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Digging Up the Past and Surviving El Salvador's Phantoms: Salvadoran-American Post-Conflict Traumatic Memory and Reconciliation

Este artículo se enfoca en la poesía salvadoreña-americana que explora el trauma nacional de guerra y desplazamiento de los salvadoreños. En esta poesía, el trauma de la guerra evoluciona para convertirse en un trauma del pos-conflicto y pos-migración que pide reconciliación con memorias de la guerra y con un presente violento e inestable. Analizo poemas de Jorge Argueta (1961), William Archila (1968) y Javier Zamora (1990), tres poetas nacidos en El Salvador e inmigrantes a los EEUU. Estudios sobre el trauma y la reconciliación en sociedades de pos-conflicto enmarcan mi análisis de una poesía que excava y reconstruye a los muertos de una diáspora salvadoreña que no se ha reconciliado con su trauma.

Palabras clave: *poesía salvadoreña-americana, literatura del pos-conflicto, trauma, reconciliación, poesía salvadoreña*

This article focuses on Salvadoran-American poetry that explores Salvadorans' national traumas of war and displacement. In these poems, war trauma evolves into a post-conflict, post-migration trauma that calls for reconciliation with war memories as well as with a violent, unstable present. This study focuses on the poetry of Jorge Argueta (1961), William Archila (1968), and Javier Zamora (1990), three poets born in El Salvador and immigrants to the US. Studies of trauma and reconciliation in post-conflict societies frame the analysis of poetry that digs up and reconstitutes the dead for a Salvadoran diaspora still un-reconciled with its trauma.

Keywords: *Salvadoran-American poetry, post-conflict literature, trauma, reconciliation, Salvadoran poetry*

As thousands of "unaccompanied minors" cross the Mexican border into the US, we witness the consequences of the US sponsorship of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992). This "new" crisis – the result of extreme poverty and violent transnational gangs, known as *maras* in the region –

may look different from the massive migration of the 1980s and 1990s, but, as the poetry of the Salvadoran diaspora details, the current surge originates in earlier national traumas of war and displacement. As I have shown elsewhere, in the post-conflict era, poets of the civil war generation, born in the 1960s and coming of age during the Isthmus' various armed conflicts, offer indirect protests, critiques, and analyses of their economically and socially ravaged "globalized" homelands (Aparicio). In contrast, Salvadoran-Americans' poetry disinters the skeletal remains of compatriots, attempts to apprehend memories of a brutal war and to come to terms with post-conflict violence. These poets' diasporic aesthetics incorporates their post-conflict traumatic memories and immigrant anxieties into Salvadoran war poetry. Salvadoran-American war trauma has evolved into a post-conflict, post-migration trauma in which reconciliation with war memories as well as with an explosive post-conflict present remains an unfulfilled promise. Jorge Argueta (1961) recalls coming of age during the civil war and fleeing to the US but failing to escape the war. William Archila (1968) remembers and poetically digs through war remains to re-create a recognizable El Salvador while also building a new home as an immigrant. Lastly, Javier Zamora (1990), born at the end of the war, explores the omnipresence of poisonous memories of war and illegal crossings into the US. Studies of trauma and reconciliation in post-conflict societies provide a framework to analyze the function of digging up and reconstituting the dead for a Salvadoran diaspora unreconciled with its trauma.

The Salvadoran Civil War, a Cold War era "small war," killed and mutilated tens of thousands of Salvadorans, and the waves of immigration out of the country due to the war and post-conflict have yet to stop. This small war, in which the US saw the FMLN as a proxy for the USSR's global reach and the Salvadoran government as an ally for democratization, continues to reverberate in multiple spheres of the lives of Salvadorans and their children. While the signing of the Chapultepec Accords and the negotiated end of the war in 1992 buoyed the hopes of Salvadoran leftist intellectuals, many of whom had fled the country to avoid repression, the opening of the country's cultural-political space was short-lived and limited. Likewise, the decrease in the intense violence and economic precariousness of the war is now rivaled by the *mara* violence and the economic and social instability of a neoliberal economic model that has failed to raise the living standard of the poor majority. So, while the FMLN soon gained political legitimacy as an official national political party, and urban El Salvador began to mirror a global consumer society with high-

end shopping centers meant to satisfy a transnational elite's consumption desires and practices, everyday life failed to improve substantially.

Poets such as Susana Reyes (1971) meditate on the urban transformation of the elite's San Salvador and its environs and the deterioration of the rest of the city. Reyes came of age during the war and has remained in the country living the post-conflict, unlike the poets mentioned above who emigrated to the US during or shortly before the end of the war. As is the case of other "war" poets who remained in El Salvador through the war, Reyes' post-conflict poetry became more intimate and less directly denunciatory compared to her war production. During the war, Reyes' poetry directly and plainly revealed the war's destruction of Salvadoran society and her hope for a brighter post-war. Her poetry of the early 1990s shares the exuberance that many felt following the signing of the peace accords: in Reyes' case, for instance, the hope that women could be full citizens with civil rights, including, rights over their bodies, for example.[1] But in her post-conflict poetry, Reyes' memories of the past, the war and post-war, often appear together as examples of what was and has been replaced, substituted as a palimpsest, as well as what has been obliterated and has disfigured the national and cultural landscapes. Reyes' post-conflict poems contemplate their scarred surroundings from within El Salvador but with few direct or explicit references to the everyday of the war and its violence.

Instead what we see in Reyes and some of her contemporaries is a memorializing of past affections buried by the war but not completely lost or erased. What remain are an affective attachment to and a nostalgia for a Salvadoran national home. In this poetry, the poetic voice expresses nostalgic longing filled with realism, a "reflective" process of looking to the past with eyes wide open. In her study of post-Soviet societies, Svetlana Boym defines "reflective" nostalgia as a critical nostalgia that meditates on the past fondly but without idealizing or longing to recreate it in the present. She argues that this type of nostalgia "cherishes fragments of memory and temporalizes space" and reveals that "longing and critical thinking" can work in tandem (49-50). In other words, it is an awareness of deep connections to the past and a past homeland and belongingness that maintains analytical and critical distance.

Reyes' poetic speakers reveal a pained, nostalgic and critical view of El Salvador but unlike Argueta, Archila, and Zamora, they do not detail their trauma. Reyes, in "Las cosas sencillas" from *La historia de los espejos* (2004), describes a simple home whose surroundings have changed, "Afuera se marchitaron los corteses. / Frente a la casa ya no pasan los ríos" (lines 9-10) to an interlocutor who has left home. The poetic voice tells her

interlocutor that home will no longer remind her of the moments she might want to remember because the memories' markers are gone even if the sentimental attachments remain:

Cuando vuelvas, ya no preguntes
por aquella casa.
Ya no pidas que te dejen frente a su puerta,
para ver los balcones con San Carlos en flor
y reírte de lo tonta que eras por
tenerle miedo a la gárgola de piedra. (14-19)

The "I" warns the *you* plainly that she will not be able to re-experience her home the way she might envision herself – laughing at childhood fears. Instead Reyes alludes to the affective damage caused by past destruction and present attempts at reconstruction. As Reyes' poetic "I" warns her interlocutor, the home she may remember has been transformed by post-conflict globalization. New parking lots, malls, and "modern" buildings have replaced the places they knew as children (lines 23-25). Yet Reyes also reassures her childhood friend that she has saved "aquella foto" and that sometimes "la desempolvo y lloro un poco" (27, 31). The poetic voice's sadness is palpable in the poem as is the acceptance of the city's transformation.[2] The underlying pain of the past and the necessity to move forward are also clear in this poetry. In the first section of the fourteen-part "Sobreviviente del silencio," Reyes' "I" reveals survivors' daily painful, lonely struggle:[3]

Ya no busco adjetivos
a la lucha cotidiana.

Con andar me conformo,
sin importar el calor o el frío en el asfalto
si la lluvia o el sol
se disfrazan de viejos delirios
de náufragos   de asesinos.

Después de estos años
amanecer es suficiente.

Quién sabe o quién quiere avanzar
… estar aquí basta. (1-11)

Here the poem directly invokes consequences of past violence and the difficulty of confronting it and the shadows it continues to cast on the "I'"s present. The memories of the war and of poetic "viejos delirios" endure in the present's physical and imaginative geography and in the language that communicates those memories. In "Memoria," a six-part poem, the poetic voice laments her inability, her cowardice to confront her memories and shake sense into language, "tomarlas de las sílabas," in order to render the past less sharp ("filos[o]"), wounded, and wounding (lines 8, 14).[4] Simultaneously, she reasserts her place in the post-war – for she chooses a path "[el] sendero contrario" away from the words she can no longer say but cannot completely erase or refrain from evoking (10). The poetic speaker thus chooses to assimilate the internal trauma even as the nation's trauma is lying skin deep, just below the post-conflict's neoliberal veneer.

As Reyes' San Salvador and her memories, Salvadoran-Americans' poetry is littered with visible and invisible reminders of the war, but her "hermanos lejanos" render their trauma into poetry in English or, in Argueta's case, in Spanish with English translations.[5] Salvadoran-Americans' language choices speak to the complexity of the Salvadoran diaspora's experience of war, displacement, immigration, and transculturation. Both Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American memories of past affection and of trauma, whether as developed narratives or fragments or painful mementos, constitute images of a twelve-year civil war and of the persistent violence of the Salvadoran post-conflict period. Peace negotiations did not bring truth and justice to survivors; instead negotiators prioritized national reconciliation as a path toward peace. While the UN-sponsored Truth Commission confirmed what was already known anecdotally – government troops and paramilitary forces committed the vast majority of crimes against humanity[6] – for victims, justice remained an aspiration rather than a resolution. According to Hamber and Wilson, truth commissions "aim to construct memory as a unified, static and collective *object*, not as a political practice, or as a struggle over the representation of the past that will continue to be vigorously contested after their existence" (36). Thus, by "psychologizing the nation," truth commissions prioritize national political goals over citizens' psychological needs, and "claims to heal the collective unconscious of the nation therefore mask how truth commissions lift an authoritarian regime of denial and public silence, as well as create a new regime of forgetting which represses other memories and forms of psychological closure" (36). These "other" forms include anger and the desire for vengeance against perpetrators (36).

Post-conflict Salvadoran and Salvadoran poetry reveals that the Salvadoran truth commission has not delivered the expected healing or "closure." Atrocities of the civil war era remain palpable and visible in El Salvador's landscape as well as in poetry, such as Jorge Argueta's. One example of unresolved, visible trauma is the 1981 El Mozote massacre in the province of Morazán, a fierce battleground for the Salvadoran Armed Forces and the FMLN. El Mozote marks an emblematic attack on the Salvadoran populace early in the war and its memorialization illustrates the complicated task of working through traumatic events, their "facts" as well as victims' truths about the events and their consequences (Alarcón Medina and Binford). In 1981, the infamous Atlacatl Battalion massacred over one thousand people, mostly women, children, and elderly inhabitants as part of the Salvadoran government's scorched earth strategy.[7] Argueta, who immigrated to the US in 1980, uses this massacre to represent the paradoxically distant nearness of war trauma:

Lejos del fuego
allá en El Salvador
en el cantón El Mozote
aún hay dolor en el fuego
Dolor quemándose en el fuego
. . .
Lejos del fuego
es llorar fuego
no olvidar
y para siempre amar sus llamas
Lejos del fuego
es vivir entre dos fuegos
uno ardiendo en El Salvador
el otro en mi pecho. ("Lejos del fuego," *En carne* 80)[8]

The massacre occurred after Argueta's departure, yet its fire envelops and reconnects him to the death he fled. Currently the massacre site is part of the Ruta de la Paz,[9] a marketing strategy to garner tourist dollars in a neoliberal post-conflict El Salvador. But, as Alarcón Medina and Binford show, the establishment of an El Mozote memorial and murals depicting "an idealized past and a peasant utopian future" do not resolve the conflicting meanings of the massacre site or the Civil War itself (520). As they assert, "as long as their deepest meanings [of the murals] remain unstable so that no one on the political right *or* left can fix their significance, they will continue to serve as a detained image of the dense

time of social antagonism there and then and here and now" (Alarcón Medina and Binford 525). In the poetry under discussion, discrete moments in Salvadorans' daily lives make up the series of "detained images of the dense time" that populate poets and the poems they publish many years after the signing of the Peace Accords.

Particularly for direct survivors and their descendants, including those in the diaspora, even now, over twenty years into the post-conflict era, and even from afar, El Salvador is a place full of "remnants of terror" (Clouser 7). El Mozote is but one highly visible, mappable fragment of Salvadorans' trauma. Even as the country commodifies itself with tourist "routes"[10] and new highways, and buries its landscape's wounds, the memories of the living and the dead persevere unabated. In Spanish, English, or both, the Salvadoran diaspora poetically fashions narratives of Salvadoran pasts and current immigrant lives. Their complex existence here in the US, with attachments to the country of their birth, is clear in Archila's immigrant poetry which records memories of that El Salvador of his boyhood. He poeticizes these memories with a critical nostalgia replete with images of death and an awareness of his physical and linguistic displacement from El Salvador, a country that "falls on [him] like a hammer" ("Immigration Blues 1980," *The Art of Exile* line 35). Archila's displaced poetic voice is "doubly marginalized and thereby invisibilized," and in turn feels a "sense of nonbelonging, of nonbeing, a cruel invisibility that was first imposed on [him] in [his country] of origin and has carried over to these latitudes," as Arturo Arias writes of Central Americans-Americans (186). In the title poem to Archila's 2009 poem collection's *The Art of Exile*, the poetic speaker returns to El Salvador where, though ostensibly home, he is unable to consume or savor emblems of Salvadoran-ness. Ten years into the post-conflict period (lines 22-23), the identity markers he mentions, beer, oysters,[11] and cheap liquor, do not fulfill their functions as nostalgia products nor do they mitigate the fact that his is a "lost" homeland and that his friends, whether due to immigration or as victims of the Civil War, are no longer there in El Salvador.[12] As Susana Reyes warns her visiting friend, Archila's poetic "I," an immigrant visiting his old home, is met with absence, emptiness, and silence:

In the public square, there will be no friend
from school to welcome you, no drive
to Sonsonate, city of coconuts,

no one to order cold Pilseners, oyster
cocktails . . . (13-17)

. . . .

By nightfall, you drag yourself back to the bars,
Looking for a lost country in a shot of Tíc Táck [sic]. (31-32)

Archila's speaker travels the landscape Reyes warns the returnee about in "Las cosas sencillas" and other poems. As all returning "hermanos lejanos," he travels from the Comalapa airport on the Pan American Highway in a post-conflict El Salvador dotted with its characteristic palm trees and volcanoes but also with drug-addicted homeless children and drunk beggars as we see throughout "The Art of Exile" (lines 3-4, 9-10, 23-25). He returns hungry for objects of a makeshift national identity, but these are inaccessible even in their place of origin. He, too, is different. No longer a Salvadoran resident, he is but a visitor from the diaspora back home temporarily, staying in a hotel in a country that tears and twists him "like an old newspaper" blown from place to place (34-37).

As a 1.5 generation Salvadoran-American, an immigrant who came of age in the US, Archila's poetic persona is also dislocated and burdened with a hybrid Salvadoran-ness in Los Angeles. Memories of his life in the pre- and war homeland uproot him in both El Salvador and in his adopted US home: "the suffering [of the Central American immigrant population] is an oppressive burden from which it desires to distance itself, a mourning that it would prefer to bring to a closure but cannot because it symbolizes virtually the only roots left" (Arias 189). In "Immigration Blues, 1980," with his mind on the "torn bodies, cramped / unburied in a ditch, covered / in weeds or dust" (lines 20-22) that are only news items in the US, Archila's poetic speaker is lost,

... a man with black hair, raw accent,
Spanish syllables caught in my throat,
words in English locked in a dictionary,
a foreigner wherever I go. (13-16)

Similar to Reyes' poetic "I" who cannot find the strength to say or conjure "guerra," Archila's poetic persona imagines and remembers El Salvador's war dead "in letters, / mid-sentence" (26-27) in downtown Los Angeles. His attempts at conjuring his dead compatriots by "pronouncing the sound of their names / in the hollow roof of my mouth" (30-31), as in the ritual

repetition of *presente* when reading lists of dead *compañeros*, have the opposite effect: the names lose their meaning in the repetition in the same way he remains weighed down by his hammer-heavy country (line 35).

In their nostalgia then, Reyes', Argueta's, and Archila's speakers acknowledge that alongside the overwhelming pain of death and absence left by the Civil War, memories of belonging in El Salvador persist. Their nostalgia colors their sadness. As Boym quips, "a modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once" (50). These poets are "sick" of their place of birth – tired of its apparently intransigent violence and cruelty as well as of the affection their memories can awaken. For instance, the poetic voice in "This Earth" carries in his pockets remains of a childhood friend, Memo. These are remains of childhood, normalcy, and treacherous images of war. The poetic "I" literally conserves bits of his country's landscape, the earth, to mourn his losses,

Every morning, I think about the war,
smell of gasoline and burning buses,
how the dead fall into our beds,
wither into the earth.
. . . .
the bombed-out walls of my school,
neighbors closing doors, nailing their eyes shut,
Memo under my feet, how I love the smell of wet dirt,
how I will cup my hands, carry this earth in my pockets.
("This Earth" lines 1-4, 49-52)

That same earth, punctuated with bones, follows Salvadoran-Americans to the US after they immigrate: "I want to fold the city like a dark blanket, / throw it over my shoulder and rest. / I'm tired of the dirt, their white open mouths" ("Small Country" lines 28-30). In both of the previous poetry fragments from *The Art of Exile*, Archila helps the reader visualize the physical and psychological lingering of trauma in survivors. The Salvadoran dirt is a metonym for the dead and their traumatic deaths. As Rebecca Clouser's examples of post-conflict Guatemala reveal, "the power of a landscape can be seen in its ability to mold thoughts, evoke memories and emotions, reinforce and create ideologies, and to relay to the world the values and priorities of a place" (7). Even when victims of human rights abuses, survivors of the Salvadoran Civil War leave home, El Salvador's presence palpitates in their bodies and mental landscapes. In "Clandestine Territory" from his most recent poetry collection, *The Gravedigger's*

Archaelogy (2015), Archila imagines Salvadoran immigrants avoiding discussions of their dangerous "territory,"

It's a matter of finding ways
around it, not to digress nor head
directly toward the subject, break
the conversation short, the way

winter pulls the sun away so early
in order to avoid its name, the way
civilians slow down their pace
to elude guards standing on watch. (lines 33-40)

The unnamed country somehow watches them, perhaps lies in wait. In this way, the eerily subtle power of the "remnants of terror" is made visible. Clouser asserts that, "In peaceful times, such manipulation of social reality can often be accomplished stealthily, unnoticed and under the guise of normality" (7). Furthermore, this manipulation also operates in the post-conflict period in the Salvadoran diaspora. Postwar landscapes retain "inevitable remnants of violence and terror," and the "peaceful" (Clouser 7-8), distant landscapes to which immigrants escape do not free them from their pasts.

Even as Archila and his family settle in Los Angeles, remembrances of the civil war stay in place and push the poetic speaker to return to El Salvador to unearth human remains and hear their stories. But unlike the "disinterested" forensic anthropologists who exhume tortured bodies in attempts to confront perpetrators with their crimes and to judge them, Archila's poems expose the trauma experienced via family stories and news reports by those who did not directly endure the war. Through poetry told from the perspective of a traumatized Salvadoran diaspora,[13] Archila scours through body fragments and an obscured history to fashion a comprehensible whole.

The Salvadoran military and death squads did not torture every Salvadoran, but the ambient fear they propagated effectively touched broad swaths of society. Lira Kornfeld writes of torture's functions during the Pinochet regime in Chile:

Torture consists of the deliberate and systematic application of excruciating pain to a person in an attempt to undermine the will, the affective links, and the loyalties, beliefs, and physical and psychic integrity of the individual … At a broader level, the

> reason for torture is to intimidate third parties, thereby ensuring responses of fear, inhibition, paralysis, impotence, and conformity within society. (116)

Archila's poetic speakers clearly share with Chileans the widespread affective effects of political repression on civilians: "insecurity, vulnerability, and fear … whatever their actual political involvement" (Lira Kornfeld 117). Witnessing violence and feeling its aftereffects as a child follows Archila through his escape to the US and into his adulthood in Los Angeles, "I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know / I could never leave this war" ("What I Learned In a War Too Small to Notice," *The Gravedigger's Archaeology* lines 31-32). His trauma is, in the words of Ignacio Martín Baró, a martyr of the 1989 Jesuit massacre at the UCA in San Salvador, "psychosocial" (Martín Baró, "La violencia política").[14]

In his influential 1988 article "La violencia política y la guerra como causas del trauma psicosocial en El Salvador,"[15] Martín-Baró develops his term "trauma psicosocial" to characterize Salvadorans' experience of war trauma: "cristalización traumática en las personas y grupos de las relaciones sociales deshumanizadas. La polarización tiende a somatizarse, la mentira institucionalizada precipita graves problemas de identidad y la violencia aboca en una militarización de la misma mente" (133). Martín-Baró's conceptualization of the specific traumatic effects of the Salvadoran Civil War incorporates the whole of Salvadoran society into the space of trauma, as direct victims of violence and its aftereffects. Importantly Martín-Baró highlights the overpowering negative presence of the Salvadoran armed forces, "la autoridad" (127) in Salvadoran citizens' daily lives.[16] This terrifying force, viewed "benevolently" by the Reagan administration, had clearly been "produciendo una sistemática destrucción de la población salvadoreña" (128), despite being a so-called low-intensity conflict (128). And the effects of twelve years of "la autoridad" and its counterinsurgency war not only remade the world of Salvadorans who lived through the war in El Salvador but also of those who became undocumented immigrants and the few who were able to acquire refugee status (Menjívar 1000-1).

The Salvadoran Civil War's reach is long and Salvadoran immigrants cannot break away from the war and their country of origin. In an essay on the psychological development of Salvadoran children growing up in a war environment defined by a "normal anormalidad" (Martín Baró, "Guerra y trauma" 244). Ignacio Martín-Baró avers that this situation:

> pone al niño en el dilema de construir una identidad interiorizando la violencia, la mentira institucionalizada y el tipo de relaciones sociales deshumanizadoras, o una

identidad socialmente estigmatizada, con frecuencia no menos violenta, y que tiene que recurrir a la mentira social, al juego de la falsedad pública y la autenticidad clandestina, como requisito de supervivencia. ("Guerra y trauma" 244)

Effectively, the war's violent normal abnormality deforms children's understanding of others: all others are potential enemies, and one must always be on the defensive in order to survive. Archila portrays everyday living during the Salvadoran Civil War as a young child – the constant reminders of war violence and the loss of childhood – and the normalization of defensiveness as a life stance. In *The Gravedigger's Archaeology*'s "Nicaragua in Black and White," the poetic speaker dialogues with an image of a Nicaraguan boy after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution raising his machete "like a flaming torch" next to his father (line 15). But Archila's poetic "I" secretly laments his "childish" desire not to make revolution, but to be a bird:

At ten, I could never find words,
my tongue knotted, phrases caught
in my vocal cords. I could not tell them

I wanted to lift my left fist, raise
dust on the shoulders of the roadside.
I could not confess that I imagined myself

beating my feathers around treetops,
that I wanted to flicker my tail
deep at the bottom of the lake,

dart through the dark waters,
that I only wanted to be a boy,
not the men buried in the land. ("Nicaragua in Black and White"16-27)

It pains the poetic speaker to not see himself in the rebellious boy proclaiming his willingness to use the machete in hand. Instead, he is tongue-tied by his disinterest in violent rebellion and his desire to be a daydreaming boy who wants to live and not die for a revolution. He has to resort to a "juego de falsedad pública," even as the war confronts him with "alternativas existenciales cuya dinámica normal tiende a producir daños, trastornos psíquicos" (Martín-Baró, "Guerra y trauma" 244, 245). The normal abnormality of the war shames the boy poetic speaker for wanting to be "normal."

"Nicaragua in Black and White"'s poetic persona's dream turns out to be quite fanciful because children feel their own and inherit their parents' psychosocial trauma, as research shows. Lira Kornfeld demonstrates that, in relatives of the Chilean disappeared, there is "a continuation of pain in the lives of the following generation [the children of survivors]: 'Our children are different from the rest'" (129-30). The trauma of victims of political violence and repression is one that does not become "post traumatic," in part because it is not a discrete moment or moments, rather it is "cumulative" and continuous, an "extreme traumatization" (Becker 106):

> characterized by a structure of power within society that is based on the elimination of some members of this society by others of the same society … extreme traumatization is never only individual destruction or only a sociopolitical process. It is always both. (Becker 107)

The theory of "post-traumatic stress syndrome" relies on assumptions that do not describe the experience of societies, such as the Salvadoran one, in which political repression and violence was an overwhelming threat and in which survivors will re-live trauma "in relation to a certain social context" (Becker 107). Therefore, Archila's re-membering of childhood war experiences, his "claim[ing] [his] inheritance" ("The Gravedigger's Archaeology" line 21), functions as an example of the "extreme traumatization" of the children of the Salvadoran Civil War. Even those who escaped violence on their own bodies behold the war's human remains and are left to decipher them. Archila's poetic "I," a child witness of the civil war and then an undocumented immigrant and refugee, cannot evade the violence and death left behind in El Salvador,

> as we enter the states, fog rolling out
> at daybreak, suburbs glazed in light—
> a load of refugees coming out of the ravine
> across streets, hiding behind parked cars
> dripping with mist, bodies low & close,
> creeping on the ground like soldiers over puddles.
> ("The Night John Lennon Died" lines 5-10)

The undocumented Salvadorans mimic "la autoridad"'s tactics as they sneak into the US and enter marked by the "extreme traumatization" of the war and the crossing. They are "defeated" kitchen helpers ("The Night John Lennon Died" lines 24-25), as Archila's poetic "I" says of his father,

attempting to re-create their lives and families in peace. Refugees' "uprooting" signifies a loss of family, social status and social environment (Van der Veer 152, 154) that sustains the ongoing, cumulative process of traumatization.

The poets under discussion confront the reader with unhealed war wounds and poetic speakers who have yet to become "reconciled" with the death and destruction wrought by the Salvadoran Civil War or to forget or work through the "extreme traumatization" they suffered. In Archila's retelling, everything about El Salvador, even its sketch on a piece of paper, and its memory is physically painful, violent. In "Geography Lesson" from *The Gravedigger's Archaeology*, he writes:

> I trace its boundaries, coordinates,
>
> short reaches across an isthmus
> and see a small wooden house on fire.
> So many flames, so many tiny soldiers,
> smudges of red. I write ten letters
>
> along the grid …
>
> Even home begins on a piece of paper,
> when the sharp tip of a pencil drives
> its blade into the surface, digs out
> the relics – the drab flecks of crust. (lines 16-21, 25-28)

The poetic voice sketches the contours of his native country's geography and topography imagining his ancestral home. Yet this exercise also becomes one of digging for "relics" that might fill the memory of home. El Salvador, whether only a silhouette or "tiny" bloodied soldiers on a map or in a poem, elicits the need to exhume the dead from their makeshift graves and to unearth the trauma of repression in order to be free from it. But the extreme psychosocial traumatization of victims of political repression is continuous and iterative (Martín Baró; Lira Kornfeld; Becker); it ebbs and wanes depending on survivors' social, political, psychological contexts. "The Gravedigger's Archaeology" gives the reader a glimpse of the unabated traumatization, "… Me, / there are days I cannot stand the noise, nor stand the filth/beneath my fingernails, nor shut out the wood creaking in my ears, / the scoops loaded loose onto the lid, making a muffled thud" (lines 31-34). This poetic exhumation parallels the exhumations of bodies from clandestine graves of massacred villages. The bones that litter Salvadorans' collective memory and history represent their "inheritance" (21), it is the onus with which they must reconcile. These poems implore

fellow Salvadoran-Americans to acknowledge the persistence of Salvadorans' and their children's psychosocial trauma and the need to do as Archila's father urges him, "*Dig, son. Dig*" in order to prevail ("Dig" line 42).

In the Salvadoran-American poems under discussion, the memory of violence and surveillance remains intact and influential. Javier Zamora, another 1.5 generation Salvadoran-American, arrived undocumented in the US in 1999 at the age of nine. Zamora's immigration story, his *travesía* unaccompanied through Mexico into the US to escape the war and join his undocumented parents, and his coming of age in the US are all marked by memories of and worries about El Salvador's past and future. As Zamora writes in "El Salvador" in *Unaccompanied*:

Stupid Salvador, you see our black bags, our empty homes,
        our fear to say: *the war has never stopped*, and still you lie

and say: *I'm fine, I'm fine*, but if I don't brush Abuelita's hair,
        wash her pots and pans, I cry. Tonight, how I wish

you made it easier to love you, Salvador. Make it easier
        to never have to risk our lives. (lines 13-18)

In the poem's final stanzas, the poetic speaker confronts El Salvador's stupidity and mendacity: – the civil war continues, its violence palpable, now between tattooed "gangsters" ("El Salvador" lines 3-4). At the same time Zamora recognizes the connection he feels to his country's "volcanic face" and his "Abuelita" (1, 16) and his desire to return, although he cannot, "We don't / have greencards [sic]" (10-11). The poem juxtaposes the poetic "I'"s engagement and longing for "Stupid Salvador" to his deep understanding that "*I'm fine*" is a lie. This juxtaposition is a poetic example of how, as Clouser argues, post-conflict landscapes can be used "by hegemonic actors to create notions of nationalism and to recreate a collective memory that best suits their interests" (7). Zamora unmasks El Salvador's lies of post-conflict change for the better. The post-conflict landscape seems to revel in the fear its emptied *colonias* and black body bags cause in the poetic voice,

… Bullet holes

in doors, we can see through you.
Little has changed.
Uniforms

aren't soldiers or guerrilleros –
they're tattoos or policemen. ("Aftermath," *Unaccompanied* lines 12-16)

Reconciliation with the Salvadoran past would require an accounting for past abuses – gross violations of human rights in massacres and the everyday violence of war – as well as acknowledgement of the persistence of conflict, repression, and fear.

In these Salvadoran-American poets' works the present's inequality and injustice are too similar to the past's to conceive of "national" reconciliation. In their poetry collections, personal trauma and the search for internal peace and resignation at the lack of change are still in progress. In "The Art of Exile," the poetic voice back in El Salvador imagines the postwar nation as an old drunk man begging for alms, "Everything will hurt, your hair, / your toenails, even your shoes / You'll curse dusty streets, demented / sun slowly burning the nape of your neck" (lines 22-29). With a similar cry of despair and anger, Zamora's speaker concludes in "June 10, 1999" that there is no change in his life, undocumented in the US, "my throat is dry / and sick and still / nothing has changed" (lines 39-41). The past, present, and future turn out to be equally painful and unjust despite the passage of time and talk of progress. Bilbija and Payne highlight the fact that memorial sites in Latin America can "involve a cathartic journey from despair to hope, from silence to erasure to acknowledgment, outrage, and the call for 'Never Again!'" (119). But in El Salvador, "formal" memorial sites, such as El Mozote or the Monumento a la Memoria y la Verdad, abut sites filled with violence that also promise future violence – as in marked and unmarked *mara* territories. Due to the coexistence of old war wounds together with new wounds, Salvadoran-Americans are a new generation with a distant homeland landscape embedded in their very skin. Twenty-seven years into the post-conflict and a world away in the US, Salvadoran-Americans like Argueta, Archila and Zamora still "bear the social responsibility to remember and not to repeat" (Clarke and Payne 123) as do their parents and compatriots back home.

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NOTES

1 See studies on war poetry by women, for instance Mary K. DeShazer.

2 Similar to "Los parques" in "Postales urbanas." Also in "Ellas: IV:" "En un solo cesto / caben las penas, / se ponen ahí, pegaditas a la esperanza / en bolsitas

para llevar / con agujeritos para que respiren / las sonrisas, el llanto de los niños, / los cuadernos y las tazas llenas de humo y pasos." (73)

3 Reyes introduces this poem with three lines from Alejandra Pizarnik's "Las aventuras perdidas" that read in part "pero creo que mi soledad debería tener alas" (41).

4 Similarly in "Sobreviviente del silencio: XIV" the city streets injure transients and the speaker. Wounds attach themselves to the speaker's body, "se pega a mis zapatos" (13), until they finally devour her in a one-way street: "Éstas me guiaron al camino / me devolvieron a este callejón / donde me devoran felices / y me cuentan de otras, de las que ciertamente nunca supe" (22-26).

5 Jorge Argueta has published several bilingual children's books on topics related to Salvadoran and/or Latin American culture more broadly and to immigration. For example, his first children's poetry collection, *A Movie in My Pillow / Una película en mi almohada* (2001), deals with leaving home because of the war and having to immigrate to the US.

6 95% of civilian deaths were attributed to the Armed Forces and paramilitary groups. The UN's report from 1993 is titled "From Madness to Hope" ("Informe: De la locura a la esperanza").

7 The Atlacatl Battalion was a US-trained counterinsurgency military force tasked with eliminating subversives during the Salvadoran Civil War. It was named after a Pipil Indian warrior and ruler of Cuzcatlán (El Salvador's pre-Columbian name). The massacre at El Mozote was one of the first military operatives that became publicized internationally. The reports by US journalists, Mark Danner, of *The New Yorker,* and Alma Guillermoprieto, of *The Washington Post,* were particularly damning and influential on US public opinion.

8 "Far from the fire / in El Salvador / in the canton of El Mozote / there is still sorrow in the fire / sorrow burning in the fire / … / Far from the fire / is to weep fire / never forgetting / and forever loving its flames / Far from the fire / is to live between two fires / one burning in El Salvador / the other in my chest" (Argueta, *En carne propia: memoria poética* 174).

9 The Ruta de la Paz includes several towns with cultural attractions including the Museo de la Revolución Salvadoreña in Perquín and ecotourism opportunities.

10 In addition to the Ruta de la Paz, the Ruta de las Flores and Ruta de los Volcanes are being marketed to national and international tourists. These last two routes include important historical sites, including traditionally indigenous and "rebellious" regions. These sites are also marketed as significant culinary destinations for national and international visitors.

11 This mention, common in contemporary Salvadoran literature and culture, echoes Dalton's nostalgic poem "Mi más hondo anhelo" from *Las historias*

prohibidas del Pulgarcito and Castellanos Moya's novel *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en El Salvador* (1997).

12 Although Reyes' poetry is set in the capital city of San Salvador and Archila's Salvadoran poems' settings are in smaller cities in other Departments, the sentiments the poetic personae feel as they encounter their former places resonate with one another.

13 Writing about state terrorism in Uruguay, Gabriela Fried Amilivia describes the responses to the (lack of) narratives of relatives' disappearances by children who grew up during the dictatorship: "openly or covertly listening; nosing around for secrets the way children do; picking up clues from the environment and fragmentary adult conversations, gestures, and moods; tying bits and pieces together; and appropriating facts and fantasies from every corner of the house" (112). As do these Uruguayan children she describes, Salvadoran-American poems draw on multiple sources to attempt to reconstruct the bones that litter their and their families' memories of the Salvadoran Civil War.

14 Ignacio Martín-Baró was one of the six Jesuit intellectuals and two female domestic workers murdered by members of the Salvadoran Army's Atlacatl Battalion on the UCA – San Salvador campus on November 16, 1989.

15 In her article, Lira Kornfeld cites a 1984 article, "Guerra y salud mental," that also uses the term "trauma psicosocial."

16 Martín Baró describes the noxious effects of the Salvadoran FAES on civilians: "La Fuerza Armada sigue representando para la mayoría de los salvadoreños un poder atemorizante y abusivo, 'la autoridad' arbitraria y omnipotente, expresión de un sistema organizado en función de las necesidades minoritarias de un diez o quince por ciento de la población" ("Guerra y trauma" 127).

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