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Remembering Traumatic Experiences in Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Remembering Traumatic Experiences in Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*," submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Hem Raj Phago, has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

The study in Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School* tries to focus on war and its after effects on the Argentinean people. She tells the stories of the people that she met and saw through her tiny hole in her blindfold while she was in the clandestine detention center ironically named the Little School. This novel has been read on the basis of trauma theory. The novel *The Little School* by Partnoy, depicts some of the accounts of the innocent people that were imprisoned and tortured during the dirty war period in Argentinean history. The study finds views and ideas of traumatic experience in the novel covering the ideas of freedom, human rights, to fight against the military oppression, to acquire freedom and search for humanity. In writing this novel Partnoy has brought out the military brutality and inhuman act in the concentration camp. Trauma is the memory of past and its after effects which connect with human psychology. *The Little School* is a story of resistance which ultimately leads those characters towards psychological pain. Through the critical analysis of Partnoy's narration of war experience, this research aims to explore the psyche of the people at the time of the war.

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I. Traumatic Experience in Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*

This project is a quest on Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*, tales of Disappearance and Survival, which is a tale on the dirty war of Argentina. It portrays the traumatic experience of post war in the Argentinean society. *The Little School* is a tale written by Alicia Partnoy, a woman who had been disappeared during the dirty war period of the history of Argentina. It is an account of a clandestine detention center. She tells of all the people that she met and saw through a tiny hole in her blindfold. The guards made sure prisoners of the Little School did not talk with each other or see each other. Prisoners were beaten and tortured for almost any reason and many were killed.

She has presented the tales from the first person narration and the third person narration which have made the text understand about the situation of Argentina at that time. At the same time she also shows the traumatic experience of Argentina. Benja and Maruia Elena, Braco and Zulma "Vasca" Izurieta are the major characters who suffered like Alicia in the prison ironically named as the Little School. Alicia is the main protagonist of the tale. She represents all of the prisoners' detail and their situation in the text.

Partnoy's *The Little School* depicts some of the accounts of the innocent people that were imprisoned and tortured during this period in Argentinean history. Partnoy tells the stories of the people that she met and saw through a tiny hole in her blindfold while she was in the clandestine detention center called the Little School. Some of the stories she told were "happy" while others were very tragic. The guards that were at the Little School were very mean and treated the prisoners very bad. The prisoners, while there were in the Little School, could not talk to each other; they were stripped away of their basic human rights to see by being blindfolded twenty-

four hours a day, seven days a week. They were not allowed to use the bathroom inside the building; they bathed about two times every three months, and they were barely given enough food to survive. The guards beat, tortured, and even killed for any reason that they felt was worthy enough for their attention.

The prison guards that were in charge of the prisoners were very ruthless and heartless. They tried to take away everything from these prisoners but throughout all of the hardships, the poor prisoners from the school kept their faiths and kept appreciating the little things in life that kept them going and from giving up. Destructing the human dignity of the prisoners was the ultimate goal of the guards at the Little School. This is very sad because the guards go as far as raping and sexually humiliating the blindfolded prisoners. Stripping someone of his/her human dignity is the lowest form of torture that has ever existed. Degradation should not be allowed in any country and the people that do torture others should receive punishment for their wrong actions. Unfortunately, the guards of the Little School did not receive any punishment for their wrong doings.

Some of the major themes in this book are children, siblinghood, and blindness. The theme of children is an occurring theme in the novel because the situation that the prisoners were in when they were in the Little School is very similar to the situation an unborn child is in when he/she is in the womb. They are both trapped in this place and some of the “children” make it out alive while others do not. It is very sad that some people and children do not make it out alive from their “womb” and so that is one of the reasons why this theme is recurrent throughout Partnoy's *The Little School*.

All the prisoners in the concentration camp ironically named as the Little School were like siblings while they were in the prison. Partnoy describes how they

stood up for one another and helped each other out when they could. Siblings help each other out whenever possible and do everything they can for each other when the other needs help. This is the exact way that the prisoners acted towards each other while in the prison. One story in the book tells of how they shared their bread with one another by telling the guards that they have extra bread that they could share with another prisoner. The sibling love that was demonstrated by the prisoners throughout this whole book just proved that even in hard times, people can still be nice to one another and help out whenever possible.

Being “blind” was a big part of life in the Little School. As mentioned before, the prisoners were blindfolded from the moment they were abducted until the moment they left the prison. Blindness from reality is what the prisoners not being able to see at all demonstrated throughout the book. They were not even allowed to take off the blindfold when they went to the bathroom. This torture was worse than being beaten because it is really hard to do things and function without sight. Being “blind” was one of the ways that the guards de-humanized the prisoners that did not do anything to deserve it.

All of the stories that are the part of *The Little School*, written by Alicia Partnoy, made the novel a more memorable book. They helped remind herself, Partnoy, and others of the hardships that they overcame and dealt with and to it gave them the courage and strength to continue on with their lives and not give up hope on the things they loved. It also helped the readers understand and picture the difficulties that some people faced during this tragic time in Latin American history. Even though it is a very graphic and tragic book, Alicia Partnoy did a wonderful job capturing the readers’ attention and keeping it throughout the book. The book helped the reader

understand what a horrible place the Little School was and what happened during the “Dirty War” period in Argentina’s history.

The Little School portrays the plight of Argentinean political prisoners in the late 1970s. As Partnoy asserts in her book, “. . . Almost 30,000 Argentines ‘disappeared’ between 1976 and 1979, the most oppressive years of the military rule” (Partnoy 11). During these years, the reactionary Argentinean government abducted and tortured any person they suspected was involved with the Peronist party or other revolutionary movements. The ‘disappeared’ included mainly college students and young adults, but also extended to middle-aged citizens, mothers, fathers, and even children. On January 12, 1977, anonymous military guards took Alicia Partnoy to a concentration camp. The camp’s name was the Little School, meaning that political prisoners were to be “taught a lesson,” mainly through violence, torture, and even murder (Partnoy 13-4). Partnoy was eventually released from the Little School and became one of the lucky ones: a survivor. Instead of hiding or going into exile, however, she began to write *The Little School*, a fictionalized yet extremely detailed account of her time in prison. In this book, Partnoy organizes her memories into short chapters of anecdotes, vignettes, and other daily occurrences. As Julia Alvarez writes in the introduction to *The Little School*, “These are not short stories in the genre of fiction—they are not fanciful and crafted, erudite and inventive—but in the genre of survival tales. Partnoy is a Latin American Scheherazade bearing witness, telling her stories to keep herself alive.”

To give some historic background, testimonies as a form of resistance began as an offshoot of women’s political movements in general. In her essay, *Remembering the Dead: Latin American Women's Testimonial Discourse*, Nancy Saporta Sternbach points out that “. . . Military repression and authoritarian rule are no newcomers to the

Latin American political scene, but women's open and direct opposition to them is" (Sternbach 91). Indeed, in the last half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Latin American women have been increasingly fighting against authoritarian regimes and patriarchal control. Annie G. Dandavati, a Latin American scholar, traces Chilean women's uprisings in particular in her book, *The Women's Movement and the Transition to Democracy in Chile*. According to Dandavati:

Women struggle to become independent agents involved in determining the direction in which their country would move. They not only protested the political, economic and socio-cultural domination of the military regime, but also sought to transform the existing situation and offered an alternative vision of society based on democracy, equality and horizontal social relations. (6)

It is important to note that Latin American women are not only reacting to, but transforming political and gender-oriented oppression in their respective countries. Dandavati is quick to highlight, especially, the fact that Latin American women's movements are ". . . More than a reaction to the cultural model of domination and authoritarianism envisaged by the regime", they involve "a process of creation as well" (8).

There are many purposes for which Latin American women write testimonial literature. One of the more immediate reasons is to gain aid and sympathy from the international community. The governments against which these women are testifying are not only patriarchal and controlling, but also secretive. In the case of Alicia Partnoy, her story as a disappeared person would never be inscribed into official history, and so she took it upon herself to write *The Little School*. Similarly, Rigoberta

Menchú's experience as an indigenous woman placed her so far into the margins of society that she had to create her own forum for testimony. As she writes, "One of the primary purposes of this text [testimony] is the denunciation of injustice and the defense of society's marginalized or excluded by those same people" (Craft 5). Moreover, as a "resistance narrative," "the testimonial novel has been translated and widely disseminated for political and cultural reasons—often reaching a public far greater outside Latin America than within the region" (Craft 3).

Due to the atmosphere of fear in many of the authors' native countries, and the extreme poverty of many of the citizens, testimonial novels may not receive a lot of overt attention. Once these texts reach the international community, however, they provide evidence for human rights offenses as well as causes for action. Beverly supports this point in his book on *testimony*, positing that testimonial novels are used primarily ". . . As a way of mobilizing international opinion in favor of an end to the violence" (84). This is exactly how Alicia Partnoy utilized her prison memoirs in *The Little School*, as she has presented her book as evidence to the United Nations and at international court hearings about the Disappeared in Argentina. She claims to have written *The Little School* not only for herself, but also for all of the other political prisoners who were tortured, killed, or exiled. "By publishing these stories," Partnoy says, "I feel those voices will not pass unheard" (18).

Different critics have analyzed the text from various perspectives but the psychological approach through trauma study in case of author's position and his traumatic situation has not been applied yet. There exists strong need to carry out research on this from a new perspective. Without proper study on this issue, the meaning of the text will remain incomplete. Having taken this fact in consideration, the present researcher proposes to carry out research from the perspective of trauma

studies by highlighting the issues of physical and psychological impact upon the people who were blindfolded and mistreated in concentration camp from all kinds of follies of war by involving upon it or denying it.

Talking about trauma study, it attempts to study the unusual condition and mental state of an individual in relation to the accident or the event that has happened in their past. It believes certain horrific and atrocious events in the experience of the victims which gives severe shock and shatters their previous conceptions and making of the world or life. Thus, this lack of ideal or state of conflict generates confusion and something inexpressible that is trauma. So, exploring the past trauma theory tries to revise it in newer matter. In this way, it has become the mode of representation of narratives, history, culture and various other philosophical fields. Hartman, talking about trauma theory, says:

It provides the more natural transition to a real world often falsely split off from the universe, as if the one were activist and engaged and the other self-absorbed and detached. There is an opening that leads from trauma studies to public, especially mental health issue, an opening with ethical, cultural and religious implications. (543-44)

Hartman's investigation makes clear that trauma theory has opened up many new modes in the study of mind body relation. Trauma is mainly concerned with psychological network extending into the body.

The term trauma generally refers to the emotional and substantial damage to the psychological development of a person. It is an action shown by the abnormal mind to the body and provides a method of interpretation of disorder, distress and destruction aroused by the psychological repression.

Trauma study has its various fields like psychological, philosophical, ethical and aesthetics questions about the nature and representation of the traumatic events. This concern of trauma theory, “ranges from the public and historical to the private and memorial” (Lukehurst 497). Trauma is physical as well as psychological wound that causes severe shock, but that wound is not only the cause of individual’s memory but also the affection of political, social and cultural aspects of the society because “trauma that paradoxically becomes the basis for collective and personal identity” (Lacapra 724). So, this thesis tries to depict the traumatic experience collected by the character of *The Little School*.

Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, is concerned principally with question of references and representation: how trauma becomes text, or how wound becomes voice. Caruth sketches a theory of trauma as instigator, of historical narrative which describes the intersection among traumatic narratives. Caruth argues that “trauma as it first occurs is incomprehensible. Traumatic narrative, then, is strongly referential, but not in any simple or direct way” (5). The impact of major traumatic events is never identical to any two people and those trauma manifests where political and psychological forces fuse.

Regarding the matter of trauma theory, Anne Kaplan in her essay “Why Trauma Now?” focuses on trauma culture. According to her remembering of recent catastrophic event compels us to go back into the trauma of industrial warfare, totalitarian atrocities. This destructive speed of modernization along with imperial invasion and colonial control, destruction of traditional culture are also the matters of trauma now. Supporting the idea of trauma memory as Caruth explains, Kaplan argues:

In arguing that trauma is a special form of memory they stated that in trauma the event has effect only not meaning. It produces emotion, terror, fear, shock but perhaps above all this destruction of the normal feeling of comfort. Only the sensation sector of the brain-the amygdale-is active during the trauma. The meaning making one, namely, the cerebral cortex, remains shut down because the effect is too much to be register cognitively in the brain. Caruth, taking this theories for granted, argued that just because the traumatic experience has not been given meaning, the subject is continually haunted by it in dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations. (34)

Moreover, about the memory she further adds the idea of Sushana Radstone. She views that “memory is the outcome of complex processes of revision shaped by prompting from the present whereas trauma theory posits the linear registration of events as they happen, albeit such registration may be secreted away through dissociation”(109).

Types of trauma are different in nature such as psychological trauma, ethical trauma, war trauma etc. Psychological trauma is described as mental disorder. Sigmund Freud, a founder of psychological trauma, describes it as a disorder which has its root in some experience long since consciously forgotten and repressed and which later on manifests itself in nightmares, overwhelming anxiety and other disturbances. Therefore, physical and psychological disturbance arising from the unconscious remaining aftereffects of trauma upset the patients. The physical trauma is taken as the response to the physical injury and the previous physical condition of the victim. Physical trauma is related more to the physical hurt and damages which affect vital organ leading to the serious condition of the patient. The physical trauma

is very much panic that is serious in injury or shock from violent or accident. Trauma is theoretically real psychological disorder which comes within the individual's feeling and can be examined how they are being threatened or feeling hopelessness. The extra ordinary events closely affect the victims and they come fundamentally as the trauma itself.

This thesis mainly uses the psychological trauma and political trauma, its adverse effect on the innocent prisoners during the dirty war of Argentina. Psychological trauma is closely related with physical trauma. The causes and dangers of psychological trauma is cruel violent, domestic violence, racial war, religious conflict rape case, alcoholism, etc. These conditions create psychological threat upon the people. War or other mass violence can be the cause of psychological trauma. In this novel, the central character Alicia Partnoy presents the psychological impact of war upon her schoolmates. She recollects her own experience in the Great War from her experience. Young people knowingly or unknowingly involved in war and faced numerous difficulties in the battlefield. Alicia shows these kinds of experiences in this novel.

The study makes significant contribution mainly in three areas of concern. Firstly, this study shows the bad impact of war upon the characters' psychology. Secondly, this research makes significant theoretical connection of the trauma theories with the memory of central character. Lastly, the significant of this thesis exists in its theme of autobiography as well as bad impact of war upon human being. Without the study of war and its bad impact upon the human psychology, we cannot understand the gist idea of the novel.

The objectives of the study are to highlight the futilities of war and its aftereffect on the psychology of Argentinean soldiers. Through the critical analysis of

Alicia's narration of war experience, this research aims to explore the psyche of the people at the time of war. Moreover, this study also aims at denouncing institutionalized war in a more encompassing way. Although this study makes significant use of concept developed in trauma scholarship. It does not offer a comprehensive analysis of trauma theories rather offers an analysis of understanding trauma studies which remains the primary tool of analysis.

The key concept of trauma theory is closely linked with psychological pain. Trauma is one of the most significant and unavoidable outcome of a violent conflict. Apart from the material, physical and economic damages that are inflicted on the population, the traumatic experience of violence can have long lasting and deep rooted psychological consequences. Witnessing violent crimes, loss of loved one, destruction of community, involvement in perpetration of violence, displacement, and torture are some of the common situations in a conflict zone that may have multiple impacts on the individual's psychology.

Emotional or psychological trauma is the result of extraordinary stressful events that shatters one's sense of security, making one feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world. In this way traumatic experience often involved a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves one feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it does not involve physical harm. Lenor Terr, a Psychiatrist writes, "Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind" (8). Van der Kolk makes similar points about the complicated nature of trauma when he says, "Traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat" (393). A traumatic experience impact the entire person- the

way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we make sense of the world are profoundly affected by traumatic experience. This is what exactly the protagonist of the novel Paul feels in the story of his life during World War I.

This thesis outlines how psychological factors related to traumatic experience and personality disorder are associated with chronic homelessness. It reports a systematic review of the literature detailing which strongly supports the conclusion that psychological disorders strongly predict homelessness and provides indicative evidence that psychological interventions can improve the life chances of homeless people. It concludes that additional research is required both to establish the most effective psychological interventions for chronic homelessness in the Argentine cultural context, and to evaluate the effective transfer of research knowledge from research to service delivery settings.

Latin American women react in a myriad of ways to governmental, military, and patriarchal controls. The stereotype of the self-sacrificing, victimized Latin American woman is all too false in the wake of activist organizations such as The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. This political group openly protested against the military's abduction and torture of their children and family members. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo also cleverly manipulated their sacred position as mothers as a protection against severe governmental persecution. This paper, however, focuses on a more typical type of political protest: the testimonial literature, or testimony, of Latin American women. In response to the aforementioned atrocities in Argentina, for example, writer Alicia Partnoy took up her pen and wrote the testimonial novel *The Little School*, which describes her experiences as a political prisoner. She then disseminated the book throughout the international community in

order to resist the oppressive regime. In this paper, I discuss how key testimonial texts, such as Partnoy's re-script history, re-define literary conventions and re-inscribe stories which have been either forgotten or ignored. I argue that women's testimonial literature should be taken seriously as a formidable challenge to the authoritarian powers threatening peace in many Latin Florida Atlantic Comparative Studies.

II. Testimony as the Form of Resistance in *The Little School*

The Little School is a novel written by Alicia Partnoy, a woman who was "disappeared" during the dirty war period of the history of Argentina. It is an account of a clandestine detention center. She tells of all the people that she met and saw through a tiny hole in her blindfold. The guards made sure prisoners of the Little School did not talk with each other or see each other. Prisoners were beaten and tortured for almost any reason and many were killed.

The Little School consists of what the subtitle terms "tales of disappearance and survival" inspired by the three and a half months spent by Partnoy as a disappeared person in the clandestine prison camp transfer and eventual reappearance. These "tales" are presented in the text as brief, titled vignettes, framed from the beginning by Partnoy in a sober introduction to the history of imprisonment and disappearance in Argentina and its impact on her life, and at the close with a series of appendices detailing the cases of the disappeared at the Little School and describing the distinctive characteristics of the prison guards. Almost all of the "tales" are told in first person, and in many the speaker seems closely identified with Partnoy herself. Focusing on the text as a reflection of Partnoy's experience, *The Little School* is often read in concert with literature on human rights, torture and testimony as an example of testimonial writing by a survivor, with more or less attention to its literary qualities and the multiple discourses it engages.

Military regimes are not at all unusual in Argentina, but those that ruled from 1976 to 1979, were unique in the number of civilians, mostly young people, who were kidnapped, jailed, tortured, and/or murdered because of their political beliefs. Late in 1977 the author was taken into custody by the army and sent to the Little School, one of many camps where dissidents were "taught" their "lessons." Imprisoned without

charges, she spent almost a year blindfolded and bound, cut off from friends and family, including her child, until being inexplicably released. Partnoy's glimpses of her life in prison are understandably disjointed and meandering, but they stand as a record of character and fortitude.

It is the small details that make these stories so heartbreaking. A child's nursery rhyme that runs endlessly through the mind of one prisoner while being tortured. A friend's jacket that shields the guard's blows once that friend is removed from the school, possibly killed. A broken tooth kept in a matchbox that reminds one prisoner she is still "whole." The glimpses of life another prisoner catches through the bottom of the blindfold, where it doesn't quite lay flat against her cheeks. The sheer delight in catching raindrops in the palm of a hand where the window leaks during a storm.

The Little School is based on the setting of Argentinean war. It details the situation in which the common people grew progressively worse, which creates anger, mental and physical tension to them. In such a way *The Little School* tends to romanticize what war was actually like. This novel sets out to portray the meaninglessness of war. Partnoy's novel dramatizes the adverse impact of war and portrays the cruelty terror and savagery of war with the relentless focus on the physical and psychological damage. So, this novel epitomizes the war's devastating effect on the generation who were forced to fight on the revolution of Argentina. On the other hand, *The Little School* is the novel as narration of trauma and memory of past, which includes physical disturbance, revenge, physical and mental torture as well as other traumatic phenomena. Throughout the whole narration, Partnoy's traumatic experience is seen in the novel.

Trauma is a memory of past and its aftereffect. It comes out through various ways according to the circumstances and according to the age factors. Trauma not only makes people panic and anxious but it also turns them to be rebellious and angrier. Especially in war trauma, the panic situation turns into resistance. This novel *The Little School* is a story of resistance which ultimately leads those characters towards physical through psychological pain. In the revolution of Argentina, Partnoy has presented herself as victimized revolutionary which are a bitter resistance against sentimental, romantic ideals of warfare. In this way trauma develops in her psychology through the situation of physical war.

In the very beginning of the book the very first quote illustrates the testimonial traumatic experience of her life. She has remembered her brother who has sacrificed his life in the war of Argentina. His life is so absurd that it was very difficult to live his life, in this respect she, in the cover page, writes:

In memory
Of Daniel, my brother,
For whom life became
So absurd that he
He decided to make his own.

(n. pag.)

This is how Partnoy begins her text with the memorization of her brother, who has sacrificed his life for the sake of democracy in Argentina. This is actually how Partnoy lived her life in the Little School. Thus here, she is not able to forget her past life and remembering each and every moment of her life. This is also the war between the two different ideological belief one Partnoy's side and another military junta, who

was ruling over Argentina and People like Alicia are imprisoned. About the memorization of present, past and future Kundera writes:

The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past. They are fighting for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies and histories rewrite. The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. (Kundera 22)

A recent survey of victims of violence reported that memorization was prioritized as the second most valuable form of state reparations following monetary compensation. In part, it is perhaps this impetus to bear witness to the suffering of victims that has given rise to a proliferation of memorials in recent decades, including those marking genocide in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia, violent repression in Argentina and Chile, wars of liberation in Bangladesh and Palestine, nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, and terrorism in Madrid and New York. As a form of transitional justice, memorials have too often been relegated to the domain of artists and architects whereas they represent a strategic resource in conflict and peace. Many veins of memorization can be pursued in the space between justice and reconciliation, forgiveness and retribution, and remembrance and forgetting.

Memorials can act as a conduit for reconciliation, bringing opposed groups together, or they can entrench divisions and aggravate old wounds. They may consult afflicted parties and deliver a form of justice through acknowledgement to the aggrieved or they may entirely exclude the victims from the process of construction. They function as pedagogical instruments, instilling the lessons of “never again” in future generations or threaten a nascent peace by inciting retaliation through an

inflammatory rendering of the past. Memorials can also provide a place of sanctuary for mourning or they can become targets of future aggression due to their symbolic resonance. There is no right or formulaic way to construct memorials. The choice facing survivors and nations alike is not only whether to memorialize, but also in what form and to what end. At best, memorials help to heal the wounds of antagonism and to induce individuals to reflect on what they can do to prevent future violence. *The Final Document of the Military Junta on the War against Subversion and Terrorism*, April 1983 writes:

. . .There is also talk of 'disappeared' persons who are still held under by the Argentine government in unknown place of our country. All of this is nothing but a falsehood stated with political purposes, since there are neither secret detention places in the republic nor persons in clandestine detention in any penal institution. (3)

In this testimonial fiction, Partnoy not only talks about the story of her life but also how common people were made disappeared from the Little School. She talks about the autocratic Military Junta Party who used to torture the common people without any reason. And later during the time of investigation they were made disappeared. In this respect *The Little School* is also the story of those disappeared people during the dirty war of Argentina.

Latin American women react in a myriad of ways to governmental, military, and patriarchal controls. The stereotype of the self-sacrificing, victimized Latin American woman is all too false in the wake of activist organizations such as The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. This political group openly protested against the military's abduction and torture of their children and family members. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo also cleverly manipulated their sacred position as

mothers as a protection against severe governmental persecution. This paper, however, focuses on a more atypical type of political protest: the testimonial literature, or testimony, of Latin American women. In response to the aforementioned atrocities in Argentina, for example, writer Alicia Partnoy took up her pen and wrote the testimonial novel *The Little School*, which describes her experiences as a political prisoner. She then disseminated the book throughout the international community in order to resist the oppressive regime. In this paper, I discuss how key testimonial texts, such as Partnoy's, re-script history, re-define literary conventions and re-inscribe stories which have been either forgotten or ignored. I argue that women's testimonial literature should be taken seriously as a formidable challenge to the authoritarian powers threatening peace in many Latin American countries. Further, identify two axes of patriarchy against whom these women authors are fighting: military/governmental control and the chauvinism of male revolutionaries. Alicia Partnoy in her very first story entitled "The One- Flower Slippers" writes:

That day, at noon, she was wearing her husband's slippers; it was hot and she had not felt like turning the closet upside down to find her own. There were enough chores to be done in the house. When they knocked at the door, she walked down the ninety foot, corner, flip-flop, flip- flop, for the moment she think that she should not open the door; they were knocking with unusual violence. . .but it was noon time. She had always waited for them to come at night. It felt nice to be wearing a loose house dressed. Her slippers after having slept so many night with her shoes on, waiting for them. (25)

This story is written from the first person point of view. In this story "The One- Flower Slipper," Alicia has presented her own story from first person point of view.

This is the beginning story of the text and in this story she reveals the situation when the military junta came in her house and took her. This is not only the story of Alicia but the story of all freedom fighter of Argentina. The extract also points out that how the autocratic rule try to suppress the people whom they suspect.

The very beginning story represents the testimonial of the story. This is the trend the writer of testimonial starts the trend in this genre. In disappearing act about the testimonial writers it is written that:

Writing stories, albeit literary in nature and testimonial in intent, poses its own risks for the survivor/witness/author. As an author of these autobiographical stories about a terrifying past, Partnoy experiences the conflicting pulls and obligations between the writer (who has obligations to a reading public) and the written (Partnoy as a character/witness whose obligation lies with her own lived experience and that of the missing). While all the autobiographical writers feel these pulls, the particularly horrifying nature of Partnoy's past further complicates the act of representation. The doubling of the voice- the writer/written split shared by all writers of autobiography- is directly linked to Partnoy's experience of dissociation as a victim of atrocity.

(170)

In the disappearing acts also the nature of autobiographical writer and testimonial writer is clearly identified. Most commonly the testimonial writers write on their own experience of horror. This is exactly what Partnoy has presented in her testimonial text *The Little School*. As a victim she has clearly presented the incident. In the first story she has presented her story which is full of experience though it is written in the

first person point of view. It makes clear to all the reader of the text that it is her own experience when she is arrested.

She presented the story ahead with her own experience. She starts to run from the house and at last she was caught by the military junta. Which she has presented in the following way:

She realized who was at the door and ran towards the backyard. She lost the first slipper in the corridor, before reaching the place where Ruth, her little girl, was standing. She lost the second slipper while leaping over the brick wall. By then the shouts and kick at the door were brutal. Ruth burst in the tears in the door way. (22)

The Little School, a fictionalized yet extremely detailed account of her time in prison. In this book, Partnoy organizes her memories into short chapters of anecdotes, vignettes, and other daily occurrences. As Julia Alvarez writes in the introduction to *The Little School*, “these are not short stories in the genre of fiction—they are not fanciful and crafted, erudite and inventive—but in the genre of survival tales. Partnoy is a Latin American Scheherazade bearing witness, telling her stories to keep herself alive” (Alvarez 9).

Alicia further writes to show the horrifying incident in the little school. Here how she was blindfolded and what she observe is clearly stated in the following lines of the story.

The following morning she was tapped her on the shoulder and made her stand up. Someone had re-tied her blindfold during the night. The peep hole was smaller but still big enough for her to be able to see the floor: blood on the tiles next to a spot of sky blue. They made her walk

on the bloodstains; she tried not to avoid them so they would not notice that she could see. (27)

After the arrest all the prisoners are blindfolded in the Little School. They cannot see the situation in the Little School and they cannot observe other prisoners there. It also clearly state that, the system in Argentina, was very cruel that they do not have any concern on human rights.

Further in disappearing act it is written about the testimonial that:

These “tales of disappearance and survival” are an odd generic mix of autobiographical and testimonial literature. Like testimonies, Partnoy’s accounts began as oral presentations to the listeners, or series of listeners, whom she hoped would help end the atrocity in Argentina. She insists that the story she has to tell is not about her struggle, or heroism, but about the struggle and fate of a whole generation. (165)

In the disappearing act as well it is clearly stated that this is not only the problem of any particular person like Alicia but it is the fate and struggle of whole Argentinean society. But also she has shown her courage to capture all the memories of her struggle through this text. About the problem of writing holocaust Michael Bernard Donals state, “As testimony, it prevents us from recuperating as experiences. In part because of the nature of written history and in part because of the nature of the events to which Lewin bore witness (that is, events that confounded his sense of the actual), what Lewin wrote and what saw are reconciled by the reader” (144).

In the next story of the text “Latrine” she has presented the very horrific story of her experience in the Little School. Here in this story she remembers the events even not getting chance of privacy and secrecy that all people possess. It is well clarify in the very first line of the story in this way, “I’ve discovered the cure for

constipation.” I told Maria Elena one morning after peeping under my blindfold to make sure that Loro was in the other room” (29). It means that all the prisoners are in the same room whether they are male or female. They have difficulty on their secrecy. About the problem and the Little School administration she further says:

We all managed to see Chiche’s face. Chiche, the soft supervisor, frequently suffered from attacks of demagoguery in which he came to visit “his” prisoners and inquired about the treatment we were receiving. All of us suffered from constipation a result of months of immobility, inadequate food, and the lack of even a minute of privacy to empty our bowels. (27)

Here, Alicia is explaining the horrific nature of little school but as we go on reading this story we can find some contradiction in the story. Though she has presented many problem but if we go on reading the trauma testimony theory by Cathy Caruth then Cathy Caruth in her essay *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History*, writes about the state of suffering that leads soldiers in the traumatic condition. She clarifies her views in this way: “The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century” (181). For Caruth, however, a trauma occurs when there is an encounter with the real, which is that which denies signification. She writes:

There’s an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarizes what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn’t an object any longer,

but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence. (Caruth 164)

These encounters with the Real are traumatic experiences where the link between two thoughts have met to repression and must be restore, through moving the event into the realm of the Symbolic. For Caruth, “this was accomplished through analysis where the analyzed would symbolize that which has led his or her desire to become fixated or stuck” (49). The desire is not to symbolize the entirety of the Real, but rather to symbolize that which the analyzed has become fixated on, the traumatic Real.

Blas de Otero about the holocaust of the war has written a poem which gives clear picture of fear during the dirty war of Argentina. This poem goes like this as it is written before the story “My Name”

You know it well.
 They’ll come for you, for me, for all of us
 God will not even be saved here,
 They have murdered him.
 It’s the written word.
 Your name is ready,
 Trembling on a piece of paper. . . . (39)

The military junta whom they suspect they take all of them and torture them and kill them. So in this poem it's all about the people whom the military junta suspect and all common people know about it. All people have to be ready to die. Further concerning the same song by the guard of the prison she mentioned in the same story as:

“Should treacherous Death
 Harness me to her hitching post

Please use two horse whip to make me

A cross for my headboard.

Should treacherous Death. . . .”

Since that moment they have called me Death. Maybe that is why every day, when I wake up, I say to myself that I, Alicia Partnoy, am still alive. (43)

This song by the prison guard intends to say that they cannot be trusted as they always stand against the system. In this sense they should no more alive in the earth. Alicia after hearing this song feels that they are killed but is still alive.

Testimonial account of Alicia has given the specific genre of life and death in her text *The Little School*. It has become one of the parallel forms of other culture, in this context Cathy Caruth has written:

Testimony, today, has become a major nonfiction genre beyond the specific instance of the Holocaust. It may have reinforce parallel forms on other culture, such as in the Latin American testimony. Vernacular, especially when orally transmitted, and with the semi-articulate eloquence of unrehearsed speech, the witness accounts coming out of the Shoah have raised public consciousness toward other genocidal acts, both earlier and later. They may have encouraged the explosion of confessional and pseudo biographical narratives generally. (93)

As Cathy Caruth mentions about the nature of testimonial literature it has become one of the major literary genre today to reveal the real experience of the holocaust. Alicia Partnoy is doing the same in this story collection as well. She is presenting the real story of her own.

In her next story “A Conversation Under the Rain” she has further stated about the situation she has witnessed in the prison called the Little School as:

This day had been different: the rain had made it different. Shortly after lunch it had begun to rain. The smell of damp earth made her come to grips with the fact that she was still alive. She inhaled deeply and a rare memory of freedom tickled her cheekbones. The open window let some rain in. . . . A drop fell on her forehead, just above the blindfold, and slowly began to make its way to her heart. Her heart, hard as stone, after having shrunk to dodge anguish, finally softened. Like day- old bread soaking in water, her heart was swelling and dissolving slowly but unavoidably. . . when she thought she was about to cry, she heard her window close. (67)

This is the critical situation Alicia is telling all about the Little School. All the prisoners have to face the same problem. Alicia as the true witness of the events is telling minutely the incidents of the prison called little school. This is the way of torture they are experimenting on the prisoners in the little school.

The vision of the better world, Partnoy claims, put her in the Escuelita, then in a women’s prison, and finally, into exile. Here I will examine the two voices that Alicia Partnoy developed to write about decomposition and re-composition- about disappearance and torture on the one hand and the human struggle to survive and overcome on the other. She further writes:

They cut of my voice
 So I grew two voices
 Into different tongues
 My songs I pour. . . . (160)

These two voices do not reflect the plural subjectivity associated with testimonies. Rather, on the most superficial level, the two voices indicate the two kinds of writing undertaken by Partnoy, the testimonial reports/ documents and her literary autobiographical stories, poem, and play. It speaks directly to political action. In the interview of Alicia Partnoy about testimonial says that; “I leave the writing about torture for my work with Amnesty International. I write about what happened and the people who read it go out and do something about it” (interview). In her literary writing, Partnoy encapsulates and backgrounds the violence. Recomposing the disappeared, rather than documenting their destruction, is what matters. And desperate, rather than documenting their destruction, is what matters.

Evita one of the famous Argentinean poet on the issue of the dirty war has said in her poem as:

I remember having said:
 “One day all this will change.”
 And I do not know whether that was
 An invocation or an imprecation
 Or both . . . (75)

Whatever was going on Argentina during the dirty war, Evita hopes that everything will change but she is not sure because it's just she has heard. It quoted just before the story “A puzzle”. In this story she remembers her daughter because from two month she is in the prison and she has not seen her daughter. Torture of separation from the family and their children is very difficult for any member. She recalls her daughter as:

For a while now I've been trying to recall how Ruth's face looks. I can remember her big eyes, her almost non- existent little nose, shape of her mouth. I recall the texture of her hair, the warmth of her skin.

When I try to put it all together, something goes wrong. I just can't remember my daughters face. It has been two months since I've seen her. I want to believe that she is safe. (77)

Psychologists have tended to view survivors only with regards to the trauma of their memory, sometime dismissing those who are very young and deemed not to have any recall of their Holocaust because of their memory of the past. This is exactly what is portrayed in the above quote from the story the puzzle. In this issue Kushner writes; "Such deception is, of course, relatively rare, but it forces us to read and listen to testimonies with greater care, relishing their very messiness, and to take seriously the question why, in the less common case" (287).

Alicia Partnoy in her next memory about toothbrush in her story "Toothbrush" presents about the behavior of the military junta in the Little School in this way:

Five days ago Vaca, a fat, humongous individual (not Gato- Vaca, I could never see that one), brought a can of insecticide and sprayed us. After a while he entered our room again and put a gun in my mouth. "It's loaded," he said. "You're scared aren't you?" I didn't move. Maybe this is why the whole business of the toothbrushes seemed so absurd. The fact was that a few minutes later he appeared again and gave us each a toothbrush and toothpaste. (81)

In the story "Toothbrush" Partnoy has presented her experience and reality in the Little School. How the military at the prison time by time scare the prisoners and how painful it is to live in that situation is presented by the Alicia in the story. Further she says that they get brush and toothpaste but they have not seen water from many days and it is surprising that without water it is difficult to have clean ones face and teeth

but it's just only to show the visitors not for themselves to brush their teeth. The next morning again they took the brush.

In the next story "Bread" she starts the story with the quotation from Mario Benedetti, a Latin American's Lord's Prayer, as ". . . Give us this day our daily bread, the one that, yesterday, you took away from us" (83). From the literary level this quote is highly appreciable because it is demanding democracy and freedom to the people. Freedom is inevitable for all the people and without it is difficult to sustain in the world. In the same issue Alicia further writes:

In this climate of overall uncertainty, bread is the only reliable thing. I mean, it is the only reliable thing beside the belief that we have always been right, that betting our blood in the fight against these killers was the only intelligent option. We don't know when it is time for screams, time for bread. At noon we wait to hear the sound of the bread bag sweeping the floor, that smell purifying everything; we wait to touch that bread: crunchy outside, soothingly soft inside. We wait for it so we can either devour it with greed or treasure it with love. (83)

Here, Alicia is giving more emphasis on democracy and freedom. While LaCapra makes reference to the encounter with real as traumatic, his theory suggests that this encounter only acts as a place-holder and the true trauma only occurs belatedly and through repetition. This repetition of the event can activate symbolic meaning where the "scene was traumatized, elevated into a traumatic real, only retroactively, in order to help (the patient) to cope with the impasse of his symbolic universe" (LaCapra 73). This shows that how soldiers are exploited by their commanders in the warfare.

In the prison they have made bread as the means of communication between the prisoners. They can share their feelings through the ball of bread. It is well clearly mentioned in the same story “Bread” in this way:

Bread is also the means of communicating, a way of telling the person next to me: “I’m here. I care for you. I want to share the only possession I have.” Sometimes it is easy to convey the message: When bread distribution is over, we ask, “Sir, is there any more?” When the guard answers that there isn’t any, another prisoners will say, “Sir, I have some bread left, can I pass it to her.” (85)

This is the way they have made idea to communicate with other prisoners in the Little School. They were not allowed to communicate with each other and they have made this way to circulate their idea and feelings in the prison. This is the traumatic situation they have to undergo during the dirty war of the prison.

Jane Kilby’s idea of violence supports the source of trauma happened in specific period of time. He clarifies his idea of trauma with the support of Hartman which is about the reality of violence. According to Kilby those traumatic events are unspeakable, unforgettable, that creates problematic imagination inside the psyche of victim. He supports the idea of violence with Hartman in this way:

The desire to deny the reality of violence is such that the victim is quite capable of forgetting what has happened, and if not forgetting it, the victim is as likely to find the experience unspeakable, but, as I established, this poses a fundamental problematic: for how do we guarantee the reality of violence if, at best, it is no longer the reality you imagine and if at worst it disappears without a trace? (10)

The traumatized protagonist in fiction brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural values or ideologies. Psychological trauma may accompany physical trauma or exist independently of it. Typical causes and dangers of psychological trauma are sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence, indoctrination, being the victim of an alcoholic parent, the threat of either, or the witnessing of either, particularly in childhood, life-threatening medical conditions, medication-induced trauma.

Alicia Partnoy in her another tell “Ruth’s Father” has quoted another poem which reveals the horrendous plight of the concentration camp as:

Eduardo says that on a cell wall
 At the police station where he
 Was tortured when arrested,
 Someone had written:
 “Take heart, my friend,
 One day more is one day less.” (91)

This is the plight all the prisoners have to face when they are arrested from the police and kept in the detention camp during the dirty war of Argentina. When they are arrested they are tortured without any investigation. They start to arrest whom they suspect. Living one day more is one day less as they are tortured horrendously.

In her story “Ruth’s Father” she mentions about the disappearance of her husband and father of Ruth. In the very first line she says that “Nobody knows where he hides/nobody’s seen him at home/ but we hear him all the time Rib-bit Rib-bit Little Frog” (93). This is the condition that she has experienced when she was at the detention camp. She is even not aware about her own husband and her daughter

whether they are safe or not. The military junta do not allow to investigate about their relatives. This has created tension among the prisoners and their family members during the dirty war of Argentina. She is remembering her dear daughter time by time she remembers as:

Daughter, dear, my tongue hurts and I can't say *rib-bit rib-bit*; even if I could, you wouldn't hear me. This little poem soothed you when you cried; you went to sleep listening to it. . . . I've repeated it for a whole day but I still can't sleep. *Rib-bit rib-bit he sings on the roof* . . . I won't see you again . . . the electric prods of my genitals. . . . Trapped, like the little frog . . . but we hear him all the time. I told the torturers if they took me to the meeting place I would point to him; then, when I saw him I didn't do what I'd promised. (93)

In this story Partnoy is remembering her daughter and her husband. She is not aware where her daughter and her husband are. She also remembers the torture she is facing in the Little School, the electric shock and her friends.

In Testimony, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub propose that psychoanalysis is a form of testimony to the unspeakable, recognizing the unconscious witnessing of the subject. In their view, psychoanalysis acknowledged, "for the first time in the history of culture, that one does not have to possess or own the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, not available to its own speaker. (15)

Victims they write whatever they witness and according to the theory of trauma and testimonial claim that the victims are not conscious and they cannot memorize as it is. In this respect there may be some contradiction in their story. Some fictionalize and some real but here as it is the live experience it is worth suspect that it is not real. As we go on reading the testimonial literature it gives us new sight to analyze the torture they face during the concentration camp.

Before another tale calls Poetry she has presented a small poem which reveals the pathetic condition of the prisoners in the Little School. The poem goes like this:

I curse the poetry
Of those who do not take sides . . .
From *Poetry is a Weapon*
Loaded with Future. (101)

This poem by Gabriel Zelaya is quoted in the tale because here Partnoy is playing with the poems as she believes that it is the best weapon to fight with the atrocity of the Argentina. Poetry is the best means to lead towards the future. In this respect she is remembering her own poems in the story “poetry”.

Our stream was killed,
Torn away by its roots,
What remains is just a hole
Half dirt and half mud.
The trees were riddled with shot,
And all that was green was murdered,
A thin trace of water runs
Lonely in the desolate channel. . . . (105)

The autocratic rules have torn away the freedom of the Argentineans. And the hole of torture is remaining where they have to live their life. Green was murdered means that now they can no more live the life of freedom. Still they have hope of life from where they can see their life and future for the country. Felman and Laub also describe literature as testimony, remarking that “psychoanalysis and literature have both come to contaminate and to enrich each other,” both function “as a mode of truth’s realization beyond what is available as statement, beyond what is available, that is, as a truth transparent to itself and entirely known . . . (15-16). Hence, it is a mode of truth and realization of true incidents.

Felman and Laub are right to see psychoanalysis and literature as entangled forms of trauma testimony. High tragedy and other literary genres have long functioned as such, sometimes self-reflexively and sometimes not, and that’s largely why Freud repeatedly drew from folklore and literature to dramatize his theories. But Freud’s very invocation of folklore as evidence points to the limits of a standard psychoanalytic reading. Furthermore, even if psychoanalysis and literature testify to trauma, are we really reliable witnesses? And how much can we ever know about ourselves or about others?

The way in which testimonial has evolved as a form of women’s resistance is characteristic of Saskia Weiringa’s description of social movements in her book, *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. Weiringa declares: “Movements are not static; they should be seen as processes which are modified as they come into contact with everyday life, confronting politics and generally (but not always) the state, in a constant process of reflection, communication and negotiation. They generate certain social processes as they define and redefine themselves” (7). Testimonial literature is a poignant example of

Weiringa's theory because it has, as a literary genre and a political movement, modified the way that Latin American women confront politics. The authors of testimonial engage in this "process of reflection, communication and negotiation" in their texts, creating a genre in which they as women and as Latin American citizens can voice their discontent.

Further, in the introduction to her book, Weiringa asserts that women's acts of resistance are not only subversive, but "subversive," highlighting how, internationally, women are deeply involved "in circumventing, encoding, and denying the various, distinct, and multi-layered verses in which their subjugation is described, and in replacing them with their own verses (1-2). While Weiringa is discussing Third World women in general, her argument rings especially true for Latin American women writers. These authors, as well as other political activists, are rebelling against patriarchy. What is so key to testimony is the way in which testimonial writers use the written word as their weapon against patriarchy. Testimony is so powerful medium because it attacks institutions and governments at a practical and a theoretical level.

Before another tale of "The Denim Jacket" she has presented another small poem which gives some detail clue of the story. The small poem goes like this:

If I don't see her again,
 Give your daughter a kiss for me.
 Make her a happy child, strong but sensitive,
 And teach to give to others . . .
 Zulma "Vasca" Izurieta,
 April 12, 1977
 On the evening she was taken
 To be killed. (107)

Here in this story she gives the full details of the murder of Zulma who was taken away to be killed. This is how they take the prisoners to kill one by one. She has presented the date of her killing as she is only the witness of her death in the concentration camp.

In the story “The Denim Jacket” she has presented the brief detail of the killing of her co-prisoners. She has presented it in the very first paragraph of the story.

The story goes like this:

When I got into that denim jacket the night before yesterday, I felt really protected. It was like snuggling in my mother’s arms when I was a little girl. This was the first time I felt safe since the military arrested me. Earlier the night before I’d been trembling out of rage and impotence because they had taken away Benja and Maruia Elena, Braco and Vasca to kill, I was sure. I felt that my bones were frozen the night before yesterday. (109)

As Alicia got this jacket she happens to remember other prisoners in the jail as she has worn the jacket of Vasca. She is the witness of the incidents how they were taken to kill. This is the way they take all the prisoners of the Little School to kill. She has demanded the blanket from the prison guard but they provided her this Jacket and she has identified this Jacket as it belongs to Vasca.

Testimony, as a genre, is notoriously fluid and difficult to categorize, because the word “testimony” can describe anything written by a first-person witness who wishes to tell her/his story of trauma. More specifically, John Beverly, an expert on testimonial literature, gives his definition in *Testimony: On the Politics of Truth*: “By testimony a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real

protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (31). This complex and extremely specific definition shows one attempt to categorize testimony in a way that at least gives it credence as a literary genre. As Marc Zimmerman states in *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala*, however, "clearly testimony is a form in which literary and social considerations become necessary and overtly intertwined," and because of this intersectional, testimony defies any easy explanation or categorization (11).

With testimonial, then, it is apparent how many definitions and formats can cover just one literary genre. Within the three case studies, the authors give us various perspectives; what binds them together, however, is their goal of writing these stories: to fight against their oppressors and gain recognition for other disadvantaged women and men in their situation. As Zimmerman writes: "By virtue of its collective representativeness, testimony is, overtly or not, an inter-textual dialogue of voices, reproducing but also creatively reordering historical events in a way which impresses as representative and true and which projects a vision of life and society in need of transformation" (Zimmerman 12). The same collectivity, intersectional and intertextuality that make testimony difficult to pinpoint is also its greatest strength. It is a genre that can be manipulated in various ways to give voice to the voiceless.

III. *The Little School: A Trauma Narrative*

The “Dirty War” in Argentina was indeed very dirty and dark. A lot of innocent people died and were punished for no wrong doing at all. *The Little School*, by Partnoy, depicts some of the accounts of the innocent people that were imprisoned and tortured during this period in Argentinean history. Alicia tells the stories of the people that she met and saw through a tiny hole in her blindfold while she was in the clandestine detention center called the Little School. Some of the stories she told were “happy” while others were very tragic. The guards that were at the Little School were very mean and treated the prisoners very bad. The prisoners, while there were in the Little School, could not talk to each other; they were stripped away of their basic human rights to see by being blindfolded twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They were not allowed to use the bathroom inside the building; they bathed about two times every three months, and they were barely given enough food to survive. The guards beat, tortured, and even killed for any reason that they felt was worthy enough for their attention.

The prison guards that were in charge of the prisoners were very ruthless and heartless. They tried to take away everything from these prisoners but throughout all of the hardships, the poor prisoners from the Little School kept their faiths and kept appreciating the little things in life that kept them going and from giving up. Destructing the human dignity of the prisoners was the ultimate goal of the guards at the Little School. This is very sad because the guards went as far as raping and sexually humiliating the prisoners that were blindfolded. Stripping someone of his/her human dignity is the lowest form of torture that has ever existed. Degradation should not be allowed in any country and the people that do torture others should receive

punishment for their wrong actions. Unfortunately, the guards of the Little School did not receive any punishment for their wrong doings.

All of the prisoners in the Little School were like siblings while they were in the prison. Partnoy describes how they stood up for one another and helped each other out when they could. Siblings help each other out whenever possible and do everything they can for each other when the other needs help. This is the exact way that the prisoners acted towards each other while in the prison. One story in the book tells of how they shared their bread with one another by telling the guards that they have extra bread that they could share with another prisoner. The sibling love that was demonstrated by the prisoners throughout this whole book just proved that even in hard times, people can still be nice to one another and help out whenever possible.

All of the stories that are a part of *The Little School*, written by Alicia Partnoy, made the novel a more memorable book. They helped remind herself, Partnoy, and others of the hardships that they overcame and dealt with and to it gave them the courage and strength to continue on with their lives and not giving up hope on the things they loved. It also helped the readers understand and picture the difficulties that some people faced during this tragic time in Latin American history. Even though it was a very graphic and tragic book, Alicia Partnoy did a wonderful job capturing the readers' attention and keeping it throughout the whole book. The book helped the reader understand what a horrible place the Little School was and what happened during the "Dirty War" period in Argentina's history.

History of Argentina is the history of recurring control of military regime. The continuous breaking of democracy is the history of Argentina. The novel, *The Little School* by Partnoy, is the outcome of political repression experienced by the writer herself during the dirty war period in Argentina. Partnoy tends to memorize her bitter

past experience by writing this novel *The Little School*. She tries to depict the characteristics of prison guards at the Little School who were very mean and torturous. The prisoners experienced torture, violence and even killing in the concentration camp. The writer has brought up torture, political repression and inhumanity at home vividly. The central focus of this text is war and its aftereffects but it includes many other subject matters like siblinghood, children, humanity, democracy, human rights etc.

The Little School mirrors the plight of Argentinean prisoners in different chapters in the late 1970s. During the war period military personnel abducted many Argentinean people who were involved in war or not and took them in the concentration camp ironically named as the Little School. Partnoy, however, tries to bring out the military brutality all the prisoners experienced in the clandestine detention center. Life in the detention center being blindfolded was very much panic and memorable because of inhuman treatment by the camp guards. Even they were not allowed to talk and move while in the camp. Such types of torture to the prisoners are to degrade their dignity and self-esteem. This historical memory of Partnoy is very much successful in portraying the contemporary Argentinean history.

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