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Transatlantic Triangulations: Genre and Traumatic Memory in the Novels of Esmeralda Santiago and Alejandro Zambra

Amanda A. Taylor
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

TRANSATLANTIC TRIANGULATIONS: GENRE AND TRAUMATIC MEMORY IN THE NOVELS OF ESMERALDA SANTIAGO AND ALEJANDRO ZAMBRA

A Thesis

by

AMANDA A. TAYLOR

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Cathryn Merla-Watson
Chair of Committee

Dr. Marci McMahon
Committee Member

Dr. Matthew Christensen
Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

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When a traumatic event collectively happens to a group or body of people, be that geographically, emotionally, or physically, an imprint is left behind which impacts a part of a culture or society. The larger the scale of the incident, the wider the scope in terms of lives affected and memory established, which creates a new history for many.

In Alejandro Zambra's (2011) *Ways of Going Home*, Zambra remembers his traumatic childhood growing up under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in war torn Chile in the 1980s. While this postmodern novel uses memory and historical perceptions from a child's viewpoint, Esmeralda Santiago's (2011) historical romance *Conquistadora* focuses on the characters within her historical romance and centralizes the effects of colonialism in Puerto Rico.

Interestingly, these novels are published within a few years of each other and focus on collective traumatic memory, inviting analysis of conventional genre through transatlantic or transnational triangulation. These texts offer a global picture of the aftermath of colonialism and violence, the trauma it leaves behind, and the ways history can be told through varying cultural perspectives.

While transatlantic approaches have focused on political and wartime discourse, there is a gap in this scholarship within the personal and collective memory realm within trauma. Through the postmodern memoir, collective traumatic memory and cultural identity, this thesis connects

this gap by demonstrating how these elements are triangulated culturally and geographically with examples from each of these texts.

This transatlantic approach stems from Chile and Puerto Rico, as set within these stories and the very bloodline of these authors. Through these stories, I will identify how each represents collective identity in culture through the impact of memory in trauma and demonstrate the effects of the postmodern memoir using collective identity and intergenerational trauma.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my partner, Paulo Eduardo Uchoa, who believed in me when I could not. This thesis is also dedicated to my family and friends who were my cheerleaders throughout the entire process. I am eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I knew little, but at least I knew that: no one could speak for someone else. That although we might want to tell other people's stories, we always end up telling our own."
― Alejandro Zambra, *Ways of Going Home*

"You were either growing up hearing about earthquakes, or living through them," Chilean author Alejandro Zambra said in a 2015 interview with *BOMB* Magazine. Events of tragedy, like an earthquake, leaves a mark on the community who experienced it. This collective trauma, Zambra goes on to explain, acts as a rite of passage in certain situations as he compares the first earthquake, he personally experienced in 1985 to the devastating earthquake his grandmother lived through in 1939. "I'd heard so much about earthquakes, and I'd experienced some small ones, but the 1985 quake was an important moment," he said in the interview. "In 1985 something that'd been fiction all of a sudden was becoming real. Paradoxically, there was even a flash of satisfaction" (Alcaron, de la Torre, *BOMB*). The satisfaction that Zambra mentions reveals the unspoken understanding of trauma on a collective understanding that has affected many people. Using the violence, uncertainty and trauma experienced during an earthquake as a platform for understanding, Zambra also uses these violent devices to describe a larger, longer lasting reign of terror: the Chilean dictatorship under the regime of Pinochet, which he lived through as a child. In this spirit, this thesis explores how the novels *Ways of Going Home* by Alejandro Zambra and *Conquistadora* by Esmeralda Santiago explore traumatic memory, particularly through the reengaging of genre convention.

Zambra (2013) explores these distilled realities growing up with trauma in his book *Ways of Going Home.* Zambra opens his short, postmodern novel with the earthquake – similar to the earthquake his grandmother lived through in 1939 after it wiped out the entire city of Chillan. Unlike the devastating earthquake in 1939, the earthquake in Zambra's novel happened in 1985, around the same timeline as Zambra experienced his first earthquake as a child. His protagonist, a nameless 9-year-old boy that Zambra has referred to as a "secondary character" is growing up in the city of Maipu, Chile, and maneuvering his adolescence as a foray into Chile's tumultuous past (2). This novel is a meta-literary work by a writer who experienced firsthand the Pinochet regime, but who doesn't consider himself victimized by this reign of terror. As a child, the only understanding of fear and trauma is handed down from the adults who understood this dangerous shift of living under a dictatorship. To Zambra, and the unnamed boy in *Ways of Going Home,* the adult's versions of these stories and tragedies are distilled, as there was no other way to live or a prior experience on what life was supposed to be like. While Zambra could recall the severity of his parents, the times of silent sadness, and the unexplainable disappearance of neighbors throughout the neighborhood, for Zambra and the unnamed boy, life was continuing as normal. This thesis analyzes how Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* and Esmeralda Santiago's *Conquistadora* engage the genres of memoir, historical romance, and postmodernism within a transnational context to explore collective memory and trauma.

While this postmodern novel uses memory and historical perceptions from a child's viewpoint, Esmeralda Santiago's (2011) historical romance *Conquistadora* focuses on the characters within her historical romance and centralizes the effects of colonialism in Puerto Rico. Both Santiago and her protagonist, Ana Larragoity Cubillas, grew up in Puerto Rico, and while Ana is drawn to Puerto Rico through a diary from an ancestor who travelled there with Ponce de

Leon, Santiago was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1948 and moved to the United States when she was 13 years old. *Conquistadora* uses the genres of historical romance and elements of memoir to recount the struggles Ana faces in running a sugar plantation in an untamed countryside that is riddled with disease, isolation, and unrelenting heat. Once the Civil War breaks out in the United States, her own life becomes threatened by the workers she has on her plantation. The story weaves from Ana's personal accounts of events happening on her plantation, as well as within her romantic life which is constantly shifting from her marriage to forbidden romances. The story combines facets of history as told through memory and character accounts, all while providing the drama of a historical romance. While historical romances are works of fiction, they also embody the lives and stories of individuals who lived during historical turmoil.

Similar to how Zambra explores traumatic memory in his postmodern novel, in a *PBS News Hour* interview with Santiago on August 12, 2011, Santiago recalls how the novel started as a way to help her understand her own history. While Santiago left Puerto Rico at the age of 13, the only true understanding of living in Puerto Rico is based on what she experienced in her short time there and through the history that was taught to her in school. Within the interview, Santiago says "I come from poor, landless peasants who left no records. And so, I began to read the story of Puerto Rico, and the more I read the story the more I realized I would never find my own ancestors, but I could make my imaginary ancestors. And so the book emerges as a result of my trying to create them, to create the people that might have been," (Brown, Jeffrey, *PBS News Hour*) While *Conquistadora* explores this coming-of-age story of Ana Cubillas, the exploration of Puerto Rico and Santiago's roots also comes into the spotlight.

Interestingly, these novels were published within a few years of each other and focus on collective traumatic memory, inviting analysis of conventional genre through transnational triangulation. This invites analysis of understanding colonial trauma or violence beyond the nation that allows us to see a larger picture of transnational traumatic memory across the Américas. Triangulation is defined by using two points to discover the third point, and in this thesis, what can be discovered through the triangulation of these two texts is how trauma and collective memory can be used as tools to create a historiography of the past. These texts offer a global picture of the aftermath of colonialism and violence, the trauma it leaves behind, and the ways history can be told through varying cultural perspectives. In this thesis, I analyze how Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* and Esmeralda Santiago's *Conquistadora* engage the genres of memoir, historical romance, and postmodernism within a transnational context to explore collective memory and trauma. In order to understand the analysis of different novels within these approaches, this thesis will be broken down in several sections including scholarship in traumatic and collective memory, a section on genre criticism and a section on theory in the postmodern novel, historical romance and memoir. While the use of the postmodern novel includes using the devices of metafiction and self-reflexivity, Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* provides interesting mechanisms of time jumping and unreliable narrator. The story jumps back and forth to Zambra's personal accounts and the accounts of his fictional character within the novel. Santiago's historical romance uses the mechanisms of memoir to recount major historical occurrences, such as the United States Civil War, and include fictional perspectives from the characters within her novel. This history is broken down into more understandable terms to the reader, as the inner workings of these characters' minds relays to the reader what exactly the personal aspect is to these traumatic events. The transnational approach to these texts includes

the effects of postcolonialism and colonial influences that result in constraints on cultural voices. Through these cultural approaches and the use of genre, I argue that these texts are revealing in their messages of traumatic memory to convey larger contexts of collective memory and trauma.

The idea of collective traumatic memory fascinated me after Zambra's book, *Ways of Going Home*, was recommended by friend and colleague, Marci Caltabiano-Ponce, after we realized that Zambra was going to be visiting the university as keynote speaker during UTRGV's Festival of International Books and Arts (FESTIBA) as part of the NEA Big Read grant. I read the book in a day and thought about how interesting it was that a child doesn't know fear until it is taught – kind of how children aren't afraid of bugs – like cockroaches, my personal nemesis – until someone yells at them to get away from it. That fear and shock usually stays with the child into adulthood. In Zambra's case, living under the regime of Pinochet, a fierce and deadly dictator, he had no idea that his way of life was unusual from anyone else's. The anxiety felt by his parents became a normal occurrence to him, as he had no other basis for comparison. Around the same time that I had read the book, I was taking a course ENGL 6310: Studies in Ethnic Literature in the spring of 2018 with Dr. Cathryn Merla-Watson. We were asked to write a research paper due at the end of the semester focusing on culturally charged literature. I could think of no better text to delve into than *Ways of Going Home*. The more I analyzed the novel, I realized the dictator novel became a mechanism that Zambra used to portray the regime of power under a dictatorship, instead of focusing on one single person. Working as a multimedia journalist within the UTRGV News and Internal Communications department, I volunteered to cover Zambra's discussion, as I became interested in his book and was excited (mostly anxious) to interview him. Before his public discussion, I was able to pull him aside for the interview. Marci was able to standby as translator since Zambra's first language was Spanish. Growing up

in a mixed-race household, I can understand the Spanish language, but cannot speak it as well. He spoke to me in English, but in Spanish he said his words weren't translating correctly and he was uncomfortable. "It's fine," I told him after he paused to find the words that would translate correctly in English, "you're fine – I understand what you are saying." But he looked at me and said, "I'm sorry, it's not fine – what I am trying to express and what you may be understanding could be two different things." I stood dumbfounded. He was right – the translation from his birth language to mine was no way going to translate along the same lines of comprehension due to our very different cultures and backgrounds. As the interview went on, I reiterated ideas that he was conveying on childhood memory and the idea of belonging, and even added my own interpretations. I had read the book, at the very least, so I was able to use it to connect what he was saying to certain pieces within the story. Overall, the book, he said, was a representation of how his generation dealt with growing up under a dictatorship and how it ultimately skewed the perception of what a normal life was. "This is a book that happens more when you *think* about facts than a book about facts," he said. "It's about trying to go farther into your memories and trying to deal with them. About innocence and guilt, and how both things are not exact." Facing the past was a way for Zambra to revisit his childhood – where he felt he was most at home. I realized that for Zambra, there were multiple ways to get home. I believe he wanted to give that same self-reflexive discovery of what "home" was to the interpreter – the reader.

In sum, this thesis explores Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* and Santiago's *Conquistadora* and how these novels engage traumatic memory using the generic conventions of the postmodern novel, memoir, and historical romance. These conventions evolve, as I show, within a transnational context to explore collective memory and trauma. To explore these complex textual relationships, I have organized this thesis into three main chapters. Chapter one

gives an overview of what I am defining as new genre criticism where there is a shift of understanding genre as warranting merit to how genre morphs through re-engaging these conventions. In chapter two, I analyze *Ways of Going Home* and how this postmodern novel uses memory and historical perception to detail and connect trauma to the past using various tools such as unreliable narrator and non-linear plot structure. Chapter three examines the conventions of historical romance and how *Conquistadora* focalizes the effects of colonialism in Puerto Rico. The conclusion returns to triangulation and comments on how transatlantic approaches fill a gap within this scholarship within personal and collective memory in trauma literature. Through the postmodern novel and memoir, collective traumatic memory and cultural identity, this thesis demonstrates how these elements are triangulated culturally and geographically through the topography of these texts.

CHAPTER II

DIRECTIONS IN NEW GENRE CRITICISM

Genre criticism is a rhetorical analysis methodology that analyzes how texts conform to conventions and expectations within their respective genres. However, the definition of genre criticism is in constant flux of the expectations as well as conventions and constraints of interpretation. According Jacques Derrida (1980) in "The Law of Genre*,"* "as soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn" (56). Derrida further explains that once this limit is established, constraints and interdictions are not far behind. The very role of genre, according to Derrida, is to play within certain principles such as resemblance, analogy, and identity, among others, and reveal what the law of that genre is to personal recitation. Derrida argues that there must be attention to how the law of genre follows no rules and is lawless.

The history of genre criticism also underscores how this methodology has always been evolving. In the introduction to *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 6*, (2013) edited by M.A.R. Habib, literary criticism first developed into an autonomous discipline within academia within the nineteenth century. Habib credits this century for providing cataclysmic changes due to the diversity of intellectual and ideological currents of political and social upheavals. Habib explains,

> It seems that the founding causes of this rise of English to eventual institutional recognition were largely ideological: at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the classics were viewed at the heart of liberal education. But as industrial society developed, there arose a pressing need to educate the urban population, to combine training in literacy with the fostering of national values (14).

This insight emphasizes the growth of literary criticism and the developments in diverse national traditions. While genre criticism has changed much in the past fifteen years through the reconceptualization of genre and its role in interpretation of texts and culture, the function of genre helps transform from a descriptive analysis to a more explanatory activity.

In fact, Anis Bawarshi (2000) states in "The Genre Function," that this "explanatory activity" includes "one that investigates not only text-types and classification systems, but also the linguistic, sociological, and psychological assumptions underlying and shaping these text-types" (335). She argues that genre theorists are constantly questioning the traditional views of genres as "simply innocent, artificial and even arbitrary forms that contain ideas" (339). From the historical to the more contemporary aspect, genre criticism remains a tool in rhetoric to demonstrate elements within the story such as narration, idea, function. This method explores not only how these devices work, but also why these devices work. Bawarshi elaborates how genre forms function: "this container view of genre, which assumes that genres are only familiar communicative tools individuals use to achieve their communicative goals, overlooks the socio-rhetorical function of genres-the extent to which genres shape and help us recognize our communicative goals, including why these goals exist, what and whose purposes they serve, and how best to achieve them" (339). Regardless of the overarching theme of the narrative, the impact of genre will affect the audience. While genre is multifaceted, if a reader goes into a story

with an expectation of a particular genre, such as a western or a romance, they will read the text as such. The preconceived notions of genre can, in a sense, tell a story before the story has even been read by the reader. While Bawarshi discusses the goals narrative of the story, a close-minded approach from the reader could interfere with underlying messages or postmodern functions of genre. As interpreters of these narratives, the reader should be attuned to how the author subverts generic conventions.

To that end, this thesis pays close attention to the ways in which two authors engage generic conventions and analyzes how these diverse engagements authorize meaning around traumatic collective memory throughout the Américas. The genres under study in this thesis include the historical romance and memoir as well as the postmodern novel. *Ways of Going Home* by Alejandro Zambra and *Conquistadora* by Esmeralda Santiago are the texts that are being analyzed through these forms of genre. While *Ways of Going Home* utilizes memoir and postmodernism to identify traumatic memory within the political unrest of Chile during the regime of dictator Pinochet within the 1980s, *Conquistadora* weaves memoir and the function of historical romance in order to represent the political, social and personal historical accounts in Puerto Rico in the 1800s. In what follows, I give a brief overview of these genres to give context for my analysis of these novels in the new two chapters.

Bridging Historical Romance and Memoir

The historical romance genre emerged in the early nineteenth century and is characterized by a plot that takes place in the past. The main convention of a romance novel is detailing the past with aspects of romance or a romantic point of view. While historical romances may seem ambiguous since “romance” is in the genre, it can include other elements that are not considered

romantic. This can also include fictitious narratives that detail the past or even novels that mix both history and romance. While historical romances are works of fiction, they also embody the lives and stories of individuals who lived during historical turmoil. The influence of historical romance can cross genres by detailing the past. However, this genre has traditionally not been approached as ostensible "serious" literature. According to Eric Murphy Sellinger (2007) in "Rereading the Romance," this genre has often been overlooked as a serious form of literature even though "romance novels can, themselves, display intelligence, worthy politics, and aesthetic accomplishment remains one of the best-kept secrets in literary study, however ways to find and read the books themselves may be" (309). When Sellinger refers to the historical romance as not being considered a "serious" form of literature, this means that it is not understood what types of information can be found in historical romances.

There is stigma surrounding the genre based off of false preconceptions around its status as serious literature, but the genre is worth taking seriously due to the often finer details from a first person point of view that can be found within these narratives. Pamela Regis (2003) in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* also describes the genre as being overall interpreted negatively: "Even the most cursory survey of criticism of this genre yields a ringing condemnation of it: critical characterization of the romance novel is overwhelmingly negative" (3). While the romance novel is expected to end happily, the basis of a story is almost predetermined or nonfactual. In a historical romance, you can blend the elements of a romance with history that is prewritten and does not adhere to the romance genre, but the fact that "romance" is even in the genre may lead readers to believe this is a fictional romance fantasy. Regis argues that the romance novel incorporates a deeper and broader literary history. Blending history with fiction is an effective tool to understanding, and essential, within this form of

writing. More specifically, historical romances can offer insight into more specific conventions of the story, such as character development.

In another aspect, George Dekker (2006) argues that historical romance as a genre gives characters essence in terms of how they think, feel, and behave. Dekker writes, “The finest historical romances seamlessly blend history and novelistic fiction, satisfying both one’s educated interest in reconstructions of past events and ways of life and one’s fascination with fictional adventures in regions of place and mind rarely represented in historical record” (450). The dissection of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance* (1850) shows, for example, an accurate depiction of Puritan life through engaged storytelling. The restrictions of women, the basic way of life living under a heavy religious influence and the expectation of how society should behave during this time period is a way of retelling history as well as reflecting on the past from specific character analysis, which can be both fictional and factual. The historical romance genre weaves facts with fiction and features themes of passion, history, and sex - all facets that continue to fascinate the senses. A modern example would be the success of the “Outlander” franchise, which features a series of books and a TV show surrounding the constant dynamics between Jamie and Clare Fraser. While the stories weave fantasy and adventure, their story circles around the romance between these two protagonists as they move from historical factual events, which includes war and battles.

The memoir genre emerged in the late twentieth century and is conventionally described as the author’s personal memories written in a nonfiction narrative. Memoir is commonly used as a way of retelling history or a biography through personal accounts. Memoir also recounts personal ties to historical and personal events through a first-person narrative. This approach is powerful within the spheres of cultural studies and literary studies because memoir can recollect

historical fact through character analogy. It is sometimes easier to detail an event if it is explained from a character's point of view. In "Ethical Dialogues: Youth, Memoir, and Trauma," Kate Douglas (2015) connects memoir with varying contextual facets of literature. Douglas elucidates, "This intervention re-engages literary and cultural questions about the relationship between literature and trauma, memoirs and industry mediation, the multivocal nature of life writing, and the spaces available for youth voices" (281). While her article focuses on memoir trauma in youth, Mark Sanders argues that memoir as a literary device asks readers to think differently about truth, or what is fact. Within a memoir, the "forensic truth" must give way to an acceptance of the "narrative truth" (282). This means that while memoirs are effective in recounting personal experience from person to person, or protagonist to protagonist, the "narrative truth" is a personal and subjective form of storytelling.

Fiction in memoir is a bit more forgiving, as realism and fiction are formed together to form literary realism that can bend laws in factual memoir. From a historical perspective, the power of memoir in narration is to be taken as a "half-truth." Within the book *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff, Clare Savage, a Jamaican-American writer magnifies the themes of colonialism, race, and political awakening through her own self-discovery within her two cultures. The reflections of the protagonist, Clare, are based on her experiences with oppression, sexual dividedness and the conflict of a person being neither white nor black. The novel describes Clare as "A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, native born, slaves, emigres, Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her. The people around her had a deep bitterness to contend with" (5). Clare recalls situations and imagery to give a deeper understanding of what the protagonist was feeling, all while presenting occurrences embedded in historical fact. What this example shows

us about memoir is how powerful a personal perception of a given event can be to an individual, and how these events can be internalized, then externalized as a new, more understood form of self-revelation. What was once internal understanding then becomes an external perception.

The Postmodern Novel

The postmodern genre emerged in the late 1960s to early 1970s and is characterized by using metafiction and intertextuality to thematize political and social issues. Literary conventions such as fragmentation, unreliable narrator, dark humor, and paradox, are used to convey non-linear plots and metafictional stories. Fragmentation is defined as the brief pieces within the novel that are an incomplete thought of a memory or a flashback while an unreliable narrator means that the author jumps from person to person. In *Ways of Going Home*, Zambra uses an unreliable narrator when jumping between his main character, an unnamed 9-year-old boy, back to his own thoughts and interpretations within the novel. Dark humor and paradox are both used in forms of sarcasm or as a way of being self-contradictory or when something is absurd or illogical. Regarding the popular scope of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon in the watershed monograph *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) argues that postmodernism is the most over- and under-defined term in current cultural theory and contemporary writing. “It is usually accompanied by a grand flourish of negativized rhetoric: we hear of discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentering, indeterminacy, and antitotalization” (3). Hutcheon goes on to describe postmodernism as a “contradictory phenomenon” with uses all concepts, including painting, literature, film, dance, TV, etc. as installations of subverts in context. All forms of contemporary art offer postmodernist contradiction, which generates self-awareness through history and fiction as human constructs. While postmodernism is in everything human beings (natural consumers) digest (capitalistically), Fredric Jameson (1991)

in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) also maintains that postmodernism "is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (6). The same applies to the literary front, as the postmodern novel offers intense moments of historicity to genre. The postmodern novel is irreverent and iconoclastic through the genre's ability to become radical or experimental over conventional tropes.

Transnational and Hemispheric Approaches to Literature

Transnational and hemisphere approaches signal a shift from understanding literature within solely a regional or national context and pushes the critic to understand approached literature and its literary influences or symbolism across and through borders. Our understanding of literature or a particular text is not limited to just the nation but rather a confluence of countries. The transatlantic field within scholarly approaches in literature have paralleled effects on producing a concept which Tania Gentic and Francisco LaRubia-Prado coined within their book *Imperialism and the Wider Atlantic: Essays on the Aesthetics, Literature, and Politics of Transatlantic Cultures* as the "Global South" (3). Gentic and LaRubia-Prado explain that this concept stemmed from the influence of Europe and how the European presence was largely viewed as imperialistic between the Americas, Africa, and Europe. These influences were seen and conceived as colonial influences. "In this sense, an academic bifurcation of the Atlantic space has emerged, as, with several notable exceptions, Anglo-European and Hispanic Atlantic relationships are studied at a distance from each other" (3). They describe that due to these constraints under these colonial influences, various cultural voices are sometimes difficult to find. "—a consequence of a colonial history that continues to affect academia today—further ruptures our understanding of the space" (3).

While transnationalism is a current buzzword, it has a long history. Just recently the scope of transnationalism and transatlantic literature has reached mainstream literature and media. According to Eric Slauter in "History, Literature, and the Atlantic World," the scope of transatlantic literature has only broadened, but has become difficult to examine due to lack of presence. "In fact, scholarship on *circum-*, *eis-*, and transatlantic literary history during the last decade constitutes a strong and growing field within early modern literary studies, even if some of that work has yet to find its way into the proper disciplinary bibliographies" (138). Slauter goes on to describe the adaptation of literary bibliographies which have been or continue to be developed in order to cross point references in historical and literary scholarship. Matt Cohen, author of the article "Revolutionary Histories: Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism" realizes that the concept of transatlantic approaches in literature may not be a new concept entirely, but it is coming to the forefront in analyzing early constructions within the nation. He writes, "The past two decades of early American studies have seen the application of powerful new transatlantic approaches to analyzing the construction of the early United States. These approaches have recently felt pressure from coeval developments in cultural studies and postcolonial theory that envision more complex relationships between subject and nation formation" (654).

In a more modern realm, the use of portraying cultural ideals and beliefs can best be demonstrated through the use of art, whether it's literature, theatre, performance, or textile. In literature, the use of quixotic texts follows an impractical pursuit of ideals. In regard to quixotic texts focusing on the British Atlantic and the cultural fit of common transnational models, Eve Tavor Bannet, author of "Quixotes, Imitations, and Transatlantic Genres," writes that certain transnational models were fashioned by transnational codes. "In an imperial age dominated by rivalry and war, and in a world altered by social and geographical mobility, by the transnational

circulation of books, and by the expansion of the reading public, quixotic texts repeatedly put into question the continued applicability of anachronistic transnational imitations in conduct and writing to different ranks, localities, and genders" (553). She explains that these quixotic writers sardonically contemplated scenes in which rival empires struggled to distinguish themselves from overarching common cultures in the arts. The influence, therefore, by the spread of literature through these transatlantic avenues provided a blending of ideas and beliefs throughout culture – including art, literature, theatre, and performance.

Another approach to thinking about transnationalism rethinks the relationship between history and reality. For example, Arif Dirlik, author of "Literature/Identity: Transnationalism, Narrative and Representation," from *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies,* argues the relationship between history and literature in a scholarly versus creative work. "Ethnic or transnational literature present a challenge not only to historical ways of thinking, but also to the ways in which we have organized the study of the world in terms of nations, areas and regions. While the challenge is to be welcomed for forcing a rethinking of history and its complicity in power, those who would dismiss history, celebrate the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and history, or simply privilege literary over historical constructions of identity, often overlook the indispensable critical insights compelled by a consciousness of historicity." (209) Dirlik embellishes the concepts that fundamental issues within the implications of writing and configuring the boundaries between what's public and what's private. Her overarching concern is the perspective of blurring distinctions between what's fiction and history from the transnational standpoint.

A deeper perspective that plays on these blurred boundaries between fiction and history can be found within an article written by Winfried Fluck, Stefan Brandt and Ingrid Thaler titled

"Introduction: The Challenges of Transnational American Studies," the authors dive into new challenges faced while writing about internationalizations. "Today, the transnational and its sibling's comparative, international, and post national American Studies are often deployed to express an (un)conscious desire to transcend the national paradigm which has returned with a vengeance in America's cultural imaginary" (1). This "cultural imaginary" is depicted as a "genuine inclusiveness and broad international collaboration" as quoted by Emory Elliott. The incorporation of transnationalism within literature and academic events became more prominent within the 1990's and throughout the early 2000's, according to the authors, mostly due to the ability of the genre to explore the stakes of transnational American studies.

Bringing these types of studies to a wider plane, within the context of Jose David Saldivar's book, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (2012), the collaborations between framing devices of American studies, critical U.S. studies and Latin American studies are sandwiched between transnational, anti-national and outer national models. Using references from Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano, and architect for world-systems analysis, Immanuel Wallerstein, as a backbone source for his discussion, Saldivar says "The histories of coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and newness in the Americas were foundational for Quijano and Wallerstein for managing 'the gigantic ideological overlay' of the Americas and for explaining the uneven histories of dystopia and utopia Americanity has had to grapple with over the past five centuries" (3). Saldivar says that these views are pan-Andean and this presence is tempered by not finding an explanation for the U.S.-Mexico borderlands power couplet. As a founder of U.S.-Mexico border studies, Saldivar expands the scope of American studies and what Americanity means as a concept.

With that in mind and within the vein of cultural nationalism, Paul Gilroy, author of *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (1993) debates over postmodernism and how it casts questions over historical periodization. The development of the black culture in the Americas and Europe is a historical experience with implications of transatlantic culture. The black Atlantic utopianism that Gilroy discusses emerged from anti-capitalism toward the transnational black experience, which he writes, "for the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination" (40). The work that Gilroy describes essentially becomes a part of communal liberation.

In this chapter, I've presented an overview of memoir, historical romance, the postmodern novel, and how transnational approaches to literature begin to intersect. In my analysis over the next two chapters, I will reveal how new genre criticism becomes this transnational approach to literature. In comparison to old genre criticism, the value of a text was determined in terms of merit and how it adhered to the conventions of genre in a particular way. By doing this different type of genre criticism, a more modern approach, it allows us to ask different questions about the texts that are more relevant to today.

CHAPTER III

TRAUMA AND POSTMODERNISM IN *WAYS OF GOING HOME* BY ALEJANDRO ZAMBRA

Alejandro Zambra's novel *Ways of Going Home* (2013) begins with the main character and sometimes unreliable narrator, an unnamed 9-year-old boy, recalling a time he got lost in his city. His parents, frantically looking for him, were surprised to see that their son had made it home before they did, having found another way home to safety. The unnamed character's mother told him "you went a different way" through tears and concern (3). Throughout *Ways of Going Home*, the direction forward is often also the way back, mixing memory, thought and translation into a feasible understanding of the future. While Zambra lived throughout the coup and regime of dictator Augusto Pinochet as a child, Zambra does not consider himself to be a primary victim of this tumultuous political time due to his distilled memories as a child. The collective memory Zambra uses is an example of how his family, friends and neighbors reacted to these events as a community instead of a first-person account of personal trauma. This chapter explores how Zambra uses postmodernism to explore trauma and collective memory. As well, this novel also reimagines postmodern conventions within the context of historical trauma inflicted by Pinochet's Chile within the 1970's. This chapter will look at how Zambra explores collective memory and trauma through the postmodern conventions of postmodernism, fragmentation of plot, unreliable narrator, paradox, dark humor, and the dictator novel.

Postmodernism

Through this subsection, the genre of postmodernism will be illuminated in how Zambra uses it throughout *Ways of Going Home*. The postmodern genre emerged in the late 1960s to early 1970s and is characterized by using metafiction and intertextuality to thematize political and social issues. Literary conventions such as fragmentation, unreliable narrator, dark humor, and paradox, are used to convey non-linear plots and metafictional stories. Throughout the novel *Ways of Going Home*, Zambra uses postmodernism to not only undermine the authoritarian regime of Chile, but to incorporate the consequences of the trauma living in a dictatorship by using authoritarian forms. In doing so, Zambra gives new insight into the mechanisms of narration, time, and memory through his novel, which can also be described as a dictator novel. Through his personal accounts and through the lives of the characters within the story, they reveal the deeply rooted trauma from growing up in a dictatorship under the rule of Pinochet. From Zambra's perspective, which often echoes the perspective of his unnamed main character, who starts as a young boy and matures, the violence and wounds became a part of them. Because he was a child when this happened, the trauma simply became a way of life instead of something that had to be maneuvered, as they knew nothing else before the rise of the dictatorship. Family and friends going missing, the voices of worried parents huddled into the shadows through late night conversations, and the ongoing tumult both in society and their personal lives became a second nature. The trauma felt by the characters in the story are living with this pain that was not intended to be painful. Zambra uses this distilled normalcy to help expose what happens when trauma was not meant to be trauma. There are several sections within the novel that depict the unnamed main character with his mother, where they tease until he pushes his mother too far with conversations involving politics. In one section toward the end of the novel, the unnamed

character is staying at his parents' house with Claudia, the unnamed main character's love interest. He wakes up at 2 a.m. to find his mother drinking mate tea and they engage in a conversation about politics. The unnamed main character is trying to explain to his mother that by not participating in politics, it meant that you are, by default, supporting the dictatorship.

Within this passage, the main character's mother becomes defensive upon her son claiming that he realized what the struggles of the dictatorship included. As a parent, she wanted to protect her son from the harsh realities surrounding the dictatorship, and when that goal came into question, she became defensive.

> "Fine, Mom, but dictatorships don't fall just like that. The struggle was necessary.'
>
> 'What do you know about those things? You hadn't even been born yet when Allende was in power. You were just a baby during those years.'
>
> I 've heard that comment many times. You hadn't even been born. This time, though, it doesn't hurt. In a way, it makes me laugh" (109).

The narrator and Zambra are tied as one character, as demonstrated within this passage. Another example of Zambra using his main character as a form of himself goes back to the earthquake he experienced in 1985. The unnamed main character within his novel also experiences a similar earthquake, and the two seem to be tied to this trauma. This quote reveals what the main character was feeling when he came back to his destroyed town after a massive earthquake, much like the one Zambra himself experienced as a young child. "If there was anything to learn, we didn't learn it. Now I think it's a good thing to lose confidence in the solidity of the ground, I think it's necessary to know that from one moment to the next everything can come tumbling down. But at the time we went back, just like that, to life as usual" (9).

After the earthquake, the unnamed main character first meets Claudia, an older girl who asks him to spy on her uncle, who may or may not be hiding terrorists under Pinochet's regime. The two have secret meetings as children to discuss the events that happen at Claudia's uncle's house. Her uncle ends up being revealed as her father as the two reconcile their bond as adults. In comparison to the first part of the novel detailing Claudia and the narrator's story, the second part of the book delves into the narrator's (Zambra's) personal life, including his real life on and off again relationship with his girlfriend, Eme. Zambra's story and the story of his unnamed character become blended, which could also be why Zambra never gave his main character a name. This character could simply be Zambra in a parallel story. He takes the reflections of the first section of his novel which details in first-person the process of writing the actual novel, into his own personal life and story – which is also reflected from his unnamed main character's life in his own novel. Blending the two lives of both the narrator and the actual author is another form of postmodernism that is a central binding theme throughout the novel. The intent behind this unusual method of writing can only be seen as a way to blend fiction and reality – as they are both shocking and valid at times. The story switches between author and character, as well as the past and present, into reality and fiction. The story exposes the harsh realities growing up in the shadow of parents who had to survive during a dictatorship and shines a light on what that survival entails - equally confusing, equally conflicting. While most adults had to side with Pinochet as accomplices, other families were torn apart as victims. The novel is personal, both in essence to Zambra's experiences and the experiences he's created through his protagonist.

Fragmentation and Collective Memory

Within this subsection, the use of collective memory and distilled fragmentation of past events and how these are used throughout the novel will be analyzed. While collective memory

reflects an account from history that has been told through society sometimes from generation to generation, collective memory in trauma occurs when an instance or event of trauma occurs within a society at any given time. It can be argued that collective memory and collective trauma are essentially the same idea. But, while societal norms will vary, and the response to a traumatic event will depend on the person or persons involved, collective trauma can be both a response to overhanging traumatic events, (national, global, governmental) as well as a more personal instance (assault, death of a loved one, abuse) that a collective group can understand or share like experiences from. Throughout Zambra's *Ways of Going Home*, the story jumps to and from the political and social turmoil of living under a dictatorship. The use of collective memory is used within the context of the novel to help understand the fear within the community during this time.

A coup ended the former Salvador Allende's presidency in 1973 – when the brunt of the horror began. In Chile through the early 1970's, Augusto Pinochet was a man globally known for committing thousands of murders, forcing people to disappear and brutal acts of torture throughout his rule over Chile. For 17 years, Pinochet ruled over Chile, bringing with him the harsh realities and horrors of a dictatorship.

Alejandro Zambra was born two years after the coup in 1975. The author recalls stories of growing up within this time frame and recalls his parents attempting to make some of the worst situations bearable. To protect his innocence, his family created new memories in order to shield the children from the ongoing horrors of the Pinochet dictatorship. Zambra speaks upon these memories as fragments of truths to describe the brokenness of growing up in a dictatorship, though the isolation and limited freedom never really went away. Since there were so many limitations during the dictatorship, this way of life followed long after the coup. This distilled

reality becomes a prominent theme in the scope of his novel, with elements of time, narration, and self-reflection as methods of recounting harsh realities.

The use of memory and having memories told to you as a child is a prominent element in Zambra's book, specifically when comparing memory and actual events together to form a feasible past. Zambra writes, "I always thought I didn't have real childhood memories. That my history fit into a few lines. On one page, maybe. In large print. I don't think that anymore" (67). From this quote, it is evident that the events the narrator in the story experiences and the events his parents in the story experience may be two separate emotional tracks, but overall lead back to the same events, albeit experienced from different perspectives. He uses the innocence of his unnamed main character to ask the harder questions about the intricacies of the political turmoil in Chile. Through a child's perspective, the reality of the severity of the dictatorship becomes distilled through innocence. The unnamed character and Zambra's memory as a child merge to create a dystopian reflection of the past. Within this passage from the novel, the unnamed main character is concerned of being labeled a communist and what that means for his family. He asks his teacher for better understanding, and while his teacher steers him in a better direction, he is also afraid of the conversation.

> "Mr. Morales, on the other hand, liked me from the start, and I trusted him enough to ask him one morning, while we were walking to the gym for P.E. class, if it was very bad to be a Communist.
>
> 'Why do you ask that?' he said. 'Do you think I'm a Communist?'
>
> 'No,' I said. 'I'm sure you're not a Communist.'
>
> 'And are you a Communist?'
>
> 'I'm a kid,' I told him.
>
> 'But if your father was a Communist, you might be one, too.'

> ‘I don’t think so, because my grandfather is a Communist and my father isn’t.’
>
> ‘And what is your father?’
>
> ‘My father isn’t anything,’ I answered, with certainty.
>
> ‘It’s not good for you to talk about these things,’ he told me, after looking at me for a long time. ‘The only thing I can tell you is that we live at a time when it isn’t good to talk about these things. But one day we’ll be able to talk about this, and about everything else.’
>
> ‘When the dictatorship ends,’ I told him, as if completing a sentence on a reading test (25).

Within this passage from the book, the main character is afraid of being associated with a communist because of the negative connotation of this political stance and the danger it could mean for his family. Through his childlike innocence, he asks his teacher in secret to put some meaning behind his thoughts. His teacher tells him it isn’t good to discuss these things yet because it isn’t safe. When the main character responds “when the dictatorship ends" (25) it is as if there is an automatic response to these types of situations that has been engraved within the minds of the young people during this time. Collective memory and the way it is used within this novel also includes the collective understanding or collective acceptance of those who lived through the coup, and those who were taught about it.

In the vein of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs, a major figure in the history of sociology and author of *On Collective Memory* (2008), held the primary thesis that human memory could only function within a collective context. He believes that collective memory is only as strong as the group of people who keep it alive. Halbwachs states within his book “While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember it” (48). Halbwachs claims that it is through individual memory which collectively becomes a remembrance of the past. “Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited by space and time” (84). Through

Halbwachs's perception, it is within the individual interpretation of an event that gives the actual event more meaning or makes it continue to live on. In correlation to how Zambra uses collective memory within the novel, much of what his unnamed main character understands about the dictatorship was told to him through family members who directly lived through it. This support is felt through all connections of this character's life, including his teachers within his school and neighbors throughout his neighborhood.

The idea of memory and the space it holds can be coined within the term *lieux de memoire*. According to Pierre Nora, in the article "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, the importance of memory lies in the fact that it is fleeting. She writes, "Our interest in *lieux de memoire* (memory space) where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn-but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (7). Nora explains that memory and history are anciently bonded and that the equation of memory and history are self-evident by individual interpretation. "The 'acceleration of history,' then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory-social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies-and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past" (8). This type of memory can be seen throughout *Ways of Going Home*, both in reflection of the dictatorship and in a romantic nature. Paralleling his own romantic relationship while he was writing the novel, Zambra has a romantic interest for his unnamed main character, Claudia. The two move through life together recalling memories of the past, both personally experienced memories and memories that their families have fed to them.

As the two in the novel progress in their love interest, the unnamed character recalls a time when he found Claudia beautiful for simply existing, and he told her that her beauty did him good. One afternoon making lunch together, Claudia recalls a time in her childhood when her parents or grandmother would force her to eat even when she didn't want to. They'd tell her to "shut up and eat" (93).

"But that's how Claudia felt as a child: that strange things were happening and they were living with the pain, they struggled with a long and imprecise sadness, and nonetheless it was better not to ask questions. To ask was risking that they would answer the same way: shut up and eat." The narrator is reflecting on past childhood memories and comparing this instance to the mentality of not being able to get any answers from their parents other than phrases like "shut up and eat." While both Claudia's parents and the main character's parents were trying to protect their children, it turned these children into adults with a false grasp of reality over instances that indirectly affected their lives. While their parents suffered under the dictatorship, the children also suffered from a different point of view. Within this same passage, the unnamed main character talks about memories.

"Later the time for questions came. The decade of the nineties was the time of questions, in her opinion, and right away she says, 'I'm sorry, I don't want to sound like those quack sociologists you see on TV, but that's how those years were: I sat down and talked to my parents for hours, asked them for details, I made them remember, then I repeated those memories as if they were my own." In some terrible, secret way she was seeking her place in their story.

'We didn't ask in order to know,' Claudia says to me as we collect the plates and clear the table: 'We asked in order to fill an emptiness'" (93).

This emptiness that Claudia is describing is a defragmented account of the past as she tries to make her own meaning. According to Michelle Balaev, author of journal entry "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," there is a certain scope of identity that occurs when a population is collectively affected by trauma. "The conceptualization of the connection between trauma experienced by an individual verse that experienced by a group works within a larger debate regarding identity formation, especially racial identity formation. The theory establishes an essentialist concept of identity organized around a notion of the intergenerational sharing of loss and suffering because the actual events are transmitted to descendants of the same racial, ethnic, religious or gender group" (153). Balaev goes on to compare these notions with a large-scale event of trauma, the African slave trade and how this form of historical cultural absence has impacted African descendants of slaves for generations and will continue to do so. This type of trauma lives through generations of populations, so within the context of *Ways of Going Home*, this type of trauma is felt in memory instead of direct understanding for generations preceding that which was directly impacted by the dictatorship.

In that same vein, Ron Eyerman, author of *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2001), Eyerman writes that while the impact of slavery was obviously traumatic for those who experienced it, the ability to trace the effects of slavery on modern African American behavior is through collective behavior. "As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all" (2). Eyerman states that while the cause of the trauma can be significant and easily

identified, the actual trauma must be culturally accepted which is a process which requires time and representation. Much how Claudia and the unnamed main character within *Ways of Going Home* attempt to make sense of their past and their families pasts.

Unreliable Narrator

Written in the first person, and then switching from main character to author, the novel reveals the power of narration and how it applies to the human psyche in terms of memory, acceptance, and healing. Zambra uses the elements of time, narration and plot to bring the events surrounding Chile's dictatorship under Pinochet to the surface, creating an interesting timeline of personal accounts and historical fact – and what that looks like to different people at different ages, times and places within the story.

Much like Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), which is a novel dealing with the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo which is also narrated by multiple characters, Zambra's story is broken up into secondary characters, which are described at the beginning at the book as a first part, and then into two other separate parts: Literature of the Parents and Literature of the Children. The method of breaking up a book in this nature is that the dictator plays the minor character, while the people who keep the dictatorship prominent are in the forefront, demonstrating the real occurrences of what has happened – much like living in a shadow under a massive, intimidating figure. The elements of narration play a powerful part on how Zambra weaves the story. He uses the method of an unreliable narrator, both writing in the perspective of a young boy growing up in the reign of Pinochet, and also the writer who is describing his tale. An example of this is breaking from the storyline to administer the author's own thoughts. Here, the author is speaking to his on and off again girlfriend, Eme, about the book he's writing. He inserts his own thoughts about his own writing process which, at times, the

reader must shift from a character within a story to the voice of the author. The narration within this next quote goes from character in the story to the author administering his own thoughts on what he just said.

"I don't know,' I answered. And it's true, I don't know. The thing is, Eme - I think now, a little drunk - I'm waiting for a voice. A voice that isn't mine. An old voice, novelistic and solid" (39).

After which the author replies with his own thoughts: "Or maybe it's just that I like working on the book. That I prefer writing to having written. I'd rather stay there, inhabit the time of the book, cohabit with those years, chase the distant images at length and then carefully go over them again. See them badly but see them. To just stay there, looking" (39).

The narrator is both the storyteller and the protagonist – giving the reader more insight into what the specific character at a specific time is thinking or feeling. Through this narrative style, the main character and the writer are two sides of the same coin. According to Jennifer Harford Vargas in her novel *Forms of Dictatorship: Power, Narrative, and Authoritarianism in the Latina/o Novel,* writing in a different person or perspective can denote just how less formal literary devices can mediate novels representations of reality. She believes that each novel takes on its own "story world" in how the narrator addresses the elements of content and theme with questions surrounding authority and how authoritarian regimes manipulate reality through structures that are themselves, forms of power (16). Using the vehicle of narration, Zambra is both getting in touch with some of his more personal memories and trauma from growing up under an authoritarian rule, while his main character lives out the actual life he is remembering from his childhood. With only minor differences, both Zambra and his main character are

recklessly wandering through their broken lives – one present, one from memory. Being able to call on actual events and events that are made up in the story, the novel is representative of a personal narrative, as well as a storyboard for actual historical fact. In this sense, the narration makes the dictator (Pinochet) the minor character. Although he is a looming force, within the story the main character is growing up, learning about the ways of his young life, as his parents and families suffer through the budding regime. The perspective of a child is the center lens, as the adults carry on with their hushed realities – meeting in doorways at night, whispering in hallways, watching their steps.

Paradox and Cultural Analysis

In this subsection, paradox and cultural analysis are examined in how Zambra uses them throughout his postmodern novel. While the characters of Claudia and the unnamed character within Zambra's novel piece together meaning through the help of their family's memories, their interpretation still falls under the cultural memory of these events. The paradox within this vein of cultural and personal memory lies within which cultural experiences were taught and which ones were passed down from generation to generation.

A good example of this kind of paradox can be seen in cultural acclimation and the stressors involved in these types of learning situations. These kinds of experiences can be defined by Diana Taylor, author of *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003) who wrote about her cultural experiences, though felt directly, from being born in Mexico to becoming acclimated to Canadian culture while in boarding school. "While a citizen of the Américas, I was/am not a happy NAFTA subject, a product of 'free' markets and cultural zones. In a world set up in terms of 'First World' and 'Third World,' 'white' and 'brown,' 'us' and 'them,' I wasn't them, but I wasn't us either. I wasn't Anglican,

but I wasn't Catholic. Ironically, perhaps, that led me to identify with everything, rather than nothing" (7). While Taylor touches on her personal memory with this kind of traumatic acclimation to a new culture, her book explores the various genres of performance and how repertoire works together to make political claims, transmit traumatic memories and define what a new sense of cultural identity within a given place. "Performance, on one level, constitutes the object/process of analysis in performance studies, that is, the many practices and events – dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals – that involve theatrical rehearsed or conventional/event-appropriate behaviors" (3). What one society considers an event, others may not due to geography and culture. "The is/as underlines the understanding of performance as simultaneously 'real' and 'constructed,' as practices that bring together what have historically been kept separate as discrete, supposedly free-standing, ontological and epistemological discourses" (3). While Taylor's personal accounts of her acclimation are felt on a more personal level, the accounts of trauma felt by the unnamed character within *Ways of Going Home* is reflected also to Zambra's own personal accounts within the book on the process of writing a novel. In this way, the performance aspect that Taylor reflects on is directly accountable within the work of Zambra. As the author weaves his novel from his character's perspectives, to his own perspective in writing the book, these correlations often illuminate the author's mindset. This method is used to enable a deeper understanding of these very personal feelings and actual situations the narrator has gone through. In this following quote, Zambra says that writing is a way to wash everything clean, indicative of a need to get his thoughts on paper and move forward with a deeper or more concise understanding. For Zambra, this could be a cathartic way to understand his own emotions and even cope from past events that still haunt him.

"Sometimes, when we write, we wash everything clean, as if by doing so we could advance toward something. We ought to simply describe those sounds, those stains on memory. That arbitrary selection, nothing more. That's why we lie so much, in the end. That's why a book is always the opposite of another immense and strange book. An illegible and genuine book that we translate treacherously, that we betray with our habit of passable prose" (125).

It's as if Zambra is using the method of writing to help make sense of his past, much as Taylor's examples represent the importance of an art or performance for interpretation and meaning. Zambra's accounts offer only a glimpse into a collective narrative, where his own thoughts and experiences can potentially mirror or complement others' experiences. This is known as a social understanding or a collective conscious. Comparing these constructs to social memory, social memory is an occurrence how society or a group of people remember them collectively. So, instead of individual interpretation, the memory or event is felt on a societal level. On social memory, Paul Connerton, author of *How Societies Remember,* he specifies that images from the past illustrate a present social order. "It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory. To the extent that their memories of a society's past diverge, to that extent its members can share neither experiences nor assumptions. The effect is seen perhaps most obviously when communication across generations is impeded by different sets of memories" (3). He argues that much of our experiences highly rely upon our remembrance and knowledge from the past. Our images from the past are what serve as a present social order, yet oftentimes these images are insufficient as historical basis. Zambra uses this type of method throughout his novel, specifically when talking about his family and neighbors collectively. Everything from sitting around a bonfire after a massive hurricane, to listening to his own family whisper in shadows about who has vanished without a trace – a common

occurrence living under the fist of a dictator.

In a collective sense, Zambra's feelings will mirror, more or less, the feelings and collective conscious of his friends and family. More specific to literature and the types of literature that emerged from collective memory in trauma, Gisela Norat, author of journal article "Representing the Unrepresentable: Literature of Trauma Under Pinochet in Chile" touched on the genre of *testimonio* – testimonies of Chileans who directly were impacted or remember living under the control of a dictatorship. "Scholars of the genre not familiar with the particulars of Chilean affairs and the country's literary production on the topic will find useful the exposition of the historical context under which General Augusto Pinochet rose to power and launched a campaign of terror against descendants" (161). Much like Paul Connerton's points on social memory, oftentimes, a first-person account of historical trauma becomes a part of a collective memory shared by a culture. Norat goes on to say that these *testimonios* "lucidly contextualizes the Latin American genre as a socio-political tool in literary form for invoking social change" (85). These forms of testimony may form a question in the authenticity or legitimacy of truth, but they also offer an alternative representation disseminated by official history. Although in *Ways of Going Home*, we only see these types of *testimonios* from Zambra himself and his unnamed main character, the interactions his main character has with major influences in his life, such as his school teacher and their exchange on communists, signal the same type of feelings of trauma lingering behind.

These types of interactions fall on understanding based on similar personal accounts. Within his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2014), Dominick LaCapra states on writing differentiative history from fiction (personal recounts) "Fiction may have referential notes, notably when it blends fact and fiction but historiography to be professional historiography –

even beyond a restricted research paradigm – must have notes that provide references for statements that function referentially and make truth claims (except when these statements convey what is currently accepted as common knowledge at least among professionals)" (6). This type of common knowledge or a basis of understanding can be seen directly within interactions between Zambra's unnamed main character and his family. While his parents silently worry about the state of their country under the harsh political influence of Pinochet, they also still try to shield the boy from any real concept of danger. Ultimately, the attempts for analysis from literary critics and theorists on post-traumatic testimonies pose a problem for historical representation and understanding. Delving deeper into this concept, Cathy Caruth, author of *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (2016) offers insight on how to read for trauma. While trauma studies were not always regarded as a declared field, Caruth delved into the psychological and neurological impacts on these studies, such as the impact of the Holocaust. Caruth explains that under the scope of trauma studies, the study "has the disadvantage of codifying the term 'trauma' and eliminating some of its surprise and literariness" (174). Caruth analyzes the oscillation between traumatic impacts such as death and other traumatic events in life as the present. She analyzes a "double telling" for these types of crises and underscores the relativity between the very language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory (7). A good example of this can again be understood when looking at the interactions between the unnamed boy and his parents. His parents believe that they have done a good job shielding him from unsettling events, but in reality, the boy has seen and made sense of these events on his own. While his mother believes he has no concept of danger or war, or what it means to vanish, he has no problem asserting himself and asking questions.

Collectively, there is so much to be understood when delving into the realm of trauma

studies and, in this sense, why and how authors write about their own experiences in trauma. In a blog article by Nasrullah Mambrol, "Trauma Studies: Literary Theory and Criticism," the studies of Caruth are discussed as a model for trauma studies. "In the traditional trauma model pioneered by Cathy Caruth, trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. The model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche." Mambrol goes on to connect normal memory with narrative representation and that the two are unassimilated by events. These unassimilated events presented by Mambrol can be easily connected to Gilad Hirschberger's concepts on the "crisis of meaning" (1). Hirschberger, author of the article "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning" (2018) connects collective trauma with collective memory, which "culminates in a system of meaning that allows groups to redefine who they are and where they are going." Victims of trauma, he states, using the memory of trauma can be adaptive for an overall group survival. The connections between trauma and individuals who have suffered similar trauma become a "trans-generational self." Contrarily, for perpetrators or the person imposing trauma, "the memory of trauma poses a threat to collective identity that may be addressed by denying history, minimizing capability for wrongdoing, transforming the memory of the event, closing the door on history, or accepting responsibility." While much is said about the victims of trauma and how memory is used to process and remember, Hirschberger also incorporates the premise from the perpetrator and what this means to intergroup understanding.

The Dictatorship Novel

One of the ways Zambra uses the postmodern novel falls under Jennifer Hartford Vargas conforms to what she describes as the dictator novel. Jennifer Harford Vargas's *Forms of*

Dictatorship: Power, Narrative, and Authoritarianism in the Latina/o Novel, describes the dictator novel as a way to examine the use of transnational afterlives of dictatorship and the forms of dictatorial power that has shaped not only the lives of Latina/o's, but how these experiences have also affected minorities living within the United States (Harford Vargas, 5). Through postmodernism, Zambra steers the stories within *Ways of Going Home* to reveal the naturalism behind growing up in violence, making Zambra's story a dictator novel. According to Jennifer Harford Vargas in her book, her term "dictatorship novel" is meant to draw attention to the regimes of power instead of to a single person in power. "My use of 'dictatorship novel' in a more expansive sense allows me to consider novels that fit neatly into the category and those that fit more awkwardly but bring interesting and important considerations of dictatorial power to the discussion," (11). Zambra, although using personal experiences and memories as a platform for the terror behind his understanding of a dictatorship as a child, still echoes the horrors and difficulties of the family unit through the eyes of a child, and later, as an adult in reflection. Vargas illuminates Latina/os' contributions to the literary world through the scope of a dictator novel regarding how writers directly represent authoritarianism. Though most of the writers she uses as examples, (Junot Diaz, Hector Tobar, Cristina Garcia) are American-based writers with roots in the Caribbean, Mexico and Central and South America, Zambra's novel can also be considered a dictator novel due to the strong, looming force of a powerful dictatorship throughout *Ways of Going Home*, despite the fact that Zambra is based in Chile.

According to John Alba Cutler in *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature*, these stories represent historical dictatorships in an unmediated way, that "literary works sociologically, reading them as transparent repositories of cultural description" (Cutler, 18). By using narration as a tool, the dictator novel becomes more humanized. What can be taken

from the pages of history books or any historical journal on political events becomes more malleable through this meta-narrative scope. Under the regime of Pinochet, countless Chilean families were victims or accomplices to major violations of basic human rights. Families were ripped apart; people were murdered and the children living in this time associated these civil discourses and acts of violence as the norm. What is left are fragmented memories and the testimonies of a narrative presence and absence.

Zambra's story becomes a dictator novel in the sense that we are living through someone's personal recounts of a traumatic childhood. While most readers can't identify with living through a physical war – the war within the minor and major characters in this story are all emotional, intangible. The love story between the boy in the story and Claudia, mirrors Zambra's relationship with Eme in his more personal reflections. What he isn't telling us in person, he is detailing through the boy in the story. The reflective vehicle drives from the past to the present, and what shapes beyond that is a terrifying tale of authoritarian power and the long-lasting effects this has on a person unable to deal with this invisible trauma. From the perspective of the narrator within *Ways of Going Home*, the correlation from past to present is put into terms of the novel that both the character and author are writing about living with trauma from the dictatorship. His life, essentially, was writing the novel for him through experiences.

In this following quote, Zambra recalls a moment when Eme and her family were listening to a radio broadcast about more people dead, and more people disappearing due to political violence. Through a postmodern lens, Zambra recalls the distillation of his writing process and how he realizes, as the author, that his book is meant to belong to his parents. While events surrounding the dictatorship in Chile are from a certain perspective from Zambra, the pain and

crisis expands far beyond his own comprehension to his parents. This is a metanarrative that encompasses generations of people who have suffered during this time.

"When she went inside, Eme saw that her father's friends were crying and that her mother, rooted to her seat, was staring off into space. They were listening to the news on the radio. A voice was talking about a raid. It talked about the dead, about more dead. … This novel belongs to our parents, I thought then, I think now. That's what we grew up believing, that the novel belonged to our parents. We cursed them, and also took refuge in their shadows, relieved. While the adults killed or were killed, we drew pictures in a corner. While the country was falling to pieces, we were learning to talk, to walk, to fold napkins in the shape of boats, of airplanes. While the novel was happening, we played hide-and-seek, we played at disappearing" (41).

It's important to understand the varying elements used throughout *Ways of Going Home* to fully grasp the concepts of this dictator novel. Through the elements of erratic time, unreliable narration and the power of traumatic memory, the story pushes through barriers of linear time and brings validation to a generation of silent horror. The self-reflexive vehicle that Zambra uses throughout the novel is a direct representation of both cultural and personal trauma.

Authors who write within this narrative form approach dictatorship in varying relationships. The cognizant contradictions that can be found in most personal recounts dealing with secondary characters (or in this case, the past and present characters) demonstrates this type of writing as a form of power. We are shoved back and forth through this narration, catching glimpses of what the author wants us to see at which time. Although the method sounds chaotic, what results is an unyielding narrative of personal loss, gain and insight. This postmodern narrative form is used as a tool for imagining justice (Harford Vargas, 30). In Junot Diaz's novel

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, the story is shaped about a dictatorship without introducing so many direct dictatorial power dynamics. The story, according to Vargas, "dictates without dictating" when it comes to narrating and telling a story without fixing the story mono-logically. Much like Zambra's use of characters, Diaz also goes back and forth from major to minor characters, almost distracting from the one major element in the background – the dictator. Through this story, more concrete information is divulged by way of footnotes and communication patterns. These are other elements and postmodern techniques that demonstrate the powerful messages one can find within a dictator novel. The messages are there – but the way they are being transmitted are different, but no less effective. In addition to postmodern narration and unreliable narrator, Zambra deploys the dictator novel convention by way of fragmented time. In this story, we, as readers, are pushed back and forth from past to present – from reality to memory – from the reflexive to the fact. The constant unconstrained time leads to an effective parallel when comparing emotions to reality.

In Ana Ros's *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay*, Ros touches on the elements of collected memory and time. These interpretations vary from person to person, but children who grew up under a dictatorship process painful memory in wavelengths of time. She touches on how "individual's memories, based on unique life experiences as well as on the ability to retrieve them, constitute our identity and cannot be transferred," (7). This theory is based on Paul Riceour's notion that acts of remembrance are social in character, but the memories are often isolating from his book *Time and Narrative*.

According to Elizabeth Jelin's *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, it is through "vehicles of memory" that spark different responses to different clusters of time (25). For example, books, movies or even toys from a specific date will flood back memories from that

specific time. These items can send the person back to a time when this particular item was relevant, and the remembrance can spark multi dimensions of remembrance, pain, and nostalgia. Ros says, “The act of remembering appears nontransferable: only those who suffered personally can remember and assign meaning to the past, which implies forms of memory focused on the victims and their families,” (7). According to Elizabeth Osborne’s article, Pinochet considered himself a father figure, a deeply rooted relationship that was planted into the young children during his terrifying regime. “Because Pinochet was a self-proclaimed father figure, his death also casts the “children” of the family-as-nation into orphan hood as they search for another “father” to imitate and to rebel against. This period of the post-Pinochet, like the post dictatorship, is still haunted by his figure, as evidenced in the texts through references, voices, images, and footage” (5).

Dark Humor as a Vehicle

In *Ways of Going Home,* Zambra utilizes the elements of time in this same way – tying memories and pain to certain people, places, and things. The back and forth from the past to present only represents that the author is using his past trauma as a vehicle, allowing readers to feel the same bursts of chaos in intensity he feels going back and forth from normalcy to nostalgic pain. Since common items to, specifically, the children within this time frame connected them to various traumatic pieces of time, it’s only natural that this generation would process pain and trauma differently. This time of trauma is evident through the disjointed fragments of storytelling found throughout the novel. Through this sort of timed storytelling, the narrator is able to paint a picture through the story, and then presents the underlying fact with accounts from memory in various time periods. The story anchors certain painful instances – such as when the boy in the story watches Claudia walk away and disappear – to a time when

factitious elements of pain were taking place. For example, the displacement and disappearances of countless families and individuals that never circled back, unlike Claudia – who the boy rediscovers later in life and starts a romantic affair with. The story is told in circular motions. Here, time is nonlinear and oftentimes fragmented. In terms of remembrance and what trauma does to the brain, according to Osborne, painful memories are often kept compartmentalized and only revisited when a memory is sparked by way of sight, sound, taste, or smell (18). Within the novel, the narrator addresses various fragments of time and memory bringing a real representation behind the trauma of these kinds of memories. Zambra utilizes these erratic episodes of time in an equally erratic manner to give light into the chaos his characters are feeling. It's a method that is both tactful and intuitive, since most wouldn't understand the true horrors of living under a dictatorship. Zambra offers insight into the horrific situation by drawing from his personal account and using his characters as literary vessels. As an almost nostalgic love story, both Zambra and his main character can wonder about the fate of lovers and past relationships. The back and forth of these characters and the ever-looming questions as to whether there is romantic interest, creates a dark humor aspect that breaks through the trauma. In this context, the author is nostalgic about his past relationship with character Eme within the book. She asks him in the story if the novel he's writing is a love story and if they fall in love, to which the writer says "I'm writing about you, the protagonist is a lot like you" (47).

There is a constant teasing between the unnamed main character and Claudia within the book, that often seems to parallel his own personal experiences with then girlfriend, Eme. It's as if Zambra is using the characters of the unnamed boy and Claudia as avatars to echo his own desires and pain.

"It seems beautiful to me for them to never reunite. To simply go on with separate lives until the present, slowly getting closer and closer: two parallel trajectories that never quite meet. But someone else will have to write that novel. I would like to read it. Because in the novel I want to write they meet again. I need for them to meet again" (47).

The significance of this quote brings in Zambra's nostalgia and pain over a broken relationship. While he is hopeful that his own characters will make it in the end, he also knows that these characters have been created after his own likeness and the likeness of his romantic partner, and that they do go their separate ways after all. Zambra is almost wistful about the relationship, and while he is keeping their futures a mystery, it appears that he already knows the fate of the unnamed boy and Claudia.

In Bieke Willem's *A Suburban Revision of Nostalgia: The Case of Ways of Going Home*, he touches on the idea that areas of a big city that are more difficult to reach from a city center are often associated with poverty and marginalized inhabitants. "…the urban periphery, as a geological entity, is inextricably bound up with economic and social meanings," (Willem, 1). The idea is paralleled to how meanings are not fixed and can change from one perspective to another. In Zambra's novel, these varying narrators, time frames and recollections are meant to drive multi-faceted levels of pain into a conceivable narrative. According to the unnamed character within *Ways of Going Home*, the dictatorship looms in the background as he grows up in a world fractured by this dangerous force.

"I didn't remember if I hadn't seen the long sequence of The Battle of Chile that takes place in the fields of Maipu. Workers and peasants defend the land and argue heatedly with a representative from Salvador Allende's government. I thought how that land could very well be Aladdin Street. The land where, later on, neighborhoods with fantasy names would appear and

where we would live, the new families - with no history - of Pinochet's Chile" (51). Much like Harford Vargas's methods in drawing insight into the dictator novel and how it directly represents pain and trauma, Zambra's novel uses fragments to bring attention to each feasible piece of memory, in comparison to an entire history of pain. In many ways, Zambra's novel is a collection of single threads that make up an entire tapestry of Chilean history.

CHAPTER IV

COLONIAL TRAUMA AND HISTORICAL ROMANCE IN *CONQUISTADORA* BY ESMERALDA SANTIAGO

"If the American South had Scarlett O'Hara as its Civil War antiheroine, the English-speaking Caribbean of the 1800s had Annie Palmer. … But Santiago's plantation mistress isn't a shrew who derives sadistic pleasure from flogging her slaves. Nor is she their ministering angel, although she tends to the sick and oversees baptisms and prayers. Ana is something much more elusive and contradictory. She delegates the flogging, but flinches when the slaves scream." Gaiutra Bahadur, *The New York Times*, July 15, 2011

This historical romance genre emerged within the early nineteenth century, and the genre is characterized by a plot that is set in the past. While the scope of the genre is broad, it can reveal much about history, setting and time periods than being just a prescribed love story, the genre does include various points of views from the characters to help maneuver through political, social or personal trauma. A historical romance, often called a romance novel, will detail the past through a character's points of view. While the word "romance" is within the genre's title, this does not always mean that a romantic relationship must take place in order for it to adhere to genre tropes. The most common tropes informing the genre include stories of scandal and a forbidden romance, a sort of "beauty and the beast" premise, marriage of conveniences or love affairs. While these conventions illuminate human desires and forbidden needs, the use of historical romance goes far beyond these standard features by using distinct points of view of detail at a significant moment in time and history. What this use of point of view reveals about colonial trauma is that there are ways of deconstructing systems where

women play a predominant role - roles in which males would have taken responsibility. *Conquistadora* (2011) by Esmeralda Santiago breaks the normative tropes of the historical romance through the central protagonist Ana, and how this novel encompasses other elements that are not considered romantic. In *Conquistadora,* Santiago uses the genre of historical romance to wage a powerful critique of colonialism revealing how slavery within Puerto Rico was in actuality a major form of historical trauma in collective memory. Historical trauma is also indicative within the expectations and treatment of Ana, who constantly undergoes maltreatment from her own laborers on her land, her husbands and her own family for no other reason than the fact that she is a woman and is physically and mentally abused for this. Through these tropes, Santiago employs the genre to author a decolonial imaginary through which to uncover non-normative histories concerning gender and sexuality. In the context of Conquistadora, the use of decolonial imaginary is far from traditional or perfect. While Ana within the novel is a representative of colonialism, she is both the conquistadora and also decolonialized by being a woman and queer, or bisexual.

Through its revisioning of the historical romance genre, the novel *Conquistadora* creates a decolonial imaginary. In *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999), Emma Perez writes, "Deconstructing systems of thought that frame Chicana history is my task. In other words, I experiment with a consciousness of Chicana and Latina knowledge. In the case studies, a specific discursive field emerges from 'things said,' thereby mapping identities and feminisms." (xii) These 'things said' also include histories where women are not mentioned. Within this narrative, Ana has taken on the task of managing a large sugar plantation in Puerto Rico. According to a book review from Gaiutra Bahadur from *The New York Times,* the story can be mirrored to famous works such as *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and *White Witch of Rosehall* (1929). Bahadur writes "In fiction,

plantation mistresses have tended to be either unbridled despots (often with a touch of the "madwoman in the attic" à la *Jane Eyre*) or demure creatures who stay in the Great House, civilizing everyone in and around it. Esmeralda Santiago plays with, then capsizes, these caricatures in *Conquistadora*, which she has set in mid-19th-century Puerto Rico." ("Tale of a Puerto Rican Plantation Mistress," 2011)

In creating a decolonial imaginary the novel *Conquistadora* features a strong female character, Ana. While it's not that strong women characters in history did not exist, it's merely that they were not recorded. Historical romances became a way of excavating through fiction this kind of queer history as well as a critique of colonialism in a way that also dealt with historical trauma. While this story remains a work of fiction, it details the bravery, commitment, and perseverance that the main female character endures, despite multiple instances of emotional and physical abuse, illness, death, political turmoil, and violence. While the bulk of this novel is fictional, the actual events surrounding Ana in time are factual, such as the brink of Civil War in the United States which rippled into Puerto Rico, the death and sickness from plague and the political upheaval due to civil rights movements sweeping the country. Through this story, normative tropes of historical romance are being broken to also detail a historiological text. This novel could signal that there is no perfect ideal of a colonial imaginary, as her main character is deeply seeded within traditional expectations of women and non-traditional expectations, as well.

Undermining Historical Romance

The first way in which Santiago undermines the historical romance is through her use of setting. An example of this kind of romance within *Conquistadora* is depicted by Ana's love of her land and plantation. Ana Larragoity Cubillas is in love with the sugar plantation and spends

most of her time tilling the land, overseeing her workers, and dreaming of expanding. Ana believes that is within her blood to be working on her plantation, Los Gemelos, and she will do anything to see it successful. In a discussion between Eugenio, a property manager, and Severo Fuentes, the groundskeeper turned second husband to Ana later in the novel, the discussion of Ana's ability and commitment to the land comes into play after Ana's first husband, Miguel, dies. It is questioned as to whether Ana can manage the land, and if it is even proper for her to do so as she is a woman.

> Severo: "'Are you concerned, senor, that dona Ana is not capable of managing the plantation as well as don Ramon and don Inocente, may they rest in peace?'
>
> Eugenio: 'I'm aware that a great part of their success was due to your able management.'
>
> 'You're very kind, senor, but - '
>
> 'You underestimate me, Fuentes, I may be a foolish old soldier but I'm not stupid.'
>
> 'I'd never think you were either of those things, senor.'
>
> 'We understand each other, then. It's in my interest that Los Gemelos succeed, and that Ana believe she's responsible for the triumph of man over nature or whatever she thinks she's doing here.'" (219)

For the character of Ana, the use of the historical romance genre is to bring Ana to a more authoritative light – introducing her true passion for her land. Acting as a driving force, Ana focuses on her commitment to her plantation as a way to keep her strong and occupied. "She never asked why she focused all her energy and sorrow on the fate and fortunes of Hacienda los Gemelos. She only knew that from the moment she saw it, the land and everything and everyone within its borders were essential to her existence. It couldn't be questioned, challenged, or

explained. It just was." (296) As the historical romance genre can cross time periods and other genres to detail the past, within *Conquistadora*, the genre is used to trace Ana's steps toward independence and success when it comes to the cultivation of her land and dreams of a prosperous sugar plantation.

While there are romantic relationships in between her cultivating her plantation and the looming Civil War, Ana's ferocity and passion is most prevalent when her land is concerned. "Our esteemed maestro points out that eighty-four percent of our population is enslaved by their ignorance. But twelve percent of its residents are also physically, emotionally, and legally enslaved. To overturn the tyranny of Spain we must work toward freeing them with as much passion as we seek freedom for ourselves." Forbidden to utter their aspirations for their future openly, the younger men aired their views in private, frustrated that a large and powerful segment of the island's elite opposed them. Abolition was at the heart of the debates. The island aristocracy, many of them refugees from the wars for independence in North and Spanish America and on Hispaniola, came to Puerto Rico with their fortunes and their slaves precisely because the *vecinos* hadn't taken up arms against the colonial government." (323).

Another way that Santiago undermines the traditional historical romance is through Ana's sexuality. A childhood friend from Ana's past remains a permanent fixture in Ana's heart, and the two even formed a pact to marry brothers to stay close together always. While it is never confirmed that Ana is a lesbian or bisexual and does have romantic relationships with both men and women, the attachment Ana has with Elena remains a complicated relationship. Once plans were made between the two to stay in contact, the two were younger and had more willingness to remain close. Upon adulthood, once the two spread apart and started to live their own separate lives, Ana's focus shifted from Elena to her future and what that meant to her personally.

"When they'd dreamed up the plan, Ana loved Elena with a passion, and her ardor had not cooled over the last ten weeks since her marriage. But Ana had decided that her sexual life with Ramón and Inocente, lackluster or even at times brutal as it was, was the price she had to pay for the world on the other side of the island. Ana's gaze had turned toward her future and her attachment to Elena, though once powerful and satisfying, had already begun to recede like a ship sailing inexorably into the horizon." (52-53).

Heteronormativity in Historical Romance

The historical romance genre is heteronormative as many popular novels within this genre have become commonplace to assume that the ending will be happy. According to Meredith S. Faust, "Before the consequences of heteronormative or non-heteronormative endings in popular novels can be examined, first heteronormativity and the components that make it up, particularly gender, sex, and desire, must be investigated" (2). These happy endings typically end with a heterosexual monogamous relationship that oftentimes includes a marriage, restricting limitations of happiness in the novel to the confines of hegemonic heteronormative ideals (Faust, 1).

The novel, often compared to Margaret Mitchell's (1936) *Gone With the Wind*, features a strong female lead responsible for a plantation written by a woman author, but Ana is not concerned about marriage and settling down with a man who can support her as *Gone With the Wind*'s Scarlett O'Hara is. *Conquistadora*, a non-heteronormative romance novel almost acts as the anti- *Gone with the Wind* basis as it depicts Ana as a strong, independent woman who freely demonstrates her love with both males and females and doesn't chase after a monogamous relationship. Ana is in control of the narrative in ways that female characters historically are not.

Referring back to Emma Perez's (1999) *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Perez discusses the historical aspects on how literature presents another way of rewriting history, in this sense, a decolonizing way of understanding history. Perez defines decolonial imaginary as a tradition of history infused with morality "with ponderings over what is and what is not the definitive story." (xiv) Perez states that there are no pure original histories, only stories about women that have been told by men. "We are spoken about, spoken for, and ultimately encoded as whining, hysterical, irrational, or passive women who cannot know what is good for us, who cannot know how to express or authorize our own narratives." (xiv) Historically, women have been written through the male gaze, which extends into the historical fiction and historical romance genres. Perez writes "History monographs pose particular historiographic questions to advance the accepted official arguments … breaking out of the borders is like choosing to go outside, into the margins, to argue or expose that which no one will risk. It means traversing new territories and disciplines, mapping fresh terrains such as cultural studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, and of course, Chicana / o studies." (xiv) According to Perez, while history may monograph historiographic questions, it is necessary to go outside specific margins in order to shine a light on history from a women's point of view.

Conquistadora is an example of reconstructing histories that were never written because of the time. In Perez's essay, she excavates words that have inherited meaning that have shaped Chicano/a historiography. She writes about the process of this kind of excavation and the formulation of her work: "The first chapter interrogates historiography as a colonialist project which has engineered Chicano history in the last decades. At the same time, and more importantly, Chicanx historiography has been framed in resistance to the colonialist project. Borrowing from theorists and philosophers of history as well as cultural feminist critics, and

building upon the pioneering studies of Chicana feminists historians, I argue that traditional historiography produces a fictive past, and that fiction becomes the knowledge manipulated to negate the 'other' culture's differences. (xviii) These traditional historiographies that Perez discusses are like this story of Ana within *Conquistadora* as Ana is an example of a woman undertaking a man's role in a traditional sense.

Santiago also defies heteronormativity of the historical romance genre through her focus on queer genre. A forbidden love happens between Ana and her best friend, but Santiago includes the confines of her upbringing to demonstrate how this goes against the heteronormativity to the convention of sexuality within a traditional historical romance. She explores the convention of self-worth and independence through Ana's tumultuous upbringing. Starting off as an unloved daughter, Ana is to be quickly married away as this is what was expected of obedient women in the 1800s. When she was older and attending school, her best friend, Elena Alegria Feliz became her closest confidant and ultimately her lover. Even after it is decided that Ana is to marry into a wealthy family, a family that has twin brothers who are looking for wives, Ana and Elena plan to marry each of the brothers, Ramon and Inocente, in order to stay close to each other always. Due to the innocent nature of their relationship – as they were both each other's first loves - it can be argued that Elena remained Ana's one true love throughout the story. "She was twenty-five and had known physical passion from the time she was sixteen. She'd lost her self-consciousness about sex with Elena and knew how good it felt but also how quickly the feelings dissipated. She dreaded male sexual attention like Ramón's and Inocente's, the violence of it, the deathlike languor afterward.". (254). Even after Ana is toted off to Puerto Rico to become a *patrona* along with the twin brothers at their sugar cane plantation, called Los Gemelos, that they inherited, Ana stays in contact with Elena through letters. While

there are moments that Ana thinks of Elena and remembers her through her memories, Ana and Elena never rekindle their romance physically. Eventually, the two lose all connection whatsoever. While Ana is meant to have a life and children with Ramon, it is revealed that she never truly loves him. It is even suggested that the two brothers, being twins, share Ana intermittently and disguise who they truly are to her. While Ana is privy to this game, her true passion starts to grow with the land that she has inherited. The allure of adventure and possibility is what attracted Ana to the sugar plantation, leaving her familiar Spain and old life behind. Throughout the story, it becomes prominent that Ana allows this work to devour her. Even after she has her son, Miguel, she does not seem to hover over him as a new, young mother would. She has servants and house maids to help with the responsibility of motherhood and focuses her attention to her plantation.

Santiago uses the convention of plot to further depict Ana's independence and strength through her versatility and focus on success. Ana's independence is always stemmed from her desire to cultivate the land and make a more prosperous plantation. After the tragic death of her husband, Ramon, Ana eventually marries Severo Fuentes, a former land worker who was contracted by her family and lives on site at the plantation. While her marriage to Ramon gave her power and authority, her marriage to Severo became more of a partnership as they both had the land's interest at the root of their relationship. Unlike her marriage to Ramon, Ana experiences a more fulfilling relationship than that which she had with Ramon. "He made love like a woman, slow and attentive to the nuances of her pleasure. His hands were weather-beaten, but he had a light touch and his rough fingertips against her skin were particularly erotic. … No one, including Elena, had made her feel so much." (260) Her marriage with Severo proves that Ana is able to form deep relationships with both men and women, but the basis of her sexuality

is not known, although she refers mentally back to Elena often. Her comparing being together with Severo to Elena draws clues that Ana could be a lesbian, or at the very least, bisexual, but no other relationships are formed with other women within the story. When thinking of Severo, Ana realizes that he is at least a tender man and doesn't abuse her like her late husband and his twin brother did. "At least he was loving and passionate in bed and treated her courteously before others. Culture and tradition had accustomed women, even one as perceptive as Ana, that this was the most they could expect from a husband. That didn't mean that she accepted the situation without a way to retaliate for his infidelity. Severo wanted a legitimate heir, so now it was Ana's turn to take pains to avoid getting pregnant. (273).

The romantic relationships that Ana does form are either obligatory or created to make her work on the plantation easier as if by partnership. The only true romantic encounter that Ana did have was with Elena, as that had no business benefit for Ana and seemed purely emotional. It can be argued that Ana chooses to pour her work into her plantation in order to leave something behind for her son, Miguel, but toward the later end of the story Miguel is also sent to study in Spain. Ana's constant struggle with maintaining the plantation seems to come from a more introspective space, as maintaining the success of the plantation becomes her number one priority. This attachment to the land replaces the normative trope of heteronormative romance within historical romance.

In relationship to a historical romance, *Conquistadora* conforms to the conventions of a historical romance due to the romantic relationships that Ana encounters and by the way the story includes major historical events, such as the Civil War, within the story. Strong relationships and romantic encounters are experienced to give the characters depth. The reader is then able to understand the story characters thoughts and emotions on a deeper level due to the

emotional ties behind their reasoning. Since we understand Ana's drive and determination and have learned about the turmoil and devastation that she has persevered from, it is easier to understand why she'd react the way she did during the slave rebellions that occurred on her own hacienda. During the fires that were set on her land by the rebellions, Ana also prayed in solidarity with her slaves. "Ana waited on the *casona* porch, gripping the stair rail. Below, the slaves chorused the Lord's prayer and the Ave Maria she'd taught them. She repeated the familiar words mechanically as she peered into the night and resisted her greatest fear. In the intervals between breaths, she begged a God she rarely appealed to." (405)

Her plantation was built on the backs of her slave's labor, and while she did not treat her workers badly, they remained living the life of a slave in labor camps that were established around the premises. Once the slave rebellions began, the rebellions extended over all the plantations, regardless of how well they could have been treated within a certain setting. The dream of freedom was more powerful than any instance of kindness from a master or owner.

While this story does not conform to the true conventions of a historical romance because of the use of decolonial imaginary, it can also be argued that any true romance felt by Ana is expressed only when involving her land, creating a different type of romance within the story. While there are deep connections that she has established with lovers and her children, Ana can become aloof or even cold when she is involved with anything other than her one true passion – the plantation. Even as it is expressed that her drive is to leave something behind for her children to inherit, one must question what these values truly meant to Ana. She was expected to marry into a wealthy family, she was expected to have children, but she went above what was expected of her and became a *patrona* of the land and an owner to the property. These were things that did not adhere to the expectations of a woman during this time period. While Ana does seem

distracted by the overall power and wealth that the sugar plantation brings her, the afterthought of family and children seems to be what Ana uses in order to continue her work on the plantation. This is her driving force or what she refers back to when she needs to convince herself that she works so much because she cares about her children's futures. Just as Ana's own mother was cold to her as a young woman, it can parallel to the disconnect that Ana has with her oldest son, Miguel. She ends up becoming pregnant with Severo's child toward the end of the story so she will have a legacy to carry on her work despite the death of her first son.

Spatial Isolation

Where there were deep connections that Ana established with those she loved, the convention of connection lay within the traumatic events that surrounded colonialism. The plantation, for example, was prosperous due to the hard labor of slaves that the family owned. When the slave rebellions happened over the tumult of the Civil War in America, many of the slaves revolted and a huge fire was set to the grounds. Many other slaves were killed in the process, but one traumatic event for Ana included the death of her son, Miguel, who had come back from school in Spain to visit his mother. The fire caused devastation, not only to the plantation that Ana poured sweat and endless hours into, but the fire had claimed her son Miguel, burning him alive. "Her breath left her, and she held onto the porch railing, watching the whirling flames licking the black sky. Over the clapping of the cane, she heard screams, voices, barking, footsteps running away, then finally toward her, with the fateful certainty that disaster had touched her again." (400) As her son was carried to Ana, charred and on the brink of death, Ana's thoughts turned to her plantation and what this meant as far as her status of the property. "If he died, as his last survivor, she'd inherit Los Gemelos. The thought stunned her. That she'd even think this now was appalling." (408) This is telling of Ana's priorities, as she even admits

to herself that she hadn't been a good mother to Miguel or a good wife to Ramon. That she had cast Miguel away to Spain for him to study, but mostly so she wouldn't have to waste time being a mother so she could pay full attention to the plantation. Miguel ends up perishing from his wounds that he suffered in the fire. He is buried in the same area that his father was buried on the property.

The overall setting and land signify an idealized romance that is not normally depicted in a historical fiction. The lush descriptions of the land and Ana's fixation with the overall success of the plantation runs in tandem with her quasi relationship to the property itself, as if often blinds her from what should be most important. Santiago employs the use of the historical romance genre to critique colonialism and historical trauma in the way she reimagines the conventions of desire and lust. According to Lisa Fletcher (2008) Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity, individual novels can demonstrate how the romance genre is obsessed with speech and performativity. Heterosexual romance, Fletcher states, is romantic in subject language. "Further, historical romance fictions endlessly thematize and worry over the troubled line between the denotative and the performative capacities of language, and over the related distinctions between truth and lie, fact and fiction, reality and romance, which are so crucial to the genre's form and function. That these novels can neither resolve nor contain these oppositions in any meaningful or lasting way is the key paradox of historical romance fiction." (2)

While Ana no doubt felt devastation over the loss of her son, she also turned that grief and trauma into looking toward the future and what that meant for her plantation. It can be argued that Ana turned her focus to her land, not as a coping mechanism or a way to block out the traumatic experiences she encountered, but that her priorities were evident even at the end of

the story. “There was life beyond the gate where Ramon and Miguel rested. There was life outside the fenced cemetery where Pabla and Fela watched over the slaved who’d toiled for her, beyond Jose’s monument of suffering. There was life in the rich soil she’d nurtured, in the canebrakes, yes, but also in the orchards and gardens, in the vegetable patches and flower beds. There was life in El Destino, where Segundo, her young son, was now only just beginning to stand on his own upon the land he’d inherit. We’re all walking on corpses, she thought, but his, too, is life. And she walked beneath the morning sun toward another planting season.” (414) For Ana, life is compared to “another planting season” as this was the only way that Ana knew.

Being a woman, Ana felt the pressures, especially as “la patrona” to not be weak in front of anyone, including her second husband, Severo. Even in instances of extreme grief, Ana refused to come off as weak. “From the first she’d sensed that she should never bow before Severo, that among the things he most valued was her strength of character. But there were moments, like now, when she wished she could allow herself the female prerogative to be weak, to cry loudly. She’d swallowed so many tears that someday she might be unable to hold more inside and they’d overflow into a torrent. (296-297) While this was a form of internal isolation rather than spatial isolation, this type of isolation mixed with her solitary life on the plantation painted Ana as a human being. She refused to allow herself to look weak, even in front of the man she married.

Domestic Abuse

While Ana did suffer emotional, physical, and sexual abuse from her husband, Ramon, and his brother, Inocente, Ana always had the continuous struggle to fight for what she felt was hers. Once her husband Ramon had died, her grief for Ramon was replaced by dread that her plantation would be taken away from her due solely to her being a woman. Ana had to use her

ties to Severo, and the impending marriage of the two, to secure her position within her plantation. She also had to use her son, Miguel, as the future heir of Los Gemelos to ensure a man would always oversee the day-to-day responsibilities of the land. While this may not be seen as physical domestic abuse, the abuse that Ana suffered internally being undermined by men around her was a constant battle.

> "Eugenio chuckled. 'You talk like a soldier.' She smiled back. 'But, Ana, a plantation needs a man to handle the workforce, slave or free, a man to negotiate with vendors and customers, a man, Ana, not a young woman with a child.'
>
> 'Severo Fuentes has been an excellent mayordomo. I'm confident that he can -'
>
> 'And how do you think it will look for you to stay here, alone, with Severo Fuentes?'
>
> She hoped that her blush didn't show. 'He's been nothing but respectful.'
>
> 'I'm sure he has when you husband was here. But I've seen how he looks at you.'
>
> She blushed deeper, angry now. 'Don Eugenio! What are you implying?'
>
> 'Nothing, my dear. Forgive me. I'm merely pointing out the reality of your situation. You're young and unprotected. He's a young man, and ambitious. How long, do you think, before he figures out that, if he married la patrona, he could be the patron?' He sat again and leaned toward her. 'Leonor and I have made the ultimate sacrifice, Ana. Two sons, dead. And, no, don't defend yourself. I don't blame you. I do not blame you,' he repeated, to make sure she understood. 'You're young, and someday you might wish to marry again and perhaps you'll have more children. And that's your prerogative. But Miguel is the last Argoso, and I intend to raise him under my roof, with my values and, yes, even my prejudices and perhaps some of my vices. That's my prerogative, you see, as patriarch of this family.'

> Ana stood as if to leave but instead sat again, her gaze on the floor, weighing what to say next. 'What if you sold Los Gemelos to me?'" (215)

During the slave rebellions, the slaves at Los Gemelos finally broke free from their servitude and followed suit of the slave rebellions in the United States. It is evident that the slaves on the plantation had families and children who were entitled to their freedom under the new laws of the Civil War. "The struggles for independence by Haiti from France, Santo Domingo from Spain, and, in 1844, Santo Domingo from Haiti to create the Dominican Republic had made Puerto Rican liberals determined to free Puerto Rico's slaves without the bloodshed and civil war that had devastated Hispaniola and forced thousands of people to flee with their assets. (246) While Ana and her family had not been unkind to the slaves, the fact remains that the slaves wanted their freedom and to move on from their positions on the farm. This is what caused the fire at Los Gemelos, but the story itself focuses on the plantation burning and the lives lost due to the growing flames. The overall trauma felt by these slaves is not described in depth within *Conquistadora* during the rebellions, but the story instead focusses on Ana's perception and what this means for her life. Half expecting the slaves to attack her home, Ana prepares to protect herself and her household as the fires grow closer and the slaves become more violent. "Reports about the outbreak of civil war in the United States had arrived through ship's captains and periodicals smuggled onto the island. In early 1863, copies of the text of the Emancipation Proclamation arrived in Puerto Rico, but by then *sanjuaneros* knew something momentous had happened *en el norte* because large numbers of Spanish soldiers disembarked and were sent directly to the hinterlands to discourage rebellion once the nearly 42,000 slaves learned the news. Letters from business associates and family members in Cuba reported even tighter control over the nearly 370,000 slaves working in the sugar industry of that island. (325-326).

The detachment of what is happening around her to what is immediately expected of her, such as tending to the land, reveals a heteronormative romance to the land itself and reveals Ana to be an independent woman and character. Once the rebellions break out around their land, for example, Ana takes the lead and calls on her slaves to protect what is theirs. "'We need you all.' Ana spoke with as much authority as she could manage; she would not allow herself to panic. "From here it looks like there will be burns and injuries. Those of you who can't fight the fire will transport victims and help in the infirmary." They must believe it was an accidental fire. None but Ana, Conciencia, and Meri had seen the torches in different directions. The others shouldn't suspect that one or more of them had rebelled. But she was more than aware of the eyes fixed on the rifle in her hands. She pretended it wasn't there. (390) This attachment to her land becomes Ana's focal piece speaking outwardly toward her slaves as she extends her desire for help.

Another form of abuse comes from her second husband, Severo, who is known to visit one of the workers on the land, Consuelo. She had her own hut within the property and Severo would act out on his infidelity from Ana with Consuelo. When Ana and Severo were first married, Severo frequented Consuelo less and less, but once discourse began in the new marriage between Severo and Ana, Severo went back to Consuelo on a regular basis.

"She lived on his land beyond Ana's circuit. He provided for her as well as he provided for Ana, except that Consuelo's needs were simpler, her expectations lower. Before marrying Ana, he'd lived with Consuelo, but when Ana accepted his proposal, he moved to his house by the river. During the three months of their engagement, he appeared at Consuelo's gate on Sunday afternoons after his rounds, but he hadn't been to see her since his marriage. (268)

At first, Severo hid these infidelities from Ana, but as time passed, Ana became privy to what Severo was doing, but cared less and less. Ana suffered plenty of emotional abuse from her first husband, Miguel, and his twin brother, who shared her as if she was wife to both of them, but this betrayal from SEvero hurt Ana a bit more than she expected. As she did with every other instance of strife within her life, Ana turned her focus toward her land and dreams of expanding and becoming more successful. She disassociated from her pain by externalizing it into hard work and perseverance.

Supernatural Elements

Throughout *Conquistadora*, supernatural elements can be felt through Ana's perception. Santiago engages supernatural elements through the protagonist, both by her superstitions and by her spiritual beliefs. Ana often believed that she was the reason for unmeasurable misery that fell upon herself, the ones she loved and her land that she so passionately loved. The constant worry of things crashing down around her remained in her mind. When her husband, Ramon, died for example, she worried more about her future and ownership of the land. Her intuition told her that it was her idea to come to this new land and the brothers Ramon and Inocente followed her. So ultimately, she was the cause of most of the destruction that fell upon them.

"Following Ramon's death, Severo worried that what he'd worked so hard to build would crash down with the sweep of a pen across a document. Luis had his eye on Los Gemelos from the beginning and had encouraged Ramon and Inocente's vices to accelerate their dissolution. However, he hadn't counted on Ana's attachment to the plantation. He hadn't known, or understood, that it was Ana who brought Ramon and Inocente here, not the other way around." (234)

Continuously superstitious, Ana often thought of the dead, but refused to let these memories or worries dictate her decisions when it came to the prosperity of her plantation. "Her words weighed between them as three ghosts floated in the air: the sons Jesusa wanted and lost, the ones who wouldn't talk back or challenge her." (36) While Ana did feel as if some of her actions went against the normal confines of a woman, she turned more toward the spiritual world around her - in this case, her plantation - as a force of guidance and reassurance. When disaster struck the land, Ana felt the impact in her soul as if it were a loved one that had died or underwent pain. A clear example of this is when a hurricane ravaged over the plantation on September 5, 1852. She forced herself to be strong, all while feeling defeated and deflated in the realization that so much work that was put into the plantation was erased overnight.

"When they emerged, two days later, the world was upside down. Were she not la patrona, Ana would have joined the laments of the women, children, and old men as they walked the sodden grounds. The gardens and orchards had been flattened. The *bohíos* were gone, as well as the roof on the bachelors' barracks and one wall of the unmarried women's building. One of the barns had disappeared with the animals in it, leaving only the outline of where it had stood. The windmill was gone, and Ana imagined its huge vanes whirling over the land faster than they ever did over the crushers. (262) Often, Ana referred to her ancestors, the Cubillas and Larragoity families, who were conquerors and adventurers who explored new lands to cultivate. Even in the early days of arriving at Los Gemelos, Ana would write to her parents often, always including how she was feeling spiritually. "Cubillas and Larragoity blood course through my veins. I feel the spirit of our ancestors in this land and am mindful that they met their challenges with courage and curiosity. I'm fulfilled by the rewards of hard work. At the end of each day, I'm proud of how much I have accomplished." (83) This feeling of accomplishment followed Ana all

throughout her journey, and even at the end, when she had suffered so much loss and pain, she pulled the drive from within herself, believing that working the land was her destiny, and moved forward.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: TRIANGULATING TRANSNATIONAL GENRES

In this thesis, I have argued how Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* and Esmeralda Santiago's *Conquistadora* engage the genres of memoir, historical romance, and postmodernism within a transnational context to explore collective memory and trauma. I conclude this thesis with some ruminations on the triangulation of genre across borders. While the term "triangulation" can be applied to several different research methodologies within any scope of study, the use of triangulation within this thesis is being applied to connect the regional and cultural aspects of the provided texts. The general concept of triangulation is to be able to draw a triangle with each point being easily traced back to the adjoining points. In the terms of literary studies and/or cultural studies, triangulation is a methodological strategy that easily allows a multimethod approach to social sciences. David J. Vasquez (2011), in "Triangulations: Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity," writes: "Navigators relate an unknown position to the known locations of two others by mapping an imaginary triangle… Triangulation is a dynamic technique that engages multiple way points, distances, and recalculations in the process of navigation" (3).

Another way in which triangulation is used in literary studies includes metaphor analysis. In the scope of approaches to using triangulation for research, Sonya L. Armstrong (2011) in "The Subjectivity Problem: Improving Triangulation Approaches in Metaphor Analysis Studies" foregrounds varying methods in triangulation used to supplement the trustworthiness of metaphor analysis. Armstrong writes: "… we argue that qualitative

approaches to metaphor analysis are most effective when an intentional plan for triangulation is built into research design. To enhance a researchers' interpretation of linguistic metaphors and their entailments, it is necessary to have a system in place for verification" (382). Within that same article, Armstrong uses points addressed by R. Schmitt, author of the report "Systematic metaphor analysis as a method of qualitative research" (2005) when she includes: "Particularly worth noting is his remark about not (just) using triangulation to validate, but also to understand the differences in the conclusion reached by the various evaluation methods as grounds or opportunity for additional theoretical explanation" (382). Talking in depth about two distinctive research studies approved by the Institutional Research Board in line with the collection of data, including metaphor checking and field-based observations are "…useful in settings when interaction with individual participants is limited and metaphor checking cannot be as easily implemented, combines thematic analysis of extensive field-based observations with the metaphor analysis for the purposes of triangulation (153). This applies to the texts analyzed within this thesis.

Within the novels *Ways of Going Home* and *Conquistadora*, a triangle can be drawn to connect collective memory, trauma and the various forms of genre (memoir, historical romance, postmodernism) to offer this perspective on transnational cultural trauma. While Zambra discusses the traumatic events of living under the Pinochet dictatorship through his unnamed character within his novel, Santiago draws in the effects of colonialism and historical romance to centralize on the political and social unrest during this time period within Puerto Rico. Both personal and collective memory can be drawn selectively, as each individual will remember certain events differently from the next. In sum this thesis has argued how Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* and Esmeralda Santiago's *Conquistadora* engage the genres of memoir,

historical romance, and postmodernism within a transnational context to explore collective memory and trauma. I conclude that this argument signals questions about the triangulation of genre and the way we need to understand the reengaging of genre in relationship to traumatic memory across borders.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda A. Taylor was born in Harlingen, TX, on November 16, 1985. She attended high school at McAllen High School and graduated in 2004 with honors. She went on to receive her bachelor's degree in English from the University of Texas-Pan American in 2013. She worked as a reporter and editor for ten years at The Monitor newspaper in McAllen, TX, before pursuing a new career as a Multimedia Journalist at The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley in 2017. She obtained her master's degree in English with emphasis in Cultural Studies and Literatures in May 2021. She continues to live in McAllen, TX, with her fiancée and six rescue dogs. She continues to write and work within publishing.

Amanda A. Taylor
aalysetaylor@gmail.om