² For more on the Alliance for Progress as a renewed push for U.S. hegemony in Latin America, especially Central America during the 1960s, see Mark Berger *Under Northern Eyes: Latin American Studies and US Hegemony in the Americas 1898-1990*.

While anti-aggression pacts dominated post-war policy in Europe and the Americas, philosophy and art were also placed on trial for their part in allowing, even celebrating and encouraging the violence that shook Europe. The most emblematic case is the rise of Nazism, and famously, Heidegger became a target of criticism because of his inability to recognize the National Socialist project for what it was. Heidegger's exposure, in turn, led to a more extensive critique of Western philosophy.²²³ Emmanuel Levinas explains that war is the basis of ontology in the very first pages of the preface to *Totality and Infinity*. For Levinas, war, which refers back to the Greek term *polemos*, permeates the unfolding of Western thought and predisposes it to violence. Levinas finds *polemos* to be the animating force behind everything from struggle of the dialectic to the unfolding of ontological difference. He therefore argues for ethics, rather than politics, to avoid Nazi terror. Levinas's case is only one among many representative attempts at dismantling or extirpating this entrenched state of *polemos* in philosophy to avoid its devastating political consequences. Like international policy, post-war philosophy moved toward anti-aggression in an attempt to root out the truly "polemical" aspects of the Western tradition.

The philosophical reaction against war differed from the artistic one. Instead of adopting the anti-aggression of diplomacy and philosophy, art, from literature to music to plastic arts, tended to express a generalized impotence. Theodor Adorno famously wrote: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). Though he later recanted, his observation signals that the Second World War revealed a crisis of civilization and barbarism, representing a collapse of the categories that organized warfare.²²⁴ The imperial German campaign combined with the German

²²³ See especially *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt on the link between anti-Semitism and imperialism as the internally and externally violent impulses underlying totalitarian regimes.

²²⁴ As we saw in Chapter 1, the League of Nations served as an early attempt at international cooperation for the elimination of warfare. Carl Schmitt describes the League as one of the early institutions that eroded the legal structure of the *jus publicum Europaeum* in his *The Nomos of the Earth*. His later *On the Partisan* re-evaluated the enemy's place in the wake of the Cuban Revolution.

state's extermination of segments of its own population collapsed the distinction between external and internal warfare. This combination of external and internal war in the same space devolved into a more generalized representational crisis in which political and artistic categories seemed to no longer serve a purpose. The literary—and Adorno will later suggest, life itself—became devoid of meaning. A similar crisis in the aftermath of the First World War had led to the idea that war is unrepresentable except in the most brutal realism (see Chapter 1) or, more radically in the wake of the Second World War, that contemporary technological violence had exhausted representation as a whole, leaving a void in its wake. As the distinction between civilization and barbarism, within and without collapsed spectacularly and violently, literature, especially poetry, came to a constitutive impasse, as Adorno explains.

The Second World War exposed the problem of strong sovereignty eclipsing everything from philosophy to literature. A cordial exchange of letters between Schmitt and Heidegger serves to illustrate the crisis at the interface of philosophy, literature, and politics. Acknowledging receipt of the third edition of *Concept of the Political* in 1933, Heidegger mentions that he shares Schmitt's interest in Heraclitus's Fragment 53, which reads: "War [*polemos*] is both father of all and king of all: it reveals the gods on the one hand and humans on the other, makes slaves on the one hand, the free on the other" (translated and quoted in Fried 21). Heraclitus names a sovereign, war, which confers structure and order on the world. In his reading, Heidegger emphasizes the importance of this war-king by pointing out, "you [Schmitt] did not forget *basileus* (king), which gives definitive meaning to the whole [Heraclitean] maxim if one interprets it completely" (quoted in Fried 28). Heidegger does not elaborate on his commentary; this king might be taken as damningly close to the Führer, though a more generous reading might interpret the war-king as the force responsible for the unfolding of the ontological

difference (cf. Fried).²²⁵ Heidegger then adds a comment that characterizes other responses to political turmoil: “But now I myself stand in the midst of *polemos* and all literary projects must give way” (quoted in Fried 28).²²⁶ Heidegger writes that art plays a necessarily secondary role in the face of this *polemos*. He finds himself in a crisis situation that causes him to abandon his complex thought on the poem in a casual degradation of “literary projects” that echoes Plato’s banishment of poetry as useless in the *Republic*, Book X: “And the tragic poet is an imitator and like every other imitator is thrice removed from the king and from the truth” (119). In Heraclitus, the sovereign is war; the poet’s imitation is removed from this sovereign-war and from reality and therefore fails to be representative.²²⁷ Even before the Second World War, then, poetry was ill aligned with the ravages of war.

Dalton, however, takes a different approach to the relationship between poetry and politics. He mocks the lack of representation in anti-war organizations such as the OAS/OEA pointing out that paradoxically the suppression of warfare quashes the people as citizens. This suppression of warfare causes a crisis of political representation, visible in the growing antagonism between government and people. Dalton places these policies on display in another sphere purportedly in crisis: literature. Poetry *is* possible, he seems to say. But under conditions of post-war anti-aggression, each country’s president slips easily into the other in a US-dominated ranking of power with little concern for the people. Therefore, poetry cannot name a

²²⁵ See especially Chapter 1 “Polemos and Heraclitus” from Fried’s *Heidegger’s Polemos: From Being to Politics*. Heidegger’s most extensive published treatment of Fragment 53 appears in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*: “The *polemos* named here is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense. As Heraclitus thinks it, struggle first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition. ... In confrontation, world comes to be” (67).

²²⁶ His own personal “war” involves his role as Rector of the University of Freiburg, so the university as an institution also forms a critical part of the production and reproduction *polemos* and the associated degradation of “literary projects.” Mark T. Berger’s *Under Northern Eyes* shows the university’s role in perpetuating US hegemony in the Latin American context.

²²⁷ A modified version of this argument appears in twentieth and twenty-first century readings of Central American literature. See below: “Writing the *Demos* in Committed Literature, Post-Literature, and the Cosmo-polis.”

truth. Instead, it points to the people's absence. For them, naming runs the risk of appearing to power.²²⁸ Dalton signals this aporia in the representative relationship between politics and literature where the proper name fails. The people's distance from the king and from truth exposes the abyss between transnational governance and the *demos*, especially in capitalist market integration. Representation is no longer the only criterion for evaluating art. *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* shows this attempted erasure of the people's political agency in efforts to diffuse bellicose aggression.

Anonymous and Unfaithful: Naming and Fidelity in Dalton's Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito

Las historias prohibidas, published late in the author's tragically shortened career, represents a departure from earlier work that aligned Dalton with the Committed Generation's combination of literature and communism. In the most telling example, in an *ars poetica* dated in 1962, Dalton ends his poem by asking whom the poet should represent: "¿Para quién deberá ser la voz del poeta?" (*El turno del ofendido* 45).²²⁹ The poet assumes responsibility for the people in spite of what he describes earlier in the poem as a world full of anxiety, desperation, crime, and hatred. He serves as a conduit for the people's self-expression. In line with his militancy in the ERP, Dalton sees the communist-poet's role as naming and representing the struggles of the people.

Dalton's approach resembles other committed communist poets of his generation and politically engaged poets more generally. In the aptly titled essay "Poetry and Communism" on the relationship between poetry and politics, Alain Badiou argues: "Poets are those who seek to

²²⁸ Recall that the man in Kapuscinski's account wanted nothing more than anonymity, and Dalton asks the reader not to invoke his name after death in "Alta hora de la noche."

²²⁹ "For whom should the voice of the poet be?"

create in language new names to name that which, before the poem, has no name ... The poem is a gift of the poet to language. But this gift, like language itself, is destined to the common—that is, to this anonymous point where what matters is not one person in particular but all, in the singular” (94). The poet names the common, and this is what makes poetry communist in essence. However, we have seen that Dalton challenges this conception of naming. For him, the author disappears among the people, no longer seeking to name or contribute to the “common” of language as Badiou suggests. In “Alta hora de la noche” from the 1969 collection *El turno del ofendido*, Dalton moves explicitly toward anonymity, exhorting the reader: “Cuando sepas que he muerto, no pronuncies mi nombre” (119).²³⁰ Instead, he asks the reader to say other, more common words: “flor, abeja, lágrima, pan, tormenta” (119).²³¹ Saying his name—Dalton says pronouncing his eleven letters—would conjure him from his grave where he rests: “he ganado el silencio” (119).²³² The word—poetry as naming—has the power to revive, but the poet prefers to remain unnamed and reserve the conjuring powers of the voice for daily necessities like bread.

Dalton seems to give an eerie prediction of his own death, but this early death meant that he would earn himself, not silence, but instead a place in extensive debates about the efficacy of left-wing militancy and justice after his own comrades executed him. However, even before he returned to fight clandestinely with the ERP in El Salvador, he was already transforming his name and identity. He underwent plastic surgery in Cuba and assumed a different name to disguise himself from the authorities.²³³ Accordingly, in this later period during which he drafted *Las historias prohibidas*, he seemed to confer less authority to both his name and his voice.

²³⁰ “In the Dead of Night” / *The Turn of the Offended* / “When you learn that I have died, do not pronounce my name”

²³¹ “flower, bee, teardrop, bread, storm”

²³² “I have earned silence”

²³³ Castellanos Moya documents Dalton’s movements as he returns to the armed Communist struggle in the four-part essay “Dalton: Correspondencia clandestina,” published online on *Iowa literaria*. The essay details Castellanos Moya’s research in the Dalton family’s archive.

Instead of intervening directly in the collection, Dalton curates the texts, organizing the national history of El Salvador into episodes and cycles in a compilation of news fragments and images. The strong voice of the militant author-poet of the 1962 *ars poetica* disappears beneath a collage of facts, as *Las historias prohibidas* follows less a methodology of poetic collection and more one of research and accumulation. In this change, both Dalton's voice and his name begin to recede in favor of staging historical problems, resolutions, and resonances.

Critics consider the collection one of Dalton's most experimental and least accessible, representing a change in literary form that corresponds to a change in political circumstances. In their classic study of Central American revolutionary literature, John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman write that the collection:

appear[s] at a time of crisis for the future of Latin American national liberation movements signaled by the general collapse of *foco* strategies after 1969, Allende's defeat in Chile, and—in Central America—the effects of the Soccer War and the repression of the UNO electoral coalition in El Salvador and the earthquake in Nicaragua. *Las historias* is written in response to and in a sense *on* the fault line of left fragmentation and debate over theory and strategy in this conjuncture. (133)

Beverley and Zimmerman point to the fact that this compilation mirrors a broader sense of historical fragmentation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they contend that the collage in fact represents constitutive silences within Salvadoran culture: "*Las historias*, as the plural suggests, also makes fun of the effort to construct a monolithic national narrative. 'Badly' made, ungainly, incoherent, it is an example of the fragmentation and silences of the national culture it seeks to represent, a world of unexpected contradictions and combinations, of multiple codes and

temporalities” (132). The text fits this historical moment of fragmentation, which, in turn, mirrors Salvadoran national identity. Paradoxically, then, poetic fragmentation confers unity on the collection because El Salvador plays on the separation and unification of “el pulgarcito de América,” an appendage to a larger unit, whether hand or continent.²³⁴

While fragmentation certainly informs Dalton’s portrayal of Salvadoran history, he radicalizes his approach to naming and history by creating constellations and repetitions within his collage. For instance, the 1932 massacre after a peasant uprising appears again and again, even out of historical time and in spite of the collection’s broadly linear arc. In the poem “Todos,” Dalton identifies the peasant massacre as a moment in which the Salvadoran people were born half dead: “Todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932 / sobrevivimos pero medio vivos” (128).²³⁵ The “everyone” or “all of us” of the title democratizes, including the reader in the poem. Dalton points out that his reader is also half-dead and by extension contains the cadavers of others, unrepresented by proper names.²³⁶ For Dalton, there is no longer a clear demarcation between living and dead, within and without. Yansi Pérez writes of the poem: “In order to find the other’s word one has to move far away from what is one’s own, far from property, far from the very concept of author and authorship” (179-180).²³⁷ The masses of the *demos* become the others within. They are improper and unnamed to the reader and unauthorized and un-authored by the author. Dalton voices these unnamed without enclosing them under his authority, much

²³⁴ “America’s little thumb”

²³⁵ “We were all born half dead in 1932 / we survive but half alive”

²³⁶ This poem most closely resembles Badiou’s anonymous and singular point of the common, mentioned above. Dalton presses this anonymous point further, away from the naming and fidelity that are central to Badiou’s philosophical system as laid out in *Being and Event*. As he claims in another essay collected in *The Age of the Poets* “Philosophy and Poetry from the Vantage Point of the Unnameable,” the name is the fundamental connection between being and event: “Philosophy is the general theory of being and of the event, insofar as they are tied together by truth. For a truth is the work *upon* the being of a vanished event, of which only the name remains” (57). Dalton’s poetry seems to suggest that the name—whether of author or event—must also vanish.

²³⁷ For more on the 1932 massacre’s importance for Dalton, see Pérez’s Chapter 2 “Witnessing and Trauma: The Massacre of 1932 in Dalton’s Work,” pp. 119-181.

less a national identity. The uprising—stasis—of 1932 brought together the living and the dead, and the half-living, half-dead victims reappear when Dalton cites them as indicative of the land tensions that, unresolved, would later spark the Soccer War.²³⁸

Recalling a looming historical debt to his readers, Dalton interrupts the collection's historical line by burying the multiplying cadavers of generations past within each person. As history doubles back on itself, Dalton interrupts "the orthodox Communist party stage theory of Latin American development" (132) that Beverley and Zimmerman accuse him of holding to. Instead, this repetition of cadavers recalls what James Iffland describes as an understanding of history that resembles Walter Benjamin's in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Dalton creates constellations that recall the forgotten victims of "progress," not melancholically but rather as "algo absolutamente contemporáneo" (167).²³⁹ These dead do not belong, but without properly belonging, pass into the poem and into the present. Dalton points to the growing count of the dead in the ironically named "El descanso del guerrero" from *Taberna y otros lugares*: "Los muertos están cada día más indóciles / ... / Me parece que caen en la cuenta / de ser cada vez más la mayoría" (6).²⁴⁰ This silent majority gradually overtakes poetry, making it itself increasingly disobedient and difficult to manage. Gone is the mimetic approach to poetry tied to the sovereign and truth—and failing to adequately represent both. Gone too is the poet's call to name something. He now struggles to include voices that disobey his conjuring, to name the unnameable.

²³⁸ My claim that Dalton uses poetry to signal a problem with representation differs from Jim Knight's recent analysis of *Las historias prohibidas*. Knight argues that Dalton presents a counter-hegemonic project with essentially the same model of masculinity as the hegemonic Salvadoran government model. While masculinity is a key part of the "hombre nuevo" paradigm, Dalton's poetry also presents elements that exceed the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic dichotomy, even if, as Knight claims, he does not challenge the male/female one.

²³⁹ "something completely contemporary"

²⁴⁰ "Every day the dead grow more unmanageable / ... / I think they're beginning to realize / that they are increasingly the majority."

As Dalton changes his approach to let these voices speak through the poem instead of through the poet, he gradually moves away from poetry as privileged aesthetic instrument for communicating a political message. The relationship among voices within the poem becomes less hierarchical and more horizontal. As a result, Dalton's strong poetic subjectivity diffuses into intertextuality in the penultimate poem of *Las historias prohibidas* about the Soccer War. The poem, as we saw, is called "La guerra es la continuación de la política por otros medios y la política es solamente la economía quintaesenciada (Materiales para un poema)."²⁴¹ Already from the title, the reader follows Dalton's leaps from the famous Clausewitzian aphorism to a Marxist adaptation to his poetic materials in the three parts of the title. Then Dalton gives one of those "raw materials," a news wire: "Tegucigalpa, el 25 de mayo de 1969 (AP). El Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Honduras, en un discurso sobre los efectos de la integración económica centroamericana en su país, señaló a la crema dental Colgate salvadoreña como factor de aumento de las caries entre los niños hondureños" (197).²⁴² He drops the reader in a clipping about toothpaste and economic integration. This first fragment ridicules the banality of cheap patriotism, ignores the transnational Colgate, and mocks the gravity of a news story. Yet Dalton's only work in this ridicule comes in the fragment's frame. For the most part, the history of the war in "La guerra es la continuación..." amounts to a collection of news wires, articles, and speeches. The poet does not intervene with his own voice, but he does build the fragments into a growing order of intensity, from toothpaste toward landless peasants and the outbreak of hostilities and into a series of headlines about the war's effects.

²⁴¹ "War Is the Continuation of Politics by Other Means and Politics Is Merely the Quintessence of Economics (Materials for a Poem)"

²⁴² "Tegucigalpa, May 25, 1969 (AP). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Honduras, in a speech about the effects of Central American economic integration in the country, pointed to Salvadoran Colgate toothpaste as a factor in the increase of cavities among Honduran children."

The author's voice seems to have disappeared in this poem, but Dalton has another trick waiting for his reader. Since *Las historias prohibidas* is such a thoroughly researched and almost academic collection, it includes a bibliography. However, at the end of the list, Dalton adds an important note: "Fuera de los textos y poemas originales, tres textos han sido modificados para lograr los efectos perseguidos por el autor y dos textos aparentemente extraídos de otras publicaciones son apócrifos, escritos también originalmente por el autor. Corresponde a los lectores descubrirlos" (232).²⁴³ Dalton writes two texts that he is not supposed to have written, texts that he attributes to other publications. He has worked his way around the proper names of presidents and poets in "O.E.A." and "Alta hora de la noche," and he has dispersed his poetic voice away from representation in "Todos." But he takes a further step; he destroys the illusion of fidelity created in the thoroughly researched and carefully framed arrangement of texts. It becomes the reader's task to attribute truth or falsehood to the fragments that Dalton presents. He introduces the improper into this ostensibly national poetry collection. He introduces doubt and questions fidelity in a collection already labeled for its forbidden stories.

The two texts that Dalton introduces do not represent anything, but rather offer news articles written when no event took place. They are representations without presentation. These two apocryphal texts radically interrupt the type of bordering that happens around the names of the poet or president, as well as those around a national culture. Until the last page of the collection, Dalton's false texts move, unnoticed, into the national narrative like the unacknowledged migrants crossing the Salvadoran-Honduran border. They interrupt the propriety of the text, in both Dalton's poetic-academic exercise, but also in a similar way in the state's texts on citizenship and property. Undocumented migrants and, more radically, squatters

²⁴³ "Outside of the texts and original poems, three texts have been modified to achieve the author's desired effect and two texts that appear to be taken from other publications are apocryphal, also written originally by the author. It is the readers' responsibility to find them."

as undocumented land users introduce points where the texts of maps and deeds claim that there is nothing. This migration marks the nation's failure to represent its people as well as to contain and control movement. Like Dalton's falsified identification papers or the faked materials he uses to construct his poems, these migrants do not belong from the state's perspective. Thus, in spite of its persistent reference to El Salvador, *Las historias prohibidas* disarticulates the national pretension of unity, moving instead toward an interruption of the smooth relationship between presentation and representation, an interruption of naming and placing.²⁴⁴ Dalton is not a faithful subject who names the *demos* to release it into the commonality of language; rather, he gradually becomes the subject who diffuses himself in disguise among the *demos*.

As these migrants begin to populate the borderlands before the war, they expose the Soccer War's fundamental problem: the free market cosmo-polis, intended to emerge from regional integration, cannot contain the *demos*, which appears as anarchic and improper. Central American integration intended to create a group of nations controlled by the heads of state listed in "O.E.A." Yet the integration project cannot represent life under a national or even regional frame. Instead, the Central American *demos* escapes as Dalton's writing escapes the frame of truth. This same *demos* even escapes its own crisis in the name "Soccer War," which focuses more on spectacle and less on people. The headlines included in the final section "XXXVII. Algunos resultados del conflicto (hasta la fecha)" include three worth particular mention: "REARME Y MODERNIZACIÓN DEL EJÉRCITO SALVADOREÑO BAJO LA DIRECCIÓN NORTEAMERICANA," "REARME Y MODERNIZACIÓN DEL EJÉRCITO HONDUREÑO

²⁴⁴ This is an argument with but also against Badiou. On the first account, it valorizes his work on radical acceptance of undocumented migrants. On the latter, it questions the functions of naming and fidelity that extend from his theory of subjectivity, which one might expect to align clearly with a poet-militant like Dalton. While there are certain resonances and commonalities between Badiou's poetic and political preferences and Dalton as Marxist militant, Dalton's later poetry actually works against the theory of the subject that one expects from his work toward armed revolution.

BAJO LA DIRECCIÓN NORTEAMERICANA,” and “DECENAS DE MILES DE SALVADOREÑOS VAGANDO CON SU HAMBRE A CUESTAS DE HONDURAS A EL SALVADOR Y DE EL SALVADOR A HONDURAS. EN HONDURAS YA NO TIENEN TIERRA. EN EL SALVADOR NO TIENEN TIERRA NI TRABAJO. NO SON NI SALVADOREÑOS NI HONDUREÑOS: SON POBRES” (228-229).²⁴⁵ Dalton’s *Las historias prohibidas* indexes this looming and unrecognized conflict, product of the 1932 uprising as it continues into the 1970s, without aiming at a fuller representation or an expanded archive. Instead, Dalton playfully dissolves the boundaries of authority, naming, and fidelity, hinting at a dynamic that will become crucial in the historical crisis set to strike Central American history and literature—the crisis of representation of this poor *demos* during the coming civil wars.

At the end of *Las historias prohibidas*, Dalton’s summary of the effects of the war suggests that poetry gradually builds toward self-destruction. From its improper names—*demos* and *todos*—to its apocryphal materials to its exhortations that the reader accuse the author of betrayal or infidelity, the poetic text enacts, even encourages, its own undoing. Even before the outbreak of war, poetry cannot name or enclose these materials, just as the state cannot close the border to stem the tide of poor Salvadorans moving into Honduras. Dalton points out that this gradual rise of tension from toothpaste to mass displacement is part of a constellation of Central American history, remitting not just to the 1932 massacre but as far back as *Las historias prohibidas* goes, to the conquest. Toothpaste and cavity incidence, like the Soccer War, are merely ridiculous manifestations of an extended pattern in which each episode resonates with the

²⁴⁵ “Some Consequences of the Conflict (To Date)” / “Rearmament and modernization of the Salvadoran army under North American direction,” “Rearmament and modernization of the Honduran army under North American direction,” and “Dozens of Salvadorans wandering with their hunger on their backs from Honduras to El Salvador and from El Salvador to Honduras. In Honduras they no longer have land. In El Salvador they have neither land nor work. They are neither Salvadorans nor Hondurans: they are the poor.”

others. The Soccer War, then, becomes one of those constellations around which literature works as an exposure of stasis: uprising and revolt, but also continuity.

Writing the Demos in Committed Literature, Post-Literature, and the Cosmo-polis

Dalton emphasizes this continuity when he returns to the famous Clausewitz aphorism that he uses in the title in one of the final fragments about the Soccer War. He writes that the fiction of the war will be its continuation by other means:

La falsificación de la historia de esa guerra
es su continuación por otros medios
la continuación de la verdadera guerra que se desarrolló
bajo las apariencias de una guerra entre El Salvador y Honduras:
la guerra imperialista-oligárquico-burguesa-gubernamental
contra los pueblos de Honduras y El Salvador. (227)²⁴⁶

In the continuity between war and politics, historical war and fictionalized history, the Soccer War is only an “appearance” or symptom—in Dalton’s words, “bajo las apariencias de una guerra” (227).²⁴⁷ The true continuity of warfare in the region includes both national and international exploitation, the inability to regulate private property under oligarchic land ownership and the inability to account for labor in merging economies.

The performance of this stasis in the poetic collection disarticulates literary and national framing, and as a consequence, challenges the relationship between literature and politics traditionally understood in Latin American cultural studies through testimonial, cosmopolitan, or realist art. The first approach considers literature an instrument of politics in engaged or committed art. A cursory glance might place Dalton, as poet-militant, in this camp as someone who sought both political education and engagement through art. When critics describe Dalton’s

²⁴⁶ “The falsification of the history of that war / is its continuation by other means / the continuation of the true war created / under the guise of a war between El Salvador and Honduras: / the imperialist-oligarchic-bourgeois-governmental war / against the people of Honduras and El Salvador.”

²⁴⁷ “under the guise of a war”

Las historias prohibidas as “difficult” or “inaccessible,” his work is implicitly criticized for aiming at a higher aesthetic and, in exchange, failing to be sufficiently democratic. In cultural studies, a similar turn shifted focus away from literature altogether and toward *testimonio*, particularly in Central America. John Beverley famously described *testimonio* as post-literature, which would work to stimulate political action. The oral histories recorded in testimonies came to represent the *demos* in an almost unmediated way, and those who gave testimony were placed under as literal and mimetic a frame as possible. In Beverley’s words, this non-literary literature “democratizes” the field of cultural studies because there are lower barriers to access (398).²⁴⁸ Those who gave testimony replaced authors, not only because they created a discursive frame around historical crises but also because that frame could be more accurate since those testifying were also subjects of history—alternately victims of this historical cycle and actors against its brutality.²⁴⁹ However, testimony also struggled to escape its origins in the legal paradigm of a linguistic account of visual, subjective experience. Like Dalton, Rigoberta Menchú was famously accused of lying in her account *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*.²⁵⁰ Testimonial post-literature thus shared with engaged its reliance on the true, faithful subject of history and accessible content. Yet, as we have seen, Dalton is not a faithful or accessible subject, nor is the *demos* he approaches easily captured. He is too far removed from the truth of the *demos*, and once again, as in Plato, the tragic poets’ distance from sovereign and truth is seen as diminishing their account.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Beverley also explains: “La idea de ‘post-literatura’ sugiere no tanto la superación de la literatura como forma cultural sino una actitud más agnóstica ante ella” (398). The use of the religious term “agnostic” indicates that belief still forms the central concern of the intersection of literature and testimony.

²⁴⁹ On *testimonio* and its exhaustion by the mid- to late-1990s, see *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, edited by Georg M. Gugelberger.

²⁵⁰ Published in English as *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

²⁵¹ For more on the relationship between *testimonio* and the literary text, see “The Aura of Testimonio” in Alberto Moreiras’s *The Exhaustion of Difference*, pp. 208-238.

A second understanding of the relationship between literature and politics extends testimonial post-literature into a more wide-ranging critique of the creation of knowledge. The self-styled decolonial school expands the critique of *polemos* in the wake of war, especially Levinas's criticism of Heidegger, in order to consider how to remove the Western epistemic—even ontological—problem of oppression and recurring warfare. The group seeks to extend the historical moment of decolonization intellectually, as is the case with Nelson Maldonado-Torres's *Against War*, for instance. In general, the decolonial project builds toward “critical cosmopolitanism,” drawing on but taking distance from Kant's cosmopolitanism (cf. Mignolo).²⁵² And yet, the cosmo-polis is still a polis, as the Greek root shows; it still implies conflict, not in the form of *polemos*, but rather, as we have seen in El Salvador, in the form of wars and uprisings which would become horrifyingly violent in the 1980s. Historical decolonization, after all, involved a suppression of warfare in transnational organizations like the OAS/OEA, which merely continued the war in other forms, especially, as we will see below in more detail, the twin project of fomenting the global circulation of capital and containing life, encouraging north-south economic development while preventing south-north migratory flows (Duffield “Global Civil War”).

The third approach to the relationship between literature and politics places literature in a secondary position in the wake of historical devastation. As in post-World War II Europe, the Central American civil wars and the shortcomings of engaged art and *testimonio*, contemporary literature is broadly seen as moving from the engaged portrayal of this authentic *demos*—whether

²⁵² Walter Mignolo's “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism” explores problems ranging from 16th century Atlantic commerce, the nation state, natural law, and human rights discourse and provides a critical genealogy of the European “cosmo-polis.” However, it then turns to a modified form of the same idea with a slight twist; Mignolo calls for “critical cosmopolitanism,” which is a “globalization from below.” He takes up the themes of this article later in “Cosmopolitanism and the De-colonial Option,” seeing a “critical distance” from the cosmopolitan tradition.

to foment political consciousness or an ethical relationship with the other—toward a portrayal of savage destruction. In particular since the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords that ended the Salvadoran Civil War, literature has been indelibly marked by the experience of destruction implicit in surviving the cycle of armed insurgency. This “end of history” after its descent into violence created a crisis of representation in literature and left-wing politics according to Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, who describes contemporary Central American narrative as a literature of destruction. Literature loses its emancipatory possibilities and utopian impulse. In authors such as Horacio Castellanos Moya and Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Villalobos sees “su distancia y sospecha tanto con respecto a las narrativas mágico-realistas y heroicas, que fundaron la utopía de un hombre nuevo, como con las ideologías liberacionistas que inspiraron a los frentes populares y a sus ejércitos revolucionarios” (134).²⁵³ Destruction characterizes Central American narrative, which in turn “ha hecho explícito el carácter naturalizado de la violencia, la honda crisis de la lengua comunitaria para nombrar una historia en común” (146).²⁵⁴ For Villalobos, the naturalization of violence in the wake of warfare leads to pared-down realism—not the expulsion of literature, but its approximation to historical reality.²⁵⁵

These three modes appear to be literary responses to political and economic tensions—testimony during Cold War insurgency, cosmopolitanism during late capitalist expansion, and realism after the civil war and during global financial contraction. As we have seen, however, war traverses each of these periods. Dalton’s view of history—“La falsificación de la historia de esa guerra / es su continuación por otros medios”—accounts for this war going by different

²⁵³ “their distance from and suspicion with respect to magical realist and heroic narratives, which founded the utopia of the *hombre nuevo* (new man), and the liberationist ideologies that inspired popular fronts and their revolutionary armies.”

²⁵⁴ “has made explicit the naturalized character of violence, the deep crisis of a communitarian language to name a common history”

²⁵⁵ So-called “dirty realism” is an offshoot of this trend, exporting an image of Latin America’s violent drug lords and underling *sicarios*—realism with grit. The works often sell well in the global north and show the shrinking gap between criminals and state actors alongside the rise of paramilitary and extra-legal forces.

names and shifting into different forms.²⁵⁶ War is not an anomaly that literature reacts to or digests. Instead, it is the condition that reconfigures representative borders. It is no longer clearly outside, nor bipolar, nor delimited to the moment at which conflict erupts into violence. It is both within and without, present before, during, and after the time-limited “war” as a continuous assimilation of violence. Concretely, the Soccer War resulted in the cleared tracts of Honduran land from which Salvadoran rebels could train for attacks on government forces several years later.

This continuity of warfare appears just outside the borders of the state, and just beyond the reach of the text. As the border places citizens, Dalton’s authorial frame in *Las historias prohibidas* places texts, but neither is impermeable. In writing a “national” poetry collection for El Salvador, Dalton paradoxically unbinds this border, eliciting and staging the slippage between *demos* and writing that takes place on the map in the anarchic spaces cleared of state presence. At the edge of testimonial truth or mimetic writing, the bordering functions of naming and fidelity come undone, and the poem becomes a staging ground for experiments with a type of warfare both partially unbound and partially contained. Instead of writing an engagement with the *demos* or a response to the unfolding of history as war (*polemos*), Dalton writes of the interrupted identification between *demos* and territory, *demos* and author, even the *demos* and itself. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to find a language to “name” the history of violence because the collection disrupts the proper name as index of identity assumed in testimony, interrupts the author’s authority that one might expect from cosmopolitanism, and questions the fidelity that realism assumes by admitting that the text itself may be apocryphal. This continuation of warfare is a key part of Castellanos Moya’s *Desmoronamiento*, where the themes of border, traitor, and

²⁵⁶ “The falsification of the history of that war / is its continuation by other means.”

the destruction of literature and history take Dalton's work on the Soccer War into the twenty-first century.

Desmoronamiento: *Tracing Collapse*

From the very first pages of *Desmoronamiento* (*Breakdown or Collapse*, 2006), the main character, doña Lena, accuses her daughter, husband, sister, and virtually everyone around her of being a traitor. As a Honduran, she is particularly antagonistic toward Salvadorans and those that associate with them; her daughter's most egregious sin consists of marrying a Salvadoran. Doña Lena even goes so far as to say that the civil war in El Salvador (1979-1992) is the result of the Salvadorans' aggressive temperament. Like Dalton, she sees this as a continuation of the Soccer War, displaced into a bloody civil war: “[doña Lena] decía que habíamos hecho bien al expulsar a los salvadoreños de Honduras, aunque después nos atacaran con una guerra alevosa: «Esa gente es maligna, y como ahora ya no tienen a quien agredir, han decidido matarse entre sí»” (193).²⁵⁷ Doña Lena links the Soccer War to the civil war in her characteristic black-and-white vitriol. The continuation of the 1969 war, she points out, is merely its containment among those “barbaric” people who started it.

This continuity of warfare appears in Dalton's collection under a left-wing Salvadoran perspective, while *Desmoronamiento* is mostly right-wing and Honduran. Castellanos Moya, like Dalton, compiles documents over a long period of time, revisiting some of the major historical events of the period from a few years before the war to several decades after through the daily lives of an upper class family. The first part describes the wedding day of doña Lena and don Erasmo's daughter, Esther (Teti), coincidentally the same day as the Kennedy assassination in

²⁵⁷ “She used to say that we had done right to kick the Salvadorans out of Honduras, even though they came after us in a treacherous war. ‘Those people are evil, and now that they don't have anyone to attack, they've decided to kill each other.’”

1963. The second part includes letters between Teti, living with her husband in El Salvador, and her father don Erasmo Mira Brossa, living in Honduras—first during the 1969 Soccer War and later after Teti’s husband’s murder and a failed coup in El Salvador in 1972. (Recall that these last two form parts of the “fault line” of leftist politics on which *Las historias prohibidas* rests in Beverley and Zimmerman’s account.) The third part takes place just after doña Lena suffers a stroke in late 1991 and continues through her death and the settling of her estate in 1992.

This final part of the novel focuses on inheritance, not only how the family divides up Lena’s property, but also, tangentially the unexpected ways the Soccer War’s legacy affected the family. We learn that Teti never returned to Honduras, even though she had planned to, and that Lena’s favorite grandson, Eri, disappeared for several years during the civil war. While the family suspects that Eri joined the Salvadoran insurgency, they have no evidence. Ironically, Eri is the only “traitor,” and yet because of his close relationship with his grandmother he is never accused of betrayal. Instead, Lena suspects that he has been kidnapped or driven mad by Salvadorans. Eri later reappears but moves to Mexico, and when he finally returns to Honduras, it is only to execute his grandmother’s estate as efficiently as possible.

All of this information about Eri’s later life filters through the first person narrative of a character called Mateo in the final part of the novel. Officially, Mateo is Lena’s gardener, but he’s also a handyman, chauffeur, and security guard. If Lena is characterized by her anger and accusations of betrayal and Eri by his reticence and mysteriousness, then Mateo seems the portrait of the common-sense *campesino*. He spends much of the final part of the novel securing the estate from real and imagined threats while Lena slowly wastes away. His typical tasks include things like, “cerrar puertas y ventanas” (158) and “arreglar un cerco de piedra que había

sido afectado por una correntada” (173).²⁵⁸ Mateo has internalized his responsibility for closing and protecting the property to such an extent that he even has a nightmare that Lena is furious with him for not closing doors in the house as she would: “En algún momento de la noche me pareció oír el ruido del bastón de doña Lena golpeando la loseta del piso, como si ella hubiese andando caminando por la casa, como si yo no hubiese cerrado todas y cada una de las puertas de las habitaciones y del corredor, tal como ella hacía. Los ecos permanecen en las casas aunque ya nadie las habite” (161).²⁵⁹ Lena’s spirit inhabits the house, and so, throughout her illness, Mateo makes an effort to protect the house as she would. He doesn’t allow Lena’s other grandson, Eri’s brother Alfredito, into the house for fear that he might steal something.

The older, more mature Eri, on the other hand, makes the impression of a slightly jaded yet cosmopolitan journalist. In one of his rare conversations—most of what we see of him comes through Lena’s memories—Eri asks Mateo about some of his family’s properties in Olancho, trying to determine if his inheritance might be larger than he expected. Mateo responds:

Le dije que alguna vez le escuché a doña Lena comentar que los terrenos de su familia se habían perdido por las interminables disputas entre los herederos y que la reforma agraria les había pegado el tiro de gracia; también le conté que el abogado Mira Brossa [el esposo de doña Lena y abuelo de Eri], cuando fue director del Instituto Nacional Agrario, veinte años atrás, había tenido que repartir las últimas caballerías entre las cooperativas campesinas, algo que doña Lena

²⁵⁸ “closing doors and windows” / “repairing a stone fence that had been damaged by a strong gust of wind”

²⁵⁹ “At some point in the night, I thought I heard the sound of doña Lena’s cane hitting the floor tiles, as if she were stomping around the house, as if I hadn’t shut each and every one of the doors to the rooms and hallway, exactly as she did. Echoes stay in houses, even when no one lives in them.”

nunca le perdonó y por lo que lo acusaba de haber sido un «tonto útil» de los curas comunistas. (201)²⁶⁰

The family's patrimony has gradually been dismantled, in spite of doña Lena's lifelong efforts to protect it for her beloved Eri. The family had to gradually sell off its assets, especially to dissipate the tension that came with land reform. We learn that, since her husband died, doña Lena has lived from selling parcels of land from her estate. Very little remained by the time of her death.

In this final part of the novel, Castellanos Moya creates a tense comparison between doña Lena's obsession with property and territorialization and her grandson's desire to liquidate the property and move the money. This represents a significant change from the years immediately following the war when Dalton saw class positions firmly entrenched with the oligarchy holding its land with an iron fist as the dispossessed moved between El Salvador to Honduras in a stateless, precarious existence. Now, land reform and migration have dissipated some of this class-based tension. This slightly modified status quo has changed the relationship with the classes; now lower-class Mateo is the one responsible for protecting Lena's property while Eri moves around from place to place, dismantling and distributing liquid assets among the heirs. Mateo fixes fences and locks doors; Eri flies around Central America on dubious political and journalistic missions. By making Eri a foil for Mateo, Castellanos Moya writes the Soccer War into the post-Cold War period, during which nascent financialization and globalization began to re-configure the relationship to capital. The stalled economic integration of the CACM was

²⁶⁰ "I had heard doña Lena mention before that her family's lands had been lost to endless disputes among the heirs and that land reform had dealt them the final blow; I also told him that the lawyer Mira Brossa [doña Lena's husband and Eri's grandfather], when he was director of the National Agrarian Institute, twenty years ago, had had to distribute the last portions among *campesino* cooperatives, something that doña Lena never forgave him for and for which she accused him of being a 'useful idiot' to the communist priests."

gradually being re-worked into the circuits of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994) and later Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA, 2005).

Castellanos Moya discerns this shift in capitalism through the generations. Doña Lena, for instance, viewed assets as physical property. However, with the rise of finance capitalism in the 1990s, Lena's view became outdated. If the post-war anti-aggression treaties compressed the relationship of political leaders among themselves, causing the people to drop out, more recent changes liquefied the relationship to the sovereign, at least in part. Symbolically in *Desmoronamiento*, matriarch doña Lena dies of a cerebral hemorrhage, an overflow of liquid outside of blood vessels and into the brain. This hemorrhage makes her incoherent, so that she repeats her invective against traitors and malcontents, but she loses the thread of her lifelong insults. As Mateo says: "Era extraño escucharla, porque repetía frases que yo me sabía de tanto oírlas a lo largo de los años, pero mezcladas, sin hilación" (185).²⁶¹ The tissue that connected her invective and her cries of betrayal comes apart when more and more blood spills into her brain. In this modern-day sovereign figure, even the slippery non-narrative connections that Dalton laid out in his poem "O.E.A." are now coming unbound.

Doña Lena's death recalls the medical definition of stasis: a stoppage of circulation. She served this function in the family—a sort of clot preventing the family's free circulation between Honduras and El Salvador, a bastion of private property and old, upper-class Honduran ways. She dies of the hemorrhage that finally overwhelms the clot, however, and her death precipitates the liquidation of her estate. These liquid assets escape national boundaries, when toward the end, Mateo accompanies Eri as he changes dollars on the black market before returning to

²⁶¹ "It was strange listening to her because she repeated phrases that I knew by heart from hearing them over and over again through the years, but all mixed up, like she'd lost the connecting thread."

Mexico with the cash. Mateo then has another nightmare in which he imagines Lena's desperation about the dismantling of her estate:

Me desperté cuando ella [doña Lena] gritaba, fuera de sí, que esa pareja de traidores [su hija Teti y nieto Eri] la pagaría caro, que su maldición era que errarían sin patria ni posesiones lo que les quedaba de vida. Entonces escuché los golpes enérgicos del bastón en el corredor, como si doña Lena recién se hubiese levantado, enojada porque yo había olvidado trancar las puertas de la casa como era mi deber. (207-208)²⁶²

Castellanos Moya marks Mateo's insistence on security in spite of the definitive deterritorialization of the landed oligarchy that is taking place around him. According to Mateo, the spirit of doña Lena wants to dispossess those traitors who "errarían sin patria ni posesiones."²⁶³ But her intention to release them from the property is precisely what they want. Liquid assets have become much more important than land or objects.

Mateo, however, has a different relationship to doña Lena's legacy. He had long been promised the deed to the converted shed where he lives and a small plot of land around it, and after Lena's death, the heirs comply to compensate for his years of service. Upon receiving the deed, Mateo immediately and happily takes it to show his family. He and his sons sacrifice a suckling pig, and build a fence on which they hang the name of the plot: "Granja doña Lena" (209-210). Against the crisis of writing, dispossession, and flight considered characteristic of Central America, Mateo celebrates the document that gives him ownership over the small parcel of land. Doña Lena's name survives in his inheritance more than in the inheritance of her own

²⁶² "I woke up when she [doña Lena] screamed, beside herself, that that pair of traitors [her daughter Teti and grandson Eri] would pay dearly, that their curse would be to roam without homeland or possessions for the rest of their lives. Then I heard the energetic bangs of her cane in the hallway, as if doña Lena had just gotten up, angry because I had forgotten to barricade the doors of the house as was my job."

²⁶³ "would roam without homeland or possessions"

family. This affirmation of property, ownership, and the secure legacy of the matriarch ensures Mateo's containment. Castellanos shows that finally the *campesino* who had been left out of agrarian reform can have the land that he had needed since the 1960s, but only once it is no longer useful to the upper classes. Moreover, in transferring and documenting properties and borders in *Desmoronamiento*, Castellanos Moya suggests that, from at least one perspective, writing is not in crisis. In fact, it is stronger than ever; it instantiates the law.

On the other hand, however, Mateo is also responsible for burning writing. Doña Lena had instructed him to destroy everything, and just after the nightmare he remembers his promise: "Recordé que aún no había cumplido su voluntad de quemar las carpetas que ella escondía bajo la vieja máquina de escribir y que ahora yo tenía guardadas en el sótano" (208).²⁶⁴ Before throwing them on the fire, he leafs through the documents and finds some poems, probably Lena's early nationalist work from her time as a journalist and young society lady. They also include folders full of letters that make up the second of the novel's three parts, entitled "Del archivo de Erasmo Mira Brossa."²⁶⁵ As Mateo burns the documents, Castellanos Moya burns out the middle section of his novel. The author, then, is responsible for the destruction of writing. On the one hand, he affirms the law's strong understanding of written representation—the deed to the land affirming ownership, the honorific name of the property after the matriarch. On the other hand, he liquidates the property and burns the nationalist poems.

In Mateo's nightmare, a version of the "nightmare of history," there is an equivocal and incomplete destruction of writing. His resuscitation of Lena echoes Dalton's line: "Los muertos están cada día más indóciles" (7).²⁶⁶ Even farther back, the nightmare recalls Marx's *The*

²⁶⁴ "I remembered that I hadn't fulfilled her wish to burn the folders that she had hidden under the old typewriter and that I now had stored in the basement."

²⁶⁵ "From the files of Erasmo Mira Brossa"

²⁶⁶ "The dead become more unmanageable by the day."

Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (15).²⁶⁷ The nightmare of the past weighs as heavily on Dalton’s directly Marxist poetry as on Castellanos Moya’s reactionary characters. Both Dalton and Castellanos Moya compile documentary evidence of the Soccer War, including news, letters, and poems. Both point to the fact that the archive also includes pathological nationalism, property deeds, legal titles, proper names, and aggression and anti-aggression pacts. The author can manipulate this archive, destroy it, or re-work it to include false testimony.²⁶⁸

Both authors ask how to read and write in such a way that the resulting text is subject to betrayal or destruction. These texts treat warfare as containment—in Dalton through objective facts and doctrine and in Castellanos Moya through the character of doña Lena, the glue that keeps the family from unraveling. But they also signal warfare’s decontainment—in Dalton thanks to the anonymous author’s apocryphal texts and in Castellanos Moya in the hemorrhage, capital flight, and destruction of the archive. The writing of this war—once subject to alternations between internal and external conflicts within Central America—now appears to signal the continuation of conflict. Writing is the trace of violence; it is both containment *and* decontainment. It is subject to betrayal, disruption, and destruction. The Soccer War complicates the use of writing as a technology of bordering. Now, it is the trace of this interrupted border, crossed by peasants, refugees, soldiers, and guerilla fighters and marking the gradual collapse of

²⁶⁷ See also the reading of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in Chapter 4 “In the Name of the Revolution, the Double Barricade” in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, pp. 118-155.

²⁶⁸ Another of Castellanos Moya’s novels, *Insensatez (Senselessness, 2006)*, directly engages the archive, this time in indigenous accounts of massacres in a human rights report about the Guatemalan civil war. Abraham Acosta reads this novel as a conjunction of *testimonio* and mestizo fiction, confirming these two modes continue to be dominant in Central American fiction, which therefore fails to overcome the *testimonio* model. My argument here, while only tangentially related to *testimonio*, is that Dalton and Castellanos Moya’s texts point to a trace that exceeds the fidelity and strong subjectivity inherent in communist-militant and testimonial models.

the past weighing “like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire* 15).

War or Time as Sovereign

The disarticulation of literature as representation marks the slippage between writing and *demos*. This combination, a literal demography, marks a difference between captured and anarchic space, between state representation and the people, between the documents of identity, deeds, and laws and the destroyed, incomplete, or fissured archive. These contradictory movements, in turn, characterize the now global tension that became visible back in the 1969 Soccer War: the hazy border between within and without, or the impossible task of disentangling politics, economics, and demography under regional and global economic integration. As we have seen, the Central American Common Market was an early example of this erosion of national territory, met with virulent nationalism in a space that did not admit migration; whether the soccer field or the national boundary, Salvadorans and Hondurans felt threatened and sought a return to a clearly, though artificially, delimited territory. Crisis accompanied the partial disarticulation of this border, and it became both the place from which war was planned and staged during the subsequent Salvadoran Civil War and the clot in the circulation of capital during the long suspension of the CACM. Writing this border in a demographic key, as Dalton and Castellanos Moya do, is key to understanding the conflicting tensions at play in border wars that, while less overt than the Soccer War, have become increasingly common in economic integration and their associated pushbacks.

Under contemporary global integration, people are more mobile and interconnected than ever—like Eri in *Desmoronamiento*. But governments also rely on regional legal structures and

personal and group identities to fortify borders and create “secure” pockets within this more connected world. As Giacomo Marramao writes: “[I]t is said that the mobility of human beings, capital, commodities and information is irrevocably eroding the territorial logic on which our societies are founded. On the other hand, the end of the system of nation states is thought to trigger the compensatory phenomenon of the search for security and anchoring in an identity within homogeneous regional legal orders” (97). Marramao suggests that, in the face of these contradictory movements, it is helpful to take “the perspective of the *longue durée* ... to track those constitutive conditions of sovereignty and of modern law whose disarticulation lies at the bottom of the confusion and the discomfort in which we find ourselves today” (98). Marramao’s argument for the *longue durée* resonates with Dalton’s continuity of warfare, even after the end of the Cold War.

Castellanos Moya, in turn, points out the importance of time in the epigraph to *Desmoronamiento* from the play *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, which names time the most arbitrary of sovereigns: “Whereby I see that Time’s the king of men, / He’s both their parent, and he is their grave, / And gives them what he will, not what they crave.”²⁶⁹ Castellanos Moya does not argue for an accumulation of facts, as in *Las historias prohibidas*, nor does he argue for a longer-term perspective. Instead, he simply points to time as a kind of motor of the plot of the slow unraveling his novel presents.²⁷⁰ Castellanos Moya attributes the quote to Shakespeare, but it is more likely that the play was written in conjunction with lesser playwright George Wilkins. This confusion of the name recalls Dalton’s trick of reducing himself to anonymity in “Alta hora de la noche” and adding texts of dubious authorship in *Las historias prohibidas*. Re-thinking the poem against the name of the poet or the play against the name of the playwright reveals that literature

²⁶⁹ The epigraph is in Spanish prose rather than English verse in the novel.

²⁷⁰ The next chapter offers a more sustained reflection on time through Heidegger’s temporal ec-stases.

does not serve as an extension of creation, fidelity, and testament. Instead of being relegated to the mimicry of first truth, then king, then poetry in Plato's formulation, Castellanos Moya points to time disarticulating the atemporal "truth" of these identifications. Neither god nor militant nor heir, time frustrates desire, or "what they crave." Or for Dalton, time, under the guise of history, reveals the difference between apparent sovereign and unmanageable, unnameable people.

As we have seen, historically the failure to capture demography emerges—not from warfare and generalized destruction in the twentieth century—but instead from the well-intentioned attempt to suppress conflict without reconfiguring its terms. From transnational anti-aggression pacts (OAS/OEA) to the philosophical critique of *polemos* to transnational finance, the partial breakdown—to use Castellanos Moya's title—of sovereignty, property, and even cosmopolitanism have made this tension between containment and decontainment grow, reaching fever pitch in times of violent nationalist backlash. Politically, security analysts now "assert that the traditional dichotomy between the *national* and the *international* has collapsed" (Duffield "Global Civil War" 149). And yet, contemporary political theorists are also developing frameworks to account for fundamentalisms and identity politics that feed into "new wars" and "global wars" (cf. Kaldor and Galli).

The authors here posit demography, in the strongest literal sense, as the unaccounted trace of this tension between the containment and decontainment of the *demos*. Their texts clear a path for a different perspective from which to view cultural production in the wake of warfare. This perspective does not valorize conflict, *polemos*, as motor of history, as Heidegger and Schmitt did in the 1930s. It borrows the view that time rather than war is sovereign from Castellanos Moya—or Shakespeare or Wilkins. The author's authority is not important. It might even burn Lena's nationalist poems along with the letters Heidegger and Schmitt exchanged,

discarding the idea of *polemos* as “king of all” since Heraclitus. Demographic analysis posits that viewing literature as a response to conflict places it in a necessarily secondary position and confines it to realism and reproduction. In taking a long view of integration, nationalism, migration, and betrayal, *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* and *Desmoronamiento* make the war part of a disputed inheritance of the past in which state bordering destroys the documents from which both states and literature are made. Both authors build on, with, and against these documents to extend the Soccer War into the past and present, respectively.

However, literature is not immune from returning to its old modalities, just as the *demos* is not immune from declaring traitors and anchoring itself in nations and properties. After all, as Marramao argues, the contemporary world seems to have loosened some of the narrative threads—such as the nation—that emerge from the literary and legal archive.²⁷¹ Just as doña Lena’s hemorrhage caused her to confuse one traitor with the next, the partial unbinding of the narrative of historical progress means that a ludicrous, senseless naming might re-emerge, returning older forms of governance, property deeds, and identifications.²⁷² The time named in *Pericles* and again at the beginning of *Desmoronamiento* is a mixture of accumulation and hemorrhage, the capitalistic motor of progress and the historical time that repeats in Dalton’s constellations. From the uprising in 1932 to international war in 1969 to the 12-year civil war and into the post-Cold War era, the creation of a regional and globally connected Central American cosmo-polis has sought to contain violence.

²⁷¹ Marramao explains that the contradictory relationship has destroyed a long-standing political paradigm: “Jurists like Stefano Rodotà have spoken for some time of the ‘fragmentation of the sovereign’ in an epoch marked by new bioethical and biopolitical problems generated by the exponential growth of technological innovations that increasingly invest the private and corporeal spheres. More generally, in recent years the conviction has grown that the fall of the Berlin Wall not only marked the end of the Soviet empire and of the bipolar system but has also brought to an end the epoch of the nation state that began with the French Revolution” (97).

²⁷² The loosely stateless, networked organizations such as cartels and gangs come to mind particularly in the Central American context.

Although literature is not a response to warfare, however, both authors show warfare as continuity. By expanding the temporal frame of the Soccer War, the contradictory impulses inscribed in the arbitrariness of historical time, the war's apparent anomaly disappears. It becomes clear that the reaction against *polemos* inadvertently created a status quo of stasis. The redundancy in the constellation of status-state-stasis shows them as technologies of containment, perpetually exceeded and challenged.²⁷³ In destabilizing the border, the Soccer War exposed the pitfalls of demographic containment, not only during the war but also in its long aftermath, destabilizing the linked questions of testimonial truth and betrayal, the optics of the state and sovereign, and the crisis of the end of revolutionary movements. This is not a "crisis of representation" in which literature is unable to be faithful to its world; instead the authors present a growing breach between the law (name, title) and the demographic trace. At this intersection, Dalton and Castellanos Moya avoid the tired debates about the exhaustion of engaged, testimonial, and destructive aesthetics. Instead, they work to present the voices that interrupt the poem and burn the archive, they provide space from which to see that the stasis has gone unrecognized for decades, and that now, more than ever, the voices of the restless dead of this conflict might be heard instead of suppressed in the name of anti-aggression.

²⁷³ For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between containment and decontainment, see Gareth Williams's "Decontainment: The Collapse of the Katechon & the End of Hegemony."

Part III: The Falklands/Malvinas War and Ecstasy

“Contempla usted las ruinas del siglo.”²⁷⁴
—Carlos Gamerro, *Las Islas* (522)

At the center of the Plaza Islas Malvinas in Argentina’s southernmost city, Ushuaia, stands a large cast bronze wall with the cut-out shape of the two largest islands in the Falkland/Malvinas archipelago.²⁷⁵ Visitors can see mountain and sky through the other side, and on a nice day with a few clouds, it might look like the islands are draped in the sky blue and white Argentine flag. The bronze monument, designed by Vilma Natero, plays on the physical absence of the two islands in contrast to their strong presence in Argentine history and memory in the wake of the 1982 war in which Argentina re-took the islands only to lose them again to the United Kingdom in 74 days. One cultural critic, Vicente Palermo, even suggests that the monument serves as a frame for national consciousness: “se trata, en esencia, de una ventana al cielo con la silueta de las islas: [los argentinos] vemos el universo a través de las Malvinas” (24).²⁷⁶ The wall serves to empty the geographical shape of the islands, then uses this shape to frame the sovereignty issue and charge the emptied geography with meaning. In a 2012 expansion of the Plaza for the war’s 30th anniversary, town planners added a cenotaph—an

²⁷⁴ “Behold the ruins of the century” (trans. Barnett). All English translations from *Las Islas* are taken from Ian Barnett unless otherwise noted.

²⁷⁵ In general, I refer to the islands as Falklands/Malvinas, the slash preserving the contested nature of the territory, rather than a hyphen, which suggests a supplement. When referring to the British perspective, I use Falklands, and when referring to the Argentine perspective, I use Malvinas. Note also that the two largest islands are part of an archipelago and the attack was mounted against all British possessions in the South Atlantic including the Sandwich and South Georgia Islands.

²⁷⁶ “Essentially, the monument is a window to the sky through the silhouettes of the islands: [as Argentines] we see the universe through the Malvinas.”

empty tomb adorned with an eternal flame—fixing the connection between the islands’ eternal absence and their patiently awaited reunification.

This play between symbolic absence and sovereign presence defines the cultural legacy of the war in Argentina. Historically, however, the islands had no indigenous inhabitants. Uninhabited for much of their recorded history, they have been subject to the laws of European empires since the French first sighted and named them. European traders used the islands sporadically as a South Atlantic base, but they remained unclaimed or vacant for vast stretches of time. At independence from Spain, there were few inhabitants, and according to the legal principle of *uti possidetis*, the islands passed to the jurisdiction of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata. But in 1833, the British expelled the islands’ inhabitants, mostly traders and seamen, and created the longest-lasting settlement in history. The Malvinas monument in Ushuaia reveals the islands as the vanishing point of Spanish and British empires carrying on in competition for centuries. The British continue to exercise administrative power over the islands, which are officially considered an Overseas Territory. They maintain a military base, grant fishing privileges, and authorize and invest in oil exploration. During the twentieth century, the islands were only under effective Argentine control during the 1982 war.

The war itself was widely considered a diversionary tactic of the 1976-83 Argentine military dictatorship—the euphemistically named *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* or Process of National Reorganization. The junta had made its most bloody impact during the early days of its reign, in what became known as the Dirty War, a campaign in which thousands of citizens were murdered or disappeared for subversive dissent, generally accused of being leftist Peronists. After they had mostly eradicated dissent, the military government struggled with domestic issues such as uncontrolled inflation, and so increased bellicose rhetoric about the

islands in an effort to spur nationalism and redirect attention outward. They mounted a surprise attack, which they thought would garner domestic support and was unlikely to draw a British response (Fallaci). On the first account, they were correct; crowds rallied in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires in support of the invasion. On the second, however, they miscalculated. The UK under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent its fleet, quickly defeating the Argentines. The crowds that had rallied in support realized that they had been deceived by government propaganda into thinking that Argentina was winning until the bitter end. After the Argentine loss, the frustrated citizenry rose to challenge the dictatorship. Those who came to the Plaza de Mayo with full-throated support for the war pressured the junta to call elections immediately after their defeat. Parliamentary democracy was reinstated in 1983.

Consequently, Malvinas occupies an ambivalent place in the history of 20th century Argentina. On one hand, the loss of the Malvinas created a national trauma and international embarrassment. On the other hand, it marked the reliable end to a cycle of strong-arm dictatorships, replaced by electoral democracy. The reinstatement of democracy made the defeat bittersweet. In the years after the war, the recovery of the islands was stitched into the very fabric of the Argentine state, appearing as an article in the 1994 Constitution that reads: “La recuperación de dichos territorios [las Islas Malvinas, Sandwich y Georgia del Sur] y el ejercicio pleno de la soberanía, respetando el modo de vida de sus habitantes conforme a los principios de derecho internacional, constituyen un objetivo permanente e irrenunciable del pueblo argentino” (*Constitución Nacional Argentina*).²⁷⁷ The constitution ensures that Argentina will no longer break with international law and unilaterally invade the islands; nor will it give up on its uncompromising claim to full territorial sovereignty.

²⁷⁷ “The recovery of said territories [the Malvinas, Sandwich, and South Georgia Islands] and full exercise of sovereignty, respecting the way of life of its inhabitants in conformity with the principles of international law, constitute a permanent and inalienable objective of the Argentine people.”

In the same years during which the state busied itself with establishing provisions for parliamentary democracy, the soldiers who returned to Argentina from battle, many of them conscripts chosen based on date of birth and luck of the draw, were largely forgotten. Ex-combatants received little to no support on their return to the homeland. Infamously, the issue of veteran care reached a tipping point in the early 21st century when there were more deaths by suicide than in combat activities in 1982 (Galak). It is little wonder that in the war's aftermath, the shapes of the islands have become floating signifiers that haunt Argentina. The cut-out shapes in Natero's monument have been charged with several meanings: the persistence of British and Spanish imperial histories, irrecoverable pieces of the homeland, soldiers forgotten or buried, and the vanishing point of national sovereignty.

In recent years, attention has finally gradually turned to the plight of ex-combatants, albeit slowly. Celebrations and commemorations of the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the war in 2007 and 2012 also began linking the ongoing sovereignty claim to the growing cause of Latin American anti-imperialism: the so-called "Patria Grande," a contemporary reincarnation of a Bolivarian concept of a united Latin America. The left-wing populist governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner have revived the "causa Malvinas," associating it with a conflict between a fledgling nation and an old empire. In practice, this means that the Malvinas fold of the "Patria Grande" allows governments to lay claim to the area for resource extraction and economic development, with a keen eye toward petroleum reserves. In order to avoid the thorny issue of the dictatorship's unilateral invasion, Malvinas is often also cast as the justified and justifiable cause of a corrupt government, or as one headline puts it "causa justa en manos bastardas" (Balza).²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ "just cause in bastard hands"

As Palermo writes, these arguments insist that “Argentine national identity” converges with and even becomes indistinguishable from the “causa Malvinas” (16-25). Ongoing rancor over sovereignty makes the issue recur frequently, not only in official forums like the United Nations but unofficially throughout Argentina—from passive road signs in the countryside to a presidentially-sponsored television ad before the 2012 London Olympics that showed an Argentine athlete training on the islands with the message: “Para competir en suelo inglés, entrenamos en suelo argentino” (Presidencia de la Nación Argentina).²⁷⁹ In another incident, FIFA fined the Argentine national soccer team for a sign displayed before a 2014 match reading “Las Malvinas son argentinas” (“FIFA”). As we saw in Central America in Part II, the spectacle of sport displaces territorial tensions; similarly, in Argentina the Malvinas question remains hotly contested in areas from sport and culture to diplomacy and law.

Beyond public scuffles, however, Malvinas touches on core problems that the Latin American nation state has faced from the 1980s to the present. On one hand, Argentina asserts the islands’ indivisible sovereignty, united with the *patria* or homeland. Such a frame relies on political theological closure, as discussed in Part I; the islands form part of the indivisible Argentina, protected by international law that ensures an imperial genealogy from Spain. The national frontiers, in turn, are like the skin around an enclosed body politic, and the extraction of the islands is a wound that threatens the body’s integrity. On the other hand, the Malvinas are also inextricably linked to the rise of the *demos*, as seen in Part II; the islands’ connection to the final toppling of the bloody dictatorship twins the war with the cause of parliamentary democracy and a final end to military government. The war, initially a diversion from the stasis—civil conflict—in Argentina, also creates a new and lasting stasis—status quo—that includes liberal democracy in Argentina and the stagnation of the geopolitical position of the

²⁷⁹ “To compete on English soil, we train on Argentine soil.”

Falkland/Malvinas Islands. Part III accounts for the complexity of the Malvinas dilemma by arguing that rather than an impasse, as in the diplomatic sphere, the islands present a cultural ecstasy.

Admittedly, ecstasy is a strange choice for describing the war's deep and lasting damage. The *Real Academia Española* defines "ecstasis" as an extremely positive state: "estado placentero de exaltación emocional y admirativa."²⁸⁰ Similarly, in the OED ecstasy is "a feeling of great happiness or joyful excitement." Yet the word comes from combining the prefix *ec-*, meaning outside, with *-stasis* meaning standing. Literally, it means standing outside or standing outside of oneself. The word was used for religious trances before being associated with largely positive emotions. Here, it describes the final dynamic of the stasis paradigm, indexing Argentina's risky "standing outside of itself" when it invaded the islands and, in the war's aftermath, the dynamic political and cultural projections onto the islands' shapes in spite of their largely stagnant political status.

Part III examines the ecstatic legacy of the islands as Argentine artists and veterans fill, reconfigure, and empty the vacant space in Natero's monument. This part examines cultural production situated between political impasse and accounts of war, between appeals to eternal sovereignty and the force of the *demos* in democracy. It indexes the repetitions and fractures in representations of the war and its aftermath, reading them as dynamic responses tied to stagnant space. I connect this dynamism in ecstasy to temporality, drawing on the etymological use of the term *ec-stases* in the existentialist tradition. In particular, in *Being and Time* Heidegger divides Being into three temporal ecstases—displacements into the past, present, and future—in which each temporality is outside of itself, and all are outside of themselves when taken together. The temporal understanding of ecstasy interrupts the monolithic time of sovereignty. Temporal

²⁸⁰ "pleasurable state of emotion and admiring exaltation"

ecstasy likewise describes the war's most important psychological consequence: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in which soldiers suffer intense flashbacks to the battlefield; they feel transported outside of the situation they are in and into the past. Through analyses of these temporal displacements, this part describes a final approach to the static island borders in their destabilization of Malvinas as national monolith with alternative, ecstatic stories.

Chapter 4. Repetition and Ecstasy in Malvinas Metaphor

“La patria existe a nivel simbólico.
Básicamente, es una metáfora. Si uno trata
de hacerla real toda de golpe, se le evaporará
de las manos.”²⁸¹
—Carlos Gamerro, *Las Islas* (132)

On the day of the Argentine invasion of Malvinas, April 2, 1982, the campaign garnered vast support from both left and right. Even left-wing intellectuals living in exile wrote in public support the campaign. Among the few dissident voices at the time of invasion was Marxist psychoanalyst León Rozitchner, who saw a sinister continuity between the dictatorship and its military campaign. For Rozitchner, the Malvinas War was inseparable from the government that started it, as the title to his book on the topic suggests—*Malvinas: De la guerra sucia a la guerra limpia* (1983).²⁸² Writing in the early days of the war, Rozitchner describes how the invasion extends the Dirty War’s logic into “clean,” traditional combat. In the book, he argues that a government that does not respect domestic popular sovereignty cannot claim sovereignty over another territory. As a consequence, leftist anti-imperialism cannot make common cause with the dictatorship’s conjured nationalism, even though both want to eject the British from the South Atlantic.

²⁸¹ “The homeland exists on a symbolic level. Basically, it’s a metaphor. If you try to make it real all at once, it will evaporate from your hands.”

²⁸² *Malvinas: From the Dirty War to the Clean War*

Rozitchner's essay frustrates the dichotomy between left and right and forges a key link between the dictatorship's domestic repression and its diversionary projection into the islands. He describes the government's attempt, first, to displace internal tensions and, second, to conceal repetition of the same tactics. Taking a cue from this framework, this chapter examines how the Argentine stasis—the internal ideological and class conflict of the Dirty War—morphed in its outward projection. Instead of viewing the dictatorship, war, and liberal democratic periods as discrete, I focus on connections between them through narratives and metaphors of the wandering signifier Malvinas.

In particular, I look at these three periods—the dictatorship from 1976-1983, the war in 1982, and parliamentary democracy in the 1990s—as intertwined, large-scale traumatic events. In poetry, narrative, and cinema, Malvinas activates a traumatic cluster, including earlier events from national history. Such repetition in different contexts is not surprising given the prevalence of what used to be called “traumatic neuroses,” which today are diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress, among those who suffered repression during the dictatorship and those who returned from combat. Since Freud, such “neuroses” have been associated with the “compulsion to repeat” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 19). Trauma, characterized by an inability to act or produce language at the time of the event, seems to defy logic by reactivating memories and repeating the trauma even well after the event has passed. As a consequence, trauma disrupts the linear understanding of past, present, and future—the subject's temporal self-understanding. Narratives about traumatic events rely on parallels, fragments, and translations that work through the repetition compulsion and disrupt the traditional arrow of time.

In the case of the Falklands/Malvinas, official state position circumvents the temporal paradox of trauma by claiming the islands as a whole territory, eternally British or eternally

Argentine. Claims to sovereignty naturalize territorial integrity. For instance, when Margaret Thatcher spoke to Parliament upon the Argentine surrender, she insisted that: “There is one principle—that territorial sovereignty be respected” (“15 June 1982”). The territory must have cohesive boundaries that, in spite of challenges to them, are constantly re-affirmed—in Britain as presence and in Argentina as absence. Once the crisis of war has subsided, the islands can be classified as an ideal or symbol, rather than an actually existing space. As Carlos Gamerro writes in the epigraph, taken from *Las Islas*: “La patria existe a nivel simbólico. Básicamente, es una metáfora. Si uno trata de hacerla real toda de golpe se le evaporará de las manos” (132).²⁸³ While the metaphor skirts the thorny issues of violence, desertion, trauma, and temporal disruption, it also evaporates as it becomes real. The metaphor of the cohesive *patria*, deserving of sacrifice, is in fact the root of the trauma.

Similarly, if one tries to make Malvinas real all at once, they vanish. This chapter examines the Malvinas metaphor as it appears and disappears in cultural production, focusing on language and translation working through the repetition compulsion. The chapter shows that the war recalls the foundational trauma of the Americas, evoking a parallel with language and religion in the Spanish conquest in Susana Thénon’s “Poema con traducción simultánea español-español” (1987).²⁸⁴ Malvinas also parallels the dictatorship in its most canonical novel, Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill’s *Los pichiciegos: Visiones de una batalla subterránea* (1983), which reveals that even in the soldiers’ attempt to flee the dictatorship’s authoritarian rule, they cannot help but recreate it. In Carlos Gamerro’s *Las Islas* (1998), this history is repeated, mirrored, and mocked in the context of hyperbolic neoliberalism during the 1990s. Steeped in conspiracy theories and translated into digital space, Gamerro’s novel reinterprets the war’s legacy through a different

²⁸³ “is a metaphor. If you try to make it real all at once, it will evaporate from your hands.”

²⁸⁴ “Poem with Simultaneous Spanish-Spanish Translation”

kind of ecstasy—through the post-traumatic subject as well as the recreational drug. As conquest, dictatorship, war, and neoliberal democracy converge in cultural production about Malvinas, the chapter analyzes how the displacement of the state and its strong metaphor onto the islands in 1982 might transform. It suggests re-shaping the metaphor and its compulsive repetition with an ecstatic understanding of time as disjunction between past, present, and future.²⁸⁵

Mistranslated Metaphors of Conquest

The Falklands/Malvinas War cannot be disentangled from its past, specifically the history of European imperialism in South America. In the opening lines of “Poema con traducción simultánea español-español,” Thénon makes this apparent: “Cristóforo / (el Portador de Cristo)” (152).²⁸⁶ Given the title, the reader expects a translation and is immediately provided an etymological breakdown of the name Cristóforo. Yet the person the poet refers to—Christopher Columbus—would be called Cristóbal in Spanish. Thénon switches the Spanish name with an Italian one. This first misstep cues the reader that her “simultaneous translation” from Spanish to Spanish will be riddled with such misdirection both in the “original” text to be translated and in the parenthetical “translation.” It also calls attention to the appropriateness of Columbus’s given name, considering his task of carrying Christianity across the Atlantic. For the poet, translation of the proper name feeds into the “proper” religion and vice versa. Just as the Greek suffix –foro in the name Cristóforo indicates “bearing Christ,” the word translation means “carrying across,”

²⁸⁵ In Heidegger’s words in *Being and Time*, Division 2, Book 3, §65 “Temporality as the Ontological Meaning of Care:” “*Temporality is the primordial ‘outside of itself’ in and for itself.* Thus we call the phenomena of future, having-been, and present, the *ecstasies* of temporality. Temporality is not, prior to this, a being that first emerges from *itself*; rather, its essence is temporalizing in the unity of *ecstasies*” (314, emphasis original; revised Stambaugh translation).

²⁸⁶ “Poem with Simultaneous Spanish-Spanish Translation” / “Christopher / (Bearer of Christ)”

referring to a meaning transferred from language to language. Translation also serves as a go-between for the two historical events in the poem—the Spanish conquest and Malvinas War. The –phor suffix in Christopher also becomes a metaphor. Thénon thus draws a parallel between the two events and poetic instruments.²⁸⁷ The knot of name and religion with translation and metaphor connects the history of empire to poetry.

Thénon’s parallel invokes a tradition of linking Malvinas with obsolete imperialism on either side of the Atlantic. She fosters this historical echo using translation to disrupt, confuse, and amend the repetition of the earlier event. Take, for instance, a few lines that appear later in the poem:

alguno exclamó tierra
(ninguno exclamó thálassa)
desembarcaron
en 1492 a.D.
(pisaron
en 1982 a.D.) (153)²⁸⁸

The translations are evidently no longer Spanish to Spanish but shift into other languages—here Greek, but elsewhere English and German. In these lines, Thénon layers the Malvinas conflict with an ancient Greek invocation of the sea goddess Thalassa, who famously choked on the bodies of the Trojan War dead. The substitution of earth with not-sea maintains the particularity of each conflict but also creates the impression of history as repeated, large-scale trauma. Anti-imperialism stretches back millennia; this war resembles many of the wars before it.

Mixing these three conflicts, the poem questions the nature of historical time. From the outset, Thénon asserts that the years 1492 and 1982 are similar, and the poem promises to provide the reader a “simultaneous” translation. But just as in simultaneous interpreting,

²⁸⁷ Note also the parallel with *La laguna H.3* in Chapter 1, in which invasion and border fixing recalls Columbus and colonial-era territorialization.

²⁸⁸ “someone exclaimed land / (no one exclaimed thalassa) / they disembarked / in 1492 AD / (they stepped / into 1982 AD)”

simultaneous translation arrives with a slight lag. Thénon records this in the poetic form, in which the reader cannot read both the text on the left and the indented text in the line below at the same time. To compensate for the delay, however, she adds homonyms and plays on words, as in the poem's final lines:

Cristóforo gatilló el misal
 (Christopher disparó el misil)
 dijo a sus pares
 (murmuró a sus secuaces)
 coño
 (fuck)
 ved aquí nuevos mundos
 (ved aquí estos inmundos)
 quedáoslos
 (saqueadlos)
 por Dios y Nuestra Reina
 (por Dios y Nuestra Reina)
 A M É N
 (O M E N) (153)²⁸⁹

These lines deepen the connection between the conquest and Malvinas in their appeal to God and Queen, especially considering that both Isabella of Castile and Elizabeth II of Britain are called Isabel in Spanish. The poem also plays with the words “mundos” and “inmundos” and with the near-homonyms “misal” and “misil.”²⁹⁰ As the poem compresses the two events into a few lines, the poet indicates that the true link between them—the only line in which original and translation are exactly the same—is violence in the name of faith and monarchy: “por Dios y Nuestra Reina.”²⁹¹ The wars ultimately connect to this divine order. In other words, the poem seems to ascribe to a view of history similar to the one Gamarro explains about the *patria*. War exists on a symbolic level. War, repeated again and again, becomes a historical metaphor in the strong sense

²⁸⁹ “Cristóforo cocked the missal / (Christopher fired the missile) / said to his peers / (murmured to his followers) / fuck / (fuck) / observe here new worlds / (observe here these brutes) / keep them / (plunder them) / for God and Our Queen / (for God and Our Queen) / A M E N / (O M E N)”

²⁹⁰ “worlds” and “brutes, barbarians, swine” / “missal” and “missile”

²⁹¹ “for God and Our Queen”

in which historical “truth” is meant to appear through its specific cases. Thénon engages a metaphysical understanding of historical narrative by metaphorizing the event. As such, the comparison she makes between 1492 and 1982 aims to convince the reader of the “simultaneity” of the two wars.

However, this pretended simultaneity is always interrupted. As we have seen, the poem’s translations are riddled with intentional mistakes and misdirection. While the trauma of Malvinas recalls the historical trauma of conquest, drawing on similar narrative structures and vocabularies, the two events can never be exactly the same. To make this clear, the poem ends substituting “A M E N,” meaning “so be it,” with “O M E N,” a prophecy; the end becomes another beginning. So, while Thénon fosters repetition, she also interrupts the equivalence between one event and another as she interrupts the equivalence between one language and another. Such a smooth transfer would replicate the metaphor, “transferring” or “bearing across,” imperialism and evangelization; it would make the poem an instrument of symbolic violence. By mistranslating and re-translating, she challenges the compression of meaning and time—the processes of metaphorization—that seek to make these events the same. Thénon’s engagement with imperialism uses the conquest to point to metaphorizing tendencies in the 1982 war—a comparison that helps explain just how long and intensely the war has persisted in the cultural imaginary.

Underground Repetition in Los pichiciegos

As Thénon’s poem shows by tying Malvinas to Spanish imperialism, the 1982 campaign against the British resembled the Argentine struggle for independence from Spain. As such, it drew support from a coalition that ranged from the most ardent nationalists to the most ardent

anti-imperialists. From the left-wing, for instance, the *Grupo de Discusión Socialista*, Argentine intellectuals living in exile in Mexico, issued a statement in support of the war and in common cause with anti-imperial struggles worldwide (Rozitchner 139-153). However, their statement against imperialism unwittingly feeds into a much more recent conflict—namely, the Dirty War. After all, the junta’s invasion of Malvinas created a galvanizing distraction from internal tensions. According to Rozitchner, however, the attitude that the Argentine populace needed to be “reorganized,” which in practice meant repressed, before maturing into democracy takes an imperial attitude toward the Argentine people as a whole.²⁹² Rozitchner points out that the Argentine invasion is no less imperial than the initial British one. It merely conceals the similarity between strong-arm tactics used at home compared to those used abroad.

The war’s most canonical novel *Los pichiciegos: Visiones de una batalla subterránea* (1983) taps into this critical but slippery distinction between challenging authority and reproducing its logic under different circumstances.²⁹³ Urban legend has it that the author, sociologist and ex-advertising executive Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill, wrote it during the last few days of the war, fuelled by a healthy supply of cocaine and whiskey. *Los pichiciegos* started what would become an entire Malvinas genre characterized by dark satire and presenting the anti-heroic underside of the war. The novel follows deserters from the Argentine military, who were largely conscripts, as they form an underground group. The subterranean colony takes its name from an armadillo, the pink fairy armadillo or *pichiciego* native to central Argentina that burrows into the ground when threatened. The deserters, *pichis* for short, have all abandoned their

²⁹² De facto President Leopoldo Galtieri was forced to confront the issue of democracy in a 1982 interview with Oriana Fallaci. Using the dictatorship’s official rhetoric, he defended the impossibility of the vote as preparation for future electoral democracy; once the pressing issues of the present had been satisfactorily resolved, democratic elections would return to Argentina (Fallaci). Galtieri expected to win the election and legitimize his government on the strength of the recovery of Malvinas.

²⁹³ *The Pichiciegos: Visions of an Underground War*, released in English as *Malvinas Requiem*. All translations from this novel are my own.

regiments and built an underground network of tunnels they refer to as the *pichicera*. They come from different regions of Argentina and are therefore sometimes seen as representative of a microcosm of the country's diversity. They survive by storing provisions and bartering with neighboring groups, leaving their tunnels only under cover of darkness for fear of being killed by either the British as enemy combatants or the Argentines as traitors.

Because of their flagrant disobedience, the *pichis* are often cast as part an inkling of the anti-government sentiment that, after defeat, led to the rapid crumbling of the dictatorship. For many, the *pichis* represent the counter-hegemonic movement that presaged the end of the dictatorship. The novel's criticism is filled with examples of how it challenges literary and political convention. For instance, in the comprehensive study *Islas Imaginadas: La guerra de Malvinas en la literatura y el cine argentinos*, Julieta Vitullo describes *Los pichiciegos* as the novel that set the stage for later portrayals of Malvinas as an inversion of the war epic (19; 72-78). Vitullo draws on earlier analysis, including Martín Kohan's article "El fin de una épica," which relates Fogwill's novel to the end of the hero's epic. Kohan points out that Fogwill clears the path for a focus on the farcical rather than dramatic aspects of war in Gamero's *Las Islas* (6). For Beatriz Sarlo in "No olvidar la guerra de Malvinas," the erosion of nationalism has made it so that the *pichis* form a "colonia subterránea donde se refugian para sobrevivir, y donde los valores se organizan en función de esa misión social única: la de conservar la vida" (12).²⁹⁴ The sovereignty conflict leads to escapism in order to focus only on survival. Sarlo especially emphasizes that the *pichis* create a community based on life, rather than death, seeing the *pichis* as representative of survival against the state and the novel as a text that refuses war as politics.

²⁹⁴ "underground colony where they take refuge in order to survive and where values are organized according to a single social mission: preserving life." Sarlo's use of the word colony also indicates that even an anti-nationalist group of Argentine settlers invokes a similarly colonial structure.

Like many of those that read the novel through its counter-hegemonic currents, Sarlo's analysis of *Los pichiciegos* functions in the interval between one type of sovereignty and another, in the interregnum between dictatorship and democracy. The *pichis*, freed from the obligation to kill or be killed, enter subterranean space in which they can escape the virulent nationalism that brought them to Malvinas. While traditionally power comes down from above, the *pichis* invert this structure, presenting the literal underground power of survival and community. They have inverted the top-down logic of hierarchy and replaced it with a bottom-up model. From this perspective, it is easy to see them as presenting a counter-narrative that feeds the anti-authoritarian impulse in the aftermath of the war. Bernard McGuirk writes that Fogwill's novel thus "performs a counter-foundational narrative of inverted values, an underground movement that whilst apparently refusing metaphor, exploits the metaphorical power of the literal" (21). This "counter-foundation" works against the state's military order, and by placing his characters underground, Fogwill makes their situation echo with those who rise from below to challenge the dictatorship.

Instead of reading *Los pichiciegos* as a prediction of the future uprising, however, I take a different approach to the novel, reading it as the transferal and continuation of the dictatorship's internal power dynamics in a different place. Just as Rozitchner describes the hidden connection between the "dirty" and "clean" wars in policy and rhetoric, Fogwill's novel can be read as an exploration of the connection between the dirty and clean wars in fiction. This interpretation does not suggest that previous readings such as Sarlo's and McGuirk's are unfounded; throughout the novel, Fogwill emphasizes survival in the face of constant threat. In particular, at the beginning, it seems uncertain whether the *pichi* community is horizontal or hierarchical. But this uncertainty gradually gives way to new rules imposed and habits defined. For example,

Fogwill describes one of the earliest rules that the leaders—the *Reyes* or *Magos* (Kings)—issue: the men are strictly forbidden from drinking potentially contaminated water and from defecating in the burrow. They must boil all water or drink *mate*, tea or coffee to avoid getting uncontrollable diarrhea on pain of death. Having described the rule, Fogwill writes: “y aunque nadie sabía si los Magos eran capaces de matar o no a un pichi o a uno que había sido pichi, por las dudas no lo iban a probar: obedecían” (34-35).²⁹⁵ Obedience, rather than disobedience, quickly becomes the norm underground, as above.

Once the *pichis* have become accustomed to the control that the Kings exert, their leaders ensure power in ways that mimic the dictatorship. One evening, lubricated by a healthy dose of whiskey, the men discuss the thousands of disappearances and death flights under the dictatorship.²⁹⁶ They wonder aloud whether Argentines will ever be allowed to vote again, and later that night the scribe, Quique, and *el Turco* are fitfully trying to sleep. Suffering from a guilty conscience, Quique asks: “‘Che Turco... ¿te parece...?’ ‘¿Qué?’ ‘¿Que éstos pueden votar?’ ‘¡Éstos no pueden nada!’”, dijo el Turco y ‘¡dormite!’” (58). The issue never arises again. The Kings have slipped from the state-sanctioned violence of war to the state-instantiating violence of centralized authority and a lack of popular sovereignty. Underground, they escape the war but reproduce the lack of democracy, turning their power against their own. Later, the Kings collectively decide which are the weakest of the bunch, and those select few never come back from a mission to the British encampment. When the leader in charge of getting rid of them returns, he feels compelled to invent an explanation: “Como nadie nombró a los pichis que

²⁹⁵ “And even though nobody knew if the Kings were capable of killing a *pichi* or not, just in case they weren’t going to test it: they obeyed.”

²⁹⁶ The “death flights” were the name of the state-sanctioned process of dropping bodies of detained citizens into the Río de la Plata from a plane or helicopter so that there would be no forensic evidence of the state’s involvement in detainees’ deaths. Fogwill’s discussion of the disappearances and death flights was a bold step at the time, given the climate of pervasive fear and far-reaching information control.

faltaban, el Turco sacó el tema y les dijo que habían quedado con los ingleses, en garantía, y todos creyeron, o quisieron creer o hacer creer que creían...” (64).²⁹⁷ Their disappearance without a trace bears the hallmarks of the arbitrary violence and utilitarian logic toward the populace that the dictatorship used to justify its actions. This parallel to the dictatorship is often unremarked in the novel’s criticism, which tends to follow along with the fiction, wanting to believe or making believe they believe in the *pichis* as an anti-authoritarian clan.²⁹⁸

Fogwill also suggests the reason that the *pichis* are unable to create a viable alternative; they are trapped by fear. They deserted their regiments out of fear, but they remain under threat. Their inability to escape the war completely forces them to try different ways of dealing with the stress. As the narrator describes *el Turco*, the King in charge of getting rid of the weak *pichis*:

Es que el miedo suelta el instinto que cada uno lleva dentro, y así como algunos con el miedo se vuelven más forros que antes, porque les sale el dormido de adentro, a él le despertó el árabe de adentro: ese instinto de amontonar las cosas y de cambiar y de mandar. ... Y el que lo veía mandando, cambiando y almacenando cosas ni pensaba que atrás de todo eso estaba el miedo. Pero es el miedo el que está atrás mandándote, cambiándote. (103-104)²⁹⁹

El Turco gathers the materials needed for survival, channeling his fear of death toward commerce. The underground economy begins as a response to fear, part of the instinct to survive, racialized as the “inner Arab” in the case of *el Turco*. This economy begins to function in line with the value placed on survival that drove the *pichis* underground in the first place.

²⁹⁷ “Since no one mentioned the *pichis* that were missing, the Turk brought up the subject and said that they’d stayed with the English, as a guarantee, and everyone believed or wanted to believe or make believe that they believed...”

²⁹⁸ An important exception is Paola Ehrmantraut’s *Masculinidades en guerra*, which reads the novel as part repetition of the dictatorship, part transition of a military model of ideal masculinity to a business one.

²⁹⁹ “It’s fear that unleashes the instinct that each person has inside, and just like some people who are afraid become assholes because they awaken their inner beast, in him it awoke his inner Arab: that instinct to amass stuff and exchange it and take charge. ... And it wouldn’t occur to anyone who saw him ordering around, exchanging, and storing stuff that behind all of that was fear. But it’s fear that’s behind it, taking charge of you, changing you.”

As time goes by, the underground market's function begins to change as *el Turco* shrewdly manipulates resources:

Si a él le sobraba querosén, hacía correr la bola de que precisaba querosén, que se acababa el querosén, que todos daban cualquier cosa por el querosén. Después mandaba un pichi desconocido a la Intendencia o al pueblo, o a los ingleses, a ofrecer querosén y volvía lleno de montones de cosas a cambio de un bidón aguado que a él le venía sobrando. (136)³⁰⁰

The exaggerated scarcity of gas inflates its worth, and *el Turco*'s market manipulation drives the underground economy toward accumulation. In turn, the more resources the Kings acquire and control, the easier it is to assert their control over the other *pichis*. Mimicking the shift from state sovereignty in its traditional form—the four Kings—to more flexible, economic forms, *el Turco* suggests the early stages of the rampant neoliberalism and artificially inflated accumulation that would dominate post-dictatorship Argentina.³⁰¹ As Zac Zimmer points out: “the *Pichis*' desire and willingness to surrender themselves to the unregulated, underground market ... lends the text its eerie sense of prediction” (145). Survival, it seems, can escape neither the logic of protection nor the language of value; it is survival at any cost.

Consequently, Fogwill's prescience does not lie in his prediction of public disobedience. Instead, it lies in the final passages of the short novel in which the *pichis*' fate is sealed. Faced with threats to their survival—the choice of fight or flight—the *pichis* try to escape, but unwittingly re-create the dictatorship's political conditions and the later, chaotic turn toward

³⁰⁰ “If he had extra kerosene, he spread the word that he needed kerosene, he was running out of kerosene, people would give anything for kerosene. Afterwards he'd send a random *pichi* to the Commissary or to the town or to the English to offer kerosene and come back with tons of stuff in exchange for a watered down barrel that was left over in the first place.”

³⁰¹ In an interview with Martín Kohan, Fogwill accounts for Sarlo's 1994 materialist analysis of *Los pichiciegos* in “No olvidar la guerra de Malvinas” as a response to neoliberal *menemismo*, in which one was free to choose as long as that choice was to stay in the market (Kohan “Fogwill”).

neoliberal accumulation. In the end, a carbon monoxide leak in the burrow kills all of them except Quique. He returns to Buenos Aires to tell their story, imagining that the colony will be frozen into the mountain: “los dos ingleses, los veintitrés pichis y todo lo que abajo estuvieron guardando van a formar una sola cosa, una nueva piedra metida dentro de la piedra vieja del cerro” (155).³⁰² Through Quique, Fogwill shows that the *pichis* attempt to flee, only to get literally frozen in the same state that they had tried to escape.³⁰³ The *pichis*’ thwarted fight-or-flight response sets the stage for a repetition of traumatic stress in the vast fictional and non-fictional cultural production that follows, exhibiting a compulsion to repeat the survival response and escape the twin traumas of dictatorship and Malvinas. The *pichis* form the cornerstone of an emergent form of socio-political organization, replicating aspects of the dictatorship and the neoliberal consensus to come. They follow the shift in emphasis from state-sponsored death to a life controlled by value—biopolitics and neoliberalization—in the post-dictatorship re-configuration of politics.³⁰⁴

Repetition and Trauma in Las Islas

Carlos Gamerro’s novel *Las Islas* (1998) adapts *Los pichiciegos* to these more recent developments in the wake of the war. By the 10th anniversary in 1992, when *Las Islas* is set, powerful business interests in Buenos Aires manipulate ex-combatants and government figures alike. In his version, Gamerro brings the war back to the home front, and instead of using an extended metaphor of the underground like Fogwill, he alternates between the city and virtual

³⁰² “the two English, twenty-three *pichis*, and everything they had stored under there will become a single thing, a new rock lodged in the old rock of the mountain.”

³⁰³ Note also that Fogwill was sometimes referred to as Quique, after his middle name Enrique.

³⁰⁴ See *La dictadura del capital financiero: El golpe militar corporativo y la trama bursátil* by Bruno Nápoli, Celeste Perosino y Walter Bosisio. The book provides evidence of a close relationship between the 1976-83 dictatorship and corporations that began introducing finance capitalism into Argentina.

planes. In battle re-enactments, cyberspace, and videogames, the war rages on. Irreverence and farce are the key tools through which the novel touches on the themes of imperialism and translation to re-enact the war and re-write the Malvinas genre.

Gamerro updates *Los pichiciegos* for the 1990s by creating a parallel to Fogwill's classic. Unlike the claustrophobic setting almost entirely underground on the islands, however, Gamerro spends little time revisiting the battlefield. In a chapter that serves as the exception to this rule, the novel's protagonist Felipe Félix describes how, like the *pichiciegos*, the men in his group came from different regions of Argentina and so represented a microcosm of the country. Although he and his comrades did not desert, they were extremely isolated in their positions on the battlefield. When not being bombarded, they searched for objects that might be valuable to trade with neighboring clans, or as the narrator describes it, "dedicándonos por las tardes, si habíamos conseguido algo que valiera la pena, al trueque con los clanes vecinos (comida, pilas, combustible de helicóptero, ropa, latas vacías, turba seca; todo menos el dinero tenía su valor)" (343-4).³⁰⁵ Much like the early *pichi* economy—before it turned to commodity accumulation—Félix and his comrades create an economy based on barter for survival.

Unlike in Fogwill, however, Gamerro explains that the men cannot desert.³⁰⁶ One passage describes how Félix's group comes across a lost conscript who seems to be trying to do so:

Había aparecido un día pidiendo algo de comer, y no supo decir de qué compañía o regimiento venía. Era un 63, se le notaba en los ojos, y aparentemente se había fugado de su posición por el maltrato o la inquina de algún oficial: era lo más

³⁰⁵ "spending our evenings bartering with neighbouring clans (food, batteries, helicopter fuel, clothes, empty tin cans, dry peat; everything had a value, except money)."

³⁰⁶ The closest anyone comes to escaping is protagonist Felipe Félix, who, as one of the only English speakers, gets taken to the village to interpret. But he is relieved of his duties, allegedly for supporting the enemy's psychological propaganda campaign, although he insists he translated the information correctly (340). Yet because it contradicted what the officers wanted to hear, Félix was asked to return to his regiment. His experience as a wartime translator, cast aside as a traitor mirrors the Italian phrase "traduttore, traditore," and as a traitor, he returns him to the regiments where Gamerro adapts Fogwill's story.

parecido a desertar que podía lograrse en estas Islas de mierda. Al principio debatieron si guardarlo o no, podían castigarlos y la comida ya no alcanzaba, pero con Carlos impulsando el voto lo adoptaron como mascota y como no hablaba ni tenía identificación le pusieron Hijitus. (342)³⁰⁷

Unlike in *Los pichiciegos* where the idea of voting is ludicrous, in *Las Islas* there is a vote about whether to keep or expel the newcomer. In spite of insufficient provisions, they decide to keep him as a kind of mascot. They name the new soldier after the cartoon character Hijitus, a poor boy with an innocent face who lived inside a pipe in the suburbs of Buenos Aires along with a dog and a magical hat. In this way, Gamarro filters Fogwill's *pichiciegos* through popular culture. Félix says that running away to join another regiment was the closest one could come to deserting, so Hijitus's imaginary pipes were the closest Gamarro could come to a *pichicera*. Gamarro's *pichicera* then, is doubly fiction—a cartoon character with superpowers within a re-writing of the Malvinas novel. The passage echoes the part in which the *pichis* “want to believe” or “make believe they believe” that they will one day be freed from the pull of war. But in the end, Hijitus is just a scared kid, living in his own fantasy world.

Gamarro's citation of a popular cartoon is hardly his only mocking exaggeration of the war's key tropes. Elsewhere in the novel, he takes up the historical figure of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. Upon return from war, protagonist Felipe Félix joins an ex-combatants' organization called *La Asociación Virreinal*, which alongside its Malvinas advocacy, is a fictional group intent on restoring *all* colonial borders of the Viceroyalty. The association

³⁰⁷ “He'd turned up one day, asking for something to eat, and couldn't say which company or regiment he was from. He was a '63 – you could see it in his eyes – and had apparently fled after being mistreated or picked on by some officer; changing position was the nearest thing to deserting you could hope for on these shitty Islands. There had been a debate at first about whether to keep him (they could have been court-martialled, and then there wasn't enough food to go round), but they adopted him as a mascot after Carlos forced the vote, and as he didn't say a word or have any identification, he was nicknamed ‘Hijitus’.”

advocates for an extremely strict interpretation of the principle of *uti possidetis*, “para lo cual propone, entre otras cosas, reconquistar Bolivia, Paraguay y Uruguay e invadir Chile y Brasil” (52).³⁰⁸ The return of colonial borders would return the territory to its original Spanish mapping. However, far from having popular support, this fringe group has financial difficulties and makes money teaching courses on Argentine history, including anti-British and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about the Islands. Their view that “Las Malvinas son argentinas” is merely a footnote to their desire to restore the Spanish Catholic empire to its former glory under an Argentine flag.³⁰⁹

The *Asociación Virreinal* is just one of many examples of widespread nostalgia for the colonial period in *Las Islas*. Just as the novel re-writes Fogwill’s story through popular culture, it also re-writes the history of the city of Buenos Aires. Historically, the first European settlement there failed in 1541 after coming under attack by indigenous peoples. The city was re-founded in 1580, the so-called Second Foundation of Buenos Aires. In Gamero’s novel, construction magnate Fausto Tamerlán is working on what he refers to as the Third Foundation of Buenos Aires.³¹⁰ He has built two imposing towers in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Puerto Madero on land partially reclaimed from the Río de la Plata. According to Tamerlán, his towers are only the beginning of a more extensive new foundation that coincides with the 1992 500th anniversary of Columbus’s first voyage to the Americas.

The novel literally builds this anniversary into its setting, while saving room to ridicule it. For instance, one company that leases office space in one of Tamerlán’s towers, *Surprises from Spain* (in English in the original), decides to erect a copy of one of Columbus’s ships at the base

³⁰⁸ “for which it proposes, among other things, the reconquest of Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, and the invasion of Chile and Brazil”

³⁰⁹ “The Malvinas are Argentine”

³¹⁰ Fausto Tamerlán and his company reappear in Gamero’s cycle of novels about the legacies of major figures in Argentine history, in order of publication *Las Islas* (1998) about Malvinas, *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (2002) about Evita Perón, and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che* (2010) about Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

of the towers. Tamerlán explains: “Se vinieron para el Quinto Centenario. Hace unos días empezaron con la maldita carabela, allá afuera, para la Expoamérica 92 ... ¡Qué bajo hemos caído! Pero tenemos que financiar la tercera fundación, y me parece natural que como en las otras dos anteriores se pongan los españoles” (30).³¹¹ Not only does Gamerro draw out Thénon’s parallel with the conquest, he takes it to an extreme. He makes Tamerlán’s company the post-Malvinas, post-dictatorship foundation of Argentina based on a new business boom. The ironies pile on as the caravel turns out to be a cheap imitation traversed by homeless Malvinas veterans and Tamerlán’s thugs. Gamerro reveals that the company that paid for it, *Surprises from Spain*, is a pyramid scheme based on exploiting social connections for the benefit of very few people at the top. If it were even possible to think of a counter-foundation in Fogwill’s *Los pichiciegos*, Gamerro shows that these foundational gestures have been entirely appropriated by economic elites by 1992. Nor are they disconnected from what came before, but instead deeply rooted in the history of the exploitation of the Americas, now displaced into a new gilded age.

The narrative also updates a number of historical figures in the context of the neoliberal 1990s. Gamerro names the businessman Fausto Tamerlán, invoking an older set of references that recall both the German story of Faust, made immemorial by Goethe for his deal with the devil, and Tamerlán, the Mongolian conqueror (Timur or Tamerlane) about whom Borges begins a poem: “Mi reino es de este mundo” (“Tamerlán” 13). The late twentieth century amalgam of these mythical figures, Fausto Tamerlán, has given everything, betraying his closest business partner, for the success of his business. At the beginning of the novel, he contracts Félix to hack into a government database in order to find the list of people who were at a *Surprises from Spain*

³¹¹ ““They’ve crossed the Atlantic for the Fifth Centenary Celebrations. A few days ago they started hammering away at that fucking caravel out there, for Expo América ’92. ... How the mighty are fallen! But we still have to raise the money for the Third Foundation, and I think it’s only natural the Spaniards should chip in, like they did for the first two.””

meeting. According to Tamerlán, the people are on an official list of witnesses to a crime that implicates the family. While at the meeting, a man was thrown out of a window from Tamerlán's office in the other tower into the void between them. Tamerlán's son and heir César is responsible, and so, as Tamerlán says, the witnesses must be found and silenced. He trusts that Félix, a hacker will be able to acquire the list of witnesses using his computer savvy and connections to the state intelligence agency.

Gamerro then puts the cyberpunk genre to work to create one of many replicas of Malvinas. Félix is still in contact with one of the officers he knew on the island, Verraco, who works for the intelligence agency, and Félix knows that Verraco wants to re-live his experience in Malvinas as if he had never left. In order to access the list of witnesses, Félix creates a videogame replica of the war and pairs it with a hidden virus—a Trojan horse, in another virtual reference to classical warfare. The game is designed to replicate the war as closely as possible. However, unable to locate the small war in the game's existing templates, Félix forges an eccentric mix of characters, settings, and weapons from conflicts as varied as the Shining Path and Desert Storm in order to approximate the war. The psychology of this move is clear. Since Freud's description of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the repetition of trauma has been hypothesized as a way of gaining mastery in spite of helplessness, as in the famous description of the *fort-da* game: "At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not" (16).³¹² Félix shows Verraco that he can gain mastery over the war by programming the game so that it is incredibly

³¹² Freud goes on to complicate this hypothesis, later arriving at the idea of something "beyond the pleasure principle." We will see more about this as well as contemporary interpretations through Catherine Malabou and Slavoj Žižek below.

easy and the Argentines win every time. In this way, he ensures that Verraco gets hooked on re-experiencing the alternative virtual history as true. Yet the game also has a fatal flaw that Félix can exploit; he can change it so that the Argentines lose every time, re-traumatizing Verraco but giving Félix another opportunity to return to the intelligence offices to “fix” it and retrieve the information the background virus has copied.

Félix successfully hacks the database and extracts the list, but his adversary is one step ahead of him and has already erased any useful information from the list of witnesses. He has to leave the comfort of his virtual life to track down the witnesses in person. As he goes person-by-person looking for missing information, he realizes that his work for Tamerlán is somehow wrapped up in the Malvinas conflict, but he can’t figure out exactly *how*. Félix suspects that one of the witnesses, who seems to have disappeared from the list and continues to elude him, might hold the answer. He thinks he might be able to find this mysterious witness through an old army friend, Emilio. The problem is that Emilio is permanently interned in a hospital psychiatric ward for aphasia, which he has suffered from since experiencing a traumatic brain injury in the war. A desperate Félix goes to see Emilio anyway, hoping for even a glimpse of useful information. Inevitably, Emilio disappoints, and Félix thinks to himself: “Ahí están todos los datos que necesitás, los hechos, las fechas, los nombres; toda la historia, contada por un afásico con una bala en el cerebro que no tuvo tanta suerte como vos, o más suerte, qué sé yo, andá a preguntarle” (409).³¹³ Emilio’s words are an unintelligible mix of recognizable phonemes, or as Emilio himself says when he is trying to talk to Félix, “datos de babelidad” (409).³¹⁴ According to the doctors, Emilio perceives no problems with his own speech: “Una vez me explicaron que sus oídos percibían sus propias frases sin error, y que eran las nuestras las que se habían vuelto

³¹³ “There’s all the data you need, the facts, the dates, the names; a tale told by an aphasic with a bullet in his brain who wasn’t as lucky as you were – or maybe luckier. Who knows? *You* ask him.”

³¹⁴ “data of babelity”

un balbuceo obsceno. ¡No era él quien había perdido el habla, sino todos los demás!” (421).³¹⁵
Emilio’s injury makes language unintelligible to him; Malvinas was his Babel.³¹⁶

The reader learns that Félix also suffered a traumatic brain injury; a piece of his helmet became lodged in his skull toward the end of the war. Upon his return to Buenos Aires, he was interned in the same hospital as Emilio for seemingly incurable amnesia, but he eventually recovered his memory. In fact, the injury increased rather than decreased his capacity for communication. Félix now achieves nearly perfect translation with computer code: “me entendía ahora con las máquinas como si fuéramos animales de la misma especie; y la única explicación posible estaba ahí, en ese bulto cruzado por cicatrices que el pelo en el espejo todavía no llegaba a cubrir; el pedazo de la máquina que yo había incorporado para siempre a mi cuerpo” (425).³¹⁷
The doctors explain that the shrapnel cannot be extracted from his skull because the bone has begun to heal around it. Yet after he has recovered, Félix sees his traumatic brain injury as a sort of blessing, giving him the tools for his true calling as a hacker after the war. Mostly human but part machine, Félix fits the definition of a cyborg, as defined in Donna Haraway’s seminal essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” as “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (149). Félix straddles this threshold between fiction and reality, moving within Gamerro’s fictional universe to explore the social reality of the Malvinas legacy.

In fact, both Emilio and Félix are cyborgs—part organism, part machine—one with a bullet in his brain and the other with a piece of his helmet in his skull. Both literally incorporate instruments of warfare, yet their capacities for communication and translation come to opposite

³¹⁵ “Someone once explained to me that his ears perceived his own speech flawlessly, that it was ours that had become an obscene blabbering.” (trans. Barnett) “He hadn’t lost his speech; everyone else had!” (translation mine; this part of the citation does not appear in the English version).

³¹⁶ Emilio’s aphasia recalls Alicia’s in *Hablar con los perros* in Chapter 2.

³¹⁷ “I now got on with machines as if we belonged to the same species and the only possible explanation lay here, in this lump criss-crossed with scars that my hair in the mirror hadn’t quite yet managed to cover, a piece of the machine that I’d taken into my body for ever.”

extremes. Emilio's aphasia limits him to a sound-based language that, while reproducing certain identifiable phonemes and combining them into new words, seems virtually untranslatable. It is a linguistic code that has strayed from the objects it names—signifiers that do not correspond to comprehensible signifieds. In stark contrast, Felipe's traumatic brain injury allows him to translate seamlessly between human and machine languages. In his communication with computers, Félix finds a language that seems nearly infinitely translatable, approaching a code for information itself. Compared to the untranslatability of Emilio's speech, drifting toward the sonic and poetic, Félix approaches the universally translatable code of binary numbers that do not resort to any poetic function. Gamarro presents Félix's translation as pure exchange without metaphor or slippage.

Dramatic plot twists break the translational impasse between Emilio and Félix. The elusive Major X, a.k.a. Arturo Cuervo, arrives at the psychiatric ward. He is copying down Emilio's gibberish in an effort to crack the code. Connecting Cuervo's behavior with information he has gleaned from earlier encounters, Félix realizes that Cuervo is trying to translate and copy down his own combat diary, which has been stored in Emilio's impressive memory. Like Fogwill's character Quique, Emilio was the scribe to the phantom battalion lost in Malvinas, in which—as luck would have it—Tamerlán's older son, groomed to be heir, fought. Félix immediately connects the characters in his mind. Tamerlán really wants to know whether his older son is still alive, and in order to find out, he needs to access any possible information about the lost battalion. Félix understands that, although Emilio lost his speech in the war, Major X's diary and all of the information it contained about the shadow Malvinas campaign remains in his memory, albeit improperly encoded. Major X is trying to translate it back into usable form. And Félix needs that information.

Writing on the Body from the Dirty War to Malvinas

In the psychiatric ward, Félix realizes that Cuervo is the missing witness and target of Tamerlán's intricate plan. In the addled minds of his friends at the *Asociación Virreinal*, Major X never surrendered. According to one branch of their conspiracy theory, he had written his plans to reclaim Malvinas in the text that Félix had found: "el mítico e inhallable texto sagrado que contenía el secreto de la guerra, ... el plan infalible para arrancar las Islas de las usurpadoras garras del inglés y unir las definitivamente al suelo patrio" (453).³¹⁸ Félix begins to read the pages of the diary but soon discovers it to be the ranting of a madman. Gamero writes a pastiche of colonial travel journals in which educated explorers describe the inscrutable natives. The text seems hardly worth the effort of recovering it from a dangerous ex-military man, but for one important exception. As the characters come closer, Félix realizes that Cuervo is the estranged husband of another of the witnesses, Gloria, who has become Félix's love interest.

In his first visit to Gloria, before he knew anything about her ex-husband, Félix felt what he thought were tactile illusions on Gloria's body as they made love in the dark. In fact, when he turns on the light he discovers that they were actually marks of torture: "Eran estas pequeñas cicatrices brillosas lo que mis dedos habían detectado antes, en la oscuridad confundiéndolas con una ilusión táctil fruto de mi embeleso; el mapa que yo había trazado uniendo estos puntos con mis dedos recién ahora empezaba a tomar forma" (307).³¹⁹ Once he sees the scars, an ashamed Gloria feels no choice except to explain the torture; the darker scars were from cigarette burns, she explains, the lighter ones from an electric probe, or *picana*. The map shapes the

³¹⁸ "the mythical and untraceable sacred text that held the secret of the war, ... the infallible plan to wrest the Islands from the usurping claws of the English and reunite them once and for all with the soil of their native land."

³¹⁹ "It was these shiny little scars that my fingers had detected, confusing them in the dark with some obscure tactile illusion produced by my enchantment; only now did the map I'd drawn by joining up these dots with my fingers begin to take shape."

dictatorship's brutality. Gloria explains that Cuervo had been her torturer. He had taken a liking to her, and they had eventually married. So the mysterious Cuervo leaves behind different types of writing: one in his diary, stored, although jumbled, in Emilio's mind and copied into the papers; another, the marks Cuervo left on Gloria's body. The popular Argentine notebook brand *cuadernos Gloria*, where part of the Diaries of Major X are written, seals the connection between Cuervo's two modes of writing: on the papers Félix recovers and on Gloria's flesh.

The objects and marks that interrupt and inscribe the body—the bullet lodged in Emilio's brain, the helmet fused to Félix's skull, and the scars covering Gloria's skin—are all traumatic inscriptions. In a sense, the plot moves around the connections between these different writings. First, as Félix traces the marks on Gloria's body, the machine in him senses the electrical impulse, as J. Andrew Brown points out in *Cyborgs in Latin America*. Gamarro expresses the connection between her Dirty War scars to his Malvinas one as literally electric. Then, when Félix recovers Cuervo's journal, he connects Emilio's war story from the *cuadernos*, with crazed businessman Tamerlán's quest to find his son. Gamarro uses these writings to bridge the major historical moments in the novel, first taking the inscription from the dictatorship to the war, and then from the war to the post-dictatorship neoliberal consensus.

As *Las Islas* builds this longer historical narrative through writing, it challenges the idea, widespread in cultural criticism, that Malvinas created a stylistic break. It is seen as irreverent and farcical, while stories of Dirty War disappearances and torture are deadly serious. Martín Kohan, for example, writes that Fogwill's *Los pichiciegos* marks the end of the Argentine war epic, which set the way for Gamarro's wild experiments in *Las Islas*. María Teresa Gramuglio takes this point of division between dictatorship and war narrative even further, establishing a categorical difference between the two periods and arguing that since Fogwill Malvinas novels

have been primarily about the picaresque. In her words, Fogwill “imaginó la guerra como una picaresca *underground* de sobrevivencia que erosionó por anticipado cualquier épica futura” (12).³²⁰ She argues that this approach does not apply to novels about the dictatorship: “No hay picaresca ni grotesco ni farsa en los relatos de los secuestros, las desapariciones, la tortura, los campos de concentración” (12).³²¹ She notes a double standard in the representations of the Dirty War and Malvinas. However, as we saw, Fogwill’s novel can be read as an extension of the dictatorship’s anti-democratic principles into the South Atlantic, in which the underground cannot help but reproduce what happens above ground. Read in this way, differences of style or technique between dictatorship, war, and post-dictatorship fiction merely mask similar processes; the extension and displacement of violence into different contexts and onto different bodies.

Las Islas shows that the true break occurs in the interruption of the traumatic event. Beyond the detectable wounds in Félix and Emilio’s brains or Gloria’s skin, the psychic wounds from the dictatorship and war re-shape the understanding of time, regardless of the stylistic spectrum ranging from tragedy to farce. For instance, after Félix discovers Gloria’s scars, she explains her involvement in left-wing militancy in the early 1970s. At the end of a public rally, someone killed her boyfriend by driving an axe into his head in the middle of the street. Her reaction was paralysis: “Yo, paralizada, no pude ni gritar” (309).³²² Gloria says that the event splits her life in two: “Ese día fue como una revelación para mí, ¿entendés? Como si el hacha me hubiera partido en dos la cabeza a mí. Seguí con la militancia, incluso después del golpe, pero solo por reflejo, en automático” (309).³²³ She stays active, at least going through the motions, but

³²⁰ “imagined the war as an underground picaresque of survival, that eroded any future epic in advance.”

³²¹ “There is no picaresque or grotesque or farce in the stories of kidnappings, disappearances, torture, concentration camps.”

³²² “Me, I was paralysed, I couldn’t even shout.”

³²³ “That day was like a revelation to me, you see? As if it had been my own head the axe had split in two. I stayed in the movement, even after the coup, but only as a reflex, on automatic pilot.”

the feelings of paralysis and her inability to verbalize make it clear that she suffers from traumatic stress. After her arrest, the repeated trauma of gang rape in detention made her black out to avoid knowing what was happening: “Sé que en algún momento se me anuló la conciencia, como si hubieran tirado demasiado del cable del enchufe: simplemente se desconectó” (310).³²⁴ Gloria uses an electrical metaphor to explain how she stops inhabiting her own body, divorcing somatic experience from consciousness through the defense mechanism of psychological dissociation. She splits apart reality and corporal experience from consciousness. These events create psychic wounds that split the narrative timeline and create what Gloria describes in her dissociation—an ecstatic displacement from self.³²⁵

Gloria’s story matches the typical stories of the Dirty War that Gramuglio describes. It is both heavy and serious, but so is Félix’s. In spite of other places in the novel that use cocaine, LSD, videogames, pastiche and farcical exaggeration, Félix acknowledges that the majority of the men sent to the islands came back damaged. While they did not suffer brain injuries like him, they were still traumatized in such a way that they were no longer able to lead normal lives after they returned. This trauma may not be detectable by medical equipment; after all, Freud wrote: “In the case of the war neuroses, the fact that the same symptoms sometimes came about without the intervention of any gross mechanical force seemed at once enlightening and bewildering” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 12). Félix describes the bewildering part of “war neuroses” as a

³²⁴ “I know I just blanked out at some point, like they’d pulled the plug: it just disconnected.”

³²⁵ According to the *Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual*’s description of traumatic stress: “Traumatic experience may overwhelm mental capacities, disturb affective experience and expression, and interfere with the capacity for symbolization and fantasy, thus contributing to the breakdown of meaning. It may also interfere with thinking and with the mental processing of trauma-related memories and fantasies. Psychic trauma effects changes in the sense of self (Ulman & Brothers, 1988) and in the quality of interpersonal relationships. Clinical literature has highlighted obligatory repetition and persistent re-experiencing of traumatic events, through recurring nightmares flashbacks/ reminiscences, and driven re-enactments of traumatic themes (Brenner, 2001, 2004; Davies & Frawley, 1994; van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996)” (PDM Task Force). Gamarro’s novel works through this mental processing through symbolization, memory, and fantasy, as we will see below. For a description of the neurological response to traumatic events, see Bessel van der Kolk’s *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*.

change of shape, not necessarily in the brain, as a result of “gross mechanical force,” but in the space the men occupy in society:

Dejamos un espacio preciso cuando nos fuimos, pero allá cambiamos de forma, y al volver ya no encajábamos, por más vueltas que nos dieran, en el rompecabezas; volvimos diez mil iluminados, locos, profetas malditos, y ahí andamos, sueltos por las cuatro puntas del país, hablando un idioma que nadie entiende haciendo como que trabajamos, jugamos al fútbol, cogemos, pero nunca del todo, en algún lugar sabiendo siempre que algo nuestro valioso e indefinible quedó enterrado allá. (413)³²⁶

After leaving Argentina for the war, the men become others to themselves. They no longer fit in the space they once occupied, even though they go through the motions. Their language also shifts so that they end up “hablando un idioma que nadie entiende.” Emilio is only the most extreme example of how the ex-combatants are cut off from communicating with those around them.

The seemingly interminable Malvinas stories, adaptations, miniatures, and commemorations are not merely picaresque or grotesque. Instead, they are repetitions of the traumatic event in pastiche and farce—a cyberpunk version of the repetition compulsion that attempts to recover the capacity for language and action that went missing during the traumatic event. Just as the transition from the Dirty War to Malvinas was ecstatic—the state projecting its internal conflicts beyond its borders—the response of those affected by these events was likewise ecstatic: outside of their consciousness, dissociative. It brought about a fundamental

³²⁶ “We left a precise space when we left, but we changed shape over there, and when we got back we didn’t fit into the jigsaw any more, whichever way you turned us; ten thousand of us came back – enlightened, mad, damned prophets – and here we are, roaming free from one end of the country to the other, speaking a language no one understands, pretending we’re working, playing football, screwing, but never quite here, always aware that there’s a precious and indefinable part of ourselves buried over there.”

change in form that interrupted their identity. Following Freud, Catherine Malabou explains that physical or psychic trauma can create a new persona that inhabits the same body: “As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room” (*Ontology* 1). The event destroys a psychic form and creates a new one, and *Las Islas* displays this in the non-identity of the rape survivor with herself and the combat veteran with himself.

For Malabou, this dramatic change is inexplicable based on its past and reveals “the psyche’s ability ... to survive the dislocation of its history” (*The New Wounded* 60). The larger question facing Argentina in the wake of the Dirty War and Malvinas is how to “survive the dislocation of its history.” The answer, as Palermo points out, has been a return to Malvinas as an issue of “national identity.” But according to Félix, the reshaped identities of the ex-combatants cannot be re-incorporated into the nation, even if they appear to perform a zombie-like assimilation. They just don’t fit. The various forms of writing—on bodies, in memory, and in aphasic and computer code—yield a more fundamental problem than fitting back into the nation. It is not that a Malvinas novel like *Las Islas* is not serious enough; it is that the novel interrupts the very premise of the war, namely that something can be restored to its original state. It questions the idea that when people talk about “Las Malvinas,” they are referring to the same place before, during, and after the war, as if there were a direct, self-evident relationship between the islands’ name and their geography or the soldier’s name and his consciousness. It asks us to confront the terrifying thought that, as Malabou explains, “we might, one day, become someone else, an absolute other, someone who will never be reconciled with themselves again, someone who will be this form of us without redemption or atonement, without last wishes, this damned form, outside time” (*Ontology* 2-3). In linking Gloria and Félix, Gamarro shows that the

historical events they have confronted have changed them. They cannot be the same people they were before, just as the islands that Argentina claims cannot be the same as the ones they invaded in 1982. The war does not lend itself to farce inherently, but instead to the proliferation of temporal splits, and so to these damned forms left behind.

MDMA, Ecstasy

The relationship between Gloria and Félix represents the intertwining of the physically and psychologically traumatic histories of the Dirty War and Malvinas in the fictional present of 1990s Argentina. And while Félix often discusses the war's effects on his friends, Gamarro gives no indication that Félix suffers from PTSD until the end of the novel.³²⁷ As the plot comes to its climax, Félix is trapped in Tamerlán's office, forced to witness the violent and charged confrontation between Fausto Tamerlán and his surviving son, César. César and the family psychoanalyst kill Fausto and torture Félix using a drug that supposedly blocks the body's natural pain inhibitions. As the effects of the drug become overwhelming, Félix has a vivid flashback to the war. Although Gamarro revealed Félix's injury and amnesia earlier in the novel, the author has hidden the fact that Félix became mute during the final battle at the end of the war. In the scene, he tries helplessly to help translate his companions' surrender to the British, having served as a reliable Spanish-English interpreter throughout the novel, but no one can hear him. He thinks he must be dead (562). Félix describes the paralysis that accompanies his aphasia and vividly remembers the surrender as his body leaving the islands and floating back toward Buenos Aires. Gamarro thus sets Félix in the classic conditions Post-Traumatic Stress—shock, inability

³²⁷ In her reading of the novel in *Masculinidades en guerra*, Paola Ehrmantraut interprets Felipe Félix's condition as hysteria. While this reading aligns with her gender focus, I prefer PTSD as an analytic framework because it brings together both Félix and Gloria's conditions under the internal and external war, while tying into contemporary theoretical approaches to the subject at the intersection of psychoanalysis, neurology, and politics, as we will see below.

to speak, and dissociation. This uncanny self-separation, floating away from the battlefield recurs as Félix leaves Tamerlán's tower 10 years later on the anniversary of the surrender: June 14, 1992.

Félix recovers his consciousness somewhere at the base of the tower, near the replica of Columbus's ship. He remains stunned. Meandering around, he finds comfort in the hospitality of the vagabond that lives in containers in and around the port and Columbus's ship. Félix learns that this vagabond is also an ex-combatant from Malvinas. In the ironically titled chapter "La recuperación de las Islas," Félix leaves Tamerlán's towers in Puerto Madero and treks across Buenos Aires on Sunday night, aiming for home.³²⁸ Ten years have passed, but for him, the war is as real as it was 10 years before, as he describes it: "el tiempo para nosotros detenido en un instante como los relojes de Hiroshima" (587).³²⁹ The moment of surrender has become an eternal present of ruin and destruction. On his walk, he comes across the ghosts of his former comrades from one of the war's last battles at Mt. Longdon. Félix talks vaguely of joining them in the afterlife, but the ghosts urge him not to commit suicide. If he dies, they say, no one will be able to invoke them together as a group. They will only be able to appear individually to their families. Félix's existence holds them together in the world of the living.

One of the ghosts of his friends asks Félix if he knows what hell is, and he responds: "No te quepa duda. Puedo escribirte un libro" (590).³³⁰ The reader is left wondering if that is the book that s/he reads. Then, the ghosts leave, and despite their exhortations, Félix becomes convinced that he wants to commit suicide. He walks toward Gloria's house, and when he arrives, he tells her everything, starting with the beginning of the story and following the same structure as the novel:

³²⁸ "The Recovery of the Islands"

³²⁹ "like the clocks of Hiroshima, time for us had stopped at an instant."

³³⁰ "You bet I do. I could write the book."

Empecé con el día en que entré por primera vez a la torre de Tamerlán, o con el día en que los tres canas vinieron para reincorporarme al ejército; no había mucha diferencia: a medida que avanzaba me daba cuenta de que las dos historias habían terminado por fundirse en una como dos ríos se juntan para formar un tercero, o quizás siempre había sido uno solo y era yo el que se había encontrado en dos momentos con dos tramos distintos sin darme cuenta de que el agua era la misma. (596)³³¹

Although a decade apart, Félix sees the two stories as part of the same narrative. They form a timeline that folds back on itself: “otra torsion a la cinta de Moebius que serpenteando entre dos mundos vueltos uno como dos espejos enfrentados había terminado por encontrarse meramente a sí misma” (597).³³² The characters, in the ecstatic flights of their own memories, can travel through this timeline, encountering places where their stories converge. Gamero’s understanding of time, forges a link between the Dirty War and Malvinas as well as between Malvinas and the post-dictatorship that resists a single direction. In its serpentine twists and turns, time might seem to superimpose two events or allow them to split into different branches of the same story.

After Félix finishes his story, Gloria says that she agrees with his conclusion; they should commit suicide. They prepare everything and take cyanide pills that Gloria says she has left from her guerrilla days. Soon after they prepare the scene of their death, however, the reader discovers that she lied to him. The pill is actually MDMA—ecstasy. Initially, Félix does not realize that he

³³¹ “I started with the day I first entered Tamerlán’s tower, or with the day the three cops brought me the draft to rejoin the army, there wasn’t much difference. As I went on, I realised the two stories had ended up merging into one like two rivers that join to form a third; or perhaps there’d only been one river all along and it was me who had encountered two separate stretches of it at two moments in my life without realising the water was the same.”

³³² “another twist to the Möbius strip that, weaving between two worlds intertwined like two facing mirrors, had ended up merely finding its own tail.” The serpent that Barnett adds to the translation echoes the conspiracy theories of the *Asociación Virreinal*.

has been tricked, and by the time he does, the effects have already taken hold. He no longer cares whether he lives or dies because of the pleasure and intensity of his bodily sensations. The attempted suicide, however, makes him resemble what Slavoj Žižek describes as the post-traumatic subject—the subject that has survived its own death (28).³³³ Initially, Félix’s near-death experience set off the body’s trauma response, but in attempting to cure himself of flashbacks, he begins to re-figure this response in a different way. In this fictional experiment, Gamero’s turn to MDMA precedes subsequent recent tests of the drug as part of a treatment program for PTSD. The drug increases tolerance for traumatic memories while also encouraging imagination and association, processes that counter the dissociation that Félix experiences in flashbacks (Mithoefer et. al., Oehen et. al.). In *Las Islas*, the drug helps Gloria and Félix overcome the persistent detours into their traumatic pasts. It helps them enact a symbolic death that allows them to overcome the constant conscious and unconscious repetition compulsion.

In the scene, Félix imagines and symbolically reconfigures the major traumatic events that have appeared throughout the novel. For instance, as Gloria and Félix talk about the pills, Gloria says: “‘Che, me parece que vinieron fantásticos estos bichos [las píldoras]’” (603). Félix responds: “‘¿Dónde los conseguiste?’ ‘Me llovieron del cielo. Un amigo que vino de España.’ ‘¿Colón?’” (603). Having just left the fake caravel and considering the imperial histories woven into the plot, Félix thinks that the pills must have come from Spain with Columbus. However, this “discovery” is not one of conquest but rather a psychic experience that re-shapes Félix’s internal symbolic and temporal landscape.³³⁴ Columbus’s journey remains a symbolic presence

³³³ The post-traumatic subject is re-visited in more detail in the conclusion.

³³⁴ The reconfiguration of “discovery,” especially as “bringing near” things that are already at hand, is a central dynamic in this scene. This dynamic resonates with a passage in *Being and Time* in which Heidegger connects temporality, spatiality, and taking care in everydayness through discovering and bringing near in Dasein’s ecstatic temporality. See Division 2, Chapter 4, §70 “The Temporality of the Spatiality Characteristic of Dasein.” The following passage in particular interests me: “The self-directed discovering of a region is grounded in an ecstatically retentive awaiting of the possible hither and whither. As a directed awaiting of region, making room is

but becomes utterly meaningless as a metaphor, or vessel of meaning. The connection to the conquest is merely a mental slip on Félix's part. Columbus's landing and the Spanish MDMA merge into the same time, neither celebrated nor reviled. The conquest has shed its emotional and symbolic weight.

As Félix says immediately after his question about Columbus, the high alters his relationship to his body and identity. It changes his way of being in and relating to the world. More specifically, the "discovery" of the New World as both the Americas and a new psychic life re-shapes his understanding of his body and its world:

Una nueva ráfaga de aire tibio soplada desde el nuevo mundo apagó en nuestras bocas las palabras antes de que llegáramos a pronunciarlas, y una lánguida y exquisita dulzura se apoderó de mis extremidades, sujetándolas, entregándome inerte a esas manos irrespetuosas que sin permiso de mi parte empezaron a amasar en una bola la arcilla de mi viejo cuerpo; una nueva identidad nacía temblando a medida que sus dedos hábiles iban desenvainando de ellas las formas del nuevo; las manos de Rodin no habrían dado tanta vida a mis miembros.

(603)³³⁵

He feels his body re-shaped, as though it were clay in the capable hands of a sculptor. MDMA likewise enhances the feeling of tactile connection, and as Félix and Gloria touch each other,

equiprimordially a bringing-near [Nähern] (or de-distancing) of things at hand and objectively present. De-distancing, taking care comes back out of the previously discovered region to what is nearest [Nächste]. ... Because Dasein as temporality is ecstatic and horizontal in its being, it can factually and constantly take along space for which it has made room. With regard to this space ecstatically made room for, the here of its actual factual location or situation never signifies a position in space, but the leeway of the range of the totality of useful things taken care of nearby—a leeway that has been opened in directionality and de-distancing" (*Being and Time* 351; revised Stambaugh translation).

³³⁵ "“Hey, I think these things are the real deal.” “Where did you get them?” “Manna from heaven. A friend from Spain.” “Christopher Columbus?” A fresh gust of warm air blowing from the new world extinguished the words in our mouths before we could speak them and a drowsy sweetness gripped my limbs, holding them fast, delivering me defenceless into her irreverent hands, which began to knead the clay of my old body. A new identity was being born, trembling as her fingers gradually drew out the forms of the new; the hands of Rodin couldn't have breathed more life into my limbs.”

Félix describes how the contact between their bodies lowers defenses that emerged as a result of their past experience. Gamarro imagines the plasticity of clay, its ability to take shape, as Félix's body at the same time that the neurons in his brain fire together, altering the brain's established neurological patterns thanks to neuroplasticity. These reformulations of brain and body mirror the process that Malabou describes in her philosophical and psychoanalytic reading of plasticity through brain damage in *The New Wounded*. Félix feels his body taking on a different shape, almost re-born, as the drug helps him work through the past. Surviving his own death creates a material, formal change in the body.

As ecstasy changes the symbols and bodies in the novel, it also changes the way that Félix communicates with and through them. While communication is already a thematic axis through which Gamarro shows Félix's character develops from Spanish-English translator during the war to aphasic soldier to brain injury survivor to computer coder and hacker, the final scene re-works the relationship to language completely. In this scene, the dislocations of translation and meaning approach Emilio's sound-based language, melting away the surface or distance between words and things. Words no longer index objects but instead fuse with them:

las palabras habían caído como los vestidos y en esta terrible desnudez sin miedo la voz no era más que respiración sonora, el mismo sonido repetido una y otra vez equivalente a toda la literatura, las palabras vertidas en mis oídos no más que prolongaciones de los labios que los besaban. Qué equivocado había estado siempre: no eran las cosas las que se encontraban distanciadas de las palabras; éramos nosotros, y de la misma manera que por primera vez tocaba lo que alcanzaban mis ávidas manos de bebé, por primera vez decía las palabras que hasta ahora apenas había repetido, las decía con todo el cuerpo, no sólo la lengua

y la garganta, y la voz... la voz era el sentido del tacto yendo por dentro. (603-604)³³⁶

Félix's ecstasy merges signifier and signified. No longer a process of encoding or translation, the voice becomes the instrument for speaking *things*, as sound eliminates distance from the objects around him. Likewise, the traditional barrier between subject and object, self and other disappears. As a consequence, the contact with the other de-forms and re-forms his identity. Gloria's care for Félix means, not only that she switches the pills so that he cannot commit suicide, but also that her contact with him at this crucial moment destroys his attachment to the story that comes before. It becomes meaningless, and he cannot re-tell the story again, or at the very least not in the same way.

Gamerro's scene suggests numerous points of contact between two understandings of ecstasy: MDMA for PTSD and Heidegger's temporal ec-stases. While they seem dissimilar at first, Gamerro suggests that both effect a fundamental change in the way Félix, and by extension the reader, understand Malvinas. The repetition compulsion that characterizes PTSD forces the subject ceaselessly into the past, whether consciously or unconsciously. It replicates the sense of helplessness associated with trauma, approximating what Heidegger calls thrownness: the condition of having been thrown into the world. In this scene, however, MDMA helps Félix connect to a different part of his temporal existence. He becomes nearer to the objects around him in the present, approaching what Heidegger refers to as de-distancing or presencing. There is a notable shift in emphasis from the past to the present.

³³⁶ "Our words had fallen away like our clothes and in this terrible, fearless nakedness the voice was nothing but breathing sounds, [the same sound repeated again and again, equivalent to all of literature,] the words poured into my ears nothing but prolongations of the lips that were kissing them. How wrong I'd always been: it wasn't things that were distanced from words, it was us. In the same way that, for the first time, I was touching what my greedy baby's hands were reaching for, for the first time I was saying the words I'd only repeated until now, saying them with my whole body, [not just my tongue and throat and voice... the voice was the sense of touch turned inward]." I added the phrases in brackets, which were omitted from Barnett's translation.

While fleeting, lasting only the length of the high, the shift from past to present creates a definitive change in Félix's relationship to time. As he explains, time, represented by the ticking clock, melts away for a while. The drug suspends temporality—traditionally understood as a progression or arrow—so that time loses its directionality. Félix notices himself coming down, he says, because, although he doesn't feel fear, anguish, guilt, or impotence, they become *possible* again. Similarly, he notices: "Los relojes habían recuperado su autoridad sobre el tiempo, trozándolo minuciosamente con sus precisos cuchillos, los objetos volvían a revestirse de su superficie y los dedos ya no conseguían atravesarla al tocarlos" (606).³³⁷ As he comes down, the relationship between past and present becomes increasingly discordant, even violent, as knives slicing time into pieces. The barrier between self and other also re-appears, and while Félix is disappointed, he is no longer suicidal.

As Félix begins to reflect on the experience, he notes the fragility of the world with surprise. Something has changed. His understanding of the world is no longer ruled by mythical eternities playing off each other as in the epic battles of the previous chapters. In his words: "Primero caigo en el infierno, después aparezco en el paraíso, y de golpe... acá" (609).³³⁸ He ends up somewhere entirely mundane: Gloria's house. Ecstasy is neither the hell of flashbacks and ghosts nor the heaven of the high. Gloria's house is not an extension of Malvinas as Buenos Aires had been throughout the novel, nor is it meaningful in the way that Tamerlán's towers and Columbus's caravel were. In essence, Félix notes that the temporal ec-stases of past, present, and future, are outside themselves, discordant. It is impossible to cultivate harmony between them, but as he comes down from the high, Félix begins to experience time as the union of these displacements. The powers of the mythical, symbolic, and fantastic, which had ruled the plot

³³⁷ "The clocks had regained their authority over time, minutely slicing it up with their precise knives, objects were again clothing themselves in their surfaces and fingers no longer sank in when they touched them."

³³⁸ "First I fall into hell, then I emerge in paradise, and suddenly ... here."

until this moment, dissolve in these final pages. Gloria, whose body had been a site of violent inscription throughout the novel, finally tells a story of her own invention. She invents a fairy tale for Félix to help him sleep off his hangover. But from the beginning, she warns him that it will be a reverse fairy tale, where the expected happens—the glass shoe fits the stepsister and the ugly duckling becomes an ugly duck. There is no transformation for the sake of salvation. In Gloria’s story, the princess’s prince remains a frog, and she plans to bear his tadpoles. In this final scene, Gloria and Félix experience the final element of temporal ecstasy—the projection into the future aware of their own deaths. They plan to go to the cinema later with Gloria’s daughters, as if this day were like every other day. They arrive at a provisional treaty with the three components of ecstatic temporality: past, present, and future. Gamero engages myth and epic while acknowledging that the lost islands will not return after some magical, storybook transformation. The hope lies, not in the restoration of lost territory or the charging of *patria* with meaning, but instead in the possibility of overcoming the traumatic past in order to inhabit the everyday ecstasy that is past, present, and future, yet neither heaven nor hell.

Mirrored Islands, Specular Democracy

During most of *Las Islas* Félix conjures a symbolic universe to assimilate his traumatic experience, moving in and out of models and re-creations. But *Las Islas* shows that trauma exceeds metaphorical assimilation. As Žižek writes, the post-traumatic subject “cannot be identified (does not fully overlap) with ‘stories it is telling itself about itself,’ with the narrative symbolic texture of its life” (29).³³⁹ By the end of the novel, Félix’s stories are relegated to the

³³⁹ Žižek’s understanding of the post-traumatic subject in “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject” differs from Malabou’s, as we will see briefly below. His analysis returns to the most basic, “autistic” split subject described by Jacques Lacan. This interpretation allows him to recover the post-traumatic subject in the service of his political project—the return of the commons and a renewed communism. Malabou, on the other hand, favors a sustained

preceding pages. He is no longer the ex-combatant represented as a subject that strives for meaning, just as Gloria is no longer merely a victim of the *junta*'s torture. The transformation of their bodies, described as a change in shape, changes the "narrative symbolic texture" of these characters' stories. *Las Islas* also shows that Malvinas exhibits the repetition compulsion, finally exhausting it. However, at the level of society, the symbolic weight of Malvinas seems stronger than ever during the post-dictatorship years and into the present. Conflated with national identity and belonging in political discourse, the islands become part of a *fort-da* game, as Freud described above—first here, then gone, repeated ad infinitum. But the subject, in this case the heterogeneous national subject Argentina, never achieves mastery. It merely reinforces the pleasure principle by casting away and bringing back the lost object.

Since the 1994 constitution's proclamation of the state's objective of recovery and full exercise of sovereignty in the South Atlantic, this dynamic of loss and restoration of the islands has been inscribed into the fabric of parliamentary democracy. Its opposite, destruction, does not appear in official discourse. In fiction, however, *Las Islas* marks the transition into the post-dictatorship period through a symbolic landscape characterized by such oppositions, for instance, between the plasticity of its characters and the destruction of the metaphorical power of Malvinas, or between time and space. Under the parliamentary system ruled by a neoliberal consensus, the businessman Fausto Tamerlán even begins to see that time has become more important than territory. In one of the late chapters in the novel, he looks out of his office window to the heavy machinery reclaiming land from the Río de la Plata and remarks: "Estamos ganándole terreno al río. Ganando. ¡Ja! Tanto esfuerzo para comprar espacio cuando lo que

inquiry into the nature of the destruction of the subject through a neurological break that has not been accounted for in psychoanalysis, especially in *The New Wounded* and *Ontology of the Accident*.

necesito es tiempo” (506).³⁴⁰ By ten years later, the dictatorship has been replaced by the ascendancy of the ultra-rich businessman, and the manipulation of territory, critical to convincing left-wing intellectuals to support the war regardless of the timing, has been replaced by the manipulation of time, vital to securing capital in the fast-paced, nepotistic business world. In the following pages, Tamerlán’s words come true. His company falls, and he falls along with it, literally out of a broken window in one of his towers. He needed more time to secure his legacy. His son César was not supposed to inherit the company. His brother, Fausto Jr., had been groomed for the position, but went missing during the war while on patrol with Major X.

The conflict between the two brothers recalls Borges’s well-known prose poem about the war, “Juan López y John Ward,” which claims that two men fighting in Malvinas, “Hubieran sido amigos, pero se vieron una sola vez cara a cara, en unas islas demasiado famosas, y cada uno de los dos fue Caín, y cada uno, Abel” (95).³⁴¹ Gamarro’s opposition between the Tamerlán brothers takes this aphorism away from the battlefield and back to Argentina where the conflict haunts the democratic period. The two sons are locked in a battle that takes place in their father’s two towers.³⁴² The towers, like the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, are supposed to represent beacons of financial power in the rising Global South. They also have an additional power structure built into them: double-sided mirrors that create a point of maximum visibility at the top and minimum visibility at the bottom. The lowest level employees work on the lowest floors of the building, and supervisors can turn the mirrors to monitor any room below

³⁴⁰ “We’re reclaiming land from the river. Reclaiming. Ha! So much effort to buy space when what I need is time.”

³⁴¹ “might have been friends, but they saw each other face-to-face only once, on some islands that were too famous, and each one was Cain and each one Abel” (translation mine).

³⁴² There are numerous other doubles associated with alternative histories, including: the *Asociación Virreinal*’s belief if the Argentines had invaded the other, less inhabited island, they would have won the war; Felipe Félix’s videogame, seen above, which shows Argentina always winning at first, then always losing; a veteran’s painstakingly detailed model of Stanley/Puerto Argentino, perfected so that his comrades can destroy it and enact their revenge, although the man always claims the model is incomplete because, they suspect, he does not want them to destroy it.

them. In turn, the supervisors on the next level up can make these subordinates appear, and so on up to Tamerlán himself. The building is a contemporary, hierarchical adaptation of the Panopticon.

As the plot comes to its climax, Tamerlán's enemies invert all of the mirrors so that the top of the tower becomes the point of minimum, rather than maximum, visibility in order to obscure their approach. To fend off the oncoming attack, Félix hacks the electronic system that flips the mirrors, making them rotate constantly to buy them more time. He believes that the imminent attack must be part of César's spectacular final coup against his father, but he is wrong. As César explains when Félix asks if he will take over control of the business from his murdered father:

Voy a reventarla [la empresa]. El control pasa a una sociedad anónima, y Canal [el psicoanalista] y yo quedamos apenas como accionistas. Ya acordamos la reestructuración. Vamos a rotar todos los espejos, para que nadie sepa muy bien dónde está el jefe. Va a ser una democracia. Una democracia sin pueblo. Esta cosa personalizada y jerárquica es muy vulnerable. El error de la araña. (543)³⁴³

The final sentence recalls the beginning of the novel, in which Félix feels himself becoming trapped in Tamerlán's web. Tamerlán, the business emperor is overthrown, but the coup neither inverts the hierarchy nor replaces one despot with another. Instead, the power structure shifts to assume a truly neoliberal form in which power is dispersed among shareholders in the form of money and influence. There is no figurehead to hold accountable.

³⁴³ "I'm going to flog it [the company]. Control will be handed to a plc, and Canal [the psychoanalyst] and I will be shareholders. We've already sorted out the restructuring. We're going to rotate all the mirrors so nobody really knows where the boss is. It'll be a democracy. A democracy without the people. That whole personalised, hierarchic deal is too vulnerable. The spider's mistake."

Profound organizational changes mask the fact that what is left after Tamerlán's fall is a democracy without a people, a democracy of shareholders. His death is merely a convenient excuse for a more efficient way of organizing profit, just as the fall of the *junta* fostered the conditions for someone like Tamerlán to rise. As a government employee explains earlier in the novel, bureaucracy under President Carlos Menem is “una utopía anarquista al revés. Una organización sin jefes donde nadie es libre” (143).³⁴⁴ Malvinas precedes these changes in structure—the overthrow of the dictatorship in 1982 and the assassination of Tamerlán on the 10th anniversary of defeat in 1992. First with Fausto, who fought in the war, and then with César, who dissolved his father's company, this contemporary Romulus and Remus of Buenos Aires enact the shift from dictatorship to democracy via war. Gamero shows that these changes, while apparently disruptive and ecstatic, are merely formal. They enact a restoration masquerading as a new order.

In re-writing the end of the war in parallel with parliamentary democracy and a business boom ten years later, Gamero's version of Malvinas challenges the story that the war caused the *demos* to rise against the dictatorship. Gamero shows that power merely shifts the border between inside and outside to obscure its machinations, mirroring one side, then the other. Mirrors quickly change structural appearances, making it difficult to locate any given difference or concentration of power. As in the specular democracy that followed the war, Malvinas is the abiding node around which these shifts take place. The geography of the two islands, split across a channel, reflects Argentina's split of dictatorship and neoliberal democracy more than the fraternal split between Juan López and John Ward. The war reflects a split *within* Argentina, in which the appearance of change and movement masks the actual stagnation between

³⁴⁴ “an anarchist utopia in reverse. An organisation without leaders where nobody's free.”

internalizing and externalizing the Malvinas question. It is a compulsive, traumatic repetition that seeks to conjure an image of the *demos* in rotating mirrors.

However, Gamerro includes another set of siblings that stand in stark contrast to César and Fausto, Gloria's twin daughters Soledad and Malvina. The twins literally embody the legacy of the war. They are the product of Gloria's rape by Arturo Cuervo, born prematurely on the day the war broke out—April 2, 1982. They bear the names that Cuervo instructed Gloria to use, taken from the two islands he had set out to take back from the British.³⁴⁵ Symbolically, they seal a pact between the militants suppressed during the dictatorship—in this case Gloria—and the military elites in charge—represented by Cuervo. The girls are the bond between them, product of rape and a family built on sexual and emotional abuse. Their names seal the incarnation of the issue on which left and right, militants and military finally agreed, fostering patriotism in even the dictatorship's most ardent critics. Yet Gamerro does not make the girls a synthesis of opposing factions. They are female, a notable sexual difference from the military and businessmen that dominate the novel, and they have Down syndrome, a contingent excess—an extra copy of chromosome 21. This difference represents a code disruption like many we have seen in this chapter, only this time in the genetic rather than linguistic code. This genetic excess re-shapes the legacy of the war. It frees the girls from assuming the role that Cuervo wanted for them—to represent the country overcoming the opposition between left and right through nationalism. However, they interrupt this reach toward synthesis and resolution. Unsurprisingly, upon his return from Malvinas, Cuervo finds his daughters intolerable and abandons the family.

Soledad and Malvina ensure the symbolic destruction of Malvinas. Their corporal and genetic difference provides Gamerro with a more lasting version of the ecstasy of Félix's high in which form and content are transformed. For Félix, MDMA makes the border between subject

³⁴⁵ In Spanish; in English, they are referred to as East and West Falkland.

and object disappear. It fuses the world around him into a borderless transcendence that then settles into an ecstatic unity as he comes down. Identity becomes fundamentally malleable, changing in response to a violent temporality. In Gamarro's portrayal of Soledad and Malvina, he takes this transformation one step further, departing from the post-traumatic subject entirely. The twins bear no relation to the symbolic registers in their names nor do they respond to their genealogy. Instead, they represent something like what Catherine Malabou describes in her *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, "an unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation" (2).³⁴⁶ They exist in the wake of destruction as contingent excess, as children that do not seek the mastery of the *fort-da* game. They were supposed to be the most emphatic metaphors of Malvinas, but they refuse.

Las Islas thus presents a contrast between the neoliberal state's response to trauma—frantic repetition and projection, interiorization and exteriorization—and another, subjective and fictional way of treating it through transformation and displacement from self. The novel shows that to inscribe Malvinas as a central metaphor for Argentine identity is to misunderstand that the state's projection onto the islands effected a fundamental split between the etymological definition of ecstasy as displaced internal conflict and a more transformative definition of ecstasy as non-identity and temporal disjunction. This chapter has shown that accepting an ecstatic post-Malvinas Argentina beyond repetition means recognizing that the disruption of the border was both transformational and destructive. From Columbus's ship to Tamerlán's twin towers, war—

³⁴⁶ Malabou would not classify Down Syndrome as an example of destructive plasticity, since her work focuses on traumatic brain lesions and not genetic anomalies. In particular, she is interested in how brain trauma causes a radical shift in personality, so that the same body might have two radically different personalities—one before and one after the trauma or accident. However, in fiction, the author has more latitude to play with the body, and in Gamarro's fictionalized legacy, Soledad and Malvina appear at the end of the novel as the result of Gloria and Félix's traumatic confrontation with their own death.

destruction—has been the norm, and this history, especially in Malvinas, has emptied the signifier Malvinas of its symbolic meaning.

Conclusion

“No es contra mí contra quien disparan. Es contra todos.”³⁴⁷

—Patricio Pron, *Nosotros caminamos en sueños* (13)

Border walls are now much more common than border wars, both in Latin America and worldwide. Yet the violence enacted on bodies at the edge of a given community has changed drastically over the decades. From the first tanks rolling through the Chaco to contemporary border walls crossed by smugglers and human traffickers, there has been a gradual turn away from organized military action toward more dispersed forms of violence. Terrorist attacks in particular eliminate the distinction between enemy combatant and ordinary citizen. Most saliently, the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States represented an act of war that came from within on behalf of a stateless group. As Stuart Elden points out, since 2001, the war on terror has undermined the long-established importance of territory and consequently of the border (*Terror and Territory*). The traditional idea of sovereignty—limited to its territorial power container—has transformed.

From the moment that the national body politic congeals to its fragmentation in the violence reflected here in literature and cinema, this dissertation has shown that the principle characteristics of contemporary border conflict have long been present. They were merely unrecognized because of a binary approach to both the border and war. Violence has become

³⁴⁷ “It’s not me they’re shooting at. It’s everybody.”

engrained, not only in the treaties and texts of law, property, and international relations, but also in its confinement to friend against enemy—war as *polemos*. Stasis, used as a more general term for politics-as-violence, uncovers the processes that continue to reconfigure politics in the present. In *Political Spaces and Global War*, political theorist Carlo Galli describes the generalization of violence, especially in the period after the fall of the twin towers. Reinterpreting the legacy of Schmitt’s *Nomos*, Galli finds that, as the connection between sovereignty and violence changes, Schmitt’s territorial order disintegrates. Galli then sets a task for contemporary political philosophy: “we cannot respond . . . with Utopia (which is really an absence of space), or with the closure of space. Instead, we must find a new ‘guiding image’ that can reveal to us the concrete possibilities of the new political space we . . . already occupy” (189).³⁴⁸ Galli notes the exhaustion of two major tropes in political philosophy: utopia—meaning “no place” but also “good place,” like the utopia to which Roa Bastos’s writing flees—and enclosure—the foundation of property and the border.

Galli suggests his own guiding image for contemporary political philosophy: a drained marsh where land is reclaimed from the sea of fluid economic circulation. Yet in the Latin American context, this reclaimed land resembles the bulging financial center of Buenos Aires’s Puerto Madero—site of Tamerlán’s fictional and grandiose twin towers. In *On the Shores of Politics*, philosopher Jacques Rancière suggests another approach. He does not want to adhere too closely to the land for fear of being dragged back to the Platonic cave of ideal political forms. Instead, he proposes that contemporary politics engage the limitless and anarchic space of the

³⁴⁸ While the question of a guiding image serves to frame the effects of history and war, Galli’s broader claim that the state of the world under globalization is increasingly generalized warfare goes further than I do. While Galli evokes images of a genesis and apocalypse of civilization, curving together at both ends of historical time in an originary and final “war of all against all,” the nature of contemporary war is subject to heated debate. See *The Changing Character of War* (eds. Hew Strachan and Sibylle Schiepers) for a political science perspective. For a philosophical perspective, see Giacomo Marramao’s *The Passage West: Philosophy after the Age of the Nation State*.

sea, teeming with untameable creatures and pirates. Yet again, Latin American history reveals a sinister echo of the Spanish imperial motto in the unbound seas. After all, the colonial opening that removed the “non” from the “plus ultra,” curled around \$, led to the foundation of the empire.³⁴⁹ How might we approach politics beyond borders and wars, beyond the frames of land and sea, form and formlessness?³⁵⁰

The search continues, but in viewing specific aspects of contemporary stasis through contested 20th century borders, my rather more modest proposal has been to question the concepts and texts that undergird, inform, and undermine the concepts of frontier, border, and limit. In order to do this, I have traced some limits of my own, especially in Latin American literary and cultural studies. Most importantly, I have aimed to sustain a thoughtful consideration of war as a cluster of phenomena both on and off the battlefield, especially through a paradigm that allows for complexity—war as stasis instead of *polemos*.

Specifically, in Part I, we saw the disruption of narratives of progress and nation building, especially as these processes took place through enclosure and exploitation at the nexus of state bordering and financial exploitation. In Part II, the halted integration of Central America served as an immanent critique of the reclamation of cosmopolitan space, as the cosmo-polis is also haunted by the possibility of stasis. In Part III, the repetition of tired forms of political organization created cultural and political inflections that translate old imperial border wars into 21st century encodings, displacing exhausted historical metaphors. These three parts frame border conflicts as absolutely contemporary, including smuggling and economic nationalism in Bolivia, migration from Central America through Mexico to the United States, and national

³⁴⁹ For Schmitt too space was framed as an opposition between land and sea, a division that stood as a metonymy of the global division into East and West during the Cold War (“La tensión”).

³⁵⁰ In *Embers of the Past: Essays in Times of Decolonization*, Javier Sanjinés proposes an “amphibious” approach, not for political philosophy in general, but more specifically for social subgroups in relation to the nation in Bolivia’s plurinational state model. See especially pp. 168-172.

trauma in Argentina. Each of these cases justifies supposedly necessary border fortifications. As a consequence, the subfield of border studies should consider *many* fraught borders *throughout* Latin America, instead of just that most spectacular and surveilled one between the US and Mexico.

In lieu of proposing a guiding image for politics, then, I offer a kind of motto from another text on war. In the satire *Nosotros caminamos en sueños* (2014), Argentine Patricio Pron suggests a way of facing the changing nature of borders and violence that this dissertation has traced. One soldier keeps standing in the middle of the battlefield, evidently considering himself immune to danger. He explains that the enemy—we never learn who this enemy is—does not know his name. When his comrades tell him to get down, he says frankly: “No es contra mí contra quien disparan. Es contra todos” (13).³⁵¹ How could they be shooting at him? They know nothing about him. At base, the soldier does not see himself as a representative of a larger group. He fundamentally misunderstands the rules of engagement, or in the words of another: “¡Es tan imbécil que podría pasar por un héroe!”³⁵² Pron’s war shows violence untethered from a specific border or a specific enemy.³⁵³ Such violence is inescapable but also impersonal.

Recognizing that the rules of engagement have changed is at once terrifying and liberating. It is terrifying because the violence has no narrative of cause and effect and no code of right and wrong. It resembles a bizarrely futuristic version of Hobbes’s war of all against all. To keep the chaos at bay, we pass through airport security screening and attend to terrorism threat levels—the condition of fearing an irruption of violence aimed at no one in particular and everyone at the same time. But this change in the rules of engagement is also liberating because

³⁵¹ “It’s not me they’re shooting at. It’s everybody.”

³⁵² “He’s such an idiot he might pass for a hero!”

³⁵³ In a note that accompanies the novel, Pron explains that he wrote it out of his sense of deception and unreality as a child during the Malvinas War, yet in the text there are no references to the specific circumstances, except the fact that the characters are on some remote islands.

if the territorial bounds of the nation come undone, then there is no need to defend codes of property and the proper nor narratives of progress that sediment and obscure violence. There are other, deterritorialized forms of engagement—textual and militant—that unbind these narratives and codes. And this more terrifying, inexplicable battlefield might give rise to those foolish enough to pass for heroes.

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