

TRANSITIONAL RESISTANCE LITERATURE
AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION
IN HUGO ARCE'S *¿Y MAURA?*

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Hugo Arce, a polemic Guatemalan writer/journalist, wrote what could be termed transitional resistance literature. Both his journalism and his literary works are marked by a discourse of opposition to the staggering violence and impunity that Guatemala faced during the periods in which Arce wrote. Resistance literature has often been theorized in terms of movements for national liberation and revolutionary movements. Nevertheless, resistance literature as a struggle over the cultural/historical also plays a particularly important role during periods of transition to democracy and out of civil war.

This thesis focuses on two *cuentos* from ¿Y Maura?, the final work of Guatemalan author Hugo Arce. The thesis consists of an introduction and four chapters. The introduction briefly presents the background to the study, the professional significance of the study, and the delimitations of the study. The first chapter provides a general introduction to Hugo Arce's literary and journalistic work. It also places that work within the social and historical context and includes a literature review touching on the historical circumstances during which he wrote and briefly discusses the body of his literary work. The introductory chapter also serves the purpose of potentially being useful to those approaching the subject with an eye towards journalism or history.

The second chapter discusses the literary theory that will be applied in the close reading and introduces the work of ¿Y Maura? as a whole. In particular, that chapter explores the ways the ambiguous zone created by a state of emergency may be exploited to eliminate opposition groups. The chapter ties this idea to the specific history of Guatemala. In Chapter III and IV, the thesis looks at Arce's literature against this backdrop. The framework of resistance literature is augmented by looking at specific *cuentos* through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's State of Exception and Victor Perera's The Unfinished Conquest. The third chapter is a close reading of the *cuento*, *La Transfiguración*. The fourth presents a close reading of the *cuento* *El Delator*. Finally, the conclusion ties the four chapters together, arguing that Arce's work is an example of transitional resistance literature.

In Memory of Hugo Arce

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INTRODUCTION

In these tales lies all of the inconformity which I maintain towards a world which I never understood, and even now, do not understand.¹

-from Hugo Arce's
INTRODUCTION to ¿Y MAURA?

Hugo Arce, a polemic Guatemalan writer/journalist, wrote what could be termed transitional resistance literature. Both his journalism and his literary works are marked by a discourse of opposition to the staggering violence and impunity that Guatemala faced during the periods in which Arce wrote. Resistance literature has often been theorized in terms of movements for national liberation and revolutionary movements.² Nevertheless, resistance literature as a struggle over the cultural/historical also plays a role during periods of transition to democracy and out of civil war.

Guatemala has a particularly long history of what has been termed resistance literature.³ As part of this long tradition of resistance literature, Guatemalan Hugo

¹ See, Hugo Arce, *¿Y Maura?* (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008) 7. "En estos cuentos va toda mi inconformidad que todavía conservo hacia un mundo que nunca entendí y aun no entiendo." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

² See, Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

³ The most in-depth study of this arc of resistance literature is Marc Zimmerman's *Resistance and Literature in Guatemala*. It looks at the resistance literature of authors from "Asturias to Menchú" and covers primarily the literature periods from roughly 1923 to 1996, the date of the peace accords between the guerilla and the military.

Arce wrote from the late seventies and early eighties until his assassination in 2008. Arce's literary work spans the periods that included the Guatemalan genocide (late 1970s to 1980s), the so-called "transition to democracy" (late 1980s to early 1990s), and the period termed the "kingdom of impunity" from roughly 1996-2009.⁴ Arce's particular importance lies in the way his work reflects on the intersection of the challenges arising during these periods.

Critically, the role of resistance literature hardly ended with the peace accords of 1996, yet much of the theoretical work on resistance literature in Guatemala looks to works written in the 80s and the 90s. However, it could be argued that, as the military conflict wound down, the struggle over the historical and cultural record became the main site of resistance. Arce's literary corpus writing then may not only be read as intertwined with and informed by the civil war, but also by the staggering impunity that came after. Its relevance in part lies in the way it ties the two periods of the end of the civil war and the post-civil-war transition together, showing how the horrors that arose during the civil war bled into later challenges with corruption and violence in a society rife with impunity. Arce's literature is particularly important as it articulates a discourse of opposition to impunity both during the height of the conflict as well as during the transition afterwards.

⁴ Edgar Gutierrez, a former Guatemalan foreign minister, coined the term. See, Nathaniel Popper. The Novelist and the Murderers. *The Nation*, 2007, 12 September 2012. <<http://www.thenation.com/article/novelist-and-murderers>>. Also see, the Center for Justice and Accountability, 'Guatemala' 12 September 2012. <<http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=294>>.

In the collection *¿Y Maura?*, Arce employs the genre of *cuento*, a hybrid genre existing in-between folk-tale and short story. The use of the *cuento* in Guatemala certainly has been employed by some of Guatemala's most prominent writers. For example, Miguel Angel Asturias published *Leyendas de Guatemala*.⁵ Arce's use of the *cuento* intersects with his other profession of journalism.⁶ The form of the *cuento* could easily fit into an opinion column and serve much as a journalistic piece could to articulate a discourse of opposition. Indeed, it could even serve when journalistic pieces would have been censored.

The professional importance of this study lies at the intersection of three disciplines; namely, history, journalism, and literature. In one sense, it is a study of minor literature within an already marginal genre — resistance literature.⁷ Within the larger trends of so called 'world literature', again Arce's work is marginal, especially as there is little room in the world canon for any Guatemalan works

⁵ See, Miguel Angel Asturias, *Leyendas de Guatemala*, (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981). Also, some of Arce's *cuentos* make reference to some of the same legends that form the bases of Asturias' work.

⁶ Some of Arce's first publications were *cuentos* which will be further discussed in Ch. I.

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari articulate two characteristics of a minor literature: "minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language" (16). Arce's literature is both minor as related to Spanish as a whole and minor as related to the dominant discourses of Guatemala. A second characteristic they identify is the relation of the individual to the dominant paradigms. "Minor literature is completely different because it exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political. Thus the question of the individual becomes even more necessary, indispensable, magnified microscopically, because an entirely different story stirs within it. It is in this sense that the family triangle is connected to other commercial, economic, bureaucratic, and judicial triangles which determine its value." This discussion comes initially out of a discussion of Kafka's *Amerika*. In particular, they look at the hotel in *Amerika* with its multiple entrances as illustrating the way multiplicity can deny entrance. Multiplicity can also serve to thwart interpretation. Arce's work taken as a whole with the almost paradoxical intersection of the various *cuentos* can be said to create a similar effect. See generally, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, trans. Robert Brinkley *What Is a Minor Literature?* *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (Winter/Spring, 1983), University of Southern Mississippi; accessible at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20133921>; see also *Franz Kafka, Pour Une Littérature mineure* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1975).

beyond those of Asturias and Menchú. Thus, the intent of this study is not to proclaim an outsized place for Arce's work, but rather to show how what Walter Mignolo calls local histories reflect on global designs.⁸ By local history, I do not mean a local history transplanted and brought around the world by the channels and instrumentalities of print capitalism. Rather, I mean local histories/stories published locally against great odds and forming part of a largely local body of work. It was for such work that Arce was assassinated. It is a localized resistance that reflects on global patterns.

Barbara Harlow argues that resistance literature is often a "struggle over the cultural/historical record."⁹ Arce's literature certainly engages in this struggle.¹⁰ The importance of this study lies not only in the close reading of two of Arce's *cuentos*, but also in the limited presentation of Arce's personal history as well as the general introduction to his literary work. By providing this background, it helps show how Arce's discourse fits into a larger discourse. Also, this presentation of Arce's persecution and history of censorship is largely drawn from foreign sources, showing in a sense how local histories fit into global designs.

The contextualization of Arce's journalism serves not only to weave his personal history into that of his writing, but also to illustrate an arc of resistance that continues even in the absence of a movement for national liberation. Indeed,

⁸ See, Walter Mignolo. *Local Histories/Global Designs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). The most relevant part of Mignolo's argument for this thesis is the way he explores alternative forms of knowledge that question, blur, and shift sharp dichotomies such as those between North/South and Developed/Developing. In doing this, he shows how this local knowledge paradoxically fits into and at the same time questions global designs.

⁹ See, Barbara Harlow *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

¹⁰ The third and fourth chapters of this study are dedicated to precisely this intersection.

his dissidence caused him to be labeled a “revolutionary without a cause”¹¹ as Arce maintained an active role as a dissident writer within Guatemala even after the official end of the conflict brought about by signing of the peace accords in 1996. While resistance literature certainly has its role in liberation movements, it also has its role in transitional periods and in the wake of what has been called the global state of civil war — among which Guatemala’s was certainly one of the more violent. That is to say that there is a role for resistance literature even in the absence of an ideologically defined ‘cause’. Arce’s literature reflects on the transitional nature of resistance and often articulates a discourse of opposition to various exploitations of what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has called the “state of exception”.¹² Indeed, Arce’s writings are particularly important as they simultaneously reflect on the civil war period as well as on the postwar period called the “kingdom of impunity”.¹³ It could be said that Arce resisted a generalized reign of impunity. We see then that resistance literature remains important not just during periods of dictatorship or civil war but also during transitional periods.

Still, this study limits its scope in a number of ways. This thesis provides a broad overview of Arce’s publications. However, it does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of Arce’s publications that appeared in nearly all of the major

¹¹ Mario Cordero. “Revolucionarios sin Causa” La Hora [Guatemala] 11 Feb 2008: Opinion. lahora.com.gt <<http://www.lahora.com.gt/notas.php?key=25223&fch=2008-01-30>>.

¹² This is a state where law is suspended and obliterated. It is often precipitated by a declared state of emergency. The danger of the creation of such a state is that the protections of the law no longer exist leaving a state of absolute vulnerability where individuals and entire groups may easily be subjected to the extrajudicial use of force. I will discuss the way this connects with Arce’s work in Chapter II.

¹³ See, the Center for Justice and Accountability, ‘Guatemala’ 12 September 2012. <<http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=294>>.

newspapers in Guatemala and which spanned his thirty-year career. He also published abroad in Brazil and the United States. A similar practical limit exists with respect to the history of Arce's persecution. It does not attempt to delve into the specifics of many of the instances of persecution as that would be outside the scope of this thesis. It would also require archival research in Guatemala. Where it does document the history, this study relies on many sources written outside of Guatemala as these documents are more widely available. While this thesis provides some historical context, it is in no way a historical read.

The close reading focuses solely on two *cuentos* from one of Arce's works. The scope is also limited as it discusses *cuentos* that can be explored particularly in terms of Agamben's theorization of the state of exception. This narrow scope serves to highlight the state of exception as a theme found in Arce's writings. Nevertheless, such a narrow focus clearly leaves out other themes such as exile that might be explored. Ultimately, this thesis may expose Arce's literature to a wider audience while remaining cognizant of the work's roots as part of a minor literature whose local histories reflect on and intersect with global designs.

This thesis finds as its intellectual point of departure Barbara Harlow's seminal work Resistance Literature.¹⁴ However, it also uses the term 'resistance literature' in a more expansive sense to include resistance such as Arce's which takes place in a period of transition. As general background, it also draws on the more regionally focused work by John Beverly and Marc Zimmerman, Literature and

¹⁴ See, Barbara Harlow. Resistance Literature (New York: Methuen, 1987).

Politics in the Central American Revolutions.¹⁵ For providing background specific to Guatemalan Resistance Literature, the thesis relies on Marc Zimmerman's Literature and Resistance in Guatemala.¹⁶ In that work, Zimmerman helps provide a framework through which Arce's work can be understood, namely that he expressed an urban discourse of resistance. Still, this thesis goes farther in arguing that Arce expressed a discourse of resistance tied to the challenges of a post-civil-war transition.

This thesis focuses on two *cuentos* from ¿Y Maura?, the final work of Guatemalan author Hugo Arce.¹⁷ The thesis consists of an introduction and four chapters. The introduction briefly presents the background to the study, the professional significance of the study, and the delimitations of the study. The first chapter provides a general introduction to Hugo Arce's literary and journalistic work. It also places that work within the social and historical context and includes a literature review touching on the historical circumstances during which he wrote and briefly discusses the body of his literary work. The introductory chapter also serves the purpose of potentially being useful to those approaching the subject with an eye towards journalism or history.

¹⁵ See, Marc Zimmerman and John Beverley, Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1990).

¹⁶ See, Marc Zimmerman, Literature and Resistance in Guatemala : Textual Modes and Cultural Politics from El Señor Presidente to Rigoberta Menchú (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995).

¹⁷ Hugo Arce, ¿Y Maura? (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008). Cuento is the Spanish word for "tale" or "story." It can be used to refer to folk-tales. In Guatemala, the use of this traditional form replete with its emphasis on orality became an important part of Guatemala's resistance literature.

The intellectual underpinnings of this study will be further discussed in Chapter II. The second chapter discusses the literary theory that will be applied in the close reading and introduces the work of ¿Y Maura?¹⁸ as a whole. In particular, that chapter explores the ways the ambiguous zone created by a state of emergency may be exploited to eliminate opposition groups. The chapter ties this idea to the specific history of Guatemala.

In Chapter III and IV, the thesis looks at Arce's literature against this backdrop. The framework of urban resistance literature is augmented by looking at specific *cuentos* through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's State of Exception,¹⁹ Walter Mignolo's Darker Side of the Renaissance,²⁰ Local Histories/Global Designs,²¹ and Victor Perera's The Unfinished Conquest.²² The third chapter is a close reading of the *cuento*, *La Transfiguración*. The fourth presents a close reading of the *cuento*, *El Delator*. Finally, the conclusion ties the four chapters together, arguing that Arce's work is an example of transitional resistance literature and looking to potential further work on the topic.

¹⁸ Hugo Arce, *¿Y Maura?* (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008).

¹⁹ See, Giorgio Agamben State of Exception (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁰ See, Walter Mignolo. Darker Side of the Renaissance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

²¹ See, Walter Mignolo. Local Histories/Global Designs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²² See, Victor Perera. Unfinished Conquest (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ARCE'S JOURNALISM AND WRITING

They could come at any moment, rummage through my papers, delve into the labyrinth of my soul. The papers are the key.

–from *THE PRISONER*²³

I always resisted, one more time, and once more... still I waited with an old and tired body but on guard, for the punches which life gives. One more time, always one more time...

–from *THE BOXER*²⁴

Hugo Arce was a controversial writer, poet, philosopher, and journalist in Guatemala.²⁵ He was assassinated on the 23rd of January (2008)²⁶ in Guatemala City. His untimely end came after a thirty-year-long history during which he faced death threats, censorship, and attempts on his life. This long history of persecution

²³ Hugo Arce, *¿Y Maura?* (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008) 41.

²⁴ Hugo Arce, *¿Y Maura?* (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008) 59.

²⁵ A succinct resume in Spanish of the author's works can be found at: "Reseña Curricular" archive.org. 6 Feb. 2010 <<http://web.archive.org/web/20070705180900/www.opinion.com.gt/Numeros+anteriores/280307/resenarce.htm>>. See also, "Hugo Arce localizado sin vida en un hotel" El periódico.[Guatemala] 23 Jan. 2008: País. "Hugo Arce localizado sin vida en un hotel" El periódico. [Guatemala] 23 Jan. 2008: País. Elperiodico.com 6 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20080123/pais/47816>>.

²⁶ "International Pen Writers in Prison Committee Day of the Imprisoned Writer: Killings" PEN International, 2008. "International Pen Writers in Prison Committee Day of the Imprisoned Writer: Killings" PEN International, 2008. *pen.org* 3 September, 2010. <www.pen.org/downloads/documents/DoIW_2008_killings.doc>.

continued unabated through to the Colom administration.²⁷ Just before his death, the now former first lady of Guatemala Sandra Torres de Colom sued Arce for defamation.²⁸ Arce's assassination took place in a period of transition between governments, just days after the inauguration of Alvaro Colom, and has been called the first assassination during the Colom era.

According to Reporters Without Borders, Arce was "one of the leading figures in the Guatemala press, whose biting and always controversial articles will not be forgotten."²⁹ Additionally "[h]e was an award-winning writer and a former contributor to El Gráfico, Siglo Veintiuno and El Imparcial." He also published in other news papers and in other fora.³⁰ Arce was recognized as a controversial author by those outside of Guatemala; Canadian Journalist Bob Carty describes [Arce] as "Guatemala's Allan Fotheringham - one of the sharpest satirical pens I've read."³¹ To put this comment in context, Fotheringham was described as Canada's

²⁷ In 2003, Arce denounced Colom to the Procurer of Human Rights for violation of his right to free speech: "Columnista denuncia a Alvaro Colom en PDH" Prensa Libre [Guatemala] 21 Nov. 2003: Nacional. "Columnista denuncia a Alvaro Colom en PDH" Prensa Libre [Guatemala] 21 Nov. 2003: Nacional. *prensalibre.com* 6 February 2010. <<http://www.prensalibre.com/pl/2003/noviembre/21/73977.html>>.

²⁸ In 2007, Sandra Torres filed defamation charges against Arce using a little used and archaic tribunal of the press. "Sandra Torres demanda a Hugo Arce" Prensa Libre [Guatemala] 22 Dec. 2007: Nacional. [Print] "Sandra Torres demanda a Hugo Arce" Prensa Libre [Guatemala] 22 Dec. 2007: Nacional. *prensalibre.com* 6 February 2010. <<http://www.prensalibre.com/pl/2007/diciembre/22/191220.html>>.

²⁹ "Mystery Death of Journalist" Reporters without Borders. 25 Jan. 2008. *rsf.org*, 3 September. 2012, <<http://en.rsf.org/guatemala-mystery-death-of-journalist-found-25-01-2008,25215.html>>.

³⁰ "Mystery Death of Journalist" Reporters without Borders. 25 Jan. 2008. *rsf.org*, 3 September. 2012, <<http://en.rsf.org/guatemala-mystery-death-of-journalist-found-25-01-2008,25215.html>>.

³¹ "One of the latest targets is Hugo Arce, a socially well-connected columnist with many friends in business and government circles, whom Carty describes as "Guatemala's Allan Fotheringham - one of the sharpest satirical pens I've read." Although no leftist, Arce made the mistake late last year of

“most consistently controversial newspaper columnist.”³² Arce’s critics within Guatemala such as journalist Mario Cordero went much further, calling Arce a revolutionary without a cause, arguing that his polemic writing served only to cause controversy.³³

Others accused him of having a nihilistic bent that permeated all of his writing, and they further proclaimed that Arce was possessed of a “desafortunada naturaleza humana,”³⁴ ‘an unfortunate human nature’. Arce was also well known for publishing on human rights issues.³⁵ His strongest defenders lauded his obstinacy and insolence: “Jose Eduardo Zarco, founder of the magazine ¿Y Que? for which Arce used to write, told police after Arce’s assassination the columnist was invited to write for the magazine ‘because one must be insolent in Guatemala, and he was’.”³⁶ His career as a writer was marked by a long history of controversy and censorship. He lived with death threats and attempts on his life for the most part of his literary and journalistic career. His work was marked by biting political satire

using his columns in the daily paper SIGLO XXI to criticize President Jorge Serrano Elias, who, according to the committee's report, said he would "crush Arce like a cockroach." "Journalists set up life line to Third World colleagues" *The Globe and Mail* (Canada) July 23, 1991.

³² See, 'Bio'. <<http://www.drfoth.com/bio.htm>> Accessed Nov. 19 2011>.

³³ Mario Cordero. "Revolucionarios sin Causa" *La Hora* [Guatemala] 11 Feb 2008: Opinion. [lahora.com.gt](http://www.lahora.com.gt) <<http://www.lahora.com.gt/notas.php?key=25223&fch=2008-01-30>>.

³⁴ Jorge Palmieri. "Ingrata naturaleza humana" 28 Jan 2008. jorgepalmieri.com 11 Feb. 2010 <<http://jorgepalmieri.com/2008/01/28/>>.

--- "es evidente que Arce logro su objetivo" 11 Feb. 2008. jorgepalmieri.com 11 Feb.

2010<<http://jorgepalmieri.com/2008/02/11/es-evidente-que-arce-logro-su-objetivo/>>.

Note: at many times, this thesis will quote a phrase in Spanish in double quotes and then follow that quote with my translation of the word/phrase in English in single quotes. Elsewhere, the single quotes will denote a translation with the original Spanish in the footnote.

³⁵ *Journalists subject of bomb attack in Guatemala* Deutsche Presse-Agentur, November 4, 1999.

³⁶ In English, see: "Controversial Guatemalan journalist found dead" 24 Jan. 2008. Accessed 14 February, 2010. <<http://www.indiaenews.com/america/20080124/93533.htm>>.

and was often noted for blurring the lines of various genres.³⁷ His journalism often employed tropes of literature, yet his poetry was censored as often as his journalism, especially when it touched on political themes.

Arce was born in Guatemala City on the 18th of June 1952. He received a degree³⁸ in Philosophy from the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil and also studied English at the University of Oklahoma. His career as a writer began with his return from Brazil in 1975. In his early career, he published works in many different venues. His short fiction was published in a collection entitled Reunión de Cuentos (1984) in which his *cuentos* “Mato coche contento tu tata anoche” and “Superman” received acclaim.³⁹

As early as the 80s, the government began specifically to target Arce in order to silence him. The government of Vinicio Cerezo accused Arce of being a part of “plan manila”⁴⁰ — a plot to assassinate the president.⁴¹ The charges against Arce

³⁷ See, Perez, Luis Enrique. Prologue, Cronicas de Amor, (Guatemala: n.p., 2002) 11.

³⁸ Licenciado en philosophia.

³⁹ René Leiva, Reunión de cuentos: varios (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1984).

⁴⁰ “Este nuevo golpe terminó por desmoronar la capacidad de control del gobierno, que quedó en manos de los militares. En agosto el EMP aumentó el control sobre el presidente, al denunciar un supuesto complot para acabar con su vida, el *Plan Manila*. Para entonces la ola de represión y criminalidad alcanzaba a toda la sociedad y el gobierno se veía sumido en una falta de credibilidad por las acusaciones de corrupción. Puede decirse que ya para entonces el gobierno había perdido incluso a sus mejores aliados dentro del Ejército.” REMHI, Guatemala Nunca Mas, “Capitulo Sexto- El Gobierno de Vinicio Cerezo” (Guatemala, 1998). This is the Recovery of Historical Memory Project spearheaded by Bishop Juan Gerardi who was assassinated just before the final report was published.

⁴¹ According to Cerezo's accusation, a Libyan Commando had been contracted to assassinate the president and thus throw the country into chaos: El Nuevo Herald. “GUATEMALA CEREZO DICE COMANDO DE LIBIOS IBA A ASESINARLO” 10 Jun. 1989: 3A. Arce first reported on a plot while he was a columnist for the opposition paper El Grafico. According to Cerezo: “the second plan was revealed early this month by Hugo Arce, a columnist of the Guatemalan opposition newspaper El Grafico, the murder was going to be carried out by a Libyan commando unit that had entered Guatemala in December 1988 and had been trained in Cuba. Cerezo said that Arce must tell

were thrown out for absolute lack of evidence of any involvement. Tied to these events, Arce was also involved in a landmark journalism case in Guatemala that allowed Arce to defend the right to keep his sources private.⁴² This was only the first of the many times in which Arce faced such government pressure.

Against the backdrop of Guatemala's struggle to transition to democracy, Arce faced both censorship as well as attempts on his life. In 1990, Arce received death threats for the literary works he had published. In 1991, he was jailed and tortured under the government of Serrano Elias in one of the most flagrant cases of the Executive directly targeting its opponents. Michael Hoyt writes in his Columbia Journalism Review article "Censorship by terrorism" about Arce's experience being one of the more frightening. Even though Arce published for a mainstream daily (Siglo XXI), he was targeted for lampooning the then President, Serrano Elias:

everything he knows, because otherwise 'he would be concealing the plan, which is a crime to do.'" Online, 12 September, 2012 <<http://archive.lib.msu.edu/RECYCLER/S-1-5-21-1454471165-57989841-1417001333-1387/Df8/muc3/jun.msg>>.

⁴² Inter American Commission on Human Rights "CHAPTER IX FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, EXPRESSION, ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION" Organization of American States, 1993. 3 September 2012. <<http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Guatemala93eng/chapter.9.htm>>. See, "freedom of the press" "There has also been notable progress in Guatemalan jurisprudence on the journalist's professional right to keep his/her sources of information confidential, a right upheld by the Guatemalan courts on many occasions. There was the "Manila Plan" case, e.g., where the journalist Hugo Arce refused to reveal his sources, which the Public Prosecutor's Office was demanding. The judge overruled the Public Prosecutor on grounds that the journalist was protected by his guarantee of professional confidentiality."

See, David Banisar. "SILENCING SOURCES: An International Survey of Protections and Threats to Journalists' Sources" Privacy International 2007.

"For example, courts in Guatemala have interpreted that journalists have the right to defend the secrecy of their sources. In several cases, refusals of journalists to reveal their sources have been upheld, including the case of the "Plan Manila" where journalist Hugo Arce refused to testify over his sources."

[T]he police planted the drugs and explosives in his automobile [and] while detained, he was beaten, robbed, deprived of food and water, and interrogated in the middle of the night.

After seventeen days he was released, the judge [found] no reason to suspect Arce of the possession charges. This decision thus points to the national police force, acting with some political motive.

[...] Hugo Arce had written columns critical of President Serrano and human rights violations by the army. Two days before his arrest, the interior minister personally let Arce's editor know that the president was upset with Arce's columns.

Arce claims that through private sources he learned that the president, in the presence of acquaintances, had threatened to "crush Arce like a cockroach."⁴³

In the book Unfinished Conquest, historian Victor Perera sets this event in the context of Guatemalan politics:

Within a month of taking office, Serrano revealed his thick skin and quick temper when he condoned the arrest of columnist Hugo Arce, who vigorously lampooned Serrano in Siglo XXI. Arce was arrested on charges of 'plotting to overthrow the government'. The evidence against him amounted to several ounces of cocaine and three sticks of dynamite purportedly found in the trunk of his car. The apparent plant by police was so clumsily executed, the case was thrown out in court (333).⁴⁴

Highlighting the absurdity of the arrest, "Congressman Hector Luna likened the arrest to a poorly-made movie, carried out so clumsily that no one believes it."⁴⁵ A national campaign was held called the "white ribbon campaign," asking for his release. Foreign groups such as the Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists

⁴³ Michael Hoyt, "Censorship by Terrorism," Columbia Journalism Review 30.4 (1991): 28-29.

⁴⁴ Victor Perera. Unfinished Conquest (University of California Press: 1993 Berkeley).

⁴⁵ Cerigua. "WEEKLY BRIEFS, FEB 1991: Journalist Arrested Under Suspicious Circumstances" 19 Feb. 1991. tulane.edu 3 September, 2012, <http://www.tulane.edu/~libweb/RESTRICTED/CERIGUA/1992_1004.txt>.

played an instrumental role in his release.⁴⁶ In 1992, the offices of Tinamit, the journal where he worked, were bombed.⁴⁷ The impunity with which Arce was targeted highlights the precarious situation dissident writers in Guatemala faced.

Along those lines, the writer and academic Marc Zimmerman, one of the experts on Guatemalan resistance literature, notes: "While direct violence against news paper writers reached a new crescendo under President Serrano, only those creative writers also practicing a seriously dissident journalism (figures like Hugo Arce, for example, already under threat in the President Cerezo years) fully entered the danger zone" (255). In 1993, Arce's name appeared on three distinct hit lists. Arce was named in one put out by the "Anti-Communist Patriotic Union" along with other Guatemalans, most notably Karen Fischer and Helen Mack. His name also appeared on an anonymous list stating that those named figures "would be killed if they did not renounce their ties to the guerilla or leave the country" (Zimmerman-247).⁴⁸ The third list came from the "Roberto Lorenzana Anti-Communist Movement."⁴⁹ Others threatened in this leaflet included the Nobel Peace Prize

⁴⁶ See, Brahm Eiley. "Journalists lead in forming Central American action groups. Human rights get shaky foothold" *The Toronto Star* December 16, 1992, A21.

⁴⁷ See, Marc Zimmerman, Literature and resistance in Guatemala : textual modes and cultural politics from el señor presidente to Rigoberta Menchú (Athens, Ohio : Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1995).

⁴⁸ The anonymous leaflet accused the 24 of "being spokespersons for, defenders of, and sympathizers with the subversion and its organizations" and of "causing and living from discrediting those of us who truly fight for freedom and peace in our country" ("*voceros, defensores y simpatizantes de la subversión y de sus organizaciones y por ser los causantes y vivir del desprestigio de aquéllos que luchamos de verdad por la libertad y la paz de nuestra patria*") and warned that as of 31 March, those named would be killed unless they publicly renounced their actions.

⁴⁹ "21. On 5 October 1993, the self-proclaimed "Roberto Lorenzana Anti-Communist Movement" reportedly slipped a leaflet under the doors of various human rights associations in which 23 persons, many of them well known for their human rights activities, were threatened with death. Among those on the list were Rosalina Tuyuc, Rosario Pu Gómez, Nineth Montenegro, Byron Morales,

winner Rigoberta Menchú. Arce was also amongst a group of journalists the government had targeted for arrest. That same year, there were various attempts on his life.

Nevertheless, Arce continued to both publish journalistic pieces and literary ones. Marc Zimmerman puts Arce's writing in context:

Above all, with this context of questions about writer-journalists, mention must be made of Hugo Arce's work, also a poet, whose brilliant journalistic writing, especially for Tinamit, drew more attention than the denunciatory writing of Epoca veterans like Haroldo Shetemul, and at the time recalled the commentaries of another poet-journalist named Arce, writing during the holocaust period, as this younger Arce sought to express the urban ladino discourse of opposition and resistance in the new period. (Zimmerman 283)

In 1995, Arce published his first full-length collection of poetry and short fiction, continuing to express a discourse of opposition and resistance. He dedicated that work to Myrna Mack, "an anthropologist who was assassinated by Guatemalan state intelligence agents in retribution for her groundbreaking research on the destruction of rural indigenous communities."⁵⁰ He was one of the journalistic figures to work extensively on her case. That book was entitled Los Gatos por Ejemplo⁵¹ and it exemplified his work of dissidence. Manuel Moran Rufino in his

and Otto Peralta. The same leaflet also accused Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberto Menchú of having links with the National Revolutionary Unit of Guatemala (URNG, Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala)." 3 September 2012, <<http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/d5c155469bdbb7ab80256738003eb7e3?OpenDocument>>.

⁵⁰ "International Pen Emblematic Cases Guatemala: Myrna Mack Chang" www.internationalpen.org.uk 8 February 2010, < <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/go/freedom-of-expression/campaigns/freedom-to-write-in-the-americas/emblematic-cases#Guatemala%20-%20Myrna%20Mack%20Chang>>.

⁵¹ Hugo Arce, Los gatos por ejemplo (Guatemala: n.p., 1995).

introduction to Los Gatos por Ejemplo said the following: “[T]he reader should be aware that they will read passionate writings, written with a blood of perhaps unrequited love, and, even so should read them with an eye to the historic and with an attitude open to the passions.”⁵² Rufino highlights the way that personal, local, and historical details are woven in the historical in Arce’s work.

Censorship and attempts on his life continued throughout the governments of de León-Carpio and Arzú. In 1999, Arce formed “Fuerza intelectual contra el genocidio,” also called “Power against genocide.” That organization dedicated itself to denouncing the actions of figures involved directly in Guatemala’s genocide such as Efraín Ríos Montt, and combating their return to politics. They also opposed other figures such as Alfonso Portillo. That same year, there were a number of attempts on Arce’s life; most notably, his car was bombed while he was dining with his daughters.⁵³ During this period, Arce was known for his coverage of human rights issues. Arce’s critical columns were published in Siglo XXI in a column entitled “Alquimia.” That same year, he published his second book of poetry and short fiction sharing the same title, Alquimia,⁵⁴ a nod to the interwoven nature of the

⁵² “El carácter acusadamente temporal de las pasiones literarias que forman Los Gatos, por ejemplo, obligan a un tipo especial de lectura: el lector debe tener presente que va a leer textos apasionados, escritos con sangre de amor quizá no correspondido, y, así, debe leerlos con ojos históricos y con una actitud de apertura a las pasiones.”

Manuel Moran-Rufino, Introduction, Los Gatos Por Ejemplo, “Hugo Arce... por ejemplo” (Guatemala: n.p., 1995) IV.

⁵³ Journalists subject of bomb attack in Guatemala. *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, November 4, 1999. “Hugo Arce on Thursday told Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa) that a firebomb exploded beneath his car on Wednesday evening as he and his daughters sat in a restaurant. Immediately two men whom Arce had asked to check on his car came storming in. He had refused to go out to the car himself because he suspected an ambush.//Arce is a member of the group “Power Against Genocide,” which turned during the campaign season against the candidacy of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt.”

⁵⁴ Hugo Arce, Alquimia, (Guatemala : Colección de “Lecturas de Ediciones Bella”, 1999).

author's work, the majority of the works therein having been first published in that column.

In 2000, Arce was once again completely censored. He was not only kept from writing, but also found that many of his writings were being removed from archives. Censored from print, Arce attempted to use both radio and television to continue his work, but found once again that the state was actively censoring him in violation of his human rights.⁵⁵ In the face of censorship, Arce nevertheless continued his creative work. In 2002, he published Cronicás de Amor,⁵⁶ his third full-length work. Another Guatemalan author, Luis Enrique Perez, comments on the intersection between Arce's experiences as a dissident writer and the writing itself.

In Hugo Arce literature is the most suitable exterior being to his internal one. [...] [H]e is an example that there is not a difference between literature and life, because authentic literature is ultimately an expression of life, [...] because in the end, sincerity and passion are the odd foundation of this strange synthesis of feeling and premonition, or perhaps the foundation of an unexpected alliance of fecund experience and free imagination.⁵⁷

Censorship and attempts on his person continued unabated throughout the early 2000s, continuing to influence the trajectory of Arce's writing.

Arce continued to criticize the government and to publish where he was able. During this time, Arce began numerous projects. He revisited his early writing and

⁵⁵ Arce worked briefly on the program in Guatemala "Aqui el Mundo."

⁵⁶ Hugo Arce, Crónicas de amor, (Guatemala: n.p., 2002).

⁵⁷ Perez, Luis Enrique. Prologue, Cronicas de Amor, (Guatemala: n.p., 2002) 11. "En Hugo Arce la literatura es el más idóneo ser exterior desu ser interior. La vida es el más fecundo proveedor de su creación literaria. Y él es un ejemplo de que no hay diferencia entre literatura y vida, porque la autentica literatura es finalmente una expresión de la vida, ya porque esa vida se siente, ya porque se presiente, ya porque, finalmente, la sinceridad y la pasión son el raro fundamento de una extrana síntesis de ese sentir y ese presentir, o quizá el fundamento de una insospechada alianza entre fecunda experiencia y libre imaginación."

continued his creative work. Indeed, Arce and his controversial journalistic presence even entered into the fiction of other Guatemalan authors, adding an element of verisimilitude to their writings.⁵⁸ Due to political pressure, Arce's work was shut out of most media. Figures from across the political spectrum personally requested that Arce be removed from the columns of prominent national papers.⁵⁹ Accordingly, in 2006, he began to publish online on the site *opinion.com.gt*.⁶⁰ There, he published both journalistic and literary works, those censored from print, and those recently printed but not widely available. He also began to prepare for the publication *¿Y Maura?*, a collection of stories that reflects both on the repression that Guatemala has seen and on the personal history of the author. During this period, Arce also began to publish in the dissident journal *¿Y Qué?* The slogan of this journal "Decimos lo que otros callan" (we say what others won't say) refers to a long history of dissident journalism in Guatemala.⁶¹

During the lead-up to the 2007 elections, Arce was critical of all of the parties involved, receiving numerous threats against his life should he continue writing. Reporters without Borders notes: "Since the candidature of [...] Álvaro Colom to the presidency in 2003, [Arce] had written articles highly critical of his person. The [...]"

⁵⁸ See, Sanchez, Haroldo. *Los Juegos De La Mente*, (Guatemala: ed. Artemis Edinter, 2005) 205. Haroldo Sanchez is a Guatemalan journalist working both in print and on television.

⁵⁹ Arce's editors at *La Hora* had been pressured to fire him. Roxanna Baldetti, a member of the right wing 'Partida Patriota', and Alvaro Colom, president and member of the center left UNE, on numerous occasions brought political pressure to bear in order to censor Arce.

⁶⁰ This site was an opinion site where a number of authors would publish columns. New columns would appear weekly.

⁶¹ This makes reference to an important dissident Guatemalan journalist Irma Flaquer. Flaquer's column was entitled "Lo que otros callan". Flaquer's disappearance and execution are emblematic of the dirty war during the Civil War years.

First Lady, Sandra Torres Colom, started a lawsuit against him in December for ‘insults and defamation’. The case had been due to open in a few days time.” Arce was to be tried by a tribunal of the press.

Just a few days before the trial was set to begin, Arce was assassinated on the 23rd of January 2008. Despite the official verdict “the death of Hugo Arce, of the monthly *¿Y Qué?*, found shot through the heart in a Guatemala hotel room on 23 January 2008, continues to raise questions.”⁶² The day after his death, the site containing his writings of the previous two years, *opinion.com.gt*, was taken down. His assassination was staged as a suicide. Until recently, coverage of the facts of his assassination remained widely censored in Guatemala. After a nearly five-year-long court battle, a judge in Guatemala dismissed the official story of suicide and called for a full investigation into Arce’s assassination. The judge also called for an investigation into corruption, manipulation of the crime scene, abuse of authority and false testimony in the cover-up of Arce’s death.⁶³ Sadly, Arce did not live to see his final work, *¿Y Maura?*, published. Its publication finally came in February of 2008.

In speaking of Arce’s last book in a posthumous memorial, Luis Urbina touches again on this thread of controversy: “Hugo Arce, philosopher, writer, and irreverent journalist who during many years manifested his inconformity in opposition to the Guatemalan system in various written mediums both in the

⁶² Reporters Without Borders, *Journalist on daily Prensa Libre shot dead at his home*, 13 May 2008, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/482d421219.html> [accessed 3 September 2012].

⁶³ El Periodico. “Ordenan cambio de fiscalía por caso de Hugo Arce” Viernes 9 de Noviembre, Guatemala.

country and abroad; for many his writings were undesirable, for others brilliant, and for others a mix of both” (3).⁶⁴ Another Guatemalan writer, Gil Zu, expresses a similar sentiment remembering the controversial writer on the anniversary of his death: “I tried to remember you Hugo Arce, because beyond your bravado and your look a la Gabino Barrera (*Buitre de la Montaña*), you were very human. You loved Guatemala in your way and you will not find your place amongst the forgotten poets. Your pen remains present and in force” (Translation Mine).⁶⁵ While many writers wrote reacting to Arce’s death, other figures, including human rights activists and other figures in civil society, also wrote remembering Arce’s controversial pen.

Karen Fischer, a Guatemalan Human rights lawyer representing Arce’s family in the ongoing case related to his assassination, wrote commemorating the anniversary of Hugo Arce’s assassination the following: “A journalist, a poet, a writer—a controversial man— polemic, dreamer, sentimental yet with great love for your fertile and long-suffering Guatemala. [...] your ideas remain, there captured handwritten on a piece of paper, in your struggles, and in your thoughts.” Fischer’s

⁶⁴See, Urbina A, Luis Fernando, *Revista CulturizArte*, 1.1 “Memoria Postuma” (Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos, 2008).

“En la trágica vida guatemalteca, encontramos un día a día de sinsabores, sueños truncados o voces calladas, es por ello que en la sección que denominamos Memoria Postuma hacemos recordación de valores nacionales, en esta primera edición escribimos de Hugo Arce, filósofo, escritor y periodista irreverente que durante muchos años manifestó su inconformidad en contra del sistema guatemalteco en diferentes medios escritos de país y del extranjero, para muchos sus escritos son indeseables, para algunos brillantes, para otros una mezcla entre ambos. Hacemos referencia del último proyecto que ocupó el tiempo de este escritor, y leeremos de su puño y letra, figurativamente, del porque de su último libro y veremos que el escrito hoy publicado fue solo un sueño inconcluso para Hugo, quien como muestra de amistad me permitió participar en la edición y publicación de su última obra, es por esa amistad que deseo compartir la narración de como nace su libro y de su sentir con respecto a su obra.”

⁶⁵ See, Gil Zu, *Al siempre Polemico Hugo Arce*, La Noticia [Guatemala], 2010, “Traté de recordarte Hugo Arce, porque más allá de tus bravuconadas y tu mirada a lo Gabino Barrera (*Buitre de la Montaña*), eras muy humano. Amaste a Guatemala a tu manera y no vas a ocupar el lugar de los poetas olvidados. Tu pluma sigue presente y vigente.”

comments echo a sentiment that was held throughout civil society. Having worked with Arce for years on various human rights issues, she also in her actions becomes part of ensuring that Arce's ideas remain. She concluded her article with the following statement: "As Nietzsche said so well, my friend 'Nothing is true, everything is permitted' yet isn't that just what occurs in the magical realism of Guatemala."⁶⁶ This rhetorical move weaves nihilism and magical realism together, similar to what Arce called 'realismo tragico,' 'tragic realism,' a play off of magic realism 'realismo magico'. Indeed, this is also one of the themes of *¿Y Maura?* It is seen in the way that Arce uses the *cuento* to approach a reality that is often harsher than what fiction can capture. Some of the *cuentos* expose this failure of fiction which emphasizes the tragic while others emphasize the ways that life nevertheless continues against this backdrop.

Much like what Manuel Moran Rufino commented on in relation to Arce's first full-length work, *Los Gatos Por Ejemplo, ¿Y Maura?*, can be read with an eye open to the historic aspects, yet also open to the passionate intimacy of the writing itself. The next chapter will discuss the theory that underpins the close reading of chapters III and IV. It will also briefly introduce, in a cursory manner, *¿Y Maura?* as a whole. This collection of *cuentos* reflects on the length of Arce's literary career, and on the complexity of the Guatemala he had witnessed. Its importance lies in its

⁶⁶ See, Karen Marie Fischer, "Y ¿tú también te mandaste a matar?" El Periodico [Guatemala] 28 Jan. 2010.

---"Y ¿tú también te mandaste a matar?" El Periodico [Guatemala] 28 Jan. 2010.
elperiodico.com.gt 4 Feb. 2010.

<<http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20100128/opinion/134995/>>.

reflections on the complex interactions between the civil war, the transition to democracy, and the reign of impunity.

CHAPTER II

LOCAL HISTORIES AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

This chapter provides theoretical underpinnings for my reading of ¿Y Maura?⁶⁷ Works such as Harlow's Resistance Literature⁶⁸ and Marc Zimmerman's Literature and Resistance in Guatemala⁶⁹ are useful in terms of contextualizing ¿Y Maura?, yet Giorgio Agamben's in-depth exploration of the concept of the state of exception fits better as a theoretical underpinning for a close textual reading.⁷⁰ Mignolo's work, Local Histories/Global Designs, may also be relevant in looking at the nested structure of Arce's text.⁷¹ Finally, Arce's work reflects on a moment where dictatorship, revolution, and a transition to a so-called democracy intersect and where the state of exception persists and has become a paradigm of government.

⁶⁷ See, Hugo Arce, ¿Y Maura? (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008).

⁶⁸ See, Barbara Harlow, Resistance Literature (New York: Methuen, 1987).

⁶⁹ See, Marc Zimmerman and John Beverley, Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1990). Also see, Marc Zimmerman, Literature and resistance in Guatemala : textual modes and cultural politics from el señor presidente to Rigoberta Menchú (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies: 1995).

⁷⁰ See, Giorgio Agamben, State of Exception, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁷¹ See, Walter Mignolo. Local Histories/Global Designs. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Harlow's work addresses "a particular category of literature that emerged significantly as part of organized national liberation struggles and resistance movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, and which may be called resistance literature" (Harlow xvii). She also explores the intersection of knowledge and power and the ways in which literature acts alongside other forms of resistance. Harlow's writing provides a broad overview of resistance literature. However, she admits the selection of authors she addresses may be arbitrary as her selection of authors is designed to paint a broad picture of resistance literature.

Where Harlow provides a broad almost global overview, Zimmerman in his works Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions and Literature and Resistance in Guatemala takes an in-depth approach. The former looks at the implications and power of resistance literature in the region while the latter looks at the long history of resistance literature in Guatemala. Critically, Zimmerman shows the diversity of Guatemalan resistance literature in exploring its implications from Asturias to Menchú. His work looks initially at the history of Guatemalan Literature in the postindependence period through to the Estrada Cabrera dictatorship (1898-1920) (Zimmerman 82). Zimmerman explores this history in part to show later evolutions. The novel for a long time held sway as the major genre. While Zimmerman notes that Asturias' El Señor Presidente constitutes one of the "macrostructures of Guatemalan Literature," which describes the totalistic world of Estrada Cabrera's dictatorship. At the same time, Zimmerman also tries to avoid theorization of an entire genre in relation to a few 'masterworks', hence the diversity of authors (Zimmerman 14). Rather, he follows a number of threads as he

weaves together this diversity of perspectives. He explores the works of important 'resistance poets' such as Otto Rene Castillo, as well as genres such as *testimonio* as exemplified by Rigoberta Menchu. He also shows how testimonial aspects appeared as a paradigm of resistance in multiple spheres both in the rural and in the urban in particular, as previous generations of writers during the 70s and 80s had begun to write largely from exile, leaving newer generations less encumbered by previous literary modes. Zimmerman also at times takes a historical and sociological approach, articulating the differences in the discourses of resistance during different periods. He looks at the ways different writers within the same generation drew inspiration from different sources. For example, during periods when modernization was a major trend of Guatemalan literature, some authors drew off of European critiques of modernization. Zimmerman's in-depth approach brings nuance to the topic and it permits subtle differences to be discerned that might be left out in a work designed to give a broader perspective. By recognizing differences within contemporaneous resistance movements, he shows how resistance literature is not monolithic, even if certain works and certain authors stand as part of the macrostructure.

Zimmerman's work in its latter volume looks at the role of resistance literature even when the armed resistance had largely been defeated. This is also when many of the scorched earth policies were implemented, and indeed, this is when other forms of resistance became particularly critical. Zimmerman identified

some of Arce's earlier work as being part of an Urban Ladino discourse of resistance.⁷² *¿Y Maura?* continues that discourse.

Taken as a whole, *¿Y Maura?* appears deeply fragmented and indeed even contradictory, yet the author's introduction— almost serving as a frame tale— shows how the *cuentos* fit together in a constellational way.⁷³ They reflect on a "violent and unbridled" Guatemala and details in one *cuento* often connect to details in others.⁷⁴ At the same time, both the *cuentos* and even the frame tale point to larger patterns. Even the path to publication has some history:

This book I wrote part in Europe, part in South America and part in Guatemala. It was astray almost fifteen years in Geneva, but in the end came back to my hands, and from my hands I deliver it to yours, who will do me, perhaps, the favor of reading it. Although, hands clearly do not read, but hold the book, which helps a bit.⁷⁵

The path to publication literally followed the path that an exile might have taken.

Indeed, had Arce remained abroad, his writing might have been published in exile,

⁷² Ladino, it should be noted, is a contested term. As used by Zimmerman, this would primarily denote a discourse based on the experiences of those living in the metropolitan area of Guatemala City. Ladino for him is defined in opposition to indigenous (nonindigenous). At the same time, he recognizes that there are many modes and degrees of *mestizaje*. For Victor Perera, the term *ladino* has a somewhat more complicated meaning, coming as it does from *ladino* originally meaning mixed. It encompasses the space between the *criollo* (Spanish) and the indigenous. Its different uses can range from those who are ethnically nonindigenous but whose cultural identity bears indigenous influence to those who are ethnically indigenous but whose primary language is Spanish. The meaning may also change with where it is used.

⁷³ By constellation, I am making reference to the concept of constellations as embodied by the work of Walter Benjamin. The constellation makes a number of appearances in his *Arcades Project*. The constellation serves to link numerous events together in nonlinear ways. Arce's *cuentos* can similarly be said to link to each other in nonlinear ways, creating a constellation of *cuentos* that engage in the struggle over the cultural/historical record.

⁷⁴ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 7. "Desenfrenada y violenta."

⁷⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 7. "Este libro lo escribí parte en Europa, parte en América del Sur y parte en Guatemala. //Estuvo extraviado casi quince años en Ginebra, pero al fin llegó a mis manos y de mis manos las entrego a las tuyas, que me harán, quizás, el favor de leerlo. Aunque, claro está las manos no leen, pero sostienen el libro y eso ayuda un poco."

something he had refused. However, his refusal to go into exile in a strange way parallels the way in which local histories relate to global designs. As Mignolo writes, “Today, local histories are coming to the forefront and, by the same token, revealing the local histories from which global designs emerge in their universal drive” (Local Histories/ Global Designs 21). Arce’s refusal to leave relates to the global patterns of exile and displacement. On the local level, it could be seen as a way of avoiding the fate of other writers who died in exile. On a personal level, perhaps he did not want to die like his relative and fellow author Manuel José Arce who died in exile in Paris. Indeed, Hugo Arce spends an entire *cuento* contemplating this fate in *Podríamos hablar mucho tiempo acerca del tango*.⁷⁶ Thus, on multiple levels, we see local histories embedded in global designs. The transnational history of the collection on another level itself can be seen as an actual illustration of changes in what Walter Mignolo calls “languaging”:

The rearticulation of the status of nations [...] is forming a world of connected languaging and shifting identities. As people become polyglots, their sense of history, nationality and race become as entangled as their languaging. Border zones, diaspora, and postcolonial relations are daily phenomena of contemporary life. (Local Histories 236)

Mignolo touches upon global trends that are forcibly blurring identity. Returning to the context of Guatemala, the term *ladino* provides such an example of blurring within a nation. Many of Arce’s *cuentos* reflect on these trends, in particular on the Guatemalan diaspora and on blurred identities. Indeed, many of Arce’s *cuentos* are written from perspectives that do not easily fit into dichotomies such as urban/rural or dictatorship/resistance. The history of the collection itself seems to be

⁷⁶ Hugo Arce, *¿Y Maura?* (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008) 81.

representative of a local history embedded in a global trajectory. *¿Y Maura?* was lost while Arce was abroad, but was returned to him in Guatemala, was reedited in Guatemala, and was eventually published in Guatemala.

Mignolo recognizes economic forces as one of the global designs. Elsewhere, he explores the violence of coloniality and postcoloniality as another. Arce's stories are written against the backdrop of violence of the Guatemalan Civil War. Aside from economic integration, one of the "global designs" that *¿Y Maura?* confronts is that of the so-called state of Global Civil War, referring to the many civil wars across many nations of the globe, some as proxy wars between the US and the USSR and others stemming from the echoes of decolonization.⁷⁷ Here, Agamben's theorization of this becomes particularly relevant: "Faced with the unstoppable progression of what has been called a 'global civil war', the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (State of Exception 2). Drawing on both history and philosophy, Agamben illustrates the dangers inherent in the state of exception. The state of exception starts as a state of emergency but becomes a form of governing by force. It is paradoxically legitimated by the suspension of law on account of the state of emergency. The state of exception becomes a gateway to further atrocities. This connects explicitly to many of Arce's *cuentos* that explore this space and to the historical era in which Arce was writing when the state of exception indeed had become a paradigm of everyday life.

⁷⁷ In particular, much of the language within the *cuentos* refers to other *cuentos*. Many of the tales speak to this violence directly. Others precisely in not speaking to the violence let it seep in as a background whose presence is shown indirectly.

Agamben speaks to the intersection of dictatorship and revolution. In exploring the concept, he articulates the way in which both can create a state of exception. He focuses on dictatorship as a paradigm of government that produces a permanent state of exception. He articulates the intersection with revolution in the following citation:

Thus, in the forms of both the state of exception and revolution, *status necessitatis* appears as an ambiguous and uncertain zone in which de facto proceedings, which are in themselves extra- or antijudicial, pass over into law, and juridical norms blur with mere fact—that is, a threshold where fact and law seem to become undecidable. (29)

It is in this zone of ambiguity that many of Arce's *cuentos* are set. The acute importance of this intersection is further evinced in situations where a dictatorship is confronted with a revolution, using the presence of resistance as evidence of the continued need for the state of emergency. The state of emergency can become a means used to create a counter-insurgency state. The "violent and unbridled" Guatemala that serves as the backdrop to Arce's work is at this nexus. Stemming from a *coup d'état*, a series of military dictatorships persisted, creating an ongoing state of exception that lingered even during the transition to democracy. Critically, Agamben argues that "an inverse moment also acts in the state of exception, by which law is suspended and obliterated in fact. The essential point, in any case, is that a threshold of undecidability is produced at which *factum* and *ius* fade into each other" (State of Exception 29). Arce's work in many of the *cuentos* illustrates this obliteration of the law. Two such *cuentos* that will be analyzed in the following chapters are *Transfiguración* and *El Delator*.

With the obliteration of law comes a liminal space wherein individuals can be subjected to a state of bare life. Such a moment allows for the expansion of this liminal space. As Arce writes, "Maura, my cousin, was assassinated and her memory has converted itself, as I already said, in the excuse and the reason for a tale that bears her name" (*¿Y Maura?* 7).⁷⁸ Maura, a lawyer and a judge at the time of her assassination, literally represents the ongoing obliteration of the law as her death came after the conflict had officially ended in the period called 'the kingdom of impunity'.

Maura the real person and the fictional figure intersect in this work, collapsing the distance between the author and the characters: "The tale *¿Y Maura?* which gives the name to this book is the reason and the excuse for writing it."⁷⁹ Something similar happens with the main character in *Transfiguración*. Harlow theorizes one way that this collapse can happen in a broader context:

The merging of the categories of common law prisoners and political detainees entails as well the emergence of a mutual and reciprocal relationship between writer and character. The distance between the two which had been maintained [...] is collapsed when writing itself becomes an offense against the state punishable by law and a prison sentence. (140)

Thus, Arce's personal history also forms part of this complex tapestry as he was both a political prisoner and a persecuted writer. In the work as a whole, this becomes most evident in the large number of first-person perspectives that could not all be the author but which still appear to draw off of the persecution he faced.

⁷⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 6. "Maura, mi prima, murió asesinada y su recuerdo se convirtió, como ya dije antes, en la excusa y la razón para un cuento que lleve su nombre."

⁷⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 5. "El cuento *¿Y Maura?* que da título a este libro, es la razón y la excusa para escribirlo."

The distance collapses both with respect to figures of resistance and to figures forming part of the apparatus of violence in a sort of inverse relationship to the one mentioned above. These include in *El Olor*, the man who disposes of those who have died after being tortured, and in *El Arma*, the perspective of a soldier who has transformed into a weapon and struggles to remember his childhood before he was forced into the army.

Understanding the collapsing of distance between the writer and the subjects which Arce writes about helps to explain the way in which the various *cuentos* fit together. Often, the figures in one *cuento* reappear in another. In this way, the *cuentos* are woven into one another. With revolution, dictatorship, and the state of exception as threads woven into the work from the historical backdrop, the fact that a zone of ambiguity akin to the state of exception is so present is not surprising.

Indeed, the ways in which the *cuentos* intersect can appear paradoxical. However, in reflecting on the quotidian violence of civil war, daily life is indeed subject to the fundamental paradox of sovereign power: “[T]he paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 15). This paradox is important precisely because it means that the sovereign has the power to suspend the law by declaring an emergency and thus creating a state of exception. The horror of the state of bare life finds expression in a number of *cuentos*, including *Quiché* and *El Delator*. These *cuentos* have as a point of reference the Guatemalan genocide.

Guatemalan historian Victor Perera sees these events as being a part of an unfinished conquest the seeds of which were laid some 500 years earlier. In the

introduction to his work, he lays out and describes various periods of oppression, starting with the initial conquest led by “Cortes’s blond captain Pedro de Alvarado” (Unfinished Conquest 1). He shows how the social structures and institutions built up over these 500 years led in part to the Guatemalan genocide. Perera notes “[t]he view that the contemporary Maya, in particular, is in some way subhuman is all too common among Guatemala’s military officers, worthy successors to conquistador Pedro de Alvarado” (Unfinished Conquest 48). Perera, painstaking in his work, often ties in unexpected sources. Take the following from a military comandante in Nebaj: “We believe the war against subversion is total, permanent, and universal; we must defeat the communists not only in their mountain hideouts but in every city, town, village, and hamlet” (Unfinished Conquest 61). Perera also shows how this total war left no part of the country untouched. It was total war in the sense that the state had been transformed into the aptly termed ‘counter-insurgency state’ where the state was entirely reoriented towards this purpose. Perera describes the meticulous methods used by death squads to target journalists, activists, and intellectuals knowing that by assassinating one, they could silence hundreds of others.

This state of total war ties into that of the state of global civil war that Agamben discusses, and returning to Mignolo, we see how such local histories indeed are inserted into global designs. Perera’s historical work shows how in Guatemala, the genocide fits into a global pattern. Arce’s resistance literature is written against this backdrop of the state of exception. “In these tales lies all of my inconformity towards a world which I never understood, and even now, do not

understand."⁸⁰ Arce reflects on the paradoxes inherent in that state, with different *cuentos* often reflecting on iterations of the state of exception.

⁸⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 7. "En estos cuentos va toda mi inconformidad que todavía conserve hacia un mundo que nunca entendí y aun no entiendo."

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE IN THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

In this chapter, I will examine Hugo Arce's *cuento* "La Transfiguración" in the collection entitled *¿Y Maura?* By way of this close reading, I will show how the text as resistance literature engages in the struggle over the cultural/historical record.⁸¹ The focal point of this chapter is to explore the role of narrative in the face of the "state of exception" as theorized by Giorgio Agamben.⁸² What is entailed by the "state of exception" is a liminal space wherein one may be reduced to a state of bare life and become subject to sovereign power without any protections. The objective is to show the intersection between resistance literature and the state of exception in Arce's work.

Of the *cuentos* in Arce's collection *¿Y Maura?*, one short story that directly engages with the importance of resistance literature is "La Transfiguración." It employs tropes of the genre while also highlighting the challenges of engaging in the struggle over the cultural/historical record in the face of total war. This short story centers around the last moments of a group of friends. It reflects on the

⁸¹ See, Harlow, Resistance Literature.

⁸² See, Agamben, State of Exception.

transformative power of literature, yet it also critiques the romanticization of revolution by showing the very real costs of resistance and showing that these costs can be borne by all parts of society. It opens with the narrator imagining the possibility of transfiguration and transformation into an enormous raven. It proceeds to describe the final moments of this group before returning to the trope of transfiguration. Once this transformation into a raven is achieved, the narrative ends with the narrator being shot down. In crashing ‘inevitably’ to the ground, he asks— “Who will tell our story?”⁸³ Rather than concluding the narrative arc, this question contrasts with the narrative structure of the rest of the *cuento* as it breaks the narrative fourth wall by directly addressing the reader with a question. With this final question, this short story directly engages in the struggle over the political/historical record yet also exposes the challenges inherent in that struggle. Barbara Harlow notes that in resistance literature, the distance between writer and character can collapse:

The merging of the categories of common law prisoners and political detainees entails as well the emergence of a mutual and reciprocal relationship between writer and character. The distance between the two is collapsed [...] when writing itself becomes an offense against the state punishable by law and a prison sentence.⁸⁴

In “La Transfiguración,” the distance between writer, narrator, and character collapse on numerous levels. Harlow further notes that the collapse of such differences links the writer and the populace in their various forms of resistance, yet the situation described within this narrative is a state of exception where the

⁸³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

⁸⁴ See, Harlow, *Resistance Literature* 140.

population, and the figures of opposition be they armed with words, weapons, or the will to resist can be eliminated outside of the law in a space that the law itself created.

“*La Transfiguración*” opens *en medeus res* amidst a final stand with the narrator pondering transfiguration: “Puedes ser un enorme cuervo, tener alas maravillosamente negras y brillantes. Levantar vuelo por esa ventana y perderte en el cielo azul plomizo. Le creo. Sé que la transfiguración es posible.”⁸⁵ The opening sentence: “You could be an enormous raven, have marvelously black and brilliant wings”⁸⁶ weaves together both the marvelous as well as the ominous. The raven is often a sign of ill omen. It is an animal that can signify the liminal space between life and death.⁸⁷

However, the wings of the raven are marvelously black and brilliant. This stands in contrast with the more ominous connotations of the raven, giving the raven an almost otherworldly splendor. The contrasts become more pronounced as the narrative continues, “Levantar vuelo por esa ventana y perderte en el cielo azul plomizo”(46).⁸⁸ The idea of taking flight and losing oneself in the blue sky reinforces the narrative flight of fancy. In contrast, however, the narrator ponders taking flight from a window rather than just taking flight. This grounds the action in a specific

⁸⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “You could be an enormous raven, have marvelously black and brilliant wings. Take flight from this window and lose yourself in the leaden blue the sky. I believe him. I know that transfiguration is possible.”

⁸⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46.

⁸⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson. (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

⁸⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Take flight from this window and lose yourself in the leaden blue the sky.”

moment in the manmade world. Thus, in this moment, both the worldly and the otherworldly are evoked. Furthermore, the narrator is not pondering losing himself in the blue sky but rather in the sky which is described as “*azul plomizo*/leaden blue.” The descriptor of “leaden” weighs down the tone of the sentence.

Transfiguration is not simply a marvelous act of losing oneself; rather, it remains tethered even its most fantastic moments.

Transfiguration is furthermore set up as a sort of doctrine: “Le creo. Sé que la transfiguración es posible.”⁸⁹ The belief in transfiguration evokes at one level the belief in the transfiguration of Christ, yet what is evoked here is not a glorious or sacred transfiguration. It is a marginal and marginalized one, much like the raven as the symbol of the metamorphosis in this narrative. “*La transfiguración*” then shifts from this reflection on transfiguration to close in on the scene. It focuses in on the very window from which the narrator pondered taking flight.

The narrative transitions from this reflection on transfiguration to focus in on the scene at hand, but strikingly, there are no indicators of a precise geographic location in the world, evincing a kind of border thinking where binaries such as center/periphery and public/private are collapsed. The narrative is in itself a kind of window into the way that conflict is a sort of borderlands. The abrupt transition of the narration is made with a gunshot shattering the window, in a sense zooming in on the scene as the violence escalates. “Un disparo destroza los vidrios de la ventana y los compañeros caen muertos como en cámara lenta, haciendo más irreal

⁸⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “I believe him. I know that transfiguration is possible.”

el momento.”⁹⁰ The language used is cinematographic *camara lenta*, literally meaning in slow motion camera style. The sentence structure emphasizes the ‘unreal’ more prominently than it does the ‘moment’ itself. Here, the stark reality of the moment makes it seem less real to the narrator along the lines of the slow motion illusion that the brain can create under extreme duress. Thus, that the moment seems less real to the narrator is a realistic aspect of the narrative. Now that the scene appears to have slowed down, it exploits this moment to make an unexpected shift away from the scene at large to focus in on the characters.

Almost as if it were a narrative jump cut, the story continues “Pero aún así, no me decido a dejarla sola, está herida de muerte.”⁹¹ The presence of both genders implies that the resistance this group represents is not a narrow opposition. Here, the role of resistance which is often gendered masculine is broadened. Furthermore, there are still no geographic markers, leaving the reader uncertain as to where exactly this resistance is taking place. The only marker tells us that the site of resistance is a house. The next sentence plays with the gendered stereotypes of resistance. Here, the narrator in an almost cinematic gesture rushes to the balcony to fire back. “Su mano roza la mía e instintivamente llego a uno de los balcones y descargo la tolva del M-16 que ya casi ésta adherida a mis manos por el sudor y la sangre.”⁹² This scene for a moment appears to be an almost romantic portrayal of

⁹⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “A gunshot destroys the panes of the windows and comrades fall dead as if filmed in slow motion, making the moment more unreal.”

⁹¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “But even so, I decided not to leave her alone, although she is fatally wounded. Her hand brushed mine and instinctively I go to one of those balconies and discharge the clip of the M-16 which has almost adhered itself to my skin because of the sweat and blood.”

resistance. The hero after having his hand brushed by the dying heroine then rushes to the balcony to fight back in one valiant last stand. At this moment, all of the figures are still nameless. They appear to be nameless and romanticized. However, other aspects of this description complicate such a reading.

The M-16 is almost glued to the narrator's hand because of the sweat and blood. He goes to the balcony out of instinct. Rather than firing the M-16 at someone, he is described as simply discharging the clip. This situation at first glance is valiant but upon further examination, it shows a subtle despair. Both aspects are woven into the same narrative thread, highlighting a space somewhere between the idealization of resistance and the desperation of an intractable situation. This is an example of the text engaging in the struggle over the cultural/historical record. It also complicates the stereotype of resistance. The AK-47 is strongly associated with insurgency, revolution, and resistance. However, the weapon used here is the American designed M-16, which is not a weapon so strongly associated with revolution or insurgency. Furthermore, the M-16 due to its need for regular maintenance is not a weapon ideally suited for guerilla warfare, implying that those in the house are not part of a more typical resistance. While the narrative is not specifically tied to a place, it is engaged in the representation of resistance as something more than a stereotyped and idealized or demonized image.

The narrative again shifts in a cinematic fashion. In a sense, it almost zooms away from the scene as if the narrator had a bird's eye view. "Afuera llueve

⁹² See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. "Her hand brushes mine and instinctively I go to one of the balconies and discharge the clip of the M-16 which has almost adhered itself to my skin because of the sweat and blood."

levemente y no lejos de aquí debe haber un niño jugando tenta, o quizás haciendo un circulo en la tierra con sus dedos. Afuera hay tal vez veinte carros, dos tanques y aproximadamente unos cuatro cientos soldados abriendo fuego granado contra la casa.”⁹³ The word ‘afuera’ or outside sets up a structure that indicates the intersection between everyday experiences like the weather, childhood games, etc. and the narrative that is unfolding. The statement “Llueve levemente” outside it rains lightly contrasts with the “*fuego granado*/ heavy fire”⁹⁴ that the house is under. The literal meaning is that he is playing “*tenta*/tent” which implies that the child is looking for cover. The metaphorical and more commonly used sense is that he is playing hide and seek. Poignantly, he is playing alone and there is only one child nearby playing hide and seek, or perhaps drawing circles in the sand.⁹⁵ This sentence opens up multiple readings. One is that the child is hiding from the military actions. A contrasting read is that the child is playing in spite of the surrounding events. Reading it in both ways shows both the tragedy of the situation and the hope that the child represents. Drawing circles in the sand can similarly be interpreted as a game and also as a drawing of the nearby events as the narrator and his companions find themselves surrounded, encircled by the military.

⁹³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Outside it rains lightly, and not far from here a child is probably playing hide and seek, or perhaps making a circle in the earth with his fingers. Outside there are probably twenty trucks, two tanks and roughly four hundred soldiers laying down withering fire with against the house.”

⁹⁴ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46.

⁹⁵ Drawing circles comes up in other *cuentos* in the collection such as *Bítacoras de Viaje*, where the traveller in that short story is drawing circles while waiting to die. These details can be seen as connecting these two *cuentos*. However, further study connecting the two is outside of the scope of this work.

This multiplicity is further complicated by the use of ambiguities in the language. Here, “Debe haber” has two senses. One is the sense of ‘there is probably.’ The other is the more literal sense, ‘there should be.’ Thus, the phrase can also be read as “nearby there *should* be a child playing hide and seek or perhaps making a circle in the dirt” (46). This reading begs the question— why isn’t there a child playing nearby? The most immediate answer would be the nearby fighting, yet there is also the subtle suggestion that the child that should be playing is gone, whether killed, disappeared, or otherwise is unclear. The approaching forces are well in excess of what would be needed to militarily defeat those in the house. ‘Twenty trucks, two tanks, and four hundred soldiers’ is certainly excessive against a group of five. Furthermore the house or ‘casa’ comes under withering fire, showing that the action is being undertaken not only against those in the house but in a sense against the home itself. The site of resistance is a home and the private space of the home has become a warfront.⁹⁶ In enumerating the specific forces, the narrative highlights in a concrete manner the excessive force being brought to bear. Indeed, it is such an excessive force that one could reasonably hold that there would be few if any survivors left to bear witness to the unfolding events.

Furthermore, the moment being represented is not clearly mapped onto a geographic site of resistance. For example, in Guatemalan resistance literature, revolution is often associated with ‘*la montaña*/the mountain’. While *la montaña*

⁹⁶ This can be seen in the poetry of various Guatemalan authors, including Otto Rene Castillo and Manuel José Arce, as well as in various testimonial works. In other *cuentos* in the collection *¿Y Maura?*, the imagery of ‘the mountain’ is repeated specifically in terms of armed revolt rather than the broader act of resistance. The lack of a specific place when contrasted with other *cuentos* broadens the context.

implies a peripheral relation to the centers of power, here, the home could be anywhere in relationship to the centers of power. Read in terms of the Guatemalan context, this implies a shift from the earliest stages of resistance, which were primarily ladino led; it also implies a later period than that in which the indigenous population had first become involved in the conflict. If read in terms of the Guatemalan context, it implies a period when the nature of the conflict shifted from a civil war accompanied by a dirty war to include what is now known as the Guatemalan Genocide. While it is impossible to put a specific date on the beginning of this period, there was an escalation of the atrocities committed during the presidency of Ríos Montt in 1982-83.⁹⁷ This period also coincides with the period of the dirty wars in the south cone. The home being the site of resistance suggests the period during which the counter-insurgency was taken literally into the homes of those held to be part of the opposition. Indeed, during this period, even suspicion of sympathy to various oppositional factions whether revolutionary, civil, or otherwise could be a death sentence.⁹⁸

“La Transfiguración” operates on multiple levels. It can also be read more broadly than in terms of Guatemala. In a sense, the lack of a specific geographic location suggests that these events could unfold in many places. In a sense, then the

⁹⁷ For an in-depth analysis of the Guatemalan genocide, see Victoria Sanford’s Violence and Genocide in Guatemala drawing off of Violencia y Genocidio en Guatemala (Guatemala City: FyG Editores, 2003) and Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Online, 3 September 2012, <<http://www.yale.edu/gsp/guatemala/TextforDatabaseCharts.html>>.

⁹⁸ Read in the Guatemalan context, this is understood as taking place during what historians have called the Holocaust period. See, Zimmerman Literature and Resistance in Guatemala and see Perera The Unfinished Conquest. Other *cuentos* in the collection such as *Pobre Diablo*, *El Olor*, and *El Arma* focus on the specific mechanisms of oppression in Guatemala and the almost industrial aspect it took on near the end of the conflict.

narrative if only indirectly reflects on a global state of civil war, and the state of exception this entails. I will further expound on the state of exception; however, it is important to return to the text in order to highlight the excess of force used in the moment described. “Afuera hay tal vez veinte carros, dos tanques y aproximadamente unos cuatro cientos soldados abriendo fuego granado contra la casa.”⁹⁹ The size of the force implies that the objective here is not simply the elimination of a small group of insurgents. Rather, it suggests a larger mobilization; indeed, the large number of troops implies that this military action is part of the *modus operandi* of the campaign.¹⁰⁰

Within the context of the story, the military action is not an isolated example of excessive force but more suggestive of a scorched earth campaign.¹⁰¹ According to Agamben, “The state of exception appears as the threshold of indeterminacy

⁹⁹See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Outside there are probably twenty trucks, two tanks and roughly four hundred soldiers laying down withering fire with against the house.”

¹⁰⁰ This type of campaign could serve multiple purposes. One such purpose might be something along the lines of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam. (See, Roger Hilsman. *To Move a Nation: The Politics Of Foreign Policy In The Administration Of John F. Kennedy*. New York: Doubleday. Vol. 15, March 1968, No. 2) or the Briggs’ plan in Malaya (See, Nagl, John A. (2005). “Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife”. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; also see Jay Gordon Simpson “Not by bombs alone” <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/jfq/1622.pdf>). A Hamlet strategy was implemented in Guatemala and was called the Development Pole Strategy (“Counterinsurgency and the Development Pole Strategy in Guatemala” *CSQ* Issue: 12.3 (Fall 1988) Resettlement and Relocation Part 1, Online, 3 September 2012, <<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/guatemala/counterinsurgency-and-development-pole-strategy-g>>. One potential pitfall of such counterinsurgency/resettlement strategies is that they operate at the threshold of the state of exception. Here, an indeterminate space has been created and with the creation of such a space, the only barrier left to the extermination of any group within the state of exception is the decision to do so.

¹⁰¹ “Counterinsurgency and the Development Pole Strategy in Guatemala” *CSQ* Issue: 12.3 (Fall 1988) Resettlement and Relocation Part 1, Online, 3 September 2012, <<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/guatemala/counterinsurgency-and-development-pole-strategy-g>>.

between democracy and absolutism” (3).¹⁰² While perhaps established in response to an original state of emergency or *état de siege*, here that state has now become the norm. The state of exception is often associated with such a state of emergency. Given that is a narrative without a defined geographic location, “La Transfiguración” is not necessarily reflecting on a specific historical state of exception. Rather, it can be seen as a reflection on such a state of exception in more general terms. Like the state of exception, the narrative itself is liminal, having the imprint of history and histories woven into a narrative structure that exposes the potentiality of a such a state, regardless of geography. Furthermore, it also reflects on the intersection between such a moment of absolute vulnerability and the role of resistance literature.

As the narrative continues, it describes the violence. Having described the forces arrayed against them, the narrator then goes on to describe the scene of carnage. Again, the description is cinematographic, almost as if it were a panning shot capturing the scene. However, certain unexpected details make the scene more poignant.

Arrastrándome regreso a ella y le digo “es el fin”. Su Mirada recorre la habitacion: Rita, Manuel, Archila, y Figueroa están deshechos y en el suelo los peces tropicales de Rita se inflan y se desinflan rítmicamente. Manuel tiene desecho el cranéo. Macedo y Figueroa parecen borrachos; uno sobre la mesa y el otro sentado en una silla con la cabeza caída hacia atrás¹⁰³

¹⁰² See, Agamben, *State of Exception* 3.

¹⁰³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Dragging myself along the floor I return to her side and tell her “it’s the end”. Her gaze runs across the room: Rita, Manuel, Archila and Figueroa are undone, and on the floor Rita’s tropical fish inflate and deflate rhythmically. Manuel’s cranium has been shattered. Macedo and Figueroa almost seem drunk, one slumped over the table and the other in a chair with his head falling backwards.”

“*Arrastrándome*” comes from the infinitive *arrastrar*/ to drag.¹⁰⁴ The reflexive form “*arrastrándome*” highlights the narrator’s condition, likely wounded; he drags himself across the floor. The verb “*arrastrar*” can also be used to describe the movement of animals such as snakes or imaginary creatures and is similar to slithering in English. This highlights the debasement of the human condition, which also highlights the general reduction to a state of bare life and agony wherein all of these figures “may be killed and yet not sacrificed”(Agamben 8). Their last moment is at hand “*es el fin/ it is the end.*”¹⁰⁵ The narration for a moment describes her gaze, which runs across the room in an almost shot reverse shot sequence, narrator-“*ella/her*” - narrator. Specifically, the description shifts from the narrator’s view point(shot), to follow her gaze (reverse), after which it returns to the narrator’s point of view. At the same time as the narration is setting up the scene, it is also exposing the narrative construction of the scene.

The narrative then proceeds to ‘recorrer’ or pan across the scene, in a parallel fashion to “*su mirada/her gaze.*”¹⁰⁶ Given the previous description, the expected details present themselves first. “Rita, Manuel, Archila y Figueroa están deshechos”¹⁰⁷(46). The names are not specific enough to give a sense of place other than suggesting a context where these names might be found, which could be nearly

¹⁰⁴ Defined by the RAE (Real Academia Española) as “1. tr. Llevar a alguien o algo por el suelo, tirando de él o de ello. 2. tr. Llevar o mover rasando el suelo, o una superficie cualquiera.” “Arrastrar,” *Diccionario de la lengua española - Vigésima segunda edición*, Real Academia Española, 3 September 2012 <<http://lema.rae.es/drae/>>.

¹⁰⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46.

¹⁰⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46.

¹⁰⁷ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Rita, Manuel, Archila and Figueroa are undone.”

anywhere. One might also read into the names a racial connotation insofar as the names do not forcibly denote the protagonists as indigenous. That said, neither is that possibility excluded.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the protagonists could be of any race or combination of races, criollo, indigenous, ladino, mestizo, mulatto, or Asian. The four are “*deshechos*”. The past participle form of *deshacer* has multiple meanings.¹⁰⁹ *Deshechos* could be interpreted as the “remains,” that is, what was discarded as waste. It could also be interpreted as “discarded” or undone. It has the less used but relevant meaning of being broken in the sense of a fleeing unit. In this context, it implies that militarily, they have been defeated, yet it also has a more graphic meaning closer to the sense of an animal having been slaughtered and butchered. It also suggests to be done away with. These different senses together imply that they have been broken militarily, done away with politically/legally, and are thus free to be slaughtered/butchered/discarded as they no longer enjoy any protections. In a sense, this phrase itself contains the evolution of the state of exception. First, a state of emergency is declared wherein a group is declared to be an enemy of the sovereign power. This state of exception having been created by the state of emergency becoming permanent and these groups having been identified either in racial, ethnic, or political terms, they can then be done away with or discarded, that is to say stripped of all legal/humanitarian protections. Stripped of all protections,

¹⁰⁸ In other *cuentos* delving into specific atrocities suffered by Guatemala’s indigenous population, more specific names are used, in a sense recognizing the historic specificity of those massacres. One of the legacies of colonialism is the use of European first names. For further information on the mapping of coloniality into language and naming practices, see Walter Mignolo’s *Border Thinking* and *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*. With regard to this thesis, the mapping of colonial history onto language itself will be further discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ “Deshacer,” *Diccionario de la lengua española - Vigésima segunda edición*, Real Academia Española, 3 September 2012 <<http://lema.rae.es/drae/>>.

the only remaining barrier between juridical-legal exclusion and extermination is the decision to do so.¹¹⁰ The figures or characters in this story have been defeated, dismissed, and are about to be exterminated.

However, the next detail is so unexpected that it breaks the cinematographic style of the narrative present in the scene. It unsettles the narrative continuity and highlights the violation of the private space by focusing in on what could be seen as a frivolous possession: “y en el suelo los peces tropicales de Rita se inflan y se desinflan rítmicamente.”¹¹¹ Almost as if describing the scene in detail would be too gratuitous, the dying tropical fish speak volumes. They are a leisure item in a scene of absolute violence. The fish also represent the fragility of life. Here, life on a daily basis has been shattered and is no longer possible. The fish are an artifact of an existence before this violence. They highlight the shattered state of things. The surrounding violence is described in quotidian terms, highlighting the excessive force employed at the moment. The tropical fish provide a detail that implies that this final moment was not one that was expected. The very act of keeping and caring for tropical fish would almost seem absurd if the protagonists were engaged in a long campaign. Thorstein Veblen notes in Theory of The Leisure Class: “The case is different with those domestic animals which ordinarily serve no industrial end; such as pigeons, parrots and other cage-birds, cats dogs and fast horses. These commonly are items of conspicuous consumption, and are therefore honorific in

¹¹⁰ For an in depth discussion of the State of Exception in terms of what has been called the global state of civil war as well as in terms of genocide, see Giorgio Agamben’s The State of Exception and Sovereign Power and Bare Life.

¹¹¹ See, Arce, ¿Y Maura? 46. “And on the floor Rita’s tropical fish inflate and deflate rhythmically.”

their nature.”¹¹² The presence of the tropical fish shows that this house was a site where leisure was possible.

Further, if we understand that this moment was not part of a long campaign but rather part of a shift in quotidian life, we see that while they were engaged in resistance, it is not clear that they were revolutionaries. The tropical fish as a leisure item imply that the ‘casa’ is their home. Whatever state of emergency, be it civil war or otherwise, has transformed into a campaign that is undertaken house by house. To return to an earlier part of the narrative, there ‘should be a child nearby playing hide and seek’(46). However, there is not. The absence of the child acts in a premonitory way predicting the elimination of those in the house. As with the trope of the raven with the fish, the narrative exposes the liminal space between the creation of a state of exception and the decision to eliminate a group of people, a state between bare life and death. The fate of the tropical fish shows that the home has become the grave, highlighting the frailty of life. The fish need to be in water to survive; similarly, the scene is describing the deprivation of the essentials for human existence or the reduction to a state of bare life.

As the fish inflate and deflate rhythmically, they seem to be marking the pace for the entire narrative. The description of what might be daily events in the house is woven into the description of the carnage. The distinction between the private and the public has collapsed. The private space of home has now become the site of state violence. This pairing exposes the day to day nature of the events unfolding around them: “Manuel tiene deshecho el cranéo. Macedo y Figueroa

¹¹² See, Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, (New York: Penguin, 1994) 140.

parecen borachos; uno sobre la mesa y el otro sentado en una silla con la cabeza caida hacia atrás.”¹¹³ This, however, contrasts with Macedo and Figueroa who appear drunk: “one slumped over the table and the other seated in a chair with his head falling backwards” (46) (Translation mine). The carnage shown by Manuel’s shattered cranium makes the description of Macedo and Figueroa more unsettling. It maps the quotidian onto the scene of violence showing the collapse of the distinction between public/private in this state of violence. The gap between the quotidian and the larger surrounding events has disappeared, almost as if the exception has become the norm. The home, society, the family, and the individual are all “deshechos” in this state of total war. *Deshechos* here conveys multiple senses. One sense it conveys is that of being reduced to remnants. Another even more violent sense is that of being torn apart or dismantled. It also in its noun form implies the spoils of war or here, the spoils of the conflict.

The narrative proceeds to return to the trope of the raven. The protagonists like the tropical fish await a certain fate. The gaze that has just panned across the room returns to the narrator. Unlike the outset of the narrative, the idea of transfiguration is no longer repeated with such conviction. The sense of an inevitable end becomes increasingly present. “Vuelve la vista a mí y muy calladamente repite: “puedes ser un enorme cuervo, tener alas negras, levantar vuelo...”¹¹⁴ Earlier the thought of transfiguration was a voice that was gendered

¹¹³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Manuel’s cranium is torn open. They appear drunk; one slumped over the table and the other seated in a chair with his head falling backwards.”

¹¹⁴ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “She returns her gaze to me and in a muted tone repeats: “you could be an enormous raven, have black wings, take flight...”

male, “Le Creo”; now, it is gendered female; the marvelous aspects of transformation have also disappeared. The wings are no longer marvelously black, they are simply black. The sky earlier was described as “leaden blue/*azul plomizo*;” now, the “*fuego granado*/heavy fire” has added another dimension to the descriptor “leaden”, that of a hail of bullets.

The violence escalates when the moment of suspension is broken violently, small arms fire giving way to explosions. “Repentinamente, una explosion arranca la puerta, por la ventana veo que se acercan diez, quizás veinte. Avanzan pegados a las paredes, es cuestión de minutos para que entren y todo termine.”¹¹⁵ The narrative keeps building in explosive fits towards the end. Part of the description seems to suggest a glorious last stand against impossible odds, yet once again, unexpected details ground this romanticization by placing emphasis on the day to day. “Ella mi compañera, mi único amor, muere hablando de un parque.”¹¹⁶ The narrative explores the liminal space between idealism and pessimism. That she dies speaking of a park is another detail like the tropical fish that is unexpected and breaks up the cinematographic style. It also reminds us that the unfolding scene is not speaking of resistance as a glorious act; rather, it is reminding the reader that in this instance, it is part of the fabric of life. Unexpected violence in tandem with resistance to that violence have come to define the quotidian.

So too is the state of exception part of the daily fabric. Indeed, Agamben ties

¹¹⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Abruptly an explosion tears down the door, through the window I can see that ten perhaps twenty are closing in. They advance plastered to the walls, it is a question of minutes before they enter and everything ends.”

¹¹⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “She my companion, my only love, dies speaking of a park.”

the two: “The fact is that in both the right of resistance and the state of exception, what is ultimately at issue is the question of the juridical significance of a sphere of action that is itself extrajudicial.”¹¹⁷ While this narrative is not necessarily interrogating questions related to the juridical sphere, it is interrogating the possibilities inherent in such a state. The contrasting moments such as the tropical fish, or speaking of a park tie the narrative back to an everyday life removed from the unfolding events. Simultaneously, they are a forceful reminder that the personal or private life has been stripped away and that what remains are memories and dying tropical fish. The narration having conveyed this scene of destruction immediately turns to the trope of transfiguration amidst the scene of destruction.

As the narrator returns to the trope of transfiguration, the tone becomes increasingly desperate. “La transfiguración y el escape son posibles, recuerdo la doctrina, me forzo a pensar en la revolución y en la lucha.”¹¹⁸ The narrator forces himself to think of “*la revolución*/ the revolution” and “*la lucha*/the struggle.” It is almost as if in this moment, the only thing the narrator still possesses is the freedom of thought, yet the narrator makes a shift from thinking of revolution in the abstract to thinking about factors which precipitated resistance: “Traigo a mi mente la mirada de los miles de niños que he visto morir, de los desamparados, de los perseguidos”¹¹⁹ The fact that the narrator has seen thousands of children die suggests having witnessed massacres or at the very least the death of thousands of

¹¹⁷ See Agamben, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998) 11.

¹¹⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “Transfiguration and escape are possible. I remember the doctrine; I force myself to think of ‘la revolución’ and ‘la lucha.’”

¹¹⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. “I bring to my mind the looks on the faces of the thousands of children I have seen die, of the abandoned, of the persecuted.”

children. This gradual shift from the doctrine of revolution and the struggle to documenting specific reasons to resist highlights the everyday reasons for the narrator's resistance rather than ideology.

Indeed, transformation into a raven is thus linked to resistance: "y justo en el momento en que la punta de la bota redonda y negra empuja los restos de la puerta, siento la mutación y consigo aún ver sus ojos antes de emprender el vuelo por los restos de la ventana."¹²⁰ Nearing death, the narrator hopes for transfiguration and escape. The house, the home, the site of resistance has been destroyed. The hope for transfiguration is what remains. As the narrative continues to unfold, it becomes clear that transfiguration is a trope for both oral telling as well as literature.

The narrator does manage to take flight and for a second, it appears that the nameless narrator will transcend his own final moments, that somehow the narrative itself will allow him to escape. However, this hope like the narrator is shot down. "Y empiezo a tomar altura cuando un disparo destroza mis alas, antes de estrellarme irremediabilmente contra el suelo. Logro recordar sus palabras: 'Puedes ser un enorme cuervo, con alas negras' y pienso: ¿quién contará nuestra historia?."¹²¹ Subject to overwhelming force, the nameless narrator in an unnamed place manages to achieve transfiguration for a fleeting moment, yet he can be shot down just as easily. Perhaps what is explored here is not necessarily the act of revolution but the often nameless act of resistance. In this state of exception, these

¹²⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. "and just at the moment in which the point of the round black boot pushes away the remains of the door I feel the mutation and I even manage to see her eyes before undertaking flight from amidst the remains of the window."

¹²¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46. "And I begin to gain altitude when a gunshot destroys my wings, before crashing irreparably against the ground. I manage to remember her words: "You could be an enormous raven, with black wings" and I think, who will tell our story?"

figures can be killed, the surrounding populace can be disappeared; yet who will tell this story? This question points to the need to write “el cuento.” At the same time, it is ironic because “contar el cuento” is to tell the story. Here, the *cuento* in this instance is related to memory and the need to inscribe it textually. The paradox then is that both the oral and the written are inscribed into the same question. The question creates a dissonance between the written *cuento* and the narrator within the *cuento*. Ultimately, the final question directs the reader’s attention to that dissonance.

By ending the story with an open question, the narrative’s fourth wall is broken. The reader is in a sense implicated. On one level, the question almost demands an answer. On another level, the phrasing “*nuestra historia/our story*” implies the possibility that the reader is part or could be part of such a moment, that they too could find themselves in such a state of exception. Further nuancing the reading is the double meaning of *historia*, being both history as well as story.

With this final question, the *cuento* admits the impossibility of literally speaking for the other; at the same time, it allows for the possibility of telling or recounting the stories/histories of others. While the most immediate reading of “La Transfiguración” implies that of armed resistance, upon closer observation, the only detail related to armed resistance is the discharging of the clip of the M-16. Indeed, the act of resistance is the narrative itself. This in turn suggests that the pen or the act of telling the story itself is a fundamentally important part of resistance. The text then is the product of that resistance. Thus, this question of who will tell the story subtly ties the role of resistance literature to the horrors faced by many who

find themselves in a no-man's land where they can be killed with impunity.

If anyone can be killed by the sovereign power in this state of exception, then nearly anyone could find themselves in the role of the narrator or the reader. Importantly, the narrator asks who will tell (*contar*) the story. This exposes the very limits of the narrative, itself which is printed, suggesting indeed that the oral telling may be the only telling possible. The narrative sets up a paradoxical situation— as the narrator poses the final question, he is in that moment a raven and thus can no longer 'tell' the story, having lost the ability to literally speak. The final question is left unanswered. Whether telling the story of revolutionaries/resistors who died an anonymous death, that of civilians massacred with impunity, or reflecting on a campaign of genocide, the open-ended question— "who will tell our story?" would appear to leave open the very sobering answer — no one. Reading the *cuento* narrowly it would appear that no one survives to tell the story. However, the very presence of the *cuento* contradicts this reading. Here, it appears that the transfiguration of events into a *cuento* was achieved. The oral verb '*contar*' (to recount) is transformed into the written *cuento* or tale. This in mind, the narrative is not only involved in the struggle over the cultural historical record but also engages the reader in that very struggle, exposing the very important role of both the oral and the written as a part of resistance in the face of such a state of exception.

CHAPTER IV

THE WITNESS, THE INFORMANT, AND THE UNFINISHED CONQUEST

This chapter provides a close reading of the *cuento*, *El Delator*. *El Delator* describes a massacre as it unfolds. It also illustrates a moment when the state of exception becomes the dominant paradigm of state power and this power is used against the civilian population. We can understand the state of exception as described in *La Transfiguración* as the beginning of a campaign that will lead to the extermination of entire groups of people. However, it is not forcibly tied to a specific nation. *El Delator*¹²² explores precisely this type of moment in Guatemala's civil war, when the state of exception is exploited to eliminate an entire group of people. The previous chapter explored the echoes of a "global civil war." This chapter explores the local histories of civil war. Whereas *La Transfiguración*¹²³ asks the question who will tell our story, *El Delator* exposes one of the problematic answers to this question as the *cuento* is narrated by the informant who led the

¹²² See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. Also another version of this *cuento* appeared in Arce's *Alquimia* in 2000. One major difference is in the presence of the informant in the *cuento*, not being present in the other version. The other version made reference there at the end to *Guatemala Nunca Más*, a collection of testimonies and witness accounts of the atrocities of the civil war. There, as a mass of flies descends on the bodies, their buzzing seems to whisper *Guatemala Nunca Más*.

¹²³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 46.

military to the village that they subsequently massacre. However, someone other than the military tells the story. While in this case, the narrative is specifically tied to Guatemala, it still plays with ambiguities of place as it is unclear where exactly in Guatemala this massacre takes place. In a sense, this lack of specific detail points to the ambiguous zone where dictatorship and the state of exception meet revolution:

Thus, in the forms of both the state of exception and revolution, *status necessitatis* appears as an ambiguous and uncertain zone in which de facto proceedings, which are in themselves extra- or antijuridical, pass over into law, and juridical norms blur with mere fact—that is, a threshold where fact and law seem to become undecidable.¹²⁴

While there are many aspects of the *cuento* that are tied to a specific historical period, the language simultaneously opens it to be read more broadly. A Delator was “an ancient Roman prosecutor or informer.”¹²⁵ In Guatemala, it became an informant who was either tortured, coerced, bribed or otherwise encouraged to inform on the insurgency.¹²⁶ The reader is exposed to the unfolding massacre, the

¹²⁴ See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* 29.

¹²⁵ “Delator,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2010, Encyclopædia Britannica, Online, 3 September 2012, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/156344/delator>>.

¹²⁶ The CEH stands for the Commission for Historical Clarification. See, Commission for Historical Clarity [Guatemala], *Guatemala Memory of Silence*, “Conclusions- 49. Criminalisation of Victims” 1994. Online 3 September 2012. <<http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc1.html>>

“49. The State also tried to stigmatise and blame the victims and the country’s social organisations, making them into criminals in the public eye and thus into “legitimate” targets for repression. This was done by stripping them of their dignity as individuals, using fire and sword to teach them the lesson that the exercise of their rights as citizens could mean death. The CEH considers that this systematic indoctrination has profoundly marked the collective consciousness of Guatemalan society. Fear, silence, apathy and lack of political participation are some of the most important effects of having criminalised the victims, and present a serious obstacle to the active participation of all citizens in the construction of democracy.” The CEH stands for the Commission for Historical Clarification.

apparatuses of repression, the informants, and the military, almost making the reader a sort of third-hand witness.

There is enough detail to tie the massacre and the *cuento* to Guatemala, but not enough to tie it to one specific place. This could be one of the many massacres that occurred in Guatemala. The presence of the *Kaibiles* accounts for its particular brutality. Their “training included killing animals and then eating them raw and drinking their blood in order to demonstrate courage. The extreme cruelty of these training methods, according to testimony available to the CEH, was then put into practice in a range of operations carried out by these troops, confirming one point of their decalogue: “The *Kaibil* is a killing machine.”¹²⁷ The data collected by REMHI shows at least “1090 massacres,” with the army or paramilitaries responsible for at least 94% of them.¹²⁸ The narrator in the *cuento* reminds us of the impossibility of documenting all of the massacres. As told from the informant’s point of view: “I knew what they were capable of doing if they found me still alive, because not only was I an informant, but also a witness.”¹²⁹ The work enters into conversation with this history, and this conversation also connects it to the atrocities faced by the society as a whole.

The narrative starts with what would appear to be a third person omniscient point of view, although as the narrative unfolds, this gives way to the informant’s point of view. The global viewpoint becoming an individual viewpoint helps

¹²⁷ Commission for Historical Clarity [Guatemala], *Guatemala Memory of Silence*, “Conclusions- 42. Kaibiles” 1994. Online 3 September 2012
<<http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc1.html>>

¹²⁸ See, REMHI, *Guatemala Never Again*, “massacres” (Mary Knoll: Orbis, 1999) 295.

¹²⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

highlight the way that specific events fit into larger patterns. In this case, it highlights how the events described could fit into a larger picture of Guatemala's civil war. The scene is described in a matter of fact way. It opens in an unassuming manner. Indeed, the connection between the title and the narrative does not come until near the end: "A las cuatro de la mañana llegaron a las lomas que rodearon la aldea dos camiones repletos de soldados, tres jeeps artillados y el coronel que dirigía la operación."¹³⁰ The opening seems quite matter-of-fact, marking the beginning of the timeline of a series of events. It describes the forces assembling and shows the high level of the operation as a colonel is directing the operation. It also sets up the military as an outside force coming to the "hills that surround the village."¹³¹ That a colonel "*dirigía/directed*" the operation emphasizes that the strategic planning led to the events that unfolded and more importantly, that this is not a rogue operation; it is a carefully directed operation forming part of a larger campaign. Furthermore, the time of the operation is such that they can take the village completely unaware.

The narration starts describing the outskirts of the village and proceeds to describe the scene in the village. At this point, it still employs the omniscient point of view. "En la aldea, Matías Xiriac no había podido dormir bien porque cuando cerraba los ojos comenzaba a ver como su cuerpo se quemaba y despertaba sudando de fiebre y temblando de frío."¹³² Here, the term "*aldea/township*"¹³³ implies the

¹³⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. "At four in the morning, to the hills that surrounded the small village, came two green trucks filled with soldiers, three artillery jeeps and the colonel who directed the operation."

¹³¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

peripheral relationship of the village to the assembled military forces. An *aldea* according to the Real Academia Española (RAE) is a “*Pueblo de corto vecindario y, por lo común, sin jurisdicción propia* / A village covering a small area and, as commonly understood without its own jurisdiction.”¹³⁴ That the village does not have its own jurisdiction is important as this means that it exists in an ambiguous juridical zone. It is either outside of the legal sphere or it is too insignificant with respect to local power structures to have its own jurisdiction. An *aldea* exists *per se* in a zone of legal uncertainty. Already outside of the juridical sphere, it becomes the scene of a massacre where any remnants of legal protection have been suspended in the state of emergency or exception.

Interestingly, the word *aldea* has its origins in Arabic, a linguistic artifact left from Islamic Spain and the era of the *reconquista*. Similarly, the name Matías Xiriac itself exposes the legacy of *la conquista* as Matías or Matthew is a Christian name imposed upon Xiriac, an indigenous last name.¹³⁵ The massacre that the narrative goes on to describe is part of what historian Victor Perera has called the Unfinished Conquest.¹³⁶ Mapped into this short sentence is the *reconquista*, the *conquista*, and the unfinished conquest or the Guatemalan genocide. That the *aldea* does not have

¹³² See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. “In the town Matias Xiriac couldn’t sleep well because when he closed his eyes he began to see how his body was being burnt and he woke with a feverish sweat, trembling with chills.”

¹³³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹³⁴ “Aldea,” *Diccionario de la lengua española - Vigésima segunda edición*, Real Academia Española, 3 September 2012 <<http://lema.rae.es/drae/>>.

¹³⁵ For an in-depth discussion of the ways in language itself reflects the legacy of colonialism, see Walter Mignolo’s *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, and *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

¹³⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

its own jurisdiction shows its position at the margins of power as embodied by the juridical system.

The description of Matías is also premonitory: “he couldn’t sleep well because when he closed his eyes he began to see how his body was being burnt and he woke with a feverish sweat, trembling with chills.”¹³⁷ While at this moment, it is ascribed to fever, this sequence announces what is to come; in a sense, he wakes with a deathly chill. His state highlights the situation of the village that is being consumed not by another type of malaria but by a different kind of sickness.

As the narrative proceeds, the events on the outskirts of the village initially creep into the experiences of those in the village. “A las cuatro escuchó el ruido de los motores caterpillar que transportaban a la tropa. Los escuchó lejanos, vagamente y creyó que la malaria que lo estaba consumiendo en el catre tenía ese sonido.”¹³⁸ The sound of the caterpillar motors rather than contrasting with the living conditions is indistinguishable as Matías is being consumed by malaria. Matías’s living standards are further highlighted. Rather than lying on a bed, he is lying on a “*catre/cot*.”¹³⁹ Thus, the coming massacre is a further debasement of the living conditions and the exploitation of a space that in a sense already existed outside of any legal protections. The narrative uses repetition to move the narrative

¹³⁷ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. “In the town Matias Xiriac couldn’t sleep well because when he closed his eyes he began to see how his body was being burnt and he woke with a feverish sweat, trembling with chills.”

¹³⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. “At four in the morning he heard the rumble of the caterpillar motors which transported the troop. He made it out in the distance, vaguely and believed that the malaria that was consuming him in his cot had that sound.”

¹³⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

forward, all the while suggesting that the unfolding events are part of a larger campaign with military operations that are repeated.

The two spheres, that of the *aldea*/township without its own jurisdiction and the military operation, are increasingly brought together by the narrative. The repetition of the timeline serves to highlight the planned nature of the unfolding massacre. “Para las cuatro con diez empezaron a tomar posiciones [...] mientras los especialistas daban instrucciones de cómo colocarse para evitar que hubiera prófugos a los comisionados militares que iban llegando.”¹⁴⁰ That the timeline unfolds in such small increments places emphasis on the different stages in the military operation. The fact that there are specialists specifically trained to ensure that none of the inhabitants are able to flee shows the high level of planning and training involved in producing this military campaign. Moreover, the specialists are instructing the soldiers on how to position themselves so that there will be no survivors. This is the beginning of the exploitation of an extra-judicial space to commit a massacre.

The narrative continues to play with the numerous layers of conquest. It proceeds to focus on the sacristan and the Father of the small church, all the while contrasting these figures with the Colonel. “A las cuatro con veinte Jorge Orozco, el sacristan de la pequeña iglesia, despertó al padre Romero y comenzó a arreglar el altar para la misa de seis, mientras el coronel DEM Alfredo Moreira desayunaba dos

¹⁴⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. “By four-ten they began to take positions[...] while the specialists gave instructions on how to position themselves to avoid there being fugitives to the military commissioners that were en route.”

huevos duros y un vaso de whisky."¹⁴¹ Orozco and Romero serve as a reminder of the *conquista* as they represent the legacy of the Christianizing mission that began with the *conquista*. As with the title "El Delator/ The Informant," The figure of Father Romero makes reference back to Rome, '*romero*' in Spanish meaning one from Rome as well as rosemary.¹⁴² In the sense of one from Rome, Father Romero makes reference back to both the Roman Empire as well as the Roman Catholic Church. As I have mentioned before, Arce's work is often constellational, referring to events outside of Guatemala. Thus, this could also be a reference to the San Salvadorian Archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated in 1980 by a right-wing death squad while giving mass. Romero was known for his sympathies with liberation theology and for his work with the poor. Arce himself was not only of Guatemalan but also some generations removed of El Salvadorian origin.

Romero and Orozco stand in sharp contrast to colonel DEM Moreira, who represents an attempt to finish the conquest begun by missionaries and conquistadors. While the presence of Romero and Orozco both serve in a sense to refer back to the *conquista*, the colonel embodies the postcolonial iteration of conquest. DEM stands for Diplomado del Estado Mayor. It is the diploma needed in order to qualify to become a general, again reinforcing the high level organization of these operations.

¹⁴¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. "At four twenty Jorge Orozco the sacristan of the small church woke father Romero and began to arrange the altar for the six o'clock mass, meanwhile the colonel DEM Alfredo Moreira had for breakfast two hard boiled eggs and a glass of whisky."

¹⁴² "Romero," *Diccionario de la lengua española - Vigésima segunda edición*, Real Academia Española, 3 September 2012 <<http://lema.rae.es/drae/>>.

The dominant power is now the sovereign state, as embodied by the colonel DEM. His breakfast of “two hard boiled eggs and a glass of whisky” only serves to add to the severity of his character. Ironically, both Romero and Orozco find themselves as referents to a previous conquest, yet victims to a modern form of conquest in the form of state violence.¹⁴³ The narrative, having created this complicated contrast between Romero Orozco and Moreira, proceeds to describe the operation that is being undertaken.

The massacre begins with the death of Juana Inés Tupax. It does not take place in the village proper but rather on the outskirts of the village as the soldiers take positions so as to avoid there being any survivors of the massacre. Like Matías, Juana highlights the political, cultural, and economic marginalization of the community as she dies while beginning the walk to work at the eatery 10 kilometers away. This highlights the economic marginalization. Tellingly, the first death occurs in a liminal space between the village and the military force. The violence begins in this in-between space. “Fue la primera en morir. En el camino una mano feroz la atrapó del pelo, mientras otras más fuertes le tapaban la boca, la tumbaban al suelo y un tremendo culetazo, el primero que recibió, le rompió la clavícula.”¹⁴⁴ This sudden and brutal violence portends what is to come. Furthermore, the initial violence is not attributed to an individual but rather is attributed to “*una mano/a*

¹⁴³ It should be noted that according to historian Victor Perera, the “unfinished conquest” was contemporaneous with another wave of Christianization.

¹⁴⁴ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. “On her way a ferocious hand caught her by the hair, while others stronger still covered her mouth, knocked her to the ground and a tremendous blow from the butt of the gun, the first one she received, broke her collarbone.”

hand.”¹⁴⁵ The subsequent violence is attributed to “*otras más fuertes*/others, even stronger.”¹⁴⁶ The narrative here places emphasis on the actions more than on the actors. In this way, the hand with the descriptor of “*feroz/ferocious*”¹⁴⁷ and the hands “*más fuertes/ stronger*” show the inhumanity of those committing the violence, all the while suggesting the hand as a metaphor for the entire operation as the soldiers close in on the village, crushing those in their path. Indeed, the *mano blanca*/the white hand was one of the most violent paramilitary groups in Guatemala during the civil war; it furthermore had close ties to the military establishment.¹⁴⁸

In this way, the hand also acts as a historical referent; the *mano blanca* also refers to the construct of racial superiority that permeated the military thinking at the time as it is not just any hand but a white hand. Returning to Perera, “The view that the contemporary Maya, in particular, is in some way subhuman is all too common among Guatemala’s military officers, worthy successors to conquistador Pedro de Alvarado” (*Unfinished Conquest*, 48). In the *cuento*, the violence is premeditated and executed with precision so as to retain the element of surprise when the assembled forces move upon the village.

With the way the scene unfolds, it is clear that the role being played by these soldiers is a practiced one. The scene is made more poignant due to the terrifying efficiency of the operation. Just as the hand shows the inhumanity of the actors, the

¹⁴⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁴⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁴⁷ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁴⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

scene also illustrates the dehumanization of the victims. “*En el camino una mano feroz la atrapó del pelo/On her way a ferocious hand caught her by the hair.*”¹⁴⁹ The dehumanization is shown by the verb *atrapar/* to trap or to catch like an animal. However, this is only one part of the dehumanizing violence: “*mientras otras más fuertes le tapaban la boca/ while others stronger still covered her mouth.*”¹⁵⁰ This second step is to ensure that her screams do not alert anyone to their presence. They proceed to throw her to the ground: “*la tumbaban al suelo y un tremendo culetazo, el primero que recibió, le rompió la clavícula/ and a tremendous blow from the butt of the gun, the first one she received, broke her collarbone.*”¹⁵¹ The narrative has already exposed the marginalization of the community in political and economic terms. With this first victim, we see how the marginalized space of an *aldea* now becomes the site of a massacre.

The violence is so sudden and swift that information that would be useful cannot even be obtained or indeed is not even wanted. If this were simply a military campaign, then the information might be critical. These operations have transformed into something else. “*Tenía tanto miedo que no podía contestar aunque supiera. ¿Dónde están las armas? ¿Cuántos guerrilleros hay en el pueblo?*”¹⁵² The neutrality of the narrator at this moment begins to become questionable. The use of the imperfect subjunctive form “*supiera*” of the verb *saber* indicates first of all

¹⁴⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁵⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁵¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁵² See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. “She was so afraid that she could not answer even though she ought to have known. Where are the weapons, how many guerrilleros are there in the pueblo?”

that she ought to have known and secondly that the narrator is retelling the story after the fact with limited personal knowledge. It breaks the narrative continuity, which up until this point has chronicled the unfolding story in a matter of fact way. From this moment on in the narrative, the point of view only goes on to become more problematic as if something about this violent moment broke the impersonal narrative arc.

Indeed, the subsequent details provide an unexpected level of personal knowledge. "En menos de cinco minutos Juana Inés Tupax, hija de Santiago Tupax, era un cadaver despojado de su risa, de su futuro y su llanto. Una masa de sangre, saliva y polvó quedo de ella."¹⁵³ The telling begins to become problematic as the narrator recounts the family relations. The point of view is a liminal one with the narrator having personal knowledge of the village, yet being on the outside looking in. In this way, the narrator can both recount the unfolding actions while also providing detailed information of the goings on within the village. If we read this narrative as part of the "unfinished conquest," we can then also read the narrator as a new type of "go-between."¹⁵⁴ The idea of the unfinished conquest comes from historian Victor Perera who sees the seeds of the violence of the civil war as having been laid with the conquest of the Americas. The view of the Maya as inferior is indeed one of those narratives he traces from the conquest to the culture of the military. The following statement from a Military Comandante in Nebaj illustrates

¹⁵³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86. "In less than five minutes Juana Inés Tupax, daughter of Santiago Tupax, was a cadaver dispossessed of her smile, of her future and her weeping. A mass of blood, spit and dust was all that remained of her."

¹⁵⁴ Greenblatt discusses the role of "The Go-Between" in the conquest of the Americas in his book *Marvelous Possessions*, most specifically in the chapter of the same name "The Go-Between" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

this mentality: “We believe the war against subversion is total, permanent, and universal; we must defeat the communists not only in their mountain hideouts but in every city, town, village, and hamlet” (*Unfinished Conquest*, 61) Thus, we see that this idea of conquest intersects with a state of total war or state of exception.

The narrative has already made the marginalization of the community clear. Nevertheless, the narrator highlights the ultimate dispossession as she is now “*un cadaver despojado de su risa, de su futuro y su llanto. / a cadaver dispossessed of her smile, of her future and her weeping.*”¹⁵⁵ Poignantly, even if in political/economic/juridical terms she is dispossessed, she still had agency as embodied by her “*risa/smile*” her “*futuro/future*” and even her “*llanto/weeping*”. However, after the brutality of soldiers, she is beaten almost literally to a pulp: “*Una masa de sangre, saliva y polvo quedó de ella. /A mass of blood, spit and dust was all that remained of her.*”¹⁵⁶ The narrator’s seemingly intimate knowledge makes the description of the scene even more startling; it is perhaps easy to think of someone being dispossessed of their smile, yet she is even dispossessed of her “*llanto/weeping,*” highlighting that even the difficult tear-filled existence which she may have led was nevertheless still hers. The *rabia* on the part of the military may be seen as related to views like those of the military commander in Nebaj, that this was not just war, but war against a dehumanized enemy.

With this death, the fixed nature of the narrative slowly begins to disintegrate. Now, even the elements seem to become a part of the story. As

¹⁵⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

¹⁵⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 86.

recounted by the narrator, even the sun took on an important role: “A las cuatro con cuarenta el sol lanzó el aviso penetrando con sus rayos en la pequeña aldea de doscientos habitantes, veinte perros flacos y una pequeña iglesia.”¹⁵⁷ The timeline that inexorably moves the narrative forward contrasts with the description as the sun “*lanzó el aviso/ shot out a warning,*”¹⁵⁸ giving a sense if only for a moment that the massacre might be avoided. The warning penetrates the township/village of “*doscientos habitantes, veinte perros flacos y una pequeña iglesia/ two-hundred inhabitants, twenty skinny dogs and a small church.*”¹⁵⁹ Again the “*aldea/township*” marks the political/juridical margins, the skinny dogs mark the economic marginalization, and the small church, while marking a previous conquest, also marks the position of this community at the margins of that conquest. Historically, this relates to communities which may have been Christianized but were not conquered, many of which kept their traditions alive under thinly veiled syncretism.

The vestiges of the Spanish conquest which began some five centuries earlier are embodied by the church, which ironically, is the first site attacked by the incoming forces. Indeed, the church may actually represent a way in which traditions were kept alive. “El primero en verlos fue Orozco, el sacristán, y logro tocar las campanas antes de que una rafaga de galil le destrozara el cráneo.”¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵⁷ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87. “At four forty the sun shot out a warning penetrating with its rays into the small pueblo of two hundred inhabitants, twenty skinny dogs and a small church.”

¹⁵⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁵⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

tolling of the bells is ominous, that it was Orozco's last action even more so. The tolling of the bells both marks the impending massacre and also serves as a sort of last rites for the village. Orozco manages this act "*antes de que una rafaga de galil le destrozara el cráneo/* before the burst of a Galil would tear apart his skull."¹⁶¹ With regards to the Guatemalan Civil War, the Galil became one of the most feared symbols of oppression. Historian Victor Perera notes: "Uzis and the larger Galil assault rifles used by Guatemala's special counterinsurgency forces accounted for at least half of the estimated 45,000 Guatemalan Indians killed by the military since 1978."¹⁶² Furthermore, in the highlands, the Galil "name had come to evoke a dark iconic resonance to thousand of highland Mayas."¹⁶³ In this way, the global arms trade is subtly woven into a narrative that on another level is locally tied to Guatemala.

The tolling of the bells announces the coming massacre. Once the bells were tolled, the town is overrun by the soldiers: "*entraron por todos lados como hambrientas hormigas rojas/*entered from all sides like hungry red ants."¹⁶⁴ The narrator places emphasis on the speed and efficiency with which they carry out the massacre: "*y cuando mataron al último de los veinte perros ya habían asesinado a la*

¹⁶⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87. "The first to see them was Orozco, the sacristan, and he managed to toll the bells before the burst of a Galil would tear apart his skull."

¹⁶¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁶² See, Victor Perera qtd in Jane Hunter *Israeli Foreign Policy in South Africa and Latin America* (New York: South End Press, 1987). "Uzis and the larger Galil assault rifles used by Guatemala's special counterinsurgency forces accounted for at least half of the estimated 45,000 Guatemalan Indians killed by the military since 1978" 23.

¹⁶³ See, Perera, *The Unfinished Conquest* 109. The presence of the Galil also likely places the massacre between 1978-1987.

¹⁶⁴ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

mitad de la población/ and by the time they killed the last of the twenty dogs they had already murdered half of the population.”¹⁶⁵ We have already seen how the “*aldea/township*” existed in a sort of state of exception; here, we see the decision by the sovereign power to exploit the state of emergency to massacre an entire population. The massacre is committed with a ferocious efficiency accompanied by sadistic brutality. The sergeant “*con un machete verde, como el campo verde, decapitaba al hijo menor del panadero/* with a green machete, like the green field, decapitated the youngest son of the baker.”¹⁶⁶ Father Romero falls “*con una cruz en la mano y una mano en la frente/* with a cross in hand and the other on his forehead.”¹⁶⁷ The narrator continues detailing that by 4:56, only eighty survivors were left.¹⁶⁸

Among the survivors were the elderly, women, and children. For a moment, the violence subsides and if only fleetingly, it appears that their lives might be spared. Then the questioning begins as if somehow, the questions justified or were part of the necessary motions to commit a massacre. This part of the operation forms part of a campaign of total war to be waged anywhere subversives or insurgents may be found. In this moment, the state of exception has become the dominant paradigm of a counter-insurgency state.

The state of emergency has become the justification for massacre, which is illustrated by the interrogation scene: “*un teniente fornido, de bigote recortado y olor*

¹⁶⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁶⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁶⁷ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁶⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

a lavanda, comenzó el interrogatorio ¿Donde están las armas? ¿ Donde está la guerilla?/ A stocky lieutenant, with a trimmed moustache and smelling like lavender began the interrogation: where are the weapons? Where is the guerilla?" This scene echoes the previous one, yet this time, it is a lieutenant carrying out the interrogations. That he smells of lavender and is so meticulously groomed shows the normalization of the situation. His moustache also serves to mark him as being of Spanish descent.

The interrogation seems to be a matter of going through the motions to reach what is a foregone conclusion: *"Y después de veinte minutos de gritos de espanto informaron al coronel DEM, Alfredo Moreira, que la población civil se negaba a cooperar/* And after twenty minutes of horrified screams they informed the Colonel DEM Alfredo Moreira that the civilian population had decided not to cooperate."¹⁶⁹ The extreme violence is normalized by defining those already killed as not being part of the civil population. Those being interrogated are fifty children, ten old men, and twenty women. That is to say that those that have been killed have been defined after the fact as belonging to the opposition. It is precisely such violence by a sovereign power that the state of exception allows. However, the most brutal part of the massacre is left unsaid, summed up only by the colonel's orders to proceed: *"El coronel díó un trago de whisky y ordenó 'Procedan, ahorren balas, ya saben que estamos escasos de parque' /* The coronel took a shot of whisky and ordered: Proceed, save bullets, you know that we are low on ammo."¹⁷⁰ At this moment, the

¹⁶⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁷⁰ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

colonel orders the rest of the population to be executed and reminds them that they are still “low on ammo.”

It is precisely at this moment that the narrative takes its final twist. The act of resistance lies not in just recounting the massacre but also in recognizing the problematic nature of the witness. As Harlow noted, resistance literature is engaged in the struggle over the historical/cultural record. Thus, the problematic figure of the informant becomes particularly important in this struggle as it highlights the problematic nature of the historical record itself in the face of such a brutal campaign. The third person narrative is interrupted abruptly following the unspeakable last events of the massacre: “Yo, que fui testigo de todo y además fui quién delató que en esa aldea le daban de comer a los guerilleros, salí corriendo cuando ví la mirada furiosa de los soldados hacía mi.”¹⁷¹ Here, the narrator announces in an almost testimonial fashion his problematic position as both witness and informant. Now that he has served his purpose, the soldiers turn on him. As he flees, he states: “*Sentía los pasos de los kaibiles persiguiéndome*/ I felt the steps of the kaibiles pursuing me.”¹⁷² The *kaibiles*, as far as counter-insurgency specialists are concerned, were known for being particularly brutal. It is only in this moment that this link to the massacre is made, helping in part to account for the particular violence of the massacre as well as forcibly tying the *cuento* to Guatemala. The informant in his headlong rush to escape injures himself as he tries to escape the wrath of the *kaibiles*. “*Revisé de dónde provenía mi dolor y encontré el puño del*

¹⁷¹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87. “I, who was a witness to it all and who also informed that in this town they fed the guerilleros, took off running when I saw the furious gaze of the soldiers towards me.”

¹⁷² See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

machete clavado en mi estomago./ I checked to see where the pain was coming from and found the hilt of the machete driven into my stomach."¹⁷³ Even after sustaining such a painful wound, the narrator is obsessed with escaping, knowing that what the specialists might do was far worse than any other fate, yet he could not move.¹⁷⁴

The narrator again reiterates those fears. "Sabia lo que eran capaces de hacer si me encontraban aún vivo, pues no solo era un delator, sino un testigo/ I knew what they were capable of if they found me for I was not only an informant but also a witness."¹⁷⁵ This construction places emphasis on the latter, that he was a witness. In this way, the importance of being a witness is juxtaposed against the problematic fact that he is also an informant, yet ultimately, this problematic witness may be the only witness.

The narrator proceeds to describe exactly how he managed to survive. "*Cuando desperté, me habían sacado el machete.* / By the time I awoke they had already taken out the machete"¹⁷⁶ It is ironically one final act of cruelty that allows him to survive. "Escuché a unos de los soldados decir: 'No lo matemos, dejémoslo aquí, que se desangre, que se muera lentamente entre los árboles./ I heard one of the soldiers say : 'Let's not kill him, let's leave him here, let him bleed dry and die slowly amongst the trees."¹⁷⁷ This extreme cruelty, to leave him for dead, ironically accounts for his survival and thus perversely also allows for his testimony.

¹⁷³ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 87.

¹⁷⁴ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

¹⁷⁵ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

¹⁷⁶ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

¹⁷⁷ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

However, it cannot be said that the informant/witness truly lived, although he did survive. “Unas moscas peresozas y gordas comenzaron a zumbiar en todo mi cuerpo. El dolor era lacerante, la vida me estaba yendo así, lentamente, fue como morir. / A few fat and lazy flies began to buzz throughout my body. The pain was lacerating, life was leaving me just like that, slowly; it was as if to die.”¹⁷⁸

Ultimately, this figure is also reduced to a state of bare life yet somehow survives. However, the combination of bearing witness to something he should not have lived to tell of “*fue como morir*/was as if to die.”¹⁷⁹ With this final twist, the narrative engages in the struggle over the cultural/historical record as it reflects on state violence and the state of exception in Guatemala. More specifically, it reflects on this struggle as a problematic process. While *La Transfiguración* poses the question in the face of total war: Who will tell our story?, *El Delator* gives us one problematic yet important potential answer— the informant/witness. The narrative does not attempt to resolve this problem; rather, it simply leaves it there for the reader to consider. Despite the problematic narrator, the events are recounted and ultimately, the problematic witness is still a witness. Here, we see that history cannot be so easily erased. Ultimately, in spite of the circumstances, one witness will survive to tell what happened. Someone will remain to tell the story.

¹⁷⁸ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

¹⁷⁹ See, Arce, *¿Y Maura?* 88.

CONCLUSION

I waited for her here, in the same place, smoking the last cigarette, like now in the same place from which I have not moved in the fifteen years in which I have not seen you and now they ask uselessly ¿Y Maura?¹⁸⁰

-from ¿Y MAURA?

In this quote, Maura, both the real and the fictitious one, intersect with the author and the figure sitting there waiting in the *cuento*. The fifteen years here may both refer to a person as well as to the collection that was ‘astray for fifteen years’. Indeed, the ‘real’ and the ‘fictitious’ here intersect in way that blurs and calls into question the dichotomy of reality/fiction. Much of the collection exists in this liminal space, creating a work that as a whole is a constellation of referents, some pointing outwards to history, others pointing inward to a *mise-en-abime* of fictional discourse.

In a way, the entire collection emphasizes the importance of discourses other than the “official stories” such as those in the *cuentos La Transfiguración* and *El Delator*. Its oppositional discourse is not just ideological but also a discourse resisting dominant paradigms and power structures. In a way, this idea brings us full circle to Arce’s other profession—journalism. Even if problematic or

¹⁸⁰ Hugo Arce, ¿Y Maura? (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008) 62.

controversial, journalists still play an important role and they often find themselves targeted in these states of emergency where total war reigns. Indeed, the Inter-American court of human rights highlights the fundamental relation between expression and the protection of human rights:

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone upon which the very existence of a democratic society rests. It is indispensable for the formation of public opinion. It is also a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of political parties, trade unions, scientific and cultural societies and, in general, those who wish to influence the public. It represents, in short, the means that enable the community, when exercising its options, to be sufficiently informed. Consequently, it can be said that a society that is not well informed is not a society that is truly free.¹⁸¹

Arce throughout his *cuentos* often focuses on problematic points of view but nevertheless highlights the important fact that anyone ‘lived to tell the story.’ Focusing on the problematic viewpoints is part of engaging in the struggle over the cultural/historical record, which itself is one of the key aspects of resistance literature. Highlighting the survival of these problematic figures emphasizes the ways in which the conflict lives on; it also highlights the importance of these figures to the cultural/historical record. The question of resistance literature is central to Arce’s literature. At the same time, through his *cuentos* and his journalism, what is being resisted often shifts. It may be the military dictatorship in one era one day and posttransition political corruption the next. Given that Arce’s resistance so often focused on resisting impunity, it is fitting that his work would so often touch on the state of exception, which *per se* permits such impunity. Arce’s work is transitional, reflecting both on the state of total war and the period when all the

¹⁸¹ See, Compulsory Membership in an Association prescribed by Law for the Practice of Journalism, para. 70, IACtHR, 1985. Accessed at : <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iachr/b_11_4e.htm>.

documents have been signed and the weapons put away, but the culture of violence and dehumanization persists in the fabric of everyday life. It is against this backdrop of violence that Arce struggled to also understand the meaning of violence, both as it may be so sudden and so ephemeral yet also be so tangible with such long-lasting repercussions. Ultimately, as Arce said, this work represents all of his inconformity towards a world he never understood. Arce's inconformity as expressed in literature is expressed in what can be termed transitional resistance literature.

While this thesis has explored and theorized some aspects of Arce's work, much is beyond the scope of the present study. It has provided a tentative introduction to Arce and his work, but much more remains to be done in this area. Referring to *¿Y Maura?*'s introduction, Arce explains "it was astray almost fifteen years in Geneva, but in the end came back to my hands, and from my hands I deliver it to yours, who will do me, perhaps, the favor of reading it. Although, hands clearly do not read, but hold the book— which helps a bit."¹⁸² Further work could be done exploring the idea of transitional resistance literature. *¿Y Maura?* could also be read in terms of Arce's journalistic writing or in relation to the larger body of Arce's literary corpus, especially his contribution to transitional resistance literature. Further work could also include an English translation of *¿Y Maura?* However, this type of project "ya es otro canto" is another matter yet to be told.

¹⁸² Hugo Arce, Introduction, *¿Y Maura?* (Guatemala: Ediciones Galileo, 2008) 7.

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