

Love and the revolution: The Potential and Limitations of Love and Differential Consciousness in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*

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Abstract: Love and the revolution connect in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998) with the use of a quotation from Ernesto Guevara. This specific connection applies to both the Guatemalan civil war and the Los Angeles 1992 protests in the novel. Revolutionary love can be seen as analogous to what Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), identifies as the hermeneutics of love, which is a certain skill set that can mobilize love in the service of social change. Within this frame, she considers that the most important skill is that of a "differential consciousness," an ability to shift in and out of different subject positions and learn of other realities. In this essay, I contend that in her personal reflections and social activism during the Guatemalan civil war, the character of Elena shows the distinctions between revolutionary and familial love and the potential of differential consciousness. In contradistinction, other characters in the novel show the limitations of differential consciousness and love. *The Tattooed Soldier* recognizes and enacts numerous manifestations of love and differential consciousness in the public world, only to approximate social change sometimes but to demonstrate its need all the time.

Keywords: Guatemalan civil war; Los Angeles protests; hermeneutics of love; differential consciousness; revolution.

"Vegetables in the sink and a killer in my living room. Almost a smile on her lips. They want Antonio, but I will not give him to them. I will not. Why am I so calm? This is unnatural. I am not a brave woman. But this man has come to kill me and I am not afraid." (Tobar 147)

"Romantic love provides one kind of entry to a form of being that breaks the citizen-subject free from the ties that bind being, to thus enter the differential mode of consciousness..." (Sandoval 140)

In the first epigraph, Elena Bernal, the main character in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*, contemplates her defiance as members of a death squad enter her home in Guatemala to kill her family while she refuses to disclose the location of her husband. She does not understand her serene demeanor and lack of fear. Elena proclaims herself to not be a brave woman and calls her reaction unnatural; she does not reveal the location of her husband Antonio and ultimately dies. The second epigraph, from Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*, describes the potential of romantic love to be the conduit to freedom from the ties that bind subjectivity, a way to enter the differential mode of consciousness where one can shift from one subject-position to another. Does romantic love enable Elena Bernal to shift into the subject-position of a tranquil, brave woman and resist the death squad in her living room, thereby protecting the one member of her family that she could save? Is this the power of romantic love or love overall? What do we study when we examine love in literature, especially the literature written by authors from underrepresented communities?

Interestingly, Héctor Tobar published his debut novel, *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998) two years before Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). Moreover, both works focus heavily on the possibilities of love and revolution within the context of the lives and critical works of people from underrepresented communities. Accordingly, these two contemporary texts can be put in a dialogue of complementarity. In fact, both Tobar and Sandoval use the same quotation from Ernesto Guevara about love and the revolutionary in their works. Tobar uses this quotation as a guiding principle for Elena's life (to her own admission) and Sandoval uses it as one of the epigraphs to the fourth section of her work. As such, Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* provides an effective theoretical framework to analyze the revolutionary potential and limitations of love in Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*.

Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* tells the story of two young lovers and the fatal aftermath of their union. Antonio and Elena meet as university students in Guatemala City. Elena's political activism during her country's civil war draws Antonio to her cause and closer to her.¹ In time, they must flee the city to the countryside to avoid detection by the government when Elena becomes pregnant. They marry but while living in the countryside, Elena's continued activism reveals her and her family's location. Elena and her child, Carlos, are killed by the Guatemalan military, and Antonio becomes a political exile in the USA. Antonio's only solace is the friendship of a man named José Juan. Meanwhile, Longoria, the Guatemalan military officer who murdered Elena and Carlos among many others, excels in his retirement in the USA. Years after the loss of his wife and child, Antonio finds himself unemployed and homeless, and reenounters Longoria in MacArthur Park. Antonio's pursuit of Longoria for revenge begins then against the backdrop of the building social tensions and inevitable eruption of the Los Angeles riots in 1992 and culminates with Antonio's murder of Longoria.² The novel concludes significantly with Antonio pondering what Elena would have thought of the riots and its aftermath; it ends where it truly begins: on the question of love between Antonio and Elena.

1. The Guatemalan civil war lasted from November 13, 1960 until December 29, 1996 when the Peace Accord was signed. Unfair land distribution (and thus wealth distribution), which favored European-descended residents and foreign companies such as the American United Fruit Company (UFC), was the main cause of the civil war which pitted the Guatemalan government against leftist rebel groups (supported by ethnic Mayan indigenous groups and Ladino peasants). Before this war, the CIA overthrew Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in June 1954 after he confiscated a large portion of the United Fruit Company's land for the purpose of redistribution to the peasant class and only offered 1.2 million as compensation to the UFC. This overthrow led to the installation of Guatemalan Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas as President. He quickly returned confiscated lands and outlawed trade unions. A few years after this coup and inspired by the Cuban revolution, Guatemalans formed guerilla groups and gathered in the hills. Then, four decades of civil war ensued, which caused an influx of Guatemalan immigrants to the USA starting in 1980 (Gonzalez 136-137). Without a doubt, the circumstances of the Guatemalan civil war were exacerbated by the United States of America, thereby rightfully becoming the place where Guatemalans sought refuge from violence.

2. There exist tensions in meaning between "protests" and "riots." I do not mean to gloss over this significance. As the novel names the events of Los Angeles, 1992 as "riots," that is the word I will use in this essay. This move does not mean that the justifiable and complicating causes of these "riots" will go unaddressed. In fact, that is the critical move being made when attempting to link "riot" to revolution in the analysis of this novel. Moreover, such careful deliberations about what word best describes the events of Los Angeles, 1992 are common. Lynn Mie Itagaki starts her work *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout* by contemplating such words as "crisis," "uprising," "rebellion," and "riot." She opts for "crisis" (4-5).

This revolutionary love between Antonio and Elena bears a striking resemblance to what Chela Sandoval describes as “a hermeneutics for identifying and mobilizing love in the postmodern world as a category of social analysis” (9), which can create social change. In her *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval explains how the

five skills of semiotics, deconstruction, meta-ideologizing, democratics, and differential consciousness [...] when utilized together, constitute a singular apparatus that is necessary for forging twenty-first century modes of decolonizing globalization. That apparatus is ‘love,’ understood as a technology for social transformation. (2)

Briefly, these skills are described as follows: semiotics is the ability to see all meaning as constructed by signs; deconstruction is the ability to deconstruct meaning through sign-analysis; meta-ideologizing is the ability to construct another meaning for the available signs; democratics is the ability to exercise a spirit of democracy in pursuit of justice; and finally, differential consciousness is the ability to assume other subject positions and shift back and forth. The last of these skills is of the utmost importance as it allows for people to move in and out of their subject positions and be changed by their subsequent knowledge acquisition (Sandoval 66-156). As a whole, these five skills provide access and guidance to cultural movements, which Sandoval labels as “theoretical and political ‘*movidas*’ [movements]-revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (140). Thus, revolutionary love becomes synonymous with actions geared toward social change for the betterment of the larger community. Sandoval’s conceptual approach offers an adequate perspective to read Tobar, as it opens a new methodological and practical breakdown of what acts of love can look like in the service of social activism.

Recent scholarship about this novel by critics such as Matthew Byrne, Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Eric Vázquez, Julie Minich, Dale Pattison, Crystine Miller, Lynn Mie Itagaki, Regina M. Mills, Jennifer Harford Vargas, Shane D. Hall, and Esen Kara address topics like homophobia, pan-ethnicity, justice, mestizaje, political violence, trauma, civil racism, statelessness, dictatorship, environmental injustice and urban spatial dynamics and identities. However, no scholarly analysis of this text focuses solely on the topic of love and its intricate connections to social activism and possible revolution. This essay makes this intervention, and it does so by prioritizing an analysis of Elena and her struggle with what it means to be a revolutionary. Some of the aforementioned scholars do examine Elena and her role in the recognition of justice, but they often end their analysis at that point. Therefore, this essay does work with previous scholarship on this novel in “probing new ways of imagining social transformation” (Harford Vargas 25-26). Specifically, although the focus on Elena in the novel allows for gender to be accounted for more fully in the details of revolutionary and familial love, the practice of differential consciousness proves to be more limited. The character of Elena best embodies the distinctive qualities of revolutionary and familial love and the potential of differential consciousness, but the characters of Antonio and José Juan best embody the limitations of revolutionary love and differential consciousness. By comparing US and Guatemalan contexts, *The Tattooed Soldier* argues for an expansive and not exclusive consideration of the relation between revolutionary and familial love while admitting the potential failures of differential consciousness. In this way, the novel makes known a number of issues related to US hemispheric influence such as US race relations, migration, injustice, and revenge, but also highlights the wide-spread relevance of revolutionary love and affinity.

Revolutionary Love

It is no coincidence that Ernesto Guevara's quotation which connects love and the revolutionary comes at the start of Elena and Antonio's relationship, amidst the cultural and political tensions of civil war. When Elena takes an interest in Antonio, she shows him a freshly painted mural of Guevara on their campus: "The revolutionary is guided in all his actions by great feelings of love.' [...] 'It's one of the guiding principles of my life.'" After reading out loud the inscription, she adds: "That's the problem with the left. They don't understand the meaning of love. They think that love is something abstract. They don't know that love means you don't lie" (90). Elena's statements perplex Antonio, but she does not force her ideas upon him. Notably, Elena proclaims love to be both abstract and non-abstract as she tries to convey the totality of its significance to the revolutionary. Love both serves as a philosophy of life for respectful engagement of others and offers a practical guide to remain truthful. These attributes of respect and truth constitute a foundation for the revolutionary. Elena proposes this complex understanding of love that Antonio does not perceive. In his relationship with her, however, he will be taught this manifestation of love.

Later in the novel, Elena and Antonio will stumble upon a strike of waste collectors and their reaction will reveal another manifestation of love. They join the strike and "show their solidarity with the working class, the youth in support of the older generation" (93). Their gesture of solidarity in this moment signifies real and practical support, which acknowledges the truth of the workers' struggle and shows respect to them. Eventually, Elena realizes the danger they have subjected themselves to: the demonstration is illegal and they joined it without covering their faces. Nonetheless, she does not regret taking part in it because it felt like the right thing to do at that moment (94). Exercising solidarity is not the consequence of an abstract consideration or the result of a rational decision. Nevertheless, their actions show how "thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility" (hooks 13). hooks claims that love as action has ramifications and possible consequences for the actors. Furthermore, the idea of love as action stresses "the possibility of alternative modes of holding to account" and prompts other questions such as, "If love is a principle, what practices are embedded within that principle?" (Mills 114). Mills' implicit assertion that the principle of love has certain practices embedded within it is demonstrated through Elena's future actions, which coincide with Chela Sandoval's hermeneutics of love.

Antonio and Elena vacate the city and leave behind their political activity. The anonymity they recover in the countryside allows them to transform their feelings of love into actions. Upon noticing funerals for local babies, sometimes three or four a month, Elena starts asking questions and then hears about Colonia La Joya, where the poor quality of air is believed to make the babies ill and die (116). Out of genuine concern for the babies dying, and perhaps with the energy of a new young mother, Elena visits this town when Carlos, her son, is six months old. When she sees Colonia La Joya for herself, Elena notes how unstable and unsafe the town's residential structures are (122). She keeps visiting, desperate to find out why so many babies have died. Antonio does not understand her concern and confronts her (122). He calls her visits "wanderings" (123), and much like the scene where Elena shows Guevara's quotation to Antonio and explains what it means to her, he simply does not understand. Still, Elena knows why she must act the way she does. If "the revolutionary being guided by great feelings of love" is her guiding principle, then Elena must side and work for the disenfranchised and marginalized in her community. Her love for the people of Guatemala is the impulse that moves her.

To better understand the context of revolutionary life and how Elena struggles with it, one must return to where the revolution and love quotation resides. In "Socialism and Man in Cuba," Ernesto Guevara specifies further how "vanguard revolutionaries must idealize this love of the people, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible" (226). Here, Guevara explains succinctly how high-minded political, social, and cultural ideas must meld with love of the people; the two are not distinct. If Elena still holds her revolutionary ideas from her time in Guatemala City, then she must find herself in alliance with the poor, sick, and dying in this nearby village. Visiting Colonia La Joya constitutes an expression of love, and she feels the obligation of returning time and again despite her husband's lack of comprehension. During her visits, Elena sees the town for herself, observes the precarious and unsanitary living arrangements of the town, and attempts to understand the cause of death of the babies. She demonstrates her love through her actions as she actively performs and enacts real social changes for the people of Colonia La Joya, despite her husband's concerns about her personal safety.

The Implications of Gender for Revolutionary and Familial Love

The experience of revolution has always involved gender role expectations. Before fleeing the city, Elena notes the stagnant and stifling implications of gender while still at the university. Not even the recent presence of Marxists-Leninists within the movement changes the unequal gender dynamic: "[A]ll the leadership positions, Elena had noticed, were still held by men. 'This Leninism, or whatever they call it, is just the same machismo,' she told one of her woman friends. 'Machismo with a more serious face'" (87). For women in the revolution, there are limited roles and prescribed abilities. In studying writings by and about Ernesto Guevara, Ileana Rodríguez claims similarly:

For in representing women and peasantry, revolutionary thinking takes the same path, and reproduces the preexistent epistememes. Women are, thus, quasi-men, incomplete men, and sexuality continues to be a danger zone undermining "the morale of the troops." Therefore, both women and guerillas must be policed. (73)

Even revolutionaries reproduce oppressive gender roles and social structures for those they would liberate. Elena recognizes these restrictions while she lives in Guatemala City, and she observes that they do not disappear after she and Antonio move to other places. These conditions only intensify for Elena, especially as she becomes a wife and a mother.

Despite her consistent struggle with defining and understanding revolutionary and familial love and their gendered implications, Elena always acts with love in regard to the people of Colonia La Joya. When she finds herself pregnant while living in the countryside with her husband, away from danger, she experiences guilt for not being a revolutionary the way Guevara defined the role. She quickly comes to new terms with what "love" might mean to the revolutionary: "There could be nothing wrong in accepting the love of a man and loving the child you conceived together. Beyond the movement there was this other responsibility to child and husband" (108). Out of necessity, Elena interrogates revolutionary love since she has no other choice. She still cares about the welfare of her fellow community members. Yet, she has her newly-formed family to nurture. After resolving that she "like[s] being a wife," Elena negotiates a compromise between revolutionary and familial love based on her gender: "This was what it meant to be a woman. You faced the difficulties, accepted them, and then adjusted" (118). Intriguingly, her conclusion that revolutionary and familial love

can be connected and simultaneous, contradicts Ernesto Guevara's directives about familial love and the revolution:

They [revolutionaries] cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the level where ordinary people put their love into practice. The leaders of the revolution have children just beginning to talk, who are not learning to say "daddy"; their wives, too, must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives in order to take the revolution to its destiny. The circle of their friends is limited strictly to the circle of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside of it. (226)

Elena's supposition that the two loves must be connected implicitly critiques the gender-biased discourse present in Guevara's comments. Rodríguez notes here the failure of the image of the "New Man" for Guevara through an examination of his diary, where she asserts that he never is "an undisciplined or heroic collective subject" but remains "a masculine, singular I-even in self-criticism" (53). In her description, there is no convergence of masculine and feminine traits, and this is especially evident in Guevara's description of the sacrifices required from the children and wives of the revolution. Elena's critique and connection of familial and revolutionary love makes way for woman revolutionaries to exist and be active in their families and causes. Women, often as primary care-givers, cannot separate themselves from their roles in their families; this does not mean that they stop caring and working for the betterment of their communities, especially when experiencing oppression. For that reason, the revolutionary and familial love and work for Elena continue.

Elena's analysis of the health ailments in Colonia La Joya allows her to probe more in-depth questions of revolutionary and familial love. To begin, Elena studies issues of public health and sanitation and interviews her domestic worker Marisol and the local priest Father Van der Est (128). After visiting the village and taking note of the dangerous living conditions, she sets off in an examination of what the physical circumstances of the village indicate about possible health hazards. From a decoding of these signs and information, she expects to answer why so many babies die in one location. Elena commences this work despite the toll it may take on her marriage. One day, while Elena reads her photocopies and takes notes, Antonio chides her for doing so much work and not dedicating enough attention to their own son. They argue, and Elena must reconsider once more the connection between revolutionary and familial love:

Love. If revolutionaries were always motivated by feelings of love, then what to make of her feelings for her husband and child? There seemed to be no escaping them, no escaping their demands of her, their desire to be fed, clothed, washed, humored. Elena looked down the street at a gallery of windows, rows of closed shutters like so many wooden eyelids. There was no place to run. (129-130)

Certainly, Elena is subject to the pressure of both familial and revolutionary love as she feels obligated to tend to her family and to the needs of her neighbors who are not aware of what is going on with the deaths of so many babies, represented in this quotation by the gallery of windows with closed shutters like eyelids. Significantly, Elena 'has no place to run;' she cannot turn her back on her family nor her community, and must continue her loving actions regarding both entities. Such commitment leads to Elena's discovery of the truth behind the babies' deaths. As a result of her efforts, Elena discovers the cause of the issues affecting Colonia La Joya while she and Antonio are visiting. They find out that the lack of a proper landfill site and sewer system contaminates the water-supply and causes a fetid

air, thus ailing the people (132-133). At this moment, Elena elaborates another response to what makes the babies sick and die. She has rightly interpreted the signs of public health and sanitation in Colonia La Joya, so as to determine that it is not the air that causes the disease, but the contaminated water. When Elena makes this discovery, she feels compelled to act and tells Antonio:

“We’ve got to do something about this, Antonio. We have to stop it. This sewage is killing the people downstream. It’s killing the babies.” Antonio bit his lip. “This isn’t our home,” he responds after a long pause. “We’re outsiders here.’ ‘I will do what I have to do.” (133)

Elena does take further action as she writes a letter, explaining all that she has discovered, to “the president of the departmental government in Totonicapán” (134). Her ability to identify with others and assume other subject positions bring her to act as if she lived in Colonia La Joya, as if she was not an outsider. By doing so, she exemplifies what Chela Sandoval termed a “differential consciousness.” Sandoval can describe such actions as demonstrating “the procedures for achieving affinity and of alliance across difference; they represent the modes that love takes in the postmodern world” (182). In addition, María Lugones would label Elena’s actions as the result of “world-travelling” and loving perception: “So travelling to each other’s ‘worlds’ would enable us to *be* through *loving* each other” (73 emphasis in the original). Travelling to each other’s worlds allows people to see others differently and act more ‘justly’ towards them, more ‘lovingly.’³ As a result, Elena does what she must do in order to enact love. She writes and sends the letter act out of a spirit of democracy and in the pursuit of justice. Again, here it is possible to read an echo of Sandoval’s “democratic” skill. Coincidentally, this action also comes to represent what Guevara describes as “love of living humanity:”

In these circumstances, one must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth in order to avoid dogmatic extremes, cold scholasticism, or an isolation from the masses. We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force. (226)

Elena transforms her ‘love of living humanity’ into actual deeds through the research of the cause of illness and the subsequent action of writing the letter that discloses the lack of sanitation in Colonia La Joya and the high human costs it causes. She takes this action out of a spirit of democracy for her neighbors who are harmed. What is more, she is in the position of her neighbors as she is not an outsider to them due to Elena’s ability to access differential consciousness. There is no hesitation here, but sadly, there are consequences.

Written out of love, Elena’s letter can assist the people of Colonia La Joya, but it does prove fatal to her family, as authorities now know her and Antonio’s whereabouts. The government sends soldiers to kill her and her family but they only succeed in killing mother and baby. It is important to note that before the death squad enters her home, Elena performs domestic duties but the revolution never leaves her mind: “‘There’s nothing revolutionary about being a good cook,’ Elena thought, fighting off a faint sense of guilt” (144). Even in what turns out to be one of her last thoughts, the gendered implications of familial love nag at her as she seemingly feels guilty for not doing more to live up to the label of “revolutionary.” Once the killers make their presence known, Elena thinks of her only regret as she lays dying: “*I didn’t protect my baby*” (148 emphasis in the original). She

3. María Lugones bases her definition of *loving* on Marilyn Frye’s idea of a “loving perception” in “In and Out of Harm’s Way: Arrogance and Love” from *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Frye describes “loving perception” as the ability to see others without consuming them, assimilating them, reducing them, fearing them, or simplifying them (76). For Lugones, in this frame of vision, one can act justly towards others.

does not doubt her investigation of the deaths nor the writing and sending of her letter; Elena only regrets not doing more to protect her baby. Once more, the simultaneity of familial and revolutionary love can be noted: one does not negate the other. Instead, one love enhances the responsibilities and needs of the other. From another perspective, it is possible to view Elena as a revolutionary mother to all, including the dwellers of Colonia La Joya. Borrowing Rodríguez's words, it is possible to associate Elena with the following description: "Woman takes hold of fortitude, the persistence of the ideologies of maternity, and constitutes herself as mother of all suffering humanity, a Woman/pillar as much at the ideological level as at the emotive and economic one" (178). Elena reveals the great potential of motherhood based on the convergence of revolutionary and familial love and their gendered implications. This scene effectively ends Part II of *The Tattooed Soldier* and returns readers to the contemporary moment in MacArthur Park, Los Angeles, where Antonio has recognized the man, Longoria, who killed his family. Now, this meditation on how love connects to revolution and family extends to the impending scene and question of riots in Los Angeles, 1992.

The Question of Riot or Revolution

The aftermath of the Rodney King trial and verdict provides the main setting of Part III of *The Tattooed Soldier*, thus emphasizing the novel's tension between revolution and riot. After the police officers are cleared of charges for beating Rodney King during his arrest, protests of the verdict turn quickly to riots and looting. Longoria notes this change while watching television at The Pulgarcito Express (270). When viewing how quickly the riots progress on the television, Longoria wonders if there is "some guerilla cell masterminding the operation deep within the fabric of the city?" (286). Longoria's words make an indirect statement that riots can be seen as revolutions in their movements. Besides, when Antonio describes the people and their actions during the protests, he uses phrases like "American holiday" (284), "bizarre dance" (288), and observes "a group of people gathered on the street as if for a block party or quinceañera" (288). Amidst scenes of looting, Esen Kara writes, "The novel maps out those moments of laughter, desire, and chaos nested within each other, investigating the revolutionary potential in these collective interventions in modern urban everyday life" (322). It appears that riots have the potential to become revolutions.

As soon as the novel's setting focuses on the Los Angeles riots in 1992, a confusion in how to label this phenomenon amongst the characters arises. When Frank and the Mayor, two African-American homeless men who live in the same encampment as Antonio, return from the riot scene, Frank uses a telling label: "Hey, my little Spanish friend, we're back from the war," Frank said. "Back from the revolution" (275). Perspective matters greatly here. As an African-American man, Frank can note the significance of his community and the larger community of Los Angeles fighting back against an unfair criminal justice and law enforcement system. He does not even use the word "riot" in this exchange; he calls what is happening a "revolution." At this moment, a link between riots and revolutions and how these phenomena can involve actions of love is perceived. This meditation is not easy as further descriptions of the riots show how vandalism and looting are uncomfortable elements to set within the framework of a revolution. Frank and the Mayor describe further what they have just seen and how they have participated:

"I hit that window on the third floor," Frank interjected.
"Where the lights were on. Still got that old baseball arm."
"God, I feel good right now. So good!"
"But, we didn't get anything. I saw people taking stuff."
"Man, this is more than *that*," the Mayor said, sounding slightly offended. "You know what I'm saying. This is more than just getting things, fools." (276)

Again, perspective matters greatly as the Mayor reminds Frank that the goal of the demonstration is to protest for racial justice, not the acquisition of material goods through looting – despite what they had just witnessed in the scene. One, however, is left still with the question of how vandalism and looting, actions of riots, fit into a conceptual formulation of revolution. Lynn Mie Itagaki's definition of civil racism as "the behaviors or practices expected of racialized subjects in order to assimilate into Whiteness or achieve the status and protections of U.S. citizenship" (6) facilitates examination here. This concept allows one to recognize a link between practices of civility and social inequality:

polite social behavior can mask deeply entrenched beliefs in and practices that promote the fundamental *inequality* of others, and *rude* social behavior can conceal deeply entrenched beliefs in and practices that promote the fundamental *equality* of others. (Itagaki 19 emphasis in the original).

Hence, the existence of civil racism allows the uncivil acts of vandalism, looting, and rioting to be viewed as possible political strategies to make claims on the government and shape politics. Political scientists Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly also have reformulated the idea of democratic deliberation by posing the concept of "contentious politics," meaning the collective ways in which people make claims through petitions, chants, and manifestos. For these political scientists, "violent public protest and nonviolent actions are both crucial forms of political communication, however undesirable and alarming some may find either" (Itagaki 26). With these ideas in play, the actions witnessed and committed by Frank and the Mayor become viable and readable as acts of revolution.

Further, Sandoval reaches a similar conclusion when she analyzes Roland Barthes and Frantz Fanon in her work. She explicates how practitioners of the methodology of the oppressed remake

their own kinds of social position utilizing all media at their disposal—whether it is narrative as weapon, riot as speech, and looting as revolution. In such activities, no legal boundaries are upheld as sanctified limits of the law, and their aim is chiseling out a new social body—one capable of acting justly on the behalf of equality (Sandoval 77-78).

Sandoval allows for vandalism and looting to be read as acts that carve out a new social body, which would include and act in the interests of the oppressed and marginalized. On a theoretical level, inclusive of vandalism and looting, Sandoval also provides room to view riots as connected to revolutions. However, Tobar's narration complicates this idea.

The focus on Latino/a characters' reactions to the Los Angeles riots present major obstacles to viewing riots as equivalent to revolutions and manifest a failure of differential consciousness. First, there are the comments made by Antonio and José Juan once the riots break out. In regard to the outrage at the verdict of the Rodney King trial,

Antonio expresses bewilderment:

He wished he knew more about it so that he could understand the rage and hurt that seemed to overtake his two Black friends [Frank and the Mayor]. They looked like people who had pinned great hopes on something and suddenly had those hopes shattered. (273)

Because Antonio lacks knowledge about American history and racial injustice in the United States, he does not understand why Frank and the Mayor are so disappointed by the King trial verdict; he fails to access knowledge from seeing their immediate disappointment and sharing the same space with them. His reflection does express an empathetic desire to know, but that cannot replace the concrete history and examples of mistreatment that are embodied in the Mayor and Frank. Next, José Juan utters a statement that adds another dimension to Antonio's lack of knowledge. When Antonio tries to explain the riots, José Juan comments definitely:

"It's because of that *negro* who got beat up," Antonio said, thinking out loud. "Because the police beat him up." "What *negro*? They're Latinos," José Juan said. "They don't know any *negro*. They don't care about any *negro*". (281)

José Juan's response indicates not only a lack of knowledge about the Latino/a community in that an Afro-Latino/a population can exist within it, but it also demonstrates a limitation of differential consciousness as he cannot access how members of the African-American community may feel about the verdict and why he may share these same sentiments as a member of the Latino/a community. Indeed, the Latino/a community shares a comparable fate with the African-American community after the events of 1992: "During the L.A. crisis, Latinas/os comprised half of those arrested, most of those made homeless by the fire, and some of the wounded or dead; in its immediate aftermath, the Immigration and Naturalization Service deported hundreds" (Itagaki 104). However, in José Juan's mind, the two communities are separate and cannot possibly care for one another or fight for the interests of the other group; no lines of affinity or alliance are present.⁴ Both Antonio and José Juan's limited perspectives hinder riots from being equated to revolutions. Comprehensive knowledge, action, and practices of differential consciousness are critical in revolutions; none of this seems to exist here.

To add to this complexity about differential consciousness and how to view riots, Frank and the Mayor comment on the riots' conclusion. When they return disillusioned to their encampment, they voice their honest assessment:

"We seen some ugly shit out there. The ugliest."

"The fun was gone after the fourth hour. Right, Mayor? The hoodlums took over. No spirit out there. Just me, me, me." (303)

Ironically, the Mayor and Frank conduct this exchange while holding a transistor radio and packages of underwear. It appears that the Mayor's earlier comment that the riots are not about material goods does not prevent him from acquiring some for his own basic necessities. Although, their criticism of the riots lacking 'spirit' and being too focused on the individual self remains. Perhaps, riots cannot be equal to revolutions as the maintenance of communal spirit is too difficult in the unorganized, chaotic nature of the riot. Frank and the Mayor, as African-American men, are positioned best to judge the communal elements of the Los Angeles riots. It is no

4. It is worth noting that Esen Kara uses the work of Mike Davis, and Héctor Tobar's nonfiction work *Translation Nation* to stress the multiethnic aspect of the 1992 Los Angeles protests: "The uprising thus initially began as a large protest by the African-American community but soon spread to other ethnically marked areas that had long been dealing with gentrification and insufficient urban infrastructure" (321).

coincidence that the most succinct and biting criticism of the riots comes from these men. Lastly, Eric Vázquez best summarizes the difficulty in viewing riots as revolutions:

For all of Tobar's work to salvage the LA riots' liberated climate and to document its multifarious grievances, in my reading these uprisings do not represent a viable form of justice [...] The rioters lack a common project to address the problems of US imperialism in Central America and its ramifications in Los Angeles as opened up in *The Tattooed Soldier*. (143)

Vázquez affirms that the absence of an articulated goal that addresses effectively larger societal issues weakens the riots' claim of justice. Additionally, to go back to Guevara's quotation and its connection to Chela Sandoval's hermeneutics of love, if revolution or revolutionary love necessitate a common goal, as is evident in Elena's life and actions, then the Los Angeles riots are difficult to be read as revolutionary. Although a widely-shared outrage at acts of racial injustice start these riots, no common goal emerges from them or is carried out through their execution; these are key elements of a revolution.

Perhaps Antonio's murder of Longoria presents the greatest failure of differential consciousness and the potential of revolution. When Antonio discovers Longoria in Los Angeles, he follows and studies him. Even when he hears Longoria's peasant accent, Antonio cannot accept the fact of Longoria's complicated subjectivity as a soldier in the Guatemalan army:

The soldier, the killer of his wife and son, was a peasant [...] *God knows what led this peasant to join the army, to become one of the army's hired killers. God knows the person he was before and who he has become since. The easiest thing would be to forget about the man.* (163 emphasis in the original)

Of course, the novel's narration makes plain that the Guatemalan army forcibly conscripts Longoria when he is seventeen, but Antonio ponders how a peasant, the defined enemy of the state, comes to be enlisted in its military. He also acknowledges the possibility that Longoria may have been a different person before and even after his time in the army and asserts that the easiest thing to do would be to forget that he ever saw Longoria. In this moment, Antonio exhibits differential consciousness as he can contemplate and almost place himself in the possible multiple subject positions of Longoria. The result of this movement, and the best demonstration of revolutionary love, would be to forget Longoria as an object of revenge. That is not what happens. Antonio becomes enraged again at the sight of Longoria's tattoo of the yellow jaguar (a symbol of his murderous military unit). Resolving to kill Longoria gives Antonio's spirit a sense of purpose (165). This comprehensive failure of differential consciousness remains clear as the inability to recognize Longoria's conflicted subjectivity repeats in the narrative: "That was something the old woman and the people in the marches never thought about. What about Sergeant Longoria? If he hadn't killed, he might be dead himself" (170). Once conscripted into the army, Longoria's own life would depend often on his ability to take the lives of others; no one really acknowledges this point.

Similarly, when Antonio follows Longoria to his apartment, he breaks-in when he leaves, and sees "certificates showing the soldier had completed training at academies in Guatemala, Panama, and the United States" (175). These academies include the School of the

Americas in the Panama Canal Zone (21) and the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare in Fort Bragg, North Carolina (29). Not only is Longoria's subjectivity complex, it is also shaped strongly by the influence of US forces. His personal history reflects the public history of the Guatemalan civil war; both indict the United States of America as complicit in all the violence and loss of life. Nonetheless, Antonio cannot see Longoria as anything different than a murderer, and he sets out to kill him on the day the Los Angeles riots start, the "day of settling accounts, a day for all vendettas, private and public" and a "day without submissiveness" (283). He shoots Longoria and drags him into a dark tunnel to die alone and hidden away from discovery. Antonio's murder of Longoria results from a failure of differential consciousness and is an act more befitting a riot rather than a revolution. It is not an act of revolutionary or familial love on Antonio's part. There is no love, as defined by Sandoval and depicted by Tobar, discernible here. Subsequently, Longoria's death reaps no larger, common goal for the wronged people of the Guatemalan civil war. Let us contrast this to the way in which Elena's actions of love are prompted by a strong desire to know what causes the deaths of babies in Colonia La Joya and how to stop them. The character of Elena becomes critical in realizing the final connections amongst love, revolution, and riots. Antonio will recognize this truth in the final pages of the novel, after his murder of Longoria.

Love As The Concluding Framework For Revolution

Determination of the final connections amongst love, revolution, and riots rests upon the analysis of one character in this novel, Elena. After the murder of Longoria and the end of the Los Angeles riots, Antonio ruminates on scenes where people are cleaning up the debris:

All the brooms on the streets now—they were definitely an act of love. The sweeping and the sweeping, strangers meeting to collect a treasure of shimmering shards. We are cleaning now. Here is the true brotherhood of the city. But the brooms could not do their work without the fields of broken glass, without the soggy ashes that covered the sidewalks. Antonio wondered if throwing a rock was an act of revolution and thus also an act of love. (306)

Antonio links concretely riots to revolutions by suggesting that a state of rebuilding necessitates a state of ruination. Assuredly, "in the vernacular of love it is impossible to tell the difference between destructive and world-building impulses. We see that revolutionary impulses are destructive, too" (Berlant 690). Ultimately, Antonio does not answer the question if throwing a rock can be read as an act of a riot and a revolution (thus love) definitely. He believes the only person he knew who could answer that question is dead:

If only Elena were here, in Los Angeles, Elena would know, she would be able to give him a definitive yes or no. After all, she had studied and thought about these questions of love and revolution and had given her life in search of the answers. (306-307)

Antonio notes how Elena sacrifices her life in executing her own revolution out of great feelings of love. Elena acts in individual and communal ways for the benefit of others in multiple locations, thereby demonstrating revolutionary love while still enacting familial love for her husband and child. Consequently, this essay's reading of Elena and *The Tattooed Soldier* disagrees with Harford Vargas's assertion that "how Elena might have imagined justice in

more restorative and loving rather than retributive terms is left dangling in the air” and that the novel “leaves open-ended the definition of revolutionary love” (142). Elena’s actions both in the capital and in the countryside of Guatemala show a definition of revolutionary love that compels her to work for the interests of her larger community, inclusive of her family.

Moreover, Chela Sandoval’s methodology of the oppressed elucidates the revolutionary love displayed by Elena. The skills of semiotics, deconstruction, meta-ideologizing, democratics, and differential consciousness describe Elena’s actions, especially when she lives in the countryside and involves herself in the problems of Colonia La Joya. As Sandoval summarizes, these skills

operate as a single apparatus that I call the physics of love. Love as social movement is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global coalitions of citizen-activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation. (184)

Elena represents one of these citizen-activists who is allied with the people of Colonia La Joya “through the apparatus of emancipation.” Can the participants in the Los Angeles riots be seen as citizen-activists? Since no common goal characterizes their actions, it is hard but not impossible to see them as exercising revolutionary love or Sandoval’s methodology of the oppressed. Based on Tobar and Sandoval’s works, revolution and riot are all intricately and messily tied up with love and differential consciousness.

Héctor Tobar narrates a complex story about the Guatemalan diaspora that traverses time, geographic locations, and relationship ties. To set a story about a time of civil war in a nation against the backdrop of social and cultural unrest in another nation is an ambitious goal. The structure and content of the novel emphasizes the potential of simultaneous revolutionary and familial love and differential consciousness in the character of Elena but also admits the possible failure of revolutionary love and differential consciousness in the characters of Antonio and José Juan. Finally, what anchors and pushes this demonstration of love, be it revolutionary or familial, and differential consciousness forward is the profound question of whether or not riots be seen as revolutionary. In countries suffering under US intervention as well as in the populations within the US who are victims of racism and discrimination, practices of love, affinity and alliance deserve to be highlighted. Ernesto Guevara’s quotation puts the concepts of love and revolution in play. A reading in dialogue with the ideas of Chela Sandoval’s methodology of the oppressed allows us to strengthen the ties amongst these ideas and to show how they can be put into action, allowing readers to consider the role of differential consciousness and revolution. Cleverly, to highlight the relevance of a discourse about love and affinity on the national level, Tobar inserts the question of where riots fit in through the novel’s partial setting of Los Angeles in 1992. In the end, revolutionary love appears synonymous with Chela Sandoval’s hermeneutics of love. Guevara’s thoughts anticipated Sandoval’s work. As Sandoval herself notes, for many years now,

a diverse array of thinkers [have been] agitating for similarly conceived and unprecedented forms of identity, politics, aesthetic production, and coalitional consciousness through their shared practice of a hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world. (4)

Various writers and critics have been advocating for similar practices as Sandoval does under the label of “love” however, her

explanation of love's mobilization and a detailed break-down and analyses of the skills that constitute the practice of love is new. Here is where Tobar's novel excels, and perhaps where Latino/a literature overall succeeds in depicting how the concepts of love, revolution, affinity, and alliance are intertwined and dependent on each other. The literature of this community and the issues it addresses, such as colonialism, migration, environmental and racial injustice, mass incarceration, and misogyny, cannot help but show, time and time again, how the comprehensive well-being of a healthy society depends on practices that deconstruct and construct meaning, encourage lines of affinity and alliance, promote the shifting back and forth into numerous subject-positions, and prompt action. This manifestation of love is nowhere better shown than in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*.

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