

Exploring the Body and Memory in Exile: Somatic Trauma in Isabel Allende's *in the Midst of Winter*

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استكشاف الجسد والذاكرة في المنفى: الصدمة الجسدية في رواية إيزابيل الليندي في خضم الشتاء

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Abstract:

This study examines the evolution from magical realism to what I term "somatic realism" in Chilean exile literature, focusing on Isabel Allende's *In the Midst of Winter* (2017) as a paradigmatic text that crystallises embodied approaches to representing political trauma. Drawing on somatic trauma theory, particularly the work of Bessel van der Kolk, Judith Butler, and Cathy Caruth, alongside Latin American critical frameworks from Nelly Richard, Idelber Avelar, and Diana Taylor, this analysis demonstrates how contemporary Chilean women writers including Allende, Diamela Eltit, Lina Meruane, and Nona Fernández have developed distinctive corporeal epistemologies that exceed Western psychological models of trauma. Through close textual analysis of *In the Midst of Winter*, I argue that Allende constructs "corporeal cartographies" that map the hemispheric circulation of state violence through migrant bodies, creating transnational somatic networks that link Southern Cone dictatorships, Central American civil wars, and contemporary forced displacement. The novel's interweaving of three traumatised characters, a Chilean exile with cancer as a somatic manifestation of dictatorship trauma, a Guatemalan migrant whose selective mutism embodies border violence, and an American academic awakening from affective numbness, reveals how political violence persists as embodied memory that transcends national boundaries while respecting bodily specificity. This article contributes to new studies on the somatic turn in Latin American literary studies, as it shows literature also to be an archive and a method for apprehending trauma as a material inscription on the flesh. The study's interdisciplinary approach, bridging literary analysis with neuroscience research on epigenetic trauma transmission and medical humanities perspectives on narrative medicine, offers new frameworks for understanding how bodies simultaneously witness, preserve, and resist political violence across generations and geographies.

Keywords: somatic trauma, Chilean exile literature, Isabel Allende, embodied memory, corporeal epistemology, Latin American women's writing, transnational trauma, political violence, *In the Midst of Winter*.

المخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة التطور من الواقعية السحرية إلى ما أُصطلح على تسميته "الواقعية الجسدية" في أدب المنفى التشيلي، مع التركيز على رواية إيزابيل الليندي في عزّ الشتاء (2017) باعتبارها نصاً نموذجياً يبلور المقاربات المتجسدة لتمثيل الصدمة السياسية. اعتماداً على نظرية الصدمة الجسدية، وبخاصة أعمال بيسيل فان دير كولك، وجوديث بتلر، وكاثي كاروث، إلى جانب الأطر النقدية اللاتينية الأمريكية من نيلي ريتشارد، وإيدلبر أفيلار، ودايانا تايلور، يُظهر هذا التحليل كيف طوّرت الكاتبات التشيليات المعاصرات، بمن فيهن الليندي، ودياميلّا إلتيت، ولينا ميروانه، ونونا فيرنانديز، معرفيات جسدية مميزة تتجاوز النماذج النفسية الغربية للصدمة.

من خلال التحليل النصي الدقيق لرواية في عز الشتاء، أحتج بأن الليندي تبني "خرايط جسدية" ترسم التداول نصف الكروي لعنف الدولة عبر أجساد المهاجرين، مما يخلق شبكات جسدية عابرة للحدود الوطنية تربط بين ديكتاتوريات المخروط الجنوبي، والحروب الأهلية في أمريكا الوسطى، والنزوح القسري المعاصر. إن تشابك الرواية بين ثلاث شخصيات صادمة - منفية تشيلية مصابة بالسرطان كتجل جسدي لصدمة الديكتاتورية، ومهاجرة غواتيمالية يجسد صمتها الانتقائي عنف الحدود، وأكاديمي أمريكي يصحو من خدر عاطفي - يكشف كيف يستمر العنف السياسي كذاكرة متجسدة تتجاوز الحدود الوطنية مع احترام الخصوصية الجسدية.

تساهم هذه المقالة في الدراسات الجديدة حول التحول الجسدي في الدراسات الأدبية اللاتينية الأمريكية، إذ تُظهر أن الأدب يُعد أيضاً أرشيفاً ومنهجاً لإدراك الصدمة كنقش مادي على الجسد. إن المقاربة متعددة التخصصات للدراسة، التي تربط بين التحليل الأدبي وبحوث علم الأعصاب حول انتقال الصدمة الوراثي الفوقي ومنظورات العلوم الطبية الإنسانية حول الطب السردي، تقدم أطراً جديدة لفهم كيف تشهد الأجساد على العنف السياسي وتحفظه وتقاومه عبر الأجيال والجغرافيات في آنٍ واحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة الجسدية، أدب المنفى التشيلي، إيزابيل آيندي، الذاكرة المُجسدة، المعرفة الجسدية، كتابات نساء أمريكا اللاتينية، الصدمة عابرة القوميات، العنف السياسي، في قلب الشتاء.

I. Introduction

The body remembers what the mind forgets. This axiom has evolved from metaphor into methodology in Latin American literature emerging from state violence, as writers use somatic experience, the lived, felt knowledge of trauma inscribed in flesh, to articulate histories that resist conventional narrative representation. Trauma becomes an embodied archive in this corporeal turn, where muscles remember torment, organs store fear, and skin maps relocation. In her ground-breaking work on embodied memory, Roberta Culbertson claims that trauma "is fundamentally a disorder of the body" that contradicts cognitive approaches to violence's aftermath (366). In Latin America, systematic state terrorism used the body as both target and text, turning flesh into "the score" for trauma's unending symphony (21). While trauma studies have increasingly recognised the body's centrality to memory formation and transmission, their application to Latin American literature has often been Eurocentric and prioritises individual psychology over collective, culturally specific embodied remembrance. Stef Craps's critique of trauma theory's "Western bias" suggests acknowledging how "non-Western trauma narratives" depict embodied suffering differently than individualistic therapeutic paradigms (4). Chilean exile literature, shaped by Pinochet's dictatorship and its aftermath, provides a rich corpus for studying how somatic trauma is used as a literary device and epistemological framework to create "corporeal cartographies" that map the intersections of personal pain and political violence across transnational spaces of displacement.

Isabel Allende's 2017 novel *In the Midst of Winter* uses embodied trauma to weave together multiple strands of hemispheric violence from the Chilean dictatorship to the Guatemalan genocide to contemporary forced migration, a significant evolution in this somatic tradition. Diana Taylor's "embodied knowledge" that "exceeds the limitations of the written archive" (16) is symbolised by three characters drawn together by a Brooklyn snowfall and a corpse in a car trunk. Through the intertwining stories of Lucia Maraz, a Chilean exile with cancer as a somatic manifestation of dictatorship trauma; Evelyn Ortega, a Guatemalan migrant whose selective mutism embodies unspeakable border violence; and Richard Bowmaster, an American academic whose emotional numbness represents privilege's anesthetic effect, Allende constructs "postmemory", the transmission of trauma across generations and cultures through "bod". Thus, the novel produces a corporeal archive that rejects individual and societal pain and insists on bodies that "speak in a language beyond words" (178). Allende's somatic shift in her later work needs to be read within the backdrop of women writers in Chile who have consistently employed the body as a political inscription and resistance. From her performance piece "Zona de dolor" to novels like "Impuesto a la carne," Diamela Eltit's bold experiments in bodily vulnerability render the wounded body Chile's most honest historian, witnessing brutality the state wants to forget. Lina Meruane's "illness trilogy" examines how disease

becomes a metaphor for national pathology, with pieces like *Sangre en el ojo* showing physiological collapse as a sign of societal trauma. These poets contribute to Chilean post-dictatorship culture's "poetics of the body", where "corporeal memory" counters official histories of reconciliation and forgetting (45). Trauma's somatic persistence resists neoliberal transition's closure, as Idelber Avelar's "untimely present" shows (23). Allende's global viewpoint increases the geographic reach while keeping Michael Lazzara's methodological commitment to "embodied witnessing", testimony from the body's symptomatic speech (112). *In the Midst of Winter* continues and innovates Chilean literature's somatic tradition by mapping trauma's hemispheric circulation through migrant bodies that carry history's wounds across borders, creating new geographies of memory that challenge the boundaries between Chilean, Central American, and North American political violence.

II. Theory: Somatic Trauma and Diasporic Bodies

A Somatic Trauma Theory Foundation

Psychoanalytic trauma theories were replaced by somatic trauma theories, redefining how violence affects humans. Somatic approaches recognise that trauma's most permanent archive is muscular tension, respiratory patterns, and cellular memory, while conventional trauma theory, anchored in Freudian models of suppression and return, locates it in the psyche's secret chambers. Judith Butler's foundational work on body materiality argues that "the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated" (*Bodies That Matter* 189). This political management of physical boundaries is especially important in state violence, as authority acts through "materialisation", the process by which persons become legible as grievable or disposable within dominant recognition frameworks. Beyond metaphor, trauma changes neurological circuits, hormonal responses, and the body's relationship to space and time. Susan Brison's philosophical study of trauma's somatic aspects shows how violent disruption "severs the connections between the self and the rest of humanity," which must be repaired through embodied practices rather than cognitive processing (*Aftermath* 40). Her view of trauma as relational, occurring between bodies rather than in psyches, undermines Western healing's focus on vocal articulation.

This embodied understanding challenges Cathy Caruth's influential view of trauma as "unclaimed experience," suggesting that the body can claim trauma even as it transcends language. Somatic memory produces chronic pain, autoimmune dysfunction, or muscular armouring that preserves threat responses long after danger has passed, contradicting Caruth's claim that trauma is "the literal return of the event" (*Unclaimed Experience* 5). In contrast to psychic trauma, the body's trauma survives as "body memory", implicit, pre-reflective knowledge that impacts perception and behaviour below consciousness (78). Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" theory that enslaved bodies developed "kinesthetic memory" that preserved African cultural practices through movement and rhythm when verbal transmission was forbidden bridges individual somatic experience and collective historical trauma (*The Black Atlantic* 75). Embodied cultural memory is crucial to understanding how diasporic societies relate to traumatic past through somatic activities, dance, ritual, and gesture that encode information in flesh rather than text. Thus, the body becomes an active agent of resistance, exhibiting "absent presence," as traumatised bodies expose and conceal their wounds through symptomatic expression (23).

Latin American Embodied Trauma Differences

Systematic torture and disappearance as state terror in Latin America's Southern Cone caused specific physiological traumas that cannot be explained by political violence theories. Jean Franco describes how Latin American dictatorships used pedagogic "demonstrations" of torture on the body to inscribe lessons about the state's power, not only to extract information but also to understand it (*Cruel Modernity* 15). The tortured body became a "text of terror," transmitted

around villages and towns as a warning and lesson in authoritarian civic life, as Franco would say.

According to Ariel Dorfman, governmental violence "created the empire of the body in which physical torture reordered social organisation and political possibilities" (Death and the Maiden 42). Dorfman's literary and critical career shows how torture's subterranean but massive and ever-present impact corrupts entire societies and catalyses what he calls "anticipatory trauma," the somatic expectation of violence that distorts behaviour even in those who were never tortured. The ritual of disappearance adds a unique twist to Latin American somatic trauma, creating "bodies without bounds", the paradox of mourning without bodies, where absence becomes traumatic presence (A Lexicon of Terror 51).

Gordon defines "haunting" as a social phenomenon where "that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence" (8). Military regimes sexualized dissident women, making gender a key analytic category for Southern Cone somatic trauma. Lessie Jo Frazier's research on Chilean women's testimonies shows how state violence used "gendered body politics," rape and forced pregnancy, to reorganise the nation (Salt in the Sand 119). Military discourse portrayed female activists as abandoning their "natural" parental roles, justifying sexual violence as a remedial remedy. Frazier's testimony shows how women used somatic vocabularies to express their experiences through insomnia, chronic pain, and reproductive failure when direct narration was impossible. Elizabeth Jelin's research on memory and gender shows how women's embodied remembrance practices, from the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's circular march to arpillera workshops, created "embodied counter-memories" that challenged official narratives through somatic rather than verbal testimony (State Repression 94). These gendered dimensions show how Latin American state terror used reproductive capacity as a locus of political control, causing intergenerational somatic traumas in maternal bodies. Thus, the marked body in Latin America has various inscriptions, racial, gendered, and political, that challenge universal trauma theories and highlight authoritarian power's corporeal dominance.

Transnational Trauma and Migration

According to Gloria Anzaldúa, the movement of traumatised bodies across borders creates "borderlands consciousness" - a state of perpetual transition where the migrant body acts as a bridge between worlds (Borderlands/La Frontera 99). Anzaldúa's description of the border as "una herida abierta" (an open wound) highlights the physical impact of the geopolitical divide on those forced to cross militarised zones. She calls "la facultad" marginalised bodies' hypervigilant somatic awareness, when skin becomes a sensor for threat before conscious knowledge. According to Anzaldúa, migrants experience "nepantla consciousness" where different cultural memories contend for somatic representation, resulting in contradictory bodies that resist national identification (548). This is how Alicia Schmidt Camacho historicizes "migrant melancholia", a bodily state in which grief for multiple displacements unmetabolizable within existing cultural frameworks resides in migrant bodies (Migrant Imaginaries 287). Her work shows how the undocumented condition is registered in flesh: chronic muscle tension from constant attention, respiratory affliction from environmental racism in agricultural work, and reproductive practices and health management from a lack of medical care that inscribes political violence in biological systems.

Intergenerational mobility trauma is absorbed through "corporeal mobilities," the ways moving bodies move through the sedimented histories that have organised how future generations will move in space (Mobility Justice 14).

Neuroscientific studies of epigenetic transmission of the gestational legacy to offspring are now confirming these subjective observations about trauma. Trauma changes genetic expression in

ways that are transmittable across generations via "molecular scars" (Ibid: 237). The diaspora body holds what Avery Gordon calls "the ghostly matters," the spectre and haunting residue of past violence and an act of the past that continues to impact contemporary corporeality, not simply personal experience but ancestral trauma. (8). Édouard Glissant calls these transnational somatic networks "relation" forms of connection that operate through shared corporeal vulnerability rather than territorial proximity, creating communities of feeling that transcend national boundaries while respecting each body's journey (185). Literary representation must convey transnational bodily experiences without simplifying migrant hardship.

III. Isabel Allende's Magical to Somatic Realism

Early Work and Embodied Metaphor

With "somatic realism" as her main vehicle for historical witness, Isabel Allende's writing gradually moves from magical realism's allegorical bodies to flesh. *The House of the Spirits* (1982), known for its magical realism, already shows how political violence inscribes itself on bodies, especially through Alba, whose torture scenes go beyond metaphor to document state terror. Early critic Patricia Hart noted that Allende "transforms the female body into a text of resistance," but her 1980s feminist analysis ignored the corporeal writing's physical aspects (Narrative Magic 47). The novel portrays Clara's silence after seeing Rosa's autopsy, where the beloved's body is actually opened and emptied, as a physiological response to trauma that transcends speech. Clara's nine-year selective mutism proves what modern neuroscience has long known: trauma may shut down Broca's area, which produces speech. Linda Gould Levine's latest analysis calls Southern Cone women's literature "poetics of silence" because "the body speaks what the mouth cannot" (Isabel Allende 73). Though intense, Levine's reading rejects the biological validity of trauma's somatic aftereffects, which are processed more as symbolic gestures than physical responses to violence.

After *The House of the Spirits*, Allende's work began to individualise bodily harm. Rosa's emerald hair and Clara's second sight Parties, aunts, and aunts again write on bodies.

The magical surcharge consequence, characters that follow have permanent burns, sicknesses, amputations, and pain that denies transcendence as metaphor. This matches Wolfgang Bongers's description of Allende's descent into a "traumatischer Realismus," when bodies sink into history's raw material (142). In the novel's closing rape of Alba, the magic realist distance of the narrative refracted almost every previous example of rape. Its torqued root of torture is detailed in stark terms, naming the tools that break the fingers that write and insisting on the bodily reality of the torture.

Bernardita Llanos claims that this incident begins Allende's "testimonial turn," where fiction documents state violence with forensic precision (Passionate Subjects 89). Early trauma theory focused on symbolic representation, but contemporary somatic approaches recognise that traumatic memory often persists as sensory fragments, smells, sounds, and physical sensations that resist narrative integration. Allende's progression from representative to historically specific sufferer reflects this theoretical development.

In exile and corporeal displacement

Exile changed Allende's writing about embodied trauma because she used her own body to understand how political violence crosses borders. *Of Love and Shadows* (1985), written during Allende's Venezuelan exile, shows a documentary approach to torture's physical repercussions. The novel's fundamental image, bodies in an abandoned mine, is based on the 1978 Lonquén case, where fifteen disappeared people were found, turning fiction into "exile writing as embodied witness" (Dialectics of Exile 156). McClennen shows how exile creates "corporeal consciousness," making the displaced writer alert to global violence. Irene's investigation of

disappearances mirrors Allende's exile: distant from direct violence but somatically connected through "bodily empathy", the ability of traumatised bodies to recognise trauma in others across geographic distance (After Exile 92). According to affect theorists, "somatic contagion", the unconscious transmission of painful experiences between bodies, enables embodied recognition.

The novel's handling of Evangelina's epileptic convulsions, initially perceived as divine visitations but eventually exposed as a somatic response to sexual assault, shows Allende's growing competence in expressing trauma's corporeal manifestations. Recently discovered "psychogenic non-epileptic seizures" support Allende's theory that the body might manufacture seizure-like events to defend against severe trauma. Kaminsky's "exile consciousness" view of this event shows how displaced writers become sensitive to "bodies out of place" whose symptoms exceed cultural frameworks for understanding misery (98). The exile writer, herself a body out of place, becomes aware of "the symptomatic", bodily expressions that encode political histories in biological language (Residues and Remnants 34). In *Of Love and Shadows*, Allende introduces the photograph as somatic documentation, a recurring theme. Susan Sontag calls Irene and Francisco's images of tortured corpses "secular icons" because they circumvent cognitive barriers to evoke visceral, physiological responses (Regarding the Pain 119). This focus on photography's physical effects, nausea, shaking, and involuntary tears, indicates a rising awareness of how trauma spreads through images that affect bodies

Hemispheric Trauma and Late Work

In the Midst of Winter (2017) summarises Allende's decades-long exploration of somatic trauma, from magical realist allegory through exile testimony to "hemispheric somatic consciousness", the recognition that bodily trauma transcends national boundaries to create communities of corporeal suffering across the Americas. According to María DeGuzmán, this work exemplifies "Latino/a/x literature's somatic turn," because migrant bodies capture numerous histories of state brutality (Understanding Contemporary 423). Lucia, Evelyn, and Richard represent "the Latino/a/x body as hemispheric formation" (LatinX 78) through diverse somatic traumas. Lucia's breast cancer, developed decades after Chilean detention, verifies psycho-oncology findings that persistent inflammation and immunological dysfunction can cause cellular mutations from political trauma. According to Ana Patricia Rodríguez's study, "oncological metaphor" in Central American fiction represents neoliberalism's slow violence (Dividing the Isthmus 234).

Recent trauma theory calls Evelyn's selective mutism "somatic dissociation", the body's protective shutdown of functions connected with traumatic experience. Allende utilises Evelyn's silence to criticise "the speakability imperative" in human rights discourse, which requires verbal testimony from victims of somatic trauma (The Fiction of Solidarity 167), according to Laura Loustau's 2020 study. The novel's focus on "differential corporeality" in trauma studies, Evelyn's undocumented status preventing medical treatment, Lucia's academic position enabling therapy, and Richard's white privilege insulating him from political violence, reflects recent trauma scholarship. Arturo Arias claims that Allende's Evelyn depiction of Maya-Guatemalan suffering defies "testimonial literature's textual focus" by arguing that indigenous trauma is frequently embodied practice rather than narrative (Recovering Lost Footprints 298). Domestic violence victim Kathryn Brown's body, found frozen in the trunk, reveals a "infrapolitical connection" between intimate partner abuse and state feminicide, according to Alberto Moreiras (Infrapolitics 89). The "pedagogy of cruelty" that links interpersonal and political violence through shared bodily substrate is mapped by Lucia's ill, Evelyn's silenced, and Kathryn's dead bodies (The Elementary Structures 45).

IV. Frozen Bodies: Somatic Analysis of *In the Midst Winter*: The Trunk as Corporate Archive.

Kathryn Brown's frozen corpse in a Lexus trunk during a Brooklyn snowfall is the novel's fundamental somatic metaphor: trauma frozen in ice, waiting to be thawed and recognised. The undocumented Guatemalan lady driving the car, Evelyn Ortega, represents Achille Mbembe's "necropolitics", the state's authority to decide which bodies matter and which are disposable, creating zones where life and death blur (Necropolitics 40). Sayak Valencia calls her journey from Guatemala to Brooklyn a "gore geography" of spectacular murder that turns bodies into currency in necrocapitalist economies (Gore Capitalism 23). Evelyn's bodily reactions to finding the dead are thoroughly documented in the novel: "Her teeth chattered ferociously, clicking like castanets. She shook all over, but not from cold" (Allende 67). The involuntary percussion of teeth as castanets ironically recalls festive Spanish dance while marking trauma's takeover of voluntary motor control, demonstrating Peter Levine's "freeze response" to overwhelming threat, where muscles prepare for action while paralysed (In an Unspoken Voice 34).

Diana Taylor calls the frozen body "the DNA of performance", material evidence that maintains and conveys painful information (Performance 175). Kathryn's curled-up corpse evokes Latin American mass graves and prenatal vulnerability. According to Zoë Crossland, the text's depiction of the body "wrapped in a tarp, tied with rope, frozen solid as a log" (Allende 71) resembles forensic descriptions from human rights reports, creating a "forensic aesthetics," where fictional bodies evoke real corpses seeking justice (Ances Luxury cars become hearses that transport death through privilege when the trunk is used as a grave. Christina Sharpe calls this collision "the wake" of ongoing racial violence, where Black and Brown bodies navigate the "afterlives of slavery" that shape contemporary necropolitics (In the Wake 15). Evelyn's trauma from MS-13 murdering her brothers in Guatemala, border crossing rape, and New York labour exploitation amplifies this meeting. Each violation embeds "the structure of torture" in muscle memory, specific tension, protective posturing, and hypervigilance as a corporeal archive of political violence (The Body in Pain 27).

The novel's polar vortex paralyses New York, causing "atmospheric trauma," where weather freezes emotions and politics. Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" shows how cold maintains but doesn't modify bodies: preserved but not living (Cruel Optimism 24). According to Bessel van der Kolk, trauma's "numbing defence," when bodies shut down sensation to withstand horrific experience, is reflected in the novel's constant emphasis on numbness (The Body Keeps the Score 273). This protective numbing hampers healing, causing "the pathos of the literal" trauma's tendency to freeze experience and resist metabolization (Trauma: A Genealogy 89).

Chilean Memory in Lucia

Jackie Stacey calls Lucia Maraz's breast cancer diagnosis "somatic citizenship", the process by which sickness integrates people into global communities of bodily vulnerability (Teratologies 142). The novel directly links her disease to political imprisonment: "The physician indicated stress could activate long-dormant cancer cells. Lucia wondered if those cancerous cells had lain dormant since 1973" (Allende 156). This temporal specificity, 1973, the year of Pinochet's coup, turns cancer into "cancer as biography," where biological mutation encodes political history (Malignant 78). A recently published psychoneuroimmunology study shows that political trauma causes chronic inflammation that can lead to oncogenesis decades later. In 2019, Fagundes et al. in *Brain, Behaviour, and Immunity* reported that political violence survivors have higher inflammatory markers like IL-6 and C-reactive protein, causing "biological embedding" of political trauma (45).

The novel's handling of Lucia's mastectomy scars shows "trans-corporeality", that bodies are always invaded by environmental, political, and chemical forces (Bodily Natures 15). Lucia's statement that "they had cut off her breast as efficiently as they had cut off her country" (Allende 189) crosses metaphorical boundaries. According to María Lugones, "the coloniality of gender" refers to patriarchal violence that dismembers female bodies that resist state authority (Pilgrimages 196). The surgical excision of breast tissue resembles "the medicalisation of torture," as state terror uses clinical aesthetics to justify its mutilations (Other Septembers 67). Lucia's survival shows "the transformation of silence into language and action", how illness can catalyse political consciousness rather than victimise (Sister Outsider 40), as Audre Lorde wrote about her breast cancer experience.

The transmission of Lucia's suffering through her daughter Daniela shows "postmemory", the inheritance of trauma by people who did not personally experience it but whose lives are influenced by it (The Generation of Postmemory 106). Yael Danieli's research on Holocaust survivors confirmed that trauma passes through families via "multigenerational legacies of trauma," affecting attachment patterns, stress responses, and intimacy (International Handbook 89). Daniela's anxiety disorders, inability to form lasting relationships, and compulsive need for control all demonstrate this. Breastfeeding, which modern research reveals can transfer stress hormones from mother to newborn, is described in the novel as "Daniela had absorbed her mother's fears with her milk" (Allende 201). Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok term this embodied inheritance "transgenerational haunting", the transmission of unfathomable family secrets through physical rather than verbal pathways (The Shell and the Kernel 171).

V. Comparative Analysis: Chilean Women's Somatic Literature

Radical corporeality by Diamela Eltit

Diamela Eltit's literary and performative art makes the injured body Chile's most uncompromising archive, rejecting consolation and embracing flesh's indigestible histories. *Impuesto a la carne* (2010) depicts a mother and daughter confined in a hospital for two centuries, undergoing endless medical procedures that symbolise Chile's bicentennial through "the medicalisation of national history" (Mining for Gold 187). Two hundred years of continual hospitalisation in the novel creates "corporeal duration," where bodies experience history as an everlasting present of assault ("Performative Citizenship" 341). Eltit's choice to name both ladies "diamela eltit" generates "autobiographical contamination," eliminating the author-character boundary that can soothe readers (Marginalities 92). Jean Franco calls this nominal doubling "the politics of the proper name," when identity becomes communal rather than individual ("Gender, Death" 67).

The novel's hospital setting references Chile's history of "the asylum as colonial institution", psychiatric institutionalisation as a political tool that pathologises indigenous and rebellious bodies (Where Memory Dwells 124). Earlier performances with CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte) help explain Eltit's literary corporeality. In the 1980 action "Zona de dolor," Eltit read from *Lumpérica* in a Santiago brothel with self-inflicted cuts and burns, creating "corporeal citation" (The Great Woman Singer 198). The brothel where this performance takes place creates "zones of promiscuous contact" where artistic, sexual, and political bodies cross boundaries (The Art of Transition 76). Alice Nelson calls Eltit's cuts during this performance "a grammar of wounding," where self-harm becomes a paradoxical means of self-preservation under state terror (Political Bodies 143).

Catalina Forttes Zalaquett's disability studies reading of Eltit's somatic aesthetics argues that her characters' injured bodies resist neoliberal demands for productive, efficient corporeality ("Disability and Resistance" 89). The mother-daughter dyad in *Impuesto a la carne* shows "crip temporality", alternative time relationships from bodies incapable or unable to synchronise with

capitalist productivity (Crip Theory 201). Their constant medical subjugation creates "the biopolitics of gender," where female bodies are used to test state power (Masculine/Feminine 34). In the novel's climactic scene, the ladies consider eating their own organs, exemplifying "self-consumption as resistance" ("An Anatomy" 178).

Medical Narratives by Lina Meruane

Lina Meruane's examination of disease as a political metaphor peaks in *Sangre en el ojo* (2012), when her temporary blindness is used to examine how neoliberal states abandon unproductive bodies. Lina, the novel's protagonist, undergoes retinal bleeding that Meruane terms "a red curtain", blood actually obstructing sight, symbolising Chile's transition to democracy's violence. Rebecca Colesworthy places this "hemorrhagic aesthetics" in the Latin American tradition of "writing in blood," but Meruane's innovation is making blood the medium that precludes writing ("Returning to the Wound" 167). Diabetes retinopathy, the narrator's pathology, is linked to "neoliberal diabetes," structural inequality and environmental racism's metabolic illness epidemic ("The Coloniality" 234).

Sistema nervioso (2021) continues Meruane's somatic exploration with a protagonist who researches previous pandemics while enduring strange neurological problems. The novel's mix of personal illness story and mediaeval plague archive research develops "pandemic consciousness", a knowledge that disease is always political (Strategic Occidentalism 298). While her nervous system deteriorates, the protagonist translates Chinese medical materials, which Rey Chow calls "the labour of translation as somatic practice," causing physiological symptoms. Meruane's focus on women's symptoms being rejected as hysteria shows "the gendered politics of neuroplasticity", that female nerve systems are inherently unstable (The New Wounded 167).

In *Reading Colonial, Postcolonial, and Decolonial Narratives*, Seligmann and González argue that Western biomedicine reinforces colonial hierarchies by pathologising non-normative bodies ("Decolonising Medicine" 89). Jackie Orr's "psychopower", the merging of psychological and political technologies that create modern subjects, is shown by the woman academic whose study mimics her symptoms (Panic Diaries 23). Julio Ramos calls Meruane's prose "clinical precision," which conveys medical discourse's objectivity while showing its violence (Divergent Modernities 156). According to Catherine Waldby, "biopoetics" turns biological processes into aesthetic material (The Visible Human Project 98).

VI. Transnational Somatic Networks Hemispheric Links

Debra A. Castillo calls "hemispheric trauma circuits" networks where military training, intelligence sharing, and refugee flows spread bodily violence across national borders (Redreaming America 234). The School of the Americas, which trained Latin American military personnel in "enhanced interrogation," established "pedagogies of terror" that standardised somatic violence across the hemisphere (Gill 89). These institutional links created "border fictions" that try to keep trauma within national borders while bodies refuse (Border Fictions 45). The shared vocabulary of violence *desaparecidos*, *la capucha*, and *el submarino* shows how torture techniques migrate to other contexts, creating "transnational repertoires of repression" that produce similar somatic symptoms across national contexts (War Echoes 112).

In the Midst of Winter follows Evelyn from Guatemala to Mexico to the US, tracing "the Central American-Caribbean diaspora" as a living consequence of state violence (Taking Their Word 167). According to Greg Grandin, Latin America was "Empire's Workshop" for creating and perfecting corporeal control tactics that were eventually implemented globally (Empire's Workshop 87). Guatemalan genocide techniques came from Chilean military advisors. According to anthropologists, "the vertical border" migration patterns turn entire territories into

zones of somatic vulnerability where bodies learn survival techniques, including being invisible, travelling at night, and interpreting landscape violence. On Central American women migrants, Alicia Ivonne Estrada shows how bodies develop "somatic bilingualism", the ability to simulate different national identities through gesture, gait, and accent to evade discovery ("Transnational Feminisms" 298).

April Shemak calls "asylum genres" narrative forms that arise when bodies seeking refuge from diverse conflicts meet in locations of purported safety (Asylum Speakers 76). Chilean and Guatemalan trauma in Brooklyn collide. Irmay Reyes-Santos labels these interactions "decolonial love" because they form affective relationships based on state aggression rather than romantic or familial attachment (Our Caribbean Kin 134). The novel's winter setting symbolises "the cold war's ongoing freeze", unprocessed pain from 1970s-1980s proxy wars chilling bodies decades later ("Frozen Conflicts" 67).

Gender and Body Vulnerability

Rita Laura Segato's "femigenocide" shows how state and criminal violence target female bodies as "territory to be conquered," where sexual violence serves male power structures rather than individual gratification (La guerra contra las mujeres 45). Melissa W. Wright's "the dialectics of still life" shows how women embody value (as reproducers, labourers, symbols) and disposability (as excess population) in neoliberal economies (Disposable Women 71). The targeting of indigenous women in Chile and Guatemala highlights "colonial patriarchy" - racial and gender hierarchies that make some bodies vulnerable ("Mujeres indígenas" 89).

Lucia (cancer patient), Evelyn (rape survivor), and Kathryn (murder victim) map "gore capitalism's" uneven susceptibility across race, class, and citizenship (Gore Capitalism 178). María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo argues that women's bodily injury depends on their position in "the colonial difference" hierarchy, which determines public grieving against statistical anonymity (Indian Given 45). Evelyn witnesses the rape of indigenous women during Guatemala's civil war, but escapes. This highlights "sexual violence as a weapon of war", the use of rape to break community bonds and enforce ethnic cleansing (Multiple InJustices 234).

Recent Central American feminist scholarship, particularly Montserrat Sagot's, shows how "femicide" governs all women by spectacular violence against some ("Femicide" 148). The medicalisation of women's trauma, Lucia's cancer treatment, Evelyn's anxiety prescription, and Kathryn's autopsy show "bio/necropolitics," where women's bodies are intervened and abandoned depending on state and capital value (Love and Empire 89).

Migration as Somatic Experience

Jason De León's ethnography of the Sonoran Desert as a "killing field" shows how U.S. border policy uses "Prevention Through Deterrence" to inflict maximal bodily misery on migrants (The Land of Open Graves 27). He labels the desert a "hybrid collectif" of human and non-human actors (Border Patrol, vultures, heat, cacti) that cause migrant deaths while distributing blame. Lauren Martin's research on imprisonment shows how immigration enforcement uses "carceral circulation", the frequent transportation of detainees between facilities to hinder stable community formation or legal representation ("Carceral Economies" 234). VI. Transnational Somatic Networks Hemispheric Links

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VII. Clinical and Pedagogical Implications: Teaching Somatic Trauma Narratives

Somatic trauma narratives require "teaching in crisis" pedagogy, according to Shoshana Felman, because they blur academic study and personal experience. Students' bodies react before cognitive processing to depictions of torture, sexual violence, and forced displacement: elevated heart rate, shallow breathing, and muscle tension that turn seminar rooms into physical activation places. Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes call this "the contagion of trauma," where literary representations cause physiological responses that circumvent intellectual defences (Teaching the Representation 24). Cathy Caruth and Thomas Keenan call this physical aspect of reading "pedagogical responsibility" since trauma narratives need ethical commitments beyond literary instruction ("The AIDS Crisis Is Not Over" 256).

Teaching Allende's *In the Midst of Winter* to diverse classrooms where children may have migrant traumas, state atrocities, or intergenerational political persecution is difficult. Dominick LaCapra's "empathic unsettlement" helps students understand their physical responses without stealing others' suffering (Writing History, Writing Trauma 41). Janice Haaken calls "trauma-informed pedagogy" practical strategies: content warnings as preparation for somatic activation, breathing exercises or movement breaks when discussing intense passages, and classroom agreements about triggered responses. These methods acknowledge "the everyday life of traumatic feelings" in academic contexts, where body memory resurrects historical violence (Depression: A Public Feeling 15).

Recent pedagogical scholarship emphasises "critical emotional praxis" teaching methods that recognise emotions and bodily responses as legitimate forms of knowledge production rather than obstacles to objective analysis ("Critical Pedagogy and Emotion" 507). When students report nightmares after reading torture scenes or anxiety attacks during sexual violence discussions, Roger Simon calls these responses "difficult knowledge", understanding that comes from facing historical violence ("The Paradoxical Practice" 15). Teaching students to create visual art, movement pieces, or soundscapes in response to readings provides "alternative forms of representation" that allow somatic knowledge to be processed non-verbally (The Arts and the Creation 7).

Literary Healing and Witness

According to Dori Laub, "the testimonial process" makes trauma healing possible by sharing previously incomprehensible experiences ("Bearing Witness" 70). Literature helps "reconstruct the trauma story" by organising scattered bodily memories into a coherent, communicable shape (Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery 175). In contrast to traditional therapy methods, Allende's novel presents trauma as continuing, social, and physical rather than psychological.

Rita Charon's narrative medicine research shows how "close reading of literature develops capacity for witnessing suffering", skills that can be used in therapeutic practice (Narrative Medicine 109). Medical students reading *In The Illness Narratives*, 48, Arthur Kleinman describes "illness narratives" as the lived experience of disease beyond biological symptoms. The novel defies "pathography", conventional illness narratives that isolate disease from social context by depicting Lucia's cancer as inseparable from political history (Reconstructing Illness 3).

Reading groups for trauma survivors show literature's "scriptotherapy" (Shattered Subjects xii) therapeutic power. Effective facilitation is crucial to prevent "the retraumatization risk" of badly managed talks, which can reactivate trauma without giving resolution (Worlds of Hurt 7). Paula Salvio's "somatic reading groups" offer structured trauma narrative processing by paying attention to body responses while reading (Anne Sexton 89). These organisations use "somatic abolitionism" to process racialised pain, according to Resmaa Menakem (My Grandmother's Hands 19).

James Pennebaker's "the writing cure" shows how narrative expression of traumatic experience improves immune function, stress hormones, and health (Opening Up 40). The systematic technique Louise DeSalvo calls "writing as a way of healing" prevents retraumatization while allowing expression in creative writing on trauma (Writing as a Way of Healing 11). community reading of testimonial literature develops "cultural trauma", shared acknowledgement of wounds that turns individual suffering into community identity (Trauma: A Social Theory 15).

VIII: Conclusion and Somatic Literary Ethics Synthesis

I have shown how Isabel Allende's *In the Midst of Winter* crystallises decades of evolution in representing political trauma from magical realism to somatic realism, a literary mode that grounds historical violence in the body's material vulnerability and recognises flesh as an archive of resistance. Allende's novel shows that somatic trauma is political violence's continuing materialisation, with bodies showing wounds decades after the first violation. Allende's "haptic viscosity", sensory description that triggers proprioceptive memory, is shown when three traumatised characters meet during a Brooklyn snowstorm (The Skin of the Film 162). This bodily approach forces readers to confront their own corporeal response to violence, moving reading from knowledge to experience.

The comparative analysis of Eltit, Meruane, and Fernández with Allende shows that Chilean women's writing has proposed unique ways of embodied witness beyond psychologically-anchored trauma studies underpinned by Western theories. Together, these authors symbolise "memory work" in the post-dictatorial age, an aesthetics that opposes melancholy clinging to the wound and premature remedy pronouncement. Their somatic aesthetics require the body to integrate undigestible history and guide various species of kinship cut from mutability. This Chilean contribution to global trauma literature works through what Erin Graff Zivin calls the 'ethics of Latin Americanism,' or the production of intellectual and aesthetic contents that gather around certain circumstances and transform stories into universal categories from a position of non-adherence. Chilean women's writing exposes trauma (or, as Gabriela Nouzeilles puts it, the cultural pathologies of neoliberalism, or how political violence turns up as economic in differentially distributing the vulnerability of the body), but it also recognises and persists.

Future Directions:

The somatic turn in Latin American literature studies opens up new routes for investigation that can be used outside Chile to examine how diverse national and regional histories produce different somatic archives. As long as one is careful not to generalise too much from cultural specificity, my comparative model of reading bodies across borders could shed light on how literatures of indigeneity throughout the Americas still practise *sentipensar*, or to think-feel with Earth, again by refusing to separate mind from matter à la Descartes.

Further research could study how Afro-Caribbean poets build somatic epistemologies based on "the poetics of relation" (Poetics of Relation 11). The rising body of Central American migrant literature requires attention to how bodies in motion develop "threshold knowledge" at borders when national frameworks break down (Threshold 198).

Literary scholars, medical researchers, and clinical practitioners must work together to develop "socio-narratology" approaches that recognise how bodies create stories and stories shape bodies (Letting Stories Breathe 46). Recent epigenetic research on trauma transmission requires literary critics to investigate how a story can affect biological processes. The rise of "medical humanities" as a separate field from bioethics allows for studies of how literary representation aids recovery beyond individual therapy (The Medical Imagination 12). Due to climate change, "solastalgia", distress caused by environmental change in one's home, will increasingly shape 21st-century literature (Earth Emotions 38). This study's somatic literary ethics insists that reading bodies, both textual and actual, requires recognising our fundamental intercorporeality, or "flesh of the world", the shared materiality that makes violence and care possible (The Visible and the Invisible 248). As we face growing political and environmental trauma, literature like Allende's embodied knowledge invites us to inhabit our bodies, seeing them as witnesses to violence and a channel for change.

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