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“The War Cut Out My Tongue”:
Domestic Violence, Foreign Wars, and
Translation in Demetria Martínez

We always had a hard time getting the Atlacatl soldiers to take prisoners instead of ears.—Visiting professor at the School of the Americas, *Newsweek*, 26 January 1990

I refused to believe that what I was seeing was a pattern of scars, the legend to the map of his life—1982, someone had branded those numbers into his back.—Demetria Martínez, *Mother Tongue* (1994)

This empire fears translation.—Amy Kaplan, Presidential address to the American Studies Association, 17 October 2003

For her work in 1987 as a reporter covering Salvadoran refugees seeking U.S. Sanctuary, Demetria Martínez was indicted on charges of conspiracy. Having successfully defended herself, she continues to write about the effects of war on language.¹ Her poems, fiction, and essays courageously question the longstanding myth of the United States as a new beginning, an inclusive social order, a nation that provides protection against—rather than perpetrates—terror. A preoccupation with language informs the alternatives Martínez imagines to the shrill anti-immigrant claim that Americans must dream strictly in English. Marked by expansion and annexation, language complements class, race, sex, and citizenship as a shaping discourse of American culture.² Our attention to linguistic difference can help us decipher imperialism’s scars and may render more subtle and trenchant our critique of terrorism, especially U.S.-sponsored terrorism in the Americas and around the globe.³

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Whereas recent criticism illuminates the ways Spanish-language and bilingual texts add to traditionally monolingual American canons (both North and South), my reading of Martínez's predominantly English-language texts dwells on the traumatic political, social, and emotional wounds of language *loss*.⁴ In *Mother Tongue* (1994), a depressed Chicana college student becomes politically conscious through her intimate involvement with a Salvadoran refugee in the Sanctuary movement. The novel shows how foreign intervention can be a catalyst for migration and that domestic violence—racial discrimination as well as physical or emotional abuse in domestic spaces—is a means to harness the tongues of annexed and migratory subjects.⁵ Both domestic and foreign violence work to “cut out” Amerindian and Spanish-language tongues in the historical arc of U.S. imperialism in the western hemisphere.⁶ Despite government intimidation, Martínez's writing actively opposes torture, detention, and disappearances—practices in which the United States has increasingly participated since the 1980s.⁷ Martínez's work teaches that the first step in opposing these government practices should be reading the signs of the unheard and mistranslated, whose bodies have been scarred by imperial violence.

In addition to demonstrating Martínez's contribution to discussions of American literature and empire, my essay seeks to elucidate the peculiar echo of U.S. Salvadoran policy in the Iraq of the new millennium. In the 1980s, U.S.-trained death squads terrorized civilian populations in Central America; through a literal translation, the United States has now carried these tactics into West Asia. This model for subduing insurgency has become known as “the Salvador option.”⁸ In the aftermath of the Central American conflicts, as now, we face the troubling question of how to talk about the effects of such repression on bodies and on languages.

Martínez's several books of poetry and essays as well as her award-winning novel, *Mother Tongue*, innovatively imbricate domestic and foreign violence. Eager to expose the relations of power within the largest U.S. minority group and aware of the violence that Latino(a)s experience in domestic contexts, Martínez shows how this violence is connected to U.S. wars of aggression. Still neglected by U.S. Americanist criticism, Martínez's work appeared before the recent wave of what Susan Gillman calls “U.S. empire studies.” Martínez demonstrates the need to theorize empire from within American studies

rather than in a new field where the scholar might objectively “get beyond” a critique of (or support for) U.S. imperialism.⁹

Beginning with a discussion of Martínez’s definition of the mother tongue, my essay considers the task of translating foreign and domestic violence as it figures in Martínez’s writing. I use the term *domestic violence* to refer to gendered physical and emotional abuse inside the home and to discriminatory practices based on race, class, language, and citizenship-status inside U.S. borders. I argue that Martínez positions the reader as a witness to refugees’ testimony about the violence that has marked their bodies. By migrating across borders, the refugee’s body becomes a text that translates the effects of foreign aggression. This intimate meaning, coded in the refugees’ scars, challenges the ideal of an objective reading of empire from within the United States. Interpolated as responsible—as able to respond and as taking responsibility—the reader learns to scale the barriers that would block a view of the interdependence of foreign and domestic violence.

As casualties of similar processes of violence, mother tongues—redefined by Martínez as nondominant languages suppressed through war—become indispensable tools for the excavation of what I call a *disappeared* history. In the U.S. context, the government does its best to “deflect, deny or ignore” its violations of human rights and international law.¹⁰ The Chicana who renames herself and reclaims her culture resists monolingual imperialism by listening for America’s mother tongues.

Translating the Salvadoran War

Critics have read *Mother Tongue* as a poignant “love story,” as an innovative “internationalization” of Chicana and Latina writing outside *el barrio*, and as an indictment of a paternalistic U.S. Sanctuary movement.¹¹ These readings usefully underscore late-twentieth-century Chicana narrative’s sophisticated navigation of the borders of sex, nationality, race, and language in Latin and North American literary traditions. I propose that Martínez calls attention to the difficult transactions between languages marked by migration and war, and between Chicano(as) or Latino(as) and recent immigrants from Latin America.¹² When the narrator of *Mother Tongue*—daydreaming, diary-writing María—reflects on her complicated relationship to the Salva-

doran refugee José Luis Romero, she explodes common stereotypes of the Chicano(a) “out there picking lettuce.” As Martínez has noted, mainstream publishers at first resisted precisely this self-reflective aspect of the narrator.¹³ During the course of the narrative, both María and José Luis become aware of how their social positions are affected by race, gender, class, and language. Both of them play the part of victim and victimizer in the perpetuation of violence. For if María generously provides a temporary shelter for José Luis, she also makes him into a character in an escapist romantic narrative in order to avoid facing the causes of her own depression. And although José Luis helps María relearn her Spanish and appreciate her chicanidad, he also transfers his unresolved memories of being tortured by the Salvadoran government onto her body in a traumatic incident of domestic abuse. This incident occurs the same night that they conceive their only child, also named José Luis. Narrated mostly in the first person by María (but also including single chapters in the first-person voices of José Luis and of their son), the novel brings into focus the relations of power among these Chicana, Salvadoran, and Chicano-Salvadoran characters. It also attends to their respective relations with the dominant Anglo-American culture. Thus, the novel questions the longstanding association of the United States with innocence, without rendering the Chicana or Central American characters as simply victims.

While Martínez builds on Gloria Anzaldúa’s foundational work on linguistic terrorism in the borderlands of the United States and Mexico and anticipates Rubén Martínez’s journalism about border crossing, she differs from other Chicana novelists in underscoring the need for translation between her English-dominant Chicana narrator and the Spanish-dominant Salvadoran characters. In contrast, two other Chicana-authored novels that chronicle El Salvador’s twelve-year war (1980–1992) make the trauma of exile from Central America easier for North Americans to consume by smoothing over linguistic differences. Graciela Limón’s American Book Award winner *In Search of Bernabé* (1993) and Carole Fernández’s *Sleep of the Innocents* (1991) feature omniscient narrators who have ready and equal access to the consciousness of both Salvadoran and North American characters, despite their working-class Salvadoran protagonists’ racial, linguistic, class, and national alterity.

In contrast to Limón’s and Fernández’s heroines who enjoy the wel-

come of the Sanctuary movement or experience the United States as a respite from violence, the account of José Luis's migration in *Mother Tongue* emphasizes his sense of being misunderstood and misrepresented, despite the guidance he receives from María's godmother, Soledad, a wise, veteran activist.¹⁴ Working as a shop clerk while on leave from college, María foregrounds her relatively privileged location as an obstacle to her understanding of José Luis, the dark-skinned, undocumented dishwasher who speaks to audiences in Spanish from behind a handkerchief to protect his identity. For both María and the readers of her narrative, to imagine José Luis is to see, at first, an "empty mirror" and to hear, as most North Americans would, a "ghostly rustle of Spanish spoken in restaurants above the spit of grease on a grill" (*MT*, 56).

José Luis's story reaches North American audiences only through translation or in distorting newspaper reports. Whereas we read Limón's and Fernández's characters in fluid English with an occasional, arbitrary Spanish phrase thrown in to remind the reader that the protagonist speaks little English, *Mother Tongue* is painstakingly narrated in a poetic, dense English by a Chicana whose Spanish merely got her where she wanted to go, "like an old car, parts missing or held together with clothes hanger wire" (*MT*, 11). María only grasps bits and pieces of José Luis's story at first: "I caught a word or two that I knew had to do with his past. Cell. Water. Cry. The words had a barbed wire feel to them. I didn't dare climb the fence to find out what was on the other side" (*MT*, 38). The title *Mother Tongue* insists on the role of linguistic difference in mediating relations of power between Salvadoran and Chicano(a) characters, despite their common ethnic coding in the United States as "Hispanic."

Instead of eliding the work of translation across languages, nationalities, and political perspectives, the novel critically assesses how easy it is for the North American characters, including the big-hearted María, to consume a sensationalized, romanticized, or demonized version of the Salvadoran or Chicana in their midst. Until she learns José Luis's language and rethinks her history from his perspective, María confuses his face with her own: "for a moment in the dream his hazel eyes became my eyes, clove-colored, lids powdered with brown shadow" (*MT*, 31). Here, María's self-projection elides José Luis's difference. This vigilance about their differences illuminates the peculiar epistemic violence perpetuated by and upon the Chicana narrator

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who dwells within the borderlands of two formerly warring nations. In the process of piecing together a narrative of her past, María becomes aware of what José Luis would undergo were he to become a character in her own Frederick-Jackson-Turner-esque frontier narrative, where she and José Luis would reinvent themselves “in the promised land, leaving the old self behind” (*MT*, 84).

This frontier tale proves a horror story when María understands herself to be part of the communities taken over by Spanish, Mexican, and then U.S. governments. Her ancestors endured a history of “many sovereignties” (*MT*, 54) and had to struggle over centuries to sustain in postcoloniality the parts of their identity that she was expected to forget.¹⁵ When María becomes José Luis’s simultaneous interpreter, an intimacy develops that in the end alerts her to her own history of linguistic expropriation. Documenting the process by which a naive, New Age-ist, Chicana, part-time volunteer with the Sanctuary movement interrogates her culture and her reason for existence, *Mother Tongue* repeatedly poses Cherié Moraga’s brutally honest question about how to respond to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees in the 1980s: “what is my responsibility in this?”¹⁶

Remembering the Mother Tongue

In *Mother Tongue*, the language taught by the mother does not reflect a pure ethnic, national, or cultural origin. Like the Salvadoran José Luis, the Chicana María, and their binational child, the mother tongue itself is “one of millions conceived in love and war” (*MT*, 162). To remember the mother tongue, then, does not mean a return to an originary home; to transparent communication between the “Hispanic” characters; to undifferentiated maternal plenitude; or to a facile political, ethnic, or national unity. Jacques Derrida makes this point in his reflections on monolingualism: “The language called maternal is never purely natural, nor proper, nor inhabitable.”¹⁷ Language constitutes an aporia between María and José Luis, which they must traverse through various forms of cultural translation. But while Martínez shares a Derridean conviction about textuality’s mediation of any transfer of meaning, she diverges from Derrida’s sense of an inevitable monolingualism.¹⁸ Against the mother tongue as Rousseau’s liquid ethnic essence, against its definition as imposed colonial artifact, and against

the concomitant tropes of masculinist national fraternity, Martínez renders the mother tongue an element of culture that social interactions produce in asymmetrical relations of power.¹⁹ Martínez's text suggests the usefulness of thinking not in terms of an original, paternal interdiction but a linguistic archive.

Michel Foucault's concept of the archive challenges notions of familial descent—and related concepts of race, language, and nation—from a single origin. For Foucault, the archive is conceivable only “by the discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say, and from that which falls outside our discursive practice; it begins with the outside of our own language; its locus is in the gap between our own discursive practices.”²⁰ Archive-like, Martínez's mother tongue provides a set of enunciative conditions from within which we can speak. Its status as a social construction only becomes clear from its borders. These linguistic and formal borders show language to be a historical and cultural artifact. Barbara Johnson draws a similar conclusion about mother tongues: “[T]he moment a comparison is set up that requires language to be seen in terms of another, both languages are seen in their systematicity, their linguisticity.”²¹ In Martínez's writing, scenes of translation and friction between languages bring to the fore the cultural interactions that produce languages.

Mother Tongue endorses this definition of language as a systematic dispersion rather than a derivation from one origin. The text consists of the notes, letters, recipes, newspaper clippings, photographs, poetry, journal writing, horoscopes, and cassette tapes that thirty-nine-year-old María strings together. Rather than constructing a single, recoverable truth in the past, María consciously recovers a past made up of pieces of text. In offering her son the promised “story of how he came into this world” (*MT*, 147), *Mother Tongue* tells how María, José Luis, and their son learn to perceive the discontinuities that mark them: their languages, their nationalities, their access to too much or too little wealth, their bewitching by an American myth that “heaven gave us a unique destiny, that we are to spread truth among nations” (*MT*, 162). Reading the United States through the eyes of the refugee José Luis, María sees through the discourse of American exceptionalism that initially clouded her perception of him.

Martínez attributes language loss to the history of colonization, racism, and the tactics of institutional discipline and policing. In *Mother*

Tongue, she addresses traumatic memories and melancholia caused by violence but wisely does not restrict her narrative to an individual or to a particular cultural diagnosis.²² For María, English-language acquisition coincides with the young Chicana's entry into a masculinist symbolic order and into discourses of whitening and Americanization. Recollecting the point at which the name *Mary* had displaced *María*, she recalls entering, as a girl, a "wonderland as white as in fairy tales her mother reads to her each night" (*MT*, 168). This world of books is white, which in the U.S. Southwest signifies "Anglo" or English-speaking. But a bicultural subject may have two languages. The relation between them mirrors larger political and social conditions, rather than a primordial maternity. As a Chicana, María's first language may have been Spanish, but the novel indicates that she becomes English-dominant. By teaching children to speak and write different languages, mothers introduce these new speakers to the politically mediated fissure between the mother tongue and other tongues.

Martínez refuses to give language the status of a pure cultural origin by historicizing the metaphor of the mother tongue as a cultural system mutilated by war. In her essay "Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana," she describes her relationship to Spanish as filled with shame, struggle, and yearning—not with easy ethnic identification.²³ Surrounded by Spanish between the ages of one and five, Martínez recalls that, as for María, Spanish evokes childhood without signifying plenitude. When asked in an interview if she speaks Spanish, Martínez claims that she "listens to it" but admits that she doesn't "really have all the words yet," explaining that this incompleteness is a "key concern" in *Mother Tongue*.²⁴

The estrangement of Spanish reflects the English-Spanish asymmetry in the historical relations of the United States and Latin America.²⁵ Martínez remembers that speaking Spanish was disciplined in Anglo-dominant institutions: "When I went to school, [Spanish] just faded away." In "occupied Mexico," Spanish immersion is possible at home, but "punishments may be meted out for speaking Spanish in school, from mouths washed out with soap to the placement of Spanish speakers in classes for the mentally handicapped."²⁶ Concomitantly, in thirteen states, virulent English-only movements have drawn on anti-immigrant sentiment to nourish campaigns to make English the official language. Irrationally presuming that English speakers

are not also immigrants or descendants of immigrants, biased courts, schools, and advocacy groups have sought to delegitimize or criminalize Spanish.²⁷

Although Martínez prompts the reader to rethink assumptions about America's mother tongue, her text refuses to grant any single language an originary status. Martínez laments the violence of linguistic imposition but does not nostalgically cast Spanish as an inexorably lost home and an estranged space of familiar intimacy and transparent communication, as does, for example, the early Richard Rodriguez.²⁸ Responding to a query about the use of English to talk about Latino(a) literature, Martínez defines neither Spanish nor English as mother tongue: "I have long maintained that Spanish is a father tongue, that of the conquerors. Our true mother tongues are indigenous languages, many wiped out in genocide. I dream of a day when we Latinos are trilingual, or at least studying a third tongue. Quechua, Tewa, Yoheme, Diné, Nahuatl—the roads to recovery are legion" (*MT*, 47).²⁹ This response makes language study a means to redress colonial and imperial violence. While this characterization of mother tongues as Amerindian neglects other suppressed African or Asian influences in Latino(a) culture, the statement undermines the idea that a single European language such as Spanish (or English) might adequately represent *latinidad's* mixed legacy. Acknowledging a relationship of domination during centuries of European invasion and annexation, this anticolonial multilingualism remembers the power of the rebellious mother tongue to dispel the ghost of the invader.

Domestic and Foreign Violence

Mother Tongue intertwines domestic violence, state-sponsored terror, and silenced tongues as effects of U.S. militarism and, in particular, as a result of the U.S.-financed war of the Salvadoran government against a majority of its own people. The U.S.-supported Salvadoran regime regularly targeted civilians, using massacres, torture, political assassination, detention, and "disappearances" to terrorize the population and to dismantle support for the rebel forces among the population.³⁰ Historians and the Salvadoran Truth Commission concur that "the vast majority of the 60,000 killed in the war were civilians killed by the army or its friends on the extreme right."³¹ Decades later, the tactic of terrorizing and killing civilians has become known as the aforemen-

tioned “Salvador option.” With prescience about the future of U.S. foreign relations, *Mother Tongue* brings home to readers the intimate and persistent reverberations of U.S. involvement in propping up a repressive government.³²

Tactics such as torture and detention without charge not only violate the physical and mental integrity of the person in custody but also transgress national and international law. A memorandum produced by Attorney General Alberto González in 2002, however, states that the Geneva conventions do not apply to the conflict with Al Qaeda and the Taliban and that the conventions can be legally ignored by the U.S. military in the current “war on terror.” This memo has facilitated efforts by the United States to evade responsibility for its policies on torture.³³ Sexual humiliation or the “breaking down,” “loosening up,” beating, or burning of detainees in secret facilities has the effect of terrifying a large portion of the population into silent complicity.³⁴ These acts parallel seemingly private violations within the domestic sphere. Amy Kaplan stresses the overlapping of the foreign and domestic fronts as a powerful tactic of empire: “And we must further understand how empire doesn’t just take place in faraway battlefields, but how it exerts its power at home—in fact, in the interconnections between the domestic and the foreign.”³⁵ Domestic language can function as code for the tactics of foreign abuses.

Martínez’s *Mother Tongue* interweaves narratives of domestic and foreign violence to expose the fiercely defended homeland as inevitably contaminated by the violence its armies wreak elsewhere. In the novel’s most dramatic scene, imbricated histories of aggression culminate in José Luis’s violent attack on María. During a night of intimacy, a single word triggers a transformation of the soft-spoken, philosophical poet. He imagines that María is one of the soldiers who cut off his fiancée’s ears in El Salvador. Still shuddering from his own experience of torture by the Salvadoran state’s security forces, his personality rapidly shifts; in a transformed state, he takes out his raging grief on María’s body.³⁶ José Luis’s unresolved trauma in the wake of atrocities that caused him to flee El Salvador explodes in this aggressive act.

For María, being beaten by her lover unsettles a disturbing, long-buried memory: as a seven-year-old girl, she was sexually abused by an adult neighbor while he watched scenes from a war in Southeast Asia on television. In the irruption of this twinned traumatic memory, a neighbor attempts to “gut [her] like a fish” while the government

“cancel[s] . . . whole populations” with massive bombs (*MT*, 173, 167). This traumatic scene from María’s childhood immediately follows the scene of domestic trauma with José Luis.

As the crucial nexus between foreign and domestic violence, between Southeast Asian and Latin American scenes of war, and between distinctly gendered and languaged subjects, the following lengthy passage merits citation in full:

The man smiles his minus sign smile, canceling the girl. He gets up off his knees and turns on the TV. Time for the news. Men in baggy clothes that make them look like rocks or trees genuflect, set rifles on their knees, take aim. Helicopter blades shred the sky. Winds beat the jungle down from three dimensions to one. The men with guns have on helmets that look like turtles. They point their guns at small men with almond eyes and matchstick cheekbones who come out of the trees with their hands behind their heads. Smoke billows, breaks up into characters, a language that has yet to be invented. A village is burning. The village becomes a smoke signal that not even God can decipher.

The man with the tie greets the girl’s mother. She has come home from the hospital; her father is not doing well. . . . The girl’s mother gives him cookies wrapped in tinfoil. Thank you, good-bye. Thank you, good-bye. He smiles, canceling the two of them. He is dead in the eyes. The world is flat to him. He will go out and cancel whole populations.

The girl opens her mouth to say something to her mother. But she has no words for what has happened, no words for evil. Besides, it’s beginning to snow, a spring snow. She presses her nose to the window pane. Fat flakes splat on glass, stick to rocks like moss. She imagines a wonderland as white as in fairy tales her mother reads to her each night. The girl is beginning to drift off, to forget. For many years she will not know that much of what she is doing is fighting sleep. (*MT*, 167–68)

María’s seven-year-old body figures as the country being invaded and bombed on the television screen, the last time such scenes flowed into living-room television sets.³⁷ The neighbor cuts into her with a knife-like finger while smiling at the installation of democracy through scorched-earth bombing and other methods of subduing brown-skinned insurgents. Because of the contradiction (which

does not become less acute when such images themselves become cellular-phone camera snapshots of stripped and raped prisoners in Abu Ghraib), the girl finds herself in a snowy white world where she “drift[s] off, [and begins] to forget.” Like a speaker whose wires have been cut, the girl’s thoughts send out signals that don’t become audible (*MT*, 165). This scene’s staging as a repetition underscores the accumulation of unresolved, incompletely articulated trauma from the U.S.-Mexico war through the neocolonial wars of the 1970s. Set in the new millennium (2002 is its narrative moment), the book vaticinates the wars in Iraq, for which El Salvador, as the United States now formally acknowledges, was a preparatory exercise.³⁸ Territorial annexation and the migration of millions who were displaced by wars in the 1980s have led their children to “choose” to forget their parents’ Spanish and other languages.³⁹ Relearning the suppressed mother tongues proves indispensable for María to perceive and challenge the lingering presence of the powerful neighbor.

Unlike recent arguments for bi- or multilingualism as a crucial ingredient for a nation’s economic advantage and security, *Mother Tongue* irreverently questions the claims of modern nations to adequately represent centuries of María’s indigenous, Sephardic, Spanish, and mestizo ancestors of the U.S. Southwest.⁴⁰ Languages changed with multiple sovereigns, which the politically naive María knows little about until she meets José Luis. Although English did not come to replace Spanish as an official language in New Mexico until decades after 1848, José Luis has to tell María that “Mary is English for María,” and not vice versa, as the Anglicized Mary had believed (*MT*, 73). The linguistically reconnected María is able to exorcise the ghost of the invader, her neighbor, whose mouth literally would cross out her speech when he ordered her not to talk about what he did to her: “When I said to José Luis, it’s me, María, I remembered. And the ghost of the man with the minus sign fled” (*MT*, 168). The renamed María asserts her language and her right to defend her body against the violating claims of the Anglophone neighbor, and against José Luis’s misplaced rage.

María’s prolonged inability to remember who she is reveals the cost of assimilation, which has diminished her connection to the millennial cultures of her ancestors. The process of whitening and the draining away of her color relate directly to an inability to articulate a critique of the events affecting her, she notes in her journal (*MT*, 55). With the reclaiming of her name and her language, María initiates activist

work on the Parent Teacher's Association and visits the Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared in El Salvador with her son.⁴¹ Although María initially longed for José Luis to rescue her from depression and boredom, she transforms her writing into a form of engagement when she realizes that José Luis's war is also her own, and that "love could not be divorced from history" (*MT*, 44).

Parallel to this description of María's sociopolitical awakening, the novel challenges individualized explanations of domestic violence and interprets these actions as part of a larger network of international policing and counterinsurgency. The novel does not pose the equivalence of torture in prisons to torture in homes, but it does argue that the abuser-torturer simultaneously operates in roles assigned by imperial and domestic discourses. *Mother Tongue* criticizes the illegibility of domestic abuse: "His life was destined to be a statement about the times; I was to suffer the times in my body" (*MT*, 36). María notes that José Luis's traumatic burning and beating at the hands of the Salvadoran military readily garnered the support of the community, but her domestic trauma registers mutely in her body. Whereas José Luis could discuss his wounds before packed churches, María envies him and laments that her wounds "have always been invisible" (*MT*, 172). Shame and taboo within the community often discourage critical awareness about sexual violence, which frequently registers as an insult to the victim's male family members rather than to the abused woman or man. The construction of sexual abuse as cause for shame, in fact, helps shore up the patriarchal and heterosexual roles of the defenders of the nation.⁴² By intersplicing domestic and foreign spheres, the novel shows how the U.S. application of domestic-style terror helps to silence critical social movements in opposition to foreign intervention. The discourses of individualizing shame generate a sense of powerlessness that tends to disable criticism of the extension of these tactics to other parts of the globe.

The mother's inability to perceive her daughter's suffering suggests her unredeemed potential for challenging the history of cultural expropriation. Oblivious to her daughter's silence after being left with the neighbor, María's mother offers the abuser gifts and gratitude. Without a critique of her own position among the "cancelled" populations in the United States, María's mother raises her daughter to become a "Berlitz-tape Chicana," or an English-dominant speaker in the U.S. Southwest who anxiously longs for the Spanish that she no longer speaks fluently. Not having the tools to assess the poli-

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tics of assimilation nor to question the fairy tale of freedom and justice, María's mother culturally abandons her daughter long before her actual premature death from cancer. Notably, however, the mother's death prompts María's tailspin of depression and her circuitous search for her cultural history in the town of thick-walled buildings that, according to family lore, her Mexican ancestors helped to build centuries before in Albuquerque.

The Reader As Witness

Mother Tongue interpellates the reader as a responsible witness and calls upon her or him to serve as interlocutor. The reader listens to the characters' self-censorship, escapism, and stories of violation while in the custody of irresponsible, powerful neighbors. Arresting the linguistic legacy of dispossession, translation mediates between the Salvadoran characters, on one hand, and the North American characters (and readers) on the other. Derrida, in his discussion of the subjectivity that is formed in a colonial language, raises the crucial question of who becomes the addressee as a result: "Where do we find ourselves? With whom can we still *identify* in order to affirm our identity and to tell ourselves our own history? First of all, to whom do we recount it? One would have to construct oneself, one would have to be able to *invent oneself* without a model and without an assured addressee."⁴³ Indeed, María's narration of the story of her son's origins also functions as a process of self-invention in relation to a general addressee along these lines.

María writes in the first person to a "you" whom she addresses variously as her lover (José Luis), as her son (also José Luis), as herself, and as the reader (*MT*, 33, 59, 89, 101, 158). The impersonal reader becomes an interlocutor for María's reconstruction of fragments that she kept stored away in a shoebox. At the moment when she translates the notebook that José Luis left in her possession before disappearing from her life—while stepping outside her dominant English language and rehabilitating her rusty Spanish—María opens her own wounds and simultaneously address the reader:

I have not laid hands on this story for six days, have not gotten near the paper. It has taken me this long to move beyond the resentment I feel at having told you the part of the story I had intended to keep to myself. Resentment, because in telling you—*whoever you are*—

I opened the wound. I told myself part of the story I had hoped to keep from myself, the disappeared part. (*MT*, 88–89, my emphasis)

With the phrase “whoever you are,” the reader becomes an explicit interlocutor in this intimate retelling for the first time. This rhetorical move makes María’s awareness of herself as a Chicana who grew up in occupied Mexico a model for the reader to discover the covert or “disappeared” parts of U.S. history, one notable chapter of which is the funding by U.S. citizens of governments that “disappear” and torture their citizens (in the amount of over \$4 billion in the Salvadoran conflict alone). To “open the wound” up to the anonymous reader threatens a remaking of the American past in such a way that the reader, like María, must respond to and for it.

Similarly, the text’s closing gesture reiterates the reader’s indispensable role in preserving the memory of subaltern survivors of U.S.-funded violence. In the epilogue, which takes the form of an undated letter addressed to María from José Luis, the reader learns of his clandestine return to El Salvador and his eventual exile in Canada. With no interpretive frame in the narrator’s voice, it remains uncertain whether the letter ever reaches its destination. The reader intercepts the appeal from José Luis: “I pray you have not forgotten me” (*MT*, 194). The letter refuses the readerly desire for a conclusive end to the narrative or an answer about the final whereabouts of José Luis. After María became pregnant, José Luis left them. The process of writing the story of her son’s conception and of her own experiences of abuse enables María to take steps toward resolving the mystery of her lover’s whereabouts. She takes her nineteen-year-old son to the San Salvador office of the Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared, where they learn that José Luis has been classified as “disappeared.” Because his body had never been found, the young José Luis takes this to mean that his father might still be alive. The epilogue reconfirms that José Luis, the father, may have survived the war. Thus the reader—and not just María—holds in hand the refugee’s request to be remembered.

“Disappeared” History

When María describes her and José Luis’s past as “the disappeared part of the story,” she employs the Latin Americanized adjectival form of the verb *desaparecer* (to disappear). Both José Luis and María her-

self belong, in María's mind, to *los desaparecidos*. The person who is disappeared is not acting on subjective intentions as the verb implies in English in the active form; rather, he or she receives the force of a violent action. Human-rights groups formed in the 1970s and 1980s throughout Latin America—such as the one that María and José Luis visit in San Salvador—often described themselves as Committees of Mothers and Family Members of the Disappeared. This past participle reflects the impunity with which the operatives within national security apparatuses normally carry out their tasks: torturers have long expected freedom from public scrutiny.⁴⁴ *Mother Tongue* translates the hegemonic understanding of American history into the language of the survivors. This language foregrounds the traumatic events in the past that are often elided from official memory because they flagrantly contradict the U.S. national self-presentation as democratically based on the rule of law.

In post-Vietnam wars, the translation of the refugee's or the detainee's version of war becomes necessary because the U.S. public usually learns about the use of torture and illegal detention through highly mediated outlets of information. Often the press dares to publicize U.S. involvement in torture only after having held onto the story for months or years.⁴⁵ The testimony of victims becomes suspect until such time when it may have less damaging political repercussions. If the history has been "disappeared," the decisive task of making these chronicles of war intelligible falls to fiction, *testimonios*, poetry, and criticism. In the attempt to wrest tradition away from a rising conformism, Martínez's *Mother Tongue* engages in the unbinding of the past, in order, as María states, to "call into question the neatly bound volume of trivia and revelations you thought was your history" (*MT*, 87). Addressing itself to the reader living in the white wonderland and silent amnesia of present and past wars, the novel fills in the blank spots of María's memory of her relation to José Luis.

Chronicles of torture, detention, assassination, and disappearances enter the individual and national historical consciousness based on the social conditions that make these events possible to recount. Salvadoran refugees and human-rights activists—such as the Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared of El Salvador—swayed U.S. public opinion in the 1980s by speaking out. Often when the activists applied for asylum, the U.S. government and instruments of public opinion branded them as threats to national security.⁴⁶

Like historical refugees, detainees, and activists, José Luis struggles against such false representations of his testimony in the Albuquerque newspapers that imply his story is not credible. In one instance, María comments on a newspaper column about José Luis's recent speech before Sanctuary movement activists: "I said, because your skin is brown, what you say will be followed by words like, Romero claimed. Whereas if you were white, it would read, Romero said. That is how they disappear people here. . . . They insert notebooks and microphones between themselves and your history" (*MT*, 33).⁴⁷ Wise to the misrepresentation of non-Anglos and to the effects of U.S. policy on the darker-skinned side of the global color line, María lends another nuance to the term *disappeared* in the United States. While it is true that a white, middle-class person who denounces torture in English may not gain a fair hearing in the mainstream media, Martínez astutely notes the way the media tends to further marginalize brown-skinned, non-English-speaking, working-class (and especially undocumented) people as authorities on the history that has most deeply marked them. Thus, racism collaborates with political quietism in order to discredit the victims of torture and insulate the mainstream reader from serious questions about the right of the United States to spread its peculiar light to the rest of the world.

Writing across a language divide further amplifies the gap between U.S. journalists and undocumented immigrants.⁴⁸ This distance makes it easier for journalistic discourse to belittle the victims fleeing the so-called fledgling democracies of El Salvador and Guatemala. Although Ann Crittenden seems critical of the racism of some North American volunteers involved in the Sanctuary movement when she observes that "[s]ome congregations 'ordered' refugees the way they might select a new pet dog," her comment prefaces her uncritical reproduction of a common failure to comprehend the experience of shell-shocked refugees, as revealed in this extensive quotation from an Anglo volunteer:

Whenever I turned a corner near the church, I'd see someone leaning against a wall and I'd know *it* was another one. I'd hear the whisper, 'Padrecito,' and think *Oh No*. Then they'd come inside and start crying. Pretty soon they'd be camped in the place, burning their food, staring at you from the corner of the room, stinking—the odor comes with them—and we would be trying to go about our business.⁴⁹

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Crittenden sums up: "In no time the unwashed villagers, who had never lived in a house with indoor plumbing were dipping their tin cups into the toilet for drinking water, while the children, sick with diarrhea, defecated all over the floor."⁵⁰ Characterizing the Central Americans as "unwashed," "stinking," and naively barbarous, the volunteer and Crittenden condemn the refugees, as if their ill health resulted from their indolence or inherent uncleanliness, rather than from torture, flight, poverty, and lack of orientation in a new environment. Crittenden's volunteer certainly does not speak for the entire Sanctuary movement, in which thousands of heroic and committed women and men, like María's godmother, Soledad, engaged in civil disobedience in order to protect the human rights of victims and to protest U.S. policy.⁵¹ And yet this journalist's narrative of the movement of church groups involved in Sanctuary exemplifies the racism of which María warns José Luis.

Partly due to lack of political will, partly due to the mainstream bias of U.S. journalism, many Central American refugees' stories did not gain sufficient credence to alter the historical record until the pertinent U.S. policy had run its course and could no longer be affected by these revelations. For example, not until over a decade after the assassination of Archbishop Romero of El Salvador by heavily armed men in civilian clothes did mainstream news outlets corroborate what refugees had been saying for decades: that the United States offered tactical and monetary support for Romero's assassins.⁵² This welcome news of some accountability for the murder arrives late. Now, it only commends us to neither forget nor silently condone torture and illegal detentions in Iraq, Guantánamo, and secret prisons elsewhere. It becomes necessary to learn Arabic and other languages not as a skill to deploy in the national security apparatus but as a preparation for listening in this context.⁵³

"Borders I Cannot Cross"

The criminalization of Martínez's journalism that I mentioned in my opening paragraph constrained her writing process. Despite the support of Allen Ginsburg, Rudolfo Anaya, and others around the world, the seven-month indictment and more than two-week trial in which she was acquitted on First Amendment grounds generated years of anguish that made the writing of *Mother Tongue* simultaneously more difficult and more urgent.⁵⁴ Martínez mentions in an interview that

Mother Tongue took years to write because she had to wrestle with the self-censorship spawned by the indictment of her writing: "It took me a long time to really get over what had happened to me in the trial once, you know, that sense of shame, guilt, of being violated, that sense that I had asked for it. I mean, I must have been a bad girl to do something like this."⁵⁵ Martínez's grammar breaks down precisely at the moment she describes the trial's effects on her. She leaves out the subject and the verb that would reveal the state's role in producing her contradictory emotions of violation and guilt. Although she parodies the outrageous claim that "she must have been a bad girl," her paraphrase of the state's accusations reveals the facility with which the state momentarily repossesses her tongue. Her distinctly gendered "sense of shame, guilt, of being violated" echoes the response of the violated girl in the novel. Upon hearing the command not to talk, and the claim that she was guilty, Martínez notes that she drifted temporarily into silence. The eloquent writing with which she emerges from this silence merits closer, sustained attention from U.S. literary scholars.

The U.S. government based its case against Martínez in part on evidence contained in one of her poems, "Nativity: For Two Salvadoran Women, 1986–1987." Unlike Crittenden's account, the poem honors the bodily conditions of two pregnant refugees who are fleeing the violence in El Salvador in order to save their own and their children's lives. Rather than make a spectacle of the refugees' need to urinate unceremoniously on pine needles, the poem calls attention to the North American reporter's limited ability to represent the refugees' decision to flee their country while pregnant. "The tools of my tribe"—as the poet calls her notebook and pen—mark a border that the English-dominant reporter cannot cross. The reporter cannot speak in the place of the refugee women because of her privileged ability to cross borders *with* documents. The politically charged border—between the United States and Mexico, between the global North and the global South, between intellectual and bodily work, between the writing subject and the news object—traces a hemispheric divide across the continent and across the Salvadoran women's swelling wombs: "your belts, like equators, / mark north from south, / borders I cannot cross."⁵⁶ The border divides not just geographic regions but also a traditionally gendered split between the mind and the body and between their respective labors.

The Chicana reporter acknowledges a common position in a gen-

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dered discourse. Bonding in difference with the women to whom she dedicates the poem, she deploys nonverbal gestures: “watching you vomit morning sickness, / . . . / A North American reporter, / I smile, you tell me you are due / in December, we nod.”⁵⁷ The state attempted unsuccessfully to prosecute such mutual acknowledgment as a threat to national security. In violation of the rules of objective reporting, as a testimony to possible tactics of solidarity in the wake of poststructuralism, Martínez’s art represents the immense task of translating between the Americas. While there are borders the North American citizen cannot cross, the gesture of extraverbal communication proves to profoundly threaten a superficial definition of national security.

To relearn the language that María understood fluently until she went to school does not ensure solidarity with José Luis, just as the ability to communicate in Spanish does not guarantee a “nod” of understanding between the journalist and the Salvadoran women in the poem. The English-dominant Chicana must also learn to imagine herself through the refugees’ eyes. In this space between languages, the untranslatable reveals itself through barbed wire. Similarly, the Meso-American lovers transgressively in *Mother Tongue* enter a borderland: “Dodging from word to word for hours at a sitting, we made our way across borders of language without passports or permits” (*MT*, 69). This undocumented, passportless crossing of borders studded with barbed wire—a figure for the task of translation—permits María to reopen wounds and begin to heal.

Reading, Writing, and Translation in the Context of Empire

Although the war cuts out María’s tongue, she eventually learns to write out the memories of the wars that she absorbed, as a child and as a young woman. In her translation for readers in the United States of an ideologically conflicted historical period, Martínez dares to protect her journalistic sources and to speak out about injustice despite pressure to remain silent.⁵⁸ The novel and her poems enact an alternative to the pretended objectivity of journalistic accounts of the Salvadoran war. Martínez’s writing prizes intimate writing on notebook pages, in letters, and in lines of poetry, all of which permit the narrator and the reader to excavate a different version of the past and imagine an alternative future.

Of course, the political relations between the invading force and the insurgency produce radically divergent, if not incommensurate,

narrative perspectives.⁵⁹ Plagued by misrecognition and transference, any communication between the two perspectives begins from an aesthetic stance and demands the difficult work of translation. Without claiming a single fully recoverable or translatable truth, Martínez's writing subject assumes an aesthetic stance in relation to her past. María readily admits that she embellishes, lies, and makes up stories (*MT*, 150), in keeping with Friedrich Nietzsche's definition of communication between two radically different spheres as "at most, a stammering in translation into a completely foreign medium."⁶⁰ Martínez writes according to the distinct constraints of fiction, poetry, and translation. Her texts produce a counter-memory of the American past through creative translations culled from a heterogeneous, bilingual archive.

In the process of reclaiming the mother tongue by learning to read and write another past, María deciphers continuities between her story as a Chicana in occupied Mexico and a map of 1982 that she sees inscribed on José Luis's back. In his discussion of colonial monolingualism, Derrida figures spoken remarks or marks on the page as scars: "Terror is practiced at the expense of wounds inscribed on the body."⁶¹ Similarly, in Martínez's text, the terrifying history of El Salvador in 1982 is written on José Luis's body. These marks belong to María and the reader's archive. Previously unable to read José Luis's "signs" and deaf to the "signals [they] could not yet decode" (*MT*, 49, 66), María and the reader learn to interpret the scars of wars that neither she—nor we—can any longer ignore. She learns a way to narrate the corpus of American history with different models than the romantic tales and frontier narratives from the invader's point of view. María actively pursues the perspective of the mother tongue, that is, the viewpoint of the betrayed language, when she recognizes that she and José Luis share a history of occupation within American empire.⁶²

In light of the increasingly legalized surveillance, torture, detention, and disappearances that the United States continues to use on new fronts in order to maintain control at home and abroad, Martínez's work exemplifies a critical angle that will train us to listen for the subaltern texts of the U.S.-Iraq-Guantánamo borderlands, as the reverberations of the current war inscribe themselves onto the bodies of the current generation.⁶³ These signs belong to the archive with which we might begin to critically remake the history of the "war on terror."

Rutgers University

Notes

I dedicate this essay to five of my teachers: Joel Seidel, María Teresa Tula, América Sosa, Sonia Baires, and Zenaida Joaquín. The essay is informed by my work as a translator for Salvadoran human rights and feminist activists between 1989 and 1992. In my mind as I wrote the essay were the over four hundred persons who have been detained without charge in Guantánamo Bay since 2002. For comments and suggestions, I am grateful to the Faculty Colloquium of the Rutgers Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience; Nancy Díaz; and Carmen Mantilla.

- 1 In November 1987, while working as a reporter for the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *Albuquerque Journal*, Martínez accompanied a Lutheran minister involved in the Sanctuary movement on a trip to interview refugees in Mexico and the United States. Subsequently, Martínez was accused of conspiracy against the U.S. government and faced a twenty-five-year prison sentence and \$1.25 million in fines.
- 2 Samuel Huntington makes this claim by portraying language retention among Hispanics as a threat to U.S. values; see *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 256.
- 3 Michael Moon endorses Werner Sollors's call for a "multilingual turn" in American literary studies ("Turning from the National to the Multilingual," *American Literature* 76 [December 2004]: 683). See also Werner Sollors, *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1998). I do not wish to suggest that the category language supplants long histories of racism or the privileges of class or U.S. citizenship. Such a claim would elide, for example, persistent white racism toward English-speaking African Americans, Latino(a)s, Natives, or Asians. See also Amy Kaplan's call for attention to translation ("Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 17, 2003," *American Quarterly* 56 [March 2004]: 15); and Kirsten Silva Gruesz, "Translation: A Key(word) into the Language of America(nists)," *American Literary History* 16 (spring 2004): 85–92.
- 4 For readings of bilingualism as part of a diet for national health, see Doris Sommer, *Bilingual Aesthetics: A New Sentimental Education* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2004). Debra Castillo considers the significance of literature in Spanish for both U.S. and Latin American literary traditions in *Redreaming America: Toward a Bilingual American Culture* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2005). Class position dramatically shapes attitudes toward bilingualism and translation. Predominantly middle- to upper-class children enthusiastically enroll in bilingual programs, but working-class Latino(a) migrants regard immersing their children in English as a strategic necessity even if it means they may lose

their ability to speak Spanish. The learning and translation of indigenous or subaltern languages by elites has often served to further the effectiveness of imperialism, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes in "Translation as Culture," *Parallax* 6, no. 1 (2000): 13–24.

- 5 The phrase "annexed and migratory" encompasses Latino(a) groups incorporated into U.S. citizenship through wars of aggression in addition to immigrants or refugees from Latin America.
- 6 See Demetria Martínez, *Mother Tongue: A Novel* (New York: Ballantine, 1994): "War is a god that feasts on body parts. It deforms everything it touches, even love. It got to me, too. It cut out my tongue" (161). Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *MT*.
- 7 The Abu Ghraib prisoner-abuse scandal, the detention of hundreds at the U.S. Guantánamo military base in Cuba, and secret CIA-run prisons in Eastern Europe and North Africa exemplify this increase. Abu Ghraib is often represented in the U.S. media as an aberration in U.S. policy, but it more likely represents the public face of an invisible network of prisons across the globe; see Stephen Grey, "America's Gulag," *newstatesman*, 17 May 2004; <http://www.newstatesman.com/200405170016> (January 2006). Despite the Supreme Court's decision to grant detainees the right to habeas corpus (*Rasul v. Bush*, 124 S.Ct. 2686 [2004]), President George Bush signed into law, on 30 December 2005, the 2006 National Defense Appropriations Bill, which overturns the U.S. Supreme Court's extension of habeas corpus relief. This Bill (H.R. 2863) declares that petitions for habeas corpus relief on behalf of Guantánamo detainees may not be heard in any court, and it prohibits any other claims related to any aspect of their detention. I am grateful to Sunalei Stewart, Legal Counsel to Senator Jeff Bingaman, for clarifying, in an interview with me, the current legal situation of the detainees (4 January 2006). On Guantánamo, see Michael Ratner and Ellen Ray, *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green, 2004); and Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo's astonishing play based on spoken evidence: *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* (London: Oberon, 2004).
- 8 See Michael Hirsh, "New War, Old Tactics," *Newsweek*, 24 January 2005, 8. According to James Rupert, dozens of handcuffed cadavers on roadsides, with acid burns and bullet holes in their temples, suggest the reproduction of a Salvadoran style counter-insurgency war in Iraq ("Iraq Security Scandals: Reports from Iraq," *Newsday*, 16 November 2005, A5).
- 9 See Susan Gillman, "The New, Newest Thing: Have American Studies Gone Imperial?" *American Literary History* 17 (spring 2005): 196–214.
- 10 Stephen Macpherson Watt, "Torture, 'Stress and Duress,' and Rendition as Counter-Terrorism Tools," in *America's Disappeared: Secret Imprisonment, Detainees, and the 'War on Terror,'* ed. Rachel Meeropol (New York: Seven Stories, 2005), 80.

- 11 On *Mother Tongue* as a love story, see Robert C. Mossman, "Teaching Demetria Martínez's *Mother Tongue*," *English Journal* (December 1997): 38–41; as an internationalization of Chicana and Latina writing, see Daniel Pérez, "La internacionalización de la voz narrativa chicana en el trabajo de Demetria Martínez" ("The Internationalization of the Chicana Narrative Voice in the Work of Demetria Martínez"), *Escritura* (Caracas) 18 (January 1993): 133–40; and Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez, "Nuevas voces salvadoreñas: Sandra Benítez y Demetria Martínez" (New Voices of Salvadoran Women: Sandra Benítez and Demetria Martínez), in *Reflexiones: ensayos sobre escritoras hispanoamericanas contemporáneas (Reflections: Essays on Contemporary Hispanic American Women Writers)*, ed. Priscilla Gac-Artigas, 2 vols. (Fair Haven, N.J.: Ediciones Nuevo Espacio, 2002), 1:109–19. On *Mother Tongue* as a critique of the Sanctuary movement, see Debra Castillo, *Border Women: Writing from La Frontera* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002), 168–88.
- 12 Juan Flores reflects on the diversity within pan-Latino(a) social formations and on the benefits of having more than one language; see *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 49–61, 140–65. My essay heeds Sherry Simon's call for attention to translation as an intercultural mediator; see introduction to *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, ed. Sherry Simon and Paul St. Pierre (Ottawa, Canada: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 2000), 11. See also Sherry Simon's work on feminist activist translators in *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Trans-mission* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 13 Demetria Martínez, "Poetry, Politics, and the Drama of the Unseen: An Interview with Demetria Martínez" by Kirsten Iversen, *Bloomsbury Review* (March–April 1998): 11–12.
- 14 I diverge here from Ana Patricia Rodríguez's useful essay, "Refugees of the South: Central Americans in the U.S. Latino Imaginary," *American Literature* 73 (June 2001): 387–412.
- 15 Martínez's poem "Song" figures lost indigenous and Ladino languages as shards of an Anastazi pot that the poet reassembles as a wind chime, suggesting the ongoing expressiveness of mother tongues even in conditions of subordination or as excavated fragments; see Demetria Martínez, *The Devil's Workshop* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 2002), 69.
- 16 Cherié Moraga poses this prophetic question upon learning about the defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990; see "Arte in América con Accento" ("Art in America, with an Accent"), in *Latina: Women's Voices from the Borderlands*, ed. Lillian Castillo-Speed (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 212.
- 17 Jacques Derrida, *The Monolingualism of the Other; Or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 58.
- 18 The common multilingualism of migrant workers corroborates Martí-

nez's vision. Sommer also challenges Derrida's insistence that writing in multiple languages necessarily appeals to a single, absolute idiom (*Bilingual Aesthetics*, 45).

- 19 The novel affirms V. N. Volosinov's insight that "the organizing center of any utterance, of any experience, is not within but outside—in the social milieu surrounding the individual being" (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik [New York: Seminar Press, 1973], 93).
- 20 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 130.
- 21 Barbara Johnson, *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 57.
- 22 Rogelio Díaz-Guerrero, for example, racializes male supremacism by describing it as a psychological neurosis peculiar to Mexicans; see "Neurosis and the Mexican Family Structure," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 112 (December 1955): 411–17.
- 23 See Demetria Martínez, *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 43–48.
- 24 Demetria Martínez, interview by Karin Rosa Kias, in *Chicana Ways: Conversations with Ten Chicana Writers*, ed. Karin Rosa Ikas (Reno: Univ. of Nevada Press, 2002), 115.
- 25 See Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez and Amy Lutz, "Coloniality of Power, Immigration, and the English-Spanish Asymmetry in the United States," *Nepantla* 4, no. 3 (2003): 523–60.
- 26 Martínez, interview, in *Chicana Ways*, 115; Martínez, *Confessions*, 43, 47.
- 27 See Tarla Rai Peterson, "Reconstituting Ethnocentrism: The American Ethnic Coalition and Official English," *Howard Journal of Communications* 1 (July–September 1988): 99–112. Juan Gonzalez documents cases of the criminalization of a mother for speaking Spanish to her daughter and of coworkers for speaking Spanish to each other on the job; see *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 206–27.
- 28 See Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez, An Autobiography* (Boston: D. R. Godine, 1982).
- 29 Martínez, *Confessions*, 47.
- 30 Gregorio Selser notes the role of the United States as a funder and trainer of Latin American police forces since 1961; see "Estados Unidos en Centroamérica: El 'contraterrorista' terrorismo de estado de los militares y policías" ("The United States in Central America: 'Counterterrorist' State Terrorism by the Military and the Police"), *Cuadernos Americanos (American Notebooks)* (January–February 1986): 44–69. The Salvadoran counter-insurgency program (Agencia de Inteligencia de El Salvador) coordinated a vast network of informants and trained 3,000 members of special battalions within the National Guard, National Police, and Tre-

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surey Police. After revelations that the United States was funding death squads and torture, Congress restricted police aid. But an exception to the Congressional prohibition, the McCollum Amendment, authorized two years of U.S. funding for police training. As a result, the U.S. military trained some 5,500 members of the security forces annually between 1986 and 1989 at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia; see Gino Costa, *La Policía Nacional Civil de El Salvador, 1990–1997* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1999).

- 31 James Dunkerly, *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America* (London: Verso, 1988), 401.
- 32 In the essay “Night,” Martínez confirms her keen sense of the poet’s task as a translator between world views and distant scenes of war. She imagines a poet’s unique ability and responsibility to “translate” the effects of the U.S. invasion of Iraq “with an eye to history as lived by those who were not the ‘victors’” (*Confessions*, 143).
- 33 This legal interpretation “substantially reduces the threat [to the Bush administration] of domestic criminal prosecution under the War Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. 2441)” (“Memorandum from Alberto R. Gonzáles to the President,” 25 January 2002; printed in Ratner and Ray, *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know*, 117–23; see especially 119). Mark Danner has exposed Gonzáles’s supervision of the redefinition of torture in order to make fully legal (that is, no longer a violation of the Geneva Conventions) various forms of stripping; shackling; suffocation; near drowning; sleep and sensory deprivation; heat, light and dietary manipulation; and degrading stress positions (“We Are All Torturers Now,” *New York Times*, 6 January 2005). President George Bush appointed Gonzáles as attorney general in February 2005. Despite loud proclamations by government officials that the United States should not engage in torture, Vice President Dick Cheney lobbied Republican senators in November 2005 to enable CIA agents to legally engage in torture (“Cheney Pushes Senators for Exemption to CIA Torture Ban,” *USA Today*, 5 November 2005). Jane Mayer notes that interrogations in U.S.-run detention centers may make it legal for CIA operatives to kill detainees (“A Deadly Interrogation: Can the C.I.A. Legally Kill a Prisoner?” *New Yorker*, 14 November 2005, 44–51). For an eyewitness account of prison abuse recounted by a Muslim chaplain at Guantánamo, who was himself subject to secret arrest and interrogation before being released without charge, see James Yee, *For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism under Fire* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).
- 34 General Antonio M. Taguba’s report on the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib includes evidence from witnesses who quote these phrases as code words for torture. These witnesses also site examples of interrogators forcing men to wear female-style underwear, raping women, forcing men into sexual positions with each other, chaining them into these posi-

tions while naked, and accusing men of being a “rapeist” [*sic*]—a word that was scrawled on one prisoner’s leg—and at other moments, accusing men of being “gay”; see civilian translator Adel L. Nakhala’s comment (Section 11.d) and the comment of Sgt. Javal S. Davis (11.b.), in Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba, *Article 15–6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade, Brigade*; <http://news.findlaw.com/nytimes/docs/iraq/tagubarpt.html#ThR1.9> (3 January 2006).

- 35 Kaplan, “Violent Belongings,” 7. Among Kaplan’s other articles that address this connection, see “Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s,” *American Literary History* 2 (winter 1990): 659–90.
- 36 According to Felix S. Kury, the violence in Martínez’s novel parallels a well-documented phenomenon of personality shifts, sleep disruption, inexplicable guilt, and paranoid behavior common among Salvadoran victims of torture (“Torture Syndrome As a Specific Case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in El Salvadoran Immigrants,” *Journal of La Raza Studies* 1 [fall 1987]: 38–42).
- 37 According to H. Bruce Franklin, beginning in 1983 with the U.S. invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada, journalists and nonmilitary photographers were banished from war zones. After the 1989 invasion of Panama, the U.S. military confined reporters to a U.S. military base and reporting became subject to military approval. Today, reporting about the U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan is largely restricted to reporters embedded with the U.S. military (*Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* [Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2000]), 18–22.
- 38 Timothy J. Dunn reveals the migration of the U.S. tactics of low-intensity conflicts in El Salvador to the U.S.-Mexico border; see *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border (1978–1992): Low Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* (Austin: CMAS Books, Univ. of Texas, 1996), 98–102, 149–156. In a parallel shift, personnel transfers from Central America to the Gulf region have facilitated the application of the Salvador Option in Iraq. Jim Steele (former head of Special Forces in El Salvador and an associate of Colonel Oliver North) and Steve Casteel (formerly a high-ranking officer in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency in Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia) have been instrumental in organizing 5,000 Iraqis into death-squad-style “police commandos” under the control of Iraqi caudillos, according to Peter Maass’s groundbreaking article: “The Way of the Commandos: Getting to Know the General” (*New York Times Magazine*, 1 May 2005, 38, 83). Leadership in diplomatic posts also draws on Central American experience in creating a counter-insurgency in West Asia. John Negroponte, the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985, oversaw the growth in annual military aid to Honduras from \$4 million to \$77.4 million. During his tenure, he collaborated with then Vice-President George H. W. Bush in funneling illegal aid to the Contras in order to

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- overthrow the government of Nicaragua. While directing the largest U.S. overseas complex in the world in Baghdad, Negroponte led U.S. military advising and intelligence that committed human-rights abuses and indiscriminate bombing of civilians in Iraq. In 2005, President George Bush selected Negroponte for the position of National Intelligence Director.
- 39 The U.S. role in providing funding and training for the war on civilians and popular insurgents that contributed to the Central American migration distinguishes these Latino(a) subjects' relation to the United States from that of Italians, Russian Jews, or Germans—many of whom also fled poverty or civil wars in European contexts and lost languages.
- 40 Werner Sollors argues for language study as a way to more successfully implement NAFTA; see *Multilingual America*, 1–13).
- 41 The Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared, Assassinated, and Political Prisoners (Co-MADRES) formed in 1978, with the guidance and support of the Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. Upon his assassination by a death squad in 1980, Co-MADRES took on the Archbishop's name. Beginning in 1980, the Co-MADRES themselves became the targets of car bombs, death-squad capture, rape, and torture. These courageous activists were honored with the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 1984. For details of the group's history, see María Teresa Tula, *Hear My Testimony: María Teresa Tula, Human Rights Activist of El Salvador*, ed. and trans. Lynn Stephen (Boston: South End Press, 1994).
- 42 Cherrié Moraga eloquently challenges Chicana feminists who avoid threatening their men so as to preserve the unified force of the militant Chicano nation (*Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por los labios* [*Loving in the War Years: What Never Crossed Our Lips*]) [Boston: South End Press, 1983], 106–10).
- 43 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 55.
- 44 Founded in 1967, the California Analysis Center, Inc. became known as the Consolidated Analysis Centers in 1973. Known as CACI since 1986, this private corporation employed one of the key figures in the Abu Ghraib scandal. CACI declared in a press release that the Taguba report was “illegally released (‘leaked’)” and that they therefore reject any inquiry into what they refer to euphemistically as their employees’ “information gathering function”; see “CACI Corrects Public Information about Its Services Contract for U.S. Army Interrogation Support in Iraq,” 20 July 2004, www.caci.com/about/news/news2004/07_20_04_NR.html (3 January 2006).
- 45 The Abu Ghraib prisoner-abuse scandal dates to November 2003, but it did not surface in the press until April 2004. While it is true that coverage of these incidents has proliferated on the Internet and in some liberal media outlets, it is worth asking if the timed release of the photographs may not have strategically diverted attention from the prosecution of the war, especially the massive bombing and invasion of Fallujah.

- 46 See María Teresa Tula's comment: "The State Department opinion attached to my asylum case stated that I was a terrorist, anarchist, communist and a guerrilla fighter and that I would present a security problem for the United States. They said they didn't believe that I was captured and tortured; they said I had made it all up to receive political asylum" (*Hear My Testimony*, 172).
- 47 Tula describes a related situation. Her audiences would be moved to tears by her testimony but fail to respect her analysis of U.S. military intervention's negative effects: "Often after I tell my story people are crying. But, meanwhile, they believe what their government tells them about El Salvador" (*Hear My Testimony*, 176).
- 48 Hilary Cunningham observes that misunderstanding among participants in the Sanctuary movement arose due to a predominant monolingualism: "[P]erhaps the most substantial variable isolating Central and North Americans from one another is language" (*God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1995], 146).
- 49 Ann Crittenden, *Sanctuary: A Story of American Conscience and the Law in Collision* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988), 120; Anglo volunteer in the Sanctuary movement, quoted in *Sanctuary*, 121, my emphasis.
- 50 Crittendon, *Sanctuary*, 123.
- 51 Kelli Lyon-Johnson rightly notes that Martínez's characters challenge conventional portraits of the Sanctuary movement as white and middle class ("Acts of War, Acts of Memory: Dead-body politics in U.S. Latina Novels of the Salvadoran Civil War," *Latino Studies* 3 (July 2005): 215).
- 52 Based on declassified investigative reports, the *New York Times* states baldly that the Reagan and Bush administrations worked with Roberto D'Abuissou while knowing that he "trafficked in drugs, smuggled arms and directed the meeting that planned the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of San Salvador" ("U.S., Aware of Killings, Kept Ties to Salvadoran Right, Papers Suggest," *New York Times*, 9 November 1993, A9). In 2004, Alvaro Saravia, a California resident and former associate of Roberto D'Abuissou was found guilty for his role in Romero's assassination, according to Vanessa Colón ("Romero Relative a Victor in Suit: Judge Finds Salvadoran Strongman Responsible for Archbishop's Slaying," *Fresno Bee*, 4 September 2004). In response to this news, Rigoberta Menchú Tum raised the salient question of how Saravia was able to come to California to live in the first place; see Menchú Tum's Op-Ed, "Justice Comes for the Archbishop," *New York Times*, 31 August 2004.
- 53 I am indebted to Mary Louise Pratt's insightful call for the uncoupling of language learning from a national security imperative; see "Language and National Security: Making a New Public Commitment," *Modern Language Journal* 88 (summer 2004): 289–91.

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- 54 See Martínez, "Poetry, Politics," 11.
- 55 Martínez, interview, in *Chicana Ways*, 117. Martínez indicates that the prosecutors offered to reduce the charges against her on the condition that she turn in the names of her contacts in the Sanctuary movement, but Martínez valiantly refused. Here she makes a more forceful denunciation of the U.S. attempt to coopt her voice: "It took me a long, long time to understand that I didn't deserve it, that no one deserves to have the fist of the government come down on them for helping refugees or telling their stories" ("Poetry, Politics" 11).
- 56 Demetria Martínez, "Nativity," in Alicia Gaspar de Alba, María Herrera-Sobek, and Demetria Martínez, *Three Times a Woman: Chicana Poetry* (Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Review Press, 1989), 132–33.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 132.
- 58 According to Tey Diana Rebolledo, Martínez's decision to speak out on public issues also defies a common stigmatization of Chicanas who seek social change as "troublemakers" within the community (*Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* [Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1995], 190).
- 59 In her 2003 presidential address to the American Studies Association, Amy Kaplan comments that while she was traveling in El Salvador "under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy," she noticed that the Embassy "had no sense that the story of America could be told from the vantage point of El Salvador" ("Violent Belongings," 11). This assertion strikes me as uncharacteristically naive. The United States was funding and advising the military and the government of El Salvador in a dirty civil war. Any Salvadorans within the fortress-like U.S. Embassy would logically be forced to parrot the U.S. government's vantage point.
- 60 "On Truth and Lying in an Extra Moral Sense," in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ed. and trans. Sander Gilman, Carole Blair, and David J. Parent (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 252.
- 61 Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 27.
- 62 Norma Alarcón, Cherié Moraga, and Monique Mojica reinterpret La Malinche as a powerful translator, as a figure for the unruliness of language, as a betrayed survivor of sexual violence, and as a founding condition for mestiza cultural survival. In addition to Moraga's discussion of La Malinche in *Loving in the War Years* (98–101), see Norma Alarcón, "Traductora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock et al. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), 278–97; and Monique Mojica, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (Toronto, Canada: Women's Press, 1991).
- 63 On new practices of illegal detention in the United States, see Rachel Meeropol, ed, *America's Disappeared: Secret Imprisonment, Detainees, and*

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the "War on Terror" (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 18–22; and Heidi Boghosian, *The Assault on Free Speech, Public Assembly, and Dissent: A National Lawyer's Guild Report on Government Violations of First Amendment Rights in the United States* (Great Barrington, Mass.: North River Press, 2004).

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