A Contra corriente
*Una revista de estudios latinoamericanos*

Vol. 22, Núm. 1 (Fall 2024): 42-55

# Chronicle of Terrorism Foretold: Miguel Ángel Asturias's "¡Americanos todos!" and 9/11

**Henry Thurston-Griswold**
Juniata College

Written nearly seven decades ago, Miguel Ángel Asturias's remarkable short story "¡Americanos todos!" encompasses this entire period of United States hegemony denouncing abuse of power and anticipating the unexpected consequences and costs of covert military operations. Since the tragic terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the disproportionate response they elicited from the United States government in its so-called "global war on terror," terrorism has been an ongoing and growing concern for citizens of the United States as well as for societies around the world. While terrorist acts perpetrated by radicalized extremist groups command most of the media's attention, state-sponsored terrorism has been far deadlier throughout history. Historian John Dower studies the utilization of terror as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy in his monograph *The Violent American Century*, which focuses on the period from World War II to the present. The terror campaign and military coup orchestrated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1954—which overthrew a democratically elected government in Guatemala whose land reform legislation was threatening the economic interests of U.S.-based transnational corporations like the United Fruit Company as

well as those of Guatemalan elites—constitutes one of the first instances of this violent foreign intervention during the early years of the Cold War (Dower 2017, 57).[1]

In historian Greg Grandin's incisive study of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Making of an Imperial Republic*, details various elements of the CIA's covert operation, dubbed Operation PBSUCCESS by the agency. The operation was designed to topple Guatemala's reformist government, led by democratically elected president Jacobo Árbenz, by evoking the threat of communist expansion into the Americas. Grandin notes:

> In addition to destabilizing Guatemala's economy, isolating the country diplomatically through the OAS [Organization of American States], and training a mercenary force in Honduras, the Guatemala campaign gave CIA operatives the chance to try out new psywar techniques gleaned from behavioral social sciences. They worked with local agents to plant stories in the Guatemalan and U.S. press, draw up lists of Árbenz allies to be assassinated, send nooses and coffins to government workers, and cover the capital city in incendiary graffiti, accusing individuals of being spies—all designed to generate anxiety and uncertainty. (2021, 60-61)

Although the U.S. military did not directly intervene in the coup, CIA assets bombed critical infrastructure such as bridges and roads, and the "main military action involved frequent bombings of Guatemala City and other key points from U.S. planes flown by U.S. pilots hired by the CIA and based in Nicaragua" (Gordon 1983, 59). Árbenz rapidly lost the support of the Guatemalan army and was forced to resign ten days after the initial invasion by the mercenary force began, which was led by the CIA's chosen "liberator," Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 119-29). As Grandin concludes: "The 'terror program' worked. Árbenz fell not because the CIA had won the hearts and minds of the population but because the [Guatemalan] military refused to defend him, fearing Washington's wrath" (2021, 63).

At the time of the coup, future Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias, a longtime Guatemalan social activist and supporter of the political reforms enacted

---

[1] Much has been written about the United States government's political and economic motives for the overthrow of democracy in Guatemala, particularly since the release of classified documents through the Freedom of Information Act in the early 1980s. Although the official rationale for intervention was the threat of communism during this early stage of the Cold War, economic considerations and conflicts of interest of many of the key Eisenhower administration players are indisputable. The most notable case is that of the Dulles brothers, secretary of state John Foster Dulles and director of the CIA Allen Dulles, both of whom had provided legal representation for years for the United Fruit Company prior to their government service. In fact, John Foster is reported to have negotiated the contract signed in 1936 by Guatemalan dictator Jorge Ubico that "gave the company rule for ninety-nine years over tracts that comprised one-seventh of the country's arable land, as well as control of its only port" (Kinzer 2013, 148).

during the administrations of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Árbenz, was serving as the Guatemalan ambassador to neighboring El Salvador. Following the military coup, he was stripped of his diplomatic credentials and citizenship by the Castillo Armas regime and forced into exile in Argentina (Callan 1970, 12). Incensed by the violent overthrow of Guatemalan democracy, Asturias composed a collection of eight stories titled *Week-end en Guatemala* the following year. All but one of the stories are based on the historical events of the Guatemalan terror campaign and coup staged by the U.S. government, and one of the stories in particular, "¡Americanos todos!", is especially illuminating and prophetic with regard to the topic of state-sponsored terror and its possible repercussions. This essay will examine the historical and fictional treatment of the topic in the story and how it anticipates and parallels the 9/11 terrorist acts in the United States.

Asturias interrupted work on the final novel of his *trilogía bananera* to compose the eight stories of *Week-end en Guatemala*, but they have received scant critical attention in comparison to his other fictional narrative from this period, such as *El Señor Presidente* (1946), *Hombres de maíz* (1949), and the aforementioned trilogy on Guatemala's exploitative banana industry (1950, 1954, and 1960). For instance, Luis Harss, the writer credited with coining the term the Boom to brand the new Latin American novel that exploded on the international literary scene in the 1960s, only dedicated a brief paragraph to *Week-end en Guatemala* in his forty-page chapter on the life and oeuvre of Miguel Ángel Asturias, concluding that the collection "tiene poco relieve como obra de ficción" (1969, 120). In one of the few critical articles that exclusively analyze the stories, Samuel Gordon devoted the bulk of his essay, "*Week-end en Guatemala* o la búsqueda del compromiso", to corroborate "la estrecha correlación existente entre ficción narrativa y documentación histórica" (1975, 39), and he echoed Harss's assertion that the stories are lacking in aesthetic value, ostensibly due to the limited historical perspective afforded by proximity to the tragic events (30). Seymour Menton is particularly scathing in his assessment of *Week-end en Guatemala*, declaring that it lacks unity, is stylistically inferior, and is "la más débil de todas las novelas de Miguel Ángel Asturias" (1960, 240), although as renowned Italian Hispanist Giuseppe Bellini rightly observes: "El juicio de Menton se funda sobre un presupuesto falso, esto es que Asturias hubiese tenido la intención de escribir en *Week-end en Guatemala* una novela,

cuando él mismo lo ha definido colección de cuentos sobre la invasión" (1969, 137).[2] Moreover, Bellini asserts that Asturias's passion "no logra jamás sofocar en el escritor al artista. Aunque partiendo de una realidad tan abrumadora, el libro no se transforma en un documento histórico, porque la historia se traslada siempre al plano del arte por el libre juego de la fantasía" (Bellini 1969, 136). While the focus of this essay is on the historical and ethical dimensions of the collection's second story, it should be noted that its artistic elements—characterization, imagery, plot development, language use, humor, etcetera—make for rewarding reading in addition to the story's undeniable merit as protest literature that condemns the violence, death, and destruction unleashed by the U.S. covert operation.[3]

"¡Americanos todos!" is set at the beginning of the armed invasion of Guatemala by mercenary forces in June of 1954 and narrates the traumatic experience of the protagonist Milocho, who is described in the opening paragraph as the "famoso Guía de Turistas". He has just helped the beautiful tourist Alarica Powell, a blonde "diosa californiana" (Asturias 1956, 46) with whom he is romantically involved, escape on the last boat leaving Guatemala's lone Caribbean port before the mercenary attack,

---

[2] Bellini speculates that Menton, in this early study of the work, mistakenly attributes the novel genre to these eight stories which are totally unrelated regarding characters and plot, but united in fictionally depicting and denouncing the 1954 military coup, misled by an epigraph that precedes the collection: "¿No ve las cosas que pasan? … / ¡Mejor llamarlas novelas! …" (Bellini 1969, 137). Another critic, María Eugenia Arguedas Chaverri, reexamines the question of *Week-end en Guatemala*'s genre more than three decades later in a short article in which she aims to prove the thesis that "*Week-end en Guatemala* no es una novela sino una serie de relatos entrelazados por un tema común" (1992, 53). In any case, rather than intending to assign a genre with this initial reference to novels, Asturias seems to echo ironically the incredulity of his protagonists in the first two stories. Both protagonists emphasize at the outset that the "reality" of these recent historical events is stranger than fiction, and subsequent literary critics have categorized *Week-end en Guatemala* as a short story collection.

[3] The characterization of Milocho, the main character of "¡Americanos todos!", is a prime example of Asturias's artistry. In the opening paragraph, the narrator uses expository description incorporating a series of creative images to develop the character of the story's protagonist: "Milocho, y a quien si toneles envidiaban, no tenía fondo conocido como bebedor de whiskey, chimeneas temíanle por sus humos, infuloso y fumador, figurines deportivos por sus vestimentas chillonas, prestidigitadores por sus habilidades de salón, conversadores por sus chistes y donjuanes por su piel de banana tibia…" (Asturias 1956, 45). After artfully enumerating Milocho's salient qualities, in the following page Asturias shows readers the playful and festive side of his character, who even when facing the imminent threat of death, initiates a game during the *siesta* of tickling with a bamboo shoot the neck, ears, and hand of his sleeping travel companion, an amusement which is cut short by the aerial bombardment: "…todo se cortó, en aquella siesta, mientras jugaba con la mano de Moloy, al golpe de una descarga que fue como un rayo en seco, seguido de un relámpago de fuego blanco que le dejó los ojos titilando en ceguera de celuloide, mientras se sucedían explosiones gigantescas y ráfagas de granizo metálico" (Asturias 1956, 47). Both of these examples also showcase the linguistic mastery and inventiveness of the author, as well as his skillful deployment of humor to entertain and create dramatic contrasts.

and during his return to the capital he is caught in the initial bombing strikes, which destroy the bridge near where he is resting and kill his travel companion. A dual citizen of Guatemala and the United States, Milocho is initially incredulous that the all-powerful United States colossus has carried out its threats against his small defenseless homeland, which he views as a betrayal of the ideal of the fraternity of American nations espoused by the United States. During his return to the capital, he witnesses the brutal treason of some members of the Guatemalan military, represented by Colonel Ponciano Puertas, who has directed the massacre of twenty-nine innocent civilians in the indigenous village of Nagualcachita. Mistaken for a "gringo reporter" by the rank-and-file insurgents, Milocho briefly interviews bloodthirsty mercenary soldiers from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, who share a story of heroic resistance by an ancient Guatemalan peasant and multiple tales of atrocities committed by these supposed liberators of the Guatemalan people from the fabricated communist menace (Asturias 1956, 53-55).[4]

The final two chapters of the story leap ahead an undefined but relatively short lapse of time, with Milocho resuming his duties as the preferred guide of millionaire tourists in Antigua Guatemala, the country's premiere tourist destination. His lover Alarica has returned and they have made plans to move to the United States and start their own transportation company, but Milocho is traumatized by the horrific events he has experienced and witnessed, and as a United States citizen he feels guilty and complicit in the death and destruction wreaked on his defenseless homeland by his adopted country. Alarica is oblivious to his pain and inner conflict, and her racist comments, callous dismissal of the suffering inflicted by her country, and insensitive taunts insinuating his impotence provoke Milocho to conceive and carry out a terroristic act of vengeance and poetic justice: he converts the tour bus into an improvised weapon of mass destruction by driving it over a precipice, killing himself,

[4] The topic of communist influence in Guatemala during this period has been analyzed extensively by numerous scholars. As the editors of *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History* point out in the preface: "…the view that turbulence in Central America is the direct result of outside communist interference…has become the near sacred ideology of U.S. government and corporate leaders and their spokespersons…" (Fried et al 1983, xxii). Historian Richard H. Immerman provides a well-documented and nuanced study of the topic in his book *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, highlighting the cold war ethos that shaped U.S. government officials' perceptions of the communist threat by conflating nationalistic desires for development, improved living and working conditions, and basic human rights such as freedom of association and expression with communism. This ideological bias facilitated the United Fruit Company's efforts to persuade the Eisenhower administration officials, following the 1952 agrarian reform legislation and labor strikes, that "Guatemala had become the western hemisphere's outpost for the international Communist conspiracy" (Immerman 1982, 88).

Alarica, and the twenty-nine rich American tourists in his group—not coincidentally, the same number as the indigenous massacre victims found in the village of Nagualcachita.

As indicated previously, although the term terrorism is generally associated with extremist groups and often viewed as a weapon of the weak, it is more often powerful state actors that deploy their military resources to terrorize their political adversaries and coerce them into following their dictates (Aksan and Bailes 2013, 1).[5] The violence in "¡Americanos todos!" starts with a relatively new and potent weapon in the middle of the twentieth century, aerial bombardments, used with devastating effect for the first time by Germany's Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War. Asturias highlights in this early scene the enormous power asymmetry that exists between the invasion forces organized by the United States and the defenseless civilian population, which elicits Milocho's repeated exclamation: "¡No puede ser!" Such a power differential had led him to believe naively that the U.S. would not invade Guatemala, and the scene emphasizes the injustice and absurdity of this power asymmetry by contrasting the defiant challenge of a Guatemalan peasant, Martín Santos, who brandishes his machete in the air and shouts at the distant bombers: "¡Gringos hijos de puta, bájense si son hombres!" (Asturias 1956, 48). At the same time, the omniscient narrator describes Milocho's emotional response, "sacudido de la cabeza a los pies por un temblor / de cuerpo en que se mezclaba el temor y la rabia que da el no poderse defender, el ser impotente ante la desigualdad de las armas…" (Asturias 1956, 48-49).

This theme of power asymmetry and its consequences is developed further in the dialogue between Milocho and Alarica following her return, which is initially meant to be playful banter but which becomes deadly serious for him. Milocho jokingly contrasts the awesome telluric power of his volcanoes with the insignificance of her airplanes that didn't even rouse the volcanoes from their sleep, to which Alarica wonders aloud whether they are actually powerful or impotent and concludes: "Sí, sí,

[5] In the introduction to the interviews included in this study of U.S. state terrorism, the authors contrast the State Department estimate of 13,971 deaths caused by "transnational terrorism" between the years 1975 and 2003 with one extreme but far from unique example, the Indonesian repression in East Timor between 1975 and 1999, backed by the U.S. government, which resulted in an estimated 200,000 deaths, one quarter of the population (Aksan and Bailes 2013, 1). They also explain how the definition of terrorism formulated in the *U.S. Code* and employed by the State Department and the CIA frames terror in such a way that state actors cannot be held accountable, since "the *U.S. Code* restricts terrorism to 'sub-national groups' and 'clandestine agents', which appears to exclude state terrorism" (Aksan and Bailes 2013, 2).

tus volcanes son un poco la imagen de la grandeza impotente de ustedes… Pero aquí, *darling*, no sólo los volcanes, todos, todos se hicieron los dormidos cuando asomaron mis aviones" (Asturias 1956, 60). Alarica's arrogance and indifference to the plight and suffering of the Guatemalan people serve as the catalyst for Milocho's determination to avenge his defenseless compatriots by launching what he terms in his agitated interior monologue an "Operación Planetaria" that would "llevar turistas a visitar planetas…" (Asturias 1956, 63).

Terrorist acts of all sorts result in the loss of innocent civilian lives, and consequently, one of the strategies used to justify and make them more palatable is to vilify and dehumanize the enemy. Asturias showcases this strategy in another of the stories from *Week-end en Guatemala*, "La Galla," in which the U.S. media disseminate propaganda and "fake news" that depict the indigenous people as violent communist guerrillas (103-07). In "¡Americanos todos!", the strategy is less prevalent, but there are still a number of examples of its use. The indigenous people, for example, are referred to by Alarica as filthy Indians and she declares to Milocho that "A esos indios mugrosos que tarde o temprano habrá que acabar con ellos…" (Asturias 1956, 60). In the case of Milocho, the gringo tourists are described in the opening paragraph as "manadas de gringos feos, disfrazados de turistas" (45), and the simile "hormigas de colores" (57) is used to depict them as they tour the ruins of Antigua in their colorful tourist attire. Although their participation in the story is minimal, the limited dialogue included reveals their ignorance and hubris. When Milocho informs the tourists that the ruins were caused by volcanic activity and earthquakes and not U.S. fighter bombers, one tourist celebrates that there are many things that the U.S. hasn't destroyed. Another proposes the reconstruction of the picturesque colonial ruins, which would cause immense harm to the Guatemalan tourist industry, so the U.S. will not mistakenly be blamed for the destruction (58). And finally, as they are preparing to depart on their final fateful tour, some are described as chewing their nails, picking their noses, or "se entregaban al relax, para hacerse más muebles de lo que eran" (62).

A central message conveyed in "¡Americanos todos!" is that acts of violence committed by state actors may generate violent responses from the victimized groups. Asturias invokes the biblical Old Testament code of an eye for an eye as Milocho's operation of vengeance equates the deaths of twenty-nine indigenous villagers that he witnessed with the twenty-nine gringo tourists he is guiding. During Milocho's indirect interior monologue in the tour bus, which extends for most of the final ten of the story's twenty-five pages, narrative tension and suspense build as Milocho drives and feverishly

reflects on the deadly violence inflicted on his people and his need to avenge it. The increasing velocity of the tour bus matches that of his frenzied thoughts and feelings:

> Iba acelerando, acelerando, acelerando… veintinueve… veintinueve… acelerando… acelerando… ya no verán nada… dentro de un momento ya no verán nada… quítense esos anteojos… acelerando… acelerando… escupan esos chicles, recen… recen… acelerando… acelerando… su visión era doble… ya no sólo veía a los turistas, sino a los fusilados… sobre cada turista iba un fusilado… (Asturias 1956, 64)

He also links his "Planetary Operation" of revenge with the forces of nature that according to his fanciful historical interpretation avenged the genocide carried out by the Spanish conquerors: "…este volcán sepultó una ciudad entera el 10 de septiembre de 1541, dos horas después de anochecido, vengándose de las crueldades de los que diezmaban las poblaciones indígenas, ahorcaban a sus caciques, humillaba a sus gentes…" (67). This account refers to the previous Spanish capital located near Antigua, now known as Ciudad Vieja, that was destroyed by a mudslide caused by the eruption of the Agua volcano, where Spanish state-sponsored terror also provokes a violent response by the forces of nature that represent the justice of the gods for Milocho.

The story ends with Milocho shouting *¡Americanos todos!* as he plummets to his death with Alarica and the busload of tourists, and the title phrase alludes to the story's overarching theme, namely, the betrayal of the ideal of brotherhood of all American nations proclaimed in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and expanded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the United Nations in 1948, only six years prior to the violent overthrow of Guatemala's democracy as a new world order designed and directed primarily by the United States in the aftermath of World War II is emerging. Historian Alfred McCoy emphasizes the tension and contradictions between the U.S. government's rhetorical call for respect of national sovereignty and universal human rights while at the same time striving to preserve and expand U.S. economic and political power.[6] McCoy juxtaposes Eleanor Roosevelt's passionate advocacy for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations in 1948 (2021, 191-

[6] McCoy's chapter on the new world order that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century, titled "Pax Americana," emphasizes what he views as the duality of U.S. global power: "Even at its peak of power in the decades after World War II, Washington's pursuit of unilateral military might was balanced, however tenuously, by its promotion of an international community of sovereign states governed as equals under the rule of law…This underlying duality of Washington's version of world power would manifest itself in numerous contradictions during its 70 years of global hegemony" (McCoy 2021, 193-94). As can be seen in "¡Americanos todos!", the violation of Guatemala's sovereignty and the rule of law by the U.S. government constitutes one of the early and most egregious betrayals of these universal rights promised to all nations and peoples.

94) with the Truman administration's equally impassioned pursuit of a realpolitik approach to US foreign policy:

> "We have about 50 percent of the world's wealth but only about 6.3 percent of its population," said George Kennan in 1947, when he was the chief of policy planning at the State Department. "Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all … high-minded international altruism." If the UN, formed in a burst of idealism amid the great allied victory over fascism, embodied that altruism, then the Cold War instruments that Kennan would help to create represented the darker side of a duality that permeated Washington's postwar programs, large and small. (McCoy 2021, 219)

The phrase "Americanos todos" is first uttered by an incredulous and shell-shocked Milocho following the initial bombing when he denounces the barbarity of the attack and laughs bitterly at the new irony attached to the phrase (Asturias 1956, 50). In the second chapter, Colonel Ponciano Puertas, whose very name (Pontius in English) evokes the theme of betrayal, also affirms ironically that following the overthrow of the Guatemalan government, "es verdad que ahora 'Americanos todos'…" (53). The third mention comes from the regular tour bus driver when life has ostensibly returned to normal, who reports that Milocho has been getting drunk, roaming the streets shouting *¡Americanos todos!* and punching himself in the face when he speaks English, declaring that his true self ("mero yo") is punishing the citizen ("ciudadano") for speaking that foul language ("idioma inmundo") (59). This is the first clear indication of the internal conflict and guilt that Milocho is experiencing and sets the stage for his verbal confrontation with Alarica and his decision to avenge the betrayal of the ideal of American brotherhood and the deaths of his defenseless Guatemalan compatriots.

The betrayal theme is further developed by the inclusion of a scene in chapter three observed by Milocho in which the treacherous Colonel Ponciano Puertas, who has already betrayed his country by supporting the military coup, engages in a perverse game with a prostitute known as "la Cubana", a clear reference to the immorality of Cuban society under the Batista regime. The colonel has bet that he can trap the nipple of la Cubana's breast with his lips without using his hands while she rubs her breast over his eyes, nose, cheeks, and chin, and when he is unable to do so, he grabs her breast with his hands and savagely bites her nipple. La Cubana shrieks in pain, but as she withdraws into the night, she screams twice the word "traidor". The omniscient narrator reveals that as a witness of this depraved scene, Milocho trembled not because of the treacherous bite, nor the colonel's burst of laughter at being called a traitor, nor

the colonel's gold teeth stained by the nipple's blood, "sino por la palabra inabarcable como la sombra, aquella palabra traidor, que empezaba a ser moneda legal en su pobre país" (Asturias 1956, 56). In this way, the author denounces the pervasiveness of the betrayal which encompasses both the collective treachery of the U.S. government as well as the individual betrayal of the depraved colonel.

The story's tragic conclusion may be read as a misguided and desperate attempt by Milocho to not only avenge the betrayal of the fraternal ideal but also to restore it, since in his traumatized state, he is uniting in death the murdered Guatemalan indigenous villagers and the complicitous American tourists. Milocho's final words as the bus is about to plunge over the precipice are: "--¡Americanos todos! –alcanzó a decir Milocho sin soltar el timón ni sacar el pie del acelerador clavado a fondo… --¡Americanos todos!…" (Asturias 1956, 71). Nevertheless, the protagonist's violent vengeful response to the state-sponsored terrorism perpetrated by the U.S. government should not be interpreted as Asturias's endorsement of the eye for an eye code. This story and its counterparts in *Week-end en Guatemala* denounce the betrayal of humanitarian ideals and principles preached but not practiced by the United States, but the final paragraph signals the futility of Milocho's terrorist act. The "indios" have been relegated once again to their neo-colonial role of "peones esclavos" who are sent to retrieve the bodies from the depths of the precipice; the general population remains fearful of the renewal of bombings upon hearing the engines of the air transport sent for the victims' remains; and since there is nothing to investigate, no one knows the cause of this tragic crash and Milocho's futile attempt to strike back against the empire (71). The omniscient narrator closes the story with the recovery of Milocho's body and a final imagined voicing of his protest and plea: "El último cadáver que se rescató, entre peñascales y espinos, fue el del Guía de Turistas, Emilio Croner Jaramillo, el famoso Milocho, no muy desfigurado, con la boca abierta, como si todavía gritara: --¡Americanos… americanos todos!…" (71).

"¡Americanos todos!" serves both as a cautionary tale and as a prophetic text. The story illustrates Gandhi's maxim that "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind." It also offers a textbook example of blowback, a term coined by the CIA and popularized by the political scientist Chalmers Johnson in his seminal study *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, which was first published in March of 2001, about six months before the 9/11 tragedy. As Johnson explains in the first book of what would become known as his Blowback Trilogy:

> The term "blowback," which officials of the Central Intelligence Agency first invented for their own internal use, is starting to circulate among students of international relations. It refers to the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people…. / The most direct and obvious form of blowback often occurs when the victims fight back after a secret American bombing, or a U.S.-sponsored campaign of state terrorism, or a CIA-engineered overthrow of a foreign political leader. (Johnson 2001, 8-9)

Milocho's act of vengeance retaliates for the violent overthrow of Guatemalan democracy and the killing of defenseless civilians. Johnson chronicles the covert operations conducted by the U.S. government in the Middle East and elsewhere that incited the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In both instances, the "weak" respond in kind to cases of U.S. state terrorism which seek to impose political and economic policies through violent means, violating the humanitarian values that undergird democratic systems and initiating cycles of violence that claim seemingly endless innocent victims.

This story is also eerily prophetic as it anticipates by nearly half a century the horrors of 9/11, when reality unknowingly and gruesomely imitates this short work of fiction on a larger scale. Asturias has created a tale in which—in the face of the overwhelming power cruelly wielded by the United States against its small Central American neighbor—a character dismissed as impotent by the principal representative of U.S. power and privilege in the story transforms a tourist bus into a weapon of mass destruction that takes the lives of United States citizens. Nearly fifty years later, in response to decades of the U.S. government's clandestine involvement in the Middle East—pursuing its strategic interests and what the extremist organization Al-Qaeda views as a covert war against the Islamic faith—a small group of extremists carries out terrorist attacks against symbols of U.S. economic, military, and political power, by transforming another mode of transportation, commercial airliners, into weapons of mass destruction that demolish the World Trade Center towers and result in nearly 3,000 innocent civilian deaths. In both instances, an innocuous and essential tool of daily existence that facilitates mobility and freedom of movement is converted into an improvised explosive device in order to exact revenge for what the "impotent" perpetrators perceive as state-sponsored acts of terror.

The title of this essay was inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's superb *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, a novel also based on real events which announces in its opening sentence the inescapable death of the popular protagonist, despite the fact that nearly the entire town knows that twin brothers seek to kill him to avenge their sister's honor. This narrative implicitly condemns the violence that permeates a racist, classist and

sexist society as the narrator, characters, and readers attempt to discover who "deflowered" Ángela Vicario and why it was impossible to prevent the murder when so many of the townspeople knew of the killers' intentions, while the brothers themselves do everything they can to be prevented from satisfying the demands of the society's anachronistic and chauvinistic honor code. Nonetheless, both individuals and institutions fail in their attempts to save the "innocent" victim, and the novel concludes with the brutally violent and unavoidable death of Santiago Nasar.

"¡Americanos todos!" opens and closes with violence, ending with Milocho's horrific terrorist act that is portrayed as an inevitable response to the state-sponsored terrorism perpetrated by the United States government and its surrogates. Moreover, the fictional vengeance imposed by Milocho prefigures the very real violence that ensues from U.S. covert operations in Guatemala. Repressive authoritarian military regimes installed and supported by the United States annul the political and economic reforms enacted during the Ten Years of Spring (1944-1954) of Guatemalan democracy, and the ongoing suppression of basic human rights sparks a thirty-six-year-long civil war that does not formally end until the signing of peace accords in December 1996. The war's death toll is estimated at over 200,000 fatalities (Rothenberg 2012, xxi), 83 percent of whom were indigenous Mayans (236). The United Nations investigation conducted by the Commission for Historical Clarification determined that genocide was committed by government military and paramilitary forces (76-78), who were found responsible for 93 percent of the human rights violations and acts of violence between 1962 and 1996 (235). In addition to foretelling the protracted violence that would ravage Guatemala, Milocho's improvised four-wheeled weapon of mass destruction foreshadows the deadly use of another mode of transportation by Al-Qaeda on 9/11, in addition to successive cycles of violence in countries ranging from Afghanistan and Iraq to Syria and Libya. According to investigative journalist Nick Turse, from 2013 to 2015 during the Obama administration, the United States deployed special forces in covert operations in an average of 134 nations per year, roughly 70 percent of the world's countries (Turse 2015). There has been no significant change in covert operations policy under either the Trump or the Biden administrations. As retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, professor of history, and military analyst William Astore has reported, military spending has increased dramatically during both administrations: it currently consumes "more than half of the federal discretionary budget annually," and it is projected to surpass one trillion dollars per year within the next several years (Astore 2023). Since the late nineteenth century, there has generally

been bipartisan consensus on the use of clandestine violent intervention in other countries in the name of promoting democracy, combatting the communist menace, or more recently neutralizing "arcs of instability" (Dower 2017, 105-06). A careful study of history demonstrates that these rationales for intervention often mask the economic interests of powerful transnational corporations and wealthy individuals who exert undue influence on U.S. foreign policymakers. The year 2023 marked the seventieth anniversary of the U.S. and British military coup that overthrew a fledgling democracy in Iran that had nationalized the country's oil reserves, and next year Guatemala will observe the same tragic milestone that brought to an abrupt end desperately needed political and economic reforms. Both history and literature suggest that it is long past time for the U.S. government to renounce the use of covert operations and state-sponsored terror as an acceptable means to conduct foreign policy, and in the spirit of Milocho, to proclaim, "Humans all!" and pursue non-violent, diplomatic means to mediate conflicting agendas while respecting the human dignity and rights of all people.

## Works Cited

Aksan, Cihan, and Jon Bailes, eds. 2013. *Weapon of the Strong: Conversations on US State Terrorism*. London: Pluto Press.

Arguedas Chaverri, María Eugenia. 1992. "*Week-end en Guatemala*". *Káñina* XVI(1): 53-59.

Astore, William J. 2023. "'The Greatest Fighting Force in Human History': The Perpetual Wars You Aren't Supposed to Notice." *TomDispatch*, 8 August, https://tomdispatch.com/the-greatest-fighting-force-in-human-history/. Accessed 9 August 2023.

Asturias, Miguel Ángel. 1946, 1991. *El Señor Presidente*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

___. 1949, 2004. *Hombres de maíz*. Guatemala City: Editorial Piedra Santa.

___. 1950, 1981. *Viento fuerte*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

___. 1952, 2018. *El Papa Verde*. Guatemala: F&G Editores.

___. 1956, 2001. *Week-end en Guatemala*. Guatemala City: Editorial Piedra Santa.

___. 1960, 2016. *Los ojos de los enterrados*. Madrid: Drácena Ediciones.

Bellini, Giuseppe. 1966, 1969. *La narrativa de Miguel Ángel Asturias*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada.

Callan, Richard. 1970. *Miguel Ángel Asturias*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc.

Dower, John W. 2017. *The Violent American Century: War and Terror Since World War II*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

García Márquez, Gabriel. 1981. *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*. Bogotá: Editorial La Oveja Negra.

Gordon, Max. 1983. "A Case History of U.S. Subversion: Guatemala, 1954." In *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History*, edited by Jonathan L. Fried, Marvin E. Gettleman, Deborah T. Levenson, and Nancy Peckenham, 45-69. New York: Grove Press, Inc.

Gordon, Samuel. 1975. "*Week-end en Guatemala* o la búsqueda del compromiso", *Papeles de Son Armadans* 80: 29-46.

Grandin, Greg. 2006, 2021. *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Making of an Imperial Republic*. New York: Picador.

Harss, Luis. 1966, 1969. *Los nuestros*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.

Immerman, Richard H. 1982. *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Kinzer, Stephen. 2013. *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and their Secret World War*. New York: Time Books Henry Holt and Company.

Johnson, Chalmers. 2001. *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

McCoy, Alfred W. 2021. *To Govern the Globe: World Orders & Catastrophic Change*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Menton, Seymour. 1960. *Historia crítica de la novela guatemalteca*. Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria.

Rothenberg, Daniel, ed. 2012. *Memory of Silence: The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schlesinger, Stephen and Stephen Kinzer. 1982. *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.

Turse, Nick. 2015. "U.S. Special Ops Forces Deployed in 135 Nations." *TomDispatch*, 24 September. www.tomdispatch.com/nick-turse-a-secret-war-in-135-countries/. Accessed 10 July 2023.