Abuse, Suffering, and Resistance in *A Private Family Matter*:

Rethinking Gendered Approaches to Domestic Violence

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ABSTRACT

Anthropologists writing on domestic violence often focus on the abusive agency of male perpetrators or the suffering and resistive agency of women victims who, determined to find themselves again, become survivors. In a case study of Cuban-American domestic violence, using the book *A Private Family Matter*, I consider abuse, suffering, and resistance as fluid categories of experience rather than as fixed categories of people. I take a creative view of agency, where each character creatively or manipulatively draws on culture in attempts to restructure his or her life. I conclude that imagination and cultural notions of discipline and control are far more important than other anthropologists have emphasized. The findings have practical application for solving domestic violence in the U.S. and contextualizing domestic violence as part of broader cultural phenomena.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly representations of Cuban Americans often center on the experience of exile.

Key topics include nation and identity (Fernández and Betancourt 2000; Pérez 1999; Poyo 2007),

memory and representation (Benítez-Rojo 2007; Herrera 2001; Rojas 2007; Rubio 2007), exile

politics (Pedraza 2007; Torres 1999), diaspora and transnationalism (Duany 2007; Fernandez

2003; Herrera 2007; Riviero 2007; Rodenas 2007), and even narratives, poems, and films

(Alvarez Borland 1998; Díaz 1985; Eire 2003; Ichaso and Jiminez-Real 1979; Torres 2003). This

focus on exile is important because 1.2 million Cuban Americans resided in the U.S. as of 2000,

and the majority arrived after Fidel Castro's 1959 overthrow of Fulgencio Batista (Guzmán

2001:2-3). Rapid political and economic change sparked a migration to the U.S. of middle and

upper class Cubans who had lost property and status or feared retribution (Eckstein and Barberia

2002:801). A second wave of immigrants followed in the 1980s of lower-class Cubans hoping to

escape poverty through U.S. economic opportunity (2002:804-5). This émigré experience has

been one of cultural and political conflict. As María Torres explains, Cuban Americans,

identifying with Cuba and America, have been trapped in a "great ideological fault line between

capitalism and communism" (1999:197). Upon leaving Cuba, they became supposed traitors, but

on entering the U.S., they encountered racism and xenophobia. Some returned to Cuba to

reconnect with their homeland but became disillusioned with corruption in the Cuban

government. Such discrepancies left them struggling to identify a viable political position

between the two extremes.

Not all Cuban immigrants in the mid-to-late 1900s, however, came to the U.S. for reasons

related to the 1959 Revolution, and not all saw exile and the political tension between the U.S.

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and Cuba as the central struggle of their lives. One recent memoir which brings this issue to light is Victor Rivas Rivers' book *A Private Family Matter* (2005).[1] Victor's family immigrated to Chicago from Cuba in the late 1950s, just before the revolution. However, family troubles, not politics or economics, drove Victor's father, Tony, to migrate. While he had a sound job in Cuba, Tony wanted to escape his parents' judgment and perhaps hoped to turn his life around, for he was violently abusing his wife, Olga, and his children (Rivers 2006:35). This experience of domestic violence, not exile or U.S.-Cuban relations, became the central experience of Victor's life, creating his sense of identity in the U.S. and driving his personal and political ambitions. While Victor later achieved a degree of fame in playing football for the Miami Dolphins and acting in films such as *Blood In, Blood Out* (1993) and *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), Victor primarily published his memoir as a spokesperson for the National Network to End Domestic Violence. In his narrative, the childhood abuse he suffered because of his father frames all other aspects of his life, which progresses from "war zone" to "exodus" to ultimate "peace" (Rivers 2006:17, 201, 359). The memoir, though, is about more than Victor, or his family, or even the Cuban American's community's successes and failures. Victor Rivas offers the book as a tool others can use to avoid, understand, and prevent abuse. A quote from Victor's mother captures the book's fundamental aspiration: "If you can save *one person* from being subjected to the torture that was our life, then whatever loss of privacy we experience would be worth it" (2006:361). The grand narrative of exile and politics seems to have all but silenced the concerns of Cuban American families such as Victor's for whom the immediate and painful experiences of family violence took precedence over U.S.-Cuban political concerns.

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[1] Victor goes by the name Victor Rivas Rivers as an author and activist, but otherwise in the context of his family he calls himself Victor Rivas.

To be sure, some research does exist on Cuban American domestic violence, but these works stress only its absence or its low occurrence in comparison to that of other Hispanic groups and Anglo Americans. A discussion of the 1992 National Alcohol and Family Violence Survey compares Cuban-Americans to Anglo Americans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans. It found Cuban-American husbands "rarely violent" compared to the other groups, based on instances of reported abuse (Kaufman Kantor 1997:67-8). Another study goes so far as to claim that "wife assaults among Cuban-American families are virtually nonexistent" (Kaufman Kantor et al. 1994:218). Given Victor's recent memoir and the possibility that domestic violence may go unreported, such statistical conclusions underemphasize the extent to which domestic violence truly *has* been a problem in Cuban American families and may be a larger issue than national surveys show. In attempting to explain the phenomenon of less abuse among Cuban Americans, researchers also suggest that such families are "less male-dominated," have "less segregated roles for husbands and wives," and are "very successful at adapting to mainstream American culture by becoming 'bicultural,' that is, maintaining certain Cuban traditions while adopting American characteristics" (1994:218). The authors say Cuban Americans have found a "less hostile environment" in America than most, and they have thus achieved a degree of "economic and political power in Miami" (1994:218). It is true that Victor's family became "bicultural." However, the family was still highly male-dominated within the framework of Cuban machismo. Despite whatever economic and political power Cubans found in Miami, the Rivases encountered a relatively hostile environment of racism, low wages, and poor working conditions.

This thesis uses anthropology to rethink current discourse on Cuban Americans, which has focused on exile and the non-existence of domestic violence, to show that domestic violence

has had a central and powerful role within some Cuban Americans' lives. I examine the interacting influences of mainstream "American" and "Cuban" culture on family members as they enact and experience domestic violence. I also explain how the family engages with Cuban machismo, racism, low wages, and poor working conditions. However, these elements, instead of fully determining domestic violence, work within a broader array of American and global cultural factors, such as mass media, food, toys, and the military. The individual, in a dialectical relationship with culture, draws on these elements through imagination and creativity to negotiate agency on personal and familial levels.

While I draw from anthropological theories on the lived experience of violence, my approach also critiques key ideas in anthropological studies of domestic violence. In writing about domestic violence, anthropologists often focus on the abusive agency of male perpetrators or the suffering and resistive agency of women victims who, determined to find themselves again, become survivors. By "perpetrators," I am referring to the people anthropologists designate as carrying out acts of abuse against family members, be it psychological abuse through name calling or physical abuse through beatings. By "victims," I mean the people anthropologists describe as suffering physical, psychological, or otherwise culturally or personally significant and painful abuse from an intimate family member. Cathy Winkler even calls such women "victim-survivors" (V-S) to denote how they recognize their vulnerability but also gain power from it (1995:156). Winkler, a victim of rape, writes as survivor/informant. The "V" and the "S" of "V-S" have distinct meanings for Winkler: "'V' is for the victory that will happen for us someday; 'S' is a pluralistic reminder of the multitude of people raped" (Winkler 1995:181). Winkler literally attaches the term "victim" to "survivor" through the use of the dash, never discussing the rapist as a possible victim or survivor.

The problem with such gendering of agency is not that gender has no role in domestic violence. Rather, I question whether gender has such an overarching power to determine an individual's behavior in domestic abuse cases that we should separate agency in this way. Instead of essentializing violence, suffering, and resistive agency in the categories of perpetrator, victim, and survivor, I suggest that we consider these as fluid categories of *experience* – abuse, suffering, and resistance – rather than as fixed categories of *people*.

In recognizing such fluidity, I hope to draw attention to two related processes which are key to understanding interactions between individuals in Victor's family and cultural context: *creativity* and *imagination*. Accounting for creativity in gender roles allows one to recognize the ways that individuals select among diverse cultural elements, and perhaps alter them in some way, through their enactment of abuse, suffering and resistance, a process by which they forge their personal and collective identities. According to Matthew Gutmann, the idea of culture is more "diverse" and "malleable" than we sometimes assume (1996:24). Quoting Edward Sapir, Gutmann points out that "[c]reation is a bending of form to one's will, not a manufacture of form *ex nihilo*" (1996:25). Yet creativity, as imagination, recognizes an opposite force as well: cultural limits and socioeconomic structures that often prove difficult to overcome. Individuals are limited in their creativity by culture and society, and they are capable of imagining and striving for dreams which prove frustratingly unobtainable.

Male Violent Agency and Female Victimhood:

The Problem with Studies of Gender and Violence

Ethnography would seem to be the ideal mode of investigation for understanding domestic violence, except for the near impossibility of an ethnographer's witnessing abuse within a household firsthand. Those anthropologists who do write about it focus on women's

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personal narratives of spouses who abuse them (Behar 1993; Trinch 2003). Others look at community relations in domestic violence (McClusky 2001; Van Vleet 2004), the legal and judicial implications of prosecuting perpetrators (Brommer 1997; Connell 1997; Lazarus-Black 2001; Websdale 1998); protection from domestic violence and retribution as a human right (Erwin 2004; Foblets 1999; Levesque 1999); civil society views and NGOs' solutions to solve domestic violence (Helie-Lucas 1994; Loseke 1992; Snajdr 2005); or the promulgation of domestic violence through the school system (Bourgois 1998; Hall 2000a). Much of this literature claims to follow a dialectical notion of agency seemingly applicable to all humans but then, in practice, tends to essentialize violent agency as masculine and creative and resistive agency as feminine, where men become perpetrators and women become victims and survivors. Drawing from theories on imagination and creative agency, I suggest another way of looking at the situation that may help demystify domestic violence at the level of lived experience. I recognize that all actors work as creative agents, but within a dialect of culture and individual identity. Gender roles and other elements of culture leave room for creative manipulation, but individuals are not "free" agents because of cultural and socioeconomic limits.

The dialectical view of agency is common to most contemporary anthropological theories. While classical anthropologists stressed structure over agency, whereby personal relations, institutions, or cultural type determined a person's actions (Benedict 2005; Radcliffe-Brown 1952), contemporary anthropologists view individuals and culture interacting in a more balanced fashion. In her study of domestic violence among Mayan women in Belize, Laura McClusky describes culture as a creative process whereby individuals follow a dialectic of "understanding and giving meaning to their actions and the events that happen around them" (McClusky 2001:12). Culture is a repertoire, a group of possible understandings or actions from which

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individual agents select behaviors (2001:10). On the other hand, society also has the power to resist agency, as Mindie Lazarus-Black (2001) shows when she details the structural barriers women in Trinidad and Tobago encounter in the legal system.

In studies of men and domestic violence, however, violent agency has seemingly replaced the broader individual-culture dialectic, where violent agency has become a unique characteristic of either men or masculinity. One example is Pierre Bourdieu's (2004) study of gender and symbolic violence which contrasts male perpetrators to female victims. Because Bourdieu is interested in understanding domestic violence as a question of who holds the power and who does not, he understands violence as a tool of domination. He suggests that violence is a resource that men possess, but not women, and this additional capability is what allows men to gain hegemonic power over women. "Structures of domination," he writes, are the product of both institutions and "agents," the latter who are "men, with weapons such as physical violence and symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 2004:339). Specifically, *violent* and *dominating* agency is masculine because males are the ones who have the weapon of violence necessary for achieving power over women (2004:339). Women can never be agents in Bourdieu's theory because they are the dominated. In explaining symbolic violence, for example, he states that:

> symbolic violence is instituted through the adherence that the dominated cannot fail to grant to the dominant . . . when, to shape her thought of him, and herself, or, rather, her thought of her relation with him, she has only cognitive instruments that she shares with him . . . [,] no more than the embodied form of the relation of domination (2004:339).

In short, for Bourdieu, female identities under men's symbolic violence reflect only the same dominated, inferior, and powerless identity men have constructed for women, and automatically he equates "the dominant" with men and "the dominated" with women (2004:339).

Julia Hall's discussion of men's agency in her article "Canal Town Boys" (2000a) contributes to the same misconception of female passivity by focusing on males only as abusive actors. Hall is interested in violent male identity and behavior, specifically the childhood enculturation of violence. She explains that white working class boys' violent agency and identity construction in the U.S. stem from childhood experiences at school and the community center. These organizations were partially to blame for the boys' perceptions that violence towards girls was normal, expected, and necessary behavior for interacting with peers because adult supervisors did not disrupt such behavior. For example, boys would trip and kick girls on the soccer field at school, and the coaches rarely stopped play for these incidents, commenting, "If you want to play, you have to learn to play hard" (2000a:479). In another example, a boy, convinced his girlfriend was cheating on him even though she said it was untrue, hit the girl at school for cheating on him. The teachers did not punish him because they saw it as a fight between two kids where both "should have 'known better'" (2000a:479-80). Hall's focus may be useful in understanding how boys can normalize abusive behavior at a young age. However, it only partially helps to explain instances of domestic violence. Hall never examines violence within the household realm, the primary context for domestic violence, and she focuses on enculturation at an early age, not interactions which continue to occur at later ages that may also inform domestic violence, such as employment experiences and frustrations or marriage experiences. Most importantly, Hall examines the boys only as violent actors, and this focus ignores other ways they may be interacting with their peers or being victimized themselves. She reinforces the separation of female victims and male perpetrators by publishing a separate article on girls called "It Hurts to Be a Girl: Growing up Poor, White, and Female" (Hall 2000b).

In studies of women and domestic violence, suffering and resistive agency have replaced the broader culture-individual dialectic. Men enact abuse, while women receive it (Alcalde 2007; Lazarus-Black 2001; McClusky 2001). While such studies explore the positive attributes of women's agency in order to counter men's violent agency, this focus on women as victims and survivors helps us little in understanding examples where women engage in abuse or feel rage (Behar 1993; Van Vleet 2002). Again, by discussing resistance as something closely linked to victimhood and, primarily, women, it is not possible to consider how women commit abuse or how men can engage in resistance strategies to curb their own abusive behavior.

For example, in "Law and the Pragmatics of Inclusion," Mindie Lazarus-Black (2001) examines the relationship between women's agency and the legal system in cases of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago. When she speaks of "agency" she really means abused women's resistive agency: "the exercise of any measure of resistance and self-determination used by an abused woman to regain control of her life and in her attempt to stop the abuse she experiences" (2001:390). Women had recently gained the legal right to take domestic abusers to court; yet women did not always receive the aid and protection that the legal structure appeared to offer. Factors such as the content of the law and how police and magistrates interacted with women limited the amount of control women had in determining the outcome of their cases. While women did not realize full agency, they still had some degree of power in their interactions. For Lazarus-Black, however, female agency entails a positive acquisition of power through victimhood. Women survive through admirable "resistance" and "self-determination." Lazarus-Black thus suggests that women's actions are categorically different from men's violent agency. I find this problematic because, as I will explain later, when we look at lived experience

and the abuses women often carry out, especially in the case of Victor Rivas's mother, the distinctions are not so clear.

Likewise, writing on Mopan Mayan women in Belize, Laura McClusky advocates a creative view of agency, which she defines as "how people affect the world around them, using, manipulating, challenging, and creating culture" (2001:12). With such a perspective, McClusky hopes to counter the "depopulation" of violence, descriptions of violence which speak more of analytical categories than people, by balancing her book with both narrative and analysis (2001:10). The problem is that by "people" she must truly mean "women" because she tells primarily the stories of women (2001:12). Furthermore, her solutions focus entirely on giving women strategies to counter their husbands' abuse. For example, McClusky suggests that the locals work to decrease women's social isolation, increase their economic freedom, and enhance their ability to select their own husbands by getting rid of the tradition of arranged marriage. This would also entail women's participating in available development projects, continuing their education to be less economically dependent on husbands, and working to develop and enhance local support systems, including the traditional *comadre/compadre* relationship, which is an alliance between a poorer community member and a richer one. Such alliances have helped women find employment in nearby cities, providing women the economic means to leave abusive situations. While these solutions may provide valuable resources, they ignore the possibility that men too may be trying to resist violence and therefore also need help. Men's violent behavior might be linked to cultural standards of male behavior, low pay and/or poor working conditions, as I will discuss below in terms of machismo and Tony Rivas's own experiences.

In "Women's Experiences of Identity-based Violence in the Intimacy of their Homes in Lima," M. Christina Alcalde also emphasizes suffering and resistive agency as women's primary experiences. She offers a useful discussion of how, through "verbal violence," men use women's Indianness and their low levels of education to make pejorative attacks (2007:4). Alcalde argues that while some women internalize these representations as evidence of their worthless identities, others reject the insults to find pride in themselves. Still others challenge the insults but find they cannot escape others' characterizations of themselves as backward and inferior. However, again, it is hard to believe that men do not suffer and resist in their experiences of domestic violence and, likewise, that women never enact abuse.

Latin American Gender Ideologies and Possibilities for Fluidity

Many of the studies I just discussed are based in Latin America, and, as such, they draw on cultural categories of gender based on ideals of machismo, social class, and Catholicism. However, other ethnographies in the region do not so solidly separate women and men into victims and agents. Matthew C. Gutmann, for example, argues that Latin American masculinity, or *machismo*, involves more diversity and potential for individual creativity within gender roles than anthropologists' focus on violent masculine agency is able to acknowledge. He notes that the idea of macho in Mexico contains inherent ambiguities, meaning that much is left up to the creative actor. Gutmann draws on Vicente Mendoza's (1962) analysis of folk songs in which the latter found two alternative representations of machismo, one "authentic" – "courage, generosity, and stoicism" – and one "false," of "cowardice hiding behind empty boasts" (Gutmann 1996:223). Men in Gutmann's fieldwork distinguished between "*hombres*," real or ideal men, and the once-more-common but now-disappearing "machos" (1996:221). The machos, virile and with "kids all over," are short-sighted because they focus "on the present, on satisfaction, on

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pleasure, on desire" (1996:221). Other men talked about the difference between "machos" and "mandilones," who are "female-dominated men" always subordinate to the interest of their wives or girlfriends (1996: 221-2). Many informants preferred to locate themselves in-between these two categories rather than within one or the other (1996:221-2). In short, *machismo* is not one uniform gender ideology that equates maleness with wife beating, thereby causing men to act violently. Instead, men navigate among loosely-defined, often contradictory conceptions of manhood that involve ideas ranging from courage and generosity to fears of female domination.

In "*Carne*, *Carnales*, and the Carnivalesque," José Limón (1989) describes working-class Mexican-American Texan men's jokes as a resistance to upper-class exploitation of the men as less-skilled workers. These strategies are not unlike those among women sufferers of physical abuse, as highlighted by the anthropologists discussed earlier. The men navigate among fears of homosexuality and their perceived statuses as lower-class male immigrants, dominated by the American political system. They bring the ideas together and reformulate them, using jokes, games, and play on sexual violation to challenge social violation (Limón 1989:476-7). For example, the term "chingar" refers to social and sexual violation (1989:476). The men joked: "'*Me chingaron en el jale*' (I got screwed at work)," "'*Pos gano Reagan, y ahora si nos van a chingar*' (Well, Reagan won, now we're really going to get screwed)," or "'*la vida es una chinga*' (life is constantly being screwed)" (1989:476-7). They call the upper classes "*los chingones* (the big screwers)" (1989:477), and link such commentaries to sexual exploits that challenge heteronormativity through jokes called "*chingaderas*" (1989:477). As just one example of many, Limón at a barbeque observes two men joking about genitals: "Simón takes Jaime's hand as if to shake it but instead yanks it down and holds it firmly over his own genital area even as he responds to Jaime's '¿Como estas?' with a loud '¡*Pos, chínga ahora me siento a*

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toda madre, gracias!' (Well, fuck, now I feel just great, thank you!)" (1989:473). As Limón argues, these men may be expressing a "latent anxiety about homosexuality" as some might argue, but they also creatively transform the unfavorableness of social violation into an enjoyable joke (1989:477).

The writings of Gutmann and Limón suggest a different way to understand and analyze domestic violence in the Cuban-American context. I will show how Tony Rivas (Victor's abusive father) acted out machismo with a high degree of creativity in ways that reinforced and challenged dominant male stereotypes. In the process, Tony also suffered from social violation and victimization as a working class Cuban immigrant.

Some researchers of women in Latin America similarly highlight the fluidity between women's experiences as abused and abuser. Krista Van Vleet successfully dispels the notion that women are always victims in her examination of domestic violence and affinity in Bolivia. She observed acts of violent abuse between not only women and their husbands but also between a woman and her mother in-law and sister in-law, "*especially their husbands' brothers' wives*" due to economic competition because shortages of labor in the region lead people to rely on labor exchange networks among kin, extending beyond the husband-wife pair. Conflicts and power relations within these various networks lead to greater amounts of violence, especially the power that a mother-in-law has to direct her son's wife's labor.

Ruth Behar, in *Translated Woman*, has shown that women, upon suffering domestic violence, sometimes develop feelings of rage which can turn into violence against family members. Behar tells a story narrated to her by Esperanza Hernández, a victim of abuse. Esperanza's story, set in rural Mexico, suggests that the boundary between perpetrator and victim is not as clear as we might first imagine. The violence of the abuser may have its source in

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another kind of violence-induced suffering and, alternatively, the suffering of the victim may result in violence. Esperanza explains the violence she experienced in terms of *coraje*. *Coraje* blends *ira* and *valor*, "rage" and "courage," and, as such, it connects violence and acts of resistance into a single unified category. *Coraje* connects perpetrators to victims because it physically moves from one to the other. After Esperanza's husband beat her out of rage and jealousy over her imagined infidelity, Esperanza became enraged herself, and that *coraje* manifested itself in her breast milk, not unlike Maria Tapias finds in her study of women's suffering in Bolivia (2006). Esperanza nursed some of her children without expressing and thereby expelling the rage first, thus causing them to get sick and sometimes die. In other instances, the rage she felt at being abused transformed into violence against another. Also, as mother-in-law, she abused her sons' wives for their insubordination to her. She later supposedly used witchcraft to make her husband go blind to pay for his years of mistreating her. She even goes to a medium who crosses gender boundaries to gain such power. Bourdieu may be right that men often have more access to the power of abuse. However, the ability to express such violence depends upon the broader range of cultural resources available and specific social or familial contexts.

In short, the writings of Gutmann, Limón, Van Vleet, and Behar suggest that abuse is not something unique to male perpetrators, and that even the people we might label as the primary victims can, as a result, suffer from violent rages and enact abuse. In addition, attempts at resistance or experiences of suffering can break the cycle of violence or, alternatively, they can themselves become violent. The dividing line between victim-survivor and perpetrator is not as clear is it might initially have appeared.

Creativity in Violence

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The best solution for navigating through these more confusing details in lived experience may be to view peoples' actions in terms of creative agency. Creativity has been a key component of anthropological studies of violence. In *Fieldwork Under Fire,* Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius Robben depict war and violence as producing emptiness, a "deadened world," where victims see no meaning or life and have to attempt creatively to restructure their lives (1995:147). Nordstrom and Robben stress that the experience of violence is often chaotic, confusing, inconclusive, and incomprehensible (1995:1, 3). Common products of war are "barren fields," "broken communities," "tortured bodies," and "shattered realities" (1995:147). Given this void, they argue that victims can either accept their fate or strive to resist, to retake and remake their lives. Here, creativity helps victims become survivors. However, the authors never speak of the possibility that perpetrators, too, may use creativity to produce violence. Perpetrators may be victims or survivors themselves or, alternatively, victims and survivors may be perpetrators. Instead, Nordstrom and Robben see perpetrators only as destructive and victims as constructive.

Lila Abu-Lughod also locates creativity in dominated peoples. Studying women in a Bedouin community in Egypt, she shows how forms of resistance can function as *"diagnostic[s]* of power"; they can elucidate power relations within multiple socioeconomic systems over time (Abu-Lughod 1990:42). She finds resistances in the ways that women use secrets and silences, refuse to get married, engage in "sexually irreverent discourse" that makes fun of men, and recite oral lyric poetry, a practice that allows women to violate public codes of modesty (1990:45). As they creatively adopt forms of resistance from Egyptian society and the Islamic movement, the women simultaneously enter into new and wider authority structures beyond camp life. Because

she equates resistance and creativity with victims, however, she never examines how supposedly dominant individuals like Bedouin men can be creative in their application of power.

Neil Whitehead is one of the few anthropologists who writes that violent acts in themselves can be creative and meaningful. They may resist modernity and globalization, as "cultural affirmation and expression of identity in the face of a loss of 'tradition' and a dislocation of ethnicity" (2004:6). Alternatively, representations of violence cannot be seen as separate from violent acts: "representations are part of violence, not just 'about' it" (2004:18). Thus he argues that the media has made serial killers into icons. Take, for example, the character of Dr. Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Violent actors draw from dominant and normative cultural symbols and rules to create violent expressions just as a writer uses a language's words and grammar rules to create a poem. For instance, the Bush administration legitimized violence by printing playing cards with wanted Iraqis and thereby linked the violence to mundane cultural forms. Attacks on modernization and globalization may also be a way for marginalized ethnic groups to affirm their cultural traditions. He writes about how some indigenous Guyanese engage in ritualized cannibalism (Kanaima) as a way to challenge the authority of the state (Whitehead 2002).

In short, violent acts can offer just as much creative cultural meaning as victims' responses to those acts. The point is not that the violence is meaningful in the sense that it is *good* or *beneficial*. However, what Whitehead does not stress is that violent offenders may experience suffering, similar to victims, or that they may undertake certain acts, violent or nonviolent, in attempts to survive the suffering inflicted by others or themselves. What may be making Whitehead's point a little unclear is the tendency to see violent offenders only as enactors of violence, as perpetrators. We need to acknowledge that perpetrators may experience

suffering, similar to victims, or may undertake certain acts, violent or nonviolent, in attempts at surviving the suffering or resisting their own violence, for example by appealing to a psychologist or self-help books.

A theory of creativity must also take into account the gender systems and ideologies that impose great limits on how individuals can conceive of interacting with one another, and these concepts are a factor in issues of domestic abuse. Gender, in the Western sense, assigns biological males and females fundamentally different social roles and attributes to them different personality traits and preferences in life. Studies of gender have shown it to be a social, psychological, and cultural construction. Different gender roles are not products of inherent biological differences between men and women. Rather, social, psychological, and cultural factors create the linkages between gender and sex. Cross-culturally, groups connect and construct sex and gender differently. In fact, some see no distinction between a biological/natural aspect ("sex" in Western culture) and a cultural aspect ("gender" in Western culture). Among cultures which distinguish anatomical sex from gender, not all link gender roles directly to anatomical sex. In gendered homosexuality in Brazil, for instance, a man who has sex with other men remains *macho* (masculine) so long as he always penetrates in sexual intercourse. The penetrated is the "not-man," a woman or *bicha/viado* (gay), and is expected to behave in a more "feminine" manner (Kulick 1998; Nanda 2000:43). While deconstructions of gender discredit biological determinism, other studies show that biological sex, too, is a construct (Lancaster 2003).

Similarly, research has shown that the gender roles we have within Western society are a primary cause of female oppression and violence against women. For example, Richard Wasserstrom argues that gender roles are unjust because they create the foundation for sex-based

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oppression, whereby men's interests take precedence over women's and women are expected to meet men's needs (2000:367). According to Wasserstrom, the problem is not that society arbitrarily assigns such roles by gender but that the role of server is always morally objectionable (2000:367). If we eliminate gender, he argues, then the foundation for morally-objectionable sex roles would disappear (2000:367). Wasserstrom seems to be overemphasizing the value in getting rid of gender. As I will show, women's problems involve more than simply gender. However, I would argue that he still has a valid point in criticizing gender.

Sandra Bem makes a similar claim that gender roles provide a foundation for inequality (1993:193-4). In *Lenses of Gender*, Bem details the three "gender lenses" that perpetuate a structure of gendered dominance. These three beliefs, of androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism, are embedded in social institutions and individuals' internalized ideologies, and they work to reproduce male power. Androcentrism is the tendency to view male experience as the norm and female experience as a sex-specific deviation or as simply "other." Gender polarization is the extreme difference we find in male and female roles, where almost every aspect of social life is organized around the perceived dichotomy between men and women. Biological essentialism views gender polarization and androcentrism as products of the intrinsically different biological natures of men and women. Institutionally, gender roles dichotomize women and men by separating them into domestic and paid labor domains. Psychologically, these roles assign women and men fundamentally different identities (1993:194-5). These dichotomies then allow for unequal hierarchies of power that privilege the male domain and identity (1993:194-5). Furthermore, ideologically, gender roles cast gender inequality as simply gender "difference," making gender inequality seem natural (1993:195). Consequently, the issue is not simply male and female *difference* but female *disadvantage*.

Androcentrism's privileging and normalizing of males and male experience results in economic and political disadvantages for women. Bem argues that because in our society sex and gender-based oppression are fused, a gender-free society would eliminate the naturalized hierarchies that disguise and allow for gender-based oppression.

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu describes violence as unconditionally gender-driven. He explains that not only *difference* but also *domination* divides groups of people. Agents ("men, with weapons such as physical violence and symbolic violence") and institutions ("families, the church, the educational system, the state") reproduce, over historical time, structures of domination (Bourdieu 2004:339). Symbolic violence occurs when the dominated women see their inferior status as natural because they view their situation from categories that the dominant men have constructed. The dominant constructions shape individuals' dispositions and perceptions, causing such constructions to become common sense knowledge. Instead of offering knowledge to raise consciousness, Bourdieu argues that we should change the social conditions that produce the dispositions and entrench the dominant point of view.

As I will later explain, the machismo which drives domestic violence in Victor's Cuban American family is little different than the gendered influences these researchers suggest, only it involves a greater degree of individual creativity and manipulation. I take my lead here from Matthew Gutmann who locates individuals' actions as a dual product of culture and individual identity. Following Gramsci's notion of contradictory consciousness, Gutmann argues that women both acquiesce in and dissent from gender concepts: "'Manliness' and 'womanliness' (to say nothing of 'femininity') are not original, natural, or embalmed states of being; they are gender categories whose precise meanings constantly shift, transform into each other, and ultimately make themselves into whole new entities" (1996:14). He wants to show that illusions

have a "powerful ideological hold" on individuals, and that people, through the intersections of illusion and reality, creatively construct their lives (1996:21). He writes that "[i]n the tension of contradictory convictions and contradictory consciousness in the *colonia* lies the impulse for creativity" (1996:22). By using creativity, he hopes to move away from a cyclical view of culture as producing replications of itself to a view of culture whereby individuals agents remake it daily (1996:260).

Jane F. Collier's work (2005) stands in support of Gutmann's conclusions. She argues that even culturally normative roles leave room for creativity. Biology and culture interact to produce the individual, so no individual is exactly the same as another. Individuals are constantly working to construct their identities based on culturally-specific normative roles. One example Collier offers is the central irony in male and female gender roles drawn from the Christian Bible. Since the Bible ties women to Eve the Seductress, women can more easily prove themselves better than their nature. Alternatively, the Bible ties men to the image of God. Men fight an uphill battle, constantly trying to live up to their supposedly perfect nature. For this reason, women have an easier time justifying radical behavior whereas men are trapped by the godly expectations of family and peers, and perhaps even their own desires to achieve a similar perfection.

In noting creativity, however, we should not forget the limits that culture and socioeconomic structure place on individual lives, something which Gutmann's focus on creative agency may not make clear enough. This is especially important in Victor's memoir because in Cuba the family came from the upper classes, but as immigrants in the U.S., the parents met with poor job opportunities and low wages. As Bourdieu argues in "Social Space and Symbolic Power," class is an issue of both "schemes of perception" and "social structures" (1989:14).

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Some groups of people may achieve structural dominance over others, in the sense that they have more power in essential resources, such as economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital (1989:17). The class structure is not always blatant according to Bourdieu, therefore requiring a thorough analysis of language and symbols. The oppressed class cannot see the structure because symbolic power allows elites to use symbols to deny and thereby disguise the underlying power structure, similar to what Steven Lukes describes as the manipulation of consciousness (1974). For Bourdieu, they do this through "strategies of condescension" such as the phrases "she is unaffected, for a duchess" and "he is not so highbrow, for a university professor" (1989:16).

In cases of domestic violence, there may be a similar type of denial occurring when domestic abusers beat family members or sleep around to reaffirm macho virility or other methods of achieving control at home. Instead of the bourgeoisie using symbols and expressions to dominate the lower classes, people of low income and social status can use symbols and actions to construct a better self-image *despite* the deep structural inequalities he or she faces. For instance, when low wages prevent men from fulfilling the masculine role of provider, they might turn to violence at home or sleeping with other women to at least reassert the ideals of control and virility. Socioeconomic structure as structural violence can also victimize individuals (Farmer 2004). For instance, if wages for less-skilled workers are so low that a victim suffering physical abuse cannot leave the situation without encountering severe economic hardship, the socioeconomic situation is here perpetuating and thereby further contributing to his or her suffering. I will show how Victor's mother Olga encounters this type of problem in wanting to leave her abusive husband: she could never find a job with sufficient wages to support herself and her children.

Finally, in exploring the tensions among socioeconomic structure, culture, and creativity, it is important to note how globalization has made the study of imagination (what Gutmann terms "illusion") increasingly important. In "Global Ethnoscapes," Arjun Appadurai argues that imagination has always been a part of the repertoires from which people of a society draw their actions. Examples include "dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories" (1996:197). Yet many of the changes in global culture, such as the transnational marketing of television and music, have given imagination and fantasy an even greater role in how individuals perceive and construct their social lives. Often these result in hopes and dreams of opportunity made difficult or impossible by social structures. He writes: "Prisoners of conscience, child laborers, women who toil in the fields and factories . . . no longer see their lives as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit" (1996:198). For example, in her research on southern Cuenca, Ecuador, Ann Miles discovers that while young girls imagine themselves in successful professional careers thanks to TV and education, they encounter a reality of social obstacles of gender ("subordination as females") and class ("descendants of peasants"), which result in disillusionment, frustration, and anger (2000:55).

In conclusion, the focus on masculine violent agency and feminine suffering and resistive agency has unrealistically simplified lived experiences. Instead, it is more productive to study gender roles and experiences of abuse, suffering, and resistance as more fluid, as they take into account local culture, socioeconomic status, and imagination. The borderlines among categories of perpetrator, victim, and survivor are not as strict as we might first imagine, and how individuals creatively navigate among available or imagined options may lead one person into abusive action and another into an attempt at resistance. Expanding our scope beyond the basic

gendered pair of masculine perpetrator and feminine-victim-survivor entails looking not only to

other family/kin members within the household but also to broader interactions outside the

household: the economic sphere; children's experiences at school; social clubs and other places

of community interaction; migrations to new countries that bring men and women into contact

with new habits and new spheres of interaction; even mass media and the global spread of ideas

including ideas on race, gender, and class; and, finally, to masculine victim-survivors and

feminine perpetrators.

Outline of Chapters

In the following chapters, I discuss how creative agency plays out in Victor's memoir.

Specifically, I focus on the three main characters, Tony, his wife Olga, and their son Victor. I

discuss how, as creative agents within their experiences of domestic violence, they enact abuse,

experience suffering, and strive toward resistance. My method of an in-depth reading of a single

memoir draws heavily on a recent movement in anthropology to privilege the lived experience of

domestic violence (Behar 1993; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Former

accounts of violence have too often divorced themselves from the more intricate details of how

people live their lives under such constraints:

> For too many people everywhere in the world, violence is an all too human reality.
> This includes the victims of violence but also the perpetrators who themselves are
> caught in spiraling conflicts that their actions have set in motion but that they can
> no longer control. To understand their plight and to try to begin to forge solutions,
> we must confront violence head on, place it squarely in the center of the lives and
> cultures of the people who suffer it, precisely where they themselves find it.
> Violence may not be functional, and it is certainly not tolerable, but it is not
> outside the realm of human society, or that which defines itself as human
> (Nordstrom and Robben 1995:3).

When I discuss suffering, abuse, and resistance for each character, despite my point that

each character experiences all three, I still begin the section on Tony with "abuse" but the

sections on Olga and Victor with "suffering." I explain the characters in this way because, indeed, there is some truth to the divisions among perpetrators and victor-survivors. Tony's abuse remains the central problem in the family sphere, and Olga and Victor are the primary victim-survivors, even though I am arguing that too heavy of a distinction between the two groups could be problematic. To view perpetrators as suffering and resistive in addition to abusive may be difficult for victim-survivors themselves, but still the shift is valuable in attempting to understand the experiences of the primary abuser.

In discussing Victor's memoir, I reemphasize many of the details that he describes, so as not to shift analysis too far from actual actors and events as they occurred. I also recognize that Victor's narrative is part of his experience of domestic violence: "personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience" (Ochs and Capps 1996:20). In fact, my own narrative – in dividing Victor's story into separate chapters about his father, mother, himself, and then organizing each chapter along themes of abuse, suffering, and resistance – gives it yet another new form. Behar acknowledges in piecing together Esperanza's story in *Translated Woman* that "the act of representing 'almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation,' using as it must some degree of reduction, decontextualization, and miniaturization" (1993:271). While I agree with Behar that my rewriting of Victor's story in many ways involves yet another manipulation, I prefer to think that instead of reducing Victor's story or taking its events out of context, the reevaluation and restructuring through anthropology and creative agency can bring new ideas and new aspects of the story to light that were not apparent in the original memoir. This is one of the reasons I structure the chapters by character. Victor's voice and the chronological sequence of Victor's life both heavily structure the original narrative, especially because he conceptualizes his narrative as

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a unidirectional trajectory from "war" to "exodus" to "peace" (Rivers 2006:17, 201, 358). Bringing out the agency of each of these family members through individual chapters helps shift attention away from Victor, to the realization that domestic violence occurs in a space where multiple actors with multiple life trajectories and experiences converge in dynamic interactions. Most importantly, it helps us realize that each of these actors is caught up in domestic violence, as victim, perpetrator, and survivor, and that solutions, to be effective, must address their diverse experiences. I will discuss solutions in the conclusion.

Victor's Narrative

Victor writes a chronological discussion of his life, all except for the prologue which describes a near-fatal experience he considers "[t]he exact moment" he changed "from embattled boy to angry young man in need of rescue" (Rivers 2006:1). This occurred when Victor's father Tony, on the day of his (Tony's) wedding anniversary, threw his wife Olga out of the house with a box of possessions and "kidnapped" fourteen-year-old Victor and his siblings, driving nonstop from California to Miami. In the car were Victor, his brothers Tony Jr. and Eddie, and his sister Olga Jr.. Tony, exhausted, fell asleep at the wheel. All the children were asleep, except Victor, who woke to the sound of gravel scraping the car and the image out his window of a nearing "forty-foot drop into a gully" (2006:16). With little hesitation, he slapped his father, "for the first time in [his] life" (2006:16). He describes the slap as survival ("If I slapped my father to wake him up I might die. But if I didn't hit him, we would all definitely die"). He also sees it as revenge ("It was simply a matter of adding up the many times my father had hit me in the face") and even pleasure ("Besides that, I realized that the primal act of getting to hit him back for the first time in my life was going to give me great pleasure") (2006:16).

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Victor uses the transformative nature of this near-death experience to structure his narrative. Victor's narrative begins with "part one: war zone" where Victor as a child suffers the endless abuse of his father, abuse he had trouble distinguishing from discipline (2006:17). Becoming older, Victor describes himself as fighting back, enacting his own violence against Tony. "[E]xodus" titles the second half (2006:201). It marks Victor's first feelings of escape from violence, beginning immediately after he ran away from home and slept the night in the graveyard. The last section, entitled "peace," begins when his son, "Elias Kennedy Rivas," is born (2006:358-9). At the birth of Elias, Victor concludes that "[t]he cycle of violence had truly been broken" because his earlier "anxiety" and "fear" about fatherhood dissolved into the feeling that he "would always protect [Elias] and never hurt him" (2006:358). Writing and activism is also part of the peace Victor finds in the epilogue. He joins the National Network to End Domestic Violence as a spokesperson for public awareness, and he composes his book as a way of both "thanking" the people who helped him and "giv[ing] a voice to those victims who never had a chance to speak out, like [his] own brother Robert David Rivas," who, kicked by his father while still in the womb, developed a mental disorder and died at a young age (2006:361-2).

CHAPTER 2

TONY RIVAS

I begin my discussion with the central actor causing domestic violence in Victor's family, Victor's father Tony Rivas. I center the book on Tony and Olga, in addition to Victor, to help shift focus away from the primary victim, Victor, and better examine the diverse experiences and life trajectories of each. Tony's experiences show us the category of "perpetrator" cannot sufficiently explain the dilemmas of a Cuban-American man who abuses his wife. Tony creatively but manipulatively navigates a vaguely-defined set of ideas on what it means to be a Cuban-American man and father, within a dialectic of culture and identity. Often, he does choose to act abusively, as a perpetrator of violence. Yet, other times, contradictions among manly ideals and his failures at work and at home lead him into stress, depression, and perhaps the onset of mental illness. He also tries to resist his own violence and suffering through imagined solutions, but these "solutions" generally lead only to more violence and deeper suffering.

Abuse

> *He [Tony] was always in control, even after some of the worst explosions when he cried big elephant tears and wrung his handkerchief, begging forgiveness. . . . Of course, he could and would explode with rage. But Dad was the most dangerous and deviant when he was in an almost Zenlike state, carrying out his every move with cold, methodological planning (2006:103).*
> — VICTOR RIVAS

Tony abused all members of the family, but he directed most violence against Victor. For this reason, I focus here on the abuse of Victor. When abusing Victor, Tony draws from multiple cultural ideas and sources. While his abuse is, in a sense, limited by the cultural forms and ideas available, how he brings various ideas together through creative manipulation and imagination -- "cold, methodological planning" as Victor calls it – is what accounts for much of the seeming

bizarreness and inexplicability of Tony's violent behavior. Most of his behavior is an assertion of masculine control and power, using Victor to assert his (Tony's) own identity as the *ideal* Cuban-American man in contrast to other possible images of manhood, specifically a Cuban masculinity where some boys were seen as inherently undisciplined, rebellious, and often socially and sexually awkward, in need of the American man's strength and solid principles to become fully ideal men. Striving for the Cuban-*American* ideal, in contrast to degraded Cuban masculinity, is what drives Tony's parents to send him to America. This is the contrast Tony attempts to assert through his abuse of Victor, and this is also the identity he hopes to bring out in Victor through strict discipline. Yet Tony's own "failures" at work to bring home sufficient money and Victor's "failures" at school along with multiple other factors, make it difficult for them to achieve such ideals, leading to more struggle and violence.

Tony was born in Sancti Spíritus, Cuba to a wealthy family. His mother, Marcia Garcia-Rubio, came from a lineage of cattle ranchers, the source of the family's wealth, and they lived on a ranch called *Las Minas*, in the 1920s and 30s. Tony's father, Victoriano Rivas, was a provincial magistrate. Tony's parents seemed to subscribe to the idea that parents should help to make their sons into ideal Cuban men: strong, unwavering, and disciplined. This ideal continued to be "Cuban-American" before Tony ever came to America, since Cuban parents saw America as the progressive, modern, disciplined country which could remake backwards and undisciplined Cubans. While Tony's parents provide him with a model of how misbehaving children should be disciplined, Tony never follows this model precisely in raising Victor. However, he never fully abandons it either. His own discipline method is a drastic manipulation of the earlier model, and it is constrained by factors such as socioeconomic status, pressure from Victor's Catholic school to straighten out his son, and Victor's own resistance to such measures.

Early on in Tony's childhood, his parents had come to see him as a problem, the "black sheep" of the family, exhibiting "disturbing behavior" (2006:28). Like many other Cuban parents in the early-to-mid 1900s, Tony's parents sent him to military school in Georgia, in the U.S., to solve his behavioral problems. This strategy, part of a wider cultural phenomenon among upper-class Cubans, was later echoed in Cuban literature.

> *Los desorientados* (1948) depicts boys sent to a U.S. military academy to make them "strong men with solid principles." In "Figuras de Valle Capetillo" (1992) . . . Bento proclaims that "youth are wasting their time" and vows "cost whatever it may cost, the boys are going to a military academy. To the United States! At least they will learn English. And most of all, they will experience a different value system. The value system of that culture!" (Pérez 1999:418).

The United States was supposed to have the power to transform wayward Cuban youths. As Louis Pérez explains in the book *On Becoming Cuban*, "To experience the north was to be transformed and formed again" (1999:418). Sometimes the experience did considerable damage to self-esteem, as it may have done to Tony. Pérez writes: "Adaptation occurred gradually over time and imperceptibly most of the time, often at considerable emotional and spiritual cost: self esteem broke down, later to be reassembled around new moral hierarchies" (1999:418). The experience also taught Cuban boys the values of the north, to be "civilized" and "contemporary": "Familiarity with new customs and values was often accompanied with telltale signs of self-assurance and poise, reflections of the investment in and attachment to the very ways that people had worked so hard to obtain" (1999:418).

Tony was later proud of his time at the Georgia military school, often bragging about his parents' ability to send him there. However, after he returned to Cuba, married Olga, and had children of his own, Tony began to see disturbing behavior in Victor, just as his parents had seen in him. For example, when Victor was two years old, Olga caught him playing with his penis in

his high chair. Olga, not knowing what to do, told Tony. In response, Tony slapped Victor, toppling his high chair and causing Victor's head to hit the coffee table. This pre-adolescent sexual exploration may have been enough for Tony to begin seeing his own young undisciplined self in Victor. Yet Tony, who in Cuba lived off his parents' money and squandered his own, could not have afforded the more "traditional" reform experience of military school in the north for Victor. Tony's desire to transform Victor through the north but his inability to pay may have been one of his motivations behind moving the whole family to America.

In any case, Tony did move the family to America in the late 1950s, but the American experience did not help Victor much, at least from Tony's perspective. Tony continued to abuse Victor for misbehaving, often remarking that he was doing it for Victor's own good. For example, Tony would beat Victor for lying, and then tell Victor afterward "that he hated administering such punishment, but what else could he teach me that no one would ever trust or want to be friends with a *ladrón*, a fucking thief" (2006:9).

Tony's explanation to Victor recalls the same problem Donna M. Goldstein encountered in her research among poor children in Brazil. She argues that, in contrast to rich children, poor children's childhood is "nonexistent" because childhood is a "privilege of the rich" (Goldstein 1999:389). Instead of coddling their kids, poor parents discipline and abuse them, so as to prepare them for the harsh life ahead. Victor did recount fond memories of childhood in Cuba, reminiscing about how he and his brother would ride around in the jeep with a family servant and groundskeeper. His paternal grandparents had bought Tony and Olga a house following the wedding, and supported them accordingly. However, in moving to America, the family lost the monetary support Tony's parents were providing. Tony had trouble finding well-paying jobs, starting off as a bus driver in Chicago. His wife Olga had to take a job at a nearby factory to help

support the family. In short, the family shifted from upper-class Cubans to lower-class Americans, and Victor's subsequent childhood experiences follow the trend Goldstein observes. Victor remarks that his family life and childhood gradually became darker as the family lived longer in the U.S. Tony successively lost one job after another, gradually isolated the family from neighbors, and became increasingly violent toward and demanding of Victor.

Of course, Tony was not the only one disciplining Victor. Tony sent the two oldest children – Tony Jr. and Victor – to a strict Catholic school in Chicago. If Victor misbehaved at school, the school would call Tony in to speak to the head nun, or send Victor home from school with a note pinned to his shirt addressed to his father describing Victor's poor behavior. This approach only further emphasized to Tony that he was not fulfilling this key parental duty. Tony interpreted Victor's continual behavioral problem as his (Tony's) failure as a parent; he could not control his child.

Not surprisingly, then, the notes and reprimands from the Catholic school and the later public school Victor attended had a great effect on Tony. Many instances of abuse occurred after Tony was informed about Victor's misbehavior. For example, when Victor got in trouble for pushing a girl against the wall in kindergarten, Tony slapped him in the car on the way home and, once there, beat him relentlessly with his (Tony's) wide bus driver's belt. Another time, Victor was angry about the abuse of his mother, and he acted out in class. The teacher got angry and told him, "You will not disrupt this class. Take your desk and go sit on the balcony" (2006:143). He went out and threw the desk *over* the balcony. The principal called his father, and Tony decided to stay home for a few days from work to beat Victor.

When school failed to control Victor, another tactic Tony used was to enforce military standards at home. This technique is reminiscent of the earlier Cuban idea of military schooling.

Tony assumed a "meticulous military demeanor" with the children (Rivers 2006:2). Victor describes how Tony would have them report to him and "lin[e] up in front of him like soldiers during an inspection. At attention, not parade rest" (2006:3).

Tony also drew on more common child discipline techniques, spankings or light hits or slaps, already seen as acceptable in U.S. culture. He used these excessively, however. Degree, not kind, was what made these techniques so highly deviant. As I already mentioned, Tony beat, belted, and slapped Victor, sometimes causing him to fall and hit his head, such the time that Tony punished Victor for touching his penis while sitting in the highchair. The most extreme of these abuses, however, was when Victor threw a Lincoln log and hit Tony Jr. in the eye. Tony took Victor to his room to give Victor a belting with Victor's favorite belt. Tony beat Victor over and over again until blood started to run down Victor's leg.

As Victor grew older, Tony's violence became increasingly incomprehensible, as it evolved from child "discipline" to "abuse." This was perhaps a result of increasing mental instability, but, still, some sense of logic and cultural influence remained evident. During this period, Victor began to resist the violence more. He describes how he began to flex his muscles in response to Tony's blows and began to grow taller and more imposing. Tony's abuse, instead of remaining rigidly fixed, responded to Victor's changes. Reacting perhaps to the sense that he was now battling another man rather than a boy given Victor's attempts to display his own strength, Tony turned to violence among adults and grown men, as models for his abuse.

For example, When Victor came home injured from a fight at school, in either seventh or eighth grade, Tony did not just slap him as before. He "pummeled" him, "everywhere else that wasn't bruised already" (Rivers 2006:134). This type of punching signifies a shift to a more "adult" violence than the previous slaps and belts, something one might see in America among

prize fighters, among men fighting at a bar, even among two youths in a schoolyard. When the punches did not work, Tony returned with their German shepherd's choke chain wrapped around his hand. The next day he heated a steak knife in the kitchen and used it to burn an imprint on Victor's stomach. Again, knives and chains are reminiscent of gang violence, not child discipline. While it is unclear exactly from where Tony was drawing his ideas, Tony here undoubtedly had shifted to new models in response to his changing perceptions of Victor, and himself. Of course, machismo likely played a role as well. Given that the changes in Victor made Tony no longer the sole "man" in the house, Tony's changes in abuse may also have been an attempt to prove his manliness in relation to Victor. Since Gutmann shows ideas of *machismo* may involve various types of men, ranging from the courageous or virile men in control to the "female-dominated" men, or men with "kids all over," once Victor becomes a man, his resistance to Tony's power and control would have left Tony feeling he was in fear of becoming the dominated one, or perhaps of becoming more feminine given the potential for gender shifts (Gutmann 1996:226). Thus Tony used violence to reaffirm his manliness.

Other examples of Tony's violence are yet more bizarre, difficult to tie to specific models and yet still very different from the earlier child discipline techniques. These again seem to show how Tony wants to be in charge. One day, Victor was helping put new linoleum in the kitchen. Complaining that Victor had installed it wrong, Tony tied Victor's arms above his head with a rope and drug a board with filed nail tips across his armpits. At their house in Hawthorne, Victor refused to agree with Tony on some point, so Tony locked Victor in a mechanic's pit in their backyard while the rest of the family went to have ice cream. One thing we know more certainly is that Tony drew from TV footage and cultural ideas of disgrace, an example of how mass media offers new ways of imagining reality (Appadurai 1996: 197-8). Tony uses the media to

fantasize how to inflict ever more traumatizing forms of abuse on Victor. Not long after the linoleum incident, Tony, for little apparent reason, took Victor into the hallway where Tony would beat the dog and tied him like a hostage. As Victor describes, "He took out some rope and hogtied my legs and arms behind me, like I'd seen the police do to antiwar protesters on the evening news" (2006:158). Then he peed on Victor and told him to take a shower because he was disgusting. Victor is showing that Tony's abuse was directly connected to scenes on the news of police control. The fact that Tony peed on Victor also plays off cultural standards, where being peed on signifies the ultimate disgrace and reemphasizes Victor's worthlessness, something Tony further stresses by calling him "disgusting." The emphasis Tony puts on his genitals through the act of peeing connects back to Limón's findings where Mexican-American Texan men performed jokes on sexuality wherein the genital area is the locus of manhood (1989).

The act shows that, at some level, Tony's abuse was not about Victor at all but rather about Tony portraying and enacting his own self-image of manliness. Another confusing standard was Tony's castigation of Victor's sexuality. Once Tony found Victor masturbating in the bathtub and, in response, rammed a shaver into Victor's testicles, causing him to "almost lose consciousness from the pain" (2006:157). It seems Tony was navigating among, first, a fear his children would become homosexuals, or sissies, second, a Catholic religious conviction against masturbation, and, third, the idea that virility is proof of machoness. I say this because, in addition to Tony's concern over Victor's masturbation, he often yelled at Olga for coddling the children, saying it would make them "*maricónes*," homosexuals or sissies (2006:51). In fact, even the act of shaving would make a man more feminine, less manly, bordering on images of castration. Thus by using the razor to attack Victor's genitals, Tony in contrast seems to be asserting his own manliness, although we cannot know for certain Tony's perspective on the

matter. The act seems homoerotic, where Tony plays out sexul emotions, specifically "masculine force" on Victor's genitals in an act not unlike rape (Limón 1989:472). The situation recalls the gendered homosexuality among Brazilian transvestites where the penetrator, in this case the perpetrator, is seen as masculine and dominant, and the penetrated, in this case the victim, becomes the "not-man" (Nanda 2000:43, Kulick 1998). A need for asserting sexual dominance would not be out of place for Tony. Tony had multiple extramarital affairs, in asserting masculine virility, and, according to Olga at least, had a certain awkwardness with his own sexuality. She notes that "there was something else, some weirdness in the bedroom that led to the violence when it erupted the first time" (2006:30-1). Sorting out these various influences on Tony is nearly impossible without further evidence on or discussion with Tony himself, but they do show that Tony is working within a great number of ideas on ideal Cuban-American men.

Tony's responses when Victor begins to display strength and resistance bring up perhaps one of the most confusing aspects of Tony's violence. On the one hand, Tony offers the impression that he is hoping to instill discipline in his children. The idea of discipline, on the other hand, comes to stand for a variety of seemingly conflicting ideals and goals. While these contradictions bring out the great creativity of form within which Tony was acting, they also show that Tony applied a double standard to himself versus his child.

For example, Tony berated Victor for lack of honesty. Victor once lied about stealing money from his father's dresser for ice cream. Such views were reinforced at school when Victor's teacher accused him of cheating on reading tests, but Victor vowed he had gotten the good grades through his own hard work. After these instances, Victor recalls Tony saying that he, Victor, "deserved to be punished . . . . to remind [him] of what happens to those who take things that don't belong to them" (2006:9). On the other hand, Victor once saw his father steal a boat

trailer from another man's truck. He took the trailer back home, painted it, and retapped the serial numbers with a tapping kit to match the numbers on their older broken trailer. Victor recalled it must have been a routine thing for Tony, this kind of theft: "Seeing the ease with which my father stole, retapped, and painted this trailer confirmed to me that he had done this before" (2006:10). Perhaps Tony's message to Victor was that one should learn to steal without getting caught, or perhaps Tony was hoping as a "good" father to instill principles in Victor which he himself lacked. The teacher's perceptions of Victor may also have involved racism, either that or Tony could have been acting on the perception that Cubans were thought of as liars and thieves, where Tony hoped to fortify his son against slander through discipline. Anti-Communist sentiment, specifically directed at Cuban-Americans, was strong in America during the Cold War and following Fidel's 1959 Cuban Revolution. Victor describes neighborhood boys who yelled "Little Fidel!" and "Communist!" at Tony Jr. and Victor as they walked to school, and Victor explains that this was not an uncommon occurrence (2006:45). The anti-Communist sentiment had become, more broadly, an anti-Cuban sentiment which Victor, Tony, and probably also other family members had to deal with on a regular basis. This made assertion of what Tony's parents had imagined as American masculine identity, "strong men with *solid principles*," ever more crucial to Tony in raising his sons, hence his pressure for Victor to not act as a liar or thief (Pérez 1999:418, emphasis added).

Performance, not just the physical beating, was central to Tony's abuse. When Tony beat Victor with his bus driver's belt, Victor recalls:

> Leaning in the doorway of my room in his sleeveless undershirt, which showed off his bulky upper torso, he looked like he was ready for a prizefight, drawing out his bus driver's belt with a terrifying resolve. The initial slash elicited shrieks from the depths of my chest (Rivers 2006:58).

Even though Tony said the purpose of most of his abuse was to discipline Victor, in many ways the abuse appears unconnected to Victor. Tony's performance of the abuse becomes a display of his own strength and control. The "sleeveless undershirt" that shows off muscles is so often a symbol of violence that in the US the common slang for the shirt is the term wife beater (2006:58). More important then the term is the image it captures: a fighter, a muscular man with the ability to inflict a beating. Yet it also shows that he is laid-back, unperturbed, leaning in the doorway having changed from his work clothes, and that the beating will be nearly effortless, for him at least. Tony was likely sporting this style because he knew it would invoke fear in Victor. As Victor's recollection shows, the appearance made Tony especially threatening to Victor and the beating, painfully memorable. Perhaps, in terms of identity, he is attempting to compensate for his failure to prove himself head of the household, given the low-status jobs and poor wages he found in the U.S. These questions, however, may be better answered by turning to a discussion of the ways Tony, in addition to abusing his family, also suffered.

Suffering

> *[T]here was a losing battle being waged inside my father, as the part of him that was good, or wanted to be good, gave way, increasingly, to his demons (2006:103).*
>
> – VICTOR RIVAS

When Victor locates Tony as a "Jekyll-Hyde" figure, a man battling internal conflict between good and evil, he is recognizing that something else was going on in Tony's psyche beyond the rageful desire to abuse, namely suffering (2006:30). Tony suffered greatly as he himself abused others. Most of his personal pain derived from his inability to control his own self-image, to prove himself the ideal Cuban-American man transformed by values of the north. He also dealt with conflicting ideas of what it meant to be a man and a good father.

Much of Tony's suffering stemmed from two conflicting goals – that he should show himself to be a powerful disciplinarian and model of manliness for his children but also be a proud and loving father. In Tony's suicide note, he emphasized that he "loved" Victor, that Victor "was always #1" with him, but he also acknowledged that he was not a good father because he lacked the right "fatherly equipment" (2006:320):

> Tell Victor I love him and I just wasn't equipped or threw away my fatherly equipment somewhere, but I know he loved me and the feeling is mutual over here, please forgive our differences and problems, I can't rewrite history but I wish I could wash and rinse it, like we do our clothes and freshen them up a bit, Give my deepest Love to him (2006: 320).

Tony saw good fatherhood as achievable through the proper tool of physical interactions such as punishments or isolation in order to redirect behavior. But, it is obvious that Tony was not entirely satisfied with his disciplinary approach to raising Victor. Despite his ability to rationalize the abuse as discipline, he recognizes here that there was something fundamentally dirty about it, something that required he "wash and rinse it" (2006:32). He may even have seen it as dirty as in sexually inappropriate, deviant, or uncomfortable. The conclusion may be an acceptance by Tony of his own failed attempts to assert himself as normative man, namely an "American" man striving to be powerful but disciplined, where his Cuban otherness, his rebelliousness and virility, prevents him from achieving the ideal.

Although Tony beat Victor more than any other member of the family, constantly berating Victor's character flaws, his note also conveys the conviction that he may not have "loved" Victor enough, that he has realized that love was not discipline. He mentions this word three times, trying to offer love to Victor through a suicide note. In this sense, Tony appears deeply torn psychologically among his compulsive "need" to discipline Victor (embodying Tony's own displays of control, strength, and other assertions of identity) and his desire at some

level to "Give. . . Love" to Victor who is, nevertheless, his son, where fears of gender-shifting and homosexuality prevent him from asserting love in more feminine ways such as through hugs and coddling (2006:320). Tony may simply be taunting Victor, or he may have sincerely loved Victor and wanted to ensure Victor did not grow up to be like him. Victor's siblings hypothesize that Tony abused Victor so much because of his strong resemblance to Tony. Not only did he look like Tony; he also had Tony's reckless behavior. Tony hated himself and his situation enough to kill himself in the end, and for this he may in fact have been trying to prepare Victor more successfully for the same type of life but felt conflicted over his inability to do so.

Identity may have proven a barrier for Tony as well. He was never able to obtain his dreams based on machismo ideals and American fantasies due to socioeconomic constraints. First and foremost, he wanted to be a provider. He married Olga with the promise that she should no longer have to work. In truth, when the family moved to the U.S., Olga had to get a job to help support the family because of Tony's meager earnings. He had a job as a city bus driver, with double shifts, no doubt with low pay and little status. Then, he found a relatively better job in computer programming with an aerospace company, but even this job was not as ideal and prestigious as one might imagine. They soon put him on the swing shift, "from 4 P.M. to 12 A.M." (2006:139). In Miami, he worked nights at a Miami Beach mortuary answering the switchboard. Victor describes Tony as "embarrassed" about the position, having "lost some of his former swagger that went along with being a computer programmer with top security clearance" (2006:178). The jobs may also have simply frustrated and tired him. When he worked odd hours, he had trouble waking up, probably because of sleep deprivation. He gave his kids the task of getting him up to go to work, and it was always a struggle. They would try, unsuccessfully, propping him up with coffee only for him to fall back down asleep:

> While two of us held on to his hands, the others would offer the coffee, many times holding the cup under his nose in the wild hopes its aroma would have some magical effect and levitate him out of the bed and into the bathroom. No such luck. The bed acted like a giant magnet, yanking him . . . back to the prone position. . . . Eventually he would wake up and we would receive our punishment for our failure (2006:155).

His periods of worst violence corresponded with times he worked odd hours or on the swing shift, suggesting not only that Tony suffered but that the rage itself may have developed out of this increasing sleeplessness and irritability.

Yet another conflict Tony encountered was that he valued rebellion but also desired to portray himself as poised and civilized, at least outside the home. Tony wanted to prove himself transformed by the north but not conquered. He wanted to see himself as macho and virile, a rebel not "civilized" by his parents or military school. In Havana, his friends called him "El Ciclón," the cyclone; he had a playboy reputation for riding motorcycles to nightclubs across Havana and squandering his fortune (2006:28). On his wedding night, El Ciclón reappeared, in a more violent state. He cut up Olga's dresses and beat her. Even though, as Olga later pointed out, "some weirdness in the bedroom" sparked the initial violence, Tony later proved that he was a real "macho" by sleeping with countless maids (2006:30). When he slept with their maid in Cuba, she got pregnant and, knowing Tony would not pay, went to his parents for assistance, although they gave her none. In the US, when Tony slept on the couch because of a leg cast, Olga heard noises one night and, worried that Tony was hurting, went to find him. Instead of finding him on the couch she found him having sex with the maid, cast and all. A later girlfriend, Elsa, actually moved into the house to live with him, Olga, and the children. Originally, she had come with her husband, a baseball friend of Tony's. The husband soon left, but Elsa stayed with the Rivases.

Tony also liked to play the elite gentleman, the side Olga termed "*El Caballero*," where Tony acted poised and civilized. His car, he painted gold, the color of wealth. Even winning

Olga was a way to prove himself. He essentially bought her through his appearance as a chivalrous man from a wealthy family. He told Olga's father that a woman should not have to suffer by working. He promised to stop such injustice by marrying her so she could live a life of ease in his home (really, a home his parents would later purchase for them).

The everyday intimate interactions among a family living in the same household also made it difficult for Tony to hide his flaws, as he could with people at work or social clubs, perhaps sparking further violence from Tony to remain in control. Olga never knew of Tony's spendthrift nature and money difficulties until she married him. Tony could keep economic problems a secret from his friends but not from his family. Similarly, with respect to parenting, people in the neighborhood thought Tony a wonderful father. Victor recalls:

> Many of our neighbors and their kids thought Dad was the greatest. In a festive mood my father liked to round up kids from families like the Pilars, the Abrahams, and the Guerreros, all my friends, load everyone in the Impala station wagon, and treat everyone to ice cream. . . . When I told someone like Greg Guerrero who Dad really was, he and the others would tell me I was full of shit (2006:141).

Tony could sufficiently perform as the ideal father outside the home, but when it came to the inside of the home, this image broke down, which may have only led Tony into more violence to assert his identity as father and head of the household.

Resistance

At first, it may appear odd to argue Tony resisted violence and suffering since he was the primary source of abuse within the family. Nevertheless, Tony spent much of his life trying to escape his own violence. He migrated to new cities, changed jobs, and attempted to change and improve his self-image. As I will show, he tried to isolate himself from family life. At the same time, he tried to integrate himself into broader Cuban-American culture through tactics such as music, dress, and appearances at social clubs. He was unsuccessful in many ways, and in the end

committing suicide was the ultimate destruction of self, although this too fit his broader attempts to resist.

Tony constantly migrated from place to place and job to job. For all migrations except the last move to Miami, when he took the children and left Olga, Tony first left the family behind, to start off on his own, communicating very little. Then, after a number of months or a year, he called his family and told them he was ready for them to join him. In these migrations, Tony seemed to be trying to escape his marriage and obligations and yet once he left he still felt obligation, or perhaps desire, for them to return to live with him again, perhaps because, as he wrote in the suicide note, he still loved Victor and the others. The feelings of obligation might have stemmed from his sense that to be a true man he needed to provide for his family. Moves to new cities also corresponded to changes in jobs, a signal that he may have been trying to avoid unfulfilling jobs.

Tony's first move was from Cuba to Chicago in 1956. He had a post with the Justice Department in Cuba. Victor reasons that his father wanted to move "away from the scrutiny or judgment of his parents and siblings" (Rivers 2006:35). Certainly he could have been escaping his childhood family's judgment, but he may also have been escaping Olga and the children, since he initially migrated without them. Imagination drove his decision to move to America. The promise of opportunity in America, a new and better start, drew him back to America: "His days at the Georgia military school had left him with fond memories of the good life in America, and he assured [Olga] there would be plenty of professional opportunities there for which he was well suited" (2006:34). Just as migration was a key aspect of other Cuban-American experiences centering on exile, migration was a central element in Victor's family. The structural inequalities between Cuba and Mexico, as poorer third-world countries and the United States as a first-world

country makes the border a highly symbolic and contested act. Imagined ideas of the United States versus Cuba are central factors in characters' actions, as is migration across state borders to new cities in the U.S. In this case, migration becomes a tool for people in situations of abuse, namely Tony, to attempt to escape, driven by thoughts of an idealized community in a new location.

After moving from Havana to Chicago, Tony got a job as a city bus driver, with double shifts. The U.S. proved not to be the ideal place he had imagined. Olga and the children found this out the moment they met Tony in Chicago. Victor writes, "At 5 a.m. the next morning, Papi burst into the apartment, fuming about the toll that the double shifts as a city bus driver were taking on him. It was not his fault that he wasn't at the gate to meet our plane . . ." (2006:41). In the spring of 1964, he tried to escape again, migrating to California. Tony got a job in computer programming with an aerospace company. The work was not apparently as prestigious as he had hoped because they later had to move to a house near the airport, noisier but also probably cheaper. Tony started working the swing shift, and his violence became increasingly more extreme.

In escaping to Miami with his children but not his wife, Tony also attempted to reintegrate himself into broader social networks, as, ironically, McClusky has advocated that women suffering domestic violence should do for support (2001). Miami has been a massive center of Cuban culture (Boswell and Curtis 1984:86). His move back to Miami parallels the experiences of Cuban-American exiles who, after a period of living in the U.S., became disillusioned with the American experience and attempted to return to their Cuban homeland (Torres 1999). The only place Tony had truly fit in and been happy was socializing with other

Cuban-Americans. As Victor describes, Tony was "in his element" at The Club in Madrid in Chicago, called "*El Club Cubano*" by patrons:

> [The club was] a loud smoky dance hall and social club where the likes of Celia Cruz and Tito Puente performed, turning winter into summer and Chicago home. . . . Here at El Club Cubano [Papi] could make an entrance, survey the scene, cool and disinterested, but then – why not? – decide to be the life of the party, joking and storytelling with the other men as my mother huddled with the ladies . . . . Papi was in his element, verbally jousting with the men, flirting safely with some of the married women (Rivers 2006:41).

At the club, Tony could be a husband but also flirtatious, and popular. The club was the place where Tony could most closely become the ideal Cuban-American man he desired to be. Similar to the joking resistance that José Limón observed among lower-class Mexican-American Texan men, Tony's experiences at social clubs, places which allow him to joke and chat with other Cuban-Americans, allow him to enact his ideal image of self in a way he cannot do so easily in the spheres of work and family, given his dead-end jobs and "unsuccessful" discipline of his children. However, he achieves the resistance and good feelings only in a limited sphere of his life. His greatest difficulty lay in putting forth this same self-image in the home, where issues he may have wished to keep private, such as income or personal failures, were common knowledge among the family, leaving him to opt for other more destructive means of resistance.

While the move to Miami was a hoped-for return to the good life of *El Club Cubano*, Tony found only some of this imagined life in Miami. He spent a good deal of time at a nearby coffee stand:

> [A] source of gossip and fellowship, this coffee stand and others like it were hangouts where Cuban exiles could congregate at any hour of the day to have a shot of Cuban coffee, play dominoes, smoke cigars, and bullshit (Rivers 2006:177).

Unfortunately, the rest of his life was about the same, with his night job at the Miami Beach mortuary. He still remained violent toward his family, despite his attempts to escape his situation. In many ways, Tony succeeded at conveying himself as the ideal Cuban "macho," socializing at nightclubs and having numerous affairs, but at the same time, his failures to achieve success at work would have threatened to expose him as an inauthentic or "false" macho, with "cowardice hiding behind empty boasts" or similar to the Mexican *pelado,* "a male proletarian . . . poorly educated," or, even worse, as one of the *"mandilones,"* "female-dominated men," because his wife was having to go out and earn wages for the family (Gutmann 1996:226).

When Tony was not migrating jobs or cities to escape his position, he tried to recreate himself in other ways. Curiously, Tony attempted to separate himself from his family, when normally we might think of the opposite, with women trying to escape men who continually trap them. At one point, he cut himself out of all family photos where he was with his wife Olga. After Victor went to court and got a restraining order against his father, another Cuban-American family, the Echevarrias, informally adopted him. At that time, Tony tried to cut himself off from all legal and financial responsibility for Victor, to free him from the obligations he felt toward Victor, including the obligation of disciplining him. However, the Echevarrias refused to sign the papers to adopt Victor formally.

More than once after a period of anger (sometimes before the onset of violence), Tony would take up his keys and wallet and leave in the car (Rivers 2006:189). This short period of escape may have been an attempt at deterring his violence. During life in California, Tony seemed to deteriorate seriously psychologically but also began to take more steps of self-help. One indication that Tony's identity crisis was getting worse was that he spent hours in the

bathroom, as if it were an office. This became his isolated refuge at home, a refuge from work but also a separate space in the household away from the rest of his family:

> Dad had bought a fifty-foot extension cord for the telephone so he could make calls from his throne. With his underwear and pants pulled down, he talked on the phone, read the paper, looked through the classified ads for boats and miscellaneous junk to buy, studied stacks of self-help books, worked crossword puzzles, and called out orders . . . to bring him more Cuban coffee, serve him his breakfast, or perform any chore he desired (2006:139).

Tony read self-help books. He recognized that he had a problem, that his life was not how he wanted it to be. He attempted self-improvement in other forms as well. He started yoga and went to the company psychologist. He began to diet and exercise more, drawing on American standards of a healthy lifestyle. He changed his dress, to a more stylish look at the time: "bell bottoms and Nehru jackets, with big gaudy fake medallions and, on occasion, a kind of flattering Beatles wig" (2006:140). These practices aligned him more with American culture and less with his Cuban background and family. He bought a cassette player and music, probably because music was part of the club scenes in both Cuba and Chicago that he had loved so much, purchasing both Latin artists and popular U.S./British artists like "Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Brazil 66, and Nancy Wilson" (2006:140).

None of this worked well. He continued to be violent. After Olga and most of the children had left, Olga Jr., or "Barbie" (now in her teens) still lived with him. Tony abused Barbie sexually. In 1980, after Victor had finished college and moved to East Hollywood to pursue a career in film with his "adopted" brother Rocky Echevarria, Tony committed suicide in Miami.

Tony's suicide proved to be the ultimate in self-isolation, a further attempt to disconnect himself from family and obligations. He went in the closet and shot himself in the chest with a

double-barreled shotgun. Perhaps the closet was yet another expression of Tony's sexuality issues, given that Americans often speak of homosexuals who reveal themselves as "coming out of the closet." Perhaps going into the closet was another attempt to isolate himself in a remote corner of the house, as he did in making the bathroom his "office." Perhaps it was simply an attempt to hide the sound of the gunshot. Nevertheless, before he shot himself, he turned on Brazil 66 music and set it to play over and over again, so loud that Barbie could hear it two blocks away as she returned home from school. As Victor explains in a mockery of Tony's Cuban accent (an example of mildly anti-Cuban sentiment within Tony's own home), Tony said he listened to Brazil 66 "when he was seeking 'piss of mind'" (Rivers 2006:316). The group Brazil 66 played Latin jazz and samba; it did a lot of remixes from popular U.S. bands. Latin jazz was also the music of the Cuban club in Chicago (Tito Puente, Celia Cruz). The music was to block out the gunshot, but it also reminded Tony of his best moments, socializing at clubs. Tony wanted to escape to peace of mind and fond memories. His suicide was the final example of how he resisted violence and how such excursions always led to more violence – this time against himself. But, as I will discuss later, Tony never fully left his family because his ghost continued to haunt his loved ones for many years.

CHAPTER 3

OLGA RIVAS

Some would say Olga Rivas lived a broken life. Power imbalances and gender roles left her the victim of violence and grief. Born in Havana, Cuba, she married Tony for his money, but he began to abuse her almost immediately. The violence only escalated after they emigrated from Cuba to the U.S. There was no domestic violence shelter, and the police said they could do nothing to help her. She planned the death of her husband, and, when that failed, she attempted suicide. Even here, her husband Tony did not allow her to take full agency, for he "rescued" her from the drug overdose. Tony later threw her out, and, when she divorced him, the court gave Tony custody of the children. She never truly got her children back and finished her life relatively alone in a small trailer, struggling to get by and haunted daily by the ghost of Tony. Certainly, viewing Olga's life as oppression brought on by tragic sociocultural fate *partially* explains what her life was like. However, such a portrayal would disguise the severe problem of her violent responses to abuse. It would also gloss over Olga's conscious efforts to make her life livable in the face of destruction. A more comprehensive way to understand what Olga went through is to see her as having experienced suffering, enacted abuse, and attempted resistance.

Suffering

Olga suffered not only because of the creative ways Tony tortured her but also due to symbolic and structural violence. Olga constructed her marriage on dreams she garnered from friends and the mass media, both of which stressed the ideal of money as essential for a happy life. Olga Lopez, later Olga Rivas, grew up in Havana, Cuba in the 1930s, daughter of Jose Manuel "Manolo," a policeman, and Eladia Ibarra, a seamstress. At 12, she met her first love, Artemio, a man of 21 who drove the city bus to and from her school. Her parents, at first

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resistant, eventually allowed him to take her on dates to experience Havana's nightlife, chaperoned by Eladia. The two were content together and planned on marrying after Olga finished her teacher's certification program, but Olga broke off the engagement after her friends continually told her that money and social status were more important than love. When Olga began her teaching career, which required travel to a number of cities across Cuba, she caught the eye of minister of agriculture Eduardo Suarez Rivas, a man her father's age who had attended her students' art exhibition in Sancti Spíritus, Cuba. He began to pursue her and, the next time he met her, he hinted that if she came to visit him in Havana, he could get her a promotion. Not wanting to involve herself with a man so much older, she avoided his offers until he finally threatened to have her fired. She appealed to his nephew, Tony Rivas, for help. Tony convinced his uncle to leave her alone, but then Tony began to pursue her. He visited her classes and complimented her teaching. While he never asked her on a date, he did visit her father Manolo. He told Manolo that Olga should not teach under the horrible conditions at Cuban schools. He wanted to marry her, and marry her within three months so she would never have to work again, "so that she could take her rightful place in his home" (Rivers 2006:27). Manolo agreed to the marriage.

Olga happily accepted the offer, not because she loved Tony but because his family was rich. She did not have to marry him. She could have supported herself on her own with her promising career as a teacher. Similar to the experiences Ann Miles describes among girls in Ecuador, where mass media and education led girls to imagine successful careers which they could never attain due to structural barriers, Olga wanted to marry Tony because of what marriage could bring, imagining the fabulous life she would have, married to a wealthy heir. The imagined dream was distinctly American. Just as Tony navigated Cuban and American

conceptions of manliness, Olga saw alternative conceptions of happy marriage in Cuban love songs and the American media. Her decision seems to have been part of a broader movement, at least among upper-class Cuban girls, to cast off Cuban ideals of happy marriage for a more realistic and pragmatic American version. Her circle of friends discarded what Cuban love songs were telling them for the higher "truth" of American media; they told her: "Money and social status mattered, as did a prospective groom's name, despite what the love songs said. In fact, in America, front-page headlines blamed the escalating divorce rate on crooners who made romantic love seem so simple, when, as everyone with any sense knew, marriage was work, hard work" (Rivers 2006:22). Consequently, Olga now decided to follow her friends' advice and marry for wealth and social status, unlike her previous love-based relationship with Artemio. She envisioned marriage to Tony as her "Cinderella story" (2006:28). Her parents supported her to some extent, basing their ideas more on Cuban notions of social status than American notions of rational marriage. Manolo initially thought, "Who was he to stand in the way of his daughter's marrying into a family of the stature of the Rivas Garcia-Rubios?" (2006:27). Ultimately, this model of marrying for social class and the more seemingly rational American approach to marriage both won out. And like the Cuban immigrants drawn to America by dreams of better lives, Olga suffered disillusionment, the dream leading her into an abusive relationship.

Structural violence limited Olga's options after the wedding. Olga had resolved to leave after Tony beat her on their wedding night, going so far as to move out to a hotel, but cultural notions of unbreakable wedding vows and not-to-be-violated fatherly advice stopped her from returning home. First, she had taken sacred vows at her wedding. In Roman Catholic tradition, wedding vows bind individuals together for life, under God. Individuals may divorce on legal grounds, but the Catholic Church denounces it. For this, "she hesitated, remembering the sacred

vows she had taken"; she felt shame in breaking her vows, even though her husband had clearly broken his on the night of the wedding (Rivers 2006:31). Her feelings are similar to those of Esperanza Hernández concerning her marriage, discussed by Behar. Esperanza had gone to the family's maguey plants to scrape out the honey. The boy Julio, drunk, sneaked up behind her and grabbed her; then when he let her go he stole her scraper. He kept her there all night, she said, and given that she had now stayed a night with Julio, she felt obliged to marry him, as a matter of reputation, for now she was *robada* (robbed) instead of *pedida* (asked for in marriage): "[P]eople were going to speak badly of me, and all that was going to hurt my reputation. Now that I'm in this, I thought, I may as well go on with it" (Behar 1993:57). The woman who made her wedding dress, Doña Clara, warned her: "A white wedding dress is very beautiful, but it is also very punishing." Doña Chela who taught her the wedding doctrine told her something similar: "You're going to marry? . . . *Tonta*. You're a tonta [fool]. . . . How did you let yourself be deceived? Well, now you're ruined" (1993:62). Esperanza's mother agreed. Although Esperanza had not yet taken her wedding vows, staying out with the boy all night left her with the same cultural stigma as Olga after her wedding night, which appears to be a common Latin American gender theme – emphasizing women as the Madonnas or whores. Once "taken" by their husbands, the shame of losing their virginity outside of wedlock led both to continue with the less-than-ideal marriages.

Second, just as Esperanza did not heed the warnings people gave her, Olga failed to listen to her father Manolo. At the last minute he changed his mind and told her not to marry Tony because he was a bad man, but Olga thought he was being overprotective. Now she was "ashamed," feeling as if she had had only one chance to listen to her father and how that opportunity had passed – or that being silent and sticking with the marriage would make the

nightmare disappear. She had imagined an escape route but ultimately, not to "bring further shame to her family," and not break her "sacred vows," she stayed with Tony (2006:31). The pressures of shame which led Olga and Esperanza into their marriages, while it appears a Latin American theme, is also common in Mediterranean societies, where anthropologists have examined relationships between honor and shame (Wikan 1984; Dubisch 1993).

Olga later considered leaving after the violence escalated, but she no longer had the economic means to do so, due to the low wages paid unskilled workers in the US. She had been in a lucrative teaching program in Cuba, but she had given up the job to marry Tony. She had jobs in the US, to supplement Tony's wages. She worked on an assembly line for a plastics factory and then at Zenith assembling radios. However, her low wages could not support her and the children. A psychologist that Tony visited asked to speak to Olga. He told her Tony had "homicidal tendencies" – that she and the children should get out of the house. However, the psychologist said he could not help her with the question of how to support herself and the children.

As an immigrant, Olga also did not have full citizenship, though her husband did. When they planned to move to California, Tony went ahead alone to establish himself. He failed to send money back to Olga or even contact her. Olga supported the family alone and even thought about leaving Tony, now that she saw that she did not necessarily need him. However, she worried about her lack of citizenship and decided to stay with Tony. Her ability to become a citizen depended on her marriage to Tony, who had already become one.

Finally, according to the actions of the police, current law had few provisions to protect Olga from Tony's actions. Lillian Coleman, one of Olga's neighbors in California, had been encouraging Olga to go to the police. Olga and Lillian did go one day and told the police that

they wanted Tony arrested. The police replied, "We regret that there's nothing we can do; we have to catch him in the act" (Rivers 2006:117). They told her, "Call us next time he's beating you" (2006:117). It would have been nearly impossible for Olga to call the police in the middle of an assault, and thus the police never responded to her claims. One day she even ran down the street screaming after Tony had tortured her in the bathtub by alternating between freezing and scalding water. She ran in an open door a block down the street and called the police from an elderly man's phone. The police came; Tony lied that his wife was crazy. The police left, with just a warning that they would arrest him *next time.* Because the crime had occurred inside the family home, the police had viewed it differently than a robbery or shooting on the street. They allowed greater tolerance for the perpetrator as if it were a dispute between friends, just as a parent might threaten a misbehaving child with a punishment for future similar behavior. The dearth of women's rights in this situation connects to what Lazarus-Black found in Trinidad and Tobago where, although domestic violence was to some extent criminizalized, the legal system still did "not challenge radically the fundamental structures of economic and gender domination in their society" (2001:401). In the case of Olga, the police did suggest they could take action against Tony *if* they had proof, but Olga's complaint of abuse was, for them, not enough evidence to take any kind of action. Although the police were suspicious of Tony's claim his wife was crazy, they ultimately gave more legitimacy to his word than Olga's by leaving the house after this comment, without further investigation. They never requested Tony to give proof of his wife's insanity, but they wanted solid visible proof of Olga's claims to abuse although they could never get it because it took place behind closed doors. Consequently, Olga could not achieve police protection from Tony.

Tony's violence itself also drew on cultural meanings, attacking significant elements of Olga's self-image and social ties to her children and thereby exacerbating her physical and emotional pain. First, Tony targets Olga's beauty as a way of establishing control but also to diminish Olga's self-esteem. Before the marriage, all he had to do was win her for himself, to prove himself by snaring a beautiful woman. Tony never really knew Olga before he married her. Her *physical appearance* was the attraction: Eduardo only "laid eyes on her" and then wanted her, as did Tony (Rivers 2006:25). After the wedding and consummation with Tony, he gained nominal ownership over her, but it was tentative: something he had to prove continually and defend. Once at *El Club Cubano* in Chicago, a man on the dance floor asked Cascara, a man who had escorted Olga out, if he could dance with Olga. Cascara replied, "'This is a married woman. You'll have to ask her husband'" (Rivers 2006:42). The implication is that Tony as a married man gives him, in their eyes, ownership over Olga. Much of Tony's fear about Olga sleeping with another man seems to have derived from this Cuban idea of manliness as having control over his wife. Esperanza's husband had a similar fear of affairs. Once she went into the kitchen at one point during the night, and her husband Julio, not finding her in bed, went and found her and beat her with his machete over the head, accusing her of having been out with a lover. The fear ties back to the idea that a wife having affairs would show the husband to be less macho. Thus Tony may be attacking the same characteristics in Olga he wanted to possess, for fear of losing her to another man, or in an effort to retain control, but also for fear of being designated unmanly.

Olga's beauty and sexuality seem to have been specific targets of Tony's rage, as if removing the features which attracted him to Olga could make her less desirable to other men. On the night of their honeymoon, after Olga had received so many compliments on her

appearance and dress from wedding guests, Tony beat Olga and cut all her honeymoon dresses up with scissors to tiny slivers. On another occasion, he knocked out her teeth. On yet another, he hit her with a karate chop in the throat. For a long time after, she lost her voice. When it returned, it was no longer her melodic and singing voice but a "raspy" and "wheezy" one (Rivers 2006:109).

Second, Tony targets her relationship with her children, which affected her more deeply than his attacks on her appearance. Olga played the feminine caretaker role in the family, but Tony feared that her care would make his children turn out feminine and weak. He forbid her to hug and kiss her children, saying "'you'll pamper them and they'll turn into a bunch of *maricónes*' – slang for homosexuals – 'or sissies'" (Rivers 2006:51). He also forced her to have sex with him while pregnant, even though she did not want to, and which left her worrying constantly about the health of the child. He beat her while she was pregnant. After Tony had knocked her down on the floor that night, he kicked her directly in the belly. The assault damaged the baby's head, giving him a developmental disorder called microcephaly. They institutionalized Robert, and Tony forbid Olga to go see him, tearing up all pictures of him and the address for the institution, and eventually he died at a young age in the institution. Victor describes how his mother cried constantly after this incident and started smoking, later admitting that she almost lost her mind. Tony appeared to feel little loss for the child, but it affected Olga deeply.

Tony also attempted to separate Olga from her other children. On July 24, 1970, their seventeenth wedding anniversary, Tony threw Olga out of the house, dropping her off at a motel, four months pregnant with Carmen. She found a Peruvian couple to stay with, but when she returned to the house at the end of the week, her family was gone. Tony had kidnapped the

children and moved them across the country to Miami, driving off in the station wagon with all their belongings loaded into a boat hitched to the back. To counter the hole in her life that Tony had created when he kidnapped her children, she persisted in raising the money to follow them to Miami. Even with the added pressure of another child on the way, she loved her children too much to let them disappear from her life, and her imagined reunion drove her to follow them. She later wrote as a testimonial: "It goes without saying that I spent many months crying over the loss of my children. Only a mother could understand this pain. I had to again ask for government assistance since I was receiving prenatal care and my due date was fast approaching" (2006:192).

Finally, Tony legitimized his violence as discipline. One reason Tony offered for marrying Olga was that he wanted her to "take her rightful place in his home," which ultimately meant being his servant (Rivers 2006:27). He expected her to serve the family dinner, standing away from the table always on call. She could never sit down and eat with the rest of the family *except* when the grandparents came. On this rare instance, Tony wanted to make a good impression on his parents and show his generosity, constantly complementing her cooking. When he kicked her in the stomach causing Robert's developmental disorder, she had just told Victor that Tony was going to take them all out to dinner so she would not have to cook. Tony's rage may have been a product of her not fulfilling her supposed "job" and wanting to go out to dinner. Abusing her for having supposed affairs with other men may also have been, in Tony's mind, acceptable as discipline for unacceptable behavior.

Abuse

Frustrated and unable to escape victimhood, Olga herself ended up enacting abuse, where violence against her incited her own violence. In this section, I explain how Olga creatively

targeted both Victor and Tony with her violence, and even herself in attempted suicide. In all these cases, Victor says he understood the violence; he forgave it because he knew its source. Victor's legitimization of the violence shows how forgiveness is tied to understanding. Because Victor does not comprehend Tony's violence, he cannot forgive him as easily as he did Olga.

Olga beat Victor only once, and Victor believed he deserved it. Victor had taken her gold watch to school one day. He bragged to the other children that his rich grandparents in Cuba had given it to him. A bully called him communist, and somehow Victor ended up giving the watch to this boy to hold. The boy walked off with it. When Victor called for it back, the bully threw it up in the air. It crashed to the pavement before Victor could catch it, its glass face shattering. A teacher helped Victor pick up the pieces and put them into an envelope. Victor was so ashamed that he hid the envelope when he got home. Olga later found it and, as punishment, beat Victor in the bathtub with a belt.

Concerning her violence against him, Victor explains, "In this case, even though Mami didn't say it, I knew that inflicting punishment on me hurt her far more than it did me. . . . In our unspoken form of communication, we forgave each other as if we knew not to blame each other for my misbehavior and her frustration" (Rivers 2006:93). Victor sees the violence as reasonable because, as he states, neither he nor his mother was "to blame" for their actions (2006:93).

Olga also planned abuse against Tony, though she never carried it out. She thought about pouring gasoline on the bed and lighting it, burning Tony in his sleep, but she could not bring herself to do it. Then she conspired to stab him with his scuba diving knife. One day, she went in the bedroom while he was napping and held the knife above him, ready to kill him. At the last minute, Barbie (Olga Jr.) yelled that someone was at the door. After these failed attempts, she tried to commit suicide by eating all the pills in the bottles on her dresser. Tony found her soon

after and saved her. She explained to Victor, "'I just wanted to rest, *mijo*'" (2006:147). Victor here explains Olga's attempts at Tony's life as done out of desperation. He explains that she attempted suicide because she had just wanted to get away from the madness.

Resistance

Olga is a victim-survivor as well. As a victim, she also resists the abuse, even "during the attack" as Cathy Winkler points out. Although Olga lives under the violence of Tony for many years, throughout this time she engages in small and large strategies of resistance that do help to improve her life and that of her children, even though they are not always fully effective in stopping Tony's abuse or, later, in removing the memories of the violence.

One way Olga is able to resist, or at least to portray herself as a fighter and resistor instead of a victim, shows how gender roles make it easier for Olga to escape blame for the family's economic poverty than Tony, for whom low wages only leave him with depression and feelings of unmanliness. The situation is similar to Collier's conclusion that women have an easier time proving themselves under Christian frameworks because women only have to live up to Eve whereas men were made in a godly image, only here Olga has an easier time proving herself because of her husband's role as provider. Victor describes Olga as a survivor for getting a job to supplement Tony's low wage income. Tony's income was not sufficient to support the family after the move, now that Tony's parents no longer helped financially. Olga got a job at a plastics factory, working on the assembly line, after the family moved from Cuba to Chicago. Later she found a job with Zenith assembling radios. The irony is that by getting the jobs, Olga is able to portray herself to Victor as a resister, a fighter, "La Luchadora," not just the victim that Tony has made her. Because Tony strove for the masculine ideal of provider, his job and the meager income he made only led him to deeper depression, because he could not provide

sufficiently for his family. On the other hand, for Olga, because Victor saw her job to be that of

mother and caretaker at home – child care, cooking, and cleaning – no matter how meager of an

income she made at work, she was still able to portray herself as a fighter to Victor because she

was going above and beyond what he and others saw as her primary gender role. She crosses

gender boundaries and in doing so gains greater recognition from her son. Note that gender-

shifting for men is negative, such as when Tony fears his wife's coddling will make his son's

sissies and homosexuals. Women, on the other hand, can shift gender and thereby supposedly

acquire male strength. A similar crossing of gender boundaries occurs in *Translated Woman*,

where Behar writes that Esperanza took up witchcraft as an instance of gender shifting to

appropriate male power:

> I read in Esperanza's narrative a desire to be macha – a woman who won't be
> beaten, won't forgive, won't give up her rage. A macha too, in the sense of
> wanting to harness a certain male fearlessness to meet evil and danger head on. It
> is this macha quality that fascinates her about Chencha [the medium], who flaunts
> her manliness as the supermacho revolutionary hero Pancho Villa. (1993:923)

Other instances of Olga as survivor show how her escape from violence is not simple and

quick but gradual, complex, and confusing. Olga's silence makes her partially a victim and

partially a survivor. Olga used silence and secrets to keep up the appearance of normalcy. She

would force a smile at family events. When Tony started hitting her in the face and arms she

started wearing dark glasses and long sleeves, lying to her co-workers that she had tripped and

fallen. The secrecy may have helped her avoid more beatings from Tony, but it also hid his abuse

from people outside the household who might have helped. But she learned to protect her

children through silence, having learned that telling Tony about her children's misbehavior

would lead to abuse.

Olga used what means she had to care for her children in the wake of Tony's outbursts. According to Victor, Olga kept secret her "gift of sight": she could sense ghosts and read omens and even cause still water in a glass to boil spontaneously (Rivers 2006:20). Although Tony would not allow her to hug her sons, she nursed their injuries whenever Tony had beaten them. She had originally wanted to be a nurse, not a teacher, but her father thought nursing an unstable profession for a single woman since doctors always had affairs with their nurses. While earning her teachers' certification, she took classes at a nursing school, and as she traveled across Cuba in her role as teacher, she picked up African and Caribbean folk medicine. Cooking was also her specialty; her dad, a chef in the military, had taught her, and her cooking gave her children fond memories. When Tony put Victor on a starvation diet and was monitoring the kitchen contents, Olga brought food home under her hat for Victor from her job at an airline catering company. When Olga returned one day to take care of Barbie, after having left home semi-permanently (she left after Tony hospitalized her by giving her pleurisy from beatings with a metal hairbrush), Victor recalls the warmth she brought back to the house:

> As I entered our home, the sounds and smells exploded: Cuban music, Barbie's laughter, and a cast-iron pan being scraped along the burner. And there, hunched over the stove, as if nothing had changed, was Mami, with my grinning little sister seated at the kitchen table (2006:166).

With Olga gone, Victor describes their house as darker, their situation worse. Yet Olga returned when Tony begged her, doing it, she said, for the children's sake. Olga even stood up to Tony once. Tony was about to thrash Barbie one day for crying after having climbed out of her crib, but Olga, Tony Jr. and Victor ran in and stood between him and the crib. Tony left without doing anything, commenting that they should fix the crib.

Olga's final mechanism of resistance was to file for divorce. She followed her children to Miami. Unlike the first night of her wedding, she no longer wavered over breaking her wedding

vows or feeling shame for not having listened to her father. The change in sentiment was similar

to that of Esperanza who also eventually took her husband to court for the abuse and got a

divorce, despite her earlier worries of shame. It appears that shame decreases with age, perhaps

because of the pressure on young women to achieve a certain perfection of character, for instance

in being virgins. In Olga's case, the judge ruled that she would receive child support for the

youngest child, Carmen, but not custody of the other children because she was on government

assistance. She could see them only once a month. In many ways, the government's decision, a

form of structural violence, reinforced Olga's initial concerns that divorcing Tony would mean

leaving her children as well, and it reaffirmed that legal systems perpetuate domestic abuse by

not providing victims with viable routes for escaping the violence without severe emotional and

economic losses.

It is important to understand, though, that even after Olga had left the house she was not

free of Tony. Tony's ghost continued to haunt Olga after his suicide, as it did her children, and

she found a way to counter this too, witchcraft. Olga called in a spiritualist, similar to how

Esperanza had appealed to one, but Olga's spiritualist did not harness the power of a

revolutionary figure. She called in the figure of Tony himself, who appeared embodied in the

spiritualist. Olga herself had been seeing the ghost of Tony for years, sometimes angry and other

times, loving and repentful: "Once she woke up and found him in bed with her, in an amorous

embrace, but usually his spirit was angry and trapped" (Rivers 2006:340). The channeler found

Tony in a repentful moment:

> The old lithe spiritualist picked up my father's energy from the moment she
> walked into the trailer. Having never met this woman before, Mami was amazed
> as the spiritualist transformed immediately and began to channel Anthony Rivas
> Sr., speaking in his voice, his inflections, and his expressions. And then the
> spiritualist began to cry. As she cried, she began to wring her hands together as if

she was wringing out a handkerchief, and wiping her brow, repeating, "*Perdoname. Perdoname*" (2006:340).

The groveling Tony is far from the masculine fearlessness of Pancho Villa that Esperanza's channeler uses. Olga had called the spiritualist not to get revenge but to *understand,* to find out why he continued to visit her after death. Instead of gender shifting to appropriate male power and male characteristics, she was seeking to resist through feminine caring. Before, Tony used the same plea to keep Olga with him after their first marriage night, appropriating the childlike role to appeal to feminine forgiveness and motherly caring and gain power over Olga. Now, Tony appears helpless and childlike but also *trapped*, unable to leave Olga's trailer. Both Olga and the spirit medium, by portraying Tony in this way, gain narrative power over Tony, turning *him* into the final victim, where, although Tony could abuse her in life, he could not rest in death until *Olga* released him. The spiritualist concluded, "Better free him," and then suggested Olga "keep a fresh glass of water at the highest point in her home," which Olga has continued to do every week since (2006:340). The glass of water allows Olga to remake the story, where *she* is now the dominant and powerful one who holds control over Tony's forgiveness and peace after death. Catholic ideas of confession and redemption are partially the cultural resources that allow her to achieve this. The same "Catholic confession narrative" that Esperanza uses in telling her story appears here in Olga and the spiritualist's retelling of Tony's story after his death. Tony confesses to Olga through the spiritualist. The spiritualist prescribes a remedy to Olga as a priest would assign a penance. This puts Olga in control of Tony's redemption, although, at the same time, she remains a victim because she is the one to carry out Tony's penance.

Olga's attempt to deal with Tony after his death may even be a resistance tactic, at least in the sense that she is resisting Tony's ghost which constantly appeals to her. More than anything else, the resistance aims for closure. If forgiveness is tied to understanding, as Victor's

forgiveness of his mother's violence suggests, perhaps Olga's continual interaction with Tony's

ghost, "angry and trapped," "begging forgiveness," is a further attempt to understand him. Victor

says that Olga always thought Tony acted out of jealousy. She thought he attacked her beauty

because he was jealous of her good looks, of other men who might want her. She also believed

that he attacked Victor because he was better looking than his father. However, Olga never was

able to forgive Tony. Olga and Victor saw Tony as inexplicable, as a person so different from

them that he was beyond comprehension, more of a monster than a human and therefore

unforgivable. They follow the same logic as the anthropologists who see perpetrators only as

abusive agents, a logic which distances Tony from Olga and Victor, further dividing the

household, when in fact all three share many similar experiences when we view them all as

perpetrators, victims, and survivors.

CHAPTER 4

VICTOR RIVAS

Victor wrote his memoir primarily because he was a victim of physical abuse from his father, a male victim not so represented among the more prevalent female accounts of domestic violence. The abuse was not merely physical but attacked elements of special personal significance, such as Victor's self-image and prized possessions such as baseball trophies. Since the memoir focuses primarily on Victor's experience of violence, his account provides an example of daily life under violence, one of isolation, unpredictability, confusion, incomprehensibility, and even normality. In this chapter, I describe how Victor, in addition to victim, was also perpetrator and survivor. I explain how, as a perpetrator, his abusive behavior stemmed from confusion in interaction with girls because of his father's treatment of Olga. Other times, Victor acted violently to distinguish himself at school, but he also used violence as defense. After he escaped the household, the violence continued, because Victor had internalized it as a tool for self-control. In many other ways, though, Victor resisted the violence, becoming more of a survivor than perpetrator. He challenged the normality of his father's rage through ideas from mass media and toys, as well as from personal relationships he had. These positive images gave him the strength to stand up for his brother, escape the household, and achieve justice against Tony in the court system.

Suffering

In this section, I explain how Victor was primarily a victim of physical abuse from his father. Victor describes his daily experiences as similar to living in a "war zone" (Rivers 2006:96-7). Indeed, his life could be described as "inconclusive," in "perennial chaos," with "confusion" and "paralysis" but also "creativity" (Nordstrom and Robben 1995:1-3).

Because Tony abused Victor almost always under the premise that Victor needed disciplining, Victor began to see himself as the bad child who needed punishment. Victor explains, "My own self image was that I was a mean kid and not so smart" (2006:95). Tony compared Victor's poor grades to those of his brother, Tony Jr. He would supervise Victor's homework and slap him if he missed an answer, making it even more difficult for Victor to succeed:

> [Papi] often stood over me as I did my math homework, which was not as easy for me as spelling or penmanship . . . The effort to concentrate with him breathing down my neck was clearly a challenge, and if I got a math problem wrong, which I inevitably did . . . he was sure to try to motivate me with a *pesocozón* – a slap on the back of my head – that reminded me I could never be as smart as Tony (2006:95).

When he tried to do something special that might make his father proud of him, Tony only continued to attack him. Once, he spent the whole day working in the yard, raking and mowing, unasked, to please his dad. When Tony came home and saw the yard, he simply remarked, "You missed that spot. If you're going to do a job, don't do it half-assed" (2006:156).

Despite such claims, however, Victor *was* a relatively smart child. The problem was Tony, and Victor's teachers were so convinced that Victor was dumb that they would blame him of lying or cheating when he achieved something. At school, Victor was involved in a reading program where the students progressed through different colored card levels. Victor worked through the top color card very quickly. His teacher called him up to the desk, Victor thinking he might get an award, but the teacher told him she thought he was cheating. She sent him to the principal, who informed his father. Instead of believing Victor, who swore he did not cheat, Tony told him: "You're lying Bictor [*sic*], and you know why? Because you're not mentally

capable of doing the work you said you did. So now you're an *estupido* and a liar. . . . Tomorrow you'll start SRA over again at the lowest color" (2006:108).[2]

Instead of motivating him to do better, such practices only led Victor to act out more at home and in school. This, in turn, exacerbated the problem by reinforcing negative perceptions of him, especially when he had more freedom to act as he wished. When Tony went ahead to California and left the family in Chicago, Victor explains that he would act out more: "like a convict on early parole, I immediately overdid everything, ignoring or defying boundaries of safety and common sense" (2006:98). The principal called Olga to the office to explain that her son had been writing checks to other students out of Tony's old checkbook, sums of "$200, $1,000, $10,000, [and] $250,000" (2006:99).

Symbolically painful actions, such as biting words or destruction of prized possessions, were more hurtful to Victor than the physical abuse. For example, he explains that his father's words, repeating over and over to him that he was "stupid" for a good half a day, damaged him the most:

> [T]hese beatings and the other sick physical battering didn't damage me the way that his words did. . . . [Once] Dad had spent the better part of the day berating me for my poor performance at school, comparing my mediocrity to Tony's straight-A genius. My name and "stupid" seemed to melt into one (2006:164).

Here, he differentiates between the "physical" beating (the effects of which gradually heal) and the "psychological" damage that was more permanent and lasting (2006:164). One of the worst instances of such violence Victor recalls was when, after an argument, his father took a sledgehammer and broke all of Victor's baseball trophies. He slashed Victor's collection of game balls with a razor blade. Then he used a pair of scissors to cut up Victor's prized All-Star jacket,

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[2] Victor is using the term "Bictor" to emphasize and poke fun at his father's Cuban-accented English, where "v" sounds similar to "b."

and told Victor to clean up the mess. The pain for Victor was so severe that he tried to commit suicide soon after: "That night I slit one of my wrists, but failed again to die" (2006:165). He had already tried once before by swallowing a bottle of Viavrin he shoplifted.

Daily life under Tony's violence was isolating, unpredictable, confusing, incomprehensible, and even sometimes disturbingly normal. The family was already cut off from others by the nature of the "normal" American lifestyle, living as a nuclear family in a single household rather than with a larger family or group. However, Tony further alienated them from neighbors and friends: "We rarely if ever had anyone over for dinner; our friends weren't allowed to play inside with us" (2006:108). Tony also forced them to remain silent: "Dad compensated for the thin walls . . . by ordering us, all of us, to stand in front of him and endure beatings without making a sound. When we were incapable of doing this, he tied a gag over our mouths" (2006:108-9).

Victor's life was unpredictable in the sense that he never knew when Tony might become angry. Victor felt "a looming tension, a feeling that at any moment [Tony] could strike" (2006:43). He felt he could not joke with his father for fear it might spark something. For example, Tony Jr. and Victor once held their noses at the smell of asparagus on Tony's plate, laughing that "Those things on your plate are funny looking and they smell like a fart" (2006:104). As a punishment, he made them eat cold canned asparagus. Then they laughed at Tony's mispronunciation of "grins" for "greens": "Wipe those silly *greens* off your face" (2006:105). The laughs earned a beating from Tony.

In addition, Victor felt much confusion over his life with Tony, bordering on incomprehensibility, often because of the normality Tony exhibited. Because he did not initially recognize Tony's abuse as violence, he felt confused and conflicted about his own behavior.

After Tony beat him for tugging his teacher, the Old Nun, down in an argument in class and

breaking her kneecap, Victor reflects, "That night I fell asleep praying, as I would daily for

weeks to come, that God in his mercy could forgive me. It didn't occur to me to ask forgiveness

for Papi, because I was, after all, at fault" (2006:73). His father's abuse directed at Victor's self-

image gave him the impression that he had no characteristics to be proud of, no special talents,

although Victor at a young age only seemed to recognize this worthlessness as something in his

own nature rather than something his father caused him to feel:

> My intention was not to be bad, of course, but to avoid what was worse:
> being *nothing.* Somehow I had to find a way to distinguish myself, to hold
> my head up and walk proud of something nobody else had (2006:84).

Victor even experienced feelings of shame from past experiences of abuse that he could not

remember until later, further confusing his understanding of his own self. He did not remember

the incident where his father knocked him out of the highchair until much later in life, and when

he did, all he remembered was the fall and an unexplained feeling of "shame" (2006:38). He told

his mother:

> In the dream . . . I was wearing a diaper and had the terrifying, helpless
> sensation of falling backward, as though in slow motion, attached
> somehow to a high chair. With her back to me . . . I described the odd
> emotion of shame that accompanied my fall in the dream (2006:38).

Here, his mother could explain that Tony had hit him for playing with his penis, but with regard,

in particular, to why Tony acted as he did, Victor had much more trouble even comprehending

the situation. As he grew older, he began to see Tony's actions as a severe psychological disorder,

but labeling Tony as "crazy" did not help him much to understand or forgive the violence:

> Though I didn't have the psychological or criminal expertise to analyze
> him, I had many clues that he was crazy, but that knowledge didn't help
> when the bullets started to fly (2006:103).

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Much of the confusion stemmed from the dual role Victor perceived in Tony, as loving father but overly-strict disciplinarian. Tony abused Victor, but he also acted compassionately at times ("accessible, affectionate, even protective") which, Victor explains, threw him "off-kilter" (2006:109). Victor had to go to the hospital from an injury in a footrace around the house with Tony Jr. On the way back, Tony bought him an ice cream cone. To add to the confusion, he punched Victor in the stomach once they arrived home. As another example, when summer came and Victor had done well at school, Tony rewarded him by telling him, "Go out and have some fun" (2006:109). The memoir itself may even be a continued attempt to understand his experiences with his father by writing about them, for, as the book shows, one of the enduring characteristics of Tony is how Victor and others still suffer because they cannot fully understand him.

Abuse

Victor's experiences with Tony's violence partially led him to become a perpetrator of violence. In this section, I examine how some of Victor's violence stemmed from his confusion on how to interact with girls, given his father's abuse of his mother. Other times, he acted violently unintentionally in his attempts to distinguish himself at school. The most deliberate of Victor's violence, he did in defense, first a defense of his mother from his father's affairs, and second, plans to save everyone else in the household by murdering Tony, a response to the abuse of himself and other family members.

In interacting with girls, Victor had difficulty, partially because he was receiving mixed messages from his home life and the mass media. At home, he saw his father beat his mother to enforce his own control, treating his mother as a possession. In addition, he explains that "he had never seen his parents kiss . . . though he saw people kissing on television" (2006). Combining

these ideas, he once tried to kiss a girl he liked at school, in kindergarten. When he puckered his lips and nothing happened, he told her he wanted to kiss her. She acted disgusted. He replied, "'Jou better kees me!' . . . 'or I wheel push jou head in da wall'" (2006:55). His actions reflect those of young American boys in Julia Hall's study of Canal Town, where young boys hit female classmates at school. They normalized violence at school and at home with claims that women, specifically their mothers, were abused because they did not carry out their duties. One boy "exclaim[ed] that his mother 'doesn't always do what she's supposed to,'" namely she did not clean the house well enough, and this failure "in his opinion . . . warranted her being 'pushed around' (2000:478). Likewise, Victor "knew" from television that the girl was "supposed" to kiss him, but since she refused to carry out her role and obligation, he banged her head into the wall.

Here, Victor is combining a number of diverse messages. He had gotten, from somewhere, the message that he should "compliment" the girl if he liked her. Yet the idea of complimenting a girl left room for creativity; he had to decide for himself, in this case from movies on older couples, how exactly to do so. Yet the girl did not interpret the kiss as positive, only disgusting, for she "scrunched her face as if smelling something foul," perhaps even with a tint of racism. Since Victor explains that other "boys in kindergarten said girls were icky," the girl's reactions suggest she was acting on a culture of boy-girl interactions specific to young ages in America. The children felt that members of the opposite sex were "icky," except Victor of course, who was already striving toward Cuban ideals of macho gentlemanliness, which fit well with the romantic images of couples in TV movies.

Victor also acted violently with a teacher in an attempt to distinguish himself at school. He brought a red rubber ball to school that the Old Nun (at Catholic school) confiscated because

he played with it during class, showing off to the other kids. He begged for it back, but she told him he could only get it at the end of the year. He demanded it back, throwing a temper tantrum. The Old Nun threatened to take him to the mother superior for his behavior, which meant a phone call to his father. She tried to drag him by the arm, but Victor dug in his heels. In the ensuing tug-of-war, Victor pulled the nun off-balance, and she crashed to the floor breaking one of her kneecaps, leaving Victor shocked with a lasting image of what he had done:

> The class inhaled in unison into a clenched *GASSSPPPP* as she tumbled onto the hard tile floor, landing there on all fours. Her habit had flipped over her head, veiling her face, giving her the appearance of a downed, winged bird. Then she lifted her head and let go a bloodcurdling SCREAM (2006:70).

Again, Victor wanted to take control of the situation, to avoid the physical violence that would have ensued if the nun had called his father. He reacted physically, as his father had always done, thereby hurting the teacher, although the hurt was not intentional. He later regretted what he had done, again with "shame" that he had abused the nun as his father did his mother: "The shame that I felt for hurting the helpless Old Nun made me unable to look at my mother" (2006:73). Victor's feelings were not unlike his mother's decision to stick to the marriage with Tony, where, on the one hand, she herself felt ashamed for not having listened to her father but, on the other hand, worried the shame would reflect upon her family if she backed out of the marriage. Victor felt the same duality, where his hurting the nun translated into a violence against his mother. Just as Olga felt she had not listened to her father's advice, Victor felt he had diverged from the lessons his mother was "teaching" him in the suffering she endured.

Victor carried out other acts of violence almost as a form of self-sacrifice in defense of his own self, his mother, and his siblings. For instance, Tony once took Victor and Tony Jr. to the circus. He brought a lady "friend," with whom he was having an affair (2006:94). The

woman had a son and Victor, "[n]ot willing to play along" with his father's affair, "ended up punching the kid in the nose" (2006:94). Victor understood the affair as an assault on his mother, and, as a signal that he did not want to participate, decided to punch someone in the nose. The punch may also have been a symbolic way of defending his mother, using a physical punch because he understood physical fighting as the way to solve disagreements, not only from his experience at home but also from the atmosphere at school where violence among boys was a common element of schoolyard culture. One boy would challenge another to a fight or chase down another boy. In one instance, Victor accidentally kicked a ball in another boy's face; a posse of boys returned to attack Victor, one "snarl[ing]" the phrase "You're dead" (2006:62). In another instance, Victor's description of how a fight between he and another boy shows how pervasive and ingrained this type of confrontation was:

> With my reputation as a fighter established back at York, I was avoided by most of the tougher kids, who might have seen me as a threat. But in early 1968, I had a heated exchange with a large, gruff kid who usually kept to himself and sat in the back of typing class. We started to square off when our blind teacher put an end to it. . . . As we left class, he walked over. He wasn't done with me and I wasn't backing down (2006:132).

Schoolyard violence here was so common that students had established "reputations" and pecking orders of "tougher" versus weaker boys (2006:132). As Victor's writing shows, the way to settle conflict, for instance Victor's "heated exchange" in typing class, was a physical fight after school (2006:132). At the circus, Victor was not fighting another kid at school but rather using that type of violence to show his resistance against his father's extramarital affair, attacking the small boy rather than his father Tony because of the greater danger of Tony's retaliation, following again the schoolyard rule of avoiding fighters who were too great a "threat" (2006:132).

Victor's most serious plans for violence involved murdering his father to save the rest of his family. By the age of 10, Victor did recognize Tony's abuse for what it was. This shift coincided with Tony's adoption of more "adult" forms of violence. Ironically, Tony's escalation of violence helped Victor recognize the problem as "true" violence rather than as discipline. Victor soon experienced a distinct change in himself, from boy to hardened man. He was in his early teens at the time, meaning he really did experience his childhood as much shorter than wealthier children in the U.S., for whom feelings of childhood or young adulthood may continue through age 18 or later. When he was younger, he equated the beatings with his father's concern for his welfare. On the beating he received after pushing a girl at school, Victor recalls how he felt he deserved the abuse: "Thoughts of the impending pain clashed with my concern for the Blue-Eyed Girl and the sense that I deserved to be reprimanded" (2006:57). He recalls how through early childhood he sensed that "whatever punishment [he] received, [he] deserved" (2006:38). He says he "resisted accepting" that the inside of his house was a violent war zone, seeing it, rather, as "a training ground to prepare [him] for [his] real destiny," "an elaborate test with a prize at the end," or "a joke" (2006:39). After the beating with the choke chain, Victor decided to appeal to the police for help, showing them his injuries, although they cast it off as a "private family matter" (2006:144). After Tony peed on him, Victor describes, "Whatever flicker that once burned of the proud young boy who yearned so desperately to love and be loved was just about out" (2006:15). Victor attempted suicide shortly after, by swallowing a bottle of Viavrin he had shoplifted, although his brother found him, told him to take a shower and eat some food, and then talked to him about his reasons for wanting to die, telling him to "hang in there" until they turned eighteen and could leave (2006:158-9).

After the police ignored Tony's abuse, Victor went searching the neighborhood for a gun to kill his father. Murder was the solution for Victor because of its cultural power. He knew, perhaps from seeing the news or reading about crime cases, that the police always acknowledged and took seriously murder cases, if nothing else. However, Victor did not base his decision solely on this understanding. He also knew from having gone to the police and shown them where his father beat him, that proving the violence alone would not save his family because the police told him it was a "private family matter" (2006:144). Thus Victor's understanding of murder *combined with* his experience with the police, not one of the other alone, is what led Victor to the decision of murder; he explains, "Since I had come to the conclusion that no arrest would be made unless [Tony] killed one of us or we killed him there didn't seem to be any alternative" (2006:145). He even consulted family members to make sure he was making the right decision, and they reinforced his decision:

> When I put it to both of them, asking, if I got a gun and killed Dad, 'will you back me up and say it was self-defense?' Without hesitation both Tony [Jr.] and Mami nodded yes (2006:145).

Victor never killed his father because, as he explains, even though he asked around the neighborhood, he could never acquire a gun. Yet his inability to kill his father also seems to have stemmed from his understanding of kinship, where he felt that family bonds demanded he love his father, no matter what his father did. The day Victor ran away from home for good, Tony had thrown his scuba knife at Victor but missed, giving Victor the opportunity to kill Tony with it, but Victor still loved his father too much to carry out the murder. He told Tony he "couldn't," remarking "You're my father" (2006:198).

Victor simply decided to leave his family, running away and sleeping the night in the graveyard since he saw no other options. After a short period of time, he joined a gang, but he

dropped out the first time a gang member pulled a gun. In Miami, men driving by would pick him up and come on to him sexually. In return, he beat them up and stole their money. On the one hand, this type of behavior shows how he had learned to use violence to get some kind of benefit. On the other hand, he had limits. He used violence only for self defense and survival.

Resistance

In this section, I discuss Victor's creative methods of resistance to Tony's violence. He drew from slogans and ideas picked up from mass media and toys, books, social programs such as Little League and Boy Scouts. He also drew on prominent cultural figures such as the Kennedies, Martin Luther King Jr., and Gregory Peck, and personal figures like his grandparents, a servant in Cuba, and a school teacher. Because Tony's violence almost always occurred within the house, he was able to escape by leaving home.

Many of the early actions Victor takes to buttress himself against Tony's violence drew on slogans and ideas from toys and the mass media. One Christmas, he received a talking G.I. Joe that was supposed to repeat many phrases but ended up only able to say one, "I've got a tough assignment" (2006:2). Victor tried to imitate the G.I. Joe in his own actions:

> I learned to say it just like the G.I. Joe's recorded voice. Resolved, committed to a higher purpose. It became both my unspoken and spoken mantra, employed for facing whatever lurked in the next room (2006:2).

As an army figure, the G.I. Joe probably attracted Victor because it was solid in its declaration, "resolved" and "committed," unlike his own confusion; it was also a strong figure for fighting against enemies (2006:2). The G.I. Joe, as a part of American culture, provides a medium for Victor to reproduce ideas of *machismo*. His understanding of the figure drew off the same figure of macho strength that his father performed through his abuse. However, Victor creatively manipulated or transformed the model as well. The G.I. Joe, for Victor, embodied a certain

altruism, a commitment to a "higher purpose" (2002:2). The higher purpose was something Victor says he hoped to possess in order to counter his feelings of worthlessness. The masculine figure that Victor ultimately ended up striving for, perhaps as a result of the abuse he suffered under Tony, was a man who, unlike Tony, genuinely cared for his children, a *protective* or paternalistic macho figure.

A similar idea came from the comic books Victor read. In them, he noticed ads about a man named Charles Atlas who had studied the muscles of tigers to develop a program called Charles Atlas's Dynamic Tension. Victor did not have the money to purchase the program, so he decided to study tigers on his own. He saw how tigers are tensed and ready, so he would imagine himself a tiger, contracting his muscles before his father hit him. He even dreamed himself a tiger, but a tiger who never attacked things but rather protected creatures in danger (2006:64). Like G.I. Joe, Charles Atlas and the tiger were images of strength and manliness who were physically strong enough to defend themselves and others.

Victor took the lessons his father "taught" him and critically questioned their justness. He created synthesized survival lessons. These were like quotes or poems that captured a large amount of experience or description in a short statement, often striking a person as profound, something worthy of further circulation. Victor intersperses the statements through his narrative as lessons for his reader, such as "Survival lesson number one: Maintain a sense of irony," "Survival lesson number two: Accept the kindness of strangers," "Another cold survival lesson: Every man for himself," "Sometimes you have to dig through shit to retrieve lost treasure," "Adversity doesn't always breed character. And later: if the shoes don't fit, don't wear them" (2006:39,40,52,48,81). Victor uses the short quotes to give force to his statements, and they also

help him give compact meaning to events that otherwise might seem confusing and irreconcilable.

Note that "irony" is his first principle; an ironic phrase is contradictory to what one expects a person to say, to mock the expected phrase or actual event (2006:39). Many of Victor's "survival lessons" are ironic because they form a bitter joke from Victor's far-from-normative childhood, such as "Adversity doesn't always breed character," which reflects how Tony's disciplinary abuse led Victor only to further misbehavior (2006:81). The joke captures what Victor later perceived as the unnaturalness of his childhood abuse. Using this form allows him retroactively to resist the violence by turning a confusing and isolating situation that made him feel worthless into a humorous mockery of the same situation, which offers a valuable insight to help readers who might be in similar difficult circumstances. Carolyn Nordstrom has found such creative responses among people in Munapeo, Mozambique during the civil war. Joking about violence or offering concentrated symbols or parables allowed people to capture the war in concentrated form, evoking "a bloodshed of images," and thus reconstruct their worlds through creativity and imagination (1995:144-7). In fact, Victor's memoir is a way of resistance, of making coherence out of the confusion. Just as Cathy Winkler's academic essay on being raped provides her with a sense of coherence, storytelling puts Victor's disordered life into order, into a victorious tale moving from war to peace.

Social programs such as Boy Scouts and Little League helped Victor escape Tony and isolation. Most importantly, these programs helped Victor perceive his childhood as a "real childhood" rather than a war zone. As Victor explains, "The world outside of our home, as I understood it, was where I could be a child" (2006:45). Boy Scouts was "not too militaristic," with "fun" childhood activities full of "camaraderie," such as "camping trips" and "jamborees,"

"sports," and "festive activities" (2006:113). Baseball was special to Victor too because he was very good at it. It gave him a "sense of pride," something he never felt before (2006:112).

Victor also looked to prominent cultural figures in the mass media as icons, images of good people and "true" fathers, again to counter Tony's disciplinary emphasis with a more paternalistic vision of fatherhood. Partially, Victor's ability to draw on these figures makes him more of a victim, because they help him recognize his own father's abusive behavior. But, he still imagines replacing Tony with these better role models, resisting by envisioning himself as part of more loving and less abusive family relationships. While growing up, Victor "admired" people such as "John and Robert Kennedy" and "Martin Luther King Jr.," thinking how unfair it was that people such as these were murdered while his father was still alive and abusing others (2006:189). He imagined himself adopted by "Jack and Jackie" because JFK embodied Victor's ideal father, "noble, brave, strong" (2006:59). When Tony abused him, he would imagine, alternatively, Jack's fatherly punishment: "President Kennedy would have given me a stern talking-to, or sent me to my room to write an essay, but that would have been the end of it" (2006:59). Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird* was also a significant father figure for Victor. Victor prayed to make Tony more like Gregory Peck because Peck portrayed fatherly "devotion" and justice, "truth and righteousness": "Finch's heroism in standing up for truth and righteousness was equaled by his devotion to his kids, Jeb and Scout" (2006:119).

Victor also found figures outside of T.V. to label under his ideal vision of parenting: Abuela Maria, his grandmother; Moya, a servant in Cuba; and an eighth grade teacher, Mrs. Rice. Victor's use of these characters in his narrative as examples of good parenting again show his resistance to Tony's parenting through discipline. Once when Abuela Maria came to visit in the U.S., instead of forcing Victor to take a nap, she bribed him with a quarter. He was so happy that

he wanted to jump on his bed, but, worrying his quarter would fall, put it in his mouth and ended up swallowing it. He cried to his grandmother that he had lost it forever, but, unfazed, she recovered it for him the next time he went to the bathroom, hence the lesson "Sometimes you have to dig through shit to retrieve lost treasure" (2006:48). Here, Victor highlighted how his grandmother offered alternatives to Tony's disciplinary methods. Victor no doubt remembered her parenting once he became a father.

Moya worked on the family's ranch in Cuba, Las Minas, as a head driver. Moya offered a more caring yet masculine alternative to the macho disciplinary father figure of Tony. Tony Jr. and Victor were playing in Moya's parked car and moved the gear out of park. The car crashed into bushes across the street. Instead of immediately jumping to discipline the children, as Tony might have done, Victor perceived Moya as caring most whether the children were okay. He explains:

> Seeing that we were uninjured, though traumatized, he told us we were extremely lucky that there had been no traffic on the main road and that we hadn't crashed or tipped over into a roadside canal. Moya's message had another implication for me, which was that a protective adult would do anything in his power to make sure children in his care were not hurt. My father's messages from this era told me something else (2006:36-7).

Moya, to Victor, was a figure of a "protective" adult, not an abusive one, perhaps another source for Victor's conclusion, now that he has become a father, that a true man should be protective of his children. While this brought to light the contrast between these cultural images of fatherhood and the forms which Tony drew on, though to extremes, for his abuse. In doing so it gave Victor another idea of how he could father his child well without the abuse Tony seemed to think was necessary.

Finally, escape was a method of resistance for Victor, as it was for Tony and Olga. He achieved it through a decision to run away and with help from the legal system. Unlike Olga,

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Victor ran away and stayed away when he perceived the abuse as life-threatening. This occurred after he stood up to his father one day, when the family was living in Miami. Tony asked who left the lid up on the toilet, and Victor replied that he had done it, covering for his brother Eddie, acting on his sense that he, now a man, should protect his younger siblings. Tony and Victor got in a physical fight, and Victor ended up winning, pummeling his father cowered on the floor. Tony crawled to his room, and Victor, Eddie, and Barbie could hear him crying in his bedroom. When Tony came out, he had his scuba knife in hand and threw it at Victor's head. The knife missed. Victor picked it up, Tony taunting him to kill him, but Victor could not kill his father. Tony left the house, and Victor, worried that Tony would return to kill him, packed his clothes in a grocery bag and ran out of his house, staying a few nights in a graveyard. A boy from school came by and found him. Victor told the boy everything, things he had never told anyone before about his father, and the boy took Victor to his father, a lawyer, who helped Victor take Tony to court.

The judge ruled on Victor's side, issuing a restraining order against Tony, allowing Victor to remain with his mother. Unlike Olga, Victor had not felt enough of the same motherly responsibility toward his brothers and sisters to remain in the household with Tony when his life was threatened. His way of protecting his siblings was not to care for them so much as to stand up to Tony for Eddie, as the G.I. Joe, JFK, MLK, or any other of his ideal figures would have. Age also made a difference; a child running away from home would have been a common figure in American culture. Yet a mother running away from home, from her children and marriage, would have seemed an unwarranted escape from duties and responsibilities. Of course, Victor never fully escaped because the memory and storytelling are processes of reliving the experience,

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although from a shifted perspective where narrating his abuse becomes positive and useful, a way of helping others living under domestic violence.

Most importantly, however, Victor shows that he was never doomed to follow the abusive model of his father, although he feared he would. He reaffirms this conviction about parenthood when he speaks about the birth of his own child: "All of the anxiety and fear I had carried with me for thirty-nine years washed away in those first private moments between *this* father and his son. Eli would have a home that he would want to come home to and never fear" (2006:358). Contrary to the idea that violent fathers instill violent parenting in their children, Victor shows that he was able to creatively shift away from the abusive father figure Tony offered, a model closer to paternalism, where fathers are supposed to protect their children, not harm them.

CHAPTER 5

SIGNIFICANCE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LITERATURE

This thesis has argued that the categories of "perpetrators" and "victim-survivors," often used by anthropologists to study domestic violence, oversimplify lived experience. I have shown how each member of the Rivas family acted abusively, and the frequency of such violence and its rationalization depended on the dialectic between culture and the individual. This case study fits well with Erving Goffman's definition of "stigma," "a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity" (1986:3). Societies make assumptions about the nature of individuals, ascribing to them negative or tainted attributes which unwittingly misrepresent the wider range of characteristics people actually possess. In this case, the point is not that the labels are unsuitably negative but that the labels lead us to assumptions about individuals which, in capturing only a few characteristics of the entire person, make it difficult to understand the full complexity of domestic violence. Furthermore, despite how sociological and anthropological literature on gender often casts men as dominant, all of the Rivases suffered acutely and searched for ways to resist such violence. In fact, stressing gender divisions for abuse, victimhood, and resistance overlooks the broader point that *imagination*, in the form of ideal social and familial relationships, drove many of the family members' actions, positive or negative. Within this creative dialectic between individuals and culture, notions of *discipline* and *control* became far more important than anthropologists have emphasized, primarily because of how the conflict escalated over time, becoming ever more confusing and contradictory.

I broke down the chapters on each character in terms of abuse, suffering, and survival, and within each of these experiences we can see the creative manipulation within Cuban-American culture, compounded by socioeconomic factors. On *abuse*, Bourdieu argues that men

have "weapons" of "physical violence" and "symbolic violence" (2004:339). But to attribute these simply to a man's status as a man does not recognize that Tony drew his weapons from broadly-available cultural forms. In enacting abuse, for example, Tony partially followed the Cuban ideal of sending his male children to learn how to be "men" in the U.S., but instead of sending them to military school as his parents did him, he moved his children to the U.S. and instituted the U.S. military discipline standards at home, drawing his models of abuse from more standard U.S. (and perhaps also Cuban) child discipline measures such as spankings. Different from Julia Hall's emphasis on schools' enculturation of children, the U.S. Catholic and public schools encouraged Tony's role as discipliner. And the changes in Victor's age, as he was becoming a man, which might have challenged Tony's dominance and seem to have triggered Tony to draw more heavily from mass media (for example the police riot suppression techniques) in order to assert himself as the ideal Cuban-American man at home suggest we might need to pay more attention to shifting relations among individuals in a family over time, such as when a boy becomes a "man" or a woman becomes a "wife."

However, these same cultural models were available to Olga and Victor as well. They were not weapons *only* available to men, and Olga and Victor used violence when other attempts at gaining control over their situations failed. Victor, with his romantic notions of gender relations, used violence to force what he saw as the proper and ideal responses when his efforts at wooing female classmates failed miserably, leading to further disciplinary problems at school. The unattainability and inherent ambiguity of these ideals, and the subsequent violent responses, spiraled the family into a deepening state of disorder. As the conflict became more perplexing and incongruous, it required imaginative responses. The Rivases' decisions became like those in a war zone where a breakdown in social order leads actors on all sides to attempt to retake

control of their lives through creative means, as Robben and Nordstrom described. Thus, for example, Olga in an instance of gender-bending, turned to violence (child discipline) to control Victor when Tony's own efforts, increasingly abusive, were only creating further chaos. Yet unlike what Krista Van Vleet is suggesting when she emphasizes abuse as common among mother-in-laws in the Bolivian Andes, the action though is not a culturally standard feminine act because Olga generally took a nurturing and doctoring attitude toward child-raising, with her Cuban cooking and doctoring. The breakdown in familial order and the desire to reassert control is likely what pushed Olga into the alternative model, as it seems to have done for both Olga and Victor when they turned to plans of homicide and suicide when the police would not help.

Suffering they experienced primarily because of Tony's abuse and working-class and other socioeconomic issues in the U.S., involving imagination and failed hopes and dreams. Tony did use cultural values and meanings against Olga and Victor in symbolic violence, and he used physical violence. But Tony was not the only factor which enticed Olga into the marriage and kept her there. Olga's imagined ideal of an American marriage for money, not love, led her into an abusive marriage. Shame, but also low wages, U.S. citizenship (or lack thereof), and little police help, seemed to have kept her from leaving Tony. Victor was not old enough to have a job, but Tony's abuse of him for lying and stealing, to supposedly to discipline Victor into a better person, fit with Goldstein's model of poorer children not having a childhood because their parents want to prepare them for a harsh life. Although, discrimination against Cuban-Americans as "Communists" and less trustworthy than Americans may have played a role in Tony's worry over discipline as well, especially if Tony really was trying to get rid of the rebellious Cubanness in both he and his son.

Again, however, Tony suffered under the same gender ideals that led him to abuse his wife and children, and his poor work conditions contributed to frustration and physical exhaustion in trying to support his family. He seemed to have been imagining solutions in moving to new locales, such as Miami in an attempt to reconnect with Cuban culture, or in Cuban and American music, new fads or psychologists and self-help guides. The suffering did not justify the violence, but it does help explain Tony's frame of mind. He may have been abusively dominating his family, but he certainly was not completely happy with the situation, as anthropologists who offer solutions only to women seem to be implying.

Instead, each person was attempting *resistance* in some form or another. Take, for instance, Olga's appeal to a spirit medium, Tony's attempt to remake his life through physical migration and self-help books, and Victor's imagining of new fathers for himself and his ultimate decision to run away from home. Each person did turn to outside aid – Tony to a psychologist, and Victor and Olga to the police. They chose the solutions because these cultural forms were part of the actors' conceptions of how to control escalating problems at home. But these idealized "solutions" did not work, and family members appealed to more extreme models, like Tony's use of police counter-riot techniques from the news. For Olga and Victor, homicide and suicide became last-resort attempts to reassert control, and even Tony turned to suicide in the end. For all these reasons, anthropologists need to give greater thought to models of individual and social control that family members draw on in cases of domestic violence.

In short, it is not possible to encapsulate the experience of Cuban-American domestic violence, since, as Maria Torres explained, political émigrés are trapped between communism and capitalism, between Cuba and America. The Rivases' scattered experiences of abuse, suffering, and survival parallel the confusion and unpredictability of their situation, not unlike a

war zone, as Victor himself described his home. This unpredictability appeared even in how the family draws from cultural models. Sometimes they did seem caught between Cuban and American ideals, as when Olga considered who to marry and why. Other times, actions seemed to derive from a mix of sources and motivations, and sorting out the Cuban and American parts is difficult, if not even perhaps unimportant. More important is how all experiences in this Cuban-American case of domestic violence overlap at the points of abuse, suffering and resistance. Writers on gender such as Bem and Wasserstrom emphasize gender roles, or gendered differences, in how people interact and lead to female oppression in the U.S. In this case, individuals *do* make different decisions based on broad spectrums of gender roles. Olga for instance never seemed interested in proving her virility like Tony. However, perhaps because people are striving to reassert control in any way they can imagine, the gendered distinction anthropologists often make between perpetrators and victim-survivors simply does not appear to hold in this case.

CHAPTER 6

AFTERWORD

Practical Applications

I also believe my research has implications for how we should deal with domestic violence in the United States. Domestic violence agencies differentiate between male abusers and female victims and survivors, and in doing so they underemphasize the importance of offering valuable solutions to men. For example, the United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women and the Florida Coalition of Domestic Violence provide resources primarily for female victims. These organizations supply information on how to tell if you (a woman) are being abused and your legal options. They also offer a section for illegal immigrants on the Florida website. The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence states it is "working to end violence against women" (NCDSV 2008). Resources for men are rare. One of the few web pages I found was a section on the National Domestic Violence Hotline's website called "Am I Abusing?" The page says: "Not all men are abusive, how do you measure up?" It offers a few definitions of abuse and then concludes: "Domestic violence is a crime. It destroys relationships and families. It passes from generation to generation. It doesn't have to be this way" (NDVH 2008). Then it cites a hotline number men can call for further help. The website is asking men to recognize themselves as perpetrators, and as such, it does not acknowledge how men can be victims of violence too. The emphasis that the violence is a "crime" might further deter men from calling to find solutions out of fear of being arrested for the actions they have already taken. Better explanation and recognition of the issues men face, and better solutions than enacting violence, need to be laid out clearly on the websites as resources for men – that is, just as clearly as the solutions websites offer for women.

These agencies also overemphasize women as victims and survivors. They do not speak

to issues of anger and violence among women or other abused family members, as when Victor

and Olga decided to kill Tony out of revenge and self-preservation. People often see homicide

and suicide as solutions for bringing their homes out of the war zone that it has become, and yet

violence resources such as the website I mentioned above are only targeting *men* as violent. For

example, in February and March of 2008, although most news articles focus on husbands'

killings of their wives, many crimes involved women who murdered their husbands over

domestic violence. For example, on February 21, Barbara Sheehan in Queens NY killed her

husband, and ex-police officer, alleging years of abuse (Cusenza 2008). On March 3, Melonie

Lee Jackson in Baker County, FL fatally shot her husband. Her son said she had made previous

statements about killing him. Melonie said he was abusing her, that he:

> cut her with a hunting knife, sexually assaulted her, dragged her through the
> house by the hair . . . all before taking her outside where she said Mr. Jackson
> intended to murder and bury her (Addington 2008).

The husband had filed for divorce saying his wife was delusional, similar to the controversial

claims between Olga and Tony. The son had left home because of previous problems with his

father (Addington 2008).On March 4, Lona Scott of DeKalb County, GA shot and killed her

husband, saying she suffered domestic violence (11Alive News Staff 2008). On March 10,

Jeannie Buttry in Kentucky murdered her husband William. He was beating their 22-year son

over the head with the 9-mm. She took control of the gun and shot him (Herald-Leader Staff

2008). As these recent article suggests, violence, specifically homicide, by women victims is

more common than it might seem by looking at domestic violence organizations and resources

for victims, suggesting a need for more attention on how family members (not just women)

consider murder as the way out.

The tendency to discuss males as abusers and women as victims is an international trend, and in Russia one solution has been to create special resource centers for men's issues. The centers could be a model for American organizations. Rebecca Kay and Maxim Kostenko, researching ideas of masculinity in Russia, found that Russian men are in "crisis" (2006:90). Men felt that "tireless striving was a marker of positive male identity and behavior," as was being a provider for their families (2006:97). However, the lack of stable jobs after the fall of the Soviet Union led them to take on long and stressful hours of infrequent employment or multiple low-paying jobs to continue to provide for their families, which, ironically, they saw less of as a result of such long work days (2006:97). The situation caused both "psychological" and "physical" stresses, which fed off one another (2006:98). The men described the work as causing "feelings of acute exhaustion," the exhaustion only causing greater stress because "if their health were to fail they would lose everything" (2006:98). Kay and Kostenko argue that such issues often contribute to domestic violence in Russia and the U.K. Acknowledging and addressing abusive men's problems, however, was often seen as "working with the enemy," a diversion of funds "from the more 'deserving' cause of work supporting the victims of violence and abuse" (2006:111).

The Altai Regional Crisis Centre for Men in Western Siberia aims to solve men's crises. One of the only such male help facilities in the country, it addresses "the psychological and cultural barriers that men experience in accessing and accepting support" (2006:103). The goal is to counter stereotypical ideas and expectations regarding gender roles and family relations. Given that most of Tony's problems revolve around unobtainable ideals of Cuban-American masculinity, counseling on these issues may have proven useful.

However, I believe that this decision to treat women and men's issues separately is insufficient, given that domestic violence is ultimately both a familial problem and a socio-cultural one. To address men and women separately in domestic violence cases is to deal with isolated halves of what is ultimately a *household* crisis. Edward Snajdr (2005) in studying community responses to domestic violence in Kazakhstan found that, in contrast to the United States' divided approach, a group of Muslim women treated the violence as a familial problem, talking to both men and women (as well as members of the village community) in hopes of helping them resolve the conflict and offering a safe place for women to stay if they desired to leave their husbands for a period of time. The only problem with this model is that the Muslim women encouraged husbands and wives not to divorce, to work out the issues, based on an Islamic value of the family. Women in the U.S. may or may not want to "resolve" the conflict in this way. Given Latin American socio-cultural norms, Olga and Esperanza, for instance, say they only stayed for as long as they did because of shame and, later, economic reasons. Nevertheless, to the extent that women or men do want to work out the issues in hopes of keeping the family together, family counseling could offer a more viable solution. It could emphasize conflict resolution, depending on whether or not such a solution is possible. And it could stress non-violent solutions and offer more specific alternatives.

Any solution to domestic violence which works with individual families after domestic violence has begun, however (the Altai center, for instance), cannot offer a serious challenge to underlying social and cultural problems. In the case of the Rivases, problems included low wages, racism, gender ideals, and ineffective social institutions to deal with the problem. Unacceptably low wages and poor working conditions contributed to Tony's issues, as did anti-Cuban sentiment. It is important to note how Tony's own economic and cultural problems as a Cuban-

American immigrant influenced how he decided to raise his son, where Tony felt Victor needed the preparation for a severe life ahead. These issues of poverty and racism need to be addressed. Likewise, gender ideals often remained idealized and unobtainable, and they left a discrepancy between Olga's and Tony's notions of an ideal marriage. Family members turned to police and psychologists, as I mentioned before, but the institutions did not help solve the family's problems.

Finally, mass media offered violent images of social control. We need to begin considering the value of these cultural models and how the media portrays them, to determine whether or not there are ways to lessen peoples' manipulative use of such images. Often it seems that violent forms of control become glorified, as with the women who, in the news or on movies, shoot their husbands and seem finally "free" of the abuse. Often these models are just as much "imagined" and "idealized" solutions as achieving help from the police turned out to be for Victor and Olga, but the mass media does not always portray them as such.

Personal Significance of the Topic

My experiences in Guatemala in the summer of 2007 sparked my interest in research on violence against women, which led to this study of domestic violence. In turn, these findings helped to elucidate what I experienced in Guatemala. The first half of my stay in Guatemala involved language lessons in the second-largest city next to Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango (also called Xela), wherein femicide was a serious issue, although not as great a problem as in Guatemala City. According to a publication from the Center for International Policy in 2006, "more than 2,400 women have been murdered in Guatemala since the year 2000" (Paterson 2006:1). For these crimes, the justice system has only given "15 sentences," and the murders are worsening:

> [M]ore than 300 women were murdered in 2003, 527 in 2004, and 624 in 2005. Often portrayed in the press as faceless statistics, the victims had names and lives like Claudia

Isabel Velazquez, a 19-year-old law student raped and shot to death, or 15-year-old Maria Isabel, a retail shop employee who was found taped with her hands and feet bound together with barbed wire. . . [S]ome women were being killed by organized criminal bands intent on carving up national territory into zones of influence. Young women who were in a gang's territory and rejected the passes of gang members were at risk, as well as those who resided in rival territory and were sometimes killed and exhibited in a lurid manner to send a "message" (Paterson 2006:1).

After the death of Maria Isabel, the police response to her mother was far from comforting: "They laughed at me and told me my daughter was a prostitute" (Melville 2007:1) Congresswoman Nineth Montenegro argued that "[t]he police themselves are involved [in the killings of women]" (Melville 2007:1).

Needless to say, my host mother stressed over and over again the importance of getting home before dark. Repeated news of murders of women (and men) in the newspapers made me feel tense wherever I went, especially if I went alone, which was rare. The one day I did have to walk two blocks back before dusk, as I was one gate away from my own, a man on a bike slowed and turned down the block, staring at me. Worried, I ran to the black iron gate of my host mother's house; I quickly pounded on the door, and luckily, she showed up soon thereafter. Some say that the disappearances, murders, and mutilations are little different in nature from the murders of women during the brutal 30-year civil war, commonly remembered as "*la violencia.*"

The connections between domestic violence and dominant forms of social control which appear in the Rivas case suggest that there may indeed be a link between the violent methods of social control during the civil war and modern methods of femicide, at least in the sense that the disappearances of *la violencia* still inform local imaginations, offering models for creative manipulation. Even recent political murders in Guatemala follow a similar pattern, suggesting the forms of murder used on women are part of a broader cultural pattern. Murder becomes a dominant way of controlling the outcome of events, given inefficiencies and corruption in

political and legal systems. One example is the recent political election which put Alvaro Colom in office in September 2007. Over fifty political murders occurred over the course of the election. One victim, for example, was a 28-year-old boy who had been helping his father alert human rights groups in Washington to impending death threats against political party members (Rosenberg 2007:1). The count of fifty does not even include family member of campaigners, such as congressional candidate Hector Montenegro's 15-year-old daughter. According to the U.K. Telegraph, "Her killers had pulled out her fingernails, tied her hands behind her back, slit her throat, then stuffed the corpse into the boot of a taxi with two other victims of similarly brutal attacks" (Sherwell 2007:1). Even though the political murders may have different motives than the others, the bodily disfiguration for women remains a common model.

The second town I stayed in, Santiago Atitlán, was smaller and marginally safer. However, violence still occurred, and this time it was often as a way of prosecuting supposed "criminals" outside the inefficient judicial system – not unlike victims who murder their abusers as last attempts at control. In Santiago, I was carrying out research on relief efforts after two landslides that had occurred in 2005. One morning, I learned that a man had been murdered in the small neighborhood I had been working in on the north side of town, shot execution-style by three gunmen in the middle of the night. My host mother, an evangelical Christian, thought nothing of the death, saying he was "un brujo," a witch. Only later did I find out from an article in *El Periódico Guatemala* (2007) that the murder was part of a string of killings in the town, a social cleansing where over 35 people had been executed between January and September of 2007, for various reasons such as drug trafficking, rape, *brujería* (witchcraft), and the recent murder of two sisters, each with over ten bullet shots in their bodies, left dead in the middle of a town street.

Local vigilante groups carried out most of the violence, but here again the Rivas case has parallels. The response of Mayan communities to the civil war has been eerily similar to the responses of women such as Olga who, although she generally took a nurturing approach to child care, responded violently to Victor's smashing of her watch, given the breakdown of order in the household. Fernandez writes that Mayan common law involved non-violent solutions to crimes, "redress of grievances" but "seldom punishment" (Fernández García 2004:2). After the civil war, which was a genocide against the indigenous population carried out primarily by the Guatemalan military, she says that lynching numbers "exploded," reaching almost 500 attempts from 1996 to 2004 (2004:2). Fernández blames the breakdown of the judicial system during and after the war. The experience she describes is not unlike that of Victor and Olga turning to homicide to get rid of Tony and bring their lives under control:

> The deed that motivated the lynching might have been committed against only one member of the community, but it suffices to create a mob joined by a high degree of solidarity that unites to inflict punishment on a victim who is defenseless before the multitude. The crowd is often tired of waiting for justice to be done, so it takes it upon itself to impart the sanction. The victim is generally castigated using a combination of physical punishments that culminate in death: he is thrashed with sticks, stones, machetes, fists, feet; he is deprived of food, hanged, exposed to the sun, or set on fire. . . . These horrific deeds preoccupy jurists, human rights' defenders and intellectuals, but lamentably, they find approval amongst the majority of Guatemalans (2004:2).

Another recent news article, from April 11, 2008, offers some new information which I would never have suspected before in considering Guatemala's femicide, showing just how blurred the line between victims and victimizers has become in violence in Guatemala. The *New York Times* article, titled "Abuse Trails Central American Girls Into Gangs," explains that increasing numbers of women in Guatemala are joining gangs. One girl, Benky, on why she joined a Guatemala City gang at age 14, says, "I thought it would be like my family" (Lacey

2008:1). Instead, the gang became a "family" of abuse, with initiation through rape, not unlike loss of virginity on a marriage night:

> To join . . . [Benky] had to have sex with a dozen of so of her homeboys one night. She recalls sobbing uncontrollably when the last young man climbed off her and everyone gathered around to congratulate her on becoming a full-fledged member of the Mara Salvatrucha (2008:1).

She said she joined the gang for "love," but, eerily similar to abused wives, said she only found violence: "[T]hey'd hit me. They ordered me around. They told me I had to rob someone or kill someone, and I did it" (2008:1). She tried to escape the situation five years later, not unlike family members who try to escape domestic violence, and a gang member shot her six times. Luckily, she got to a local hospital and survived. The Swedish government carried out a study of gangs in Central America through interviews, mostly in prisons, and found that women are an underemphasized population when it comes to gang violence:

> "There are a lot more women and girls than anyone imagined," said Ewa Werner-Dahlin, the Swedish ambassador to Guatemala. "It's a surprise to the experts and it shows that authorities have been reacting to gangs without really understanding them" (2008:1).

Sometimes young girls join because of abuse at home: "'If a girl is getting abused by her father, the gang will step in and end it,' said Gustavo Cifuentes, a streetwise former gang member . . . who now works for Guatemala's government trying to lure gang members into leading better, law-abiding lives" (2008:1). But similar to Victor's experience with gangs, where joining a gang only replaced his father's abuse with new forms of violence, women who joined gangs found a violence worse than what male gang members would have gone through. At initiation, males went through a group beating, unlike the group rape for females, and beatings or other torture occurred whenever women did not comply with orders: "If the girls do not follow the directions of the leader, Mr. Cifuentes acknowledged, a beating or even worse will be the result" (2008:1).

What I have found, then, in comparing the domestic violence of the Rivases to issues in Guatemala is that viewing violence within the domestic sphere as linked to broader forms of social control could help anthropologists make valuable connections between violence within homes and violence in social spheres outside the home. That violence is a social problem in Guatemala is no secret. However, recognizing the similarities between violence within the home and violence outside of it could help explain how violence affects family relationships, or how social conflicts outside the home involve many of the same problems as in domestic violence.

My point has been that the categories of "perpetrators" and "victim-survivors" are overly simplistic labels. Abuse, suffering, and resistance were central aspects of *each* family member's experience of domestic violence. Resistance involved a high degree of imagination and creative manipulation, but so did abuse and suffering, and all drew from cultural models. Those hoping to understand and provide solutions for domestic violence should address the cultural models people use to solve their personal and familial problems, especially violent models for reasserting control in an increasingly chaotic and war-like home, and stress alternatives that have been effective. Social and economic factors such as work conditions, racism, and gender roles seem to have contributed as well. But, again, recognizing that men who are perpetrators may suffer and resist and that women victim-survivors may enact abuse is essential. The terminology and categorical gendered divisions among perpetrators and survivors preclude our understanding the full complexity of domestic violence. In fact, given Guatemala's femicide, it appears that rethinking the divide between male perpetrators and female victims has wider application than domestic violence. Articles stressed numbers of female victims and the label "femicide" emphasizes female victimhood, but men, too, are murder victims. Likewise, given the low number of cases solved, it is difficult to know much about perpetrators, but as the women

involved in gang violence suggest, females too enact violent crimes, although they also

experience suffering and resistance in gang "families." Addressing these complexities within

lived experiences of violence, I would argue, is crucial to achieving a more complete

understanding of violence and to finding more effective solutions.

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