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BODY, VOICE, MEMORY: MODERN LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S TESTIMONIOS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

A testimonio narrates, in the first person, an event or series of events experienced or witnessed by a protagonist or narrator whose actions and perspectives tend to place him or her in opposition to the status quo ante. Given the protean nature of the circumstances that give rise to the testimonial voice describing and sometimes denouncing them, and given the varied forms of expression available to that voice, the testimonio should not be categorized as a genre. It is perhaps more useful to think of it as a mode of consciousness, as a cultural form that responds to those circumstances. This dissertation concentrates on three modern female testimonios from Latin America, each one distinctive and even paradigmatic of its kind.

Domitila Barrios de Chungara's work, entitled "*Si me permiten hablar...*": *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia* (1977), gives voice to the tension between the individual and the collective as expressed through issues particularly experienced—sometimes painfully—by women: femininity, sexuality, motherhood, wifhood, and so on. Of the three examples explored in this dissertation, Barrios' is the closest to the sense of testimonio as straightforward witnessing and therefore the most traditional in its rhetorical strategies.

Lúcia Murat's *Que bom te ver viva* (1989) is a cinematic exploration of women's issues under and just after a dictatorship in Brazil—issues that resemble those faced by Barrios but also significantly differing from them. Focusing on eight former militants, it shows how long-lasting the scars left on female torture survivors can be. Murat's filmic language is both documentary and creative in ways that relate it both to Domitila Barrios de Chungara and to Julia Alvarez.

Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) casts testimonial consciousness as fiction. Her novel tells the story of the Mirabal sisters living under the repressive Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. Alvarez depends on such common women's testimonial elements as sexuality and

the place of women in a patriarchal society. In addition to including an interlocutor as a character and presenting the tension between the individual and the collective, Alvarez highlights the role of memory in a society dedicated to either revising it or erasing it. All of these testimonial elements and strategies are of course transformed by being subjected to the conventions of fiction itself.

Finally, the parallels between twentieth-century testimonios and nineteenth-century essays suggest Latin American women's proclivity for using personal narrative forms in times of national crisis in order to advance both their own political ideas and women's rights at the same time. Twentieth-century testimonios, unlike the essays of the nineteenth century, however, helped to secure women's place in the Latin American literary canon.

For Derek, Vivian, and number two

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Introduction

Modern-Day Scheherazades

In the preface to *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986), Alicia Partnoy's memoir about her imprisonment in a concentration camp in Argentina in the 1970s, Julia Alvarez calls the book a collection of "survival tales." She describes Partnoy as "a Latin American Scheherazade bearing witness, telling her stories to keep herself alive" (9). Partnoy wrote her book from three unique positions: as a political activist suffering from the violence, dehumanization, and repression of a military dictatorship, as a survivor of state-sponsored abuse, molestation, and imprisonment, and as one of those responsible for keeping the memory of what happened alive. She wrote not only to integrate and understand her own traumatic experience, but also to educate the world about the horrors of Argentina's "Dirty War" and to help prevent them from being repeated. In addition to writing her book, she has testified before the United Nations, the Organization of American States, Amnesty International, and the Argentine Human Rights Commission. Partnoy knows, like our heroine from *One Thousand and One Nights*, that to tell a story is to survive.

The testimonial mode is full of Scheherazades—women who have responded to the urgency of speaking out and know that the stories they tell are matters of life and death. Like our original Scheherazade, these women have used narrative manipulation to resist (male) political power, and they have left their narratives open-ended, always deferring the last chapter. With this open-endedness, a trait that many say distinguishes testimonio from autobiography, testimonialistas wait to see how their (and their community's) future unfolds. Domitila Barrios de Chungara's book, entitled "*Si me permiten hablar...*": *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de*

las minas de Bolivia (published in English as “*Let Me Speak!*”: *Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines*) (1977), Lúcia Murat’s film *Que bom te ver viva* (*How Nice to See You Alive*) (1989), and Julia Alvarez’s novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) are all examples of the modern testimonio. They represent, however, three very different chronological positionings—the same three that relate to Partnoy’s book as well. Barrios’ testimonio was published in the midst of governmental violence and abuse, as a tool of political intervention. She created her testimonio as a victim of social injustice and state-sponsored terror. Murat produced her film only four years after the end of the Brazilian dictatorship, the wounds of this trauma still very raw. She created her testimonio as a survivor of social injustice and state-sponsored terror. Finally, Alvarez wrote her novel a generation after the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. Her parents were the ones who had joined a revolutionary group and were exiled from their beloved homeland. She created her testimonio as the inheritor of the legacy of social injustice and state-sponsored terror. Though all three of the testimonios analyzed in this dissertation represent varying distances from governmental trauma and though all three draw on disparate genres and artistic forms, they all address the primacy of sexuality and gender (particularly feminine sacrifice) as well as the friction surrounding truth and authenticity, individual and collective representation, and the role of the interlocutor. They show how these certain traits and tensions reveal themselves over and over again despite the mutability of the testimonio.

I. The Testimonial Mode

Because of the ever-changing set of social, political, and economic circumstances that produce the testimonial voice, and because of the multiple forms of expression available to that

voice, the testimonio should not be categorized as a genre. It is perhaps more useful to think of it as a mode of consciousness, as a cultural form that responds to those circumstances. Simply put, a testimonio narrates, in the first person, an event or series of events experienced or witnessed by a protagonist or narrator whose actions and perspectives tend to place him or her in opposition to the status quo ante. This way of thinking about testimonio best connects it to conventional definitions of testimony: a firsthand authentication of a fact, truth-telling, testifying, bearing witness, and so on. Testimonios also reflect the oral, open, and public nature of traditional (more legalistic) testimonies. Drawing on many divergent genres and evolving throughout history, the testimonial mode has often been a subversive tool used by (female) subalterns to bear witness and to justify their being in the world—as well as to speak out against literary and political hegemony. By packing their works into traditionally Western, male-dominated literary parameters, generic definitions work against this notion of resistance and only stifle these testimonialistas and their productions. Indeed, the entire body of critical discussion on testimonio is anchored in subaltern studies, a discourse founded on promoting the unique and often silenced, ignored, or misrepresented voice of subalterns—those groups of marginalized people who fall outside of the dominant, hegemonic social systems. Accordingly, critical approaches applied to testimonio should support and not restrict the subaltern voice.

In *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, Ileana Rodríguez describes the main goals of subaltern studies:

Latin American subaltern studies aims to be a radical critique of elite cultures, of liberal, bourgeois, and modern epistemologies and projects, and of their different propositions regarding representation of the subaltern. Subaltern studies are postmodern and postrevolutionary attempts to understand the limits of previous hermeneutics by

challenging culture to think of itself from the point of view of its own negations. Another goal is to recognize that in the history and culture of “societies’ Others” we can find, paradoxically, new ways of approaching some of the riddles created by the incapacity of bourgeois culture to think about its own conditions of discursive production. (9)

Latin American subaltern studies scholars are concerned not only with critiquing dominant cultures and ideologies, but also with understanding their own complicity in these dominant cultures and ideologies as members of and participants in institutions of higher education. By embracing traditionally excluded groups of people, they strive to revise the way academic scholarship is carried out. And by supporting the active social, political, and artistic agency of subalterns, these scholars hope to reshape the way disenfranchised members of society are inscribed—and more importantly inscribe themselves—into history. Testimonios are one form that these subalterns can use to write their own histories and to fill in some of the cultural and historical gaps plaguing their countries. They help create a wealth of voices and perspectives that challenge “official” history and the idea of a single, whole truth. With the testimonial mode, subalterns are able to tell widely unknown stories and at the same time challenge their governments’ abusive and repressive practices. As works of resistance, then, testimonios should also resist the generic restrictions that have restrained them. For example, debates about which testimonios fall under a certain generic integument or not have left many testimonios off the list and under the radar. These debates have also taken the focus away from the testimonialistas and their stories—concentrating instead on esoteric, circular arguments about taxonomical particulars.

Thinking about testimonio as a mode of consciousness instead of a genre avoids the myriad qualifications with which others have hampered and confused the testimonial mode

through their ever-changing generic descriptions. John Beverley himself, one of the most well-known and well-respected scholars of testimonio, limits the potential and power of the testimonio through his limiting generic definitions. Because he writes that “testimonio coalesced as a genre in the sixties, in close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalized political and cultural radicalism of that decade” (*Against* 71) and that “[t]estimonio began as an adjunct to armed liberation struggle in Latin American and elsewhere in the Third World in the 1960s” (*Testimonio* 77), he must also then write that “the moment of testimonio is over” (*Testimonio* 77). He links the testimonio—as a genre—so tightly with the political turmoil of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Latin America that he is forced to argue that when this turmoil subsided, the “originality and urgency” (*Testimonio* 77) of testimonio also subsided. By doing this, he minimizes, for example, the importance of later testimonios in setting the historical record straight and/or contributing to the collective national and international memory of a particular historical experience. Though he notes that “because testimonio is by nature a protean and demotic form not yet subject to legislation by a normative literary establishment, any attempt to specify a generic definition for it [...] is at best provisional, and at worst repressive” (*Testimonio* 31), he continues throughout his essays to clarify, revise, and further qualify his generic definitions of the testimonio. Beverley is not alone. It often seems if there are as many different generic classifications for testimonio as there are testimonios themselves.

This dissertation concentrates on three modern female testimonios that best undermine not only male literary and political power, but also the notion of testimonio as a genre. By examining a traditional testimonio, a film, and a novel, this dissertation reflects how the testimonial mode *draws on* different genres—but does not itself constitute a genre. These three works help to map out new artistic forms that resist the narrowing mechanics of genre

designation. They signal how testimonios are open, while genres are closed. They reveal how fiction can be incorporated, enhancing the “real” story, and how traditional sources of testimonial tension can be turned into opportunities for creativity and experimentation. They represent three unique national contexts—from an impoverished, landlocked country, to a vast, industrialized nation, to a small Caribbean island—and three different languages: Spanish, Portuguese, and English. They show how testimonialistas—subalterns—come from disparate social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds and speak from varying loci of enunciation (not just during or under a repressive regime). Most importantly, they situate these modern-day Scheherazades in the world and help them assert their voice, changing forever the political and literary landscapes that have repressed their communities—and countless others—in Latin America.

II. Testimonio: Women’s Work

The very nature of motherhood, the very basis of femininity, has always been used as a weapon of war.

—Rigoberta Menchú “Quincentenary” 131

Platforms for Latin American women to organize and speak are often created in response to social injustice, political violence, and economic exploitation. Mothers and grandmothers of victims of state terrorism protest in Buenos Aires; civil war widows organize together to demand rights in Guatemala; and women whose husbands and children disappeared during the Pinochet regime raise awareness in Chile by creating *arpilleras*, colorful scraps of cloth sewn onto burlap. Helping to solidify Latin American women’s place in the public sphere, these platforms give women a chance to speak out against human rights violations and the atrocious conditions in which they and their families were and are forced to live. Testimonios are another form of these platforms. Testimonios serve as both personal accounts and socio-political critiques aimed to

combat governmental oppression, exploitation, and violence. They flourished during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s as the civil wars, genocides, and bloody revolutions ripping through Latin America became known to the international community, as the international human rights and feminist movements were beginning to thrive, and as postmodernism began to question old literary forms and usher in new ones. Many of the most widely read testimonios are women's: Carolina Maria de Jesus (1960), Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1977), Doris Tijerino (1978), Ana Guadalupe Martínez (1980), Rigoberta Menchú (1983), Claribel Alegría (1983), Hebe de Bonafini (1985), Alicia Partnoy (1986), Elvia Alvarado (1987), María Teresa Tula (1987), and Nidia Díaz (1988). Indeed, as Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney affirm, "It can be said that aside from three notable male producers of testimonial discourse, namely Barnet, Cabezas, and Marmol, testimonial literature is powerfully gendered by the voices of women" (8). The majority of twentieth-century testimonialistas were women who left the home to become political activists. In many cases, the absence of men (through death, war, imprisonment, abandonment, and so on) demanded, or at least facilitated, their political involvement. These women recognized testimonios as powerful weapons to use in their fights against brutal hegemonic practices. As John Beverley tells us, "Testimonios [...] are not only *representations* of new forms of subaltern resistance and struggle but also models and even *means* for these" (*Against* 90). While telling her personal story, the testimonialista hoped to raise awareness of and build solidarity for the collective struggle of an entire group of people.

This dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective can also be seen in what is considered one of the most distinctive characteristics of the twentieth-century testimonio: its synecdochic subjectivity. The testimonialista wanted her story to stand for the story of her entire community. While a few scholars have described this simultaneous individual and

collective representation as metonymy (using the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated), synecdoche better conveys the idea of the testimonialista's story "standing for" her whole community's story since with synecdoche, a part is used to represent the whole or the whole to represent a part. For example, using "the White House" to refer to the president of the United States is metonymy, while using "the ABCs" to refer to the whole alphabet is synecdoche. Both Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Rigoberta Menchú stress this synecdochic subjectivity in the powerful opening paragraphs of their testimonios.

I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I'm about to tell as something that is only personal. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country. I want to make this clear, because I recognize that there have been people who have done much more than I for the people, but who have died or who haven't had the opportunity to be known. (Barrios 15)¹

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people. It's hard for me to remember everything that's happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story

¹ "La historia que voy a relatar, no quiero en ningún momento que la interpreten solamente como un problema personal. Porque pienso que mi vida está relacionada con mi pueblo. Lo que me pasó a mí, le puede haber pasado a cientos de personas en mi país. Esto quiero esclarecer, porque reconozco que ha habido seres que han hecho mucho más que yo por el pueblo, pero que han muerto o no han tenido la oportunidad de ser conocidos" (Viezzler 13).

is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (*I, Rigoberta* 1)²

Honduran activist Elvia Alvarado also underscores this synecdochic representation in the forward to her testimonio, explaining that “I couldn’t pass up a chance to tell the world our story” (xiii). The “I” here is telling “our” story. Interlocutors involved in the testimonial process have also emphasized this dual individual and collective subjectivity. In the introduction to María Teresa Tula’s testimonio, Lynn Stephen writes, “In María’s story, we see the painful reality of life in El Salvador, beginning in the 1950s until the mid-1980s, when she left to reside in the United States. Through her eyes we experience the alienation and difficulties thousands of Salvadorans have as they struggle to ‘make it’ in the promised land in the United States” (1). Tula stands for thousands of other Salvadorans here. And in the introduction to the English translation of Doris Tijerino’s testimonio, Margaret Randall asserts, “Because this woman is a Nicaraguan, we can begin to know and understand Nicaragua” (7). The original Spanish title of Tijerino’s testimonio also highlights the mode’s synecdochic subjectivity: “*Somos millones...*”: *La vida de Doris María, combatiente nicaragüense* (“*We are Millions...*”: *The Life of Doris María, Nicaraguan Combatant*). Tijerino’s story represents millions of other stories. As these examples show, the testimonio represents both the individual and the collective—the personal and the political.

By producing their testimonios, Latin American women appropriated a literary mode that had been dominated by men for many generations. The etymology of the word “testimonio”

² “Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú. Tengo veintitrés años. Quisiera dar este testimonio vivo que no he aprendido en un libro y que tampoco he aprendido sola ya que todo esto lo he aprendido con mi pueblo y es algo que yo quisiera enfocar. Me cuesta mucho recordarme toda una vida que he vivido, pues muchas veces hay tiempos muy negros y hay tiempos que, sí, se goza también pero lo importante es, yo creo, que quiero hacer un enfoque que no soy la única, pues ha vivido mucha gente y es la vida de todos. La vida de todos los guatemaltecos pobres y trataré de dar un poco mi historia. Mi situación personal engloba toda la realidad de un pueblo” (Burgos 21).

reflects this historical exclusion of women. “Testimonio” comes from the Latin word “*testis*,” which means both “testicle” and “witness”—pointing to the Roman law that held that only men could bear witness (testify) in court. Further signaling women’s historical and legal exclusion from bearing witness, the word “*testigo*” (witness) does not have a feminine equivalent in the Spanish language. One must write “*la testigo*” instead of “*la testiga*.” Critics have been remiss in ignoring the issue of sexuality and gender in testimonio, a literary mode rooted in male privilege but co-opted by women. The fact that so many twentieth-century testimonialistas were women (in a culture plagued by machismo) and the fact that these testimonios are what helped secure women’s place in the Latin American literary canon make it that much more curious that the issue of gender and sexuality has not been more extensively studied. As Nancy Saporta Sternbach explains, “Theorists of Latin American testimonial literature are very useful in creating categories of reference, characteristics of and maxims applicable to the testimonial genre, as well as establishing its academic validity; but, for the most part, they have rarely addressed the specificity of women’s testimonial literature” (“Re-membering” 95). Only after the turn of the twenty-first century, for example, did single volumes dedicated exclusively to women’s testimonial literature begin to be produced. More attention needs to be paid to the issue of gender and sexuality in these works that represent such a powerful force for women. Many testimonialistas broke new literary ground by producing testimonios, though they often first broke new political ground by moving beyond domestic boundaries and becoming politically active. Testimonio represents, then, women’s seizure of both the literary and the political.

There is a long history of the link between sexuality/gender and politics in the literature produced about and from Latin America. Explorers envisioned the “New World” as a sexualized

political object (a woman) to be conquered, dominated, and controlled. The indigenous were feminized—painted as weak, naïve, innocent, and, above all, in need of saving. The link between sexuality/gender and politics continued in colonial literature. As Mary Louise Pratt argues in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, travel writing during the colonial period used sexual themes to reinforce and ensure white, masculine hegemony: “It is easy to see transracial love plots as imaginings in which European supremacy is guaranteed by affective social bonding; in which sex replaces slavery as the way others are seen to belong to the white man; in which romantic love rather than filial servitude or force guaranteed the willful submission of the colonized” (95). The literature of the post-independence period also focused on the relationship between eros and polis. Foundational fictions, according to Doris Sommer, employed heterosexual relationships as models for non-violent consolidation and reconciliation in nascent and fractured post-colonial societies: “Erotic passion was less the socially corrosive excess that was subject to discipline in some model novels from Europe, and more the opportunity (rhetorical and otherwise) to bind together heterodox constituencies: competing regions, economic interests, races, religions” (*Foundational* 14). In these foundational fictions, familial reproduction strengthened national production and growth. Finally, the link between sexuality/gender and politics runs throughout the testimonial mode, which flourished in the second half of the twentieth century, by responding to and exposing both the sexualized violence perpetrated by brutal, oppressive Latin American regimes and the sexualized sacrifice of the personal for the political of female activists. Not only have women’s bodies been used throughout history as sites of violence and aggression, but the women activists’ sense of female self has also been threatened and denigrated, as they have been accused of and punished for (by state officials as well as members of their own community) every type of sexual

“transgression”—from adultery, to lesbianism, to nymphomania, and so on. Adversaries imagine that these women activists have a boundless sexual desire that they sublimate into the political. The children and spouses of women activists also often suffer because of their mother’s/wife’s political involvement; they are killed, attacked, jailed, raped, or repressed in other ways. Testimonialistas live out—intensely and often very painfully—the popular mantra “the personal is the political.”

III. The Openness of Testimonio: Frustration and Production

The essential mutability of testimonial literature may preserve its viability.

—Santiago Colás 170

Constantly adapting to the ever-fluctuating socio-historical situations that arise, testimonio has remained an open cultural form. This openness has been a source of frustration and tension for readers and critics alike—as well as a fount of new ideas and inspiration for authors and artists. Examples of this dialectic between frustration and production can be found in fiction’s place in the testimonial mode, tension within testimonio’s synecdochic subjectivity, and the role of the interlocutor.

Testimonio has long been plagued by the myriad controversies surrounding its historical, cultural, and literary authenticity, as many feel that testimonios are not reliable sources of historical reality or truth. Elzbieta Sklodowska dissects the tensions surrounding the testimonio in her book *Testimonio hispano-americano: historia, teoría, poética (Hispanic-American Testimonio: History, Theory, Poetics)*, the first comprehensive study of the Spanish American testimonio. At the end, she reflects, “Our wish in the pages that we now close has been precisely this: to try to understand the internal conflicts of the testimonio, analyzing the interaction of the centrifugal forces of its ‘systematic organization’ and the centripetal forces of deception, paradox

and contradiction” (182).³ The same polemical issues that have spurred on the debates surrounding the testimonial mode, however, have also spurred on previously “unacceptable” forms of historical, anthropological, autobiographical, and political writing and new forms of bearing witness and giving a voice to the voiceless. Beverley notes this protean nature of the testimonio: “testimonio is a *transitional* cultural form appropriate to processes of social upheaval, but also destined to give way to different forms of representation as these processes move to other stages and the human collectivities that are their agents come into possession of (or lose) new forms of power and knowledge” (*Against* 105). These new forms of representation have also been fueled by several other factors, including postmodernism’s arrival and emphasis on embracing traditionally marginalized voices (in literary and historical discourses) and its rejection of both strict (literary) categories and the notion of a whole, complete, and official truth. They have also been facilitated by testimonio’s similarities to other literary trends or genres, which result in the crossing and combining of generic lines. The open definition given to the testimonio by the Cuban organization Casa de las Américas when it added “testimonio” as a category to its group of literary and artistic prizes in 1970 has also encouraged new testimonial forms.⁴ Indeed, Naomi Lindstrom has pointed out that “examination of the titles that have earned awards in this category shows a low degree of uniformity” (70).

Latin American writers have seized on this exploding potential of the testimonial mode. A wealth of variations on testimonial writing (from fictionalized testimonios to pseudo-testimonios to meta-testimonios and beyond) has pushed the exploration of the distinctions

³ “Nuestro deseo en las páginas que ahora cerramos ha sido precisamente éste: tratar de calar en la conflictividad interna del testimonio, analizando la interacción de las fuerzas centrífugas de ‘organización sistemática’ y de las centrípetas de engaño, paradoja y contradicción.” All translations in this dissertation are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Pointing to the strong female presence in the testimonial mode in the twentieth century, the first Casa de las Américas prize for testimonio was given to a woman, Uruguayan María Esther Gilio, for her work *La guerrilla tupamara* (*The Tupamaro Guerrillas*).

between history and reality, self and nation, fiction and truth, and autobiography and biography. Reflecting this boomeranging exploration, when the English version of Miguel Barnet's groundbreaking *novela testimonio* was published in English in 1968, the title changed from the original *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) to *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*. When another publishing house printed a revised English version of the book in 1994, the title switched back to *Biography of a Runaway Slave*. (My emphases.) Other examples of new interpretations of the testimonial mode include Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (published in English as *Here's to You, Jesusa!*) (1969), Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*) (1975), Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982), Mario Vargas Llosa's *La historia de Mayta* (published in English as *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta*) (1984), and Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986). The meta-testimonio *La historia de Mayta* is structured by a series of interviews and is based on the questions, frustrations, and confusions that can surround testimonial writing. In the end, the reader is not sure which or whose description of the past to believe.⁵ Indeed, many critics and authors alike have argued that *no* account of the past tells the whole and comprehensive truth—including testimonio. Details and events are always distorted, changed, or left out, both intentionally and unintentionally, and what remain are simply different *versions* of the past and of the truth. Many feel, in fact, that an element of fiction is always already present in any testimonio. As Joanna Bartow confirms, "Testimonial texts stand at various points on the ambiguous territory between document and fiction" (47).

Many of the new iterations of testimonial writing (like the ones mentioned above) are either openly fictional or openly embrace fictional elements, thereby undermining the

⁵ Kimberly Nance points out two other meta-testimonios: Benjamin Alire Sáenz's "Alligator Park" (1992) and Rosario Sanmiguel's "El reflejo de la luna" ("The Reflection of the Moon") (1994) (9).

accusations of lying and truth distortion that have dogged many testimonios. These new fictionalized testimonios create their own grounds for authenticity and truth. In fact, many critics and authors, such as Julia Alvarez, argue that fiction creates a truer picture of the past and reality since it grants more freedom and more tools with which to convey events, characters, the overall feel of a certain period, and so on. As Debra Castillo asks, “Of what significance are traditional distinctions between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’?” (251). And for Toni Morrison, “the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth” (113). One could argue, as Morrison does, that her novel *Beloved* paints the truth of slavery better than history books, official records, newspapers, and even slave narratives (all full of impersonal dates, facts, and descriptions) because it reveals what lies “beneath the veil”—the intimate, personal side of slavery’s transgressions. Indeed, she based *Beloved*, and specifically the character Sethe, on a newspaper clipping that she had read about a runaway slave named Margaret Garner who murdered her children at the moment of capture. Morrison’s job, as she sees it, is “to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn’t write it (which doesn’t mean that they didn’t have it); [...] to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left—to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard” (113). For many, these fictionalized, more personalized portrayals present a more truthful version of the past—a more intimate and up-close glimpse into what a period, situation, person, or event was really like.

These fictionalized testimonios can be seen as a response to what Sommer sees as testimonio’s overall lack of intimacy. As she explains, “[T]hese intensely lived testimonial narratives are strikingly impersonal. They are written neither for individual growth nor for glory but are offered through the scribe to a broad public as one part of a general strategy to win

political ground” (“Not Just” 109). While I do not agree that there are no personal or intimate moments in testimonios (I believe, in fact, that testimonios are very personal and intimate), I do believe that these moments are for the most part limited to what relates directly and overtly to the testimonialista’s political life and what she believes can help build solidarity for her cause—not surprising, given that this is the definitive motive for producing a testimonio. As in her real life, the testimonialista often sacrifices the personal (descriptions of intimacy that are not relevant to her political cause) for the collective (descriptions of intimacy that are). For example, though Domitila Barrios de Chungara describes the horrific experience of giving birth to a stillborn baby after being beaten in prison (a painfully intimate moment), we never learn from her exactly how many children she has, or all of their names—and her husband’s name is only mentioned twice. Sommer further argues that the personal and cultural “secrets” that are (deliberately) left out of testimonial narratives by testimonialistas are a way for this historically marginalized group of people to maintain their power and agency—as well as a preventative measure against being culturally misread (“Rigoberta’s” 34). Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (published in English as *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*) (1983), for example, ends with this tantalizing statement: “I’m still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I’m still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets” (*I, Rigoberta* 247).⁶ Some argue that omissions like these preclude a complete and completely trustworthy picture of the past.⁷ A fictionalized testimonio, on the other hand, can explore these omissions and create a more personalized story. As has been repeatedly shown and

⁶ “todavía sigo ocultando mi identidad como indígena. Sigo ocultando lo que yo considero que nadie sabe, ni siquiera un antropólogo, ni un intelectual, por más que tengan muchos libros, no saben distinguir todos nuestros secretos” (Burgos 271).

⁷ Sommer prefers to think that Menchú’s secrets “are more ‘literary’ than ‘real’ however” (“Rigoberta’s” 36).

experienced, politics affects all of us on a very personal level. It can permeate every aspect of our lives. Why shouldn't testimonial works reflect this personal dynamic? With fiction, there are even more tools to do just that.

Questions surrounding truth and fiction in testimonio often lead directly to the tension between personal and collective representation. The synecdochic subjectivity found in testimonios is one of the mode's strongest and most unique hallmarks, yet it is also where some of its greatest friction arises. In her book *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore discusses the testimonio as a literary form that has tested the limits of autobiography, as it challenges traditional autobiographical notions of form, truth, and subjectivity. She analyzes Menchú's (in)famous testimonio and argues that in a testimonial work like this, where the "I" is necessarily expanded to include "we," it is impossible to detangle "my" memory from "our" memory. This slippage between "I" and "we" can be seen as one of the main roots of the explosive and extensive controversy surrounding Menchú's testimonio. After anthropologist David Stoll declared in his book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1998) that Menchú was not in fact an eyewitness to her brother's torture and murder and that she had altered other "truths" in her testimonio (such as the death of another brother), Menchú admitted that she had fused others' memories (such as her *mother's* witnessing of the torture and murder of her brother) with her own. She argued that she had every right to represent the collective memory of her people—in any manner that she chose. Gilmore points out that

A different question [instead of "Did she lie?"] would focus on the way her testimony tests a crucial limit in autobiography, and not just the one understood as the boundary between truth and lies, but, rather, the limit of representativeness,

with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and to constrict testimonial speech, and the way it makes it hard to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously “my” experience when “our” experience is also at stake. (5)

Menchú relies on collective memory not only to represent herself, but also, in her mind, to give a more comprehensive, realistic, and truthful representation of her people’s suffering and struggle. She recognizes that her own personal memory is not always reliable. Indeed, her testimonio opens with her admission that “It’s hard for me to remember everything that’s happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well” (*I, Rigoberta* 1).⁸ Perhaps another reason why Menchú draws from collective memory is because she recognizes her state of abeyance in between being “representative” and “not representative.” How, for instance, can testimonialistas claim to be typical members of their communities when their experiences (as leaders, as targets of governmental violence, and even as subjects/authors of their own testimonios) are evidence that they are atypical? As Gayatri Spivak has pointed out, “Rigoberta, an organic intellectual taken for the true subaltern, represents herself as representative even as she points out she is not representative” (9). Though Menchú wears the traditional Mayan dress and knows the Mayan culture, languages, and history, she has also rejected part of her community and culture for the sake of her struggle. Instead of living with her people, she travels around from community to community (and country to country) to garner support for her cause. She also chose, unlike the other women in her community, to forgo marriage and children for many years for the sake of her activism. She stresses in her narrative

⁸ “Me cuesta mucho recordarme toda una vida que he vivido, pues muchas veces hay tiempos muy negros y hay tiempos que, sí, se goza también” (Burgos 21).

that she has given her life for the fight against social injustice and governmental abuse.

Skłodowska emphasizes Menchú's unfortunate yet imperative distancing from her own people:⁹

It is pertinent to emphasize that [...] Rigoberta remains alienated from her community at great cost to herself. Her political commitment, her fight in different organizations, her mobility and her inevitable "ladinization" produce what could be called the "Malinche syndrome." Rigoberta knows that in order to serve her community she has to betray it, distance herself from it, "transculturarse" herself. (*Testimonio* 125)¹⁰

Drawing on collective memory helps Menchú soften and combat this "Malinche syndrome." It helps her include her community—and include herself in her community. It allows her to become the agent (rather than the subject) of her own representation. Menchú unabashedly relies on collective memory to inform, supplement, and complement the representation of her own personal memory of the past.

Not only do the issues of fiction and the inherent tension of synecdochic representation throw the truth-value of testimonio into question, but so does the role of the interlocutor. The interlocutor is the person who interviews the testimonialista and later transcribes, translates, edits, and arranges the narrative. She is normally an educated, Western academic who shares the same political inclinations as the testimonialista and wants to help her cause. Because the testimonialista often cannot read or write well and does not have connections to the publishing world, an interlocutor is frequently necessary for the production of a testimonio. Beverley has

⁹ Menchú's (aura of) alienation can perhaps help explain her meager showing in Guatemala's 2007 presidential elections. She received only 3% of the vote.

¹⁰ "Es pertinente subrayar que [...] Rigoberta queda alienada de su comunidad a pesar suyo. Su compromiso político, su lucha en diferentes organizaciones, su movilidad y su inevitable 'ladinización' producen lo que podría llamarse el 'síndrome de la Malinche.' Rigoberta sabe que para servir a su comunidad tiene que traicionarla, alejarse de ella, 'transculturarse.'"

argued that the relationship between the testimonialista and the interlocutor is one of partnership and productivity, indispensable in the fight against oppression and social injustice. In his words, a “testimonio can serve as both an allegorical figure for, and a concrete form of, the political alliance of a radicalized intelligentsia with the ‘people’ that has been decisive in the development of resistance movements” (*Against* 78). Both sides of the coin are essential to the success of solidarity building. Because interlocutors are often from privileged, Western backgrounds—far removed from the abuse, poverty, and oppression that define the daily lives of the testimonialistas—, however, many critics feel that they are unable to objectively and synchronously produce a testimonio with the testimonialistas, despite their insurances that they do. As Sklodowska notes, “We have already pointed out that among the obligations (self)imposed by the testimonial model, the authors normally emphasize their loyalty towards the interviewed. Certainly, it does not take an exceptionally perceptive reader to notice the precariousness of the supposed harmony between author/editor and protagonist/narrator” (*Testimonio* 44-45).¹¹ Indeed, many critics argue that the interlocutor actually often works against the testimonialista and her cause. Sklodowska, for instance, maintains that the interlocutor of Menchú’s testimonio, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, undermines both the reliability and authority of Menchú’s story when she admits in the introduction that she—the one who spearheaded the entire testimonial production and is responsible for its final organization—knew little about the Mayan people or their cultural practices before she met Menchú. Many interlocutors tout the objectivity and comprehensiveness of their projects instead of acknowledging and addressing the numerous ellipses, suppressions, edits, rearrangements, and notes that intersperse the narratives.

¹¹ “Hemos señalado ya que entre las obligaciones (auto)impuestas por el modelo testimonial los autores suelen destacar su lealtad para con el entrevistado. Por cierto, no hace falta un lector excepcionalmente perspicaz para reparar en la precariedad de la supuesta armonía entre autor/editor y protagonista/narrador.”

The fingerprint that the interlocutor leaves on a testimonial work also puts the issue of authorship into question. For example, in the Spanish original of Barrios' testimonio, the interlocutor Moema Viezzer is listed as the author. In the English translation, authorship is given to Domitila Barrios de Chungara *with* Moema Viezzer. Likewise, some editions of Menchú's testimonio list interlocutor Elisabeth Burgos-Debray as the author, while others list Menchú. And some versions of Esteban Montejo's testimonio list Miguel Barnet as the author, some list him as a co-author (with Montejo), and some list him as an editor. There are many other examples, all of which make the ostensibly simple task of shelving these books in a library a deceptively tricky endeavor. While some say that testimonio is a literary mode with no definitive "author," critics like Linda Carole Byrd point out that shared production reflects the collectivity that runs so prevalent throughout the mode: "the collective 'we' of the testimonies is highlighted in the format of the books themselves [...] by emphasizing that credit for publication is shared, as was the collaborative making of the texts" (136). There are many different ways to look at the inherent tension and openness of the testimonial mode. Friction within its synecdochic representation, questions of truth and authenticity, and the role of the interlocutor all form various and multiple points of dual frustration and productivity.

IV. Three Modern Testimonios

Chapter 1 of this dissertation examines Domitila Barrios de Chungara's testimonio "*Si me permiten hablar...*": *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*, one of the most well-known testimonios of the twentieth century. In it, Barrios details the atrocious conditions in which Bolivian tin miners and their families were forced to live and work and the massive governmental oppression and violence that perpetuated their subjugation. She also

describes how she became politically involved and her path to leadership. Of the three testimonios examined in this dissertation, Barrios' best reflects straightforward witnessing and is therefore the most traditional in its literary configurations. The synecdochic representation so common in twentieth-century testimonios is clear in this work—as is the inherent tension found within this synecdochic representation. Barrios experienced this tension, often very intimately, in her daily life as a wife, a mother, and a woman living in a patriarchal society. This tension relates directly to the feminine sacrifice that Barrios was frequently forced to make, often having to choose between her family and her activism. She produced her testimonio not only to educate others, but also to aid fellow activists and to build solidarity and support for her fight against the Bolivian government. She hoped that her book would help create a better future for her children and all of Bolivia.

Lúcia Murat's film *Que bom te ver viva* is the focus of Chapter 2. Murat, who was imprisoned and tortured during the most recent dictatorship in Brazil, produced a testimonio that is both documentary and creative. Featuring interviews with eight former female activists (all torture survivors) during the military regime and narrated by a well-known Brazilian actress (Irene Ravache) who portrays a fictitious survivor herself, the film reflects a strong sense of collectivity. Not only was it part of the collective wave of works produced to combat the post-dictatorial silence in Brazil, but the film itself is a collective effort between the former activists and the narrator, who also serves as a type of interlocutor, opening, closing, and moving forward the film, adding important information, and connecting the film's subjects (the former activists) and the audience. Both the survivors and the narrator stress the tension between politics, activism, motherhood, marriage, and sexuality, showing the challenges faced by victims of (sexualized) abuse in carrying out the roles of wife, mother, and lover. *Que bom te ver viva* tries

to understand silence and why it exists, it tries to give a voice to and humanize the survivors, and it tries to explain and challenge the common stereotypes related to survivors. Simply put, it tries to resist forgetting.

Chapter 3 looks at Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, a fictional work based on real events. Her novel tells the story of the Mirabal sisters living under the repressive Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. All four of the sisters become either explicitly or implicitly involved in the revolutionary fight against Trujillo, and three of the sisters ultimately perish because of their involvement. Alvarez highlights the primacy of sexuality in women's testimonios by linking the sisters' sexual and political awakenings and the development of their sexual and political consciousnesses. In addition to including an interlocutor as a character (a stand-in for Alvarez herself) and presenting the tension between the individual and the collective, Alvarez underscores the role of memory in a society that has tried to forget it. All of these testimonial dynamics are of course adapted to the conventions of fiction. The narrative voice, for example, switches between the four sisters, creating a sense of collectivity and intimacy that works towards her project of demythologizing the heroine sisters. Though fiction allows Alvarez more creative room to explore, however, her novel still suffers from some of the same tensions as found in other testimonios.

V. Conclusion

Scheherazade knew the power of telling stories. By doing so, she spared not only her own life, but the lives of many other potential victims as well. Domitila Barrios de Chungara, Lúcia Murat, and Julia Alvarez also recognized the power of storytelling. They told their stories from their experiences as victims, survivors, and inheritors of state-sponsored violence,

repression, and devastation—as women who saw how very personal the political can be. They told their stories to inspire others to fight against social and political injustice, yet they also cautioned of the often dangerous and painful consequences of this fight. They told their stories as a way to combat the historical amnesia that so often takes hold of countries recovering from the traumas of a dictatorial regime. They told their stories to cast women as the protagonists of history. And they told their stories so that we may learn from the past in order to better our future. Though each woman spoke from a different historical, linguistic, and political context and though each woman drew on different forms of expression to create her testimonio, together they reveal how certain traits and tensions have persisted throughout the modern testimonial mode: the primacy of gender and sexuality, the friction between individual and collective representation, the role of the interlocutor, and questions surrounding truth and authenticity. Barrios, Murat, and Alvarez all show how speaking out—while it can be a matter of life and death—is one of the most powerful weapons we have to fight against the terror, horror, and destruction of a repressive regime.

Chapter 1

Tension between the Individual and the Collective: Feminine Sacrifice in “*Si me permiten hablar...*”: Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia¹²

Reflecting testimonio’s trademark synecdochic representation, Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s well-known testimonio “*Si me permiten hablar...*”: *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia* (published in English as “*Let Me Speak!...*”: *Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines*) (1977) presents her personal experiences first as a daughter and later as a wife of a Bolivian tin miner, while also detailing the Bolivian tin miners’ collective fight against their government to improve their horrendous living and working conditions. Employing straightforward witnessing, Barrios’ work represents the most traditional example of a testimonio in this dissertation. During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Bolivia, like many Latin American countries, witnessed a string of dictatorships, military coups, false democracies, and vast government-sponsored violence. This turmoil perpetuated the oppression and exploitation of the Bolivian miners and their families. While presenting both Barrios’ individual story and her people’s collective story, “*Si me permiten hablar...*” also illustrates the tension found between her private, individual life and the public, collective fight of which she is a part. Critical examinations of her testimonio, however, often gloss over the source of this tension: her femininity and sexuality. After Barrios became politically engaged, her loyalty to her family and her sexual propriety were continually thrown into question. This chapter explores how and why Barrios’ testimonio represents both the individual and collective, why the tension created between these two realms is centered at Barrios’ female self, and how the collective, political sphere often takes over Barrios’ individual, personal sphere, her own womanhood often

¹² This chapter is a revision of my master’s thesis from the University of Chicago. A prior version of this chapter also appeared in the *Bolivian Studies Journal*.

being sacrificed for the sake of the cause. Barrios constantly tries to resist or mitigate this binary tension, but it repeatedly appears—in Barrios’ gendered and sexual roles. In the midst of a twenty-first-century push for a global feminist movement and pressure to promote “authentic” subaltern voices, recognizing and examining Barrios’ denigration and sacrifice is critical in order to comprehend the too silent consequences of Latin American women’s celebrated platforms of expression.¹³

I. Individual and Collective Representation

“I don’t want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I’m about to tell as something that is only personal. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country” (Barrios 15).¹⁴ These opening words of “*Si me permiten hablar...*” establish the book as a representation of both Barrios’ individual story and her people’s collective story. Both the structure and style of her testimonio reflect this paired representation, aimed to draw in readers, increase awareness, and create solidarity.

The structure of Barrios’ testimonio illustrates not only the interrelatedness of her individual and collective representations, but also the primacy of the collective over the individual. Two sections entitled “Su pueblo” (Her people) and “Su vida” (Her life) comprise the bulk of the book. Beyond contextualization, the order of the sections (“Su pueblo” before “Su vida”) emphasizes the precedence that Barrios’ people’s struggle takes over her own life.

The title of the book, “*Si me permiten hablar...*”: *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las*

¹³ Another, well-known example of this is how the Argentine government paints the Plaza de Mayo protesters as “crazy” or “bad” mothers since their children were the targets of governmental violence, in effect passing the blame to them and attacking their womanhood.

¹⁴ “La historia que voy a relatar, no quiero en ningún momento que la interpreten solamente como un problema personal. Porque pienso que mi vida está relacionada con mi pueblo. Lo que me pasó a mí, le puede haber pasado a cientos de personas en mi país” (Viezzler 13).

minas de Bolivia, also demonstrates Barrios' dual role in representing both the individual and the collective. The first part of the title intimates the individual. With her appeal, "*Si me permiten hablar...*", Barrios breaks out of several traditional bounds and draws attention to herself. She insists that it is *her* voice that gets heard, both claiming and stressing the authority to represent and speak for her people. The use of a direct quotation from Barrios—which ironically negates the need for a request to speak, since that is precisely what she is already doing—underscores both the individual aspect of her *testimonio* as well as the importance of taking part in socio-political dialogues. By introducing her voice, she challenges not only cultural and political networks from which she has been excluded, but literary ones as well: "The tension between *permitting* and *prohibiting* is implicit in Domitila's text. The dominant culture and the literary system are authoritative not only because they forget the Other, but also because they coercively force him/her to silence; they reprimand his/her speaking out with violence" (Stephan 209).¹⁵ Barrios knows the consequences of speaking out, and so her request for *permission* to speak in the first part of the title is an attempt to temper her transgressive behavior (since she has, in fact, already spoken out).¹⁶ The political and literary forces that Barrios is speaking out against have long denied space to poor, modestly educated indigenous women. As John Beverley argues, "This presence of the voice, which we are meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated, a desire to impose oneself on an institution of power, such as literature, from the position of the excluded or the marginal" (*Testimonio* 34). That cultural/literary and political impulses are all part of the same hegemonic web is suggested by Barrios' emphasis on speaking out politically. By doing so, Barrios

¹⁵ "La tensión entre el *permitir* y el *prohibir* está implícita en el texto de Domitila. La cultura dominante y el sistema literario es autoritario porque no sólo olvida al Otro, sino que le obliga coercitivamente al silencio; reprime con violencia su pronunciamiento."

¹⁶ The title given to the English translation of the book, "*Let Me Speak!*": *Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines*, is even more demanding and domineering.

simultaneously challenges the silence of three subjugated groups: women, the indigenous, and the “Third World.” The second part of the title, *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*, situates Barrios among her people in their shared environment, conjuring the collective. The use of Barrios’ first name (how her fellow *compañeros* refer to her) suggests a casualness and intimacy which evoke an unpretentious, familiar air about her, and she has no title to separate herself from the rest of her people. Moving from a first-person quotation in the first part of the title to a third-person description of her in the second, Barrios is integrated back in with her people and aligned with them. Just as the title of her book suggests, Barrios simultaneously blends in with her people and stands out as a singular leader and speaker for them. According to Doris Sommer, “The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole” (“Rigoberta’s” 39). This synecdochic subjectivity is one of the characteristics that separate *testimonio* from other autobiographical genres, and what makes it such a powerful revolutionary tool. One person’s story can tell the story of a whole collective fight. Indeed, *testimonios* played a critical role in building international awareness of and support and solidarity for Latin American revolutions in the twentieth century.

Hoping to draw in readers and connect them to her cause, Barrios portrays intimate, emotionally charged moments and employs conversational language. René Jara explains how the testimonial mode embodies the popular aphorism “the personal is the political”: “From the narrator’s point of view, intimacy is not private, it belongs to everyone, and therefore he/she externalizes it in the exhibition of pain and anguish, humiliation and heroism” (3).¹⁷ Barrios details not only her frustrations with her government, but also the physical and sexual abuses that

¹⁷ “Desde el punto de vista del narrador la intimidad no es privada, le pertenece a todos, y por ello la externaliza en la exhibición del dolor y la angustia, la vejación y el heroísmo.”

she suffers in prison and the strain that her activism puts on her personal, familial relationships. More importantly, she describes her emotions in response to these abuses and strains. By projecting intimacy, Barrios hopes readers will empathize with her and feel angry and outraged enough to support her cause. She anticipates touching readers as much by private glimpses into her feelings as by her willingness to share them. Most importantly, Barrios wants readers to be so horrified at the Bolivian government for treating its own people with such brutality and heartlessness that they will help put more pressure on the Bolivian government to ameliorate the miners' conditions and end governmental violence.¹⁸

The conversational style of the narrative also conveys an intimacy that emphasizes the personal, individual nature of Barrios' testimonio and her desire to draw in readers. As Beatriz González Stephan reasons, the use of speeches, interviews, and conversations to construct Barrios' testimonio creates an air of familiarity and frankness:

The tone and language is that of a familiar, everyday conversation between two subjects that are situated on the same communicational level, removed from social hierarchies and rhetorical conventions. This generates the effect of the spontaneity and frankness characteristic of conversation. (209)¹⁹

This conversational style of narrative allows Barrios' individual, idiosyncratic way of speaking to come through, even as she discusses her *compañeros'* collective fight. The numerous ellipses indicating pauses in speech that appear throughout the testimonio also contribute to the

¹⁸ Reception data are difficult to find, leaving open the question of impact. It is known that Barrios' testimonio has been read widely in academic circles, but it is not known exactly how much it directly affected her people's struggle. A few years after her testimonio was published, however, there was a coup in Bolivia. Barrios immediately began to mobilize international support against the government and as a result was exiled from Bolivia and threatened with execution (McIntosh 301). Her government, then, saw Barrios and her international support as a major threat. For more on the influence of testimonios, see Kimberly Nance's *Can Literature Promote Justice?: Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*.

¹⁹ "[E]l tono y el lenguaje es el de la conversación familiar, cotidiana, entre dos sujetos que se sitúan en el mismo nivel comunicacional, alejados de las jerarquías sociales y de las convenciones retóricas. Esto genera el efecto de la espontaneidad y franqueza características de la conversación."

spontaneous and frank feel of the narrative, as do the personal interjections, like “Just imagine!,” “What a relief!,” “I was so happy!,” and “There aren’t any words to describe it!” (Barrios 134).²⁰ Barrios wants readers to move easily through the conversational and colloquial language, to feel as if she is speaking directly to them. Her testimonio is also full of questions directed toward her audience, such as “And in the end, what would happen?” and “Can you imagine that moment?” (Barrios 37, 134).²¹ These questions not only keep readers engaged, but also place responsibility on them to contemplate Barrios’ situation and her people’s plight. In addition, short rhetorical questions, such as “¿No es cierto?” (“Isn’t that right?”) and “¿No?,” pepper the testimonio and encourage agreement with what Barrios says. This orality, Sommer contends, “helps to account for the testimonial’s construction of a collective self” (“Rigoberta’s” 43). The reader, like the interlocutor who compiles, transcribes, and organizes the testimonial narrative, becomes complicit in and part of the narrator’s cause and thereby builds on the collectivity already in place in Barrios’ own community.

The interlocutor and by extension each reader is addressed by the narrator’s immediate appeal to “you.” This appeal is not only consistent with existing cultural assumptions about the community being the fundamental social unit; but it has political implications that go beyond, perhaps to corrupt, the cultural coherence that the narrators seek to defend. When the narrator talks about *herself* to *you*, she implies both the existing relationship to other representative selves in the community, and potential relationships that extend her community through the text. She calls us in, interpellates us as readers who identify with the narrator’s

²⁰ “¡Imagínese!,” “¡Qué alivio!,” “¡Me sentía tan feliz!,” and “¡No había palabras!” (Viezza 147).

²¹ “Y finalmente, ¿qué pasaba?” and “¿Te puedes imaginar este momento?” (Viezza 38, 147).

project and, by extension, with the political community to which she belongs.
(Sommer, “Rigoberta’s” 44)

The “appeal to ‘you’” that begins the title “*Si me permiten hablar...*”, then, is just as much a personal request to speak as it is a way to lure you into turning the page and helping to extend the collective community of support and complicity. The goal of expanding collectivity is one of the foundational traits of testimonio, and it helps to define “the collective” as a protean force. As Linda Marie Brooks confirms, “The listener’s replies—the dialogue between witness and editor or between story-telling performer and audience—are indispensable to *testimonio*, constitutive not simply of isolated examples but of the genre itself” (204). The testimonio, unlike any other literary mode, is based on an interconnected series of relationships—some new, some reformulated—which all function together to promote a particular political agenda. The “success” of the testimonio depends on how well the testimonialista and the interlocutor can work together to convince the reader and the testimonialista to work together. The conversational style of Barrio’s testimonio also further challenges the exclusion of both marginalized groups and marginalized literary forms from the literary canon: “The testimonial genre takes certain elements from institutionalized discursive practices and corrupts them. Instead of rigid, hermetic, and elitist structures of textual authority, it puts forward a communicational system that is flexible, plain, clear, open and comprehensible for all” (Stephan 210).²² While Barrios’ testimonio disrupts both literary and political institutions, her narrative style reflects her personal politics: open, defiant, and egalitarian. Language has become power for Barrios, and she has learned how to manipulate it. She understands that by sharing personal

²² “[E]l género testimonial toma ciertos elementos de las prácticas discursivas institucionalizadas y las pervierte. A las estructuras de autoridad textual (rígidas, herméticas, elitescas) opone un sistema comunicacional flexible, llano, claro, abierto, comprensible para todos.”

experiences, being passionate, and using conversational language, she can draw in readers and promote her people's fight for justice.

Collective representation plays an equally important role in building solidarity, both by allowing community members to bond through shared experiences and shared identity and by educating others about the Bolivian miners' struggle. Barrios, like her neighbors, knows the frustration of being evicted from your home for no reason, the pain of losing loved ones in government-sponsored massacres, the constant feeling of hunger, and the guilt of not being able to provide for your family. In her testimonio, she describes several occasions when speaking for her people solidifies this sense of unity. For example, when a commission made up of university students, the press, and the Church comes to investigate the causes of a recent massacre in Barrios' town, everyone remains silent, fearing the harsh consequences of speaking out. Finally, persuaded by others, Barrios musters courage, stands up, and begins to speak:

And I denounced everything that had happened. I explained our whole problem, how we wanted them to give us back our wages and how we'd asked for them. How the repression was killing us. And I spoke of all the things I'd seen, including how I'd seen them attack the ambulances. And I told them that the whole world must find out about our situation.

And when I finished speaking, I sat down. And well, my husband was no longer beside me. But many workers were surrounding me. Some, who'd seen other things, whispered to me and said: "Such and such happened too...." And I'd repeat what the *compañero* said to me. And in the end, every single one of the people near me embraced me and kissed me and said:

“It’s a good thing you didn’t leave, that you didn’t abandon us....” And one of them said to me: “Now I understand why it’s necessary for women to participate in everything.”

The solidarity the compañeros were showing me made me very happy.

Because I’d spoken for them. (102-103)²³

Here, Barrios represents the collective group by explaining their shared troubles as she sees them (“our problem,” “our wages,” “our situation”) and also by directly serving as a spokesperson for her compañeros as they pass on information to and through her. Because Barrios has experienced the same oppression, violence, and discrimination as her fellow community members, they trust her to speak for them. She becomes a representative for her people and an outlet for collective witnessing. She also becomes a model, showing how everyone (particularly women) can contribute. The image of Barrios’ compañeros embracing and praising her only underscores the sense of communal cohesion. Her husband’s abandonment while/because she is speaking out serves as a metaphor for her larger situation: sacrificing the personal for the political. Like the act of speaking out in this example, Barrios’ testimonio reflects her community’s shared experiences and facilitates communal bonding.

Barrios’ testimonio not only represents the collective, but also helps to shape it. George Yúdice argues “that there is no preconstituted collective identity or consciousness that the testimonio could represent transparently. The testimonio itself serves as a fundamental

²³ “Y denuncié todo lo que había ocurrido. Explicué todo el problema que teníamos, que queríamos que nos devuelvan nuestros salarios y que eso habíamos pedido. Pero que la represión fue fatalmente brutal. Y hablé de todas las cosas que yo había visto, incluso cómo había visto atacar a las ambulancias. Y les dije que en todo el mundo debían ellos hacer conocer esa situación. Y cuando terminé de hablar, me senté. Y bueno, mi compañero ya no estaba a mi alrededor. Pero muchos trabajadores estaban a mi alrededor. Algunos, que habían visto otras cosas más, me pasaban la voz y me decían el compañero. Y, al final, toditos los que estaban cerca de mí me abrazaban y me besaban y me decían: —¡Que bien que tú no te hayas ido... que no nos hayas abandonado... Ahora sí —me dijo uno de ellos— comprendo que es necesario que la mujer participe en todo. Yo me sentí muy feliz en aquel momento, al ver la solidaridad que me mostraban los compañeros. Porque por ellos había hablado yo” (Viezzler 112).

component in the practice of constituting such an identity and consciousness. The testimonio is more a cause, than an effect, of group identity” (Colás 164). We must remember when reading “*Si me permiten hablar...*” that both Barrios and Viezzer have chosen how (what stories, what semantics, what emphases) to represent (and thereby construe) the collective group. No representation is ever completely transparent. Barrios’ testimonio also works more to form (rather than reflect) group identity by offering itself as an implement of collaboration to examine the successes and failures of the collective struggle—and therefore direct its future. Barrios recognizes the power of using testimonios as handbooks to aid fellow and future activists:

This testimony now returns to the working class so that together—workers, peasants, housewives, everyone, even the young people and the intellectuals who want to be with us—can learn from the experiences, analyze and also learn from the mistakes we’ve committed in the past, so that through correcting these errors we’ll be able to do better things in the future, guide ourselves better, direct ourselves better, to see the reality of our country and create our own instruments to improve our struggle and free ourselves definitively from imperialism and establish socialism in Bolivia. I believe that that’s the main object of a work such as this. (235)²⁴

Lamenting that the lack of earlier testimonios has hurt her people’s struggle, Barrios acknowledges the importance of knowing the past in order to be able to change the future.

Highlighting the successes and communal benefits of activism is valuable as well because it

²⁴ “[E]ste testimonio vuelve ahora a la clase trabajadora para que en conjunto: obreros, campesinos, amas de casa, todos, incluso la juventud y los intelectuales que quieren estar con nosotros, recojamos las experiencias, analicemos y notemos también los errores que hemos cometido en el pasado, para que, corrigiendo estos errores, nosotros podamos hacer mejores cosas en el futuro, orientarnos mejor, encaminarnos mejor a ver la realidad de nuestro país y crear nosotros mismos los instrumentos que hacen falta y mejorar nuestra lucha para liberarnos definitivamente del imperialismo e implantar el socialismo en Bolivia. Yo creo que éste es el principal objetivo de un trabajo como es este libro” (Viezzer 10). This passage comes from an interview between Barrios and Moema Viezzer (the original interlocutor) that was added to “*Si me permiten hablar...*” after the first edition.

builds encouragement, pride, and motivation. It also helps her community see the importance (and perhaps even the necessity) of female participation, softening some of the vitriol of those who view political women as indolent or even dangerous. In addition to educating her own people, Barrios wants to make her cause known to the external world as well. The more people involved in a resistance movement, the greater the chance that a government will put an end to its abusive practices. Demonstrating this hope for outside help, there is a map of Bolivia at the beginning of the book highlighting places mentioned in the text. Barrios also offers basic statistics about Bolivia, such as the languages spoken and where it is located within South America. Her testimonio is in large part didactic, aimed not only at her own community, but at an uninformed international audience as well.

The synecdochic subjectivity of Barrios' testimonio quickly leads to questions of authority. "The slippage between personal 'voice' or 'authenticity' of experience and 'voicing' the experience of 'others' by becoming the representative collective subject makes the issue of 'who can speak for whom' a crucial one" (Ghosh xxxi). Since there always exists an inextricable personal stamp on an authority figure's collective representation and since Barrios tells the story of her people through her own life story, it is important to examine her role as spokesperson and the roots of her authority.

Experience itself is a source of authority. Throughout Barrios' life, others (usually the government or the men in her community) have spoken for her. This makes her very careful to not overstep bounds and speak for others when she should not and cannot. Barrios stresses this sense of internal caution: "I don't want to speak in a purely theoretical way about my people. That's why, maybe, I didn't mention some groups, because I don't know much about them. What can I say about the slum dwellers, about the peasant women, if I don't know them? I don't

only want to speak theoretically. I want to know them” (234).²⁵ By articulating her careful understanding of authority, Barrios not only underscores her own authority as spokesperson for her people, but also explains her resentment when unauthorized others try to speak for her. In Mexico City for the International Women’s Year Tribunal in 1975, Barrios is shocked to find that “First World” women are attempting not only to speak for her and her people, but also to erase differences between women and assume that they all have shared experiences. She feels alienated by the Western feminists who are promoting prostitution, lesbianism, birth control, and warfare against men. Barrios asserts her own authority while distinguishing her experiences from the other women’s:

I made them see that they don’t live in our world. I made them see that in Bolivia human rights aren’t respected and they apply what we call “the law of the funnel”: broad for some, narrow for others. That those ladies who got together to play canasta and applaud the government have full guarantees, full support. But women like us, housewives, who get organized to better our people, well, they beat us up and persecute us. They couldn’t see all those things. They couldn’t see the suffering of my people, they couldn’t see how our compañeros are vomiting their lungs bit by bit, in pools of blood. They didn’t see how underfed our children are. And, of course, they didn’t know, as we do, what it’s like to get up at four in the morning and go to bed at eleven or twelve at night, just to be able to get all the housework done, because of the lousy conditions we live in.

²⁵ “[Y]o no quiero hablar de una manera puramente teórica de mi pueblo. Por eso es, quizás, que yo no haya mencionado a algunos grupos, porque yo no los conozco. ¿Qué podría yo decir de aquel barrio marginado, de aquella compañera campesina si no los conozco? Yo no quiero hablar sólo teóricamente. Quiero conocerlos” (Viezzler 8). Again, this passage comes from an interview between Barrios and Viezzler that was added to “*Si me permiten hablar...*” after the first edition.

“You,” I said, “what can you possibly understand about all that?” (203-204)²⁶

“First World” women do not see and do not live the horrors of everyday existence in the Bolivian mines and therefore do not have authority to speak for Barrios and her people. The resentment and anger in Barrios’ admonition suggest that experience is a source of not only authority, but also the passion to utilize this authority in order to speak out against injustice. Whereas Barrios often rebukes the Bolivian government for unjustly speaking for her and her people, here she denounces “First World” women for attempting the same. This denunciation at the Tribunal, so fervent and so shocking, is perhaps what Barrios is most known for today.

Barrios’ unique childhood also lends her authority by helping to mold her into a singular and strong-willed individual. The eldest of five daughters, Barrios takes on many responsibilities as a child (especially after her mother dies), while at the same time fighting for the little education that she does receive. Complementing her leadership capabilities, Barrios’ father raises her with notions of gender equality and social justice—an anomalous upbringing in Barrios’ culture. He encourages Barrios’ and her sisters’ feelings of self-worth as children and always emphasizes the idea that women are entitled to equal rights. As Barrios explains,

And when people tried to make us feel bad because we were women and weren’t much good for anything, he’d tell us that all women had the same rights as men.

And he’d say that we could do the same things men do. He always raised us with those ideas. Yes, it was a very special discipline. And all that was very positive

²⁶ “Les hice ver que ellas no viven en el mundo que es el nuestro. Les hice ver que en Bolivia no se respetan los derechos humanos y se aplica lo que nosotros llamamos ‘la ley del embudo’: ancho para algunos, angosto para otros. Que aquellas damas que se organizan para jugar canasta y aplauden al gobierno tienen toda su garantía, todo su respaldo. Pero a las mujeres como nosotras, amas de casa, que nos organizamos para alzar a nuestros pueblos, nos apalean, nos persiguen. Todas esas cosas ellas no veían. No veían el sufrimiento de mi pueblo... no veían cómo nuestros compañeros están arrojando sus pulmones trozo más trozo, en charcos de sangre... No veían cómo nuestros hijos son desnutridos. Y claro, que ellas no sabían, como nosotras, lo que es levantarse a las 4 de la mañana y acostarse a las 11 ó 12 de la noche, solamente para dar cuenta del quehacer doméstico, debido a la falta de condiciones que tenemos nosotros. —Ustedes —les dije— ¿qué van a saber de todo eso?” (Viezzler 226).

in terms of our future. So that's why we never considered ourselves useless women. (56)²⁷

This special discipline from her father is made even more crucial later when Barrios faces resistance from her husband because of her brazenness and her activism. While her father is intent upon turning her into an independent woman, her husband often seems intent upon turning her into a dependent wife and mother. Barrios' father not only teaches her about equality and justice, but also serves as a role model for her through his own political activism. Barrios describes her profound appreciation for her father in this regard: "I really began to get interested, to learn about the struggle and about the people's sufferings. And that awoke in me a great respect for my father and for the cause he had devoted himself to" (70).²⁸ When Barrios feels knocked down because of her activism, her father is always there to help pick her back up and push her to keep fighting. Because much of her outspokenness, confidence, and progressive thinking is rooted in the encouragement, inspiration, and motivation of her father (and her lack of a traditional domestic model), at least part of Barrios' authority can be attributed to her atypical familial situation.

Communal solidarity also plays a large role in authorizing Barrios. According to Eva Paulino Bueno, "The community, which gives its members a sense of belonging, is impossible in the absence of a society that accepts and cherishes the cultural contribution of its members. Domitila Barrios de Chungara [...] speak[s] and give[s] [her] testimony in the name of [her] people from the very core of this sense of belonging, of togetherness with [her] kin" (128).

²⁷ "Y cuando la gente trataba de acomplejarnos porque éramos mujeres y no servíamos para gran cosa, él nos decía que todas las mujeres tienen los mismos derechos que los hombres. Y decía que nosotras podíamos hacer las hazañas que hacen los hombres. Nos crió siempre con esas ideas. Sí, fue una disciplina muy especial. Y todo eso fue muy positivo para nuestro futuro. Y de ahí que nunca nos consideramos mujeres inútiles" (Viezzler 59).

²⁸ "[C]omencé a interesarme, a darme cuenta de la pelea y de los sufrimientos que tenía la gente. Y eso fue despertando en mí un gran respeto por mi padre y por la causa a la cual él se había entregado" (Viezzler 75). Rigoberta Menchú's father was also a political activist and a role model for his daughter.

Emphasizing this sense of belonging and togetherness (and thereby her own authority), Barrios constantly points out others' encouragement of and influence on her leadership. She repeatedly mentions, for instance, when her people choose or elect her to represent them and is sure to note when people entreat her to speak for them or surround her when she does. Barrios also often directly gives credit to her community for facilitating her authority, explaining how she has benefited from the teachings and life lessons of her people: "I don't owe my consciousness and my preparation to anything but the cries, the suffering, and the experiences of the people" (163).²⁹ At the International Women's Year Tribunal, she initially feels ashamed of her modest education and unqualified to participate in the discussions going on around her, but she quickly draws courage and a sense of authority from thinking about her people:

Because, look: I, who hadn't studied in the university, or even gone to school, I, who wasn't a teacher or a professional or lawyer or a professor, what had I done in the Tribunal? What I'd said was only what I'd heard my people say ever since I was little, my parents, my compañeros, the leaders, and I saw that the people's experience is the best schooling there is. What I learned from the people's life was the best teaching. And I wept to think: how great is my people! (204)³⁰

Barrios realizes that she does not need a degree to know what her people have been through and what they need. She remains conscious of her community and feels their support even when she is not with them. "In moments of doubt and weakness it is precisely her people who renew her

²⁹ "Y yo no debo más que a los gritos, a los sufrimientos y a las experiencias del pueblo esa conciencia y esa preparación que tengo" (Viezzler 180).

³⁰ "Porque, mire: yo que no había cursado universidad, ni al colegio siquiera había podido ir, yo que no era ni maestra, ni licenciada, ni abogada, ni catedrática... ¿Qué había hecho yo en la Tribuna? Lo que había hablado era solamente lo que había escuchado de mi pueblo desde la cuna, podría yo decir, a través de mis padres, de mis compañeros, de los dirigentes. y [sic] veía que la experiencia del pueblo era la mejor escuela. Lo que aprendí de la vida del pueblo fue la mejor enseñanza. Y lloré al pensar: ¡Cómo es grande mi pueblo!" (Viezzler 227).

strength” (Muñoz 72).³¹ These nods to “her people” are as much genuine gratefulness and appreciation as persuasive rhetorical devices that underscore Barrios’ own authority by emphasizing communal harmony and solidarity.

Stressing her community’s support of her leadership is also important because it offsets the many examples of communal opposition that Barrios gives throughout her narrative. While many do encourage Barrios, many others in her community resist her—and any other woman who is engaged in activism. Barrios explains that despite increasing female participation (and despite her optimism that “Happily, these new ideas concerning women have jelled very well, and we’ve won our place in the struggle” [79]³²), many women still hesitate to become politically involved: “But there’s still a long way to go for women to reach the level of participation we think is needed. There are even women who don’t understand why they should participate” (77).³³ In addition to not understanding the need for their involvement, several other factors inhibit women from becoming politically active, for example, the fear of putting their families at risk and the pervasive view that politics is frivolous or inappropriate for the female sex. Men are not completely won over, either. As Barrios relates, even with steadily growing support,

I think that there are still about 40 percent of the men who are against their compañeras’ organizing. [...] Because, in spite of our behavior, in spite of the fact that the men in the leadership respect us, there are still people who speak badly of us, especially people who don’t understand, those who are *machistas*, you know,

³¹ “En los momentos de duda y debilidad es precisamente el pueblo quien renueva su fortaleza.”

³² “Felizmente esas nuevas ideas respecto a la mujer cuajaron muy bien y adquirimos nuestro lugar en la lucha” (Viezzler 85).

³³ “Pero todavía falta mucho para que las mujeres alcancen aquel grado de participación que pensamos sea importante. Incluso, hay mujeres que no entienden la necesidad de su participación” (Viezzler 82).

people who say that women should stay at home and only live for their family and not get mixed up in politics. (77-78)³⁴

Despite encouragement from many (of both sexes), without the full support of her community, Barrios herself must take much of the initiative to stake out her authority not only to lead and represent her people, but also to author her story and their story at the same time.

II. Tension between the Individual and the Collective

Early studies of the testimonio praised the innovative construction whereby one individual's story represents that of a whole community. It puts a personal touch on what might otherwise seem like a distant and detached historical account. Testimonios often show, however, how different testimonialistas are from the rest of their communities. They are assertive, outspoken leaders who have suffered extraordinary consequences because of their activism. They have often forgone many of their traditional distaff responsibilities and frequently live apart from their families and communities, speaking and galvanizing support. By presenting the testimonialista as unique alongside and despite insistences that she is representative, the testimonio often seems to work against itself. The presence of both the persistence and the suppression of individuality reflects the tension within testimonio's synecdochic representation.

³⁴ “De los hombres, yo pienso que un 40% todavía se resisten a que sus compañeras se comprometan. [...] Porque siempre, a pesar de nuestra conducta, a pesar de que los compañeros que están en la dirección nos respetan, todavía hay gente que habla mal de nosotras, especialmente la gente que no comprende, eso que son machistas, ¿no?, esa gente que dice que la mujer debe estar en la casa y vivir solamente para el hogar y no meterse en política” (Viezzler 83). This dismal statistic problematizes Barrios' insistence that Bolivian women and men should work together in a collective fight. Barrios adamantly rejects the Western brand of feminism in the 1970s because she sees it paint man as the enemy and pit the two sexes against each other: “Our position is not like the feminists' position. [...] For us, the important thing is the participation of the compañero and the compañera together. Only then will we be able to see better days, become better people, and see more happiness for everyone” (41). (“Porque nuestra posición no es una posición como la de las feministas. [...] Lo importante, para nosotras, es la participación del compañero y de la compañera en conjunto. Sólo así podremos lograr un tiempo mejor, gente mejor y más felicidad para todos” [Viezzler 42]).

Bueno asserts that for many critics, including especially John Beverley and Margaret Randall, “the ideal witness is a ‘communal being’ who cannot set herself apart in terms of her individuality, much less her gender” (131). Any individuality shown should immediately point back to the community, for example, standing out as a leader—*for the community*. Viewing or analyzing these testimonialistas as gendered or sexualized beings would only distract from their political projects. It is not surprising, then, that for many years gender and sexuality took a back seat in critical analyses of testimonios—despite the fact that the testimonial mode brought many female voices into the Latin American literary canon.³⁵ As Jean Franco affirms, “Latin American criticism [of the testimonio] has talked a lot about the difference between class and ethnicity but until now has not wanted to include gender as a producer of differences, even though it is one of the basic principles of social classification” (“‘Si me’” 115).³⁶ Not only is gender one of the most basic principles of social classification, but many testimonialistas, like Barrios, also specifically address how gender is wrapped up in both the politics that they are fighting against and the politics that they are promoting. For Barrios, women’s condition will improve when the workers’ condition improves. And while female testimonialistas assert their claims of representativeness, they also describe resistance to and complications within this representativeness, much of which is based on their gender. As Lynda Marín explains, “[I]t is this tension in Latin American women’s testimony between its stated project – to speak in a unified way for a people in struggle – and its unstated project – to do so in a way that negotiates truthfully among the various positions of inequality that women occupy in their cultures – which

³⁵ According to Bueno, it is this aversion to and/or neglect of sexuality/gender that has kept the diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus (a single mother of three illegitimate children, each with a different father) out of the testimonio canon.

³⁶ “La crítica latinoamericana [del testimonio] ha hablado mucho de la diferencia de clases y de etnia pero hasta ahora no ha querido incluir el género sexual como productor de diferencias, aunque es uno de los principios básicos de la clasificación social.”

pervades this writing and most curiously marks it” (55). Female testimonialistas must walk a fine line between conveying their sense of power, agency, and authority and acknowledging their challenges and limitations as women in a machista culture.

We can look at the tension between the individual and the collective in “*Si me permiten hablar...*” through the gender lens in two different ways: literarily and literally. Barrios’ gender and sexuality are significant elements in her narrative despite criticisms that she portrays her relationship with her husband and her children in a two-dimensional way (she very rarely refers to them by name) and despite testimonio’s recursive narrative code that stresses communality over individuality. At the same time, Barrios’ narrative reveals how often the individual and the collective come into conflict in her real life, as her community activism continually brings harm to herself and her family. This conflict pivots around Barrios’ female self since the normative social contract in Barrios’ culture does not provide space for women activists and since those who oppose Barrios’ activism and authority explicitly attack her domesticity, her loyalty to her family, and her sexual behavior.

When, because of her political involvement, Barrios crosses from the traditionally private, feminine domain into the traditionally public, masculine domain, she often faces great resistance. In Barrios’ culture, the women’s responsibilities are in the home—cleaning, cooking, sewing, and raising children. The men’s duties include work at the mines and political activity—both away from the home. Barrios explains how the community reinforces this strict separation of spheres: “We women were raised from the cradle with the idea that women were made only to cook and take care of the kids, that we are incapable of assuming important tasks, that we

shouldn't be allowed to get involved in politics" (40).³⁷ This machista ideology is reproduced through reproduction and childrearing, women (just as much as men) reinforcing it. Those females who break out of the traditional roles of mother, wife, and nurturer are often ostracized and punished. "For example, when we organized a demonstration to demand more job openings in 1973, some five thousand women participated. And when they went back to their homes, lots of workers beat their wives and said they were housewives and had nothing to do with politics and that their obligation was to be at home" (Barrios 78).³⁸ These women have transgressed the borders established and policed by the patriarchal institutions that dominate Bolivia and other Latin American countries—the government, the Catholic Church, and the family—and they suffer the consequences. Another time, "the compañeras went up on the balcony of the union hall to speak. The men weren't used to hearing a woman speak on the same platform as them. So they shouted: 'Go back home! Back to the kitchen! Back to the washing! Back to your housework!' And they jeered and booed them" (Barrios 74).³⁹ By crossing into both the physical masculine domain (outside the home and on the balcony) and the more abstract masculine domain of political activism and community leadership, these women threaten the masculinity of their compañeros. As a result, the men directly attack their compañeras' womanhood by insinuating that they do not belong in the public sphere, restricting them to the kitchen and reducing them to housework.

³⁷ "Nosotras, las mujeres, fuimos criadas desde la cuna con la idea de que la mujer ha sido hecha solamente para la cocina y para cuidar de las wawas, que es incapaz de llevar tareas importantes y que no hay que permitirle meterse en política" (Viezzler 41).

³⁸ "Por ejemplo, cuando convocamos a la manifestación para reclamar el aumento de cupo en el 73, unas cinco mil mujeres participaron. Y cuando volvieron a sus casas, muchos trabajadores las pegaron y dijeron que ellas eran amas de casa y que no tenían nada que ver con política y que su obligación era de estar en la casa" (Viezzler 84).

³⁹ "las compañeras subieron al balcón del Sindicato para hablar. Los compañeros no estaban acostumbrados a escuchar a una mujer junto a ellos. Entonces gritaban: '¡Que se vayan a la casa...! ¡a cocinar!, ¡a lavar!, ¡a hacer sus quehaceres!...' Y les silbaban" (Viezzler 80).

While normative gender codes relegate women to domestic work alone, Barrios views both domestic and political work as interconnected and crucial to her community's well-being. "For Domitila, domestic work and political activity are not mutually exclusive; rather, they represent a revolutionary continuity" (Muñoz 71).⁴⁰ She knows that in order to maximize this revolutionary potential, women should participate and take pride in both domestic and political affairs. Indeed, she feels that political change will improve her condition as a woman. She explains, "We think our liberation consists primarily in our country being freed forever from the yoke of imperialism and we want a worker like us to be in power and that the laws, education, everything, be controlled by this person. Then, yes, we'll have better conditions for reaching a complete liberation, including our liberation as women" (41).⁴¹ Her position against birth control (and her seemingly continual state of being pregnant) as well as her pride in her maternal, domestic duties both suggest Barrios' optimism in combining domestic and political affairs and distinguish her from Western feminists like Betty Friedan who denounced housework for being suffocating and repressive for women, preventing them from achieving their full potential. For Barrios, being a good mother and wife is a *part of* a woman's (political) potential. Mary Jane Treacy explains how many female revolutionaries in Latin America do not leave the armed struggle because of a pregnancy or the birth of a child, since they view the private and the public as two parts of the same world: "This politicization of motherhood transforms an institution that has isolated Latin American women from political struggles, but it also proves that the *guerrillera* has not totally transgressed against her most fundamental gendered role, even as she

⁴⁰ "Para Domitila el trabajo doméstico y la actividad política no se excluyen sino que representan más bien una continuidad revolucionaria."

⁴¹ "Nosotras consideramos que nuestra liberación consiste primeramente en llegar a que nuestro país sea liberado para siempre del yugo del imperialismo y que un obrero como nosotros esté en el poder y que las leyes, la educación, todo sea controlado por él. Entonces sí, vamos a tener más condiciones para llegar a una liberación completa, también en nuestra condición de mujer" (Viezer 42).

leaves her children to take up arms” (137). These women see part of their job as mothers as participation in the fight for a better future. With this reformulation of motherhood, women activists can be good revolutionaries and good mothers at the same time.

The name of the organization in which Barrios is involved, The Housewives’ Committee (El Comité de Amas de Casa), reflects the belief that women can be both domestic and political, positioning the “feminine” responsibilities of taking care of the home alongside the “masculine” duties of working on a committee. As Marcia Stephenson asserts, “The name ‘Housewives Committees’ created an oxymoron that juxtaposed the domestic sphere with the radical political arena of the miners’ unions (or committees), thereby throwing into question the boundary that otherwise separated the two spaces” (103). Members remain proud of their role as housewives, while also supporting the idea that women (housewives) can organize themselves. Meeting physically outside the traditionally feminine space (the home), the committee works on political issues, something traditionally part of the masculine domain. According to Willy Muñoz, Barrios sees this seemingly obvious clash between two very separate arenas as the perfect formula for social and economic change:

As per the prevalent social norms, Barrios’ association with both spheres—the domestic and the political—seems mutually exclusive. But she, as a marginal being, is found on the border of these two spaces, a situation that continually demands a definition of herself and the society that denies her this ubiquity. She resolves her dilemma by considering her family and her people as poles from the same reality and her contribution to the triumph of the workers’ revolution will

necessarily contribute to the direct well-being of the economic situation in her home. (75)⁴²

Barrios' activism has pushed her to the edge of both the feminine and masculine spheres, but this marginal position only underscores her view that her responsibilities as a woman and as an activist are interdependent. She feels that in order to truly revolutionize social structures, they *must* be thought of in this way, since one naturally affects the other. Indeed, while at first glance the name "The Housewives' Committee" may seem like a contradiction, it actually reflects the committee's work in renegotiating boundaries between feminine and masculine spaces, moving them closer together rather than farther apart.

While Barrios' community uses the home to determine feminine and masculine duties, the Bolivian government also uses the home to assert its power and control over Barrios' town, Siglo XX. The atrocious conditions of the state-owned houses in Siglo XX—cramped and dilapidated, they are constantly plagued by problems with electricity, water, and sanitation—make it difficult for the women to fulfill their domestic duties (and therefore fulfill their full identity as women). The state also controls the price, supply, and accessibility of food in Siglo XX, thereby controlling a woman's cooking responsibilities in her home. Women must often wait for days for certain foods. Struggling to fulfill all of their domestic obligations, Bolivian miners' wives enjoy little free time. Barrios describes how during one demonstration, even other women criticize her for wasting time: "Some women stayed calmly at home, washing, ironing.... And they laughed when they heard that we were going to have that demonstration. 'You won't get anything,' they said. And they even said that we were good-for-nothings wasting our time

⁴² "De acuerdo con las normas sociales prevalentes, su asociación a ambas esferas—la doméstica y la política—parecen excluirse mutuamente. Pero ella, como ente marginal, se encuentra al borde de estos dos espacios, situación que demanda en todo momento una definición de sí misma y de la sociedad que le niega tal ubicuidad. Ella resuelve su dilema al considerar a su familia y a su pueblo como polos de una misma realidad y que su contribución al triunfo de la revolución obrera aportará necesariamente un bienestar directo a la situación económica de su hogar."

that way and that they had responsibilities at home” (176).⁴³ Ironically, however, in attempting to keep women at home with their rigorous domestic demands, the state also often directly and indirectly forces women *out* of their homes. If a miner falls sick or retires, for example, the state takes away his home, leaving him and his family on the street. The state will also evict miners and their families (without notice) as a form of punishment. Finally, the state, because of the astonishing low wages it pays miners, forces women out of the home to sell baked goods on the street in order to make ends meet. The community accepts this type of employment for women, which Barrios herself does, since it remains in the domain of domesticity (cooking) and helps supplement the family income, directly providing for the husband and children.⁴⁴ Children, too, are often forced to sell goods on the street, keeping them from education and thus perpetuating systemic ignorance and oppression. Leaving the home helps to blur the boundaries between the private, feminine sphere and the public, masculine sphere. Stephenson suggests that the state, by pushing women out of their homes, actually facilitates activism:

Bodies moved fluidly between the interior and exterior of the house, in excess of its physical confines, continually transgressing the threshold between the inside and outside, the private and the public, the domestic and the political. As a result, due in large part to the precarious conditions in which they lived, the miners and housewives were always already (improperly) outside the social contract. (91)

Being physically and socially out-of-bounds yields mobility and organizing, which in turn leads to greater resistance against the government. For example, when standing in the long food lines,

⁴³ “[A]lgunas mujeres se quedaron tranquilas en sus casas lavando, planchando... y se rieron de la noticia de que íbamos a hacer esa manifestación. —No van a conseguir nada—dijeron. E incluso hablaron que nosotras éramos ociosas para perder nuestro tiempo así y que ellas tenían obligaciones que atender en sus hogares” (Viezzler 194).

⁴⁴ While selling baked goods is acceptable, Barrios’ community ostracizes women who work sorting rocks at the rock pile both because it is physically next to the mines (masculine space) and because mining work is traditionally men’s work. The women workers themselves are reluctant, but desperate enough, to work there.

Barrios and other women complain together and educate one another about their situation. Also, when miners and their families are forced to leave their homes, they often develop greater anger against their government and become more likely to join the resistance movement. The same is true when the state disregards privacy boundaries and assaults miners and their families within the home. As Sternbach notes, “the traditional spaces occupied by women are no longer immune from attacks, break-ins and violations” (“Re-membering” 96). Indeed, Barrios describes several incidents when state officials ransack homes to punish community members and/or look for incriminating evidence. Despite—and even because of—state control over the home, women become more politically aware and active.⁴⁵

Throwing her sexual propriety and spousal fidelity into question and showing the conflict between the individual and the collective, Barrios’ political activism and outspokenness often create stress in her marriage. Barrios’ husband, reflecting the typical views of his community concerning women, attacks Barrios’ womanhood when she initially begins her political involvement. After Barrios is assigned to guard duty, her husband conveys his disapproval by scoffing at her: “What?... This lesbian bitch!... Why she can barely take care of her kids!”⁴⁶ Barrios’ husband attacks her female self in two ways here. First he insults her sexuality by calling her a lesbian bitch, and then he ridicules her motherliness. He implies that she cannot possibly be capable of participating in politics (something that benefits and affects the entire community) since she (presumably) cannot even take care of her own immediate family. Though critical of her parenting, Barrios’ husband prefers that she remain at home and dedicate herself to her domestic responsibilities. At one point, however, he asserts his masculine

⁴⁵ Jean Franco relates how the mothers and other family members of the disappeared in Argentina would meet one another during visits to government offices, state property ironically becoming spaces of resistance (“Gender” 112).

⁴⁶ “—¡Qué!... Esta maricona... ¡si apenas cuida de sus hijos!...” (Viezzler 88). I use my own translation here because the English translation of the book uses “little fool” for “maricona,” which ignores the term’s sexual implications and softens its tone.

authority and threatens to deny Barrios her place in the home if she continues her political involvement: “My compañero told me that he absolutely wouldn’t allow me to go on participating. And that if I didn’t go along with that, I could leave. Just like that, see?” (166).⁴⁷ To ease this marital tension, Barrios utilizes one of the skills that she has learned through her activism, bargaining: “And we reached an agreement: I’d leave the committee and he’d give up his pastimes. But since he had to go out drinking with the boys, and go to the movies, the agreement didn’t last. And so during the next few days, without telling him anything, I went to a committee meeting” (166).⁴⁸ Through negotiation, Barrios outwits her husband and is able to continue her activism. As she becomes more politically active, Barrios becomes more confident, assertive, and politically savvy; she transfers her political skills to her personal life to assuage marital strife while remaining a leader for her people.

It is not so easy to bargain with the state. Like Barrios’ husband, the government knows that Barrios values and prides herself on her domestic role, so it purposely and continually creates problems in her marriage and paints her as a horrible wife and mother in order to suppress her activism. In one instance, a state mining official calls in Barrios’ husband to inform him that because of his wife’s political activities, the state is punishing *him*:

Look. It’s your wife’s fault we’re firing you from the company, because you’re a sissy. You know who’s wearing the pants in your family. Now you’ll learn to control your wife. First of all, your wife’s been in jail and instead of shutting up she’s worse than ever now: she’s still making trouble and she’s still getting everyone all riled up. That’s why we’re firing you. Not because of you, but

⁴⁷ “[M]i compañero me dijo terminantemente que no iba a permitir que yo siga participando. Y que, si no estaba de acuerdo, que me fuera. Así, ¿no?” (Viezza 183).

⁴⁸ “Y llegamos a un acuerdo: yo dejaba el Comité y él dejaba sus diversiones. Pero, como él tenía necesidad de salir con los compañeros a servirse una copa e ir al cine, el trato no duró. Y entonces, sin decirle nada, los días siguientes me fui también yo a la reunión del Comité” (Viezza 183).

because of your wife. In the second place, what do you want with a political wife? Go ahead, give her up...and then I'll give you your job back. A woman like that isn't any good for anything. Imagine, tomorrow, if you work really hard, you'll build a little house—who doesn't dream about a little house?—or you can even buy one. But, since your wife's political, the day after tomorrow the government will take it away. So your house isn't yours anymore. Why should you always be messed up by a woman like that? Now that you're fired, you haven't got anyone who'll support you. Well, let's see if that woman learns her lesson. That woman's too much! She doesn't even seem like a woman. (137)⁴⁹

This diatribe emphasizes the social norms in Siglo XX and the strict separation between the masculine and feminine spheres. Barrios' entire womanhood is put into question simply because she is politically involved. "She doesn't even seem like a woman" because women and politics do not mix in Siglo XX. She is "too much" because she participates in "too much" of what women are not supposed to. Due to the assumed and accepted control of husbands over their wives, the state criticizes Barrios' husband for not exercising this control and taking charge of his family; he must have "allowed" Barrios to be political. Because of the blame put on Barrios' husband, a seemingly contradictory statement becomes perfectly logical: "It's your wife's fault we're firing you from the company, because you're a sissy." While the English version of Barrios' testimonio translates "cornudo" as "sissy," a better translation ("cuckold") would

⁴⁹ "—Mira. Te estamos retirando de la empresa por culpa de tu mujer, porque tú eres un cornudo que no sabes amarrarte los pantalones. Ahora vas a aprender a dominar a tu mujer. Primero: tu mujer ha estado presa, y en vez de estar callada, ha vuelto peor: sigue agitando, sigue metiendo cizaña entre la gente. Por eso te estamos retirando de la empresa. No es por vos, es por culpa de tu mujer. Segundo: Mira, ¿Para qué vas a necesitar tú de una mujer política? Andá, pues, botala por ahí... y yo te voy a devolver tu trabajo. Una mujer así no sirve para nada. Digamos que mañana, con el sacrificio de tu trabajo vas a conseguirte una casita —¿quién no sueña en hacerse una casita?—. Pues te compras una. Pero, como tu mujer es política, pasado mañana el gobierno la va a confiscar. Entonces, tu casita, para nadie la tienes, ni para ti. ¿Por qué eternamente vas a estar arruinado con esa mujer? Ahora que estás retirado, no tienes quien te mantenga. Pues, a ver si escarmienta esa mujer. ¡Es demasiado esa mujer! Ni parece una mujer" (Viezzler 150-151).

underscore the conflation of sexual impropriety and female activism in the eyes of the government, since a cuckold is a man whose wife is unfaithful to him. The state attacks not only Barrios' husband's masculinity by taking away his means of providing for his family (his job and his house), but also Barrios' femininity since they insult her sexual morality and since, without a home, she cannot properly care for her family. The government, preventing Barrios and her husband from fulfilling their respective feminine and masculine obligations, succeeds in creating tension in their marriage. Barrios tells her husband, however, that she will not end her activism, "And we really had it out" (137).⁵⁰ Later, when the state blacklists Barrios' husband from other jobs, he begins to drink heavily and squander the little money they have. Barrios confronts him and "well, he hit me. And he said that it was my fault he couldn't get a job, that it was my fault he was drinking like that, and that he didn't care about what I was telling him" (141).⁵¹ By physically abusing Barrios, her husband asserts his masculine control while punishing her for her "unfeminine" and instigative actions. Barrios' activism is a constant source of stress and turmoil in her marriage, and her husband continually tries to verbally and physically discipline her errant behavior.

In addition to being laughed and scoffed at, Barrios is called everything from a bitch, to an adulteress, to a harlot, to a lesbian because of her political participation. As one state official informs her, "Only prostitutes, whores, lazy women, those who don't have anything better do to, are going to participate in the demonstration" (173).⁵² Barrios' sexuality is repeatedly the prime target of the attacks against her. In the eyes of the state, women should unhesitatingly obey the state just as wives should unhesitatingly obey their husbands. Anything that disrupts these social

⁵⁰ "Y nos pusimos fuertes, los dos" (Viezzler 151).

⁵¹ "más bien me pegó. Y me decía que por culpa mía estaba sin trabajo, que por culpa mía estaba tomando así, y que no le importaba a él eso que yo le contaba" (Viezzler 155).

⁵² "Solamente las prostitutas, las rameras, las ociosas, aquellas que nada tienen que hacer, van a participar en la manifestación" (Viezzler 191).

relations jeopardizes the state's power and cannot be tolerated. Despite the fact that Barrios is pregnant at least eight times throughout the testimonio's time span, the state sees Barrios' activism outside the home as a threat to her obligations as a mother as well as a threat to the work of the miners (since she often helps incite strikes and protests). By attacking women activists at their very sense of female self, the state works to reinforce the stigmas against female political participation that help maintain governmental power, to impede Barrios and other female activists, to inhibit other women from becoming politically active, and to discourage male acceptance of female political involvement.

The attacks on Barrios' sexual morality are some of the most hurtful to her since they imply that she is an unfaithful wife. Those who oppose Barrios assume that a politically aberrant woman is also a morally aberrant woman. Barrios laments the power of this type of logic: "For example, [the machistas] said we were the union leaders' mistresses, that we'd gone to the union in order to get involved in a love affair. So, many compañeros don't allow their wives to participate in the demonstrations or in the committee or anything, because they're afraid and they especially don't want their wives going over to union headquarters" (78).⁵³ The machistas, knowing the detrimental effects a stigma of infidelity has on women, use it as a deterrent against their political activism. The machistas' fear lies not only in their wives' potential unfaithfulness, but also in losing their authority and control in the political realm. Barrios describes another moment when a state official arrests her and, seeing her pregnant, insults her sexual integrity: "And since he saw I was expecting, he asked me if I didn't know what women were good for. And why did we get mixed up in things, since women were made only to give men pleasure.

⁵³ "Por ejemplo, a nosotras nos decían [los machistas] que éramos amantes de los dirigentes, que por hallarnos una aventura amorosa habíamos ido al Sindicato. Entonces, por temor a todo eso, muchos compañeros no dejan que sus mujeres participen ni en las manifestaciones, ni en el Comité ni en nada, mucho menos quieren ellos que estén yendo sus esposas al Sindicato" (Viezzler 83-84).

And he insulted me, no? And he even said that surely my husband had never satisfied me, and that's why I wanted something bigger, something more" (143).⁵⁴ The state official intimates, again, the substitution of politics for sex. Women, he assumes, must have some void to fill if they become involved with politics—and that void must be sexual. The official also blames Barrios' husband in part for this void for not satisfying his wife; he puts Barrios' husband's sexuality just as much in question as Barrios'. After verbally assaulting her, the official physically beats her, wanting both to punish her for not knowing her proper feminine role and to put her back in her own feminine space. Another time, when Barrios' husband goes to La Paz, the capital, to look for her, state officials ask him, "Well, who's your wife? She's that communist? Ha! She must have left with all the money. Yes, she must have gone off with her lover, that wife of yours. And you're stuck with the kids, with no money. That's how the communist bitches are...immoral...and who knows what else" (154).⁵⁵ The state officials insinuate that political activism naturally leads women to other "lewd" and "offensive" behaviors. Also, by suggesting that Barrios' husband must now assume domestic duties, the officials feminize him, attacking both his and Barrios' sexualities.

That the tension between Barrios' personal life and political life pivots around her gender and sexuality points to the larger ideological framework in Latin America under which women fall into one of two categories: Madonna or whore. If a woman does not live up to the ideals of the Holy Mother (sexually pure, docile, domestic, passive, pious, modest, submissive), then she is banished to the less admirable side of the dichotomy and branded sexually impure. From

⁵⁴ "Y como vio que yo estaba esperando familia, me preguntaba si no sabía para qué servían las mujeres. Y para qué nos metíamos a macanas, si la mujer estaba hecha solamente para dar placer al hombre. Y me insultaba, ¿no? Y llegó a decirme que seguramente mi esposo nunca me había satisfecho y por eso yo quería algo más grande, algo más" (Viezzler 157).

⁵⁵ "¿Quién es, pues, su mujer?... ¿esa comunista es?... ¡Ah!... Y seguro que se ha ido con toda la plata... Sí, seguro se ha ido con su amante, tu mujer. Y tú te has quedado con las wawas, sin plata. Si así son las comunistas... son unas inmorales... y esto y el otro" (Viezzler 169).

there, it is a quick jump to a host of other scandalous and dangerous behaviors. Because political activism for women does not fit within the marianistic code of Latin American cultures, Barrios and other women activists are scorned and punished for being socially and sexually out-of-bounds.

It might seem that political women could escape the Madonna/whore dichotomy since their actions do not take place in the private sphere of intimate life. But to the contrary, as [Inger] Agger has shown, male-dominated societies control women's public acts by isolating women as much as possible within the domestic sphere and by controlling women's bodies in both private and public arenas. [...] Transgressive women are inevitably condemned as "whores"; women who do not respect imposed social and physical boundaries are seen as having an almost mythic impurity. Agger notes that the "whore" becomes an even greater threat as someone who can defile the entire society. (Treacy 136)

Political women in Bolivia are deemed dangerous because they threaten both the political control that the state holds over its citizens and the socio-sexual relations through which this political control is reproduced. They are seen as improper and immoral women who have an excess of desire, which is sublimated into politics. Their inappropriate sexual desire cannot be satisfied, so they turn to political activism. Barrios' refusal to be a "proper" woman/wife/mother perpetuates the tension between her individual life and the collective cause, despite her attempts to resist or negate this tension and seek binary fluidity. Her testimonio, then, is as much a celebration of dual individual and collective representation (both narratively and socio-politically) as a reminder of its inherent tensions and complications.

III. The Collective over the Individual

By incorporating domestic responsibilities into her political project, Barrios believes that she can maintain a balance between her individual life and the collective fight for which she is a leader. While she continually strives to carry out her obligations to both her individual family and her collective cause, however, the tension between the two spheres remains a constant in her life: “Domitila is always caught [...] between the pressures of her commitment to the interests of the class as a whole and the needs and demands of the family unit of which she is a part” (Chinchilla 90). At several points throughout Barrios’ life, the tension between the individual and the collective comes to a head and the primacy of the collective prevails—both because Barrios herself chooses her leadership responsibilities over her maternal duties and because the state punishes Barrios and her family for her political activism. According to Muñoz, Barrios recognizes that by sometimes abandoning her maternal responsibilities, she helps the greater good of her people and their struggle: “Upon reaching her political maturity she realizes the terrible responsibility that befalls her as a leader, since the greatest achievements correspond to the greatest sacrifices” (72).⁵⁶ The powerfully poignant moments when Barrios chooses her political principles over her family signal the immense and heartbreaking difficulty of waging collective fights on very personal levels. They also reflect Barrios’ dedication to her cause and her ability to understand that suffering today will lead to a better tomorrow. “Her sense of obligation is so strong that in the most crucial moments she does not waver in sacrificing the security of her own family to achieve the well-being of her people” (Muñoz 72).⁵⁷ In Barrios’ eyes, because she is a leader, she must give the most—even if this means putting her family in

⁵⁶ “[A]l llegar a su madurez política se da cuenta de la terrible responsabilidad que le toca como dirigente, puesto que a mayores logros corresponden mayores sacrificios.”

⁵⁷ “Su sentido de obligación es tan fuerte que en los momentos más cruciales no titubea en sacrificar la seguridad de su propia familia para lograr el bienestar del pueblo.”

harm's way. Several different incidents reveal how Barrios' commitment to activism takes precedence over her husband, her children, and even her unborn babies. These painful situations, though reflecting and strengthening Barrios' dedication to her cause, often carry deep emotional consequences and even cause her to question her political involvement.

As Barrios becomes more engaged in her people's struggle, her responsibilities as a leader become greater—as do her sacrifices and their consequences. In the two most moving moments of her testimonio, state officials arrest Barrios and throw her in prison. These prison scenes are crucial not only to Barrios' tenure as an activist leader (they test her political commitment to the very core), but also to the narrative structure of the testimonio (they serve as the axle around which the testimonio turns): “For Barrios de Chungara, prison experience was the turning point in her life history and it divides her narrative in half” (Harlow, “From” 520). The prison scenes also represent an intense and concentrated microcosm of the battle waging between the Bolivian people and their government. As “Michel Foucault (1979) points out, prison is always a site of battle for political control and this seems particularly so for Latin American jails of the 1970s and 1980s where authorities and prisoners engaged in struggles to get or to hide information, no matter how relevant” (Treacy 132). In prison, Barrios comes face-to-face with her enemy and must even fight physically on her own against this enemy. The more governmental agents pressure Barrios to give up information or promise to end her activism, the more she must dig deep inside and ask herself how much she is willing to sacrifice for the sake of her cause.

In the first prison incident, state officials (working with the CIA) tell Barrios that they have her children and will kill them if she does not sign some governmental piece of paper that ostensibly will protect her children, but which Barrios suspects will be used against her and her

people. Believing that these officials do in fact have her children since they describe each of them perfectly, Barrios must choose between her family and her cause. She is torn, agonizing over the thought of her children suffering:

I felt very upset about what they were doing to my children. It was the first time in my life that I had to go through that, and I was horrified to think that they were in prison and sick in a damp cellar, without food and without anything to cover themselves with in the cold. The agent had told me they were crying, shouting: “Daddy! Mommy!” When I thought about that, my heart ached. I was all broken up and went on crying. (125)⁵⁸

The state plays with Barrios’ deepest maternal instincts. Officials intentionally tell her how horribly her children are being treated in order to make her feel even more desperate and ashamed for not protecting her offspring. While she contemplates her decision, another activist in prison reminds Barrios of her duty as a leader: “You shouldn’t think only as a mother, you’ve got to think as a leader, which is the most important thing at this moment. You aren’t only responsible to your children, you’re responsible to a cause and it’s the cause of your comrades, of your people. You’ve got to think about that” (125).⁵⁹ This activist recalls the faith, confidence, and trust her people have placed in Barrios to do everything in her power to protect and fight for them. She also probably also helps to assuage some of the guilt that Barrios feels over having to choose between her people and her family. Nonetheless, Barrios cries and struggles over her dilemma all day. She must choose between being Madonna (the mother who

⁵⁸ “Yo me sentía desesperada por la situación de mis hijos. Era la primera vez en mi vida que pasaba por esto, y me horrorizaba al pensar que estaban presos y enfermos y en un subterráneo húmedo, sin tener con qué alimentarse y sin tener con qué cubrirse del frío. Me había dicho el agente que lloraban, gritando: ‘¡Papá! ¡Mamá!’ Al pensar en todo ese problema, me dolía el corazón, ¿no? Entonces yo estaba deshecha y seguía llorando” (Viezzler 136-137).

⁵⁹ “Usted no debe pensar solamente como madre, usted tiene que pensar como dirigente, que es lo más importante en este momento. Usted no se debe solamente a sus hijos, usted se debe a una causa y esta causa es la causa de sus compañeros, de su pueblo. En eso tiene que pensar” (Viezzler 137).

puts her children above all else) or La Malinche (the woman who betrays her people). La Malinche was an indigenous woman who served as Hernán Cortés' translator and advisor and who became his mistress during the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Today, she is seen as a cultural symbol of someone who betrays her own people. The conflation of political and sexual transgressions can also be found in this legendary figure, since La Malinche both aided and bore the son of the brash conquistador who devastated Mexico.

When the officials return, Barrios painstakingly weighs her options and makes a decision: "And so, if they kill my children now, they've got to pay for it with their conscience. Because if I sign a blank sheet of paper... how many innocent people will I be putting on the line! I'd better not sign" (127).⁶⁰ Barrios ultimately decides that she would rather have the deaths of her children on the state's conscience than the deaths of her people on her own. The other activist in prison comforts Barrios by lavishing praise on her for her bravery and dedication. State officials react differently. Showing their astonishment and anger at Barrios' decision, they again attack her maternal self:

"Ay!" shouted one of them. "I told you, I told you. That's what these heretics are like, that's what these communists are like..." She said to me: "Look, all animals, lions, even wild beasts defend their young with their lives... Listen you savage!" And they grabbed me, pulled at me, and pinched me. "What kind of mother are you that you won't defend against your own children? Ay! How horrible, how terrible, what a disgusting woman!" (128).⁶¹

⁶⁰ "Y bueno, si ellos ahora matan a mis hijos, ellos tienen que pagar con su conciencia. Porque, si yo firmo un papel en blanco... ¿a cuánta gente inocente puedo comprometer? Mejor, no firmo" (Viezzler 140).

⁶¹ "—¡Ay!... —gritó una de ellas—. Te dije, te dije. Si así son esas herejes, así son esas comunistas... ¡Oiga! —me decía. ¡Mire! Las fieras, los leones, los animales feroces, con sus vidas defienden a sus cachorros.. ¡Oiga, salvaje! —Y me agarraron de aquí, me jalieron, me pellizcaron, ¿no? —. ¿Qué clase de madres es usted que no quiere defender a sus hijos? ¡Ay!... ¡Qué barbaridad, qué horror, qué asco de mujer!..." (Viezzler 140).

Ignoring the fact that they themselves placed Barrios in her excruciating situation, state officials again link political aberration (communism) with moral aberration (execrable mothering). They label Barrios not just a terrible mother, but a terrible *woman* because she does not fulfill a woman's essential responsibility: protecting her children. That one of the officials berating Barrios is a woman herself makes the tirade even further degrading and humiliating. When the state finally releases Barrios from prison and she returns to Siglo XX, she is stunned and relieved to find that the state had lied to her after all: her children are alive and well. Knowing now that she did not lose her children because of her decision in jail, Barrios celebrates: "I began crying with joy, jumping up and down and hugging them. Can you imagine that moment? It was great! It was like I'd come back to life. That moment was so beautiful that there wasn't anything but my kids and shouting and kissing them and holding them close and feeling them against me...alive!" (134).⁶² Barrios feels as if she has come back to life, as both her children and her sense of motherhood have come back to her. Her emotion is conveyed by the numerous exclamations and ellipses in the text. Including sentimental passages like this also serves as a rhetorical strategy to assure readers of Barrios' maternal love and to show that she is not the coldhearted monster that state officials paint her to be. As Treacy notes, "In response to this positioning [as unfeminine monsters], women narrators make a point of affirming their 'normal' femininity by emphasizing a desire for children or boundless love for the ones they have" (137). Passages that show Barrios' affection for her offspring counterbalance the passages that show others attacking and degrading her motherliness. Neither the trauma of her prison experience nor the relief at finding her children alive, however, stops Barrios from continuing her activism. She

⁶² "Me puse a llorar de alegría, a saltar y abrazarlos. ¿Te puedes imaginar ese momento? ¡Una cosa grande!... Era como si hubiese resucitado... Era una cosa tan hermosa aquel momento, que no existía más que mis hijos y gritar y besarlos y apretarlos y sentirlos junto a mí... ¡vivos!" (Viezzler 147).

dives right back into her work after embracing her children and stays up all night talking and planning with her fellow *compañeros*.

In the second prison incident, the state wields its own power to force the collective over the individual, in effect causing Barrios to sacrifice her unborn child because of her political involvement. Knowing that she is eight months pregnant, state officials violently beat Barrios to punish her for her outspokenness and for not providing the political information that they are seeking. Stephenson argues that the state feels justified in its brutal physical abuse since Barrios is acting out of traditional feminine bounds:

Barrios de Chungara underscores the paradoxical way in which the state interpellated the women as housewives and mothers within the dominant social contract. The prevailing ideology of womanhood constituted a political and cultural standard according to which, if the women did not “measure up,” the state, via its military or police, could “legitimately” enact violence against them.
(103)

Ironically, while state officials punish Barrios for her “improper” feminine behavior, they assault her with a brutality normally reserved for male prisoners, thereby underscoring Barrios’ political power. The tension between the individual and the collective is manifested in a very physical way here, but is still situated at Barrios’ female self: “The physical brutality [Barrios] undergoes while she is in jail is marked specifically by her gender” (Marín 58). One official interrogates Barrios, asking her why she got mixed up in politics, being a woman, and begins to hit her. When the hitting turns more violent and the official viciously beats Barrios (knocking out her teeth and causing her to lose consciousness several times), he makes sure to focus part of his assault on her stomach and the baby inside: “At one point, he put his knee here, on my stomach.

He pressed on my throat and was about to strangle me. I shouted and shouted.... It was like he wanted to make my stomach burst open” (Barrios 145).⁶³ While the state often *verbally* attacks Barrios’ womanhood, here it *physically* attacks it as well. To prove that it is disciplining her as much for violating behavioral codes for women as for being politically active, the state concentrates its assault on Barrios on her most gendered physical marker: her womb.

The state’s desire to punish Barrios through hurting her baby surfaces again when a colonel comes in: “‘Luckily you’re expecting a baby. We’ll take our revenge on your baby.’ And he took out a knife and began to sharpen it in front of me. And he said that he had time enough to wait until my child was born and that with that knife he was going to make mincemeat out of my baby” (Barrios 147).⁶⁴ The state, as in the first prison incident, sees Barrios’ maternal self as a weakness and tries to use it as leverage to gain political information and insight. Instead of providing political information, however, Barrios only defends herself and pleads for mercy. Moments after the colonel leaves, Barrios goes into labor and faints. When she wakes up, her baby, because of the trauma inflicted on her and her stomach, is dead—lying cold on the ground. She wraps the baby in her arm and tries to give it warmth, a difficult task due to the wetness of labor all around her. “Its little head was like a bag of bones that sounded ‘poc, poc, poc.’ I touched its whole body and found out it was a little boy” (Barrios 149).⁶⁵ Even years later, when Barrios remembers the incident, her heartache and bitterness are evident: “It’s very painful to lose a child that way. How I’ve suffered because of that baby I lost! How I’ve wept, looking for him! My poor little baby who was the victim of those insane people who were against me”

⁶³ “En un dado momento, me puso su rodilla aquí sobre mi vientre. Me apretó mi cuello y estaba por ahorcarme. Yo gritaba, gritaba... Parecía que quería hacer reventar mi vientre” (Viezzler 159).

⁶⁴ “[...] Felizmente, aquí mismo estás esperando familia. Y en tu hijo nos vamos a vengar. Y sacó un cuchillo y lo comenzó a afilar delante de mí... Y me decía que tenía bastante tiempo para esperar a que naciera mi hijo y que, con aquel cuchillo, le iba a hacer picadillo a mi hijo” (Viezzler 162).

⁶⁵ “Su cabeza era como un costalito de huesos que sonaba: ‘poc, poc, poc’” (Viezzler 164).

(149).⁶⁶ Further insulting Barrios' womanhood, and disregarding any respect for her feminine privacy, a sergeant comes in to examine Barrios and exposes her to the colonel and several other soldiers. While trying to pull out her placenta, he scolds Barrios for being political, blaming her for the situation she is in: "What are you up to, girl? Being a woman, being pregnant, why didn't you just keep quiet?" (Barrios 150).⁶⁷ Even at this moment of horrific pain, heartache, and humiliation, Barrios is reminded again that women should just stay home. Her humiliation and lack of feminine privacy continue when state officials take her to a hospital and a gynecologist inspects her in front of several laughing army guards. This act serves as another kind of violation or rape. The state continually crosses private boundaries and relentlessly assails Barrios' femininity and sexuality—even at her points of greatest emotional and physical weakness. As Jara argues about *testimonio*, "The borders between the public and the private disappear-- against one of the central markers of bourgeois society that institutionalizes their separation --but, ironically, it is humiliation that erases the borders" (3).⁶⁸ The state, the very institution that patrols and maintains the borders between the public and the private, transgresses these borders here—and drags Barrios across them, too. In so doing, the state proves that Barrios' individual self and family must pay for her work in the collective fight. The individual must acquiesce to the collective. The gender-specific torture that state officials perpetrate against Barrios reflects a long history of sexualized violence against women prisoners in Latin America (and throughout the world). From stripping and beating, to rape, to electric shocks to the vagina and breast, to forced miscarriage, the state has repeatedly denied and denigrated these

⁶⁶ "Es muy doloroso perder un hijo así. ¡Cuánto he sufrido por ese niño que he perdido!... ¡Cuánto he llorado, buscándolo!... ¡Pobre mi criatura que ha tenido que pagar la furia de esa gente tan enfurecida en contra de mí!" (Viezzler 164).

⁶⁷ "¿A qué te atienes, hija? Vos, siendo mujer, estando embarazada, ¿por qué no te callas?" (Viezzler 165).

⁶⁸ "Los límites entre lo público y lo privado desaparecen-- a contrapelo de uno de los marcadores centrales de la sociedad burguesa que institucionaliza su separación --pero, irónicamente, es la vejación que borra las fronteras."

women's condition as mothers. "[T]he military strips women of their most, perhaps their only, valued social role and reduces them to the condition of what has been socially inscribed as monstrous: daughters who endanger parents, mothers who abandon their young, pregnant women who expel their fetuses" (Treacy 137).⁶⁹ The state reduces these female prisoners to "monstrous women," even though—paradoxically—that is precisely what it is accusing them of being.

After losing her baby in prison, Barrios' father and husband take her to an isolated peasant village called Los Yungas where she lives for a year and a half, her body healing and her mind racing with doubts: "I was sorry I'd ever gotten involved in the committee. Why had I spoken out? Why had I denounced injustice? Why had I gotten involved? I'd ask myself all that. I felt like this was the last straw, I was sorry for what I'd done. And at times I wished I had a stick of dynamite so I could blow myself up with my children and end it all. It was so painful!" (Barrios 158).⁷⁰ Her father continues encouraging her, however, and brings her books on Marxism that re-inspire her to keep fighting for social justice and equality. She realizes that "with everything I'd suffered in the arrests, in jail, and in Los Yungas, I'd acquired a political consciousness" (160).⁷¹ Rededicated to the cause, Barrios returns to Siglo XX and continues her activism. Though her commitment is renewed, Barrios still struggles with the tension between her family and her politics, yet always puts the latter first when faced with a choice. For example, though Barrios is warned by the Bolivian government to hold back her tongue at the International Women's Year Tribunal in Mexico City, once there, she does not hesitate to speak her mind and denounce the daily atrocities that her community suffers. As Barrios is preparing

⁶⁹ Another time when Barrios is pregnant during a miners' strike, an army commander hears of her and says, "Go get her. Bring her here to me, and we'll kick that brat out of her" (Barrios 217). ("Vayan a agarrarla, Traiganmela aquí, que a patadas la vamos a hacer parir" [Viezzler 242]).

⁷⁰ "Me arrepentía de haberme metido en todo lo del Comité. ¿Para qué he hablado? ¿Para qué he denunciado? ¿Para qué me he metido? —me preguntaba yo a mí misma. Y me desesperaba, me arrepentía. Y a veces añoraba tener un cartucho de dinamita para hacerme volar con mis hijos y acabar con todo. ¡Era tan doloroso!" (Viezzler 174).

⁷¹ "con la experiencia que he tenido en Los Yungas, revisando todo lo que había sufrido en la cárcel, de todas esas cosas me había dado cuenta. Había adquirido conciencia política" (Viezzler 179).

to board the plane for Mexico, a young woman from the Ministry of the Interior approaches her to offer her congratulations—as well as threaten her and her children:

“Ay, but señora, your return to the country depends a lot on what you say there. So it’s not a question of talking about any old thing...you’ve got to think it out well. Above all, you’ve got to think of your children who you’re leaving behind. I’m giving you good advice. Have a good time.”

I thought about my responsibility as a mother and as a leader and so my role in Mexico seemed very difficult to me, thinking of what that young lady had said to me. I felt I was between the devil and the deep blue sea, as we say. But I was determined to carry out the mission the compañeros and compañeras had entrusted me with. (196)⁷²

And later, though she is nine months pregnant with twins, Barrios participates in a huge miners’ strike right alongside everyone else. Instead of resting at home and getting ready to give birth, Barrios stays inside the mine, breathing in the horrible stench there, to help organize a strike committee. Though she does not link it to her strenuous pre-labor activities, Barrios later gives birth to only one healthy baby—the other twin has already died inside of her. While Barrios’ unique, non-Western brand of feminism optimistically balances political and domestic duties, the feminine sacrifice that Barrios makes and is continually *forced* to make throws off this balance, pushing her to put the collective cause before herself and her individual family unit. Barrios’

⁷² “—Ay, pero señora, depende mucho de lo que usted hable allá para que pueda regresar al país. Entonces, no se trata de hablar de cualquier cosa. hay que pensarlo bien. Más que todo, tiene usted que pensar en sus hijos que están dejando aquí. Le estoy dando un consejo... Que le vaya bien. Yo pensaba en mi responsabilidad de madre y de dirigente y entonces mi papel en México me parecía bastante difícil, al recordar lo que me había dicho aquella señorita. Yo me sentía entre la cruz y la espada, como decimos vulgarmente. Pero yo estaba decidida de llevar a cabo la misión que me habían confiado los compañeros y compañeras” (Viezzler 218).

testimonio—through both the narrative organization and the details of her life—reflects this primacy of the collective over the individual.

IV. Conclusion

Barrios struggles to ameliorate the atrocious way of life that Bolivian tin miners and their families are forced to endure because of their government. She dreams of emancipation from violence, poverty, and exploitation so that her people may one day live with dignity, respect, and humanity. Showing her humility, Barrios explains that she hopes her “small” contribution will help her people achieve a better future: “I want to testify about all the experience we’ve acquired during so many years of struggle in Bolivia, and contribute a little grain of sand, with the hope that our experience may serve in some way for the new generation, for the new people” (15).⁷³ The power of Barrios’ “little grain of sand” lies in its ability to continue aiding, educating, and inspiring future generations. As Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey suggest, part of a testimonio’s value lies in its latent social impact: “One of the aspects of testimony’s continued appeal may be precisely that its ethical and political implications cannot be witnessed until after it has been spoken, and has assumed a force and indeed a life of its own” (5). Barrios’ testimonio has assumed a force and a life of its own by achieving international recognition and by helping to establish a platform for Bolivians (especially women) to voice their opinions and fight for social change. Barrios’ testimonio, however, also raises the question of how much she has inspired other women through her activism and how much she has inhibited others through the defamation of her womanhood. Women see that because of her political involvement, Barrios’ femininity and sexuality are often assaulted and sometimes even sacrificed. They see that even

⁷³ “Quiero hablar de mi pueblo. Quiero dejar testimonio de toda la experiencia que hemos adquirido a través de tantos años de lucha en Bolivia, y aportar un granito de arena con la esperanza de que nuestra experiencia sirva de alguna manera para la generación nueva, para la gente nueva” (Viezzler 13).

though Barrios promotes a political project that unites women and men—domestic work and political work—machismo is still prevalent and state-sponsored violence is specifically targeted at her maternal and sexual self. Among many other things, “*Si me permiten hablar...*” asks an international audience to understand the hesitance of “Third World” women to join in fights for social justice. Testimonios, celebrated for bringing out the voices of Latin American women, reveal that it is their very condition as women that is under attack. Platforms for Latin American women to express themselves, while having countless positive effects, unfortunately often force women like Barrios to sacrifice the individual for the collective and, as a consequence, to suffer denigration of their female self.

Chapter 2

From the Literary to the Cinematic in Brazil: Towards *Que bom te ver viva* as Testimonio

The most recent military regime in Brazil was one of the longest of all the neo-fascist dictatorships that dominated Latin America in the twentieth century, lasting from April 1964 to March 1985. Just before and immediately after the return to democracy in 1985, a spate of cultural production dealing with the dictatorship rippled through Brazil—productivity and creation following in the wake of death and destruction. With the urgency of fighting against the military dictatorship now gone, writers and other artists turned to the next crucial project: not forgetting the atrocities that occurred under the military regime. Inspired perhaps by the wave of both fictional⁷⁴ and non-fictional works that were being produced, Lúcia Murat's highly acclaimed⁷⁵ film *Que bom te ver viva* (*How Nice to See You Alive*) (1989) blends documentary and fiction. Murat, who wrote and directed the film, was a prisoner and torture victim during Brazil's repressive regime. Like other testimonios produced about the dictatorship, her film reflects the urgency of remembering and documenting—instead of fighting and revolutionizing. As David William Foster explains, “Produced only a few years after the transition from military dictatorship to constitutional democracy—and in a climate that included specific guarantees for women (such as the famous women-only police precincts)—Murat's film underscores, if only by

⁷⁴ Examples of novels dealing with the dictatorship include Ignácio de Brandão's *Zero* (1975) and *Não verás país nenhum* (1981), Ivan Angelo's *A festa* (1976), Renato Tapajós' *Em câmara lenta* (1977), Roberto Drummond's *Sangue de Coca-Cola* (1980), Antônio Callado's *Sempre viva* (1981), Luiz Cardoso's *Meu pai, acabaram com ele* (1986) and *Diário de Berê* (1988), Janer Cristaldo's *Ponche verde* (1986), Maria Adelaide Amaral's *Lúcia: Quase uma história de amor* (1986), Álvaro Alves de Faria's *Autópsia* (1986), Ramiro Batista's *O camaleão no abismo* (1986), Heloneida Studart's *O torturador em romaria* (1986)—which, together with *O pardal é um pássaro azul* (1975) and *O estandarte da agonia* (1981), form her “Trilogia da tortura”—, J.M. Leitão's *O hóspede do tempo* (1987), Luiz Berto's *Nunca houve guerrilha em Palmares* (1987), Tailor Diniz Netto's *Armadilha do destino* (1988), Juarez Bahia's *Ensina-me a ler: Conspirando contra o amor* (1989), João Batista de Andrade's *Perdido no meio da rua* (1989), and Luiz Glauco's *Os cogumelos vermelhos do outono* (1989).

⁷⁵ See Aramis Millarch's “Quem [sic] bom que o documentário de Lúcia esteja em exibição.”

implication—the ability to speak out that [was] restored by the return to democracy” (103). *Que bom te ver viva* especially emphasizes the importance of women’s testimony in the process of creating a collective national memory of the Brazilian dictatorship. Featuring interviews with eight former female activists (all torture survivors) during the military regime⁷⁶ and narrated by a well-known Brazilian actress (Irene Ravache) who portrays a fictitious survivor herself, the film reflects a strong sense of collectivity. Not only was it part of the collective freshet of works being produced to fight against the historical amnesia that was gripping Brazil during redemocratization, but the film itself is a collective effort between the former activists and the narrator, who also functions as a type of interlocutor, guiding the film, adding other important information, and liaising the film’s subjects (the former activists) and the audience. The survivors, as well as the narrator—like Domitila Barrios de Chungara—, highlight in particular the tension between politics, activism, motherhood, marriage, and sexuality, revealing how difficult it is for victims of (sexualized) abuse to carry out the roles of wife, mother, and lover. *Que bom te ver viva* tries to understand silence and why it exists, it tries to give a voice to and humanize the survivors, and it tries to explain and challenge the common stereotypes related to survivors. Above all, it tries to show the importance and necessity of both remembering and understanding the past in order to better survive the present and the future.

I. Why *Que bom te ver viva*?

There are numerous examples of testimonios written by *male* activists that were published during the military regime in Brazil: Augusto Boal’s *Milagre no Brasil* (1976); Frei Betto’s *Das catacumbas: Cartas da prisão, 1969-1971* (1978); Fernando Gabeira’s *O que è isso, companheiro* (1979), *O crepúsculo do macho* (1980), and *Entradas e bandeiras* (1981); Alex

⁷⁶ One survivor, who wished to remain anonymous, submitted a written testimonio, which is read in the film.

Polari de Alverga's *Inventário de cicatrizes* (1979) and *Em busca do tesouro* (1982); Alfredo Sirkis' *Os carbonários: Memórias da guerrilha perdida* (1980) and *Roleta chilena* (1981); Alípio de Freitas' *Resistir é preciso: Memória do tempo da morte civil do Brasil* (1981); Alvaro Caldas' *Tirando o capuz* (1981); and Herbert Daniel's *Passagem para o próximo sonho: Um possível romance autocrítico* (1982). Most of these works were published during the *abertura* (opening) period (1974-1985)—when censorship laws slowly loosened—and especially after exiled militants were allowed to return to their homeland. As Ken Serbin confirms, “After the relaxation of press censorship, the amnesty of 1979, and the return of exiles, the Brazilian left produced a plethora of testimonial writings on their experiences in the resistance” (189). Women, however, were a small part of this “plethora of testimonial writings.” Unlike in many other Latin American countries, finding testimonios written by women either during or just after the military dictatorship is very difficult in Brazil—but there are a few. For example, a book comprised of several micro-testimonios of exiled Brazilian women called *Memórias das mulheres do exílio* (*Memoirs of Women in Exile*) was published in Rio de Janeiro in 1980.⁷⁷ And Zuzu Angel's writings about the disappearance of her son and her fight against the government, *Eu, Zuzu Angel, procuro meu filho* (*I, Zuzu Angel, am Looking for My Son*), were compiled by Virginia Valli and published in 1986 (10 years after Zuzu Angel's death). But only in 2000 did Lina Penna Sattamini publish *Esquecer? Nunca mais: A saga de meu filho Marcos P.S. de Arruda* (published in English as *A Mother's Cry: A Memoir of Politics, Prison, and Torture under the Brazilian Military Dictatorship*) about her efforts to free her militant son from prison. And only in 2003 did Martha Vianna produce *Uma tempestade como a sua memória: A história*

⁷⁷ An earlier volume, *Memórias do exílio: Brasil 1964-19??* (*Memoirs of Exile: Brazil 1964-19??*) was published in Lisbon (1976) and São Paulo (1978). It consists of several short testimonios of union leaders, political activists, academics, artists, members of the military, and students who were all affected by the mass exiles after the military coup of 1964. Though it includes a few entries by women, it is comprised mainly of the testimonios of men.

de Lia (*A Storm Like Her Memory: Lia's Story*) about the militancy of Maria do Carmo Brito during *os anos de chumbo* (the years of lead); this book reflects the common twentieth-century testimonio format: edited and arranged by an interlocutor (Vianna) who had interviewed the activist (Brito).⁷⁸ Brazil's most well-known testimonio (also the most successful book in Brazilian publishing history⁷⁹), Carolina Maria de Jesus' diary *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada* (published in English as *Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*) (1960), was written and published before the military dictatorship began.

Because of its release (by a woman) only four years after the military dictatorship ended and because of Brazil's rich cinematic tradition of social critique, *Que bom te ver viva* is a well-suited Brazilian testimonio example to analyze. Murat's film can be seen as an extension of the Cinema Novo (New Cinema) movement, which flourished in Brazil from the late 1950s to the early 1970s and which "came to dominate the Brazilian film industry in the period of military dictatorship" (Schiff 469). Cinema Novo focused not on Hollywood themes and forms, but rather on portraying local folklore, music, and imagery and exposing the harsh realities of Brazilian society: the poor, the hungry, the disenfranchised, the victimized, the oppressed.⁸⁰ This filmic movement, then, resisted both cinematic hegemony and political hegemony. Brazilian film scholar Randal Johnson elaborates:

⁷⁸ Maria do Carmo Brito is also one of the featured survivors in Murat's film and one of the contributors of *Memórias das mulheres do exílio*.

⁷⁹ "Never had a book such an impact on Brazil. In three days the first printing of 10,000 copies was sold out in São Paulo alone. In less than six months 90,000 copies were sold in Brazil and today it is still on the best-seller list, having sold more than any other Brazilian book in history" (St. Clair XIII). It has been translated into 14 languages and has sold over a million copies worldwide (in at least 40 countries).

⁸⁰ Cinema Novo can also be seen as part of the more general New Latin American Cinema movement that swept through Latin America during this time. As Michael Martin explains, "Arising in Argentina, Brazil and Cuba in the late 1950s and 1960s, in response to the deepening underdevelopment and economic and cultural dependency of the continent, the movement has inscribed itself in Latin Americans' struggles for national and continental autonomy" (16).

Cinema Novo represented not only a new start for Brazilian cinema but also a new definition of the social role of the cinema, no longer conceived as a mere form of entertainment but rather as a mode of artistic and cultural intervention in the country's sociohistorical conjuncture. As such, it became an important site of resistance against the military regime imposed on the country in 1964. ("The Rise" 363)

Directors like Glauber Rocha, Carlos Diegues, Ruy Guerra, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Leon Hirszman, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos made films that criticized the disappearance of political rights, the foreign takeover of corporations, and the burgeoning capitalism that left many Brazilians crippled by poverty. Employing a documentary style,⁸¹ these largely fictional films were jarring, sad, and often ugly; they were meant to unsettle their audiences.

The goals of Cinema Novo were to educate others on social injustices, raise consciousness, and effect change—the same goals as the written testimonios that were also proliferating in Latin America during this time. Cinema Novo directors also stressed and prided themselves on their representational authenticity in portraying “the people,” which producers of written testimonios did as well. And Cinema Novo films and written testimonios alike produced new artistic forms and experimented with narrative structures; their respective aesthetics, then, were revolutionary both artistically and politically. The critiques of Cinema Novo and written testimonios also run parallel. For example, the representational legitimacy of the collectivity portrayed by both Cinema Novo films and written testimonios has been widely questioned. As Johnson notes, “While on the one hand Cinema Novo tended to preserve and value the cultural expression of the lower classes, on the other it tended to empty it of its content and use its form to transmit ostensibly revolutionary messages” (“Brazilian” 101). Similarly, many critics feel

⁸¹ Some Cinema Novo films were in fact documentaries, especially those from the beginning of the movement.

that interlocutors inserted too much of their own political ideologies into the testimonios that they helped to produce. To some, these two different forms of cultural production became more about the politics of the individuals “in charge” of the productions than the collective group that they were supposedly trying to help. Indeed, both Cinema Novo films and written testimonios circulated mainly in elite, leftist circles. They were consumed in large part by middle-class, “already aware” intellectuals, not reaching the popular masses that were hoped for. Despite their weaknesses, both the films of Cinema Novo and the written testimonios of twentieth-century Latin America stressed the importance of documenting and giving a voice to the “other,” not only to fight against social, economic, and racial injustices, but also to ensure the voice of the other in national and international collective memory.

Que bom te ver viva, released more than a decade after the heyday of Cinema Novo, reflects many of its traditions: it blends documentary and fiction, it experiments with artistic forms, it portrays stigmatized social realities, it criticizes injustices, and it tries to effect change. It is also, like the films of Cinema Novo, a work that resists forgetting. It fights against the historical amnesia that swept over Brazilian society after the dictatorship ended. As Joan Dassin explained in 1989, the same year that Murat’s film was released,

Indeed, much of the cultural debate in Brazil since the 1985 transition has reinforced the government position that only “forgetting” the past can insure a peaceful democratic future. This position was codified in the 1979 Amnesty Law, which wiped clean the records of suspected “terrorists” as well as alleged torturers but in effect formalized the agreement between the military and their civilian successors that human rights abuses by security forces would not be investigated.

(116)

The governments that came after the dictatorship supported the notion that the only way to move forward was to keep the wounds of the past closed and to create a level playing field for all Brazilians. Indeed, “It was only in December 1995 that President Fernando Henrique Cardoso sanctioned law no. 9.140, which acknowledged the death of 217 political prisoners and the disappearance of 152 others; the government assumed responsibility for these occurrences and paid each family an indemnity of approximately \$110,000.00 (US)” (Ferreira 3). While the women featured in the film speak of the importance of remembering the violence and repression of *os anos de chumbo*, the film itself also serves as a form of resistance to forgetting because it helps to expand (and is a part of) an (inter)national dialogue about Brazil’s past. The film, therefore, reflects the two types of resistance that Alfredo Bosi delineates: “resistance as a *theme* of a narrative and resistance as a *process* constitutive of a certain writing” (125),⁸² or, in this case, of a certain film. In its resistance to forgetting, *Que bom te ver viva* explores the difficulties, complexities, and contradictions of this project of remembering.

II. The Silence of Memory and the Memory of Silence

A crucial part of the resistance to forgetting is to understand why there are some who want to forget—why they do not want to talk about the past. Murat’s film presents several reasons for this reticence, varying from weakness, discomfort, annoyance, and even respect. While Barrios’ testimonio focuses on *action against* a repressive regime, Murat’s film focuses on *reactions to* a repressive regime. A woman who works with Maria, one of the women featured in the film, says that she does not understand how Maria can bear it, since she (the co-worker) does not even have the strength to *hear* about what happened in Brazil during the dictatorship. Estela, another woman in the film, further explains this weakness, asserting that we can bear to

⁸² “resistência como *tema* da narrativa e resistência como *processo* constitutivo de uma certa escrita”

know that there were people tortured; what we cannot bear to know is how a person *feels* when faced with torture. According to Pupi, another survivor, people do not have the courage to discuss it. As the narrator in the film notes, no one knows how to react to the idea of prison and torture. Portraying a survivor, she describes mentioning her imprisonment one time during a lunch with two co-workers; the man seemed panic-stricken, and the woman began to grab her hand in a gesture of compassion, but then opted for a short rhetorical remark, “What times, eh?”⁸³ Even some of the survivors’ children can feel the discomfort surrounding the subject of torture. Estela confesses that her children do not want to have contact with something so painful and prefer that she not talk about her time in prison.

The feeling of annoyance also impedes people from discussing torture. A friend of Regina, another woman interviewed in the film, admits that during the dictatorship, she felt guilty, but never thinks about it now, explaining, “Day-to-day living does not allow for it.”⁸⁴ Many people express this feeling of not having space in their current lives for either thinking or speaking about a painful past. Rosa, another survivor, complains that some people become irritated when she talks about what happened. They say to her, “Forget it!”⁸⁵ Rosa explains that those who have not suffered from torture cannot imagine the pain and anger that victims feel. There is an inevitable chasm between those who have suffered from torture and those who have not. However, it is possible that someone who has not suffered from torture can understand and respect this chasm. One of Rosa’s students, who learned about the rampant torture in Brazil through books, says that he does not ask Rosa about what happened to her out of respect. He imagines that it is not very pleasant for Rosa to speak about it. Perhaps many (if not all) of these

⁸³ “Que tempos, eh?” English translations from the film are mine, but often correspond with the film’s English subtitles.

⁸⁴ “O cotidiano não permite-o.”

⁸⁵ “Esquece!”

reasons for not speaking stem from another, underlying sentiment: guilt—for not being one of those tortured or for not doing anything to stop it.

Another important part of the resistance to forgetting is to study why survivors themselves do not want to speak, or at least have trouble doing so. As Jane, another survivor, says during her interview, “It’s been a long time since I spoke about this. I thought that I would never speak about it again.”⁸⁶ The film, in one sense, acts as a forum for women to explore this “survival silence.” This exploration reveals that survivors hesitate to speak for many of the same reasons that others hesitate to speak. In addition, the women in the film also discuss shame as an impediment. The narrator asks herself how much longer she will have to lower her eyes when torture is mentioned. Estela says that she has noticed that when she speaks of torture, others become agitated—they do not want to listen. It becomes awkward, and later she feels guilty, asking herself what right she has to make others agitated. A friend of Pupi confirms this reciprocal shame, saying that she has observed that speaking about torture embarrasses everyone—both those who speak about it and those who listen—because “it is a very difficult subject.”⁸⁷ For her part, Rosa describes the survivor’s guilt that she has felt. Because she survived and her brother (and others) did not, for years she “felt guilty for feeling any sense of happiness.”⁸⁸ Dominick LaCapra affirms this type of “loyalty” to a trauma:

Those traumatized by extreme events, as well as those empathizing with them, may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it. Part of this feeling

⁸⁶ “Há muitos anos que não falo disto. Pensei que não falaria mais sobre isto.” Interestingly, Jane says this even though she is a historian with a single objective: to recuperate all the information lost during the era of repression in Brazil. We can surmise that it is easier to research information about the military dictatorship than to talk about your own personal experience with it.

⁸⁷ “é um assunto muito difícil”

⁸⁸ “sentia culpada de sentir qualquer sentimento de alegria”

may be the melancholic sentiment that, in working through the past in a manner that enables survival or a reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past. (22)

“Moving on” would feel like an undeserved privilege, one that many others will never enjoy.

For Rosa, survival was a huge weight that she carried, one that she did not want to discuss. After many years, fortunately, she learned how to talk about her past and dedicated herself once again to politics. Maria also suffered from survivor’s guilt. In one scene, she describes the “death pact” that she and her husband made when they were activists: during an attack, she or her husband would shoot the other person first and then commit suicide. But when a moment of attack came, Maria could not go through with it. Instead, her husband took the gun from her hand and shot himself in the head. Maria explains that she felt guilty for years for not dying.

Pupi cannot talk about what happened to her for another reason: it makes her lonely. She explains that torture is a subject very distant from most people’s current lives. It is only for those who went through it. The most common (and obvious) reason for not talking about the past is because it is very painful. Many women in the film cannot stop themselves from crying when they talk about their horrific experiences—and some say that they never believed they would talk about what happened again. In one sense, to speak of torture is a form of reliving it, of reliving many different types of pain: physical, emotional, and psychological. The emotion evident in these women’s faces, bodies, and voices parallels the emotion reflected in the numerous ellipses, exclamations, and interjections of traditional *testimonios* like Barrios’. Regina’s husband remembers one morning when he woke up and saw his wife convulsing, mumbling, “Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch”⁸⁹ She had stayed up all night reading Fernando Gabeira’s book (*O que é isso, companheiro?*) and was so affected that she began having flashbacks and

⁸⁹ “Filho da puta. Filho da puta. Filho da puta.”

imagining that she was confronting her torturers. LaCapra addresses these latent consequences of torture: “Trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered” (41). Trauma never completely goes away. It can only be controlled with time, energy, and focus. Anticipating another flashback, Regina keeps the medicine for her epilepsy (a condition that tends to return when she discusses her trauma) at her side during her interview for the film.

In addition to presenting the reasons why people *do not like* to talk about torture, *Que bom te ver viva* also gives many justifications for why *it is necessary and important* to talk about it. As the narrator explains, speaking (out) is a *part of* survival: “I hate making accusations, but I wouldn’t know how to live without doing it.”⁹⁰ Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst who has written extensively on survivors of the Holocaust, explains this compulsion to speak: “There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus come to *know* one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life” (63). Laub continues, though, that this compulsion to speak “is inhabited by the impossibility of telling, and therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails” (64). This impossibility is evidenced by the many women in the film who stress that they have not talked about the past and thought that they never would. The film, however, through presenting eight women who were willing to have their voices heard, underscores the importance of speaking about the past and speaking out against silence. As Laub affirms, “Yet it is essential for this narrative that *could not be articulated* to be *told*, to be *transmitted*, to be *heard* [because] repossessing one’s life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process

⁹⁰ “Eu detesto fazer as denúncias, mas não saíba viver sem fazer elas.”

of survival after liberation” (69). To speak is to survive. Another reason for speaking that the film presents is to combat and correct the insufficient and misconstrued voice of the survivors that *does* exist (despite the silence of many). The narrator explains that the left is always criticized for publishing stories (though they are few) about what happened. Many try to silence these stories. In one scene, the narrator is reading a newspaper article written by a man who believes that it is “out-of-style” to talk about the dictatorship. He wants to keep the past in the past. According to the narrator, pompous men like this are, unfortunately, determining *who* can speak and *when*. It seems that the survivors have little to do with what is written or read (and when) in Brazil. The media keep up the appearance of factually and fairly telling both sides—despite the fact that they frequently try to denigrate, control, or stifle the voices of the survivors. The narrator shows a newspaper article that quotes her, but the quotation used was old, the newspaper did not ask her permission to use it, and it was situated at the bottom of the page, the part that no one reads, according to the narrator. An important element in the resistance to forgetting is the resistance to “official history,” what is normally presented in the media. As Barbara Harlow asserts, “The connection between knowledge and power, the awareness of the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record, is central to resistance narratives” (*Resistance* 116). Murat’s film, like other types of resistance narratives and postmodern works in general, consciously tries to *transform* accepted history. It rejects the idea of a singular and total truth, much less the one presented and propagated by hegemonic social forces such as the government and the media.

Que bom te ver viva wants its audience to rethink traditional cinematic paradigms as well as “official” history, as suggested by its unique mix of documentary and fiction. The film, like many works of resistance, experiments with postmodern forms, which can be seen in the

blending of the real stories of the survivors and the artistic expressions of the actress. As Harlow argues,

Historical and political events together with literary periodization are being reworked in these narratives [of resistance] and the formal experimentation which characterizes them, the manipulation of structures of plot, character, and setting, resonate within the social structures of the resistance movements themselves and the collective and popular needs to which they respond. (*Resistance* 86)

While the interviews of the survivors are presented in a traditional documentary style and the shots of the women's everyday lives show them blending into general society, the fictional scenes are highly stylized, incorporating dramatic music, lighting, and camerawork to capitalize on the emotional dynamic of the scenes. Foster argues that the film's mix between documentary and fiction also provides an opportunity for more feminist dialogue: "one could make much of [the film's] hybrid nature as exemplifying a certain type of feminist cultural production where conventional forms are inadequate and hybridness provides greater interpretive opportunities for the social text being examined. This is especially true because one of the recurring motifs in *Que bom te ver viva* is the very feminist issue of the silencing of women's voices" (98). This film, by women and about women, presents a female perspective of Brazilian history and uses innovative, postmodern filmic techniques and structures that break new cinematic ground. The film's intertextuality also reflects its postmodern tendencies. Throughout the film, numerous newspaper clippings, archival documents, home movies, and black-and-white photos of the past are presented. These artifacts furnish even more information about the political climate during the dictatorship and connect the survivors with the particular historical moments in which they were involved. The black-and-white effect underscores the journalistic feel of the artifacts—and

also recalls the Cinema Novo tradition (since Cinema Novo films were often made in black and white). Emphasizing the importance of the stories of the women in the film, the scenes in which they are talking or going about their current lives (with their children, in their jobs, at the movies, on the subway, with their friends, and so on) are in color—not black and white. These colored scenes symbolize the vibrant lives of the women today, despite what happened in the past. The title of the film itself, *Que bom te ver viva (How Nice to See You Alive)*, sardonically points to the hope and happiness that can persist despite a horrific past. The juxtaposition of black and white and color also suggests the difference between what people read in the media during the dictatorship (and still now) and the intimate testimonios of the women who really lived the revolutionary life. This film, and other resistance narratives, “testify to the nature of the struggle for liberation as it is enacted behind the dissembling statistics of western [and here, Brazilian] media coverage and official government reports” (Harlow, *Resistance* 98). Murat’s film, like Barrios’ testimonio, personalizes the stories, facts, and statistics propagated by the media and the government, while destabilizing them at the same time.

To emphasize the hypocrisy of the media even more, the narrator at one point pretends to be a newscaster⁹¹ who gives a “report” on Josef Mengele, the former Nazi doctor who insisted that he was not responsible for any of the atrocities committed during the Nazi regime.⁹² She “informs” the audience that many accusations against Mengele were the result of the intense, subliminal, and far-reaching propaganda of the so-called “survivors.” As this scene implies, the media continue to blame the survivors of torture and brand them dangerous, suspicious subversives. The vast majority of the torturers, on the other hand, have still never been punished. As Thomas Skidmore explicates,

⁹¹ Reflecting Murat’s personal influence on Ravache’s role in the film, Murat herself was a former newscaster in Brazil (Millarch, “O hino” 3).

⁹² After World War II, Mengele hid throughout Latin America and eventually died in Bertiooga, Brazil, in 1977.

As for the most important elite, the military, one point was reasonably certain: the military as a whole would oppose any attempt to fix individual responsibility for past repression, especially torture. Any suggestion of trying “war criminals,” as happened after the fall of the Greek military dictatorship or as was announced by the Alfonsín government in Argentina, was forbidden territory for any civilian government [in Brazil]. (32)

Post-dictatorship administrations in Brazil knew that the military was a powerful, dangerous force and therefore avoided disturbing it. The narrator addresses this national reluctance, reflected in both the government and the general public alike, when she cynically notes that she *said* she would bring her torturers to trial, but “Brazil doesn’t like these things.”⁹³

Another important element in the resistance to forgetting, therefore, is to give a voice to the survivors. *Que bom te ver viva* is explicitly and openly about the people who have survived violence, repression, and torture—and this is made clear from the beginning of the film. After a few words of historico-political context about the military dictatorship, a strong and simple declaration of intent appears: “This is a film about the survivors of these years.”⁹⁴ But the film is not only *about* the survivors; it is also *by* the survivors. Like other testimonialistas, the women interviewed here are both subject and agent. Because the film’s purpose is to give a voice to the survivors, it thus executes one of the good political uses of literature (and I include film here, too) that Italo Calvino outlines:

Literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude. I mean aspects,

⁹³ “O Brasil não gosta destas coisas.”

⁹⁴ “Este é um filme sobre os sobreviventes destes anos.”

situations, and languages both of the outer and of the inner world, the tendencies repressed both in individuals and in society. Literature is like an ear that can hear things beyond the understanding of the language of politics; it is like an eye that can see beyond the color spectrum perceived by politics. (98)

The women in *Que bom te ver viva* discuss both the external world (their involvement in the revolutionary movement against the government) and the internal world (their *feelings about* this involvement). These two worlds are typically (or at least frequently) excluded in the media and other forms of communication in Brazil, and also in the daily lives of the survivors. This film and similar literature go beyond politics because they present what politics alone cannot. This “good use” of film is part of the resistance to forgetting because it brings to the surface what is normally left at the bottom. A film like *Que bom te ver viva* is perhaps even more important in a country like Brazil because it gives a voice to women who live in a culture beleaguered by machismo. “*Que bom te ver viva* is in essence a document that exists to contradict and repudiate the strategies of silence applied by masculinist society” (Foster 102). For many Brazilian women, it is difficult to have a voice at all; for women who were revolutionaries, it is even more difficult because in the eyes of their people, they have been doubly violative. As Elizabeth Xavier Ferreira explains, “These [are] women who had transgressed two codes. They had affronted the political dictates of the authoritarian regime and had overstepped the principles of the gender hierarchy of their society” (6). As both aberrant citizens and aberrant women, they are cloaked in a double layer of suspicion and are deemed doubly dangerous. This twofold stigmatization makes films like *Que bom te ver viva* that much more important, as it gives a voice to these transgressive female members of society and challenges the machista structures that help hold Brazilian society into place.

Through several different techniques, the film emphasizes the importance of the words of the women featured in the film. For example, in order to not give too much attention to the narrator, Irene Ravache, when her name is presented at the beginning of the film, it appears at the top of the screen on the far-left side. Her name is not situated in the center of the screen because she is not the main focus of the film; the survivors are. Each survivor is presented individually, with her name and details about her life listed next to a frozen frame of her face. One could argue that the narrator is not necessary in the film—that she is a distraction from the real survivors. Indeed, her presence in the film creates some of the same tension as do the interlocutors of traditional testimonios. For instance, the film begins and ends with scenes with the narrator, just like many traditional testimonios begin and end with introductions, prefaces, postscripts, and epilogues written by interlocutors—thus giving these “outsiders” the first and final word and thus, one could argue, taking some of the focus off of the testimonialistas and taking away some of their agency. But the narrator represents other survivors who could not be in the film and helps present other scenes that otherwise would not be in the film. These fictionalized scenes, in one sense, play on and play up the element of fiction that is always already present in written testimonios. As Naomi Lindstrom explains, “Testimonial narratives contain substantial factual material but also an element of invention that deserves acknowledgement. This includes both the creativity of the collaborator who provides the oral story and that of the writer who reorganizes it to make a written narrative” (91). Despite Lindstrom’s misleading and skewed terms (“collaborator” for testimonialista and “writer” for interlocutor), she draws attention to the unavoidable fictionality of testimonio. Murat’s recognition and expansion of this fictionality allows her to incorporate even more perspectives and to transform the testimonial mode.

In addition, several critics, like Aramis Millarch, Carlos Helí de Almeida, and Luiz Fernando Vianna, suggest that the narrator represents the alter-ego of Murat (who also wrote the screenplay for the film) herself, thus providing a way for the filmmaker's own experiences and thoughts to be integrated into the film.⁹⁵ The narrator often speaks directly to the camera—serving as the link between the audience and the film's subjects, just like an interlocutor of a traditional *testimonio*. And in the opening scene of the film, the narrator puts a tape into her VCR to watch. The screen flashes snow and then bars of primary colors, just like the beginning of the narrator's tape would show. The narrator, therefore, is carrying out the same action as the audience (beginning to watch a movie), thus reinforcing her link between the film's subjects and its audience. The narrator also serves as the link between the other women in the film, allowing a dialogue among them all. In this way, the narrator helps to create Bakhtinian heteroglossia. As Lindstrom explains, "Bakhtin especially valued, and often analyzed, narratives in which different voices coexist and, through their interaction, give the text qualities of a dialogue or an interchange among many speaking participants" (89). The heteroglossic dynamic of the film underscores the importance of language in creating a collective memory of the dictatorship in Brazil. In addition to the narrator and the eight survivors, there are many others in the film who also speak—friends, colleagues, husbands, students, a mother, a psychoanalyst, and so on—, all adding to the heteroglossic feel of the film and stressing its sense of collectivity.

⁹⁵ "An agent of MR-8, Lúcia was imprisoned in 1971 and tortured during the first two months of the three and a half years that she was in prison. 'Que bom te ver viva' is the result of seven years of psychoanalysis" ("Agente do MR-8, Lúcia foi presa em 1971 e torturada nos dois primeiros meses dos três anos e meio que passou na prisão. 'Que bom te ver viva' é o resultado de sete anos de psicanálise") (Helí de Almeida).

III. The Dialectic between Cohesion and Intimacy

The sense of collectivity that *Que bom te ver viva* facilitates serves as a powerful antidote to the feelings of fracture and incompleteness experienced by many of the survivors. Rosa explains how torture itself caused these feelings. At one point while being tortured, she asked them to just kill her because she could not stand it anymore. One of the torturers laughed and said, “You’re no good to me dead. I’m going to break you into pieces.”⁹⁶ For her part, Maria confirms that her 60 days in jail were a constant fight to keep herself whole. A friend of the anonymous survivor in the film confirms that her friend was badly tortured and went to pieces. Criméia recounts the physical fracturing that she witnessed during the years of military repression and violence: the army showed her and other prisoners the decapitated heads of their former comrades. This shocked Criméia so much that she cannot remember who she saw, though she knows that she had known them. Pupi still believes that the world can change, but the tools (the organizations) were taken away from her, along with that bit of your soul that makes you “feel whole.”⁹⁷ Estela confirms that the greatest victory is the search, the desire to reintegrate herself, to get herself together again. When the narrator asserts that “our jigsaw puzzle remains hard to put together,”⁹⁸ she acknowledges the feelings of fracture, but also the possibility of completion. Murat’s film provides these survivors with a way to feel part of something bigger than themselves—something whole. In one sense, it is a way for them to regain the feelings of belonging that they experienced in their revolutionary groups. These feelings persisted during their activism in spite of (and perhaps even because of) their strong sense of self and agency. As Ferreria confirms:

⁹⁶ “No me interessa matar. Eu vou a fazer pedaçinhos.”

⁹⁷ “sentir inteira”

⁹⁸ “nossa quebra-cabeça fica de novo difícil de montar”

Despite the number of these clandestine organizations (more than forty) — which represented a serious problem for the project because of the dissent that sometimes erupted among them — it is possible to say that the organizations stood for collectivism. On the other hand, the militants — who were part of that collective body — were, at the same time, self-sufficient individuals with a strong individualistic sense of personal autonomy and of freedom of choice. (18)

The film mirrors these revolutionary groups, where strong individuals came together to create a powerful collective force. One could also argue that the film mirrors the cohesion, camaraderie, and collectivity that the women felt while in prison as well. Many critics (Harlow, for example) have discussed the bond that militants form while in prison, a bond that transcends race, class, and ethnicity and is facilitated by the prisoners' loneliness, fear, and shared experiences. The fact that five of the women featured in Murat's film were her prison mates while she was incarcerated during the dictatorship supports this idea (Millarch, "Brasil" 3). Both in the revolutionary groups and in prison, these women felt part of a greater collectivity. Likewise, though the film is divided into short fictional scenes, interview segments, and shots of everyday life, it coalesces to form a cohesive mosaic. Film production itself is a markedly collective process. As Sophia McClennen explains, "To be properly analyzed film must be considered as a collaboration between the director, producers, screenwriters, actors and crew. In fact, it may be one of the best examples of collaborative cultural production in the [Latin American] canon" (68). *Que bom te ver viva* occupies a unique position, being made possible by the contributions of many different individuals both in front of and behind the camera.

Despite this collective dynamic, *Que bom te ver viva* also utilizes many disparate cinematic techniques to emphasize the intimacy and primacy of the survivors' testimonios.

Millarch notes the way the film's lighting and cinematography resonate with the different aspects of the film's structure and the featured women's lives:

To differentiate fiction from documentary, Lúcia Murat opted to record the testimonies of the former political prisoners on video, with a frame similar to a 3x4 portrait; to film their daily lives in natural light, thus representing real life; and to use theater light to focus on what lies behind the photography: the subconscious discourse of the monologue of Irene Ravache's character. ("Um filme" 3)⁹⁹

Camerawork at the beginning of the film especially resonates with the film's thematic approach. One of the first images is of a prison courtyard (in black and white); there are bars across the screen (like the bars of a prison cell). The camera zooms in on the courtyard and the bars disappear, the audience going "behind the bars"—back in time and into the personal lives of the women. The title of the film then appears, in red, across the screen. This red not only represents the blood that was shed during the years of repression and violence in Brazil, but also alludes to the traditional color of revolution. Another cinematic technique used to highlight the personal element of the women's stories is showing their personal photographs. These photographs humanize the survivors, offering glimpses into their private lives. They show them with their families (especially with their spouses and children) and in "normal" contexts, like parties or baptisms. The audience can see the survivors as ordinary women apart from revolutionary activists. But this is a delicate balance. As the narrator asks, referring to Maria, "How do we reconcile this housewife with the epic story of the ex-student who organized farm workers, took

⁹⁹ "Para diferenciar a ficção do documentário, Lúcia Murat optou por gravar os depoimentos das ex-presas políticas em vídeo, como o enquadramento semelhante ao de retrato 3x4; filmar seu cotidiano à luz natural, representando assim a vida aparente; e usar a luz teatral, para enfocar o que está atrás da fotografia - o discurso inconsciente do monólogo da personagem de Irene Ravache."

part in an urban guerrilla organization, was imprisoned and exchanged for a kidnapped ambassador, and spent 10 years in exile?”¹⁰⁰ The film walks a fine line between presenting the brutality and violence of revolution and the soft, feminine side of the survivors. The women’s descriptions of torture and imprisonment are countered with shots of them engaged in domestic activities: knitting, cooking, putting on makeup, watching home movies, playing with their children, and so on. Reflecting their interior lives that are explored in the film, they are often filmed in their own homes (their private space), like the narrator is filmed in several different rooms throughout her fictional home.

Just as Barrios’ testimonio stresses the importance she places on motherhood, Murat’s film further humanizes the survivors by showing how much they value their role as mothers. In addition to the photographs where they are looking at their children with big smiles, bright eyes, and beaming faces, the words that these women use when they speak of their children attest to their maternal, feminine side. Maria describes how she found her maternal affection after prison. As she remembers, “During my first pregnancy, I discovered that being a woman is the best thing in the world” because “we produce life.”¹⁰¹ Being a woman (and a mother) gave her a sense of strength and power. Regina, who, like Barrios, lost a child in prison, explains that what helped her survive prison was the desire to have a(nother) child.¹⁰² Indeed, she became pregnant again soon after leaving prison and later had two more children. For Regina, children signified (and still do) the continuation of life. As she confirms in the film, “My children are the most

¹⁰⁰ “Como integra esta dona de casa com a historia épica de ex-estudante que organiza camponeses, participa da organização de guerrilha urbana, e presa, troca por um embaixador seqüestrado e passa dez anos no exílio?”

¹⁰¹ “Durante minha primeira gravidez, descobriu que é melhor coisa do mundo ser mulher” porque “produzimos a vida.”

¹⁰² This attitude towards children recalls another female revolutionary from another era in Brazilian history: Olga Benário. As can be seen in the film *Olga: Muitas paixões numa só vida*, during her time in prison, what gave Olga the strength and desire to live was the dream of one day living together again with her husband (Luís Carlos Prestes) and their daughter.

precious things that I have.”¹⁰³ While Regina lost her baby in prison, several of the women in the film gave birth while incarcerated. Criméia, for example, who was pregnant and gave birth in prison, notes the sad irony of the fact that she was producing a new life while torturers were trying to kill her. For her, having a child was the ideal freedom. Many of the women emphasize that having children is special and important because it is a form of surviving the past and proving that life goes on despite everything else.¹⁰⁴ Millarch notes how in the film, “a hymn to life is felt in many of the testimonies, a hope, especially on the part of the women who experienced maternity, either in prison or afterwards” (“O hino” 3).¹⁰⁵ For many of the women, motherhood is a means of defeating the torturers.

Despite their happiness in motherhood, the mark that militancy and torture have left on these women’s familial and sexual relationships is undeniable. Divorce and separation are rampant in the survivors’ lives—only three are married (two for the second time).¹⁰⁶ Estela talks about how for many years she chose torturers in her life, people with aggressive, deplorable, violent attitudes. When Criméia was arrested, she learned that her son’s father, grandfather, and uncle were all dead. She never remarried, and so her son was raised without a father. Because of her activism, several of Jane’s family members (her mother, mother-in-law, and younger sister) were rounded up and imprisoned. Her sister was tortured with the intention of breaking down Jane so that she would give up information. Afterwards, her whole family (including her father) went into exile. The narrator asks herself, after connecting her boss (who has just fired her) to the all-powerful torturers of her past, when she will be able to stop making every man

¹⁰³ “Os filhos são as coisas mais preciosas que eu tenho.”

¹⁰⁴ During one awards show, Murat herself dedicated the film’s many awards to her nine-year-old daughter and to the hope that the film brings (Millarch, “Que bom” 3).

¹⁰⁵ “sente-se em muitos dos depoimentos um hino à vida, a esperança, especialmente da parte das mulheres que tiveram a maternidade, ou na prisão ou posteriormente”

¹⁰⁶ The marital status of the anonymous survivor is unknown.

into a torturer. With her lover, the narrator pretends that she was never sexually abused, and he pretends to know nothing about it. She deplors the guilt that she feels for liking to make love, rhetorically asking whether or not she has that right. And she bemoans the way others look at her, as if in shock that she can like sex after everything that has happened to her. Addressing the audience, she says she hates it when others say that if it were they, they'd never make love again.

The additional trauma that these women suffered on the basis of their gender also contributes to the tension in their intimate, sexual lives. Marco Aurélio Garcia notes that “Besides the physical pain and moral degradation which torture produces (or tries to produce), women are subject to an additional dimension of suffering resulting from sexual violence (rape, sometimes followed by pregnancy) or the rituals of humiliation to which they are subject because they are female” (464). Maria recalls how her torturers made her put on a filthy pair of men’s pants and periodically dunked her in a tank so that they would not have to see her menstrual blood dripping when she hung from the torture pole. Regina details being stripped and searched—even in her vagina—to “make sure” that she did not have a hidden gun. Rosa describes how the torturers shocked her vagina. Pupi remembers how the torturers would confuse her—one would pretend to be nice to her and help her, one would pretend to be in love with her, and so on—so that she did not know what to feel or what to believe. According to Foster, “It is significant to note that several [women in the film] speak of losing their male partners as the result of how changed they were by torture, and this emphasis on their relations with men cannot escape a correlation with the fact that they were imprisoned and tortured by men” (101). The torture that female militants experienced differed from that of male militants in several ways, not the least of which is the fact that women were always tortured by the opposite sex—with all the dynamics of power, sex, machismo, and misogyny that that included. Ferreira

also explains how verbal abuse and humiliation were worse for *women* militants as a way to punish them for breaking the strict gender codes of the times:

The classic dichotomy that the ambiguous role of women in [Brazilian] culture represents — making them oscillate between purity (mothers and wives) and impurity (whores) — was disturbed by the evidence of women in an unsuspected position: that of political activism. Therefore, this new category of militant was submitted more intensely to verbal abuse and humiliation than the male militants (according to the accounts of many of the women’s boyfriends, husbands or lovers who had also been in the hands of the military police). That is, even when the women were not being physically abused, they were submitted to constant situations of humiliation. (27)¹⁰⁷

Regina notes, for example, that the men who stripped searched her and looked in her vagina did this just to humiliate her. Female militants, who in a sense already had to reject their gender in order to dress and behave like men in the hyper-masculinized revolutionary groups of which they were a part, were harshly upbraided in prison for not abiding by the gender roles demanded of them by their culture. These women, therefore, faced multiple layers of trauma through the sexualized torture they experienced, the power dynamics of being tortured by men, and the continual verbal abuse and humiliation that they suffered for being “improper” women. This maelstrom of gender-based castigation and abuse added to their difficulty in finding their places as women post-dictatorship. It is easy to see how and why they have encountered hardships throughout their relationships with men. And it is easy to see how and why both Regina and Pupi ended up working with abused women. Though they reveal profound and painful

¹⁰⁷ The harsher, more degrading, and more physically intimate torture that female Brazilian militants endured may account, at least in part, for the scant number of testimonios that they produced, especially compared to their male counterparts. Their emotional scars may have been deeper than men’s, and therefore more prohibitive.

complexities, the glimpses into these women's intimate lives work to further humanize them, showing the horrors that they experienced and showing them struggle—like many others—with familial and sexual relationships.

IV. Resisting the Stigmas of Survival

The humanization (and feminization) of these survivors is an indispensable part of the resistance to forgetting because it helps to create compassion and empathy for these women and it shows that they are like other women who relish motherhood and falter in relationships. It shortens the distance from subject to audience. It is also important for the resistance to forgetting because it explores and challenges the typical stereotypes of torture survivors. As Ferreira explains, “The militants had been considered ‘crazy lunatics,’ ‘abominable terrorists,’ or simply ‘poor immature devils’ by many. During all those years, it had not been easy for these activists to live with these epithets, repudiated by a great part of the Brazilian population” (14). Because of their past experiences, the survivors in the film are often still seen as unhuman, crazy, terrorists, or even romanticized myths. Part of the resistance to forgetting is to deconstruct these injurious stigmas.

In one of the first scenes of the film, the narrator explains the common notion that those who survive are not human. She cynically notes that because others believe that “whoever survived is not human,”¹⁰⁸ they cannot comprehend that survivors have desires, shit, and get turned on. This stereotype comes from the fact that torture is a process of dehumanizing its victim, which many of the women in the film describe. Pupi, for example, explains that before going to prison, she felt a sense of power, but after a long stretch of many beatings, she felt powerless and degraded as a human being. Rosa, likewise, remembers that her torturers wanted

¹⁰⁸ “quem sobreviveu não é humano”

to dehumanize her by demoralizing her. The narrator also speaks of feelings of being unhuman—or worse, being an animal, like one of Pavlov’s dogs, who after some time, did not need to be tortured to feel pain. Though the torturers are also dehumanized by torture, as several of the women emphasize, the stigma of being unhuman has stayed with the survivors more than with their perpetrators. To combat the image of these torture survivors as unhuman, the film shows the personal, emotional, and human side of the women. They discuss their relationships, their children, their careers, and their pride and happiness in motherhood. They want to show that they are like the rest of the world. As Jane affirms, “We are ordinary people.”¹⁰⁹ But this healthy attitude did not come easily for some of the survivors. For example, Maria, who held the “death pact” with her husband, says that only after many years did she understand that her reaction (not killing her own husband during an attack) was a normal reaction. Now, she has a better comprehension of this heart-wrenching event from her past. She knows that “normal people do not kill the people they love.”¹¹⁰

Just like the exiled activists who returned to Brazil after the amnesty of 1979, torture survivors have been confronted with the idea that they were (and always will be) terrorists. Jane, for example, observes that another obstacle to overcome (still now) is discrimination and stigmatization from this stereotype. And the narrator laments that even after so many years have passed, the survivors are still described in the media as subversive (“terrorists”) and the perpetrators as legitimate (“doctors”). The women in the film denounce this injustice. They explain that it does not make sense that they, who were fighting to improve the lives of the Brazilian people, are “terrorists,” while the government officials, who killed, repressed, and abused the Brazilian people, are not. Another stereotype that survivors have to confront is that

¹⁰⁹ “Somos pessoas comuns.”

¹¹⁰ “pessoas normais não matam a gente que amam”

they are crazy. One woman who works with Criméia in a women's political group confesses that she thought torture victims were permanently scarred—both physically and mentally—and was surprised that Criméia was completely lucid. The narrator also addresses this stereotype of being insane. She explains to the audience that the survivors' behavior is authentic and logical—"it is not a neurosis."¹¹¹ The film tries to show that these survivors are not crazy; their reactions to torture are difficult and painful, but normal.¹¹²

The film also challenges the common stereotype of a romanticized revolutionary, playing with the images generally associated with the resistance movement during the dictatorship. The narrator literally dresses in the role of a romanticized revolutionary when she pretends to get ready for a fancy costume party. At first, she wants to dress as a student leader—with glasses, philosophy books, and leather sandals. Then she decides to dress like a guerrilla fighter. She puts on a green beret and a jacket—but both are sparkly, suggesting a glamorized version. In the end, she chooses the "proper" outfit: a prison uniform. This outfit, more than the others, symbolizes the harsh reality of being an activist during the years of repression and violence. But then she puts on a fur coat, suggesting that, like the others, this aspect of activism is also often romanticized. To emphasize the romanticization of that era, flashes of Twiggy, Che Guevara, the Beatles, hippies on a beach, and the Brazilian flag are shown, accompanied with cheerful music. Indeed, the image of Che Guevara, with his famous beret and charismatic smile, is one of the most romanticized and commodified revolutionary images today. In another scene, the narrator compares herself with another famous romanticized historic martyr: Joan of Arc. She complains that her lover does not know what to do with her because "you don't sleep with a

¹¹¹ "não é uma neurose"

¹¹² This does not deny the reality that some victims are severely scared mentally from torture. In fact, the film is dedicated to these victims. After the last shot of the film, this dedication appears: "To those who were tortured and broke the barrier of sanity" (Aos que foram torturados e romperam a barreira da sanidade).

martyr! Who screws Joan of Arc?”¹¹³ Ferreira affirms how easy it is to romanticize what these women went through: “guerrilla warfare, women and torture. These three elements could easily transform the political experience of [female activists] into a sensationalistic adventure, depending on how and to what purpose they were being used” (14). For many Brazilians, revolutionaries are mythical characters who carried out fantastical exploits. While the women in the film try to dispel this romantic image, many note the difficulty of such an attempt. Criméia explains that she often feels like a storyteller because her nieces and nephews, her son, and her son’s friends (all from a younger generation) always want to listen to her talk about her experiences as a revolutionary and a prisoner, as if it were part of some video game. She notes, “We have a very romantic idea of the guerrilla. Being a guerrilla is like a fairytale.”¹¹⁴ But this romantic idea is deceptive, according to Criméia; only those who went through what she went through know the truth. Other women in the film also combat the image of a mythical revolutionary by talking about the horrid, violent, and painful reality of militancy, for example, the methods and instruments of torture used. As Rosa succinctly and firmly retorts, “I think torture is ugly, unepic, and unheroic.”¹¹⁵

An important part of challenging all of these stereotypes is to understand why they exist. One explanation is that they create distance between the victims of torture and the rest of society. As the narrator declares, looking towards the camera, “You all think we’re different.”¹¹⁶ Others pretend that they will never be in the same situation. They do not want to identify in any way with the survivors of torture; therefore, they resist the idea that the survivors are normal people like they are exactly *because* they do not want to be like them. For some, to be a survivor *is not*

¹¹³ “não se dorme com uma mártir! Quem trepa com Joana d’Arc?”

¹¹⁴ “Temos uma idéia muito romântica do guerrilheiro. Ser um guerrilheiro é como um conto de fadas.”

¹¹⁵ “Eu acho que a tortura é uma coisa que feia, que pouco épica, que não é heróica.”

¹¹⁶ “Todos vocês acham que a gente é diferente.”

normal. This resistance reinforces the abyss and the opposition between the victims and the rest of society and helps to facilitate forgetting. Another explanation (even more deplorable and destructive) for the persistence of certain stereotypes is that the survivors themselves have internalized them. Jane describes how she herself has frequently felt like a myth, a woman arrested during a spectacular operation. And in one scene, the narrator lists many of the common stereotypes and after each one, says, “Trouble is, I think so, too.”¹¹⁷ *Que bom te ver viva* presents the typical stereotypes for survivors of torture—and disputes them at the same time. In the end, we can see these women as ordinary people who had an extraordinary experience.

To know, discuss, understand, and challenge these common stereotypes goes a long way toward remembering the past. These proactive steps, which the film promotes and facilitates, are what are important. As Linda Hutcheon argues, “What postmodern discourses – fictive and historiographic – ask is: how do we know and come to terms with such a complex ‘thing’ [as the past]?” (123). As these strategic steps suggest, “resistance” is an active—not passive—process. The film, in one sense, is a call to arms to combat forgetting. It challenges the rest of Brazilian society (and even the rest of the world) as much as the torture survivors themselves to speak and remember the past. As Estela explains (in an interview after the film was released), “It was an opportunity to see broken a silence surrounding something that ostensibly affected only a small number of people, but that, in reality, was a traumatic experience for society as a whole” (Millarch, “Dias” 3).¹¹⁸ This film, like good literature, according to Sartre, takes aim at others in order to command their attention. Sartre affirms (using an appropriate metaphor here), “[The engaged writer] knows that words, as Brice-Parain says, are ‘loaded pistols.’ If he speaks, he fires. He may be silent, but since he has chosen to fire, he must do it like a man, by aiming at

¹¹⁷ “O problema é que eu também penso assim.”

¹¹⁸ “Foi a oportunidade de ver rompido um silêncio em torno de algo que aparentemente afetou apenas um pequeno número de pessoas, mas que, na realidade, foi uma experiência traumática para a sociedade como um todo.”

targets, and not like a child, at random, by shutting his eyes and firing merely for the pleasure of hearing the shot go off” (15). Emphasizing the film’s targets, the narrator often addresses the camera, looking at and speaking to the audience. In different moments throughout the film, she speaks to different sectors of her life and of Brazilian society. She alternately addresses her torturers, her lover, her boss, journalists, and (perhaps the most important sector) the Brazilians who did not say or do anything during the dictatorship. The film asserts itself (by asserting the survivors’ words) so that no one can (continue to) claim innocence. In this forceful sense, the filmmaker has a role similar to that of a writer. Sartre argues that “the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it’s all about. And since he has once engaged himself in the universe of language, he can never again pretend that he can not speak” (15). The filmmaker, like the writer, can break the barrier of silence and innocence. He/she can destabilize complacency and force others to enter into an (inter)national dialogue. Harlow agrees with these roles of the filmmaker/writer and the audience/reader, connecting them to the idea of resistance: “Essential then to the narratives of resistance is the demand they make on the reader in their historical referencing and the burden of historical knowledge such referencing enjoins” (*Resistance* 80). After watching the film *Que bom te ver viva*, audiences must rethink Brazilian history during the military dictatorship. They must integrate new information and perspectives. They cannot hide anymore behind a cloak of ignorance and innocence.

V. Conclusion

Que bom te ver viva ends in a manner similar to the way that it began. Instead of zooming in through the bars of a prison cell, however, the camera zooms out away from the bars

of a window in the narrator's house. The audience is exiting a domestic space—leaving the personal lives of the women featured in the film. And though the audience has learned new information and has seen the survivors in a new light, they, like Estela, who left prison with even more doubts and questions, leave the film without clear answers. The audience is no longer innocent, but it cannot answer all of the lingering questions or solve all of the lingering problems surrounding Brazil's painful past. The film, then, ends where it began. In the beginning of the film, the narrator affirms, "Everything begins exactly here. With the lack of answers."¹¹⁹ But this is the point. As Estela explains, perhaps the answers are not easy, but we can get closer to the contradictions—contradictions in both the events of the past and the survival of the present. For example, all of the women in the film offer different versions (or better, different perspectives) of what happened in Brazil during *os anos de chumbo*. And these different perspectives join with the other perspectives that already exist. Also, as can be seen in the film, all of the survivors explain and confront—in disparate ways—the contradictions of survival: suffering and overcoming at the same time, remembering and moving on at the same time. As the narrator summarizes, it is "the difficult equilibrium between not being able to forget and going on living."¹²⁰ These different perspectives suggest the Bakhtinian concept of the dialogic ("containing two or more often conflicting presentations of events, characters, and world views"), which is present in many (postmodern) works of resistance (Menton 24). Knowing and exploring the contradictions in this dialogic of the past and of survival is more important than discovering its answers, much less The Answer. This exploration into the dialogic, of which Murat's film is a prime example, constitutes the resistance to forgetting. The audience (through

¹¹⁹ "Tudo começa exatamente aqui. Com a falta de resposta."

¹²⁰ "o difícil equilíbrio entre não conseguir esquecer e continuar vivendo"

remembering what they saw and heard in the film), therefore, is also part of this project of resistance and part of the larger collectivity that the film facilitates.

Films like *Que bom te ver viva* are one way of fighting back against not only the perpetrators of the military dictatorship, but also the ignorance and complacency of Brazilian society. Released four years after the military regime in Brazil ended, Murat's film centers on the imperative of creating a collective national memory and, at the same time, setting the historical record straight. In one sense, we can see today the fruits of the labor of works like Murat's film. Part of the collective cultural force that fought against the historical amnesia that inflicted post-dictatorship Brazilian society, it helped to reshape the socio-political ideologies that had stigmatized and silenced former activists. Today, militancy during the dictatorship is often seen as a marker of pride—and not shame. As Ferreira explicates:

Active citizens who are now engaged in many projects in the country's cultural, political and economic life have recently reincorporated into their biographies their own political involvement in the radical leftist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In many cases, the stigma these identities once carried has become an emblem of political status. This has been the case of women militants. (22)

Perhaps the most powerful example of this turnaround is seen in Dilma Rousseff, current president-elect of Brazil. In its campaign for Rousseff, the Workers' Party touted—instead of hiding—her experience as a prisoner and torture victim under the dictatorship. Through exploring silence and why it exists, through giving a voice to and humanizing the survivors, and through presenting and challenging the common stereotypes of these survivors, Lúcia Murat's film *Que bom te ver viva* resists both the natural and imposed silences that defined post-1985 Brazil. And though the shift from armed resistance to the resistance to forgetting is evident, the

sense of collectivity, the role of an interlocutor, and the tension between familial and sexual relationships—all found in other testimonios—remain.

Chapter 3

Myths, Bodies, and Fiction: Testimonial Traits and Tensions in *In the Time of the Butterflies*

Julia Alvarez's national bestselling novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) is based on the true story of three sisters, Minerva, Patria, and María Teresa (Mate) Mirabal, who died fighting against the Dominican Republic's most brutal and long-standing dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961), and one sister, Dedé, who survived. This testimonial narrative, nominated for the 1995 National Book Critics Circle Award, engages the same central questions as do traditional testimonios and at the same time takes advantage of the mode's frictions to push the limits of what testimonio can do. Alvarez draws on testimonio's main strengths and—while not eradicating them—turns many of its tensions and limitations into assets and advantages. She writes not only to inspire ordinary men and women to fight against social injustice—just like traditional testimonialistas—but also to resist the natural propensity to forget history. In order to demythologize and humanize the Mirabal sisters, she echoes testimonio's sense of personalization and collectivity. Nodding to both testimonio's affinity with the Bildungsroman and its primacy of sexuality/gender, she parallelizes the sisters' sexual and political comings-of-age and highlights the tension between the personal and the political. Addressing the frailty of memory, she experiments with narrative form and construction. She embraces and celebrates both the freedom that fiction allows and the necessity of the interlocutor. Despite Alvarez's optimism that fiction is the best way to tell the story of the Mirabals, however, many of the same strains inherent to the testimonio persist in her novel—in particular, questions of authenticity and truth. By stressing the “created” and “imagined” nature of her characters and the “changed,” “reconstructed,” and “collapsed” dates, events, and incidents, she enervates her claim that the

Trujillo reign “can only finally be understood by fiction” (*In the Time* 324). Therefore, though Alvarez utilizes many of testimonio’s strengths while at the same time employing fiction to transform the mode, many of the same weaknesses and limitations found in traditional testimonios remain throughout *In the Time of the Butterflies*.

I. Demythologizing the Butterflies: Personalization and Collectivity

One of the strengths of the testimonial mode is its personalized language that draws in readers. Because of the orality of the testimonial process, readers of testimonios feel as if the testimonialista is talking directly to them. And the little rhetorical endings, such as the ones found in Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s testimonio (“Don’t you see?,” “No?,” and so on), encourage agreement with and support for the testimonialista’s cause. In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Julia Alvarez uses this same type of personalized, conversational, and colloquial language, a rhetorical strategy that plays into her project of demythologizing the Butterflies (revolutionary code name for the Mirabal sisters). By writing in the first person and rotating the narrative voice among the four sisters, Alvarez offers a personalized (though fictionalized) glimpse into their private lives and thoughts and makes readers feel as if the characters are speaking directly to them. Indeed, all four sisters address the reader, occasionally even specifically using the word “you.” As David Vázquez notes, “In scenes that evoke the genre of *testimonio*, the narrative has the quality of a text that exists as it is ‘told to’ the author. Because she [Alvarez] is the interlocutor through which this history is revealed, the novel functions as an internal rumination on individual identity, subjectivity, and national belonging” (395-396). By personalizing the sisters, they are no longer the mythologized legends that have been inflated, nor are they the flat historical figures found in history books. Rather, they are everyday humans

with hopes, dreams, passions, fears, and imperfections, trying to make sense of their place in the national political framework into which they were born and which they hope to change. They struggle to find a balance between family, religion, education, and work. And they grapple with the best way to make a positive impact on their children's future. As Alvarez states in the postscript, she takes readers on a journey through the hearts of the Mirabal sisters. She wants others to know the sisters as human beings—and not just as revolutionary heroines.

Mate's chapters feel particularly intimate (some might even say maudlin) because they are written as journal entries, beginning when she is ten years old. The memorialistic style of Mate's chapters evokes the memorialistic style of more traditional testimonios. In her first entry, Mate underscores the personal nature of her diary, writing, "Minerva says keeping a diary is also a way to reflect and reflection deepens one's soul" (30). As Mate matures throughout the years and becomes more involved in the resistance movement against Trujillo, her journal entries evolve as well. For instance, in Mate's first chapter, she draws pictures of her new shoes and Minerva's new swimsuit, in her second, she draws a diagram of a bomb, and in her third, she draws the layout of her prison cell. While Patria's, Minerva's, and Dedé's chapters are not written in journal form, they still suggest intimacy as the characters speak as if sharing their innermost feelings with a very close friend. At one point, for example, Patria observes, "You'd think there was nothing else but the private debates of my flesh and spirit going on, the way I've left out the rest of my life" (50). Alvarez also shows their human side (and combats the image of coldhearted political activists) by emphasizing their relationships as wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers. Just as when Barrios embraces her children after being released from prison, Minerva's soft, maternal side is shown after she returns home from several months of incarceration: "How lovely to be called mother again; to have their little arms around my neck;

their sane, sweet breath in my face” (258). The emphasis on Minerva’s children’s “sane, sweet breath” allays and works against the stereotype of a crazy, brash subversive so easily and so often attached to those who question, much less fight against, the government.

Part of Alvarez’s intent in demythologizing the Mirabal sisters is, as with traditional testimonios, to encourage and inspire others to find the strength within themselves to fight against oppression, violence, and social injustice. As she conveys in the novel’s postscript, through the Mirabal characters that she has created, she wants “ordinary men and women” to recognize that they are the ones who have the power to effect change and do great deeds:

And so it is that what you find in these pages are not the Mirabal sisters of fact, or even the Mirabal sisters of legend. The actual sisters I never knew, nor did I have access to enough information or the talents and inclinations of a biographer to be able to adequately record them. As for the sisters of legend, wrapped in superlatives and ascended into myth, they were finally also inaccessible to me. I realized, too, that such deification was dangerous, the same god-making impulse that had created our tyrant. And ironically, by making them myth, we lost the Mirabals once more, dismissing the challenge of their courage as impossible for us, ordinary men and women. (324)

One of the powers of the testimonial mode is the privileged glimpse into the everyday thought processes and decisions of activists. Readers can see them as ordinary humans, weighing their options and determining how best to channel their time, energy, and focus. Alvarez draws on this testimonial strength in her novel, resisting deification and mythologization. In the novel itself, Dedé is the character who takes on the burden of trying to keep her sisters humanized after they are killed. One of her first acts in this regard is to bury her sisters and their driver Rufino de

la Cruz, who perished with them, all in the same simple pine boxes, despite the fact that the sisters were already considered national heroes and were being mourned throughout the country. As she reasons, “They all died the same, let them all be buried the same” (307).¹²¹ Soon after the sisters’ deaths, their fame and deification intensify dramatically, pictures of them surfacing all throughout the country: “Those photos had become icons, emblazoned on posters—already collectors’ pieces. *Bring back the butterflies!*” (310). After her sisters die, Dedé becomes responsible for watching over their children as they grow. She struggles with allowing them to know both sides of their mothers: the heroic, brave side and the human, humble side. “Sometimes Dedé worries that she has not kept enough from the children. But she wants them to know the living breathing women their mothers were. They get enough of the heroines from everyone else” (64). As Dedé, who understands “that feeling of being caught in a legacy” (65), complains, “The butterflies, Lord God, how people romanticized other people’s terror!” (199). Minou, Minerva’s daughter, feels similarly: “I’m my own person. I’m tired of being the daughter of a legend” (65). Minou’s husband was even scared to date her at first: “I feel like I’d be desecrating the flag,” he said (316). These Mirabal family members, like many of the torture survivors featured in Lúcia Murat’s film, feel burdened by the myths of revolution. For Alvarez, the novel is the ideal form to bring the Mirabals down to a human level—to combat the distanced, inaccessible story of their lives and deaths. “Alvarez did not want to describe the sisters with ‘epic distance,’ but rather with the humanizing immediacy that novelistic discourse can allow” (Rich 174). In a novel, she can show not only the mortal side of the sisters, which allows others to relate to them and be inspired by them, but also the complex dangers and pitfalls of mythologizing them beyond recognition.

¹²¹ Alvarez also writes her book in memory of Patria, Minerva, Mate, and Rufino—and dedicates it to Dedé.

While still alive, Minerva in particular wrestles with reconciling her god-like image and her humanness. As the most outspoken Mirabal sister, she is the first one to become politically involved and becomes the most well-known throughout the Dominican Republic. As one man tells her, “What you can do is keep our hopes up. You’re an example, you know. The whole country looks to you” (274). Minerva often struggles with this immense pressure, however. After she is released from prison, she puts up a good front in her attempt to hide her true feelings: “My months in prison had elevated me to superhuman status. [...] I hid my anxieties and gave everyone a bright smile. If they had only known how frail was their iron-will heroine. How much it took to put on that hardest of all performances, being my old self again” (259). She wants her old life back again, but does not know how to achieve this after her experiences in prison. She tries to unburden herself to her old friend Elsa, but “I gave her the bright brave smile she also required of me” (265). Minerva also tries to fool her husband. “I had put on too good a show for Manolo as well. He didn’t know the double life I was leading. Outwardly, I was still his calm, courageous *compañera*. Inside, the woman had got the upper hand. / And so the struggle with her began. The struggle to get my old self back from her. Late in the night, I’d lie in bed, thinking, You must gather up the broken threads and tie them together” (267). By showing Minerva’s doubting, insecure, human side, Alvarez stresses that heroism does not come easily or without a price. It affects one’s psyche and one’s relationship with family and friends. It demands constantly putting others’ needs above one’s own. It requires putting on a brave show and playing the role of a courageous leader—even though that often goes against how one feels on the inside. While Alvarez wants to encourage others to be politically engaged, she also wants to be honest about the sacrifices required by that engagement.

In addition to the personalization of its subjects, *In the Time of the Butterflies* also draws on the collective nature of testimonios. By celebrating the Mirabals' distinct courage and heroism and at the same time showing how they had everyday dreams, fears, and problems just like the collective population, Alvarez's novel represents both the individual and the collective—just like testimonios of other women activists. Alvarez also points to the collective nature of testimonios by creating a “collective narrator”—each of the sisters has a voice and they all come together to make the story whole.¹²² As Alvarez explains in one interview, “We move through experience relationally, so multiple points of view have always been much more interesting to me than the single perspective, which tunnels through and gets what it wants and is the hero” (Lyons 132). This same type of collective patchwork can be seen in how Dedé learns about what happened to her sisters on that fateful day in November of 1960 when Trujillo's henchmen ambushed the jeep in which the Mirabal sisters were riding and killed them, afterwards pushing the jeep off a cliff to make it look like an accident. Dominicans come from all over to contribute to the collective story. As Dedé recalls, after the accident, “Each visitor would break my heart all over again, but I would sit on this very rocker and listen for as long as they had something to say. / It was the least I could do, being the one saved. / And as they spoke, I was composing in my head how that last afternoon went” (301). One Dominican man came down off the mountain and walked for days just to come say what time he heard the crash of the jeep (303). Responding to whether or not it was really true that people were coming to Dedé and telling her their versions of what happened, Alvarez expounds in one interview,

¹²² Isabel Dulfano argues interestingly that each sister represents a different class and its interest: Dedé: the bourgeois proletariat class, Patria: the landed peasant class in allegiance with the Church of Liberation Theology, Minerva: the middle-class leftist literati, and María Teresa: the ingenuous and impressionable youth who join the guerrilla movement out of infatuation and idealism (93).

Well, it was true that different people had their own little stories, all fragments of a greater whole. In a dictatorship you don't hear the truth in the news, you don't have it reported, everything is suppressed. The only way you come to know the news is by what other people tell you. That's why storytelling is so important in a dictatorship. In this case, Dedé found out what "really" happened because people came forward with their stories. She had to put together the pieces from the stories that people told her. (García Tabor 154)

In this sense, Alvarez's novel is a type of fictionalized meta-testimonio: it is a testimonio about the collective testimonio of the sisters' lives and deaths. Dedé becomes a repository for all of the micro-testimonios around her. As Fernando Valerio-Holguín explains, "For Julia Alvarez, Dedé Mirabal, the only survivor of the Mirabal sisters, becomes an important testimonial narrator as the source of the local 'little stories' that do not appear in treaties or history books" (98).¹²³ Just like the witnesses and informants who came to Dedé to give her their contribution to the story, Alvarez gathered information from witnesses and informants while doing research for her novel. Many of these names are collectively presented in a list on the last page of the book, as a way for Alvarez to give thanks and recognition. *In the Time of the Butterflies*, then, stands as testament to the many others who helped solidify the Mirabal sisters' story into both historical and literary memory.

Another way to think about *In the Time of the Butterflies* as a collective story is to contextualize the Mirabals' story within Dominican history, as exemplified by how the Mirabal museum (the Mirabals' former house) has become part of the collective national identity and memory, despite the fact that it is not a national museum with federal funding (K. Johnson 82-

¹²³ "Para Julia Alvarez, Dedé Mirabal, la única sobreviviente de las hermanas Mirabal, se convierte en una narradora testimonial importante como fuente de las 'pequeñas historias' familiares que no aparecen ni en tratados ni libros de historias."

83). “Their” story has become “our” story. Dominicans not only relate to the Mirabal tragedy because of their own personal experiences with the Trujillo regime, but also feel a sense of ownership of the Mirabal sisters and what happened to them because of how well-known and admired they were. Indeed, it is said that the deaths of the sisters was the beginning of the end for Trujillo—he was assassinated just six months after he had the Mirabals killed. The story of the Mirabals has become part of a larger Dominican story. This national collectivity is reflected by the numerous names that spread over two pages before the novel’s narrative begins. These are the names of other activists who were involved in trying to bring an end to the violence and injustice of the Trujillo regime. The four names in bold are the three Mirabal sisters and their driver Rufino. Alvarez explains in an interview that this collective list is what drove her writing process: “That list of names in *Butterflies* was a guiding idea as I wrote the novel. I told the publisher from the beginning I wanted those names to be there, because while the novel is primarily the story of three people, there were many, many more people involved” (Lyons 136). Just as many testimonios begin with the testimonialista’s acknowledgement of the many others who have fought and even died for the same resistance to governmental abuse and oppression, so does Alvarez’s novel pay tribute to the many other unsung heroes who struggled for social justice and equality against one of history’s most nefarious dictators. Listing the names of the Mirabal sisters (in bold) among the many other names on those two pages reflects the synecdochic subjectivity that bolsters many testimonios—a simultaneous blending in and standing out. It also serves as a form of deification-resistance, as it affirms the fact that there were many others who also fought for the hope of a better future for their families and for all Dominicans.

II. *In the Time of the Butterflies* as Testimonial Bildungsroman

Testimonios are often read as Bildungsromanen, coming-of-age novels, tracing the discovery and formation of the testimonialista's political consciousness.¹²⁴ The original Spanish title of Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, for example, translates into English as *My Name is Rigoberta Menchú and This is How My Consciousness was Born*. And Domitila Barrios de Chungara describes in her testimonio how "with everything I've suffered in the arrests, in jail, and in Los Yungas, I'd acquired a political consciousness" (160).¹²⁵ Alvarez draws on this Bildungsroman connection and brings out the parallel between the Mirabal sisters' sexual and political comings-of-age to emphasize women's sexuality used for political purposes in the Dominican Republic, Trujillo's power over women (through submission, rape, torture) as an example of and a metaphor for the state's power over its citizens, and the difficulty with which all four Mirabal sisters struggle to balance the personal (family, sex, religion) and the political (revolution).

In each of the sisters, we can see how the dialectical relationship between sex, gender, and politics reveals the tension between the personal and the political. As Holly Blackford points out, "Throughout the text, images of the female body, particularly of pregnancy, are used to express principles of connectivity between unique individuals, politics, and spirituality. With all the sisters, the female body registers spiritual and intuitive knowledge of political ethics" (234). As Barrios' testimonio, Murat's film, and many other testimonial works show, political resistance can be an intensely physical experience. Bodies are used as battlegrounds and

¹²⁴ Elzbieta Sklodowska, for instance, notes that there are "parallels between the testimonio and the novel of social realism, the *Bildungsroman*, the picaresque and the traditional epic, the *crónica*, and the memoir" ("paralelos entre el testimonio y la novela del realismo social, el *Bildungsroman*, la picaresca y la épica tradicional, la crónica y las memorias") (*Testimonio* 77).

¹²⁵ "con la experiencia que he tenido en Los Yungas, revisando todo lo que había sufrido en la cárcel, de todas esas cosas me había dado cuenta. Había adquirido conciencia política" (Viezzler 179).

weapons of violence through torture, rape, forced miscarriage, murder, and so on. The female body in particular has long been a site of exploitation, domination, and aggression in Latin America for conquistadors, dictators, state officials, and prison guards alike. Valerio-Holguín asserts, however, that the Mirabals—and Minerva in particular—should not just be seen as physical victims, as this plays into the long-standing misogynistic metaphor of women as conquered or conquerable nations:

Doris Sommer has pointed out in several of the major Dominican novels the use of the feminine body as an allegory of the Dominican nation facing the foreign usurper, above all in the novel *Enriquillo* by Manuel de Jesús Galván. In Alvarez's novel, it can be inferred that it is the hate for the patriarchal figure of Trujillo that brings Minerva to politicize—and not prostitute—her body. From the essentialism that condemns Minerva's body to a national allegory, Julia Alvarez insists on returning a political body to Minerva and the other sisters. (94-95)¹²⁶

In her novel that resists literary taxonomies, Alvarez resists reducing the Mirabal sisters to solely victims. She shows their agency in cultivating and determining their own subjectivities and deciding how and when their bodies will be politicized. She celebrates their strength and courage in fighting against the Trujillo dictatorship—in addition to relating the tragedy of their tortures and deaths. This resistance helps in her project to humanize the sisters and not mythologize or historicize them. Alvarez rewrites the Mirabals' body as a new type of national allegory by interconnecting the private and the public, the personal and the collective.

¹²⁶ “Doris Sommer ha señalado en algunas de las novelas dominicanas maestras el uso del cuerpo femenino como alegoría de la nación dominicana frente al usurpador extranjero, sobre todo en la novela *Enriquillo* de Manuel de Jesús Galván. En la novela de Alvarez, se puede inferir que es el odio contra la figura patriarcal de Trujillo lo que lleva a Minerva a politizar—y no a prostituir—su cuerpo. Del esencialismo que condena el cuerpo de Minerva a una alegoría nacional, Julia Alvarez insiste en devolverle a Minerva y las demás hermanas un cuerpo político.”

It is in that sense that Alvarez's novel proposes a political allegory of the Dominican Republic during the dictatorship of Trujillo. The Mirabals' body becomes a political text thanks to the inscription of the public into the private and the political into the poetic. And this is one of the fundamental differences regarding the representation of a time period. Unlike historical texts or socio-political analyses, Alvarez's novel inserts politics and history into the private life of the Mirabal family. (Valerio-Holguín 96)¹²⁷

Just as politics saturated the everyday lives of the entire Mirabal family (and all Dominican families), so does it saturate Alvarez's novel. By overlaying the personal and the private with the political and the historical (just as in traditional testimonios), Alvarez is able to emphasize the sisters' instrumentality in their own subjectivities and their own political trajectories, thus combating at the same time both the flattening and the deification of the sisters.

The politicization of Minerva's body can be seen from the beginning of *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Her sexual body and her political experiences become synchronously linked. After Minerva finally convinces her father to allow her, Patria, and Dedé to go off to boarding school at Inmaculada Concepción together, her mind and body awaken to a whole host of worldly realities which shatter her patriotic view of a good and just Dominican Republic. She realizes that her country is not the bastion of freedom and possibility that she once thought. In fact, it is a cage that suppresses these things. So now, even though her mind is open and free, she feels further trapped: "And that's how I got free. I don't mean just going to sleepaway school on a train with a trunkful of new things. I mean in my head after I got to Inmaculada and met Sinita

¹²⁷ "Es en ese sentido que la novela de Alvarez propone una alegoría política de la República Dominicana durante la dictadura de Trujillo. El cuerpo de las Mirabal se convierte en texto político gracias a la inscripción de lo público en lo privado y de lo político en lo poético. Y esta es una de las diferencias fundamentales cuanto a la representación de una época. A diferencia de los textos de historia o de análisis socio-políticos, la novela de Alvarez inserta la política y la historia en la vida privada de la familia Mirabal."

and saw what happened to Lina and realized that I'd just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country" (13). While movements and behaviors are restricted in a cage, you are still able to see out and see what is occurring all around you. In a bigger cage now, Minerva is able to "see" more, yet she is still confined and enclosed, limited in what she can do to fight against the Dominican dictator. Minerva's physical coming-of-age and political coming-of-age soon set off on parallel paths that are intertwined. When Sister Milagros gathers the young girls at Inmaculada Concepción to brief them on their menstrual cycle, she refers to it as their "complications"—an apt name for Dominican politics as well. Like the sexual maturation of young girls, politics is a forbidden topic in Dominican society, incidents only hinted at with words like "accident" and "mishap." As Sister Milagros explains, "First, she said there had been some accidents. Anyone needing a canvas sheet should come see her. Of course, the best way to prevent a mishap was to be sure to visit our chamber pots every night before we got in bed" (15). Sister Milagros cannot outright say to what she is referring: "She went through a most tangled-up explanation about the how and why, and finished by saying if we should start our complications, we should come see her" (15).

Minerva's friend Sinita has no idea what Sister Milagros is talking about since she has never been educated about her sexual body, so Minerva decides to help out—as Patria has already told her about reproduction. "Right then, I told Sinita everything I knew about bleeding and having babies between your legs. She was pretty shocked, and beholden. She offered to trade me back the secret of Trujillo" (16). Minerva is shocked in return to hear about what Trujillo has been doing: "'Bad things?' I interrupted. 'Trujillo was doing bad things?' It was as if I had just heard Jesus had slapped a baby or Our Blessed Mother had not conceived Him the immaculate conception way. 'That can't be true,' I said, but in my heart, I felt a china-crack of

doubt” (17).¹²⁸ The bad things that Trujillo has been doing are “secret”—just like the truth behind the girls’ sexual bodies. The morning after Minerva learns about Trujillo from Sinita, whose story “spilled out like blood from a cut” (18), she starts her period: “I lifted the covers, and for a moment, I couldn’t make sense of the dark stains on the bottom sheet. Then I brought up my hand from checking myself. Sure enough, my complications had started” (20). The blood shed by Minerva here is linked to the blood shed under Trujillo’s brutal regime—and foreshadows Minerva’s own blood that will be shed at the hands of the dictator. Her “complications” have started not only because her menstrual cycle has started, but also because her political awareness has begun, as reflected by the title of this section of the novel: “Complications.” Minerva has transitioned both physically and politically into the complicated world of adulthood.¹²⁹

Minerva’s political awareness will push both her and her family into a complicated and deadly personal-political relationship with Trujillo. As a woman now, she will struggle against not only the (sexualized) violence perpetrated against women under Trujillo, but also the machista ideology that his regime has spread and solidified throughout the Dominican Republic. “Minerva’s menstrual blood remains linked not only with rape but also with the violence of a feminist critic of Trujillo’s patriarchy” (Valerio-Holguín 96).¹³⁰ A strict and pervasive

¹²⁸ The Mirabal sisters grow up devoted to God, Trujillo, and their Papá, a patriarchal triumvirate. In their eyes, all three are infallible. *In the Time of the Butterflies* is in large part about the sisters’ realization that each of their father figures is flawed (they discover that their father has been unfaithful to their mother for years and has a second family of four daughters) and their struggle to readjust their lives after this realization.

¹²⁹ The physicality of Minerva’s political awakening can also be seen in her occasional difficulty in breathing. She feels this when she thinks of her school friend Lina who, after being courted by the married Trujillo, became pregnant and was banished to a mansion in Miami:

We were quiet, thinking of this sad ending for our beautiful Lina. I felt my breath coming short again. At first, I had thought it was caused by the cotton bandages I had started tying around my chest so my breasts wouldn’t grow. I wanted to be sure what happened to Lina Lovatón would never happen to me. But every time I’d hear one more secret about Trujillo I could feel the tightening in my chest even when I wasn’t wearing the bandages. (23)

¹³⁰ “La sangre de la menstruación de Minerva queda vinculada no sólo con la violación sino también con la violencia como crítica feminista al patriarcado trujillista.”

patriarchy was deeply entrenched during Trujillo's dictatorship, and those who spoke or acted out against it were swiftly and brutally punished. As Dedé hears someone saying on the radio one day, dictatorships "are pantheistic. The dictator manages to plant a little piece of himself in every one of us" (311).¹³¹ Trujillo, like the Spanish conquistador, used sex as a way not only to secure domination, but also to disseminate himself throughout the land. Ignacio López-Calvo draws out this connection: "Julia Álvarez implicitly suggests the origins of the figure of the dictator by providing him with a historical predecessor: the Spanish conquistador" (100). The link between Trujillo and the Spanish conquistador is reinforced after Minerva catches the eye of Trujillo at a party and he requests her presence at the upcoming Discovery Day Dance. This dance, celebrating Columbus' "discovery" of the Dominican Republic, is a symbol and site of the sexual exploitation and violence that both conquistadors and dictators have perpetrated against their victims. It is where Minerva and Trujillo engage in a sexually-heightened debate on whether or not women should be allowed to attend the university, a right that would go against Trujillo's machista dogma. As the two of them dance (an activity that is both private and public), Minerva charms Trujillo in order to try and convince him to allow her to attend law school at the university in the capital. "He gives me the indulgent smile of an adult hearing an outrageous claim from a child."¹³² "A woman like you, a lawyer? [...] The university is no place for a woman these days. [...] It is full of communists and agitators, who want to bring down the government" (98, 99). After lying to him about knowing a certain subversive,¹³³ Minerva reflects, "I see now how easily it happens. You give in on little things, and soon you're serving

¹³¹ As in historical reality, Trujillo rarely appears in the novel, though his presence and terror are felt throughout (Sirias 75).

¹³² Trujillo infantilizes Minerva here, just as conquistadors infantilized the natives when they arrived in the "New World."

¹³³ Minerva's attraction to this subversive, Lío Morales, is what helped to cement her revolutionary convictions, again suggesting the link between sexuality/gender and politics.

in his government, marching in his parades, sleeping in his bed” (99). When the dictator’s sexual advances intensify, Minerva’s body reacts without thinking: “I can feel the hardness at his groin pressing against my dress. [...] He yanks me by the wrist, thrusting his pelvis at me in a vulgar way, and I can see my hand in an endless slow motion rise—a mind all its own—and come down on the astonished, made-up face” (100).¹³⁴

To castigate Minerva for her outrageously disrespectful behavior at the dance, Trujillo arrests her father and tortures him in prison. By punishing Minerva’s father instead of her, Trujillo works to weaken the Mirabal patriarchy while tightening his own patriarchal grip over not only Minerva, but the entire Mirabal family as well. Before Minerva goes to meet with the dictator to beg for her father’s release, her mother warns her of Trujillo’s sexual appetite, using coded sexual terms: “By now, Mamá is sobbing. ‘*Dios te bendiga,*’ she sniffles, then reminds me, ‘Watch your you-know-what!’ I realize she no longer means just my mouth” (108). Indeed, Minerva is offered a chance to save her father if she sleeps with Trujillo. No matter what she decides, Minerva is being forced to sacrifice the personal for her politics: either her body or her father’s body will be victimized. Refusing to prostitute her body, Minerva rejects Trujillo’s offer—at the expense of her father’s physical and mental health. Never fully regaining his physical or mental capacities, he dies two years after being released from prison. As this sequence of events suggests, Trujillo was known as much for his vast sexual rapaciousness as for his unforgiving malice and abuse. He preyed on pretty women and brutalized those who did not give him what he wanted, thus utilizing sex, torture, and murder alike to tighten his grip on the Dominican Republic. As Lauren Derby confirms,

¹³⁴ Though this (in)famous slap was reported by *Time* magazine in 1960, several historians have doubted whether it really occurred.

Trujillo's power was based as much on the consumption of women through sexual conquest as it was on the domination of enemies of state. His charisma was founded as much on the concrete numbers of women he acquired (and their class status) as it was on violence and the near mythological fear he inspired by eliminating men. And whereas his insatiable sexual cupidity incited ignominy, it also brought him respect and was a key element in his legitimacy as a caudillo-turned-statesman. (1113)

Trujillo played into Dominicans' historical familiarity with the caudillo figure, drawing on it to solidify and sustain his hegemony. Alvarez, likewise, paints a Trujillo who puts great effort into generating sexual dalliances and playing up his caudillo character: he has a special official to round up girls for him (94); he has his hair darkened, drinks a special brew his *brujo* cooks up to keep him sexually potent, and dons a cluttered sash that crosses his chest (95); he wears elevator shoes to boost his height, uses skin whiteners and creams to hide his mixed-race heritage, and puts on satin sashes (96); he wears overpowering cologne (98) and has manicured hands (113). This image of Trujillo underscores his larger-than-life persona and the importance he places on sexual conquests as part of his overall strategy for maintaining domination and control. It also emphasizes Alvarez's feminization of Trujillo, a literary way, perhaps, for the author to belittle the ruthless dictator.

As the years progress and Minerva becomes more involved in the underground revolution, she struggles with how to balance her personal life and her political life—despite her tough façade and seemingly unwavering commitment to the fight against Trujillo: “I’d argue with myself. What’s more important, romance or revolution? But a little voice kept saying, *Both, both, I want both.* Back and forth my mind went, weaving a yes by night and unraveling it

by day to a no” (86). For Minerva, her marital struggles are closely linked to her political struggles. When Minerva and her husband Manolo reconcile after he was seeing another woman, Minerva tells Mate, “The struggle’s brought us together again” (140). It is hard for others to see Minerva’s internal struggle. When she asks Patria to watch her son Manolito while she is on the road with revolutionary business, Patria finally understands how painful Minerva’s personal sacrifices for the political are: “‘Keep him?’ I, who treasured my children more than my own life, couldn’t believe my sister would leave her son for anything. ‘Where are you going?’ I asked, alarmed. [...] ‘But Minerva, your own child—’ I began and then I saw it did hurt her to make this sacrifice she was convinced she needed to make” (155). Minerva must constantly weigh her responsibilities as both a mother and a revolutionary leader, just like Barrios and other testimonialista activists. She knows that her actions affect not just her family, but her fellow citizens as well. “The numerous passages dealing with the Butterflies’ private lives, beginning with their childhood, validate the feminist motto ‘The personal is the political,’ meaning, of course, that individual actions affect the rest of society” (López-Calvo 95). By focusing on the personal side of the Mirabals, Alvarez is able to show how heart-wrenching many of Minerva’s decisions to sacrifice the personal for the political truly are. Being a leader did not always (or necessarily) come easily for her. Like other revolutionary testimonialistas, Minerva accepts the fact that she must occasionally give up control over and time with her children for her work in fighting for a better future for them.

In Minerva, the most dedicated to the cause, we can see the strongest connection between the sexual body and the political. The parallel between her menstrual cycle and her activism persists in the novel throughout her short life. When Minerva and Mate visit Delia, a female doctor and fellow revolutionary who had been imprisoned with them, they discuss the status of

the underground movement in coded menstrual terms. Minerva begins, “We came about our cycles. [...] So is there any activity in our old cells?” (270). Delia responds, “The cells in your system have atrophied and are dead. [...] A few of them are still active, to be sure. But most importantly, new cells are filling in all the time. You need to give your bodies a rest. You should see menstrual activity by the beginning of next year” (270). As Valerio-Holguín succinctly notes, here again “Minerva converts her body into an allegory of the political situation” (96).¹³⁵ Later, Patria placates a governmental official upset about Minerva’s unauthorized excursion to visit Delia by telling him that Minerva had to see a doctor about a “private matter” (271). When pressed, Patria lies to him that it has to do with “women’s problems” (271). The official is softened enough by this explanation to grant Minerva permission to meet with Dr. Viñas, a urologist and (unbeknownst to the official) the new leader of the underground movement. Whereas a woman’s sexual body has historically been used as a weapon of violence perpetrated by men, in Alvarez’s novel it is also used as a weapon of power wielded by women. Not only does Minerva reject Trujillo’s sexual advances (and thus his power and control over her and her body), but here, the *language* of menstruation serves as a code language to discuss and gain revolutionary information while the *topic* of menstruation serves as a deterrent to ease the mind of a suspicious government official. The astute (and here cunningly metaphorical) way that the Mirabal women recover their own bodies parallels the astute way that Alvarez recovers the Mirabals’ story in her novel.

Mate is the youngest Mirabal sister but the second one, after Minerva, to become involved in the underground movement against Trujillo. Mate has the most romantic spirit of all the sisters and the reader sees her grow from a sweet, daydreaming, and sheltered young girl to a brave, politically-minded activist—though she never loses her romantic spirit. Reflecting the

¹³⁵ “Minerva convierte su cuerpo en una alegoría de la situación política.”

link between sexuality and politics, Minerva, the sister who will later educate Mate on politics and encourage her to become politically involved, gives her a lesson on sex when she is ten years old: “Minerva explained everything to me in detail and with diagrams as we were coming home on the train. I was not one bit surprised. First, she had already told me about cycles, and second, we do live on a farm, and it’s not like the bulls are exactly private about what they do. But still, I don’t have to like it. I am hoping a new way will be found by the time I am old enough to be married” (33). The diagrams that Minerva uses to explain sex here foreshadow the diagrams of bombs that Mate will later have to memorize as a member of the underground. Mate learns early on of the painful tension between the personal and the political. When Mate is still just a girl, Minerva tells her that she has to throw away her journal (the quintessential symbol of the personal) after Minerva’s political action group is discovered and disbanded. Any written evidence of the group must be destroyed, and since Mate has written about the group, her journal must go. Mate feels the void as she says goodbye to her journal: “Minerva was right. My soul has gotten deeper since I started writing in you. But this is what I want to know that not even Minerva knows. / What do I do now to fill up that hole?” (43). This episode foreshadows Mate’s later sacrifices of the personal for the political—her time in jail away from her daughter, her torture in prison, and ultimately her death. As Jacqueline Stefanko notes, “Gaining knowledge of sexuality and political power, Mate loses her naïveté along with her first diary” (64). Losing her journal is like losing her virginity: her innocence is forever gone. She knows now that political involvement carries personal consequences.

The tension between romantic passion and political passion can be seen most clearly in Mate. At first, for Mate, love and activism go hand in hand. She meets her future husband Leandro when he makes a delivery for the underground movement at Manolo and Minerva’s

home. She helps him find a place to put his goods: “It amazed me even as it was happening how immediately I’d fallen in with this stranger’s mission, whatever it was” (141). When Leandro asks her, “You aren’t one of us, are you?” Mate thinks to herself, “I didn’t know what *us* he was talking about, but I knew right then and there, I wanted to be a part of whatever he was” (142). She joins up with the struggle shortly after this encounter, and when she goes off to the university in the capital city, she becomes an important contact person for the movement, her revolutionary duties eventually overshadowing her academic responsibilities: “I’ve lost all interest in my studies. I just go to classes in order to keep my cover as a second-year architecture student. My true identity now is Mariposa (# 2), waiting daily, hourly, for communications from up north” (143). Her revolutionary experiences in the capital underscore again the link between sexuality and politics. Mate refers to the bomb kits for which she and her roommate Sonia must memorize diagrams as Nipples kits, and their landlady assumes that she and Sonia are prostitutes because of all the men coming to their apartment (to make deliveries). Mate blushes at this thought, but she knows that she can sacrifice a little of her reputation for the greater political good. At first, then, Mate’s romantic and political impulses are in synch: “I’m a natural for this, really. I’ve always liked men, receiving them, paying them attention, listening to what they have to say. Now I can use my talents for the revolution” (143). But later, the tension between the two begins to surface. Leandro tells Mate that he worries too much about her to pay careful enough attention to the revolution, and Mate realizes that for her, passion for Leandro trumps passion for the revolution:

My heart stirred to hear him say so. I admit that for me love goes deeper than the struggle, or maybe what I mean is, love is the deeper struggle. I would never be able to give up Leandro to some higher ideal the way I feel Minerva and Manolo

would each other if they had to make the supreme sacrifice. And so last night, it touched me, Oh so deeply, to hear him say it was the same for him, too. (147)

While the struggle is what helps unite and keep Minerva and Manolo together, for Leandro and Mate it becomes a source of tension and distraction in their relationship—though they never do abandon it. For Barrios, revolution is the deeper struggle, and this is what creates the tension in her marriage. Unlike for Minerva and Mate, Barrios' husband does not feel the same way about the revolution as she does. And while many of the Brazilian militants in Murat's film had relationships with other militants during the struggle, the trauma of their torture experience seems to have afflicted many of their post-dictatorship relationships.

The link between sexuality/gender and politics intensifies dramatically when Mate and Minerva are imprisoned. To survive its psychological toll, Mate relates her prison experience to her maternal experience: "You have to train your mind and spirit. Like putting the baby on a feeding schedule" (235). And imprisonment disrupts not only the women prisoners' subversive activities, but their menstrual cycles as well (Valerio-Holguín 96), the body once again being used as a political allegory (López-Calvo 88). Because of others' disrupted menstruations in prison, Mate does not immediately realize that she is pregnant. Her eventual realization exposes the tension between the personal and the political for Mate. She and Leandro had been trying recently to have another baby, a life change that would have facilitated her exit from the underground movement. Tragically, however, like Barrios, several of the Brazilian torture survivors, and many other women activists, Mate loses her baby in prison due to forced miscarriage. She is taken to a room where she is tortured in front of her husband, SIM (Trujillo's secret police) officials hoping to coerce Leandro into giving over revolutionary information, which he does. Later, Mate reflects in her journal, "Still very weak, but the bleeding has

stopped. / I can't bear to tell the story yet. / Just this—I've either bled a baby or had a period. And no one had to do a thing about it after the SIM got to me" (240). The pages in her journal that describe what happened are "torn out" and not reinserted until the end of the chapter, too precious and too painful to be read with her other entries. Mate's experience shows how both the outer and inner body are sites of state violence and how even the most intimate parts of our bodies and lives (sex and reproduction) are at the mercy of the government under an abusive dictatorship. Not only is Mate separated from her daughter while in prison, but she is also prevented from having another child.

Even her torture and miscarriage, however, cannot harden Mate completely. When Mate is chosen to meet with a human rights committee that is coming to investigate the prison, Minerva tells Mate that she must report all of the prison guards, even those who have been kind and helpful to them. Mate objects, arguing that the prison guards are victims, too. Minerva counters, "But victims can do a lot of harm. And this isn't personal, Mate, she adds. This is principle" (250). Mate thinks afterwards, "I never was good at understanding that difference so crucial to my sister. Everything's personal to me that's principle to her, it seems" (250). Minerva also asks Mate to give the committee her journal pages detailing her torture. But when the time comes and Mate is meeting with the committee, she drops only the pages of a collectively-signed statement (folded up in her braid), choosing both to keep her journal pages to herself and to protect any prison guards that she would have exposed. The complex conflict between the personal and the political surfaces here, though Mate is able to navigate through the difficult waters by fulfilling her political duty (dropping the collective statement) while holding onto her most personal prison experience (not dropping her journal pages). Though Mate's body was violated, she is able to control how, when, where, and by whom her written account of this

violation is read. She uses her body, the very one that was tortured and abused, to conceal her record of her horrific experience—here again, a woman’s body being wielded as a powerful tool. That she hides her journal pages specifically in her *braid*, a strong marker of femininity, only underscores the fact that she uses her *gendered* body here to carry out her own desires while easing—even if briefly—the tension between the personal and the political.

The prison scenes in the novel also point to the collective nature of the story, a strong commonality with traditional testimonios. As the women’s disrupted menstruations suggest, prison is a great equalizer and creates a collective bond between the women.¹³⁶ Mate senses this collectivity with the feeling of unity she shares with the other women in her jail cell. She moves from feeling distanced from the other women in the beginning to feeling a close kinship with them at the end. When it is time for Mate to be released from jail, she has a surprising reaction: “I feel sad to be leaving. Yes, strange as it sounds, this has become my home, these girls are like my sisters. I can’t imagine the lonely privacy of living without them. / I tell myself the connection will continue. It does not go away because you leave. And I begin to understand the revolution in a new way” (253). These new “sisters” in her new “home” have served as Mate’s substitute family, giving her a sense of belonging and cohesion during one of her most lonely and challenging periods. This sense of unity and collectivity is also reflected between the female and male prisoners—with Minerva serving as the linchpin. Not only does Minerva often lead everyone in singing the Dominican national anthem, but she also embodies the hope and courage of her people. One day, “As she was being marched down the hall, a voice from one of the cells they passed called out, *Mariposa does not belong to herself alone. She belongs to Quisqueya!* Then everyone was beating on the bars, calling out, *¡Viva la Mariposa!*” (238). *Quisqueya* is a Taíno name used to refer to the Dominican Republic. Minerva belongs to *Quisqueya* not only

¹³⁶ The fact that five of the women featured in Murat’s film are her former prison mates also suggests this bond.

because she is identified as being with *el pueblo*, but also because as a political leader, she fights for and represents a larger collective group. Mate observes this sense of national collectivity: “There *is* something deeper. Sometimes I really feel it in here, especially late at night, a current going among us, like an invisible needle stitching us together into the glorious, free nation we are becoming” (239). It is in prison, where she was sent by her corrupt and iniquitous government, separated from her family and from the rest of her fellow Dominicans, that Mate feels the strongest sense of collectivity and patriotism.

The link between gender, sexuality, and politics can also be seen in Patria (the third sister to join the underground movement), though for her, all of these things are also inextricably connected to religion. This connection makes even more sense given the lack of separation between the Church and the state in the Dominican Republic. Indeed, Patria’s devotion to (and sacrifice for) her religious convictions prepares her for her devotion to (and sacrifice for) her political convictions. Growing up, she always believed she would become a nun. She practiced writing out her religious name “the way other girls [like younger sister Mate] were trying out their given names with the surnames of cute boys” (45). While a student at Inmaculada Concepción, however, Patria’s sexuality is awakened and she begins to question her calling. When she meets with Sor Asunción to discuss her future—whether she will be a nun, devoted to God, or a wife, devoted to a husband—she cannot take her eyes off the red, sensual flowers outside: “The flamboyants, I remember, were in full bloom. Entering that somber study, I could see just outside the window the brilliant red flames lit in every tree, and beyond, some threatening thunderclouds. [...] I tried hard but I could not keep my eyes from straying to the flame trees, their blossoms tumbling in the wind of the coming storm” (46-47). These ominous red flowers are bursting with sexual suggestion—the red linked to menstrual blood and the

blossoms a reminder of fertility—and stand out against the “somber” room that represents what a convented life would be like for Patria. The coming storm intimates Patria’s imminent struggle between carnal desire and sacred desire. After meeting with Sor Asunción, Patria still cannot decide what she wants for her future. She had always thought she would enter a religious order, but her body is resistant. At night, she tries hard to restrain her hands and focus on her Savior, but she cannot control her body:

There was a struggle, but no one could tell. It came in the dark in the evil hours when the hands wake with a life of their own. They rambled over my growing body, they touched the plumping of my chest, the mound of my belly, and on down. I tried reining them in, but they broke loose, night after night.

For Three Kings, I asked for a crucifix for above my bed. Nights, I laid it beside me so that my hands, waking, could touch his suffering flesh instead and be tamed from their shameful wanderings. The ruse worked, the hands slept again, but other parts of my body began to wake. (47)

This physical awakening leans Patria closer to choosing to become a wife and mother, roles that will later help push her into political activism. So while the connection is not as direct as with Minerva and Mate, Patria’s sexual awakening is linked to her political awakening as well. After Patria meets Pedro González, she knows that she has her final answer: she will be a wife—and not a nun. For the next Easter mass, she wears a flamboyant blossom in her hair (48), a marker of her final decision *not* to be a celibate nun.¹³⁷ Though Patria resolves to marry Pedro, religion will continue to play an important part in her life. Indeed, her first encounter with Pedro itself has religious overtones. As Silvio Sirias observes, “Meeting Pedro constitutes, in itself, a

¹³⁷ Flamboyants are also linked to sexuality with Dedé. In the epilogue, she describes a daydream she has: her Canadian love interest is taking pictures of her “standing under those blazing trees—flamboyants in bloom in my imagination” (320).

religious experience. It takes place during Easter week, on Holy Thursday, as Patria helps reenact when Jesus washed the feet of his apostles. She realizes at that very moment that although she is destined to marry, she need not forsake her God or her Church” (61). Through marriage, she can carry out the marianistic code scripted for her in the Bible. And it is the combination of being a good Catholic and a good wife and mother that later facilitates Patria’s political awakening and commitment.

Patria’s political journey can be said to begin with the loss of what would be her third child. This loss coincides with and parallels her brief but profound loss of faith. Pregnant with her third baby, Patria constantly worries about Minerva, who is becoming more and more brash in her public denunciations against the government—and the Church for its support of the government. She fears that Minerva, who often points out to Patria the outdated and empty aspects of the Church, is losing her faith. Minerva’s denunciations and criticisms finally start influencing Patria, however. She laments,

For days, I’d been feeling a heaviness inside me. And I admit it, Minerva’s talk had begun affecting me. I started noting the deadness in Padre Ignacio’s voice, the tedium between the gospel communion, the dry papery feel of the host in my mouth. My faith was shifting, and I was afraid.

‘Sit back,’ Minerva said, kindly, seeing the lines of weariness on my face. ‘Let me finish counting those hairs.’

And suddenly, I was crying in her arms, because I could feel the waters breaking, the pearl of great price slipping out, and I realized I was giving birth to something dead I had been carrying inside me. (52)

Patria miscarries soon after this, the expelling of her dead baby linked to the expelling of her dead faith. She has lost her “pearl of great price,” a biblical metaphor for the richness of Heaven and, here also, a metaphor for Patria’s baby: a pearl, like a baby, is created and cultivated inside another living being and is expelled with breaking waters. As if trying to fill the void left by her recent losses, Patria and Pedro’s sex life intensifies afterwards. Patria’s faith returns to her a few months later while on a pilgrimage to Higüey to see the Virgencita with her mother and sisters. This return of faith is marked by a renewed cognizance of the collectivity of which Patria is a part: “I turned around and saw the packed pews, hundreds of weary, upturned faces, and it was as if I’d been facing the wrong way all my life” (58). This new awareness of the community of people around her is what later helps solidify Patria’s political involvement. “Patria hears a voice that tells her that the spirit of Mary rests not in the image before her, but rather all around her, in the people and their suffering” (Sirias 62). In Higüey, Patria feels her restored faith in her stomach, like a new life growing inside of her: “My faith stirred. It kicked and somersaulted in my belly, coming alive” (58). As the connections between Patria’s faith and fertility show, her body registers and reflects the melding of the personal, the spiritual, and the political, for it is her newly-restored faith that leads Patria to join the political revolution.

Patria’s involvement in the underground resistance movement is at first hesitant and then later resolute. Before she officially joins the movement, Patria’s subversiveness is expressed and cultivated through her maternal role. She conceives new child Raúl Ernesto on Cuba’s day of liberation and tells Minerva his name (an homage to both Raúl Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara) as a way to show her silent solidarity with her, Mate, and their cause (155). She also begins working with her son to devise a plan for him to go to the university in the capital—against her husband’s desires: “We had our own little plot cooked up to present to his father—the

day before university classes started” (157). Couching her plan in culinary terms (“cooked up”) only underscores her subversiveness via her domestic role. In her relationship with her daughter Noris, she also shows her rebelliousness: “I was raising my girl modern where she wasn’t kept cooped up, learning blind obedience” (157). For Patria, a devoted Catholic wife and mother, this subversiveness in her maternal role is striking and leads to a change of heart regarding her passivity towards the resistance movement against Trujillo. At a retreat with other faithful Catholic women, the retreat house is caught in the middle of the famous skirmish that took place on June 14, 1959, between leftist activists and soldiers in Trujillo’s army and for which a secret underground group was named shortly thereafter. During the clash, Patria sees a young revolutionary running towards them: “I looked at his face. He was a boy no older than Noris. Maybe that’s why I cried out, ‘Get down, son! Get down!’ His eyes found mine just as the shot hit him square in the back. I saw the wonder on his young face as the life drained out of him, and I thought, Oh my God, he’s one of mine!” (162). Seeing that boy die before her eyes connects him to the son that Patria lost years earlier and stirs up her maternal instincts. She now sees her “family” as not just her own immediate family members, but all of her fellow Dominicans as well. Patria’s name itself (“patria” means “country” and is linked to “patriotism”) reflects this national collectivity. Patria, from then on, rejects her passive stance towards Trujillo and decides—despite what the Church does—to take action against the pervasive killings and abuses occurring throughout her country.

Coming down that mountain, I was a changed woman. I may have worn the same sweet face, but now I was carrying not just my child [Raúl Ernesto] but that dead boy as well.

My stillborn of thirteen years ago. My murdered son of a few hours ago.

I cried all the way down that mountain. I looked out the spider-webbed window of that bullet-riddled car at brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, one and all, my human family. Then I tried looking up at our Father, but I couldn't see His Face for the dark smoke hiding the tops of those mountains.

I made myself pray so I wouldn't cry. But my prayers sounded more like I was trying to pick a fight.

*I'm not going to sit back and watch my babies die, Lord, even if that's what You in Your great wisdom decide. (162)*¹³⁸

Patria is now guided by her own moral compass and not by what Church authorities dictate, as suggested by her inability to see God's face in the sky. It is her maternal connection to her fellow countrymen that solidifies her political involvement. As Blackford explains, "Her maternal body and identity become the cornerstones of spiritual experience and leadership, bringing Patria 'down to earth' in the sense of connecting her both with natural rhythms and with her people's condition on earth" (230). Patria's newfound resolution to actively work to protect and save as many of her fellow Dominicans as possible while still staying within the framework of the Church reflects the reconciliation between her spiritual and political impulses as well as her personal sacrifice for the collective good. She represents the Liberation Theology movement that swept through Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century, a movement that justified the use of violence as a means of fighting against destructive, vast, and brutal repression. This way, Patria can be a Catholic and an activist at the same time. As Blackford argues, "*In the Time of the Butterflies* enacts a struggle against Catholicism's division between material and spiritual realms. The text resolves that struggle with Patria's recognition that

¹³⁸ Learning what happened to her mother at the retreat triggers Patria's daughter's political awakening, also linked to sexual awakening: "Noris was weeping in terror. It was after that I noticed a change in her, as if her soul had at last matured and begun *its* cycles" (162).

spirituality allows for social transformation and serves the collective good. [...] Motherhood, spirituality, and leadership for the collective good are now one and the same for her” (228, 233). In a sense, through her political participation and through her maternal view of her country as one large family, Patria is able to carry out the work she would have done as a member of a religious order: improve the greater good of society. She also puts the collective above the individual, just as nuns make a vow to do. After many years of struggle, Patria finally finds a balance between her sexual, religious, and political impulses.

Though Patria has found her own personal balance, the link between sex, gender roles, and politics can also be seen in her relationship with her husband Pedro after she decides to become involved in the underground. It reflects most acutely her personal sacrifice for the political good. When Pedro first learns that Patria is beginning to get involved, he refuses her sexually and tries to reinforce traditional patriarchal roles, screaming at Patria, ““Your first responsibility is to your *children*, your *husband*, and your *home*!” His face was so clouded with anger, I couldn’t see the man I loved” (166). The three italicized words underscore the traditional duties of a Dominican woman. But after Patria tells Pedro that his son does not want his patrimony (the family farm) and is himself already involved in the underground resistance movement, he is finally open to participating in the movement himself. His political acquiescence is paralleled by the return of his sexual appetite: ““But later in the dark, he sought me out with his old hunger. He didn’t have to say it, that he was with us now. I knew it in the reckless way he took me down into the place where his great-grandfather and his grandfather and his father had met their women before him” (166). Now in synch politically, Patria and her husband are once again in synch sexually. After Pedro’s change of heart, Patria’s maternal role

in the struggle is cemented, her home becoming the local headquarters for the movement: “So it was that our house became the motherhouse of the movement” (166).¹³⁹ As Sirias notes,

At first, Patria offers a secluded area of her farm for the underground to meet. She, however, remains at the margin of their revolutionary activities. But after she returns from the mountain retreat, in a display of leadership, she invites the rebels inside the house, thus joining the underground herself. By offering her home as refuge, she becomes the mother of the underground, its matriarch. (63)

Welcoming the rebels inside her home, Patria welcomes the revolution into her life. Her role as matriarch of her home spills over into the role of matriarch of the underground. While her maternal self flourishes within the movement, however, Pedro’s masculinity is questioned. Other testimonios show that this questioning is common. Barrios’ husband, for example, is constantly told that he is “not man enough” to control his wife. When Pedro is imprisoned for his activism, a military captain named Peña tells Patria that Pedro was offered his freedom and his farm back “‘if he proved his loyalty to El Jefe by divorcing his Mirabal wife.’ [...] And then he had his dirty little say. ‘You Mirabal women must be something else’—he fondled himself—‘to keep a man interested when all he can do with his manhood is pass water!’” (204). When Peña leaves, Patria can see “the lump he’d gotten by working me up to this state” (204).¹⁴⁰ Later, Patria learns that Peña has “bought” Pedro’s family’s farm (217), thus taking away both his livelihood and his manhood and serving as a metaphor for and example of the state’s control over and violation of the Mirabal families. The state often disciplines the husbands of female

¹³⁹ This motherhouse is linked to the mountain retreat where Patria’s political commitment was first sparked: “I kept seeing that motherhouse up in the mountains, its roof caving in, its walls crumbling like a foolish house built on sand. I could, by a trick of terror, turn that vision into my own house tumbling down” (168).

¹⁴⁰ Peña is further connected to Patria’s sexuality by stirring up old Catholic school memories for her: “The man gave me a creepy feeling exactly the same as the one I’d felt in the presence of the devil in the old days, fooling with my hands at night” (203).

militants, betting on the patriarchal ideologies that structure their society to bring these women back in line. Pedro's wounded masculine ego is perhaps one reason why Patria, shocking Minerva, asks for Pedro's permission to visit the other men (Minerva's and Mate's husbands) in prison (287).¹⁴¹ She wants to make sure that her husband still feels important and respected—and not emasculated. Moreover, the fact that Patria does not completely surrender all of her traditional ideas about women and men contributes to Alvarez's portrayal of the Mirabals as complex, realistic, and three-dimensional characters.¹⁴²

Though Dedé never does officially become involved in the fight against Trujillo like her sisters, she faces the same challenges brought about through the intricate relationships between sexuality, gender roles, and political activism as her sisters do. The link between sexual and political urges and experiences, for example, can be seen with Dedé, even as a teenager. When Lío, a radical cousin of a friend of the Mirabal sisters, begins spending time with them, Dedé's sexual desire is intensified: "The presence of Lío gave her the courage to go further with Jaimito [her boyfriend] than ever before" (76). Since Lío is the first political activist that she has really ever known, her mind is set free—and her body follows suit. This newfound political and sexual awakening, however, eventually causes Dedé to become confused about everything in life: "Are you in your time of the month, *m'ija?*" Mamá asked her more than once when Dedé set to quarreling about something" (78). What she is discovering about her country and her body

¹⁴¹ Minerva herself shows similar moments of deference to her husband. For example, when the rebel group is deciding who should be its leader, "At first, they tried to enlist Minerva, but she deferred to Manolo, who became our president" (166).

¹⁴² Ironically, it is Patria—not Minerva or even Mate—who briefly contemplates giving her sexual body over to Trujillo to save her family. She begs to him in front of his portrait in their home to release her son and her sisters and their husbands from prison. She offers more to Trujillo than she is able or willing to offer to God: "I guess I saw it as a clear-cut proposition I was making El Jefe. He would ask for what he always asked for from women. I could give *that*. But there would be no limit to what our Lord would want of Patria Mercedes, body and soul and all the etceteras besides. / With a baby still tugging at my breast, a girl just filling out, and my young-man son behind bars, I wasn't ready to enter His Kingdom" (203).

agitates her and causes her to question everything else around her.¹⁴³ And the night that Lío goes into hiding “was also the night she finally agreed to marry Jaimito” (79), as if the absence of such a fervent political figure is what allows Dedé to make the traditional, comfortable, and anticipated choice to marry a local boy and become a young wife and mother. There is no reminder of another, more radical life option.

Years later, when all three of her sisters are already involved in the underground movement, it is Dedé’s relationship with her husband Jaimito that remains at the root of her resistance to joining the fight against Trujillo. As Dedé explains, “‘Back in those days, we women followed our husbands.’ Such a silly excuse. After all, look at Minerva. ‘Let’s put it this way,’ Dedé adds. ‘I followed my husband. I didn’t get involved’” (171-172). Though he professes his progressiveness when asking Dedé to marry him (“I know I have to ask your father for your hand. But no matter what Minerva says, I’m modern. I believe the woman should be asked first” [81]), Jaimito becomes the stereotypical machista husband who feels it is his responsibility and right to be the one in charge of the family. When Dedé asks him if they can bury some boxes (presumably filled with weapons) on their property for her sisters, he blows up: “The Mirabal sisters liked to run their men, that was the problem. In his house, he was the one to wear the pants. / ‘Swear you’ll keep your distance from them!’ / When he got upset, he would just raise his voice. But that night, he grabbed her by the wrists and shoved her on the bed” (176-177). Shoving Dedé on the bed reinforces and reflects not only Jaimito’s control over his wife, but also Dedé’s primary role in her marriage: satisfying her husband and reproducing. Afraid of her husband’s disapproval and wrath, Dedé decides against helping out the struggle by hiding the boxes on her land: “Dedé had been ready to risk her life. It was her marriage that she

¹⁴³ Lío, the man who stirs up Dedé’s life, is “an interlanguage word-play as *lío* in Spanish also means a mess, a mix-up, a complication, or a jam” (Sirias 56).

couldn't put on the line" (177). Later, the three sisters come all together to ask Dedé to join with them in the resistance movement. She finally tells them that if she helps them out, she will be on her own at home: "Jaimito thinks its suicide. He's told me he'll have to leave me if I get mixed up in this thing.' There, she'd said it. Dedé felt the hot flush of shame on her face. She was hiding behind her husband's fears, bringing down scorn on him instead of herself" (179-180). After that, Dedé begins thinking more and more about her relationship with her husband and her own gender roles, her sisters' political proposition throwing her life into question, just as Lío had done years earlier. As she hesitates between leaving and staying with Jaimito, she explores her political impulses, going out to the shed at night to listen to Fidel on the radio (180-181). These excursions "were her secret rebellion, her heart hungering, her little underground of one" (181). In her own way, therefore, Dedé joins her sisters in solidarity though she still cannot openly enlist in the fight.

Finally, one day Dedé makes up her mind to leave Jaimito, thus opening up her opportunity to officially join her sisters. "Next to that decision, attending the underground meeting over at Patria's was nothing but a small step after the big turn had been taken" (180). But "As the day drew closer, Dedé was beset by doubts, particularly when she thought about her boys" (182). She reflects on all of the maternal love, affection, and care that they would have to live without (182). And when Dedé realizes that the local priest (who has more to lose than she) is involved in the struggle, too, she realizes that Jaimito was just an excuse for her not to become involved: "She was afraid, plain and simple, just as she had been afraid to face her powerful feelings for Lío" (184). Political fears (joining the revolution) and sexual fears (her feelings for Lío) are once again connected here. Believing that Dedé has decided to join her sisters, Jaimito leaves with the boys to go stay with his mother. Minerva, seeing how distraught Dedé is,

understands that for now, Dedé needs to focus on her marriage and not the rebel movement: she tells her, “One struggle at a time, sister” (186). After this, Dedé decides to stay in her marriage and away from the resistance movement. Despite her final decision to not officially join the struggle, readers can see that Dedé wrestles with her decision and is a complex, three-dimensional person—just as in real life. By focusing on Dedé’s internal feelings and struggles, Alvarez shows that her decision to keep her distance from the movement was not an easy one, as might be perceived from the outside. In fact, Dedé was still influenced by and wrapped up in the movement despite not being an official member of it. “Whether she joined their underground or not, her fate was bound up with the fates of her sisters. She would suffer whatever they suffered. If they died, she would not want to go on living without them” (193). Her unofficial involvement in the movement is revealed after her sisters and their husbands are jailed and she and Jaimito dedicate themselves to freeing them. The power dynamic in their marriage begins to shift, stirring up camaraderie and passion: “After all, they were embarking on their most passionate project to date, one they must not fail at like the others. Saving the sisters” (194). And “it touched her that he had found his way to serve the underground after all—taking care of its womenfolk” (196). In the end, therefore, Dedé is able to reconcile her familial (both sororal and marital) and political impulses, just like her sisters are able to do in their own ways. By showing how each sister enters the movement through a different portal—principles for Minerva, romance for Mate, religion for Patria, and family for Dedé—, Alvarez stresses that there are several different points of access to activism and several different ways to be involved. Each sister faces a distinct set of familial, religious, romantic, and political circumstances, yet they all find a way to help change their country. And though each sister’s coming-of-age story is

different, they all coalesce to create an inspirational account of four ordinary women who challenged the sexual and political codes of their time to alter their country's history forever.

III. The Freedoms and Fissures of Fiction

For Julia Alvarez, a novel is the best vehicle for understanding the story of the Mirabal sisters. Fiction is a response to many of the tensions and limitations found in other historical and literary discourses—including the traditional *testimonio*—that deal with such national traumas. Alvarez's testimonial novel, then, draws on certain key testimonial traits, such as personalization, a sense of collectivity, and the dialectical relationship between sex and politics, while also incorporating fiction in order to turn testimonial strains (the frailty of memory, questions of authenticity) into opportunities for creativity, experimentation, and truth-telling. Despite these attempts, however, testimonial tensions still persist in Alvarez's novel.

The frailty of memory is a common criticism of *testimonios*, a fact that Alvarez recognizes and plays with in her novel. Memory is never completely reliable, as events and characters fade in one's mind and as new memories blend with old ones. This blending is unavoidable in a *testimonio* since the mode relies on the recollections of the testimonialistas. As Elzbieta Sklodowska argues,

The strange hybrid we have come to call *testimonio* thus offers an amalgam of shreds of memory and cohesive narrative. It involves a series of erasure, emendations, and amalgamations quite similar to those that Freud sets out in his account of "screen memories," where the unconscious mind performs the operations of displacing, projecting, spitting, and telescoping. From a literary

standpoint, this is an intriguing blend; from the perspective of more “scientific” disciplines it is, at best, an uneasy combination. (“The Poetics” 263)

This “uneasy combination” has incited much criticism of testimonio’s reliability and has thrown its truth-value into question. It asks the question, should we read testimonio as autobiography, biography, fiction, historical document, or anthropological report? Under which section should testimonios be shelved in libraries? Many testimonialistas themselves acknowledge the frailty of their own memory. And Alvarez herself recognizes this mutability of memory in her novel. As Dedé laments one day after recalling an incident from her youth, “Nonsense, so much nonsense the memory cooks up, mixing up facts, putting in a little of this and a little of that” (72). And when Minerva reminisces with a childhood friend about a play they once performed for Trujillo, she realizes that she and her friend have different accounts of the same incident: “I wondered which of us had revised the past to suit the lives we were living now” (264). The fragmentation of the novel’s narrative mirrors this fragmentation of memory. Unlike traditional testimonios, which try to create a seamless, chronological narrative, Alvarez intentionally and continually disrupts the narrative. Her story jumps back and forth in time between the years 1938 and 1994 and switches narrative voices, rotating through the four sisters several times. Each of the four narrative voices is also highly distinct, stressing the fractured nature of memory, especially collective memory. The intertextual insertions (letters, poetry, invitations, journal entries, songs, newspaper clippings, menus, drawings, and so on) also contribute to the fragmentation. This narrative splintering not only reflects how both personal and national memory is constructed, but also the political chaos and continual disruptions of everyday life under the Trujillo regime. One never knew when Trujillo would enact a new law, change the name of a city, street, or monument, cancel a long-held tradition, interrupt the work day for some whimsical demand or

desire, or haul someone off to prison. Charlotte Rich takes a slightly different approach, explaining how the narrative fragmentation in Alvarez's novel reflects a resistance to both literary and political hegemony:

In the Time of the Butterflies can be seen to resist both a monolithic generic category and a single, authoritative narrative voice in its “centrifugal” or fragmented tendency. These qualities render the form and discourse of the text itself metaphoric of the novel's central thematic focus: the Mirabal sisters' work of resistance against a totalizing, “centripetal” force, the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. (166)

This novel, like traditional testimonios, is difficult to categorize and has been given myriad disparate labels, from “historical fiction” to “fictional testimonio” to “testimonial novel.” Alvarez is staking out new literary ground (especially for a woman), just as the Mirabals staked out new political ground in the Dominican Republic. She fights against the literary status quo just as the Mirabal sisters fought against the political status quo. The unique narrative format that Alvarez employs resists generic classification—like traditional testimonios—while reflecting the inevitable fragmentation of individual and collective memory, as well as life under Trujillo.

Alvarez also addresses the tension surrounding the role of the interlocutor. As with traditional testimonios, *In the Time of the Butterflies* is structured and driven forward by interviews. A young woman from the United States (a “*gringa dominicana*”) comes to interview Dedé, and her questions trigger a spate of memories for Dedé, which in turn leads into the narratives of the other three sisters. Each of the three sections of the novel has a chapter for each of the four sisters and each section starts with Dedé's chapter. Alvarez stresses the need for the

role of the interlocutor by inserting it into the narrative itself. Instead of trying to hide or de-emphasize the relationship, as do many traditional testimonios, Alvarez acknowledges and draws attention to it.¹⁴⁴ Readers know that the young *gringa* will carry the story of the Mirabals with her back to the United States, just as interlocutors have introduced Western audiences to the stories and lives of numerous Latin American testimonialistas. As Sirias affirms, “the *gringa dominicana* becomes the bridge through space, time, languages, and cultures that allows Americans to experience the legacy of *Las Mariposas* [The Butterflies]” (85). She becomes the linchpin that holds the whole testimonial process together.

While the role of the interviewer is necessary here (as in traditional testimonios), Alvarez at the same time highlights the distance and awkwardness of the interlocutor, rejecting the image of harmonic synchronism that many testimonios project. Reflecting this detachment, at one point she writes, “The interview woman is a shadowy face slowly losing its features” (171). The interview woman is also apologetic, aloof, overly gracious, and hesitant in her questioning, very self-conscious of her outsider position. “That was a funny woman,” Dedé’s niece Minou observes after meeting the young *gringa* (311). She then adds, “At first I thought you were friends or something” (311). Minou’s comments resist the idyllic notion of friendship and harmony between an interlocutor and a testimonialista. To further underscore the distance between the young interviewer and the Mirabals’ story, Alvarez emphasizes both the *gringa*’s faltering Spanish and her lack of cultural reference. Dedé explains the young woman’s linguistic shortcomings, poking fun at her at the same time: “She is originally from here but has lived many years in the States, for which she is sorry since her Spanish is not so good. [...] Dedé has to smile at some of the imported nonsense of this woman’s Spanish” (3, 4). Besides this language gap, there is also a cultural gap. As Dedé surmises when waiting for her, “The woman

¹⁴⁴ There is no interviewer character in the movie version of *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001).

will never find the old house behind the hedge of towering hibiscus at the bend of the dirt road. Not a *gringa dominicana* in a rented car with a road map asking for street names!” (3). The young woman’s rental car and map, glaring markers of an outsider, and the fact that she is asking for street names in a place where most *campesinos* cannot read all accentuate her alienation from Dominican culture. When the *gringa dominicana* finally does arrive, she startles Dedé by slamming her car door: “But really, this woman should shut car doors with less violence. [...] Any Dominican of a certain generation would have jumped at that gunshot sound” (5). The *gringa*’s action highlights her lack of sensitivity to the psychological effects of the Trujillo regime. Only someone who lived in the Dominican Republic would be privy to these cultural dynamics. From the start, Alvarez makes clear the linguistic and cultural distance between the interviewer and the Mirabal sisters and their culture. The Spanish words that Alvarez keeps in the text without translations also suggest these linguistic and cultural gaps—both between the Mirabal story and the *gringa* interviewer *and* between the Mirabal story and the audience. There exist similar gaps between testimonialistas and their audiences. Readers of testimonios have typically been white, Western academics and activists, people (like interlocutors) set apart from the everyday oppression and violence suffered by the testimonialistas themselves. Alvarez retains many untranslated Spanish words (and puts them in italics) both to educate her English-speaking readers and to remind them of the linguistic and cultural differences that separate them, like the *gringa* interviewer, from the Mirabals and Dominican culture in general. In this sense, these Spanish words work in much the same way as Menchú’s and other testimonialistas’ “secrets”—promoting activism and solidarity while maintaining a distance from their new allies.

Alvarez highlights her own distance from the Mirabal sisters and their story by identifying *herself* with the awkward interviewer.¹⁴⁵ Alvarez, like the young woman in the novel, lives in the United States but has Dominican roots. The interviewer wants to look at personal artifacts of the sisters just as Alvarez did when researching the sisters down in the Dominican Republic (Alvarez, *Something* 200). In the novel, Dedé mentions the lemonade that she routinely serves to people (like the *gringa dominicana*) who come to interview her, as well as the rocking chairs that await them in the *galería* (4, 7). The first time that Alvarez meets Dedé in the Dominican Republic, she describes both drinking lemonade and hearing the clacking of rocking chairs on the patio floor (Alvarez, *Something* 203). Alvarez, like the *gringa dominicana*, also has not reached a level of ease with the Spanish language; she says in several interviews that she does not feel comfortable writing in Spanish, choosing instead to write in English.¹⁴⁶ As Sirias affirms, “Today, she speaks Spanish with an accent, and would never consider trying to write creatively in her mother tongue” (2). Like the *gringa*, Alvarez is very self-conscious about her relationship to the Mirabals’ story; as a result, she is careful to not claim “ownership” of the story, despite her authorship of the novel. Halfway through the novel, the young interview woman leaves and it is up to Dedé alone to finish telling the story, which she does. So while the novel opens with the interviewer’s arrival at Dedé’s home, it closes with Dedé at home alone, asserting that “it’s me, Dedé, it’s me, the one who survived to tell the story” (321).¹⁴⁷ In addition, the first three chapters dedicated to Dedé are written in third person, while

¹⁴⁵ Alvarez also identifies herself with the character Yolanda in her novels *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *¡Yo!*. Yolanda, like Alvarez, is the second oldest of four sisters in a Dominican immigrant family living in the United States who later becomes a writer and marries three times.

¹⁴⁶ *In the Time of the Butterflies* was first published in English and then later translated and published in Spanish.

¹⁴⁷ López-Calvo complains that the *gringa dominicana* “unexpectedly fades away once the narrative progresses” (95) and notes that Roberto González-Echevarría, in his review of the novel in *The New York Times Book Review* suggests that Alvarez erred in not developing the relationship and dialogue between Dedé and the interview woman (172).

the epilogue is written in first person with Dedé's voice. Alvarez wants to show that the story is really, in the end, Dedé's.

Alvarez, however, is ultimately the one who controls the narrative and the structure of the book—just like testimonial interlocutors. Indeed, the interlocutor in both Barrios' testimonio and Murat's film opens and closes the work. Barrios' testimonio begins with a preface by Moema Viezzer and ends with her short, concluding interview of Barrios. Murat's film begins and ends with scenes of the narrator at home. Though she situates the (fictionalized) interlocutor/testimonialista relationship between the young interview woman and Dedé in the narrative of the novel itself, Alvarez's presence is still seen in the novel's paratexts as well as the narrative. In the postscript, for example, she describes her motivations for writing the novel and underscores her hand in the creation of the Mirabal characters:

When as a young girl I heard about the "accident," I could not get the Mirabals out of my mind. On my frequent trips back to the Dominican Republic, I sought out whatever information I could about these brave and beautiful sisters who had done what few men—and only a handful of women—had been willing to do. During that terrifying thirty-one-year regime, any hint of disagreement ultimately resulted in death for the dissenter and often for members of his or her family. Yet the Mirabals had risked their lives. I kept asking myself, What gave them that special courage?

It was to understand that question that I began this story. But as happens with any story, the characters took over, beyond polemics and facts. They became real to my imagination. I began to invent them. (323)

This postscript reminds readers of the role that testimonial interlocutors play in creating their own characters out of the real-life people whose stories are told. Some of the same interlocutor tension related to questions of authenticity and authority found in testimonios, then, still exists here in Alvarez's novel. Several critics have pointed out this tension. López-Calvo, for example, argues that "despite the fact that the postscript is not part of the plot itself, any claims of objectivity evaporate with the evident denunciatory tone that dominates it" (95). Shara McCallum adds, "The fact that the novel is framed by a third-person narrator implies Alvarez's presence. Her postscript, in which she explains her reconstruction of the sisters via her 'imagination,' confirms our sense of her looming over each page" (113). While interlocutors of testimonios have in general used the paratexts (prologues, notes, introductions, appendixes, statistics, graphs, glossaries, maps, and so on) to try to *de-emphasize* their influence on the subjects and the narrative, Alvarez uses the space to *emphasize* her influence. And by identifying herself with the awkward interview woman who is going to take her version of the Mirabal story back home with her to the United States to share,¹⁴⁸ Alvarez acknowledges that her world is a created world, partly invented and partly documentary. Marta Vizcaya takes it a step further: "As she reclaims and rewrites these women's lives, Álvarez focuses on the links between the construction of individual and collective histories and identities, also exploring whether her own appropriation as a writer of these historical figures is not yet another act of distortion and violence." While perhaps not an act of violence, Alvarez does seem to recognize that her novel

¹⁴⁸ In the postscript, Alvarez makes clear her intended audience, which links her even further to the *gringa* in the novel: "I would hope that through this fictionalized story I will bring acquaintance of these famous sisters to English-speaking readers. [...] To Dominicans separated by language from the world I have created, I hope this book deepens North Americans' understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered—of which this story tells only a few" (324). While Alvarez addresses Dominicans as "you" here, she also (on the same page) says "our tyrant" and "we lost the Mirabals," this ambiguity reflecting Alvarez's slippery relationship to both the Dominican Republic and the story of the Mirabal sisters.

is (and can only be) a distorted version of what really happened—even if, for her, this distorted version comes closer to the truth than other (always already distorted) versions of the past.

The postscript also shows the personal connection that Alvarez feels to the Mirabal story (despite other attempts in the novel to show her distance from it) and helps explain the incorporation of the autobiographical elements into the novel. As Alvarez admits in one interview, “Quite a bit of what I write comes out of my own experience, altered, played with, and embellished. Things I hear combine with things I make up, until I don’t know where facts end and fiction begins” (Lyons 133). The story of the Mirabal sisters was already close to Alvarez’s heart before she started writing the novel, as her parents were members of the same underground movement as the Mirabals. When Alvarez was ten years old, she and her family fled to the United States just months before the Mirabal sisters were killed—and their story haunted her ever since learning about them as a child. Her fictionalized story was born out of this personal interest and connection. Though she writes a work of fiction, Alvarez’s personal print is left on the story—just as the interlocutor’s personal print is left on a traditional testimonio. Indeed, several articles have been written about Alvarez’s intentions to use this novel as a way to work out her own issues with everything from survivor’s guilt to immigrant guilt. The autobiographical trace left on *In the Time of the Butterflies* points to both the necessity and the limitations of the testimonial interlocutor. Sklodowska, along with other critics, feels that the interlocutor often leaves too much of her own mark on the testimonio and stifles the spontaneity of the testimonialista’s story. But since the interlocutor is the one who often “discovers” the testimonialista and organizes the testimonial process, she is essential—even if controversial—to the production of a testimonio.

In the postscript, Alvarez goes on to explain not only her hand in creating her subjects, but also why she believes fiction was the best medium to use in order to relay the story of the Mirabal sisters:

So what you will find here are the Mirabals of my creation, made up but, I hope, true to the spirit of the real Mirabals. In addition, though I had researched the facts of the regime, and events pertaining to Trujillo's thirty-one-year depotism [sic], I sometimes took liberties—by changing dates, by reconstructing events, and by collapsing characters or incidents. For I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by the imagination. A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart.

(324)

Critics such as Dominick LaCapra and Toni Morrison have argued that third-person historical narratives and records are too objective, lacking the proper empathy and intimacy to relay traumatic events. For Alvarez, a novel can convey not only historical data, but also the inner thoughts and emotions of those who lived during a certain time period. It can reflect the pain, heartache, and passion of those affected by a historical trauma like the Trujillo dictatorship, elements that are arguably more important in painting a landscape of the time. Her take on writing fictionalized history, then, is much like that of Morrison, who says, "It's a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (112). Both Alvarez and Morrison, whom Alvarez repeatedly names as one of her favorite authors, take historical facts, dates, events, and actors to construct a frame that they then fill in with fiction to

create a cohesive whole. Like *Beloved*, *In the Time of the Butterflies* is a fictionalized story based on real, historical events and actors.

But this method of writing often blurs the line between fact and fiction. The publisher's note at the beginning of *In the Time of the Butterflies* attempts to protect Alvarez from the common backlash to this type of blurring, stressing the fictionality of the novel: "This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental." While paratexts normally underscore the authenticity and truthfulness of a testimonio's narrative and the testimonial process in general, both the postscript and the publisher's note in Alvarez's novel emphasize the work's fictionality. The attempts at reassurance in traditional testimonios are deemed especially crucial given the openness of the testimonial mode: "Due to the amorphous character of the testimonio, the expectations of the reader are not shaped by preexisting notions of the genre, but rather, more than anything, by the prologues and warnings that accompany concrete texts" (Skłodowska, *Testimonio* 22).¹⁴⁹ These paratexts tell readers how to read the book in front of them. However, they often work against what they set out to do. For example, the interlocutors for both Rigoberta Menchú's and Esteban Montejo's testimonios admit (in paratexts) to "suppressing" redundancies and repetitions in what Menchú and Montejo said (Skłodowska, *Testimonio* 126). This, in turn, raises doubts about the veracity and legitimacy of the testimonios. As Skłodowska argues, "By calling attention to their processes of truth-telling, these texts intensify the tension between created reality and verifiable reality" (*Testimonio* 49).¹⁵⁰ Despite Alvarez's attempts to

¹⁴⁹ "[D]ebido al carácter amorfo del testimonio, las expectativas del lector no están moldeadas por las nociones preexistentes de género, sino, más que nada, por prólogos y advertencias que acompañan a textos concretos."

¹⁵⁰ "[A]llamar la atención sobre sus procedimientos de veredicción, estos textos intensifican la tensión entre la realidad creada y la realidad verificable."

deflect it, the same type of tension exists in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. By stressing the “imagined,” “invented,” “coincidental,” and “reconstructed” nature of the characters and events in the novel, the postscript and publisher’s note throw the novel’s truth-value into question. How can fiction, by definition, be a (“the”) vessel for truth? Indeed, a year after *In the Time of the Butterflies* was released, Miguel Aquino García published a response to Alvarez’s novel: *Tres heroínas y un tirano: la historia verídica de las Hermanas Mirabal y su asesinato por Rafael Leonidas Trujillo* (*Three Heroines and a Tyrant: The True Story of the Mirabal Sisters and their Assassination by Rafael Leonidas Trujillo*), a “corrective” book much like the one David Stoll published in 1998 in response to Menchú’s testimonio. And in 2009, Dedé Mirabal published her own book, entitled *Vivas en su jardín: La verdadera historia de las hermanas Mirabal y su lucha por la libertad* (*Alive in their Garden: The True Story of the Mirabal Sisters and their Fight for Liberty*); Alvarez provided the introduction. Alvarez’s novel paradoxically emphasizes both fiction’s strength in painting a richer and more holistic picture of the truth and, at the same time, the subjectivity of that truth. As Isabel Dulfano explains,

Outwardly then, Álvarez frees herself from any form of rebuke from non-literary disciplines, for she makes no claim to historical veracity by merely elaborating a composite, fabricated version of life under the dictator Trujillo. Borrowing from Elena Poniatowska’s testimonial writing and Isabel Allende’s magical realist novels, Álvarez takes the new journalism of earlier decades a step further. By explicitly stating the historical context, Álvarez makes visible in very direct fashion the power of fiction to both bring truth to a subject and underscore its very subjective nature. (94)

Perhaps instead of thinking of fiction as *the* way to represent or understand the truth, we should think of it as *one* way to do so. Taken all together, novels, history books, films, photos, and testimonios alike can give us a more profound and more nuanced picture of something as complex and traumatic as the Trujillo dictatorship.

IV. Conclusion

Testimonio is a cultural mode of expression known for bringing women into the Latin American literary canon. While testimonio broke from traditional (masculine) literary forms, Julia Alvarez breaks from traditional (masculine) fictional forms¹⁵¹ in her novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* to expand the literary possibilities of the female-empowered testimonial mode. Presenting a female version of history, she emulates testimonio's personalization and sense of collectivity to demythologize the Mirabal sisters, she uses testimonio's Bildungsroman motif to highlight both the powerful dialectical relationship between sexuality/gender and politics and how this relationship was especially potent and relevant in the fight against the sexually-charged Trujillo, and, finally, she experiments with the tension surrounding testimonio's authenticity, revealing both the advantages and disadvantages of using fiction to represent historical reality. Several questions regarding the truth-value of her story remain—just as they do for many traditional testimonios. Above all, Alvarez's novel demands that we never forget the Mirabal sisters or the tumultuous, oppressive time in which they lived. Drawing on the didactic nature of testimonio, Alvarez hopes to educate those unfamiliar with Dominican history and to place the story of Trujillo (and the Mirabals in particular) securely into collective (inter)national memory.

¹⁵¹ In her book *One Master for Another* (1983), Doris Sommer argues that the five most significant twentieth-century Dominican novels, all written by men, strongly promote masculinism, patriarchy, and conservative populism: Juan Bosch's *La Mañosa* (1936), Ramón Marrero Arísty's *Over* (1939), Freddy Prestol Castillo's *El Masacre se pasa a pie* (1973), Marcio Veloz Maggiolo's *De abril en adelante* (1975), and Pedro Mir's *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* (1978).

The last line of the novel (in the postscript) is “*¡Vivan las Mariposas!*” (“Long live the Butterflies!”) (25)—the final word a reminder to resist forgetting.

Conclusion

Connecting the Dots: Woman's Voice and National Crisis

The testimonial mode has existed in Latin America since at least as far back as Columbus' arrival. *Crónicas* and letters written by Christopher Columbus, Bartolomé de las Casas, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz, and others testified to what life was like in the "New World." Over time, however, the testimonio has changed and adapted to whatever set of socio-political circumstances have arisen. It has become a subversive mode, a means of giving a voice to the voiceless. As such, it is no wonder that women, a traditionally marginalized group of people, have felt comfortable employing this mode when they have wanted to break silence. As a tool of political resistance, testimonio experienced a surge in the second half of the twentieth century as repressive dictatorships, horrific genocides, and brutal civil wars were devastating many Latin American nations. Women, many of whom had become activists during this period, dominated this surge. They took it upon themselves to tell the story of what was happening in their communities and in their countries, "eye" witnesses who became the "I"s of their own literary productions. They produced testimonios not only to educate the world on the atrocities that were occurring, but also to build solidarity and support for their fights against their governments. Joanna Bartow explains the wealth of female voices that began to appear: "With a greater number of women participants a greater variety of female speaking subjects appear in testimonial texts—not only mothers or outstanding cultural figures, but also independent working-class women and *guerrillas*" (19). These testimonialistas were not only subjects and agents of their own stories, but also the harbingers of women's solidification into the Latin American literary canon.

As socio-political situations evolved, so did the different forms of testimonial expression used by women. Domitila Barrios de Chungara's book "*Si me permiten hablar...*": *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*, Lúcia Murat's film *Que bom te ver viva*, and Julia Alvarez's novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* all reflect the varied artistic forms encompassed by the testimonial mode. They also represent three unique chronological positionings. Barrios produced her testimonio during a period of vast governmental violence and oppression in Bolivia. Murat produced her testimonio just after the long and violent Brazilian dictatorship had ended. And Alvarez produced her testimonio a generation after the brutal reign of General Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Despite their disparate loci of enunciation and their disparate forms of expression, these three works reveal certain common traits and tensions that have persisted in the testimonial mode: the primacy of the dialectic between sexuality/gender and politics, the feminine sacrifice that is often demanded of female activists, and the tension surrounding testimonio's synecdochic representation, the role of the interlocutor, and its truth-value. They show how powerful and important women's political involvement can be, but also how high the cost of that involvement can be.

I. Voice and Nation: A Cross-Century Comparison

Only recently has the issue of sexuality and gender begun to be studied in testimonios, works that represent such an exciting phenomenon for women living in a culture plagued by machismo. What has been given even less attention is the connection between these personal narratives and other personal narratives written by Latin American women—in particular, the essays written in the nineteenth century, as countries torn apart by battles for independence struggled to rebuild and reshape their social and geopolitical futures. The absence of men

(through death, war, imprisonment, and so on) during both the post-independence period of the nineteenth century and the dictatorial decades of the twentieth century gave women an opening to take up the pen and have their voices heard. The similarities between these nineteenth-century essays and twentieth-century testimonios suggest that in times of socio-political instability and turmoil, Latin American women have turned to personal narrative forms not only to bring about change, but also—and more importantly—to promote women’s role in bringing about this change.

There are numerous parallels between twentieth-century testimonios (such as the ones analyzed in this dissertation) and post-independence essays of the nineteenth century written by Latin American women. Both, for example, appropriated traditionally European/white, male-dominated forms. As the etymology of the word “testimonio” suggests (“*testis*” is its Latin root), bearing witness was man’s work since at least as far back as the courts of Rome. The fact that there is no female equivalent of the word “*testigo*” (witness) in Spanish further attests to women’s long exclusion from civic and legal life. Likewise, because essays have traditionally addressed issues related to the public, masculine domain (politics, society, law, governance, and so on), males have traditionally been the ones to author these works. Indeed, many hail Frenchman Michel de Montaigne, who was born in the sixteenth century, as the father of the essay. With the rise of print journalism and the struggles for independence that raged throughout Latin America, the essay form became the cornerstone of socio-political dialogue and debate in the nineteenth century—especially in the elite circles of *criollos* (persons born in Spanish America of pure or mostly pure Spanish blood). Essayists like Andrés Bello, José Martí, José Victorino Lastarria, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Eugenio María de Hostos, and Simón Bolívar opined on national and cultural (re)formation in an era defined by volatility and upheaval. A

female perspective, however, was often absent. As Doris Meyer explains, “In their search for an Americanist equation of cultural authenticity, male essayists—even self-declared liberals—were virtually oblivious to the one-sided nature of their discourse. The female presence in their midst was depersonalized, mythologized, and trivialized in accordance with a long history of gender discrimination in Hispano-Catholic society” (“Introduction” 3). Like Julia Alvarez, women essayists in nineteenth-century Latin America strove both to present a female-sided and female-empowered take on society and history and to demythologize and personalize women at the same time. They wanted to underscore women’s importance throughout history and to encourage other women to become civically and politically engaged. For example, as Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out, women’s essays often took the form of a historical catalogue of significant, outstanding women (*mujeres ilustres*) (“Don’t” 17). Many twentieth-century testimonialistas, like Domitila Barrios de Chungara, provided similar litanies, paying homage to other women activists and giving examples of prominent, intelligent females on whose shoulders they and other women later stood. These examples served as guides and beacons of light for those women who faced daily oppression and discrimination. Thus, twentieth-century testimonios and nineteenth-century essays alike engaged and reflected women as both agent and subject; women were producing their own works, about women.

Another important similarity between these two bodies of work is that they both defy any sort of precise generic definition, straddling the line between autobiography and social critique, fiction and non-fiction, public and private. While John Beverley has described the testimonio as “anti-literary” or “extra-literary,” many other critics have engaged in similar twists of denomination when describing the essay:

For some, the result [of trying to define the essay] is a persistent uneasiness about where the essay “belongs” in the standard division of genres. Others would elevate it to the status of “anti-genre,” a site for critical reflection, for subversive – precisely because it is non-systematic, unscientific – thought. In any case, it is generally consigned to a netherworld of something different, borderland, extraordinary, becoming the subject of academic conference sessions with titles like “Boundary Genres” or “Marginal Literature.” [...] Literary critics want to know where it “fits” and are disturbed by the fact that it seems to stretch the fabric of definition at the seams. (Joeres 12)

Critics have long been frustrated by attempts to define both the testimonio and the essay as genres. Like the testimonio, the essay can take many different generic shapes—and often draws on several genres at the same time. As Mariselle Meléndez affirms, referring to the nineteenth-century essay, despite its reputation for clarity, “The essay could take the form of a letter, a confession, a lecture, a prayer, or a scientific, journalistic, or sociological article” (574 footnote).¹⁵² As such, the essay should be considered, like the testimonio, a *mode* of cultural production—and not a *genre*. As with the testimonio, the openness of the essay has spurred on literary experimentation alongside critical befuddlement. And Meyer describes how the flexibility of the essay form has made it an attractive option for women: “The essay has lent itself to the expressive needs of a marginalized gender precisely because it is so adjustable to mood or frame of mind” (“Introduction” 4). Indeed, many of the most well-known female writers from Latin America have turned to the essay: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Juana Manuela Gorriti, Clorinda Matto de Turner, Gabriela Mistral,

¹⁵² “El ensayo podía tomar la forma de una carta, una confesión, una conferencia, una oración o un artículo científico, periodístico o sociológico.”

Teresa de la Parra, Victoria Ocampo, Alfonsina Storni, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska, Rosario Ferré, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Isabel Allende. Latina writers as well (Julia Alvarez, for example) have taken up the essay. Chicana writers Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Ana Castillo, and Norma Alarcón in particular have all experimented with the essay form, creating new hybrid formulations and pushing the boundaries of “the essay.” Perhaps, paradoxically, because of their traditional exclusion from both the testimonio and the essay, women writers have felt freer to mold these modes into new shapes and meanings.

Twentieth-century testimonialistas and nineteenth-century essayists alike broke new literary and political ground and worked towards legitimizing women’s place in both the literary and the political field. Their literary productions (and the arguments imbedded within them) transgressed traditionally male-dominated space. Lourdes Rojas and Nancy Saporta Sternbach note how the etymology of the word “essay” (“to try, to attempt, to rehearse”) reflects the female essayists’ attempts to assert themselves. As they explain, “When women entered the social and political debates of their times through their essays, they began rehearsing their new voices within the political and social discourses of their time, simultaneously introducing gender issues as part of the broader social and political preoccupation of the emerging Latin American nations” (172-173). What is striking, however, is that they did this while still underscoring (and never questioning) their maternal sensibilities and commitments. The nineteenth-century essayists and the women studied in this dissertation (from Domitila Barrios de Chungara to the Mirabal sisters) all challenged—while not rejecting—the same traditional ideological and social structures that often stifled their intellectual and political participation. Like many of her fellow essayists, nineteenth-century writer Rosa Guerra used coded terms to promote her progressive ideas: “Guerra purposely used a double-voiced discourse in order to subvert the patriarchal rhetoric and

espouse the causes she so passionately embraced without alienating her audience” (Sternbach, “Mejorar” 48). These writers knew that they must walk a fine line between promoting their ideas and keeping in step with the most common national concerns of the times. Any female advancement should be in the name of benefiting and bettering the Republic—for in the eyes of these essayists, women held together the nation, just as they held together the home. As essayist Clorinda Matto de Turner wrote, quoting the Mexican poet Laura Méndez de Cuenca, “The mother and the wife will be throughout the centuries those who carry the supremacy of all sociological evolution, because they are and will be the cement with which the home is built” (137).¹⁵³ Women’s education, for example, was put forth as a strategy and means to move forward an entire nation—not as an inalienable right of women. While these essayists traversed many diverse topics (slavery, literacy, religion, land reform, indigenous rights, *criollo* identity, the civilization-barbarism binary, urbanization, public health, industrialization, and so on), they especially focused on women’s place in modern society: issues surrounding male privilege, women’s role in government, women’s right to vote, gender prejudice, and so on. They used the home as a model for how the nation should be organized and executed—and emphasized women’s key role (because of their moral, intellectual, and spiritual supremacy, as they argued) in this organization and execution. The fact that “*la patria*” is feminine only helped their promotion of nation-building as a feminine project.

Just as testimonialistas used synecdoche as the underlying structure for their testimonios (“my individual story represents a collective story”), essayists used the case of women to elucidate larger national and continental concerns. As Rojas and Sternbach explain, “This perspective on Latin American society dramatized the importance of the concrete (each

¹⁵³ “La madre y la esposa serán durante los siglos las que lleven la primacía de toda evolución sociológica, porque ellas son y serán el cimiento sobre el cual se yergue el hogar.”

individual woman) in relation to the abstract (the entity called society), thus forcing the readers of those essays to establish the necessary connections between the particular situation of women and that of Latin American society as a whole” (179). Synecdochizing women as such, these writers hoped to show not only the connection and correlation between woman and nation (emphasizing that as the situation of the former improves, so will the situation of the latter), but also the idea that as better (more active) citizens, women will be the lynchpins for this national/continental improvement. As the borders between Latin American nations were being redefined, female essayists strove to redefine the borders between the public and the private so that women could become a more vital and transparent part of intellectual and civic life. Whereas testimonialistas commonly used the first-person singular (“yo” [I]) to stand for the first-person plural (“nosotros” [we]), however, nineteenth-century essayists, as Rojas and Sternbach also point out, used the *feminine* form of the first-person plural (“nosotras”) in their essays, following the male essayic model of using “nosotros” as a way to temper the boldness of the first-person singular. The female essayists’ use of “nosotras” also reflects not only the fact that they were speaking on behalf of many other women, but also the fact that most of their readers were inevitably women. This unique subjectivity highlights and reinforces the female collectivity of that era: “When the nineteenth-century essayists spoke in the feminine ‘nosotras,’ they truly were a collective” (Rojas 181). Testimonialistas also emphasized collectivity, always placing the community before the individual—both in their politics and in the narrative structures of their testimonios. This primacy of the collective elicits several questions. Do women “naturally” see themselves as part of a group more than men do? Do women activist writers realize the connection between stressing collectivity in their literary productions and encouraging collective action?

Another key parallel between the women's essays of the nineteenth century and the women's testimonios of the twentieth century is their rhetoric of persuasion. Both modes were used by women to raise consciousness and support for their respective causes and beliefs. These women considered their works didactic narratives that would educate others on national activity, help spread new ideas, and win over new allies. Indeed, they felt that the very future of their countries depended on it. The discursive strategies used by nineteenth-century essayists are what Meléndez calls "*retórica lidiadora*" (combatant rhetoric). She explains, "By '*retórica lidiadora*' I am referring to the essayists' use of a language that denotes combat, struggle, and that alludes to acts of heroism, triumphs, defense, audacity and invasion" (575).¹⁵⁴ Both groups of women detail the resistance they faced—not only from their governments, but also from their own communities and even their own families. They describe their (and other women's) past failures and successes in dealing with this resistance and offer their advice on how to navigate through their struggles. They stress how the sacrifices they have made as mothers and wives parallel the sacrifices they have made (or should be allowed to make) for their countries. As Cuban writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda writes in her essay "La Mujer" ("Women"), for example, "Ever the sacrifice, until the hour of triumph! In this way woman rises by divine right to be queen over the vast dominions of emotion; she reigns supreme in the suffering of atonement, she reigns supreme as well in the glorious suffering of battle and of victory" (26). Gómez de Avellaneda, like many other women essayists, drew on women's divine connection to Mary and their so-called sentimental superiority. While many testimonialistas underscored the necessary use of violence in their struggles for social justice and equality, some essayists, like Juana Manuela Gorriti, promoted women's frontline involvement as nurses on the battlefield, taking care of the

¹⁵⁴ "Con '*retórica lidiadora*' me refiero a la utilización por parte de las ensayistas de un lenguaje que denota combate, lucha, y que alude a actos de heroísmo, triunfos, defensa, audacia e invasión."

wounded and sick male soldiers. The spirited, patriotic language that nineteenth-century female writers used was borrowed from male writers. As Meléndez expounds, “The words so often cited by male intellectuals during the post-independence period (fight, heroism, sacrifice, invasion, country, nation, virtue) acquire a different sense when they cross the borders between the public and the private” (585).¹⁵⁵ Just as nineteenth-century women essayists applied domestic metaphors to the nation, so did they apply independence-era metaphors to the plight of the female. These women, therefore, not only appropriated a traditionally masculine literary mode (the essay), but also a traditionally masculine lexicon appropriate for the times—hoping that both male and female citizens could relate to it (and be swayed by it).

Both literary modes reflect a pressing need for participation, action, and change in societies and nations drowning in repression and fragmentation. As Beverley and others have written, testimonios are “narratives of urgency.” They are stories that need to be told. And as Rojas and Sternbach observe about nineteenth-century women’s essays, “Since the ultimate purpose of the essay itself was not the glorification of the author (the “I”), but rather a transformation of society, and by implication, women’s roles in it, a sense of urgency always prevailed in these writings” (182-183). Testimonialistas and essayists alike wanted to inspire and urge others to act quickly. They knew the importance of each day and felt compelled to shape the future of their fellow citizens. Lending itself to this urgency, the personalized tone used by both female testimonialistas and female essayists complemented the persuasive and didactic language that they also employed. Nineteenth-century women writers hoped to draw in new readers (especially other women) who were not accustomed to reading the (normally dry, esoteric) essays of the times: “Consistently, and in spite of social situations that might evoke

¹⁵⁵ “Las palabras tan citadas por los intelectuales masculinos durante la época de posindependencia (lucha, heroísmo, sacrificio, invasión, patria, nación, virtud) adquieren un sentido diferente cuando cruzan las fronteras entre lo público y lo privado.”

other responses, the woman's voice in their essays was one of sarcasm, wit, irony, and humor" (Rojas 181). With the increase in women's literacy and the proliferation of print journalism in the nineteenth century, women writers were granted not only a wider audience, but also more linguistic freedom. "Their language, too, instead of the alienating pedantic tone that is sometimes associated with the essay, adopted an invitational format. In this manner, what might have been rejected as a mere topic of gossip in a woman's salon now has been charged with the authority of the printed page" (Rojas 181). Like the testimonialistas who interpellated readers with their conversational style and short rhetorical questions that encourage agreement and attention ("No?," "Don't you see?," and so on), female essayists used more accessible language so as to reach a broader audience and make their arguments more tangible. Both groups of women wrote conversationally and often directly addressed the reader. The compassion and empathy that is evident in their works (denouncing the marginalization of several different groups of people) also worked to draw in readers and sway them to supporting their national projects. The numerous parallels between Latin American women's testimonios of the twentieth century and Latin American women's essays of the nineteenth century point to the new literary, social, and political ground that these women were staking out. They adapted traditionally male literary modes to argue for women's place and participation in history.

II. A Closer Look: Flora Tristan and Domitila Barrios de Chungara

The parallels between women's essays in the nineteenth century and women's testimonios in the twentieth century come into sharper focus when we look at a specific point of comparison. Not only did nineteenth-century essayist Flora Tristan (1803-1844) and twentieth-century testimonialista Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1937-) dedicate themselves to many of the

same issues surrounding social improvement, but they also both used personal literary forms to promote this social improvement. Their activism expanded to the written word and they used the hardships of their own lives as motivation to continue their fights and as examples in their literary productions. In their works, they advocate women's rights through workers' rights, educate and activate readers, blend the individual and the collective, reflect the mantra "the personal is the political," and work to redefine women's roles.

Flora Tristan, the illegitimate daughter of a Peruvian aristocrat and a French commoner,¹⁵⁶ was raised in the slums of Paris, but lived and traveled in Peru for a year in 1833, in the midst of its post-independence civil wars. She was influenced by the French Revolution and French socialism—and (most notably) was one of the first social theorists to link the oppression of women to the oppression of the working class. As S. Joan Moon puts it, "The first reformer to attempt to synthesize feminism and utopian socialism by securing sexual equality through the self-emancipation of the working class was Flora Tristan" (21). While other female essayists of the time *compared* the oppression of women to the oppression of other marginalized groups (the indigenous, the elderly, blacks, prostitutes, and so on), Tristan *correlated* women's rights and workers' rights. She believed the improvement of one would necessarily help improve the other. As Eileen Boyd Sivert explains, "Reciprocity, blending of goals and aims, alternating among the needs and desires of each group, seeking common cause, this is what Tristan sees as the strength of the Workers' Union. And this strength can only benefit women by becoming the espousal of their cause" (69). Tristan was, in fact, one of the first in France to introduce the idea of unionization to the working class. She wrote and rallied tirelessly to promote

¹⁵⁶ Tristan was also Paul Gauguin's grandmother. Gauguin, in fact, lived in Peru for four years, from ages three to seven. Many say his art was highly influenced by the Peruvian imagery and landscape—and his own interest in his Peruvian lineage.

the unification of (both male and female) workers, and her efforts later influenced Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Barrios, likewise, dedicated her life to improving conditions for the working class, hoping in turn to improve women's condition as well. She broke with Western feminists of the 1970s, who always viewed women's issues as the point of entry for their activism, when she focused her efforts first and foremost on bringing socialism to her beloved country. As she explains in her testimonio, "What I think is that socialism, in Bolivia, like any country, will be the tool which will create the conditions for women to reach their level"¹⁵⁷ Barrios knew that when conditions improved for the tin miner in her community, conditions for his entire family would also improve. This is why she felt it so important for women and men to join together to fight against their oppressive and abusive government—a partnership she did not see reflected in feminism. As she explains:

Our position is not like the feminists' position. [...] For us, the important thing is the participation of the *compañero* and the *compañera* together. Only then will we be able to see better days, become better people, and see more happiness for everyone. Because if women continue only to worry about the house and remain ignorant of the other parts of our reality, we'll never have citizens who'll be able to lead our country. (41)¹⁵⁸

Women and men must fight together in order to improve the way of life of everyone. Tristan, likewise, felt strongly that men and women together could create a more powerful and more

¹⁵⁷ "Lo que pienso es que el socialismo, en Bolivia como en cualquier país, será el mecanismo que creará las condiciones para que la mujer alcance su nivel" (Viezzler 8).

¹⁵⁸ "[N]uestra posición no es una posición como la de las feministas. [...] Lo importante, para nosotras, es la participación del *compañero* y de la *compañera* en conjunto. Sólo así podremos lograr un tiempo mejor, gente mejor y más felicidad para todos" (Viezzler 42).

effective force—not only for workers’ rights, but for women’s rights as well. As she writes in *Union ouvrière (The Workers’ Union)* (1843), addressing male workers:

Thus, workers, it is up to you, who are the victims of real inequality and injustice, to establish the rule of justice and absolute equality between man and woman on this earth. Give a great example to the world, an example that will prove to your oppressors that you want to triumph through your right and not by brute force. You seven, ten, fifteen million proletarians, could avail yourselves of that brute force! In calling for justice, prove that you are just and equitable. You, the strong men, the men with bare arms, proclaim your recognition that woman is your equal, and as such, you recognize her equal right to the benefits of the *universal union of working men and women*. (Tristan, *The Worker’s Union* 87-88)¹⁵⁹

Drawing on the powerful memory of the French Revolution, Tristan passionately implores male workers to embrace female workers so that both workers’ rights and women’s rights can improve. For Tristan, a “universal union of working men and women” is the ultimate marker of success and the ultimate model of social harmony between both the sexes and the classes.

Tristan and Barrios alike wanted to both educate and activate their readers, hoping to build solidarity and support for their passionate fights. Though both of these women lacked any significant formal education, they hoped to educate others—not only the literate upper class, but also (and more importantly) the less literate working class. There is a strong oral quality in both women’s works—reflecting not only their experience giving speeches and speaking at rallies, but

¹⁵⁹ “C’est donc à vous, ouvriers, qui êtes les *victimes* de l’*inégalité de fait* et de l’injustice, c’est à vous qu’il appartient d’établir enfin sur la terre le règne de la justice et de l’*égalité absolue* entre la femme et l’homme. Donnez un grand exemple au monde, exemple qui prouvera à vos oppresseurs que c’est par le droit que vous voulez triompher et non par la force brutale ; vous cependant, 7, 10, 15 millions de prolétaires, qui pourriez disposer de cette force brutal ! Tout en réclamant pour vous la justice, prouvez que vous êtes justes, équitables ; proclamez, vous, les hommes forts, les hommes *aux bras nus*, que vous reconnaissez la femme pour *votre égale* et qu’à ce titre vous lui reconnaissez *un droit égal* aux bénéfices de l’UNION UNIVERSELLE DES OUVRIERS ET OUVRIÈS” (Tristan, *Union ouvrière* 211-212).

also their intention to have their works read aloud to their target audience. Barrios' testimonio includes a map of Bolivia, basic descriptions her community, and details about the current working conditions of the tin miners (information suited more for her Western readers)—as well as analyses and advice about what strategies have worked and have not worked in her struggle for social justice and equality. As she explains,

This testimony now returns to the working class so that together—workers, peasants, housewives, everyone, even the young people and the intellectuals who want to be with us—can learn from the experiences, analyze and also learn from the mistakes we've committed in the past, so that through correcting these errors we'll be able to do better things in the future, guide ourselves better, direct ourselves better, to see the reality of our country and create our own instruments to improve our struggle and free ourselves definitively from imperialism and establish socialism in Bolivia. (235)¹⁶⁰

Barrios hopes that her book, with its strong didactic impulse, will serve as a tool to help ameliorate (first and foremost) the living and working conditions of Bolivian tin miners and their families. She wants fellow activists to use it as a guidebook to aid them in their fights and new activists to use it as inspiration and encouragement. Tristan's literary works are shaped by a similar model. In *Union ouvrière*, for instance, "Tristan's plan is both visionary and pragmatic. Her book includes 'self-help' letters that workers might use to gain the ear of the powerful (king, nobility, clergy, etc.), an account of the struggle that surrounded the book's publication, where

¹⁶⁰ "[E]ste testimonio vuelve ahora a la clase trabajadora para que en conjunto: obreros, campesinos, amas de casa, todos, incluso la juventud y los intelectuales que quieren estar con nosotros, recojamos las experiencias, analicemos y notemos también los errores que hemos cometido en el pasado, para que, corrigiendo estos errores, nosotros podamos hacer mejores cosas en el futuro, orientarnos mejor, encaminarnos mejor a ver la realidad de nuestro país y crear nosotros mismos los instrumentos que hacen falta y mejorar nuestra lucha para liberarnos definitivamente del imperialismo e implantar el socialismo en Bolivia" (10). This passage comes from an interview between Barrios and Moema Viezzer (the original interlocutor) that was added to "*Si me permiten hablar...*" after the first edition.

funds were ultimately obtained, and a list of subscribers” (Kuhnheim, “Pariah” 33). She provides practical advice and information about unionization and its benefits, while stressing her passion for her new brand of socialism, one that builds on “the rights of man” gained in the French Revolution to include women as well. As Jill Kuhnheim explains:

In her mother/preacher role she seeks to activate her readers; she does not want a passive audience but an engaged, participating community. She begins her text directed to working men and women with the exhortation “Listen to me” (37), engaging the phatic function of language to focus attention, to communicate the urgency of her message, and to speak directly to the workers. (“Pariah” 33-34)

The urgency of Tristan’s message is reflected in her opening exhortation “Listen to me,” a demand that parallels the title of Barrios’ testimonio, which begins “*Let Me Speak!*” (softer in the Spanish original—“*Si me permiten hablar...*”—but still forceful). These women have learned how to use language as a weapon, and they wield it here to assert their gendered voices into two traditionally masculine realms: the political and the literary. But these demands are not just demands to be heard. They are also calls to arms. Rallying battle cries. Galvanizing mantras that stir up excitement and solidarity. They represent a singular voice working for the collective group, a pattern that repeats itself over and over again in the literary works of these two women.

In her writing, Tristan tells of her own hardships and struggles in order to elucidate and protest the ills of society and to argue for massive social reform. As Sivert affirms, “Flora Tristan, in the tradition of the essayist, speaks of herself to the extent that she stands for the many” (63). Like Barrios, Tristan tells her own individual story as a way to tell a collective story. She advocates, for instance, for her own right to divorce her husband as a way to advocate

for the legality of divorce for all. Whereas Barrios synecdochizes herself in relation to “her people,” Tristan writes on behalf of all women—recognizing their common lot as second-class citizens. As Kuhnheim notes, for example, “She and the prostitutes she regards are subsumed under the larger category of Women; linked by gender they share positions as victims of the social order” (“Pariah” 31). Tristan repeatedly shows how she, like many other women, is trapped within the strict patriarchy of her times. Though she frequently uses herself as a model and is recognized for her efforts to unite groups, however, Tristan paradoxically also often positions herself as an outsider. The title of her first book, *Pérégrinations d’une paria* (*Peregrinations of a Pariah*) (1837), which details her trip to and throughout Peru, suggests this distanced subjectivity. In Peru to claim an inheritance from her father’s wealthy, aristocratic family, she fell in love with many aspects of Peruvian life, but she also felt excluded there, not the least from her family. Throughout her entire life, Tristan vacillated between classes, countries, cultures, languages, and families. She, like Barrios, felt the difficulty of belonging and not belonging at the same time. This tension between the individual and the collective can be seen in the fact that *Pérégrinations d’une paria* is dedicated to her “fellow-Peruvians,” yet is written in French, her mother tongue (Kuhnheim, “Flora” 1). Though she always celebrated her Peruvian lineage and proudly used her maiden name from her father (Tristan) and not her married name from her husband (Chazal), her effort to reach out to and be a part of the Peruvian population was problematized by the fact that she did not write in Spanish, the language of colonized Peru. Reflecting (and perhaps in part because of) her constant state of liminality, Tristan adopted an itinerant lifestyle—traveling, speaking, and rallying. Her identification with the entire female sex was, perhaps, a way to allay the constant tension between the individual and the collective (belonging and not belonging) that she felt in other areas of her life. Indeed,

the well-known title *Pérégrinations d'une paria* paradoxically suggests not only her outsider position (as mentioned above), but also the kinship that she felt with all women: Tristan argues, several years later in *Union ouvrière*, “that for six thousand years the ‘female race’ has been treated as a ‘*true pariah*’ (76). Italicized in the original text, this expression demonstrates how the author has again transformed her individual experience into a communal one” (Kuhnheim, “Pariah” 34). As Tristan inscribed herself into history as a revolutionary proto-feminist, she was also able to turn around the once self-alienating title of her first book to one that marks her sense of inclusion and belonging: her state of being woman.

Like the tension between the individual and the collective, the tension between the personal and the political was also felt by both Flora Tristan and Domitila Barrios de Chungara. Indeed, Tristan’s life was one long lesson about how the personal *is* the political—and how painful that equation can be. From an early age, she suffered discrimination, loss, repression, poverty, and subjugation. These hardships, however, shaped her groundbreaking ideas about social organization and equality. “Tristan’s personal experience of injustice and oppression and the financial and social restraints on her independence clearly stimulated her broader social consciousness” (Kuhnheim, “Flora” 2). Indeed, her unhappy and abusive marriage to André Chazal also helped to define her social theories (especially concerning women)—and motivated her tireless advocacy for legalized divorce. Though she left Chazal after only four years of marriage and legally separated from him a few years after that, Tristan was never granted the divorce that she so desperately desired. Instead, she took back her maiden name and adopted the persona of a single woman in Peru and elsewhere, often leaving her three children for long periods of time. Tristan felt trapped by the illegality of divorce and considered it one of the greatest threats to women’s emancipation and equality. Not only did the personal affect the

political in Tristan's life, however, but so did the political affect the personal. As her writings and activism (and concomitant fame) increased, so did her marital strife. In fact, it was after the publication of *Union ouvrière* in 1838 that Tristan's husband—in a jealous rage—made a near-fatal attempt on her life, shooting her in the back. He was sentenced to twenty years of hard labor, yet she still was not granted a divorce. Barrios' activism, likewise, caused great tension in her marriage. Her husband lost his job and was frequently berated by state officials because of her political involvement and outspokenness. He began drinking heavily and many times threatened Barrios. They fought often. Despite all this, however, Barrios never advocated divorce. She stayed with her husband and continued to bear children. Indeed, in the opening page of her testimonio, she declares that "I'm [...] proud of being the wife of a miner" (19).¹⁶¹

Though writing nearly a century and a half *before* Barrios, Tristan often appears the more radical feminist figure. She denounced many of the traditional social codes that kept women at home and promoted instead progressive ideas that allowed women more agency and autonomy, such as the right to own property and better access to education. As Moon affirms, "Tristan's socialism embodies a radical feminism that freed woman from the home and placed her on a competitive footing in the market place" (45). Like Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf, Tristan felt that financial independence (something she never enjoyed) was one of the keys to women's emancipation. The Peruvian women's magazine that bears her name, *Flora*, and the well-established feminist institution, the Centro de la Mujer Flora Tristán, in Lima both testify to Tristan's continued impact on feminist issues in Latin America (Kuhnheim, "Flora" 1). Though Tristan promoted ideas about women that were liberal for the times, however, she also underscored certain traditional beliefs about them: their natural and high morality, their profound intuition and intelligence, and their acute sensibility, for example. In *Union ouvrière*, she notes

¹⁶¹ "me siento orgullosa de ser esposa de un trabajador minero" (Viezzler 17).

“the sweet, good, sensitive, and generous nature of woman” (Tristan, *The Workers’ Union* 80).¹⁶² And Kuhnheim writes this about *Pérégrinations d’une paria*: “Employing a hybrid discourse that allows her to create a heroic self while maintaining values appropriate to women of her time, Tristan uses the autobiographical essay to unite personal and public concerns” (“Pariah” 31). Tristan utilized her writing as a platform to promote her special brand of feminist and social theories. She drew on her unique background and experiences to advocate for a new way of life for women. She embodied the slogan “the personal is the political” generations before the modern feminist movement that made it famous. “Family is politics, she believed, and women must be concerned with political, social, and humanitarian affairs” (Sivert 69). The struggles that Tristan endured, first as an illegitimate child raised by her mother and later as a woman trapped in an abusive marriage, helped to shape her progressive social theories and her remarkable career—which in turn helped to shape society. Both Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Flora Tristan pushed the boundaries between the private and the public, the personal and the political, redefining women’s roles in the process.

III. Conclusion

What has become clear in the last several decades is that the explosion of Latin American testimonios in the second half of the twentieth century has helped to secure women’s place in the Latin American literary canon. These works have become some of Latin America’s best-selling and most popular books throughout the world. Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio, for example, has been required reading in many high schools and on many college campuses in the United States. Nineteenth-century essayists, on the other hand, did not settle into the canons, despite their groundbreaking literary productions. As Meyer explains, “Essays written by women [...] were

¹⁶² “la nature douce, bonne, sensible, généreuse, de la femme” (Tristan, *Union ouvrière* 194).

excluded from the canon and were marginalized and devalued along with other literature by women that did not conform to gender expectations” (Preface ix). These essayists were not accepted as serious or proper writers, as evidenced by Gómez de Avellaneda’s rejection—based on her gender—from the elite Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in 1853. A woman essayist often had to publish at her own expense in a journal, magazine, or newspaper that she herself founded, directed, and single-handedly financed and edited (Rojas 178). Essays by Latin American women have, until only very recently, not been part of literary anthologies. And they remain largely inaccessible—hard-to-locate, out-of-print, or untranslated. *Reinterpreting the Spanish American Essay: Women Writers of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Doris Meyer and published in 1995, was the first comprehensive study of Latin American women’s essays. And her second volume, *Rereading the Spanish American Essay: Translations of 19th and 20th Century Women’s Essays*, was one of the first compilations of translated essays. Though women’s essays might not have held in the literary sphere, however, there is no doubt that they influenced the political sphere. “Writing has become an important act of survival and empowerment for women in Latin America: by consistently appropriating the public arena for women’s concerns, women essayists have seen to it that those very issues began to gain some currency in the national discourses” (Rojas 187). These women essayists helped to shape what issues were discussed, addressed, and deemed important in a time of volatility and insecurity. And it could be further argued that they helped to create the underpinnings of a continental feminist movement.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore other examples of Latin American women’s propensity to turn to personal narratives during times of national crisis. Future studies would look at other historical moments of social and political upheaval in Latin America and

study the personal narratives that women produced in response to this upheaval in order to help improve society and to support women's rights at the same time. This dissertation focuses on the testimonio, a personal mode of cultural production that, like the essay, has been reshaped over and over again by the different socio-political contexts that have defined Latin American history. A marginalized literary mode, it was appropriated by a marginalized group: women. Domitila Barrios de Chungara's book "*Si me permiten hablar...*": *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*, Lúcia Murat's film *Que bom te ver viva*, and Julia Alvarez's novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* are three variations of the testimonio, produced in the twentieth century as a way to confront the violent, oppressive governments whose effects were felt for many years.

These three works are important because they undermine the idea of testimonio as a *genre*—an idea that has caused great confusion and restriction in academic scholarship over recent years. Drawing on several different artistic genres and taking on unique forms of their own, they underscore the openness of the testimonial mode. This openness is also reflected in the three various national contexts (Bolivia, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic), the three various languages (Spanish, Portuguese, and English), and the three various stages of dictatorial trauma (during, just after, and a generation later) that these three works represent. Despite their disparate loci of enunciation, however, all three works display certain common traits and tensions that have persisted throughout the modern testimonial mode: the primacy of gender and sexuality, the friction between individual and collective representation, the role of the interlocutor, and questions surrounding truth and authenticity. These overarching consistencies have not been thoroughly examined before. For instance, though many scholars have discussed the inherent tension found in testimonio's dual individual and collective representation, very few have explored where this tension arises: in the testimonialistas' roles as mothers, wives, and

activists in patriarchal cultures that have denied them a political voice. The very intimate and personal sacrifices that female activists have been forced to make have also not been fully considered. The primacy of gender and sexuality in general has been given very little critical attention—despite the fact that testimonios are what solidified women’s place in the Latin American literary canon. For a cultural mode that has undermined male literary and political hegemony, been taken over by women, and stressed the difficulty and importance of having a woman’s voice heard, this issue is of paramount importance. There need to be more studies that, like this dissertation, analyze the pervasive traits and tensions of the modern testimonial mode and their links to sexuality and gender. This is the only way to get closer to understanding the political traumas of Latin America’s past and to appreciating the sacrifices that women have made because of these traumas. The Scheherazades of the twentieth century have spoken. Now we must listen.

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