

**'SO THAT ALL SHALL KNOW':  
MEMORIALISING GUATEMALA'S DISAPPEARED**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of PhD

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## Abstract

Between 1960 – 1996, civil war waged in Guatemala. During the conflict an estimated 45,000 people were disappeared, abducted from their homes, public streets, and buildings by members of the military, the National Police force, and government sanctioned death squads, and never seen again. Owing to the clandestine nature of this form of violence, families of the disappeared were left in a perpetual state of uncertainty, not knowing where their loved ones had been taken or if they were still alive. Following the end of the conflict, little was done by governments to try and answer these questions or to recover the remains of the disappeared. Those who had power and influence during the civil war, both individuals and institutions, largely maintained their status in its aftermath and chose to forget the past rather than discuss it. This thesis examines how, in light of the liminal status of the disappeared and the absence of a meaningful regime change, the disappeared have been memorialised in post-conflict Guatemala. This thesis discusses a variety of forms of memorial, focussing on those created by individuals and groups who believe the violence of the past should be remembered. It identifies a number of recurring themes - Contest, Recover, Informing, and Grief - that exist in these memorials for the disappeared, and explores how and why they have been expressed.

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The images that do not include a reference of origin are photographs that I have taken.

### List of Abbreviations

BROE: *Brigadas Rápidas de Operaciones Especiales* (Fast Brigades for Special Operations)

CEH: *La Comisión para Esclarecimiento Histórico* (Historical Clarification Commission)

CNT: *Central Nacional de Trabajadores* (National Workers' Central)

CNUS: National Committee for Trade Union Unity

CUC: *Comité de Unidad Campe* (the Committee for Peasant Unity)

EGP: *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (Guerrilla Army of the Poor)

FAFG: *Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation)

FAMDEGUA: *Asociación Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Guatemala* (The Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained in Guatemala)

FAR: *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* group (Rebel Armed Forces). An insurgent group operating as part of URNG during the civil war.

FRG: *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (Guatemalan Republican Front)

GAM: *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (Mutual Support Group)

GHRC: Guatemala Human Rights Commission (USA)

H.I.J.O.S: *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetfulness and Silence)

ODHAG: *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala* (Office of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala)

ORPA: *Organización del Pueblo en Armas* (Organisation of People in Arms)

PAR: *Partido Acción Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Action Party)

PNSD: *Plan Nacional de Seguridad y Desarrollo* (National Plan for Security and Development) (1982)

REMHI: *Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (Recovery of Historical Memory Project)

URNG: *La Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit)



## Introduction

On 21 June 1980, twenty-seven union leaders were kidnapped from the offices of the *Central Nacional de Trabajadores* (National Workers' Central or CNT) in downtown Guatemala City. This was one of the largest incidents of mass disappearance in Guatemala's history, and to date, none of those who were disappeared at this time have been seen again.<sup>1</sup> Clara's husband was one of the union leaders disappeared: 'my husband didn't come home that afternoon [...] He had told me, "Go to your mother's. I'm coming home early. I'll be there around five o'clock."<sup>2</sup> When her husband did not arrive home that evening, Clara and some of the other relatives of the union leaders visited the CNT offices. Here they discovered a 'scene of terror'. The room was in complete chaos: chairs had been thrown around and seemed to have been used in self-defence, and there were pools of blood on the floor.<sup>3</sup>

After this, Clara and the relatives of the other union leaders started searching for their disappeared loved ones. In response, they themselves were threatened with disappearance in anonymous phone calls, letters, and telegrams. False tip offs, claiming that certain union leaders were being tried in court, raised and crushed the hopes of families. A lack of information about the events of that day has left many of them with unanswered questions about what happened to their loved ones, and an inability to reconcile themselves with the possibility of their deaths.<sup>4</sup> 'To this day I have been left with the feeling that he could come back at any moment,' Clara said.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas P. Anderson, *Politics in Central America: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua* (Connecticut: Praeger, 1988), pp.41-42

<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Reed, Karen Brandow, *The Sky Never Changes: Testimonies from the Guatemalan Labour Movement* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp.54-55.

The omission of Clara's surname here is not accidental: for reasons of privacy Clara's surname was not given in the interview she did with Thomas F. Reed and Karen Brandow in *The Sky Never Changes*. Others who gave their testimonies refused to have any of their name included in the book out of fear it may lead to negative repercussions for them.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp.55-56

‘When a relative is known to be dead, one leaves it to God. Be it a death by violence or by other causes, one says, “I see that he or she is dead, and I must resign myself to it.” But not in this case.’<sup>5</sup>

There were an estimated 45,000 people disappeared in Guatemala during its thirty-six year civil war, which spanned between 1960 and 1996 and is argued to be one of the longest lasting conflicts in Latin America’s history so far.<sup>6</sup> Disappearances have been described as a ‘brutal’ form of selective violence, used during the civil war to destroy organizations or movements deemed ‘subversive’ by the Guatemalan State, and to intimidate and terrorise the rest of the population into subservience.<sup>7</sup> The anonymous communications that Carla received, which threatened violence against anyone searching for the disappeared, were common practice during the Guatemalan conflict, used to further the sense of terror and vulnerability created by the disappearance.<sup>8</sup> The Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI), created by the Catholic Church after the conclusion of the conflict in 1996, stated that this act of violence caused protracted suffering for the families: the liminal position of the disappeared between life and death and the ‘unknowing’ that surrounded their disappearance prevented families from accepting their absence, grieving the loss of a loved one, or visiting a site at which to mourn them.<sup>9</sup> Carlos Ibarra described the disappeared as ‘those who will always be nowhere’, a description that encapsulates

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.68

<sup>6</sup> Javier A. Galván, *Latin American Dictators of the 20th Century: The Lives and Regimes of 15 Rulers* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013), p.170

<sup>7</sup> Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p.159

Tullio Scovazzi, Gabriella Citroni, *The Struggle against Enforced Disappearance and the 2007 United Nations Convention* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007), p.13

<sup>8</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), pp.19-21

For more information on terror and its deliberate use in Guatemala see: Frank M. Afflitto, ‘The Homogenizing Effects of State-Sponsored Terrorism: The Case of Guatemala’, in *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, ed. Jeffrey A. Sluka (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp.114-126

<sup>9</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.159

succinctly the longevity of the senses of uncertainty and loss that disappearances introduce.<sup>10</sup>

During the Cold War era, disappearances were frequently used by a number of different governments throughout Latin America to suppress the Communist threat that was believed to be lurking. In Argentina, the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons that was produced following the end of the ‘Dirty War’ in 1983 suggested that nearly 9,000 people had been disappeared; in Chile it is estimated that nearly 3,000 people had been disappeared by the end of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1990; and in El Salvador some 7,000 people were disappeared between 1980 and 1992.<sup>11</sup> The number of disappearances that took place in Guatemala are estimated to amount to around half of *all* incidents of disappearance in Latin America that occurred during this time period.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, attention has largely focussed on other cases of disappearance, such as those in Chile and Argentina, with Guatemala often being overlooked in terms of academic research conducted.

This lack of recognition is not restricted to simply academia, however. Since the conclusion of the conflict successive Guatemalan governments have largely failed to recognise the extent of the violence or the destruction caused by the disappearances, or acknowledge the disappeared or their families. Regime members that were influential during the time of the conflict managed, in many cases, to

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<sup>10</sup> Kirsten Weld, ‘Forced Disappearance in Latin America’, *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/discovering-dominga> (Accessed 16/06/2017)

<sup>11</sup> Emilio Crenzel, *The Memory of the Argentina Disappearances: The Political History of Nunca Mas* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.85

Peter J. Meyer, *Chile: Political and Economic Conditions and U. S. Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2012).p.3

Gwyn Kirk, ‘Contesting Militarization: Global Perspectives’, in *Security Disarmed: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Race, and Militarization*, ed. Barbara Sutton, Sandra Morgen, Julie Novkov (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), p.31

<sup>12</sup> Karina Oliva Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Ester E. Hernández, ‘US. Central American (Un)Belongings’, in *US. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance*, ed. Karina Oliva Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Ester E. Hernández (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2017), p.10

maintain their positions of power after the civil war was brought to a close in 1996 and so affected the shaping of the official narrative that emerged post-war, presenting a history that reflected the actions of civil war governments and the military in a positive light. Subsequently, rather than working with the population in a process of reconciliation, as has been the case over time in other Latin American countries, to ease some of the pain caused and achieve some semblance of an amicable agreement over the past, governments in Guatemala have instead generally favoured a silent approach towards the acts of extreme violence that occurred, aiming to move on from the past without first discussing what happened. There have been breaks in this silence with the election of parties not so closely tied to past regime members, but any changes made during these times, in relation to attitudes towards the past and more particularly the disappeared, have been reversed when the next president with ties to former regimes has been elected. The change in regime in Guatemala has not been complete. In most cases efforts to remember the disappeared and the disappearances, in terms of memorialisation, public awareness, and seeking an end to the perpetrators' impunity, have come from below, from the families of the disappeared and those who support them.

This thesis examines how these efforts to remember have taken shape, how the disappeared of Guatemala have been memorialised in light of their liminal position and the lack of a lasting and meaningful regime change. It essentially explores two central questions: how, in what forms, have the disappeared of Guatemala been memorialised? And what was the intention behind this memorialisation? When the status of the disappeared, neither alive nor dead, and the political situation in Guatemala are considered in juxtaposition, these two difficulties create a situation of memorialisation that is practically incomparable with any other in Latin America. In

Chile and Argentina, for instance, because of their regime changes there has been movement towards discussing their histories of violence and openly and officially commemorating those who fell victim to them.<sup>13</sup> There is still the question of how those who are not alive or dead should be memorialised, but such a process of deciding and creating memorials is conducted with the complicity of the State, who recognise the disappeared as being ‘disappeared’, rather than simply not existing. It is only in Guatemala that the difficulties of memorialising the disappeared appear alongside the complications that occur with the lack of a complete and lasting regime change.

This thesis outlines and discusses a variety of memorials that have been created in Guatemala for the disappeared, examining the intentions behind these, and questioning how the liminal status of the disappeared and the absence of a regime change have influenced their construction. Chapter one explores the idea of a ‘regime change’ in Guatemala in more detail, examining the various different governments that have been in power since the conclusion of the conflict and the impact they have had on the country and its treatment of the civil war, but here it is necessary to define briefly what a ‘regime change’ means in the context of this thesis and in relation to the disappeared. John A. Booth has argued that there has been regime change in Guatemala in the sense that during the civil war there was a shift from an authoritarian military regime to a civilian democratic regime.<sup>14</sup> While I do not deny that some political transition has occurred, I believe the continued significant

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<sup>13</sup> Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture, Revised and Updated with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Peter Read, Marivic Wyndham, *Narrow But Endlessly Deep: The struggle for memorialisation in Chile since the Transition to Democracy* (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2016)

<sup>14</sup> John A. Booth, ‘Global Forces and Regime Change: Guatemala Within the Central American Context’, in *Globalization on the Ground: Postbellum Guatemalan Democracy and Development*, ed. Christopher Chase-Dunn, Nelson Amaro, Susanne Jonas (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p.22

influence (post-conflict) of those who formerly held power, be it individuals or institutions such as the military, prevents this change from being ‘complete’. As Suzanne Jonas has pointed out, although there has been a shift towards a more democratic regime in Guatemala, there has never been a total democratic transition as the military still retains control over citizens.<sup>15</sup> This is a notion that Booth himself supports, as while he recognises the changes in regimes he also notes that the democratic transition in Guatemala must be viewed with caution until the military ‘can institutionalize a new relationship of subordination to civilian rulers and constitutional restraint’.<sup>16</sup>

This lack of complete and lasting regime change has meant that there has been little effort made to find and recover the bodies of the disappeared in Guatemala or distribute information about what happened to those who were taken. The disappearances in Guatemala were a product of largely state-orchestrated violence, enacted by the military, the National Police Force, and death squads (militia groups created or sanctioned by the government), which means that in order to begin to unravel the knot of questions surrounding the disappeared, state compliance is needed. At the moment in Guatemala such acquiescence is in short supply, meaning that questions remain unanswered and the fight for information must continue. As one member of the organization *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (Mutual Support Group or GAM) stated, ‘if we knew our relative had been killed and we knew what happened to them, we could put it to rest. But we do not know.’<sup>17</sup> Disappearances therefore remain as much a matter of the present as they do the past. In order to consider how the

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<sup>15</sup> Suzanne Jonas, ‘Democratization Through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala’, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol.42: 4 (2000), pp.9-38

<sup>16</sup> Booth, ‘Global Forces and Regime Change’, in *Globalization on the Ground*, ed. Chase-Dunn, Amaro, Jonas (2001), p.41

<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, *Expectations Denied: Habeas Corpus and the Search for Guatemala’s Disappeared* (Minnesota: Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, 1988), p.55

disappeared of Guatemala have been memorialised, this relationship between the lack of regime change and the treatment of the past must not be forgotten or ignored: it is this relationship that is one of the crucial tools for shaping how memorials to the disappeared are formed and who they are created by.

This thesis engages with a variety of case studies of memorials. These include artwork displayed in exhibitions; public art; museums; memory books; commemorative events; and demonstrations. This mixture of form and their identifications as memorials follows James E. Young's idea that a 'memorial' is a broad concept and covers all sorts of signs such as books, activities, days, festivals, and sculptures, some of which may be celebratory, others commemorative.<sup>18</sup> While they differ in form, what each memorial in this thesis shares is the desire on the part of the creators to remember the past and the disappeared, which ties in with Pierre Nora's summation that for a space of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, to exist 'there must be a will to remember'.<sup>19</sup> This breadth in definition of what a memorial is, as suggested by Young and Nora, is something that has been embraced in this thesis so that as many different forms of activity and construction can be discussed.

Katherine Hite's book, *Politics and The Art of Commemoration*, has been a further influence on how memorials have been approached and discussed in this thesis. Hite emphasises the political roles that memorials and memorialisation play in societies, arguing that the process of memorialisation goes beyond a symbolic attempt to acknowledge the past and can in fact 'transform meanings of the past and mobilise the present'.<sup>20</sup> Such a transformation is usually accredited to a post-conflict state,

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<sup>18</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.4

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, Vol.26 (1989), pp.7-24

<sup>20</sup> Katherine Hite, *Politics and The Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p.4

where those in power attempt to alter the presentation of what is often a violent past to something altogether more favourable that the people can unite behind. In Guatemala there are examples of the State doing just this with the creation of memorials for the civil war that vow to remember the ‘heroes of peace’, yet I have applied Hite’s idea of the political memorial changing how the past is perceived to those memorials created for the disappeared. Owing to the political situation in Guatemala, memorials to the disappeared are required to do more than just remember. They also work to put forward an alternative narrative to that of the State, seeking to have the disappeared recovered from their liminal, often taboo, positions. As Erika Doss has argued, memorials are ‘materialist modes of privileging particular histories and values’.<sup>21</sup> In relation to those created for the disappeared, it is this oppositional history that takes centre stage. These memorials seek to make present the absence that still exists as a result of this form of violence, bringing the disappeared back into the society they once belonged to, and challenging how they were treated during the conflict. They attempt to transform the meaning that has been placed on the past by the State to one that recognises the violence endured by the disappeared and their families, and through this, mobilise some action in the present.

Hite has also stated that memorials can be ‘cathartic and empowering as well as conflictive’, an emotional relationship that is visible in those memorials created for the disappeared and one that is unpicked throughout this thesis.<sup>22</sup> Memorials for the disappeared allow relatives to take back control of their loved ones from those who performed the disappearance. The disappeared are presented favourably, as they are remembered, as the people they were, and are removed from the invisibility created by the disappearance, in that they are shown to have existed. Such an act is still based

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<sup>21</sup> Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p.38

<sup>22</sup> Hite, *Politics and The Art of Commemoration* (2012), p.3



in contestation but also serves to offer some level of emotional support and release. There is an ‘emotional effervescence through the sharing of a common feeling, even if it is sadness’, and memorials create a space around or in which friends and relatives are able to gather and either share their feelings and memories with others or reflect by themselves.<sup>23</sup> They allow for an ‘encircling’ of trauma. Memorials are used to bring linear time (that a loved one was disappeared in the recent past) together with trauma time (in which the disappearance of a loved one is never past).<sup>24</sup> Memorialising the disappeared in Guatemala then is as much about the creators of the memorials, mainly the families of the disappeared, and their experiences, as it is about the disappeared themselves.

There are a number of key texts that discuss Guatemala’s violent past, in particular the use of disappearance, and the country’s relationship with memory. Research into the use of disappearance in Guatemala has arguably followed one of several foci. First, there is literature on terror. Broadly, this describes how disappearances were used as an act of ‘state terrorism’ intended to terrorise the population. Carlos Figueroa Ibarra is a prominent Guatemalan sociologist who has written significant pieces on terror and disappearance, such as *Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala: 1954-1996* and *The Culture of Terror and Cold War in Guatemala*, which outline the deliberate establishment of terror within the country.<sup>25</sup> In his book, *Los que siempre estarán en ninguna parte*, Ibarra labelled the disappeared as ‘those who will always be nowhere’, a description that emphasises

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<sup>23</sup> Marín Beristain, Carlos, y Darío Paez, y José Luis González, ‘Rituals, social sharing, silence, emotions and collective memory claims in the case of the Guatemalan genocide’, *Psicothema*, Vol.12: 1 (2000), pp.117-130

<sup>24</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.15

<sup>25</sup> Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, ‘Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala: 1954-1996’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol.32: 1 (2013), pp.151-173  
 Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, ‘The Culture of Terror and Cold War in Guatemala’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol.8: 2 (2006), pp. 191-208

longevity of the disappearances and the perpetual absence of the disappeared.<sup>26</sup> This idea that the terrorising effects of disappearance span across different times is something that my own research has built on, considering that although the disappearances occurred in the past, they are still an issue in the present; my thesis questions how this has been reflected in memorials.

Outside of terror, research has been conducted into the wider emotional ramifications of the disappearances. Virginia Garrard-Burnett's article, *Living with Ghosts: Death, Exhumation, and Reburial among the Maya in Guatemala*, examines the impact that disappearances have had on Mayan rituals around death, and the significance of exhuming and ceremonially burying the disappeared after they have been identified.<sup>27</sup> Henrik Ronsbo, in *A Republic of Remedies: Psychosocial Interventions in Post-Conflict Guatemala*, discusses the psychological disturbances that have emerged as a result of disappearance, a topic that is also discussed by Mónica Esmeralda Pinzón González in *Psychosocial Perspectives on the Enforced Disappearance of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala*.<sup>28</sup> Due to the centrality of families and friends to the process of memorialising the disappeared in Guatemala, there had to be an engagement with the emotional side to this act of violence: the long-term affects it had on families, outside of the experience of terror.

There has also been work conducted into the perpetrators of disappearance, which has offered historical context to my discussions about governments who came to power following the conflict. Jennifer Schirmer's *Guatemalan Military Project*

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<sup>26</sup> Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, *Los que siempre estarán en ninguna parte* (Benemérita Univ. Autónoma de México: Inst. de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, 1999)

<sup>27</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, 'Living with Ghosts: Death, Exhumation, and Reburial among the Maya in Guatemala', *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol.42: 3 (2015), p.180-192

<sup>28</sup> Henrik Ronsbo, 'A Republic of Remedies: Psychosocial Interventions in Post-Conflict Guatemala', in *The Clinic and the Court: Law, Medicine and Anthropology*, ed. Ian Harper, Tobias Kelly, Akshay Khanna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Mónica Esmeralda Pinzón González, 'Psychosocial Perspectives on the Enforced Disappearance of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala', in *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared*, ed. Derek Congram (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2016)

discusses the role of the military in disappearances; Frank M. Afflitto's piece, *The Homogenizing Effects of State-Sponsored Terrorism: The Case of Guatemala* and Susanne Jonas' *The Battle For Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and the Battle for US Power* examine the role of death squads and the support of the United States during the civil war.<sup>29</sup> The role of the State as perpetrator is an aspect of disappearance that this thesis discusses in relation to this idea of a lack of regime change and builds on research by an array of academics and non-academic (for instance, governmental or non-government organizations).<sup>30</sup> Kirsten Weld discusses the role of the guerrilla forces in her article *Dignifying the Guerillo, Not the Assassin*, an area of research in Guatemala's history that has not been explored as thoroughly as the State's role in the conflict.<sup>31</sup> This thesis does not examine how the guerrilla have been remembered or even memorialised in Guatemala, but this is an avenue that could later be explored.

Following the conclusion of the civil war there were two truth commissions produced in Guatemala: the United Nations backed Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH): *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, and the report produced by the

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<sup>29</sup> Frank M. Afflitto, 'The Homogenizing Effects of State-Sponsored Terrorism: The Case of Guatemala', in *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, ed. Jeffrey A. Sluka (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)

Susanne Jonas *The Battle For Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and the Battle for US Power* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991)

<sup>30</sup> This research includes:

Susanne Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000)

Victoria Sanford, 'Si Hubo Genocidio en Guatemala! Yes! There Was Genocide in Guatemala', in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Walter Paniagua, Carlos Amezquita, Denis Martínez, 'Guatemala resists forgetting: Post- Conflict Memory Initiatives', *Impunity Watch* (Utrecht, 2012),

[http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala\\_Mem\\_Research\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala_Mem_Research_Report_English.pdf)

Congress in Guatemala Officially Denies Genocide', *Cultural Survival*,

<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/congress-guatemala-officially-denies-genocide>

Suzanne Jonas, 'Democratization Through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol.42: 4 (2000), pp.9-38

J. Mark Ruhl, 'The Guatemalan Military Since the Peace Accords: The Fate of Reform Under Arzú and Portillo', *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol.47: 1 (2005), pp.55-85

Patrick Smith, 'Memory Without History: Who Owns Guatemala's Past?', *The Washington Quarterly* Vol.24. 2 (2001), pp.59-72

<sup>31</sup> Kirsten Weld, 'Dignifying the Guerillo, Not the Assassin', *Radical History Review*, Vol.113 (2012), pp.35-54

Guatemalan Catholic Church's Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI), *Guatemala: Never Again!*<sup>32</sup> These two reports will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One, but in regards to research that identifies perpetrators it is worth mentioning here that only the REMHI report presented any information about which forces were responsible for certain crimes. When agreeing to the creation of the CEH commission, the military flatly refused to follow the example of the El Salvadorian truth commission and list responsible forces.<sup>33</sup> REMHI however contains a breakdown of the different abuses that occurred during the conflict and by whom they were committed, as well as including testimonies from the perpetrators themselves.

This thesis is in line with recent scholarship in terms of discussing the difficulties that Guatemala has faced and continues to experience in its attempts to remember the past and the disappeared.<sup>34</sup> Kirsten Weld's *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* focuses on the accidental discovery of the National Police Archive in Guatemala City and examines how the material contained in this archive has been treated, what it reveals, and what this says about Guatemala's relationship with its past.<sup>35</sup> Victoria Sanford's *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* outlines Guatemala's civil war in detail before discussing how

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<sup>32</sup> Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, [https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf)

REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999)

<sup>33</sup> Iain S. Maclean, 'Truth and Reconciliation: Hope for the nations or only as much as possible?' in *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*, ed. Iain S. Maclean (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p.19

<sup>34</sup> These are some of the texts that have been written on the topic of disappearance in Guatemala: Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, 'Genocide and state terrorism' in *Murder and Violence in Modern Day Latin America*, ed. Eric A. Johnson (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013)

Kirsten Weld, 'Dignifying the Guerillo, Not the Assassin', *Radical History Review*, 113 (Spring 2012), pp.35-54

Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

Larry Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (California: Cormorant Books, 1994)

Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny* (W.W Norton & Co., 1988)

<sup>35</sup> Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014)

this violent past has been treated.<sup>36</sup> Sanford draws on the experiences of people throughout Guatemala. Her case studies include a number of indigenous Mayan villages located in the highlands of the country that suffered more extreme incidents of violence, including the act of disappearance, during the conflict. This thesis compliments the findings that both Sanford and Weld present in their books and indeed uses some of their research insights to discuss the emotions and controversies attached to disappearance: Sanford in relation to the connection that exists between human remains and memory, and what exhumations mean for justice; and Weld in terms of what the discovery of the archive might mean for relatives of the disappeared and their search for answers.

Within her book, Sanford also touches upon the significant role that race played in the development of violence in Guatemala. Mayan communities were specifically targeted by the military and Schirmer's research into the activities and intentions of Guatemala's military during the civil war in *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* demonstrates clearly that there were specific areas targeted because of the high numbers of indigenous people who lived there.<sup>37</sup> As Virginia Garrard-Burnett has argued in *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt 1982-1983*, the counterinsurgency campaign, particularly that of the early 1980s, was 'underscored by profound class divisions, an ideology of racism, and essentialized stereotypes of indigenous cunning.'<sup>38</sup> Victor Montejo is a well-known and respected voice on the experiences of Mayan communities in Guatemala and his book *Maya Intellectual Renaissance:*

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<sup>36</sup> Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998)

<sup>38</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt 1982-1983* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.18

*Identity, Representation, and Leadership* is one that has discussed the treatment of indigenous people in Guatemala during and after the civil war, and how, in his words, ‘racial discrimination’ has led to the exploitation of the Maya people.<sup>39</sup> When discussing the creation of memorials in this thesis, I have used work such as the above book by Montejo and other interdisciplinary texts, such as Judith Zur’s *Violent Memories: Mayan War Widows in Guatemala*, to understand in more detail the traditions and beliefs of the Mayan people and how disappearances affected them; to analyse properly memorials in Guatemalan Mayan communities, such an understanding is a necessity.<sup>40</sup>

The key contribution my thesis makes is to consider the disappearances in the context of memorialisation. There has been a considerable amount of research conducted on Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, but there still remains a gap in terms of researching Guatemala’s own process of memorialising and remembering the disappeared. A report produced by Impunity Watch, a non-governmental organisation, entitled ‘Guatemala *resists* forgetting: Post-Conflict Memory Initiatives’ outlined a number of projects that had been undertaken in Guatemala between the end of the civil war in 1996 and the writing of the report in 2012.<sup>41</sup> It provides insights into how the violence of the past has been remembered in Guatemala and reinforces

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<sup>39</sup> Victor Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005)

Montejo’s book, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village* (Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 1999) also provides insights into the extreme levels of violence inflicted on the Mayan people: it tells of Montejo’s own experiences in the north western village of Tzalala when the military arrived in the early 1980s.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Zur, *Violent Memories: Mayan War Widows in Guatemala* (Colorado: Avalon Publishing, 2001)

Other texts have included: Mónica Esmeralda Pinzón González, ‘Psychosocial Perspectives on the Enforced Disappearance of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala’, in *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared*, ed. Derek Congram (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2016); Nathan Einbinder *Dams, Displacement and Development: Perspectives from Río Negro, Guatemala* (Cham: Springer, 2017); and Jennifer L. Burrell, *Maya after War: Conflict, Power, and Politics in Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013)

<sup>41</sup> Walter Paniagua, Carlos Amezcuita, Denis Martínez, ‘Guatemala *resists* forgetting: Post- Conflict Memory Initiatives’, *Impunity Watch* (Utrecht, 2012), [http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala\\_Mem\\_Research\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala_Mem_Research_Report_English.pdf)

the idea presented in this thesis that the majority of memory initiatives come from below. Michael K. Steinberg and Matthew Taylor, in their article *Public Memory and Political Power in Guatemala's Postconflict Landscape*, identified a number of memorials that exist throughout Guatemala's landscape, commenting on the fact that there were so few of them and those that did exist were largely community constructed and based.<sup>42</sup> Other relevant works that have looked at the memorialisation of the victims of the civil war include *So That All Shall Know/Para que todos lo sepan*, edited by Oscar Iván Maldonado.<sup>43</sup>

What this thesis has done is to build on some of the initial ideas and research presented by these authors, in terms of the lack of official memorials, those created by the government or the military, and the reasons for this, and the different forms that grassroots memorials can take, but then question how the disappeared as a single group of civil war victims have been memorialised. There are close parallels with other Latin American countries like Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and El Salvador, and research conducted into memorials to the disappeared and the difficulties that have arisen in these countries have offered insights into some of the processes underway in Guatemala. The presence of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina for instance, and the performance of *escraches*, highlights the existence of protest and inconclusiveness that is still very much alive in discussions about disappearance.<sup>44</sup> What distinguishes Guatemala, however, is the lack of regime change discussed above and below. This thesis questions how the disappeared have been memorialised

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<sup>42</sup> Michael K. Steinberg and Matthew Taylor, 'Public Memory and Political Power in Guatemala's Postconflict Landscape', *The Geographical Review*, Vol.93: 4 (2003), pp.449-468

<sup>43</sup> Oscar Iván Maldonado, *So That All Shall Know/Para que todos lo sepan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007)

<sup>44</sup> For more information on the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the use of *escraches* in Argentina, see: Antonius Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), and Nora Strejilevich 'Performative Memorial Sites and Resistance in Argentina', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, Vol.22: 3 (2010), pp.236-243

not only in light of the complexities that arise with remembering the disappeared but also in relation to the attitude of state institutions and personalities in Guatemala. These two perspectives hitherto examined separately, are discussed here in detail and in relation to one another.

## **Methodology**

The argument is based on detailed analysis of primary sources, including memorials, interviews (conducted by author or published), newspaper articles, reports written by organisations, and exhibition catalogues. Since my research focuses on the memorialisation of the disappeared, memorials and, where possible, interviews with their creators have been the most influential sources in terms of shaping this thesis. I have examined the appearance, locations, and intentions behind the construction of these memorials, and how creators have wished them to be perceived, rather than how the public has received them. My decision to focus on this creative process rather than the reception of memorials was based on logistics: gathering sufficient evidence to make claims about how the public views a memorial would require the collection of a significant amount of data, and even then, this would arguably only represent a select number of views. Within this thesis I wanted to examine a cross section of memorials to demonstrate the similarities in theme, if not form, between them.

There are a number of key actors surrounding the process of memorialising the disappeared in Guatemala - people and groups who are referred to throughout this thesis and who exist on either side of a prominent divide, to remember or not to remember. Such a broad division here does not account for the differing of opinion that exists on each side of this argument in terms of how such remembrance should take form, but taken at its most fundamental level, it is this idea of whether or not the



disappeared and the disappearances should be remembered and all that this entails - the creation of memorials, criminal trials, the exhumation of remains, information campaigns and so forth - that is at the heart of this contestation over the disappeared. In the course of my research I spoke to a range of people and organisations about the disappearances and the creation of memorials for the disappeared: artists; curators; family members of those who were disappeared; film makers; museum guides; and a number of different people connected with a variety of organisations in Guatemala associated with memory, such as *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM or the Mutual Support Group); *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (H.I.J.O.S or Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetfulness and Silence); *Asociación Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Guatemala* (FAMDEGUA or The Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained in Guatemala); the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission; and *Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental* (the Guatemalan League for Mental Hygiene). Given the political context in contemporary Guatemala, I have placed primary emphasis on the voices of those who contest the official narrative of the recent past, and each of the aforementioned people and organisations are in favour of remembering the disappeared.

Groups such as GAM and FAMDEGUA were established during the time of the civil war by wives, sisters, mothers, fathers, brothers of the disappeared, who initially demanded that their disappeared relatives be returned to them alive. Their work has continued over the years, and as time has progressed, their focus has moved from the return of the living disappeared to the recovering of their remains, the public recognition that the disappeared were victims of state violence, and the prosecution of

those responsible.<sup>45</sup> H.I.J.O.S was established in Guatemala in the years following the signing of the Peace Accords. It was, and is, an organization based around a different generation to those of GAM and FAMDEGUA - the children of the disappeared. That such a group exists demonstrates that remembrance of the disappearances is not restricted by age; as with the impact of the violence itself, the desire to remember and to see the disappeared publically remembered cuts across generational divides. The demands of H.I.J.O.S are similar to those of its predecessors in terms of recovering the disappeared, but it places much more emphasis on the prosecution of those who performed disappearances. Its slogan: ‘*No Olvidamos. No Perdonamos. No nos Reconciliamos*’ (We Do Not Forget. We Do Not Forgive. We Do Not Reconcile) demonstrates and communicates clearly something very close to Nora’s ‘will to remember’.<sup>46</sup>

Another significant actor on this side of the divide is the Catholic Church. Although there were close ties between the various governments of Guatemala and the Catholic Church, the church remained a separate entity, more outside of state control than, for instance, the legal courts. While this did not protect its members from persecution – Catholic priests working in rural areas of Guatemala were often targeted as they were seen to encourage insurgency –, it did allow the church as an institution a certain degree of freedom once the conflict was over, in terms of how it viewed and discussed the violence, including the disappearances.<sup>47</sup> One of the examples of memorial discussed in Chapter Two are the columns built outside the

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<sup>45</sup> For more information on GAM see: Americas Watch, *Group for Mutual Support* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1985) and their Facebook page, [https://www.facebook.com/GAMGuatemala/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/GAMGuatemala/?ref=br_rs)

For more information on FAMDEGUA see: ‘FAMDEGUA’, <http://famdeguagt.blogspot.co.uk>

<sup>46</sup> H.I.J.O.S Guatemala, <http://hijosguate.blogspot.co.uk> (Accessed 18/11/2017)

<sup>47</sup> Michael K. Steinberg and Matthew Taylor, ‘Public Memory and Political Power in Guatemala’s Postconflict Landscape’, *The Geographical Review*, Vol.93: 4 (2003), pp.449-468  
Simone Remijnse, ‘Remembering Civil Patrols in Joyabaj, Guatemala’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 20:4 (2001), pp.454-469

Metropolitan Cathedral in Guatemala City. Inscribed on these are names taken from the REMHI project, of those who were disappeared, tortured, and executed during the civil war: a deliberate move by the church to remember publically those who were victims of state violence.

While I would have liked to interview someone with a connection to one of the State's own memorials for the civil war - the memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace and the Monument to Peace, both discussed in Chapter Two - it was difficult to establish contact with either an institution or a person who would be willing to speak to me about this. Whether or not this is because of the focus of my thesis remains unclear. What official memorials exist to mark the civil war (and note here, 'civil war', not 'the disappeared') have been used within this thesis to discuss the contrast that exists in Guatemala between the different presentations of past violence. The actors who are against remembering the violence of the past tend to be those in positions of power, such as members of the military or government, especially those who would potentially face trial if their involvement in the disappearances came to light. The disappearances were an act of state violence, performed by forces either created or endorsed (often in a clandestine way) by the State and these institutions, where they still exist - death squads were disbanded in Guatemala before the end of the civil war - have worked individually to encourage forgetting of the past but also in union, putting the force of the State entire behind their attempts to suppress the past and the violence of the disappearances.<sup>48</sup> Yet, it should not be overlooked that opposition to remembering the past is not just a top-down process. There has also been public support for this notion of 'moving on' from the past, and even those who

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<sup>48</sup> An Americas Watch Report, *Little Hope: Human Rights in Guatemala January 1984 to January 1985* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1985) p.13  
Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p.158

believe the actions of civil war governments were justified. When former president General Efraín Ríos Montt was first put on trial in 2013 accused of committing crimes against humanity and genocide, crowds gathered outside the Supreme Court to publically condemn that he was being tried. Some claimed such acts of violence were justified in the face of insurgent activity, that he protected them from the guerrilla, while others argued that there had been ‘no genocide’ in Guatemala.<sup>49</sup>

When I travelled to Guatemala City in 2015 for a period of field research, I was able to see for myself how this division over whether or not to remember the violence of the past had affected the process of memorialisation. Since the memorials themselves are one of, if not the central, source for this thesis, being able to see, touch, and engage with a number of the memorials I had chosen to discuss was a significant part of my research method. I scheduled my time in Guatemala to coincide with the National Day Against Forced Disappearance, 21 June, a day chosen because of the mass disappearance of the earlier mentioned union leaders. On this day there are a number of events organised by family members and organisations to remember the disappeared and the disappearances. Being able to see and interact with these memorials meant that I had a better understanding of their appearance and how they related to their surrounding environment. While this was invaluable to my research, it has also been possible to discuss memorials that I have not had the opportunity to see or visit, owing to other research conducted on them or online resources. The various memorials that exist in Río Negro, for instance, some of which I discuss, were not possible to visit. I was however able to access information and photographs of the

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<sup>49</sup> The Associated Press, ‘Rios Montt Supporters Deny Genocide in Guatemala’, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (March 25<sup>th</sup> 2013), <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-rios-montt-supporters-deny-genocide-in-guatemala-2013mar25-story.html> (Accessed 18/11/2017)

Mike Allison, ‘Guatemala: Rios Montt Trial Ends with Historic Verdict’, *Aljazeera* (May 15<sup>th</sup> 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/05/201351591259267287.html> (Accessed 18/11/2017)

David Stoll, ‘Guatemala: Why they like Rios Montt’, *NACLA*, <https://nacla.org/article/guatemala-why-they-rios-montt> (Accessed 18/11/2017)

memorials on the website set up by the local community and also contact a community member involved in the creation of these memorials to ask further questions.<sup>50</sup> To direct my analysis of the memorials chosen in this thesis I have used works by a variety of scholars, some of who have researched memorials in other parts of Latin America; others who have looked at alternative types of memorial, such as spontaneous memorials; and others still who have examined the emotions attached to memorials. I have engaged with research about a variety of different types of memorial so that each of the case studies I discuss is grounded in existing theoretical discussions.<sup>51</sup>

When I travelled to Guatemala City I was able to conduct a number of interviews with some of the aforementioned actors face-to-face. Such interactions allowed me to perceive any emotional changes in the interviewees' tone or physical reaction. Speaking directly to the person I was interviewing also granted flexibility in terms of how the interview developed, since as the conversations progressed, I was able to adapt the questions I had prepared to the answers given. Owing to the

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<sup>50</sup> Centro Histórico y Educativo Río Negro, 'Río Negro guarda una historia que usted debe conocer', <http://www.rio-negro.info/che/>

<sup>51</sup> These examples of different forms of memorials include: Erika Doss, 'Spontaneous memorials and contemporary modes of mourning in America', *Material Religion*, Vol.2: 3 (2006), pp. 294-318; Cynthia Milton, *Art From A Fractured Past: Memory and Truth Telling in Post-Shining Path Peru* (London: Duke University Press, 2014); Jon K. Reid, 'Memorials, Roadside' in *Encyclopedia of Death & Human Experience*, ed. Clifton D. Bryant, Dennis L. Peck (London: Sage, 2009); Jack Santino, *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialisation of Death* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

Work relating to the emotions and power attached to memorials and memory include: Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, trans. by Mark Oakley (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002); Timothy Ashplant; Graham Dawson; Michael Roper, *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2000); Rebecca J. Atencio, *Memory's Turn: Reckoning with Dictatorship in Brazil* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); David E. Lorey, *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., US., 2001); Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile* (London: Duke University Press, 2006); Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994)

geographical distance between those I was speaking to and myself, I also conducted a number of interviews via Skype, which again allowed face-to-face interaction, and others through email. Although the latter did not allow for me to see the person's reactions, interviewing participants through email did permit me to gather information from a wider variety of people I might otherwise have not been able to speak to. My thesis, for example, discusses memorials in remote Mayan villages located in the highlands of Guatemala, places I was unable to visit during my period in Guatemala owing to time and financial restraints. To extend my research beyond what was available in secondary literature, I wanted to speak to those connected to these memorials. Interviews through email allowed me to do this.

As with any research project that involves connecting with members of the public, there were ethical questions to take into consideration when researching this thesis. First and foremost there was the wellbeing of participants to consider. A. M. Capron has argued that any kind of research should be guided by respect for people; there has to be a recognition of participants' rights, including the right to be informed about the study, whether they wish to participate in the study, and the right to withdraw at any time. These are principles that I used to shape my own research methods.<sup>52</sup> Before each interview I would send the participant information about my research project and a consent form, which they would sign and send back to me if they were happy with everything outlined in it. An example copy of the consent form is included in appendix one. At the start of an interview I ensured that participants knew they were able to leave at any moment they wished, and could withdraw their permission for the interview to be used in this thesis. I also offered participants the opportunity to read through the transcript of the interview, where recorded, after I had

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<sup>52</sup> A. M. Capron, 'Human Experimentation', in *Medical Ethics*, ed. Robert M. Veatch (Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett, 1989), pp. 140-159

typed it up. If there was anything in the interview they were not happy with, they were able to ask that I not use it in the thesis, at least in conjunction with their name. There is still a certain amount of fear in Guatemala that involvement with organisations connected to the disappeared or speaking out against the State will result in negative repercussions. During some initial communications with potential participants I was asked to provide some proof that I was who I said. Giving participants access to the transcript of their interview eluded some of these fears, and, as Gladys Ganiel has pointed out, built on existing trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.<sup>53</sup>

Although I did conduct field research in Guatemala, the level of fluency with which I understand and speak Spanish was not sufficient for me to conduct interviews unassisted. Where possible, I spoke to interviewees in English; however, in Guatemala this was not possible, so for my trip out there I hired an interpreter who lives and works in Guatemala City. This meant that not only was my interpreter fluent in Spanish but she was also familiar with Guatemala's violent history and so was prepared for the topics being discussed. I am aware that using an interpreter comes with the disadvantage of potentially not receiving an accurate translation of what has just been said, but for the purposes of that research trip there was little alternative: despite taking lessons, my comprehension of the language was not sufficient for me to achieve the aims I set out to accomplish without the critical help of my interpreter. As my work revolved around the use of memorials as a primary source, an interpretation rather than a word for word translation of interviews was sufficient to understand the point being made and use it for my research purposes.

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<sup>53</sup> Gladys Ganiel, 'Research Ethics in Divided and Violent Societies: Seizing the Ethical Opportunity', in *Ethics for Graduate Researchers: A Cross-disciplinary Approach*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny, Linda Hogan, Cathriona Russell (London: Elsevier, 2013), pp.175-176

## Structure

This thesis is structured thematically, with each chapter discussing one particular theme that has been identified as existing in multiple memorials. Initially I had considered organising the thesis by memorial, where each type of memorial would be examined in a new chapter. However, it became apparent that this structure curtailed discussions about similarities between memorials, presenting them instead as disconnected, separate creations, whereas in reality, a lot of memorials for the disappeared work in conjunction with one another to ensure the greatest understanding of the past. When examining the memorials I became aware of a recurrence of intentions in their creation. Aside from remembrance, the memorials to the disappeared were made to fulfil additional purposes that had emerged as a result of the political situation in Guatemala and the liminal position of the disappeared, and it was these that I picked out around which to structure the thesis. These are the themes of Contest; Recover; Informing; and Grief.

Many of the memorials examined in this thesis are discussed in relation to more than one of these core themes. This is because often the intention behind a memorial is two or even three-fold: it is just the amount of significance that is placed on each aim that differs. For instance, the primary ambition of a memorial museum is to inform, but it also recovers the reputations of the disappeared and offers a space where relatives can grieve for their loved ones. The themes I have chosen also feed into one another: again, memorial museums may recover the reputations of the disappeared, but this alternative view of this group of people is only distributed because of the museums' ability to inform. The thematic structure of this thesis is intended to highlight these connections that exist and the variety of uses that each memorial has, so the relationship between relatives of the disappeared and memorials



can be fully explored. I chose a cross section of memorials to examine in this thesis to demonstrate the variety of forms of memorial that exist in Guatemala for the disappeared. Owing to the racial element of the violence of the civil war (the indigenous Mayan people as a whole were identified as being insurgent supporters and experienced the most extreme levels of violence because of this) I made sure to include memorials that were created in Mayan villages to show how indigenous cultures were affected by disappearances, and the different relationships that existed with memory, memorialising, and the disappeared.

Chapter one discusses Guatemala's civil war and the use of disappearance during this time in detail, as well as examining the actions and behaviour of the State after the conclusion of the conflict. It is in this chapter that I argue that there has been no meaningful and lasting regime change in Guatemala. The situation is not one where the same regime has retained total power over time; rather certain individuals and political parties have continued to exert influence over governments. There have been moments where more left wing governments have gained power and have distanced themselves from these former regime members, but any changes made during their time in power have been reversed once they leave office. Hence, there has been no complete, lasting regime change.

Chapter two is the first of the thematic chapters and where a number of case studies are introduced, exploring the theme of Contest. Contest is arguably one of the most prominent themes within memorials for the disappeared in Guatemala due to the political situation. Memorials have been created to remember the disappeared and the disappearances, but they also incorporate a contesting element that challenges the silence of the State and the lack of justice for the crimes committed. The case studies explored in this chapter in relation to this theme are: the commemorative pillars

outside the Metropolitan Cathedral in Guatemala City; demonstrations, such as the events around the National Day Against Forced Disappearance; and artwork, both in exhibitions such as *Horror Vacui* and *The Disappeared*, and in public, like Daniel Hernandez-Salazar's *Street Angels* and Regina Galindo's *¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?* ('Who Can Erase the Footprints?').

Chapter three examines the theme of Recovery within memorials. Recovery of the disappeared in this thesis refers to the physical process of exhuming bodies and then ceremonially burying them, and also to the emotional, abstract process of recovering the reputations and ideals of the disappeared, and memories about them. This chapter ties to the previous theme of Contest in that recovering the disappeared is a way of challenging the official narrative put forward by the State and the lack of justice for the crime of disappearance. Recovering what the disappeared believed in, their political and social motivations, opposes the idea put forward by numerous governments that all the disappeared were criminals. Likewise, the recovery of bodies, especially those of children and the elderly, contests claims that only those who were guerrilla were targeted. The memorials examined in this chapter are: the memory book created in Santa Lucía, which includes testimony from villagers about their experiences and the lives of those who were disappeared or killed; the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union in Guatemala City; and organised posts on websites and social media sites that recover the individual disappeared and memories attached to them.

Chapter four discusses memorials relating to the theme of Informing. The memorials examined here are those that have been created with the central motivation of informing. The information contained in these memorials differs in terms of specificity, influenced by the intentions of the actors responsible for the memorials'

creation. Some, such as the memory book created in Santa Lucía, focus on a particular community or group and their experiences, and the creators will usually have a personal connection with the said group. In these cases, personal testimony and examples of particular individuals are fore fronted. Other memorials present a broader overview of the civil war violence and so the emphasis is placed on the scale of the disappearances. The disappeared are then shown as an anonymous collective. Other memorials discussed in this chapter are the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union, and the *Casa de la Memoria* museum.

Chapter five focuses on the theme of Grief. For relatives of the disappeared, grief is complex. The absence of confirmation about the death of the disappeared has prevented many families from entering into a ‘normal’ process of mourning, and even those who believe their disappeared relatives are dead still have questions about where they are and what happened to them, which prevents closure from being attained. This chapter argues that both individual and collective grief are represented in memorials for the disappeared, but while there is a distinction between memorials that address the individual and collective, there tends to be a certain amount of blurring between the categories. Owing to this, the chapter is organised on a scale according to the weighting that is placed on the individual or collective. The memorials discussed in this chapter are: the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union; the Rabinal Achi Community Museum in Río Negro; commemorative events at the sites of violence in Río Negro; and events held on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance.

The memorialisation of the disappeared in Guatemala is an on-going process, and one that is subject to change depending on the political situation. While there is the argument that interpretations of memorials can change over time and the original

meaning and intention of its creators be lost, one of the advantages that the majority, if not all to a certain extent, of the memorials examined in this thesis have is their ability to change at will. There is something temporary and transient in the forms of each of the case studies discussed here; few are made of stone or any other physical matter incapable of easy alteration. Even the memory book created in Santa Lucía has a corresponding website that, if members of the community decided to, could be added to as time progressed. The biggest predictable change in Guatemala that would influence the memorials and the process of memorialisation would be a final and lasting change in the regime, with those who were once powerful being removed from positions of influence. It is already possible to see in contemporary Guatemala the effects that a slight ease in impunity and a legal system with greater freedom has had on those who still seek information and justice for the disappeared. Victoria Sanford wrote of one community in the early 2000s who, as a result of local exhumations were much more open about their experiences of the past and were able to rid themselves of the fear instilled by the civil war.<sup>54</sup>

This thesis thus offers an examination of memorials that have been created for the disappeared in Guatemala under an incomplete regime change. It examines how the political situation in Guatemala has shaped the process of memorialisation, influencing the different forms that are taken and the intentions of the creators. If other countries with similar pasts are examined, such as Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, it is evident that even following a more complete and lasting regime change there can still be disagreement over how the disappeared should be treated, whether in relation to memorisation, exhumations, or legal proceedings. Owing to the number of people involved, each of whom has a different idea of how the situation should be

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<sup>54</sup> Sanford, *Buried Secrets* (2003), p.246

handled, it is safe to say that there will always be differing opinions concerning the disappeared. Yet, by judging the processes these countries have engaged with it is also predictable that if Guatemala were to undergo a similar regime change – complete and lasting – the memorials created in light of this would differ to those currently in place, which alongside remembering are forced to fight for the disappeared to remain in the present, where they will stay an unanswered question looking for an answer until their absence is recognised. This thesis explores what the process of memorialising the disappeared has been in Guatemala since the conclusion of the conflict, and asks how those who created the memorials have overcome the difficulties of the disappeared’s liminal position and the lack of a lasting regime change.

## **Chapter One** **Memory and the Disappearances**

It has repeatedly been said that in relation to its past, Guatemala has ‘no memory’; it suffers from a form of ‘amnesia’ either induced by an inability or an unwillingness to remember and discuss the violence of the civil war. Jean Franco refers to the existence of an ‘amnesia’ surrounding the past in Guatemala in *Cruel Modernity* and in *Maya Intellectual Renaissance*, Victor Montejo outlines the ‘dangers’ of the ‘politics of forgetfulness’.<sup>1</sup> The idea of ‘no memory’ or ‘amnesia’ in relation to Guatemala has also appeared within interviews I have conducted with artists Daniel Hernandez-Salazar and Jessica Kairé, and film maker Lucía Cuevas, and in interviews with Regina Galindo. Such expressions are not without weight: successive Guatemalan governments have repeatedly ignored or denied the repercussions of the civil war and largely failed to accept that the State was responsible for any atrocities committed, claiming instead that their actions were those of a justified counter-insurgency operation.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the narrative of the past that is projected by such governments is one that erases the more extreme episodes of violence that occurred, focussing instead on ideas relating to the peace reached and praising the Army for their role in achieving such a conclusion to the conflict. In relation to the disappearances, the attitude of the government is a similar one: they deny any involvement in these acts of violence and offer no information that may be of use to families.

Yet it is not just the State and their attitude to the past that is implicated in this amnesia. There have been additional expressions of concern about the population of

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013)

Victor Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005)

<sup>2</sup> W. George Lovell, *A Beauty That Hurts: Life and Death in Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), p.76

Guatemala: that members of the public were forgetting the damage that the civil war and those responsible for it created. The election of former military commander Otto Pérez Molina in November 2011 is one such incident that suggests these fears are not ungrounded. Pérez Molina was a commander in the Guatemalan Army under President Efraín Ríos Montt and has been tied to the violent scorched earth operations that were conducted in the 1980s, in which entire villages were destroyed. He was also the director of military intelligence between 1991 and 1993: a period when the military is believed to have tortured and executed political prisoners. Despite this, he still managed to achieve 54% of the vote in the 2011 elections.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, when Ríos Montt ran for presidency again in the early 2000s, his supporters presented him as the ‘emblem of true, lasting, visionary leadership’; the charges of genocide levied at him were dismissed and he was instead praised for leading Guatemala to democracy.<sup>4</sup>

If we present such forms of ‘amnesia’ about the past against the struggles that the families of the disappeared have been involved with for so many years, it is not difficult to imagine that such a difference in opinion and ambition would result in a significant division over memory and how it is treated. The past in Guatemala is rife with tensions, whether it is the divergences that led to the outbreak of the civil war or the contemporary considerations of such a past and the subsequent violence that broke out. The main reason for this is lack of a lasting regime change. It is the lack of a meaningful and lasting regime change in Guatemala that explains why these rifts have never been discussed or able to heal since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, which ostensibly brought an end to the conflict. It would give a false impression of

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<sup>3</sup> Terri Nichols, ‘Perez Molina, Otto’, in *Modern Genocide: The Definitive Resource and Document Collection: Volume 2: Darfur Genocide, East Timor Genocide, Guatemalan Genocide, And Herero Genocide*, ed. Paul R. Bartrop, Steven Leonard Jacobs (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2015) p.947

<sup>4</sup> M. Gabriella Torres, ‘Engendering Violence: Military Leadership Through The Moral Crisis of Guatemala’s National Family’, in *Violence and Crime in Latin America: Representations and Politics*, ed. Gema Santamaría, David Carey (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), p.68

the complexities of the civil war to suggest that such division exists solely between the government and those who oppose it, but when considering the violence of the conflict and how it should be remembered in the broadest of terms, the divide comes down to those who would acknowledge that such events took place and those who would not. As I stated in the Introduction, the former are constituted by those who participated in the running or organising of the former regimes; they are also the people who still possess power and influence, and until that changes, there is little possibility that an agreement over the past will be reached.

Memorials in Guatemala show this division that exists between the different actors at work. They speak to the ways the disappeared and the act of disappearance are remembered, or indeed, not remembered, both within and outside the context of memorialisation. To understand the memorials that have been created and the examples of these that are examined in this thesis, it is important at this early stage in the thesis to provide a sense of the historical context that has produced and sustained these divisions and has shaped the attitudes of the different actors at work. I will begin by exploring the history of Guatemala's civil war (1960 – 1996) and discussing how the act of disappearance was used as a weapon, intended to inflict damage on those considered 'enemies' of the state and any persons attached to them. The impact this form of violence had on the population of Guatemala is explored in relation to both its short and long term effects, so that the emotional destruction disappearances caused may be grasped and the difficulties of memorialising the disappeared may be introduced in detail. This chapter serves to explore how memory and the disappeared have been treated in Guatemala, so that the memorials in the following chapters are placed in context.



## Civil War: 1960-1996

### *The Arbenz Government*

Civil war broke out in Guatemala in 1960, following several years of unrest resulting from the 1954 coup that had removed Jacobo Árbenz from power. Árbenz took office in 1951 and was a member of the left wing political party *Partido Acción Revolucionaria* (PAR or Revolutionary Action Party). Árbenz would be last president to serve in what is now referred to as Guatemala's 'Ten Years of Spring': a period dating from 1944 to 1954 when the country, supported by workers and the middle-classes, engaged with political and social reform. During this time there was hope amongst social liberals and urban middle classes that Guatemala could transform itself, distancing itself from the previous authoritarian regime of President Jorge Ubico, into a modern, inclusive, and democratic country.<sup>5</sup> As president, Árbenz had the ambition of redistributing Guatemala's wealth amongst the whole population, sharing out arable land rather than leaving the majority of it in the hands of a small elite. In June 1952, Arbenz introduced an agrarian reform programme that promised to do just this. The reform confiscated uncultivated land from wealthy landowners, and reallocated it to the landless poor. By 1954, 100,000 families had received a total of 1.5 million acres of land.<sup>6</sup> Amongst those who profited from these reforms, Árbenz was a popular president. His time in power encouraged labour organising and saw the creation of twenty-five peasant unions.<sup>7</sup> However, although his reforms were moderate when compared with those taking place in Mexico under President

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<sup>5</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), p.199

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p.55

<sup>7</sup> Karina Oliva Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Ester E. Hernández, 'US. Central American (Un)Belongings', in *US. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance*, ed. Karina Oliva Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Ester E. Hernández (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2017), p.9

Cárdenas, Guatemala's agrarian reforms managed to awaken opposition from elite individuals and companies who felt their interests were being threatened.

The United Fruit Company was one such business. At the time, it was the largest presence of the United States in Central America.<sup>8</sup> For years the company had benefited from low tax rates on their vast expanses of land and from paying their Guatemalan workers very poor wages. Under Árbenz, they found that much of their uncultivated land, which made up about 85% of their 550,000 acres, would be expropriated by the government. Between 1952 and 1954, the Guatemalan government seized around 400,000 acres of this land, offering United Fruit \$3 per acre in the form of twenty-five year guaranteed bonds as compensation: a figure that had been settled on by reviewing United Fruit's own valuation of the land for tax purposes.<sup>9</sup> United Fruit however, demanded that the government pay them at least \$75 per acre, claiming that \$3 was nowhere near what the land was worth; and such opposition did not stay restricted to United Fruit for long. The Guatemalan Supreme Court declared such actions to be unconstitutional; in retaliation, Árbenz had those who opposed him removed from the high court.<sup>10</sup> In the United States, the Eisenhower government, believing that Guatemala was being governed and influenced by communist forces, supported the claims of United Fruit and between 1953 and 1954 sent a series of letters to the Guatemalan government, demanding that a payment of over \$15,000,000 be paid for the first 200,000 acres of land.<sup>11</sup>

Both the Eisenhower and Truman administrations had been suspicious of activities in Guatemala. They believed that first Juan José Arévalo (1945-1951), the

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<sup>8</sup> Frank M. Afflitto, Paul Jesilow, *The Quiet Revolutionaries: Seeking Justice in Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), p.17

<sup>9</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp.45-46

<sup>10</sup> Afflitto, Jesilow, *The Quiet Revolutionaries* (2007), p.17

<sup>11</sup> Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America* (1988), pp.45-46

president who preceded Árbenz, and then Árbenz himself, were in league with communist forces around the world, and had insisted that the government sever all ties with Guatemalan communists, something Árbenz refused to do. He claimed that communists could be best controlled if they were out in the open, and that his reforms would offer an alternative to Communism and communist forces.<sup>12</sup> Despite the support that Guatemala had shown for US interventions in Korea and their refusals to have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, Cold War-induced paranoia and the possibility of economic losses led the relationship between the United States and Guatemala to worsen as Árbenz continued with his presidency.<sup>13</sup> In 1954, when Árbenz was removed from power, the successful coup was headed by Guatemalan Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, but was sponsored by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Although Árbenz was sure that the Guatemalan military could defeat Castillo and the small military group he had assembled, he was concerned that such a defeat might result in the US sending in its own army to invade, and so he stepped down from power.<sup>14</sup> In June 1954 he announced his resignation over a radio broadcast. Three days later five army officers led by Castillo took control of the government.<sup>15</sup> Such a gesture on the part of Árbenz is indicative of the influence and supremacy the US was able to project overseas, and telling of the pressure that must have been applied to Árbenz during his time in office for him to believe that such an invasion was a possibility.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> A more detailed breakdown of events and relations can be found in texts such as Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* and Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism*.

<sup>14</sup> Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson and Steven B. Redd, 'Framing and the Polyheuristic Theory of Decision: The United Fruit Company and the 1954 US.-Led Coup in Guatemala', in *Integrating Cognitive and Rational Theories of Foreign Policy Decision Making*, ed. A. Mintz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.77-100

<sup>15</sup> Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala Never Again!* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p.188

In the months following Árbenz's resignation, the new government founded the National Committee to Defend Against Communism (*Comité Nacional de Defensa contra El Comunismo*) and enacted the Preventative Criminal Law Against Communism (*Ley Preventiva Penal contra el Comunismo*). The committee was authorized to order the detention of any person, and in the first few months after it was created, twelve thousand people had been detained, and two thousand political and labour leaders had gone into exile.<sup>16</sup> The departure of Árbenz from the Guatemalan government symbolised the end of a brief yet significant period of reform, and ushered in years of unstable and often military-led governments that did all they could to reverse the changes that Arévalo and Árbenz had brought about and to silence those who fought against such alterations.

### *Civil Unrest*

It was after the 1954 coup that opposition groups, or 'guerrilla groups' began to emerge in Guatemala. These organisations vehemently opposed the new system of government, its methods of gaining power, and reversal of the newly introduced reforms, and wished to return to a more left wing system of governance as there had been during the Ten Years of Spring. Carlos Figueroa Ibarra has identified that rather than being a continuous presence in Guatemala, these insurgent groups actually appeared in two cycles during the civil war, between 1962 and 1967, and 1973 and 1982, during which times they were at the height of their power and influence. Ibarra has also presented the idea that Guatemala experienced 'waves of terror': in 1954 following the coup; between 1966 and 1972; and 1978 and 1983.<sup>17</sup> Viewing Ibarra's two periodisations, it is apparent that the waves of terror emerged during the times of

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p.189

<sup>17</sup> Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, 'Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala, 1954–1996: An Interpretation', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol.32: 1 (2013), pp.151-173

the guerrilla's strength, in response to their activities; although this overlap is not exact, which suggests that there were periods of time when the acting government was unable to suppress the insurgent forces, and that there were years during the conflict when 'waves of terror' were created by the State despite the opposition forces being in decline.

The initial guerrilla movements in the 1960s suffered an extreme response at the hands of the military, disproportionate to the threat they actually represented. In 1966, President Cesar Mendez Montenegro granted the military total autonomy, meaning they were able to act in any manner they wished to destroy the insurgent movement. By 1970, the rebellion had been destroyed and approximately 20,000 civilians killed.<sup>18</sup> Such a change in legislation, and the data collected from 1970, matches with the second wave of terror identified by Ibarra. Following this brutality, rather than be deterred from opposing the government, in the 1970s new guerrilla groups, such as the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and the Organisation of People in Arms (ORPA), began to form. Initially the aim of these groups had been to restore the revolution of 1954, but when they witnessed Castro's triumph in the Cuban revolution, they united around a new objective: to bring the socialism of Cuba to Guatemala.<sup>19</sup>

### *Escalation of Violence*

Throughout the civil war, in an attempt to destroy these groups and obtain what Ibarra has referred to as a 'passive consensus' from the population, where an active one was a near impossibility, the government and the military engaged in

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Barry, *Guatemala: The Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Albuquerque: Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1986), p.16

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efraín Ríos Montt 1982-1983* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 27

extreme forms of violence, inflicting forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, forced displacement, sexual abuse, the destruction of homes and livestock, and massacres on the population.<sup>20</sup> Death squads were utilised by the government to perform acts of violence: thus the blow against insurgents could be struck, but the responsibility would not lie with the government.<sup>21</sup>

Although Ibarra refers to ‘waves of terror’, he also speaks of a constant ‘culture of terror’ emerging within Guatemala:

[the] political culture conceived...the exercise of domination as the indisputable prerogative and purpose of state administration. It promoted the conviction that the only way to solve differences was to eliminate the other who was different.<sup>22</sup>

The use of threatening anonymous phone calls, the circulation of death lists, death threats, and the appearance of tortured bodies in public places furthered the psychological impact that such violence had on society.<sup>23</sup> Members of the population lived in fear: many felt that they were being constantly observed, that if they said or did the ‘wrong’ thing they would fall victim to the on-going violence or their loved ones would be taken, and so began to withdraw from society.<sup>24</sup> The power of the military was both at once visible and unverifiable: ‘visible because the population could not get away from the military presence, unverifiable because people never knew when they being watched’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibarra, ‘Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala, 1954–1996’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 32:1 (2013), pp.151-173

<sup>21</sup> Susanne Jonas in *The Battle For Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and the Battle for US Power* discusses the various groups at work. Virginia Garrard-Burnett also explores death squads and the impact they had between 1982-1983 in *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt*.

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, ‘The Culture of Terror and Cold War in Guatemala’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol.8: 2 (2006), pp.191-208

<sup>23</sup> See the Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala Never Again*, in particular pp.151-174. See also the 1979 report from the National Lawyers Guild, *Guatemala: Repression and Resistance*, which contains a number of testimonies given by people who suffered psychological forms of violence.

<sup>24</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), pp.9-14

<sup>25</sup> Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts. Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s ‘Dirty War’* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p.96

The election of Romeo Lucas García in 1978 (to 1982) and then the seizure of power by Efraín Ríos Montt in 1982 (that lasted until 1983 when he was ousted in a military coup) signalled the start of a much more extreme period of violence within Guatemala's civil war. Although disappearances had been occurring since the first wave of terror in 1954 and continued until the conclusion of the civil war in 1996, between 1978 and 1983 the numbers of those who were disappeared skyrocketed. Between 1982 and 1983, there was also a much more concentrated focus on Guatemala's countryside, as Ríos Montt believed that the insurgent groups relied heavily on the Mayan people who lived there. The Mayan people are the indigenous population of Guatemala and, although they appear under the broad heading of 'Mayan', there are multiple strands of identity that exist under the term, with different religious beliefs, languages, and cultures existing in pockets throughout Guatemala. The community a person comes from can often be identified through their clothing, in the unique colours and woven patterns attributed to a particular location that decorate the material. As the violence of the civil war progressed in Guatemala, and the Mayan people increasingly became the target of extreme persecution, many chose to stop wearing such identifiable clothing, as soldiers would frequently execute or disappear people who were noted to be outside their own villages, believing that they were attempting to contact members of the insurgency.<sup>26</sup>

In April 1982, Ríos Montt launched his National Plan for Security and Development (PNSD), which detailed the national objective to eliminate the 'internal enemy'. Areas of Guatemala were colour coded according to the level of threat they represented.<sup>27</sup> 'Red zones' were those in which all inhabitants were considered

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<sup>26</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), pp.48-49

<sup>27</sup> Caroline Barker, Ambika Flavel, Claudia Rivera Fernández, 'Forensic Investigations in Guatemala: The Continuing Search for Truth, Justice, and the Missing Two Decades after the Peace Accords', in

insurgents: there was no distinction to be made between peasant and guerrilla; ‘pink zones’ meant there was a guerrilla presence; and ‘white zones’ indicated no guerrilla presence.<sup>28</sup> The ‘red zones’ were places that were heavily populated by Mayan people, and included departments such as Quiché and Huehuetenango located in the north west of Guatemala, and visible in Figures 1.1 and 1.2. In 1982 both of these departments experienced a notably high number of massacres: 120 in Quiché and 20 in Huehuetenango.<sup>29</sup> Ríos Montt is reported to have said, ‘the guerrilla is the fish. The people are the sea. If you cannot catch the fish, you have to drain the sea’. In recent years, Ríos Montt has been put on trial for crimes against humanity and genocide for his actions while president of Guatemala. He has so far evaded a final sentencing and a prison conviction. A total of 200,000 people were killed during the civil war; approximately 70,000 were killed or disappeared during Ríos Montt’s time in power alone, and between 500,000 and 1.5 million Mayan civilians fled their homes to either other areas of Guatemala or to different countries to escape the violence.<sup>30</sup>

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*Handbook of Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology*, ed. Soren Blau, Douglas H. Ubelaker (New York: Routledge, 2016)

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p.48

REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.115

<sup>29</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.308

<sup>30</sup> The Center For Justice and Accountability, *Guatemala: ‘Silent Holocaust’: The Mayan Genocide*, <http://cja.org/where-we-work/guatemala/> (Accessed 12/11/2016)





Fig.1.1 A map of Guatemala.

This map shows the entirety of Guatemala and the different departments that it is divided into. The black star indicates the northwestern departments of Quiché and Huehuetenango, where large numbers of Mayan people lived and where a high number of massacres took place.

Taken from <http://www.freeworldmaps.net/centralamerica/guatemala/>



Fig.1.2 A close up section of the map in Figure 1.1. In addition to Quiché and Huehuetenango, the rural departments of Alta Verapaz, Totonicapán, and Sololá were areas with large numbers of Mayan people. Taken from <http://www.freeworldmaps.net/centralamerica/guatemala/>

It is argued that much of the violence performed against the communities in the highlands was because of the inhabitants' race or religion, rather than any true belief that entire villages were composed of insurgents. The destruction of sacred sites, places of worship, the scorched earth policies, and the abduction and killing of children as detailed in the REMHI truth commission, all support this, as these actions suggest a desire to destroy a particular people and way of life, rather than attack an identified enemy in a conflict.<sup>31</sup> As one former civil patroller from Quiché testified to REMHI researchers:

He told my sister [a soldier] that they had to finish off all the men and all the male children in order to eliminate the guerrillas. "And why?" she asked, "and why are you killing the children?" "Because those wretches are going to come

<sup>31</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), pp.40-43

some day and screw us over.” That was their intention when they killed the little ones too.<sup>32</sup>

The following graph taken from Ibarra’s article, ‘Genocide and State Terrorism’, shows clearly just how dramatic an increase there was in disappearances during the García and Ríos Montt regimes (1978 – 1983). It is clear from the graph that every government throughout this period of conflict used disappearances albeit to greater or lesser degree, but that this usage peaked during the 1980s.



Fig.1.3 Graph showing the number of disappearances by year.

Taken from Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, ‘Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala, 1954–1996: An Interpretation’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol.32: 1 (2013).

Figure 1.4 clearly shows how these significant increases in the use of disappearance correspond with the regimes of Lucas García and Ríos Montt.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.31



Fig.1.4 Annotated section of graph in Figure 1.3.

Taken from Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, 'Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala, 1954–1996: An Interpretation', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol.32: 1 (2013).

As it is difficult to prove state involvement in a disappearance owing to the lack of first-hand testimony or physical evidence (at least initially: the importance of physical remains will be discussed in more detail in chapter three), there is very little chance of achieving any legal justice. As a tool of oppression and terror therefore, disappearances offered many benefits to Guatemalan governments. The following section of this chapter will examine in closer detail the manner in which disappearances were performed and the impact that they had on Guatemala. There are a number of key factors that define disappearance, which, to understand the difficulties that are faced in memorialising the disappeared, must be explored.

## Disappearances and The Disappeared

### *Disappearances*

Disappearances are one of the most brutal and destructive modes of violence still used across the world. They encapsulate all the physical manifestations of violence: torture, mass execution, clandestine disposal of bodies, tied in with a unique form of psychological torture, experienced by both victim and watching populace. For those who know the disappeared there is a continued uncertainty over where those who have been taken are, and what is being done to them; even when many families have given up hope that the disappeared are still alive, there is still a persistent need for information in order to attain closure. The disappeared become a phantasm in the home.<sup>33</sup> As a result of this ambiguity, the position of the disappeared themselves remains indefinable: they are certainly the victims of a crime, but they cannot be classified as either 'dead' or 'alive'. It is estimated that around 45,000 people, men, women, and children, were forcibly disappeared within Guatemala between 1960-1996, although owing to the reluctance of many people to share their stories, for fear that they will be persecuted, this number could be higher still.<sup>34</sup>

The disappeared have been defined in a number of ways. Broadly, the disappeared have been described as a person or persons who is absent as the result of a force used against their will, enacted by the government or a government agent; a person who has been made to disappear to cause a general state of anguish, insecurity, and fear; someone who has been detained and hidden in an undisclosed location.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Inger Agger, Søren Buus Jensen, *Trauma and Healing Under State Terrorism* (London: Zed Books, 1996), p.138

<sup>34</sup> Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, 'Genocide and state terrorism' in *Murder and Violence in Modern Day Latin America*, ed. Eric A. Johnson (Wiley-Blackwell: 2013), p.155

<sup>35</sup> Derek Congram, 'Missing Persons and Those Who Seek Them: Questions of Perspective and Place', in *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared*, ed. Derek Congram (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2016), p.2

María Fernanda Pérez Solla, *Enforced Disappearances in International Human Rights* (London: MacFarland & Company Inc., 2006), p.7

‘The hallmark of the enforced disappearance is mystery: for the family, for the local society, and for the outside world, a nocturnal fog has indeed engulfed the victim.’<sup>36</sup> Two descriptions that I wish to pick up here are those by Carlos Ibarra and Michael Taussig. Ibarra described the disappeared in Guatemala as ‘those who will always be nowhere’; Taussig referred to the disappeared as ‘the unquiet dead’.<sup>37</sup> The two identifiers are dissimilar to one another in terms of the aspects of disappearance that they focus on, however both of them identify central features of this form of violence that make it what it is. Ibarra’s definition centers in on the physical aspect of disappearances: the missing body, whereas Taussig focuses more on the unsettling, open-ended nature of this violence: the constant presence of those who are missing and the questions this evokes; the exact opposite of the silence death brings.

When a disappearance took place, the person in question could be abducted from anywhere. In Guatemala, there are testimonies from families who describe their relatives being snatched in the street on their way home from work; at the market; or even from their own home in the middle of the night. Sara Poroj Vázquez, who has been a member of the *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo* (GAM, or Mutual Support Group) for thirty-two years and who is pictured on the next page with a photograph of her husband at GAM headquarters, described how her husband failed to come home one evening:

My husband disappeared on 9<sup>th</sup> May in 1984. He was a baker and he told me that he would go to a reunion at 5pm at the football ground near a street in Guatemala City, which is called Roosevelt and he told me as well that he would be back at 6pm. The time went by and he didn’t come back home. A group of the BROE (*Brigadas Rápidas de Operaciones Especiales* or Fast Brigades for Special Operations) of the National Police arrived at my house at

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<sup>36</sup> Nigel Rodley, Matt Pollard, *The Treatment of Prisoners under International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.331

<sup>37</sup> In Kirsten Weld’s, ‘Dignifying the Guerillo, Not the Assassin’, *Radical History Review*, 113 (2012), p.39  
Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.48

8pm. They searched through the whole house and took away some of the belongings of my husband.<sup>38</sup>



Fig.1.5 A photograph of Sara Poroj Vázquez at GAM's headquarters in Guatemala City. Taken in September 2016 by Carlos Juárez.

Those who had been taken in such a fashion rarely reappeared and information on their whereabouts was not provided. Ibarra's reference to 'those who will always be nowhere' summarises this aspect of disappearance succinctly: the disappeared are lost. Rather than knowing that they are being held in a prison, or have been murdered and their bodies disposed of, the families of the disappeared are instead only aware that they are somewhere and nowhere at the same time. Ibarra's expression also speaks to the longevity of the disappearances, of the difficulties of finding these bodies.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Sara Poroj Vázquez, 13/09/2016, by Katherine Bailey, translated by Carlos Armando Juárez Ramírez

In many countries where disappearances take place, the search for the disappeared continues many years after the act itself occurred. There have been incidents of disappearance in countries across the world: in Spain, during the Francisco Franco regime; in Iraq while Saddam Hussein was president; and in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, to name a few. A well-known example of the unrelenting search for the disappeared is the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. In 1977, groups of women whose children had been disappeared by the regime began marching in Buenos Aires, demanding that the government return their children. Forty years later, the Mothers are still campaigning for information about their missing relatives.<sup>39</sup> Another example comes from Columbia, where one woman, Blanca Nieves Meneses, had searched for her three daughters for over ten years until recently discovering their remains. Another woman, Consuelo de Jesus David, has searched for her husband and son for over thirteen years and has yet to learn where they are.<sup>40</sup> This is one reason why the disappearances are often so distressing for family members: they have no body over which to grieve, nor a burial site that they can visit to remember the person and pay their respects. As Jenny Edkins argues:

the body may not be alive, but it is grievable. If there is no body, its loss is felt. In whatever form our beliefs and customs suggest, we pay our respects to the remains.<sup>41</sup>

This sense of not knowing that so defines what the disappearances are is where Ibarra and Taussig's definitions cross over. However, Taussig emphasises the impact that such uncertainty has on those families who are seeking answers. The

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<sup>39</sup> Uki Goñi, '40 years later, the mothers of Argentina's 'disappeared' refuse to be silent', *The Guardian* (April 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/28/mothers-plaza-de-mayo-argentina-anniversary> (Accessed 20/11/2017)

<sup>40</sup> Kelly Nicholls, 'In search of Colombia's disappeared', *The Guardian* (December 2010), <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2010/dec/09/colombia-disappeared> (Accessed 19/01/2015)

<sup>41</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Missing Persons and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.126



disappeared are unable to live or to die, they must remain as shadows until information is revealed proving their deaths, both are demonstrative of just how destructive and torturous the process and effects of disappearance really are. The violation caused by the disappearances is potentially infinite, since the power they hold only ends 'when the victim reappears alive - either free or in detention - or when his or her body is positively identified by relatives or acquaintances'.<sup>42</sup> Although few disappeared re-emerge alive, since most family members are often unable even to find information regarding their deaths or locate the remains of the disappeared, the prospect that the disappeared may still be living is ever present.

Dania Rodríguez, director of the Human Rights Commission in Washington, described the actions of one man she knew whose son had been disappeared:

... the parents of disappeared, they never give up hope of being able to find out what happened to their relative, so they need to find that closure. One of the members of the association was an elderly man who passed away last year, and he always used to leave the light on outside his house in case his son returned, so he never lost hope, it was important to him not to lose hope that he might see his son again.<sup>43</sup>

Her description of the association member who used to leave the light on for his son is a perfect representation of both the liminal position that the disappeared are in (neither dead nor alive) and this unending belief and hope that those who are missing may yet return home. This complex relationship that exists between grief and the relatives of the disappeared is explored in more detail in Chapter Five, which discusses the theme of Grief.

The following section of this chapter examines a selection of testimonies from families of the disappeared that each addresses the impact the disappearances had on

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<sup>42</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.294

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Dania Rodríguez, 22/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey, interpreted by Louisa Reynolds

their lives. These testimonies have been chosen because of the strength with which they communicate the different effects of the disappearances: they highlight the terror, uncertainty, heightened anxiety, and unresolvable grief that the disappearances created within Guatemalan society.

### *The Impact of Disappearances*

Ana Lucía Cuevas is a Guatemalan filmmaker, currently living in the U.K. Her film, *The Echo Of The Pain Of The Many*, released in 2011, is a documentary charting her return to Guatemala to discover what happened to her brother, Carlos, who was disappeared in 1984. In September 2016, I interviewed Lucía and her husband, Fred Coker, who worked as producer on the film, about the making of this film and her thoughts on Guatemala's disappearances and how they have been remembered. The film itself has been well received at the numerous locations where either they, or friends of theirs, have shown it. Lucía stated that the response from the public had been 'unexpectedly good' given that it was the type of film not often made or shown, and that it had been self-financed.

And then when we took it back to Guatemala, which was the first place that we took it, people reacted really, really well. You know people- people came- we took it to the city first, then we took it to the countryside and in both places we received a very, very, a warm welcome, and there were a lot of young people...because you know, Guatemala is a very young country, there is a very high percentage of young people... And they came to us, and they say they didn't know a lot of the things that we talk about in the film.<sup>44</sup>

The reception that the film received from younger audience members reflects the ideas discussed within the introduction to this chapter: the concern that some of the population within Guatemala are forgetting their past; in this case, it appears as if they

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Ana Lucía Cuevas and Fred Coker, 06/09/2016, by Katherine Bailey

are unaware of the violence that occurred. However, that such a group decided to attend a screening of *The Echo Of The Pain Of The Many* suggests something more positive: that although they are not informed of the past, they are keen to engage with it.

An anecdote that Fred shared during the interview, after Lucía had spoken, highlights this idea very clearly:

At one of the films, someone came up to you [Lucía] after one of the films and said ‘I feel like I’ve been living in the second chapter of a story, and you’ve just shown us the first chapter’.... And what, for me, was really, really interesting, and fulfilling is at the premiere, which was in December 2011, in Guatemala City, people came up to Lucía after her film, and you might expect someone to say, ‘oh I enjoyed your film’ or ‘it was an interesting film’, or ‘it was a well made film’ or whatever, but actually the first thing they said was ‘thank you’.<sup>45</sup>

That people in Guatemala City decided to thank Lucía for making her film speaks of not only an engagement with the past and the desire to become involved that is present, but also the need that is there for representation, for outlets that share the voices of those who offer up an alternative historical narrative to the one the government presents.

Further on in the interview with Lucía and Fred, I asked how they thought the disappearances had affected Guatemala as a whole. Lucía began by telling me that the disappearances had ‘traumatised’ Guatemala, while Fred focussed on the impunity still present in the country that allows those responsible for the crime of disappearance to get away with it. Although their answers started broadly, their final few points narrowed in to the personal impact and pain that disappearances cause, with Fred describing it as a ‘pain that never heals’. The following two extracts are

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

taken from Lucía's answer to the question: the first focuses on this broader, more national impact that the disappearances had.

I think that it has left her [Guatemala] deeply traumatised...And the impact- I think it's a crime that causes more scars and more trauma in any circumstances.... It has a big impact, not only on the person who is taken because usually they're tortured and executed, but it does have a very big impact on the whole society and on the family particularly. So I think that Guatemala is still very very traumatised by it....<sup>46</sup>

This comment on the disappearances having an impact on the whole of society is something that relates back to Ibarra's idea of a 'culture of terror'. Even those who did not experience the loss of someone to disappearances directly would have been aware, to some extent, of such violent acts taking place depending on the period and location in which they were.<sup>47</sup> Testimonies included in the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) truth commission tell of neighbours and even family members avoiding groups of people after they were threatened or someone they knew was disappeared, out of fear of being considered guilty by association.<sup>48</sup> Such terror as was fuelled by the Guatemalan State during the civil war does not dissipate overnight, as Lucía's testimony verifies.

This second extract from my interview with Lucía is from her final comment on the idea of impact, and this centres on memories of her brother and her own experiences of dealing with disappearance. The 'military diary' that she refers to is a military logbook discovered in 1999 that contained details of 180 people who had

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Although disappearances were initially used nationwide, once Ríos Montt came to power and focused his attention on the Guatemalan countryside, the urban population experienced fewer and fewer incidents of violence on the streets, and owing to the president's control over the media, disappearances, massacres, and other episodes of violence were not reported in the news, restricting the urban population's comprehension of activities even more. See Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* for detail.

<sup>48</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.53

been disappeared. It is also referred to as the ‘Death Squad Dossier’ and is discussed in more detail later below.

Sometimes it is so complicated because, you know, Carlos was disappeared in '84 and it was in 1999 that we heard about the release of the military diary... And Carlos was included in there, and we read in there that he was executed three months after he was kidnapped. So we spent 15 years wondering where he was. And I was very close to him and Rosario. [Carlos' wife who, along with her son, was murdered as a result of her involvement with GAM] I used to have nightmares of thinking he's going to come back and find out that his family has been killed. It's like, how complicated it can be. Do I want him to be dead? I would prefer him to be dead because I don't want him to come back to this reality but you want him. So it can get really really complicated.<sup>49</sup>

Towards the end of her answer, when she began to talk about her brother, it was clear in Lucía's voice that speaking about the impact disappearances have had on her own life made her very emotional. Although her brother was disappeared in 1984 and the conflict as a whole ended in 1996, the emotional repercussions of such an incident and period of history are evidently far from over. This deliberation between wanting a disappeared relative to be dead or wanting them still to be alive is a frequent occurrence in testimonies from families of the disappeared: the finding of the body offering closure but also the loss of hope.<sup>50</sup> Usually such feelings were evoked when faced with the prospect of viewing a body that had been badly tortured: hoping that their relative had not suffered such things, but also wishing that they had an answer about whether or not they were still alive.<sup>51</sup>

Isabel López de Castañon, vice-president of the organization GAM is another woman who has experienced the effects of disappearances. In 1984 her husband, Gustavo Castañon Fuentes, was disappeared from a bus stop in Guatemala City. In an

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Ana Lucía Cuevas and Fred Coker, 06/09/2016, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>50</sup> Agger, Jensen, *Trauma and Healing Under State Terrorism* (1996), p.138

<sup>51</sup> See the section on Forced Disappearances within the REMHI truth commission.

interview with photographer Larry Towell, she was asked what the difference was between an assassination and a disappearance for a family. She stated:

The effects of a forced ‘disappearance’ are much, much greater as it maintains us in a permanent state of anxiety. Terror invades the family. All the friends—the unions. The students. It can affect an entire village. It affects the whole society. It’s a social trauma. With an assassination, at least you know your relative is not being tortured. You can see his body. If your children ask, you can tell them their father is dead. But what answer can you give to the child of a ‘disappeared’ person?<sup>52</sup>

What is prominent within Isabel’s statement is not only this idea of terror permeating both social groups and the wider community as was seen in Lucía’s statement, but again the perpetual state of unknowing that relatives of the disappeared enter into. This starts from the moment an individual disappears: fear is created by not knowing what that person is experiencing or where they are. Isabel’s testimony also highlights how this fear ricochets down generations. Her concern is not just for her husband and herself, but also for her children and how they could understand their father’s disappearance.

The pain of not knowing is also shown in the following testimony. Clara, whose husband was one of the union leaders disappeared on 21 June 1980 and who I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, spoke of her own feelings in relation to this unknowing that surrounds the disappearances:

One has to live with the anguish of what has become of the disappeared. Could they still be alive? What conditions are they in? In what situation? If they were killed, where? Where were they left? How? What did they suffer in that moment?<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Larry Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (California: Cormorant Books, 1994), p.105

<sup>53</sup> Thomas F. Reed, Karen Brandow, *The Sky Never Changes: Testimonies from the Guatemalan Labor Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p.68

Another woman, who spoke to Jean-Marie Simon, a photojournalist who lived and worked in Guatemala in the 1980s, described her feelings after the abduction of her husband. The statement below clearly demonstrates the endless internal questioning that families of the disappeared endure:

The day comes when they capture him- there are no words to explain it, it's so terrible. You feel that you have lost life itself. To be alone and helpless and with that uncertainty of what can be happening to the person you love so much- if you are eating, you wonder, 'is my husband eating too?' If you are trying to fall asleep, you wonder, 'can they be torturing him? What can they be doing to him?'<sup>54</sup>

What these testimonies noticeably demonstrate about disappearances is the pervasive nature of the emotional trauma that they cause. The anxiety and fear felt by the third speaker has permeated every aspect of their life: even simple everyday tasks like eating a meal or going to sleep caused her to reflect on the situation of her husband, the mundane nature of such exercises perhaps highlighting the abnormality of her situation.

The father Dania spoke of in her interview who left the light on for his son is an example of an individual retaining the belief that their loved one might still be alive somewhere, but as time has passed others have changed their focus from wanting the disappeared back alive to wishing that they knew where their remains were. Such a transition over time is also visible in the demonstrations that organizations like GAM coordinated and the demands that they leveled at the State: from the return of the disappeared to access to information.<sup>55</sup> Opinion and belief surrounding the disappeared did not change immediately and it would be incorrect to assume that all families felt, and indeed feel, the same way. However, in many of the

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny* (W.W Norton & Co., 1988), p.192

<sup>55</sup> See: Americas Watch, *Group for Mutual Support* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1985)  
Americas Watch, *Closing the Space: Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1988)

testimonies collected by the REMHI project, which was published in 1998, speakers reflect on their past fear and anxiety that surrounded their wish for a relative to be returned, but speak in the present tense when discussing their desire to discover where the remains of the disappeared are.

The following testimony, given by a parent from Alta Verapaz to researchers for the REMHI commission, is one such example of how discussions around finding the disappeared were formed after the conclusion of the civil war. The testimony reflects a desire to know where the disappeared are - where their remains are - but also the sense of powerlessness that many experienced, unable to protect or save their relatives from harm.

My heart is heavy because of this suffering and pain. I grieve for my son, but I can do nothing now. I don't know where his body and his blood might have been left. I ask God to keep him, to shine his light on him, to gather up his soul. Why did he have to go buy corn that day? That corn would have been there another day!<sup>56</sup>

This wish to know where the bodies of the disappeared are is something that is still prominent within Guatemala today, as discussed below.

When disappearances first occurred, however, families were desperate to rescue their loved ones and bring them back home alive. Upon hearing that their relative had been taken, individuals would head to police stations or army offices to find out if their missing family member was being held there; there was often hope that they would be officially charged, and subsequently released, rather than be disappeared.<sup>57</sup> Officials were facetious with their answers to enquiries about those who were taken, denying any responsibility or knowledge of what had happened.

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<sup>56</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.18

<sup>57</sup> Afflitto, Jesilow, *The Quiet Revolutionaries* (2007), p.76



There are numerous stories of relatives of disappeared persons that record the responses of the authorities to their desperate efforts when they are asking if their loved ones were charged instead of being disappeared: “perhaps they went to the United States without telling you”, “maybe he went off with another woman?”, or “your relative must be in the mountains with the guerrillas”.<sup>58</sup>

The case of Nineth de García, president of the organization GAM, is one example of this. After being under close vigilance for several days in 1984, her husband was disappeared on his way home from work. Early the next morning several members of the security forces forced their way into Nineth’s home, in a similar fashion to those members of the National Police Force who broke into Sara Poroj Vázquez’s house.

I don’t know where I got the strength in front of all those guns, but I asked them where they had my husband. So they told me he was under investigation, that he was accused of political acts against the state security. And I, of course, being still very naïve, asked when they were going to bring him back. Then they said jokingly, ‘In seventy-two hours.’ And they started to laugh.<sup>59</sup>

Nineth’s experience was not uncommon. Many families were informed that their missing relative would return home in a matter of days or were being held in a particular place: a court, a military base, a police station.<sup>60</sup> In the majority of cases, the disappeared did not return home nor were they in the places that relatives were informed. Whether these deadlines were given to families because the officials involved found it amusing - as is clear in the case of Nineth and her husband - or because it was hoped that this would deter families from immediate action, is not clear. What is evident however, is the additional torment that this promise of reconciliation created, as can be seen in the testimony from Nineth below.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibarra, ‘Genocide and State Terrorism in Guatemala’, in *Murder and Violence in Modern Day Latin America*, ed. Johnson (2013), p.162

<sup>59</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), p.132

<sup>60</sup> Brenda K. Uekert, *Rivers of Blood: A Comparative Study of Government Massacres* (London: Praeger, 1995), p.110

I don't know what happened to me after that- I- those first few days- I was kind of like I wasn't there. I started to knit and I was singing all the time. I don't know what happened to me. I got to school and the students would say 'What happened?' I'd say, 'Nothing at all.' I was still thinking he'd be back in seventy-two hours.<sup>61</sup>

Her description of her actions in those few days, and the lack of comprehension that is still present when she discusses her behaviour, demonstrates the amount of shock that Ninth was experiencing. The seventy-two hour window that she was given by the security forces would have been a concentrated period of the hyper-anxiety and tension so characteristic of disappearance, suspended in motion and unable to act, forced to wait to see if her husband would return. Although these emotions are still endured even without this allotted waiting time, in this situation, there was nothing Ninth could have done but wait, making the emotional torment even more prominent.

As well as these emotional repercussions that families experienced, there were also financial implications to relatives being disappeared. Many poorer families suffered financially at home when the main source of income stopped owing to a disappearance. The majority of those who were disappeared were men, meaning that women were often left alone with several children and no financial means of supporting them. Some relatives served the economic wishes of the military; they gathered outside military bases with cigarettes, chewing gum, and sweets, hoping that military personnel would buy something. For some relatives this meant that they were forced to serve members of the military they believed to be involved in the disappearance of their loved one, adding to the agony of the situation.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), p.132

<sup>62</sup> Afflitto, Jesilow, *The Quiet Revolutionaries* (2007), p.77

When Aura de León Torres's husband was disappeared in 1980, she was left with two children and only the small amount of money she earned.

The little bit I could earn was nothing. For breakfast we only had one cup of *atol* [a drink made from corn]. For lunch we had two cups of *atol*. My children would say, 'Mommy. We're hungry.' And I would go out with my little son and ask people for leftovers. I was ashamed. I couldn't do anything else and I would think that I should give my children away.<sup>63</sup>

Although the emotional trauma that the disappearances caused is evident, the financial impact that this form of violence had, and the dire situation that many families were left in must not be overlooked. For indigenous families, there was little money to be earned even when both people in a couple were working.

#### *Action after a Disappearance*

When it became clear that officials were not going to help families find their lost relatives, or the relatives did not appear in the allotted timespan given, family members began to search for the disappeared. They would often risk their own well-being and financial security trying to uncover some information.<sup>64</sup> It was during these searches for the disappeared that the organization GAM was formed, when women looking for their family member or members repeatedly ran into each other in the same locations and decided to form a support network, which would later develop into a pressure group set on retrieving information from the government.

During their searches for the disappeared, families would end up travelling further afield into different parts of the country, into hospitals, morgues, and detention centres. Many even got writs of *habeas corpus* drawn up in an attempt to free their

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<sup>63</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), p.127

<sup>64</sup> David Tombs, "'He is not here": Disappearance, Death, and Denial', in *Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*, ed. Michael A. Hayes, David Tombs (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001), pp.201-202

relatives from imprisonment (a writ of habeas corpus requires that a person held in detention be brought before a court or judge); people took out newspaper adverts, spoke to journalists, and some even managed to gain appointments with high ranking officials to ask them where their missing relatives were. In 1994, José Sucunú Panjoj disappeared on his way home from work, where he worked as a loader at the bus terminal in Zone 4 of Guatemala City. His family took various steps to try and find him: ‘they filed two writs of *habeas corpus* ("*exhibición personal*").... one before the Seventh Court of First Criminal Instance and another before the Second Court of First Criminal Instance’, as well as searching mortuaries, but nothing proved to be successful.<sup>65</sup>

People searching for the disappeared would regularly check mortuaries: reports that a body had been found were both a source of hope and fear. Sara Poroj Vázquez started her search for her husband the day after he disappeared by visiting a mortuary. ‘I decided to look for him at the morgue’, she said, ‘while being afraid to find him there.’<sup>66</sup> Aura Elena Farfan also described this contradiction of feeling that she experienced when searching for her brother, Ruben. Although finding remains meant that the search for the disappeared came to an end, it also forced families to acknowledge the torture their loved one would have experienced, and in those years just after disappearances had occurred, to also accept their likely death at the hands of their perpetrators. The fear of knowing that the disappeared suffered before they were eventually murdered is evident in the statement that she gave to Larry Towell:

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<sup>65</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, ‘Report N° 21/98 José Sucunú Panjoj’, *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1997*, <https://www.cidh.oas.org/annualrep/97eng/TOC.htm> (Accessed 25/02/15)

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Sara Poroj Vázquez, 13/09/2016, by Katherine Bailey, translated by Carlos Armando Juárez Ramírez

I went to hospitals and detention centres, asking for his body, looking amongst the dead. I was going crazy. Many of them were dismembered- without hands. Some had genitals stuffed into their mouths. Others- no eyes. Others- their faces had been smashed with hammers. We listened to the news reports for cadavers... We suffer a contradiction within ourselves. We want their remains, but in reality, we don't want to find them like that.<sup>67</sup>

Although all families suffered while searching for the disappeared, for many individuals the task of tracking down their missing relatives was a lot more difficult. While disappearances were a nationwide occurrence, it was indigenous families who largely bore the brunt of these actions. Many people were taken due to their involvement in Unions, in social improvement or education projects, or as a result of their work with the Catholic Church. Miguel Angel Albizúrez, who was the director of the National Committee for Trade Union Unity (CNUS), was forced to flee Guatemala in 1978 after receiving a number of threats to his life and discovering that his name was being circulated on several death lists.<sup>68</sup> Miguel described how on 25 June 1976, police invaded the National Workers' Central (CNT) headquarters: 'they had come looking for me, but I managed to escape. A notice went out to capture me so I went into hiding.'<sup>69</sup> Although Miguel himself managed to escape Guatemala with his family, many others like him who were involved with the CNUS and CNT were not so lucky.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), p.110

<sup>68</sup> Death lists would be circulated by death squads, such as the Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA), and would list the names of all those they intended to capture or assassinate. Many of the people on these lists were assassinated or disappeared, but the lists also served to intimidate and frighten people, reminding them that they were being watched at all times.

<sup>69</sup> National Lawyers Guild, *Guatemala: Repression and Resistance* (New York: National Lawyers Guild, 1979) p.24

<sup>70</sup> The booklet, *Soft Drink: Hard Labour. Guatemalan Workers Take On Coca-Cola* published by the Latin American Bureau offers detailed insights into the work of this particular Union and the repression they faced. Victor Montejo's *Testimony: Death Of A Guatemalan Village* describes how in 1982 a village in Huehuetenango came under attack by the army and the different groups, such as schoolteachers, that were targeted in this attack. The 1979 report from the National Lawyers Guild, *Guatemala: Repression and Resistance* offers numerous different accounts from people that were targeted or who knew others that had disappeared as a result of their involvement with activities.

However, people were also disappeared for no discernible reason at all. Due to the government's targeted focus on the highlands, large numbers of people were disappeared or murdered because it was suspected that they were 'communists', and so would be in league with the guerrilla movements. On 31 November 1981, Antonio, who lives in Santo Tomás, La Unión, discovered that his son had been disappeared. On his way home from a walk, Antonio's son was tied up and thrown into a pickup truck, which drove to Mazatenango. When Antonio travelled to Mazatenango, the police told him that they did not know anything about his son's whereabouts; he could not find his son at the army base either. When giving his testimony, Antonio was asked whether his son was 'politically involved' or worked with a union. He replied:

No. He worked on a *finca* [plantation] picking coffee. They don't have unions... We're just looking for him. We want to know whether he's in jail or dead. It was just because he was a working man. It wasn't as if he didn't work. He never committed any crime.<sup>71</sup>

When searching for their disappeared, families - like Antonio's - had to travel away from their homes; many to Guatemala City, as this was where officials had their offices, and where many of the unidentified bodies were brought. Later, when the organization GAM was formed, it was in Guatemala City that the headquarters were established and meetings were held; public demonstrations also occurred in the capital. For those poorer indigenous families who had to travel long distances to reach Guatemala's capital and other departments, the search for their disappeared was expensive.<sup>72</sup> Given the low wages that laborers would be paid, there was little or no spare money to be spent on bus fares: a round-trip bus fare could cost upwards of a fortnight's wage for an agriculturalist or several days' wages for an industrial

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<sup>71</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), p.110

<sup>72</sup> Amnesty International, *Guatemala: human rights violations under the civilian government* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1989), p.12

worker.<sup>73</sup> While some individuals could afford to place adverts in newspapers, asking for information about the location of their disappeared, for those living in the countryside, the cost was often too great. A full page advert in a newspaper could cost between 170 and 180 quetzales; while one worker noted that he was paid one and a half, or two quetzales a day [thirty or forty cents US].<sup>74</sup> It is clear that this route to discover where the disappeared were, was only open to those who could afford it.

For some families, this lack of funds meant that their search for the disappeared had to come to a premature end for financial reasons. One woman, Ana Piedra, in the testimony below describes her grandmother's persistent search to find a disappeared family member. Ultimately, after she had sold everything she owned, she was forced to stop looking because she could no longer afford it.

We went looking in all parts of Chimaltenango, as well as in the capital... all of these investigations cost lots of money. I asked for help from the military commissioner of the village, Don Salomon. We didn't dare go to the detachments by ourselves, no civilian would. The military commissioner would come and sometimes he would take another person with him. This man or assistant didn't just give his help for free. For every trip we were charged 20 quetzales. In addition, he would charge for their bus fare, plus their lunches. For a year and a half we spent almost every day looking for my cousin. Every day that commissioner would earn his twenty quetzales, his bus fare, and his lunch, until my grandmother spent all her money... Before my grandmother used to have animals all around her house. Now she's empty-handed because she had to sell everything... In the end, when she had no more money, land, or animals, she had to stop looking for him. God bless him, because wherever he is, he'll have to stay there now.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the cost of searching for the disappeared, what this testimony also demonstrates is the advantage that was taken of vulnerable individuals: the military commissioner and the unidentified assistant used the situation to benefit themselves. It is more than likely that many other families also paid out vast amounts of money in

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<sup>73</sup> Afflitto, Jesilow, *The Quiet Revolutionaries* (2007), p.81

<sup>74</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), p.27, p.57

<sup>75</sup> Towell, *House on Ninth Street* (1994), pp.28-29

desperation to people they thought could help, and received little or no information in return.<sup>76</sup> Acting for financial gain was not just the prerogative of the military, however. It was reported in the CEH (Historical Clarification Commission) truth commission that the guerrilla would occasionally abduct a person and then demand a payment or economic support for their safe return. However, unlike with the military those the guerrilla would abduct were well-known Guatemalan political figures, diplomats, or business people: people one would imagine had access to money to pay for their release.<sup>77</sup>

The disappearances thus affected nearly all aspects of people's lives in Guatemala: the family unit; the progress that had been in establishing fairer working environments; emotional and physical health; and people's financial well being. The repercussions of the disappearances are still being felt in contemporary Guatemalan society, as relatives continue to search for information about those who were disappeared. Following the writing and signing of the Peace Accords, and the production of the two truth commissions, the government of Guatemala had agreed to begin a process of reconciliation within the country. Funding an official search for the disappeared was one measure that was recommended in the CEH commission.<sup>78</sup> However, so far governments have only acted on a meager number of recommendations. The remainder of this chapter explores the relationship between the State and the memory of the conflict, from the conclusion of the civil war to the present day, and will examine how this continued dispute has affected the view of disappearances in contemporary Guatemalan society.

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<sup>76</sup> Afflitto, Jesilow, *The Quiet Revolutionaries* (2007), p.82

<sup>77</sup> CEH Report, Forced Disappearance and Kidnapping, para 136, [https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf) (Accessed 2/11/2016)

<sup>78</sup> CEH Report, Recommendations, para 22, [https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf) (Accessed 2/11/2016)



## Memory in Guatemala

### *The End of the Civil War*

Despite the optimism that the signing of the Peace accords brought in 1996, there was still little trust in Guatemala's government nor in its relationship with the military: there were doubts that the impunity in Guatemala, which had for so long allowed death squads, the National Police Force, and the military to get away with acts of violence, would ever end.<sup>79</sup> The release of the two truth commissions following the conclusion of the conflict acknowledged the extent of the violence of the civil war, and therefore spoke out against this impunity and sought to reconcile factions within the country. The reports not only gave those who had suffered during the conflict a chance to have their experiences heard, but they also offered all Guatemalans the opportunity to engage with and learn about their country's recent past, something which might have otherwise remained hidden from them.<sup>80</sup>

The reports contained a number of recommendations to ensure that a process of reconciliation was established within Guatemala. They covered topics such as reparations, exhumations, and preventing future human rights violations. There were also sections that discussed ideas around memory, memorials, and ceremonies. For instance, on the topic of remembrance and historical memory, the CEH report stated:

The CEH believes that the historical memory, both individual and collective, forms the basis of national identity. Remembrance of the victims is a fundamental aspect of this historical memory and permits the recovery of the values of, and the validity of the struggle for, human dignity.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Susanne Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), p.147

<sup>80</sup> Kathy Ogle, 'Guatemala's REMHI Project: Memory From Below', *NACLA*, <https://nacla.org/article/guatemala%25E2%2580%2599s-remhi-project-memory-form-below> (Accessed 20/01/2016)

<sup>81</sup> CEH Report, 'Guatemala Memory of Silence', [http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf) (Accessed 20/01/2016), p.48

The report recommended that the Guatemalan government organise the creation of memorials, markers, and events in order to remember the civil war and those who had been victims of its violence. The REMHI report presented something similar, with one section reading:

Since many families have been unable even to bury their dead or observe their cultural or religious rites, the authorities have the obligation to facilitate public ceremonies, exhumations, funerals, and burials in accordance with meaningful religious and cultural traditions.<sup>82</sup>

This suggestion that religious and cultural traditions be upheld was central to both reports. Indigenous leaders had also been present at the UN brokered peace negotiations, which had resulted in a significant ‘Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous People’ in the accords.<sup>83</sup> Since a high proportion of victims of the violence were Mayan any processes that the government may undertake had to be sensitive to and aware of the varying beliefs and customs that were in place, and acknowledge not only the human cost of the conflict, but also the desecration of sacred sites in order to ensure that the reconciliation process was inclusive and representative.<sup>84</sup>

However, although the reports provided a detailed and previously untold version of the civil war, and offered suggestions as to how Guatemala could reunite the divided factions that existed within the country, they were not met with enthusiasm, at least not by the government or the military. When the CEH commission was first proposed the military resisted the notion of a ‘truth’ commission, refusing to participate if it was labelled as such, while the insurgent

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<sup>82</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.317

<sup>83</sup> Brett Greider, ‘The Maya “Greening Road” of Reconciliation: the Pan-Maya Movement in Guatemala’, in *Reconciliation, Nations, and Churches in Latin America*, ed. Iain S. Maclean (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p.92

<sup>84</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.316

group, *La Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit, or URNG) insisted that any commission created had to investigate the abuses of the conflict. The UN-sponsored commission of ‘Historical Clarification’ was eventually decided upon in 1994.<sup>85</sup> When the REMHI truth commission was released in 1998, it was violently received within Guatemala. On 26 April, several days after launching the final copy of the report, Bishop Juan Gerardi, the orchestrator of the project, was assassinated outside his home. Many others who were working on the report were also threatened. The cycle of violence, as Christina Montenegro has argued, had not ended; it had simply been hidden under the mask of institutional reforms and discourses of good intentions.<sup>86</sup>

The information contained within the REMHI report was undeniably the reason behind Gerardi’s assassination: the report rejected the military and government’s consensus on general amnesty and, unlike the CEH report, named those responsible for murder and genocide activities.<sup>87</sup> It presented the perpetrators’ testimonies that described the atrocities they witnessed or participated in alongside those of victims, showing clearly that the military deliberately targeted the civilian population, rather than focussing just on the guerrilla. There were also descriptions of the humiliations and punishments that recruits were forced to suffer to ensure that they would participate in acts of violence.<sup>88</sup> Although the military could, and did,

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<sup>85</sup> Iain S. Maclean, ‘Truth and Reconciliation: Hope for the nations or only as much as possible?’, in *Reconciliation, Nations, and Churches in Latin America* ed. Iain S. Maclean, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p.61

<sup>86</sup> Christina Montenegro, ‘Democratización sin memoria? El caso de Guatemala’, Rey Tristán, Eduardo; Calvo González, Patricia. XIV Encuentro de Latinoamericanistas Españoles : congreso internacional, Sep 2010, Santiago de Compostela, España. Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios Americanistas Gumersindo Busto ; Consejo Español de Estudios Iberoamericanos, pp.1389-1404, 2010, Cursos e Congresos; 196.

<sup>87</sup> Maclean, ‘Truth and Reconciliation’, in *Reconciliation, Nations, and Churches in Latin America* ed. Maclean (2006), p.20

<sup>88</sup> Ogle, ‘Guatemala’s REMHI Project’, *NACLA*, <https://nacla.org/article/guatemala%25E2%2580%2599s-remhi-project-memory-form-below> (Accessed 20/01/2016)

contest the figures within both reports, claiming that they were ‘exaggerated’, these descriptions of the techniques that were used threatened to corrupt the image of a professional military force that had won a ‘noble’ victory against communism.<sup>89</sup>

While this assassination cannot necessarily be seen as entirely representative of feeling towards the REMHI project, it did have a negative impact on how the peace process during 1998 and early 1999 was viewed.<sup>90</sup> As Susanne Jonas states, there was scepticism about the process ‘driven by suspicions that the government was covering up the crime and that army hard-liners could still (quite literally) get away with murder.’<sup>91</sup> It cannot be ignored that all those involved with this assassination were members of the military, the group most likely to feel under threat by the publication of the report and therefore the ones most likely to want it silenced.

Three former military officers - Col. Byron Disrael Lima Estrada, Capt. Byron Lima Oliva, and José Obdulio Villanueva - were eventually convicted of Gerardi’s murder in 2001, and while they are believed to have committed the physical crime, the intellectual author who decided that such a crime should be committed and how, remains unknown.<sup>92</sup> Achieving these convictions became a political issue in Guatemala. President Alvaro Arzú who was in power at the time, was seen to try and cover up the murder, framing it as a common crime; when an election was held two years later, Alfonso Portillo of the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) ran on a promise that he would investigate Gerardi’s murder properly. After he was elected, Portillo achieved the convictions he had promised. As Raul Molina Mejía and J.

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<sup>89</sup> Walter Paniagua, Carlos Amezcuita, Denis Martínez, ‘Guatemala *resists* forgetting: Post- Conflict Memory Initiatives’, *Impunity Watch* (Utrecht, 2012), [http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala\\_Mem\\_Research\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala_Mem_Research_Report_English.pdf) (Accessed 20/01/2016), p.15

<sup>90</sup> Susanne Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala’s Peace Process* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), p.147

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>92</sup> Guatemala Human Rights Commission, ‘Assassination of Bishop Gerardi’, <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/our-work/important-cases/assassination-of-bishop-gerardi/> (Accessed 21/01/2016)

Patrice McSherry have argued, it is surprising that it took the election of an extreme right candidate for the criminal investigation to take place; one would have expected moderate right wing President Arzú to do this instead.<sup>93</sup>

In his book, *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?*, Francisco Goldman claims that former president Otto Perez Molina was also involved in the murder of Gerardi. The truth behind this allegation remains unknown, but it does offer up a potential example of the continued influence of those formerly involved in violence and the suppression of the past in contemporary Guatemalan politics, and also suggests an explanation as to why the murder was never thoroughly investigated. In addition to this, it is worth noting that the leader of the FRG at this time was former president Efraín Ríos Montt; it has been suggested that the use of Gerardi's murder in Portillo's election campaign was due to Ríos Montt's influence. When Portillo became president, Ríos Montt as leader of the party also gained substantial power. Damaging Arzú's political reputation also served as a form of revenge for Ríos Montt: Arzú had been connected to the factions within the military that had thrown Ríos Montt from power in 1983.<sup>94</sup>

While the response that followed the publication of the CEH report was not as violent as that of the REMHI commission, the assassination of Bishop Gerardi suggested that there were forces opposed to acknowledging this violent past. Prior to the release of the report in 1999, researchers for the CEH report had collected testimonies from 9000 victims, and requested information from international and domestic participants in the war: the US government, URNG, and the Guatemalan government and military.<sup>95</sup> While the US government and URNG were compliant in

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<sup>93</sup> Raúl Molina Mejía & Patrice Mcsherry, 'Justice in the Gerardi Case But Terror Continues', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol.35: 1 (2001), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2001.11722569>

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>95</sup> Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves* (2000), p.153

these requests and provided the written documentation that was asked for, the Guatemalan army were not. The Defence Minister claimed that files from the 1979-1982 period (arguably one of the most significant periods of the war considering the extreme levels of violence that were reached) had been destroyed; an excuse that would later be shown to be a lie.<sup>96</sup>

When in 1999, information contained in the National Security Archives was declassified and made public, it was discovered within a 'secret message' from the US Defence Intelligence Agency that the Guatemalan Army High Command in November 1994 had ordered the destruction of any incriminating evidence:

the order given...directed that all commands destroy any information...which could compromise the security or status of any members of the Guatemalan military.<sup>97</sup>

The message also revealed that the military had designed a strategy to block future 'UN investigating commissions from entering bases to examine army files'.<sup>98</sup> The orders sent out to commands reportedly stated that any UN investigating commissions arriving on military bases would be told that before they were allowed to search the military installation or its archives they would need a judge or judicial order. The report went on to say: 'even then...an unidentified clause in the constitution will be used to prevent their gaining access to classified archives.'<sup>99</sup>

This removal and destruction of documentation concerning the conflict, along with the deliberate prevention of allowing those working for the CEH access to information, demonstrates clearly that the military were not prepared to cooperate

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>97</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency Document, 'The Rising Impact of the Bamaca Case on the Guatemalan Military Establishment', November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1994, in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 34*, ed. Thomas S. Blanton, Michael L. Evans and Kate Martin,

<sup>98</sup> Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves* (2000), p.164

<sup>99</sup> DIA, 'The Rising Impact of the Bamaca Case on the Guatemalan Military Establishment', 1994, in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 34*, ed. Blanton, Evans and Martin,

with the work of the CEH, or contribute honestly to the peace process. This is further reinforced by the referral within the message to the destruction of ‘interrogation areas’:

In addition to removing all the incriminating files, the facilities that were used in the early and middle 1980s as ‘interrogation’ areas have been totally demolished and pits which existed to bury guerrillas in have been filled and covered over with cement.<sup>100</sup>

These actions were undeniably an attempt to disguise the extent of the violence that the military engaged with, and remove any physical evidence that may lead to repercussions for high profile members of the army. Despite the remains of missing guerrillas being buried within these pits, the military focussed on covering up physical evidence of their crimes. The primary concern with these actions was the protection of the military, not the admittance and acknowledgement of what really occurred during the conflict.

As well as the contents of this message, it is also important to note the date when it was sent: November 1994. In June of that same year, the Guatemalan government along with URNG had signed the Accord of Oslo. This agreement established the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) and was a significant step towards the final declaration of peace.<sup>101</sup> The CEH was founded in order to:

clarify with objectivity, equity and impartiality, the human rights violations and acts of violence connected with the armed confrontation that caused suffering among the Guatemalan people.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>101</sup> United States Institute of Peace, ‘Truth Commission: Guatemala’, <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-guatemala> (Accessed 21/01/2016)

<sup>102</sup> CEH, ‘Guatemala Memory of Silence’, [http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf) (Accessed 21/01/2016), p.11

Despite having signed the accord in June that led to the establishment of the CEH, the Guatemalan government evidently had no intention of honouring its agreement. Through their destruction in November of evidence relating to the conflict and their plans to block any investigating commissions, the military clearly exhibited their unwillingness to cooperate with the aims and ambitions of the CEH, and with this, the acknowledgment of the extent of their crimes. In destroying evidence (both documents and ‘interrogation’ facilities), the military also demonstrated a dismissal of the idea of reconciliation: it wanted to preserve its own institution and those within it, rather than genuinely forge an open peace settlement that would lead to a more positive future for all in Guatemala.

Further to this, it became apparent once peace had been declared in 1996 that the army had been withholding information they claimed they did not possess. In May 1999, the Washington National Security Archives revealed a military logbook: the ‘Death-Squad Dossier’. This 54-page logbook was smuggled out of Guatemala army intelligence files and covered death squad activity by intelligence units between August 1983 and March 1985.<sup>103</sup> As Kate Doyle described it, the dossier offered ‘a rare glimpse of organized political murder from the perspective of the perpetrators who committed it.’<sup>104</sup> However, while this dossier was a significant discovery in itself, it also proved that the Guatemalan army had deliberately withheld information from the CEH, and had lied when they said they had no documents to hand over.<sup>105</sup>

The response that the CEH received from the Guatemalan government and the military even before its publication demonstrates just how reluctant many of those who held power were to acknowledge the extent of violence within Guatemala’s past

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<sup>103</sup> The National Security Archive, *Guatemalan Death Squad Dossier: Internal Military Log Reveals Fate of 183 Disappeared*,  
://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB15/ (Accessed 13/11/2016)

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>105</sup> Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves* (2000), p.165



and their own culpability. These attempts to withhold information and successfully prevent the reading of certain documents owing to their destruction, suggest that upon the signing of the final peace agreement in 1996, although they may have officially stated their desire for an open reconciliation process, the government and the military had very little intention of abiding by this. Memories of violence were not to be incorporated into the collective narrative of the civil war conflict; instead, for many years, the governments of Guatemala maintained a severe silence regarding the past and made little attempt to act on the recommendations of either the REMHI or CEH reports.

### *The Lack of Regime Change*

One of the central reasons for this response to the two truth commissions by the military and the government, and for their unwillingness to engage with the past and instead ‘forget’ memories of violence, is owing to the lack of a lasting regime change. 1996 and the end of the civil war promised change in Guatemala, but what followed the signing of the Peace Accords underlined and evidenced the limits of regime change in the country. Although there was a move away from military governments, over the years following the conclusion of the war there were continuous back and forths, and retrenchments. Any change that came about following the end of the conflict was temporary. The regime change was not lasting. Regime changes may be defined as the reconfiguration of ‘a nation’s dominant coalition of political actors, and the prevailing rules of the political game’.<sup>106</sup> Although there have been presidents within Guatemala who have acknowledged the

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<sup>106</sup> John A. Booth, ‘Global Forces and Regime Change: Guatemala Within the Central American Context’, in *Globalization on the Ground: Postbellum Guatemalan Democracy and Development*, ed. Christopher K. Chase-Dunn, Susanne Jonas, Nelson Amaro (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p.41

past to certain extent, and thereby moved away from the idea pushed by former regime members of embracing silence, any progress they have made has been reversed as soon as they leave office, and complicit denial readopted. Those who held power or were influential during the civil war remain in positions of authority: they have neither been ousted nor died en masse and thereby vacated positions. The ‘dominant coalition’ has not been disbanded in its entirety. Former military general and president, Efraín Ríos Montt, for instance, remains a very present figure within Guatemala. In 1994 he was elected to the Guatemalan Congress, where he remained a member until he retired in 2012.<sup>107</sup> In 1995 Ríos Montt even attempted to run for President again, only to be blocked by the Guatemalan Supreme Electoral Commission: the Guatemalan Constitution does not allow someone who once gained power through a military coup to stand for election again. However, in 2003 he tried again to run as a presidential candidate, and this time was successful.<sup>108</sup>

Unlike in Chile, where former leader Augusto Pinochet’s eventual death in 2006 allowed for some discussions of memory to begin, or in Argentina where members of the military Junta were put on trial, the former President of Guatemala, and arguably the person responsible for the most extreme years of violence, has neither died nor been removed from his position of political power.<sup>109</sup> The presence of such a figure, along with other politicians and military commanders, has prevented the creation of a space in which memory can be discussed, and instead continued to project a version of history that suits and protects those responsible. The rules of the political game have not changed. Following the signing of the peace accords in 1996,

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<sup>107</sup>J. Mark Ruhl, ‘The Guatemalan Military Since the Peace Accords: The Fate of Reform Under Arzú and Portillo’, *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol.47: 1 (2005), pp.55-85

<sup>108</sup> Victoria Sanford, ‘*Si Hubo Genocidio en Guatemala! Yes! There Was Genocide in Guatemala*’, in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.552

<sup>109</sup> For more information on the conflict within Argentina and the military Junta, see Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina’s Dirty War: An Intellectual Biography*; for information on Pinochet and Chile’s approach to memory, see Steve J. Stern’s, trilogy, *The Memory Box of Pinochet’s Chile*.

the three subsequent governments of Guatemala, those of Alvaro Arzú, Alfonso Portillo, and Oscar Berger, failed to publically acknowledge the CEH report. They carried out very few commemorative activities for the victims of civil war violence and did not make any statements supporting the idea of justice for past incidents of violence; rather, they maintained a stolid silence about Guatemala's past.<sup>110</sup>

The election of President Álvaro Colom for the Centre-Left party, the National Unity of Hope (*Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza*) in 2007 was an appointment in Guatemala that suggested the country might have been experiencing a regime change: moving away from the more right wing authoritarian parties of its civil war past. In fact, in Latin America as a whole during the 2000s, there was an increase in the number of left wing political party representatives that were elected to office, with Chile (Michelle Bachelet, 2006-2010), Brazil (Dilma Rousseff, 2011-2016) and Uruguay (José Mujica, 2010-2015) all electing presidents who had directly suffered during the authoritarian era. Although not all those who were elected for Left or Centre-Left parties addressed human rights violations, many did.<sup>111</sup>

In 2009, Colom publically acknowledged the veracity of the CEH truth commission and even accepted that the State had committed genocide against the Mayan people. He went as far as asking for the families' forgiveness for the role the State had played in the civil war violence. In 2011, Colom declared the year to be the 'Year for the Institutionalisation of Historic Memory'. Over the course of the year, the government 'carried out a number of public commemorative activities designed to ask for forgiveness from the families of revolutionary leaders and victims of state

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<sup>110</sup> Paniagua, Amezquita, Martínez, 'Guatemala resists forgetting, *Impunity Watch* (2012), [http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala\\_Mem\\_Research\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala_Mem_Research_Report_English.pdf) (Accessed 20/01/2016), p.15

<sup>111</sup> Elin Skaar, Jemima Garcia-Godos, Cath Collins, 'Introduction: The Accountability Challenge', in *Transitional Justice in Latin America: The Uneven Road from Impunity towards Accountability*, ed. Elin Skaar, Jemima Garcia-Godos, Cath Collins (London: Routledge, 2016)

repression, arts competitions were organised as well as videos and publication all aiming to recovery the individual histories of victims of the armed conflict.’<sup>112</sup> Although Colom faced criticism from some in Guatemala who claimed that his actions were motivated by a desire to win more of the left wing vote, his positive and open attitude towards memory and remembering Guatemala’s past is in stark contrast to anybody who came before or after him. And yet, it should be noted that under Oscar Berger (2004-2008), the organisation that carries out exhumations of mass graves and identifies the remains of the disappeared, the *Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation) or FAFG, received two payments from the government; money that, once Colom took power, was not given again.<sup>113</sup> Despite his public declarations and positive actions, the failure to repeat such a financial gesture does lend itself to the speculation about Colom’s sincerity.

Otto Pérez Molina, who was elected president in 2012 after Colom, returned to what may be seen as a common attitude within the Guatemalan government of ignoring the past and closing any official discussions about memory that had emerged. On 13 May 2014, Guatemalan Congress members even held a vote to decide whether or not genocide had occurred in Guatemala: of the 111 who participated, 87 Congress members voted that genocide did not occur.<sup>114</sup> Guatemala experienced a brief moment of open communication that has yet to be repeated.

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<sup>112</sup> Paniagua, Amezcuita, Martínez, ‘Guatemala *resists* forgetting: Post- Conflict Memory Initiatives’, *Impunity Watch* (Utrecht, 2012), [http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala\\_Mem\\_Research\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.impunitywatch.org/docs/Guatemala_Mem_Research_Report_English.pdf) (Accessed 20/01/2016)

<sup>113</sup> Robin Mejia, ‘Digging Guatemala: Anthropologists Look for Clues to Past Political Killings’, *Scientific America*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/anthropologists-study-political-killings/> (Accessed 19/09/2017)

<sup>114</sup> ‘Congress in Guatemala Officially Denies Genocide’, *Cultural Survival*, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/congress-guatemala-officially-denies-genocide> (Accessed 2/11/2016)

As well as the continued presence of political leaders like Ríos Montt and Pérez Molina, the role of the military within Guatemala has also remained a significant one. As Suzanne Jonas has pointed out, for a transition to democracy to occur after a civil war like that in Guatemala has occurred, power must pass from the military to civilians.<sup>115</sup> Since the conclusion of the conflict in 1996, such a transition has not taken place. Although under the presidency of Alvaro Arzú (1996-2000) there were attempts made to curb the influence of the military and bring them under the authority of the President, such as cutting the military's budget and closing some of the garrisons still operating in the Guatemalan countryside, they were not wholly successful. This was not helped by the election of Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004) who rather than continuing with reforms, instead, began to reverse them. Although he had initially expressed a wish to continue with the reforms Arzú had started, Portillo soon found that influential ex-military officers, such as Ríos Montt, who was at this point President of Congress, and retired general Francisco Ortega Menaldo, who also served as a presidential advisor, did not welcome any further changes. As J. Mark Ruhl has argued, once Portillo left office in 2004, rather than lessening their influence and power, the armed forces had instead retained 'substantial institutional autonomy' and 'de facto legal impunity'.<sup>116</sup>

As a result of this continued dominance of former regime associates and ex-military members, Guatemala has not been able to sustain a reconciliation process, nor create a space where competing narratives may be articulated and interact with one another, in which the voices of those who experienced violence may be recognised. Rather, within Guatemala it is apparent that there are two narratives in

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<sup>115</sup> Suzanne Jonas, 'Democratization Through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol.42: 4 (2000), pp.9-38

<sup>116</sup> J. Mark Ruhl, 'The Guatemalan Military Since the Peace Accords: The Fate of Reform Under Arzú and Portillo', *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol.47: 1 (2005), pp.55-85

operation: one which acknowledges that genocide took place during the civil war, and openly strives to have victims recognised and those responsible punished for their crimes; and the other, which holds the belief that those in power during the civil war acted according to the threat that was presented: there was no genocide, and society should look to the future, rather than focussing on the past.<sup>117</sup> Instead of reuniting after the conflict, which the recommendations in the truth commissions pushed for as the eventual outcome, owing to this attitude towards the past and memory Guatemala has instead retained the divisions that were made so very prominent during the conflict.

In the final section of this chapter, I return to the idea of disappearances and examine how, in contemporary society, the continued dispute and suppression of discussion over the past, brought about by this lack of regime change and the refusal of the government to acknowledge their role in disappearances, has impacted on the search for the disappeared.

### *Searching for the Disappeared*

Despite recent discoveries, such as the Death Squad Dossier and the National Police Archives, for many families the search for their disappeared relatives has still yielded few results to this day. At the time of publication, the REMHI report stated that out of those who gave their testimonies, only half (49.5%) knew where the bodies of their relatives were, and only 1/3 (34%) were able to hold a funeral service or burial.<sup>118</sup> Although it was recommended in the REMHI truth commission that ‘the government should promote forms of remembering and honoring victims that can

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<sup>117</sup> Jo-Marie Burt and Fred Rosen, ‘Truth-Telling and Memory in Postwar Guatemala: An Interview with Rigoberta Menchú’, *NACLA*, <https://nacla.org/article/truth-telling-and-memory-postwar-guatemala-interview-rigoberta-mench%25C3%25BA> (Accessed 20/01/2016)

<sup>118</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.18

become a permanent fixture in the collective memory of present and future generations’, the consistent lack of cooperation from numerous Guatemalan governments has done very little to alter these statistics.<sup>119</sup> Exhumations in Guatemala are instigated by the relatives of the disappeared, and performed by independent teams of forensic anthropologists. The organization *Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation), or FAFG, has been working since 1997 and is one such group that undertakes this task.<sup>120</sup>

Although FAFG and other organizations like them, have had a definite positive impact on the identification of the disappeared - helping families search for and uncover their relatives; providing, to some extent, psychological support; and creating a DNA bank so any remains found can be checked against DNA samples given by families quickly and efficiently - that the governing bodies of Guatemala have shown little interest in assisting these families in their searches by providing either the information they have about disappearances, or regular financial support to fund these exhumations (the government made two payments of \$100,000 to the FAFG in 2006 and 2007), has also undeniably hindered this process.<sup>121</sup>

This is also evident in relation to the search for children that were disappeared during the civil war, a topic about which I spoke to Maco Antonio Garavito from *Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental* (League of Mental Hygiene in Guatemala). *Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental* is an organization that runs several projects within Guatemala, all focused on preventing the development of mental illnesses. The project I discussed with Maco was the ‘Getting Back Together’ programme, which

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p.316

<sup>120</sup> Susana Navarro-García, ‘Exhumations in Latin America: Current Status and Pending Challenges: A Psychosocial View’, *Peace & Conflict Review*, 4:2 (2010), <http://www.review.upeace.org/index.cfm?opcion=0&ejemplar=19&entrada=100>

<sup>121</sup> Mejia, ‘Digging Guatemala’, *Scientific America*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/anthropologists-study-political-killings/> (Accessed 19/09/2017)

offers support to those families who had children disappeared during the armed conflict and where possible, aims to reunite them. This programme was formed following the signing of the Peace Accords. Although there were a number of organizations in operation that were searching for disappeared adults, there were none that were looking for the children who had been taken.

Maco stated in our interview that it was the ‘right time politically’ to begin the programme once the civil war had concluded. Before any searches could start however, there were several steps that needed to be completed first:

The first thing we [Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental] had to establish was whether there were children who had been disappeared and whether the families wanted to find them, and if they did, we had to begin the process of searching for them. It entailed working in rural areas, areas that were very remote and very far from the capital because it was these rural areas that bore the brunt of the civil war. It wasn’t a process that was going on in Guatemala City; it was a process that belonged very much to rural areas.<sup>122</sup>

The children who were abducted by the State were later put up for adoption. Owing to the illegality of this practice choosing remote rural areas from which to steal children was a practical decision; as with the disappearances of adults, secrecy and discretion were key in this operation. Some of the disappeared children were adopted by families in Guatemala, while others were sent to countries in Europe: Italy, France, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, and Holland, while others still were sent to Canada and to the United States.<sup>123</sup>

Although demand for assistance from *Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental* has increased over time - Maco told me that they have so far identified 5,000 missing children - the State has so far offered no resources to assist in their investigations.

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Maco Antonio Garavito, 22/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey, interpreted by Louisa Reynolds

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*



Throughout these 16 years we've relied entirely on international corporation aid and we're not talking about large scale development aid from the European Union or governments, we're talking about, for example, the Protestant Church from Switzerland, where after the church service they do a collection and send the money to Guatemala. That's the sort of corporation aid we receive. So in 16 years we haven't received any money from the government.<sup>124</sup>

However, although financial support would be welcomed and would assist in furthering these searches for disappeared children, it is not the only resource the organization wants access to. 'The one thing we really need from the state is information, because if the army and the government gave us that information I'm sure that we'd have managed to solve twice as many cases', Maco stressed to me. 'Even if they don't give us the money, what we need is information.'<sup>125</sup>

Maco described one particular incident during our interview where the government refused to part with valuable information, despite the involvement of the Guatemalan Supreme Court. It is a clear example of not only the difficulties that such researchers endure, but also of the manipulation that the government has engaged and continues to engage with to conceal its own responsibility for the crimes discussed.

There was a case in 1983, which was during the worst period of the armed conflict... and they rounded up 2000 people and they took them to a place that was like a concentration camp. In this place there were women, children, elderly people, and what the army did is they took twenty-four children and they separated them, took them apart, and they were treated slightly better than the other civilians, and one day the army came and told them 'you need to clean up, you need to wash, we're going to take you somewhere'.

In 2004/2005 the families came to us...so we started trying to track them down and find out what happened to these twenty-four children. We presented a *habeas corpus* petition so we got the families to come here [Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental's headquarters] and sign the document, because it's another way to gain information. With this *habeas corpus* petition, the Supreme Court had an obligation to search for missing people, so the whole process took months, and the Supreme Court even went and asked President Molina if he knew what had happened to those children. And his

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*

response was that it was all a lie, that it had never happened, and that the most likely explanation was that those children had joined the guerrilla. The official state response was that the petition was invalid because the state hadn't been involved in disappearing these children and the most likely explanation was that they had joined the guerrilla. But we continued with our own investigation and found that all of these children had been adopted by Italian families and they were taken there by the army.... But the Supreme Court and President Molina were insisting that it had been the guerrilla who'd taken them.<sup>126</sup>

This lengthy extract from the interview with Maco encapsulates perfectly the attitude of the State towards disappearances, whether they are those of adults or children: since the conclusion of the civil war, it has failed to acknowledge its role in past violence and even outright denied responsibility for certain crimes.

As I was drawing the interview to a close, I asked Maco whether there was any additional information he thought I should know. His response focused initially on this thought concerning Guatemala and the attention it received:

There was a generalised problem of disappearances in Latin America, so there were disappearances in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador. But we can say that in Guatemala, some of the most tragic cases occurred. But in spite of this, at an international level the Guatemalan case is one of the ones with the least information about outside Guatemala, in other countries. For example, when people speak about disappearances in Latin America, everyone thinks of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. For example, last year Mrs Carlotta, who was one of the founders of the Plaza Mayo women, managed to find her son. All the international news networks went to Argentina and covered that story- it was a huge story. We have an average of one family reunited every month and nobody knows about it, nobody takes an interest. There are 45,000 people who were disappeared in Guatemala.<sup>127</sup>

This statement from Maco speaks of the frustration that many who work in Guatemala in organizations designed to rectify some of the damage of the civil war often feel. As Maco said, *Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental* has, and continues, to reunite a significant number of families and yet their successes are often overlooked or

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*

sidelined. Given the continued influence of former regime members within Guatemala, it is perhaps not surprising that such successes are not celebrated openly within the country: every achievement for such organizations is another move against those in power. As Maco himself said:

There's a lot of impunity in Guatemala and those who were responsible for those human rights violations are people that are still governing and are still in power today. There's a lot of impunity, there's a lot of ignorance about what's going on.<sup>128</sup>

However, internationally such tensions over how Guatemala's civil war is perceived do not exist, at least not to the same extent. Whether the lack of coverage is a result of disinterest, as Maco suggests, requires further research. With this impunity and ignorance present however, it is understandable that those who fight against such silencing factors would experience frustration that their efforts and the changes they are attempting to make are ignored.

In addition to the successes that Maco and his associates have achieved in Guatemala, there have been other significant discoveries of information within the country. In 1999, information about 180 people who were disappeared was revealed with the unofficial publication of the 'Death Squad Dossier': a 54-page logbook that contained names, photographs, and records of abduction and execution dates.<sup>129</sup> In July 2005 the National Police Archives were discovered: these archives contain material gathered by the National Police on individuals who would eventually be disappeared. Family members searching for their disappeared relatives are able to put in requests to the archive for information. An estimated 80% of requests are positive,

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>129</sup> 'City of the Disappeared – three decades of searching for Guatemala's missing', *Amnesty International*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2012/11/city-disappeared-three-decades-searching-guatemalas-missing/> (Accessed 23/2/15)

with only 20% receiving no documents in response to their query.<sup>130</sup> Although this information may not answer every family's questions, or even reveal the location of the body of the disappeared, it is a step towards uncovering the truth behind the disappearances.

For many families, there is comfort in finding even one document or a photograph concerning their disappeared relative, as it confirms that they were being watched or monitored by the National Police, potentially even that they were arrested or imprisoned. It also acknowledges what the State itself has refused to: that the disappeared existed. As Gustavo Meoño, the director of the National Police Historical Archive says, finding a piece of information can be soothing to families:

they [the government] haven't just denied the crime to them, they haven't just denied the offense against their relative, but they've denied the actual existence of their relative, as all records have disappeared from everywhere. Finding here [the National Police Archives] any kind of information has a huge healing value.<sup>131</sup>

In relation to disappearances, the CEH commission recommended the government and the judiciary undertake a number of procedures.

.... in collaboration with civil society, initiate, as soon as possible, investigations regarding all known forced disappearances. All available legal and material resources should be utilised to clarify the whereabouts of the disappeared and, in the case of death, to deliver the remains to the relatives.<sup>132</sup>

The report also suggested that a National Commission for the Search for Disappeared Children be established; that the government prepare and present a bill of law to the

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<sup>130</sup> Kate Doyle, 'Guatemala's Police Archives: Breaking the Stony Silence', *ReVista Harvard's Review of Latin America*, <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/guatemalas-police-archives> (Accessed 23/2/15)

<sup>131</sup> *Guatemala: Rescuing The Memory* (2012) [Online video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4TZ9ihunxw>] Associació de Periodisme Fora de Quadre / Col·lectiu de periodistes Contrast

<sup>132</sup> CEH Report, Recommendations, para 22, [https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf) (Accessed 2/11/2016)

Congress of the Republic, by which the declaration of absence due to forced disappearance is recognised as a legal category; and that the government develop an active policy of exhumation.<sup>133</sup> The government has yet to act on any of these recommendations, arguably because doing so would result in the conviction of several members of the current government. The lack of regime change in Guatemala has had a significant impact on the treatment of disappearances, whether it is in relation to investigations such as those conducted by the FAFG or *Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental*, or in remembering the disappeared. In light of this, when considering the memorialisation of the disappeared in Guatemala, it is clear that such an endeavor is not small and faces many challenges.

## **Conclusion**

The civil war in Guatemala has had repercussions that have extended far beyond its thirty-six years. The government continues to be controlled and manipulated by those who once wielded power, whether or not they are guilty of committing crimes. Although legal prosecutions are now being sought, these are only emerging as a result of efforts by families or victims of violence. Meanwhile, the State continues to try and protect those who it considers to be its own, helped by the longstanding impunity within Guatemala. Alongside this lack of a meaningful and lasting regime change, the effects of the disappearances are still being felt: because of this denial on the part of the State, families are largely unable to discover information about their relatives or even where they are buried. In Guatemala, it is not a matter of either the disappearances or the lack of regime change impacting on how the country remembers its past; it is a combination of the two. Unlike other Latin American

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, paras 24-28

countries that have slowly started to discuss their pasts, place perpetrators on trial, and build memorials to those who were murdered or disappeared, Guatemala remains unable to experience such a change because those who control the apparatus by which such a movement could occur refuse to yield.

If we move to consider how memorialisation fits into this equation, it is difficult to imagine that any process which seeks to remember a group of people who were disappeared during what is now such a conflicted period of history would be an easy undertaking. What is clear from this chapter is that, if the disappeared are to be remembered and memorialised, there will be some element of contest involved. The families of the disappeared do not have the luxury of simply being able to reflect on memories of their loved ones; they still have so many unanswered questions as a result of, first, the liminal nature of the disappearances, and, second, the refusal of the government to distribute information that may answer these questions. Memorials created to and for the disappeared will be geared to demanding these answers from the government as well as fighting against the continued attempts to forget that such violence ever occurred.

The memorials that will be examined in the following chapters of this thesis have all been created as a result of this complicated embroiled conflict that has emerged between the Guatemalan State and memory. They focus on creating a disturbance and contesting the official narrative; recovering evidence of the disappearances and the voices of those who were disappeared; informing the public, the wider world, and younger generations about the history of Guatemala's violence; and providing a space where grief can be expressed. They also represent both the individual and the collective disappeared simultaneously to ensure that singular stories and memories are not lost. They acknowledge the uncertainty that still

surrounds the disappearances and the disappeared, and the inconclusiveness that this form of violence combined with the attitude of the State has created. Alongside all of this, the memorials seek to remember that these disappearances occurred and that they have had a significant impact on the lives of families and the country as a whole.

If the regime were to change in a profound and lasting way, the attitude to memory would undeniably change with it. The creation of an official memorial such as the Memory Park in Buenos Aires, Argentina is testimony to this: the memory of state-enacted violence is present for all society to see and engage with, with the consent of the government. However, until such a lasting and complete shift in political power and influence occurs, the memorials to the disappeared of Guatemala will continue to reflect the dispute over memory in both form and content.

## Chapter Two Contest

Surrounding nearly all incidents of disappearance there is protest of the past and the present, and even arguably, in relation to the future. The idea of finding the remains of the disappeared and of prosecuting those responsible for the crime of disappearance, for instance, is very much centred in the present: it relates to the past, because of when the act of violence was performed, but there are contestations grounded in desires for the present day. This opposition regarding the disappearances frequently revolves around the attitude or actions of the State: when disappearances first occurred in Guatemala, they were openly protested against by members of the organisation GAM (*Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo*, or the Mutual Support Group), who demanded that the government return their relatives home and the act of disappearance stop being used. In more recent years, this objection to the State still exists, but for many members of the organisation the focus has shifted from the return of the disappeared, to demands for information regarding the whereabouts of their remains and for justice to take place in the form of trials for perpetrators.<sup>1</sup>

Once a complete and lasting regime change takes place within a country, this contest may be more fully resolved. Those responsible for crimes may transfer power to a new government that is more willing to engage with the past, meaning that issues of the past which have been carried into the present, such as the unknowing that surrounds the disappeared, are then addressed rather than silenced, with the introduction of exhumations and the disclosing of information. As discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of recent Guatemalan governments (under presidents

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Connely Benz, *Guatemalan Journey* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p.33  
Susanne Jonas and Thomas W. Walker, 'Guatemala: Intervention, Repression, Revolt, and Negotiated Transition', in *Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition in Central America*, ed. Thomas W. Walker and Ariel C. Armony (Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2000), pp.13-14



Otto Pérez Molina, Óscar Berger, and Alfonso Portillo) have opted for silence about the past rather than engagement, and have failed to act in any significant ways on the recommendations contained in the truth commissions.<sup>2</sup> The search for the disappeared has remained unfunded since the conclusion of the civil war and there have been no releases of information that might help in locating their bodies. Owing to this, the contest between the State and families that in other countries has been largely extinguished, has persevered in Guatemala, as groups and individuals continue to demand information about the disappeared and justice for the crime that was committed; and the State continues to deny both. Disappearances then remain a matter that spans multiple time epochs: the open-ended nature of the disappearances reinforces the dialogue between the past, present, and future. The families are forced to live with the emotional pain of a past act of physical violence, in the present and the foreseeable future; the past extends into the present not only as memory but also as a continuous experience.<sup>3</sup>

In memorials, this conflict about the past and the present is made visible. Contest is arguably a cornerstone of all memorials that have been created for the disappeared in Guatemala. The lack of regime change and accompanying silence about the disappearances has resulted in a situation where in order for the disappeared to be remembered at all, friends and relatives have had to fight to carve out a space in which this can happen. Elizabeth Jelin has described spaces of memory as ‘arena[s] of political struggle...frequently conceived in terms of a struggle “against oblivion”’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Popkin, *Peace Without Justice: Obstacles to Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvanian State University Press, 2000), p.124

Rachel Sieder, ‘Renegociando «la ley y el orden»: Reforma Judicial y Respuesta Ciudadana en la Guatemala de Posguerra’, *América Latina Hoy*, Vol.35 (2010), pp.61-86

<sup>3</sup> Tullio Scovazzi, Gabriella Citroni, *The Struggle Against Enforced Disappearance and the 2007 United Nations Convention* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007), p.9

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.xviii

Never is this more accurate than in the case of the disappeared: this is not just ‘remember so as not to repeat’, it is forceful remembrance to stop the disappeared from being lost in a State-constructed silence; it is a struggle against deliberate forgetting. Since the disappeared continue to be a disputed group within Guatemalan history, even the distribution of information about the use of disappearances as a form of violence and details about those who were disappeared, is contesting, as it opposes the narrative put forward by the State, as does the sharing of memories or interpretations through artwork.

‘Contest’ is a theme that in varying degrees is present within all the memorials to the disappeared. Each memorial in its own way creates what Michel Foucault has described as ‘counter-memory’, that is ‘an alternative view of the past which challenges the dominant representation of the past’.<sup>5</sup> The memorials that I have chosen to examine in this chapter are those whose primary function is to contest and interrogate; they place the greatest emphasis on this theme of contest over any other. The intention of these memorials is to disrupt and provoke, and to ensure that the disappeared are not forgotten. Tied into this idea of provocation is the relationship that exists between the memorial and space. The location dramatically influences the meaning of the memorial and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> Many of the memorials examined here pinpointed places of historical significance to the disappearances that would otherwise be overlooked, and drew attention to particular people or organizations that operated in certain locations.

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp.111-192

Elisabetta Viggiani, *Talking Stones: The Politics of Memorialisation in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), p.3

<sup>6</sup> Owen J. Dwyer, Derek H. Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2008), p.16

The level of provocation and force differs between each of these contesting memorials, and they are organised accordingly in this chapter: they range from those memorials that oppose in a quiet, more discreet manner, to those that loudly (whether in volume and/or appearance) confront and challenge. The first memorials to be examined are those that present this contestation in an unobtrusive form: for instance, the columns outside the Metropolitan Cathedral and pieces of art work in the ‘Horror Vacui’ and ‘The Disappeared’ exhibitions. As the chapter continues, the objection expressed by the memorials becomes more overt and provocative: the presence of Daniel Hernandez-Salazar’s ‘Street Angels’ in Guatemala City; the demonstrations on the National and International Days against Forced Disappearance; and the footprints created by Regina Galindo in ‘¿*Quien Puede Borrar Las Huellas?*’ (Who Can Erase The Footprints?).

Before examining these memorials, this chapter first explores the idea of ‘contest’ in more detail. This section provides a theoretical overview of what the theme of contest means in relation to the disappeared of Guatemala and the process of memorialisation. It discusses these ideas without reference to particular memorials to the disappeared in Guatemala: these examinations come further on in the chapter when the memorials themselves are discussed.

### **‘Contest’**

Opposition or contestation through memorials is frequently seen in situations where there is a desire to remember the past but no official space has been granted in which to do so. The absence of such a space may be the result of a deliberate attempt to silence remembrance around a particular event or period of history by those in power, or it may be because a need for a space of remembrance has been overlooked.

The reason for the absence of such spaces feeds into the contestation presented in the memorials created. In Guatemala, the absence of official, national spaces of remembrance (that is, spaces created or dedicated to the memory of the disappeared by the State) is a consequence of the lack of regime change, which has meant that the contestation presented within memorials, voiced by the family members of the disappeared, has focussed on the actions, or indeed inaction, of the State. Even when viewed more broadly and taking into account all those who experienced violence rather than just those connected to the disappearances, there is still disagreement between the State and those who experienced violence over how any type of reconciliation could take place. Although many people on both sides endorse the idea of forgiveness, there is a divergence over the content and sequence of reconciliation, with many who experienced violence stating that being asked to forgive and forget is ‘unrealistic’.<sup>7</sup> Creating a memorial carves out a public space in which alternative narratives, such as those of family members of the disappeared, may be heard. As Elizabeth Viggiani has argued, in situations of ethnic or civil conflict, memorials become a powerful political tool to ‘project and sustain narratives of legitimation and victimhood’.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, for instance, a ‘memorial movement’ arose in the former Soviet Union intent on remembering the victims of Stalin’s atrocities, who had at that point been overlooked by officials. Family members of victims and those who supported them, came together to create and raise funds for a memorial that

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<sup>7</sup> Anita Isaacs, ‘At War with the Past? The Politics of Truth Seeking in Guatemala’. *Int J Transit Justice*, Vol.4: 2 (2010), pp. 251-274.

<sup>8</sup> Elisabetta Viggiani, *Talking Stones: The Politics of Memorialisation in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), p.17

remembered all those who died under the totalitarian regime, and the memorial was eventually unveiled in October 1990.<sup>9</sup>

Memorials that contest in Guatemala have created spaces in which the wishes of the State are challenged: where the disappeared may be remembered, and where issues concerning the disappearances can be voiced. Governments have almost continuously been in favour of forgetting the past, believing that opening up discussions about the civil war would cause more harm than good. A similar attitude was adopted in Spain following the end of the civil war. In 1975 after Francisco Franco's death, the Pact of Forgetting was signed. Rather than memorialise the victims of Franco's regime, the Spanish government chose almost complete silence over the political crimes of the regime and the human cost.<sup>10</sup> It is only in recent years that, as a result of continuous pressure from those who suffered under the regime, that Spain has started to discuss its violent past.<sup>11</sup> In Guatemala, this preference for forgetting has not only prevented the disappeared from being publically remembered as victims of a past incident of violence, but it has also meant that demands of families to know what happened to their relatives and to see the perpetrators prosecuted have been ignored.<sup>12</sup> These memorials contest not just the past act of disappearance, but also the impact the attitude of the State has had on families and the

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<sup>9</sup> Vera Schwarcz, 'Strangers No More: Personal Memory in the Interstices of Public Commemoration', in *Memory, History and Opposition: Under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson (New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1994), p.54

<sup>10</sup> Omar G. Encarnación, *Spanish Politics: Democracy After Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p.133

<sup>11</sup> Madeleine Davis, 'Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the "Pacto del Olvido"', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol.27: 3 (2005), pp.858-880

<sup>12</sup> Victor D. Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005)

disappeared in the present. They directly oppose state oppression, challenging the ‘prevailing culture of silence and denial’.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons for these contestations are exemplified in two state-sanctioned memorials that exist in Guatemala City: the memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace, and the Monument to Peace, both of which are dedicated to the civil war. These two memorials encapsulate the State’s desire to soften, and even arguably erase, the violence from the past. There is an acknowledgement of the armed conflict, from which one assumes a level of violence, but no recognition of genocide, assassinations, torture, disappearances. The State exempts itself from any form of responsibility. The memorials are more of a political manoeuvre favourably serving the government’s image, rather than serving the needs of a damaged society.<sup>14</sup>

The ‘Anonymous Heroes of Peace’ memorial was created after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. The memorial is comprised of a solid green marble base, the front of which is sloped away from the viewer, leading the eye upwards towards a flame contained in a glass box (see Figure 2.1); as an entire structure, it can only be around a meter in height, if slightly over. At the base of the memorial, on a separate plaque made of darker marble, are the word ‘Guatemala’ and the date ‘29 December 1996’: the day when the government and the insurgent forces signed accords to end the civil war, written in gold. Owing to the height of the memorial, this information is not easily viewed: it is closer to the floor than to the viewer’s eye line. Above this is the sloped front of the memorial on which the words, ‘*A los heroes anónimos de la paz*’ (‘to the anonymous heroes of peace’) are written, again on a separate plaque of darker marble. Beneath this plaque is a circle with an image of the quetzal bird

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<sup>13</sup> Ruth Gidley, Hannah Roberts, ‘Memory and Monuments in Guatemala: Remembering the Dead and Solidarity with the Living’, in *Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*, ed. Michael A. Hayes, David Tombs (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001), p.119

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

engraved onto it. The quetzal is Guatemala's national bird; its significance stems from the Ancient Maya, who believed the bird was sacred.<sup>15</sup> The flame at the top of the memorial is a similar size to that of a Bunsen burner and is intended to be an 'eternal flame': a feature seen in memorials around the world, used as a sign of remembrance and respect for those who died. This symbolism is somewhat weakened by reports that when the memorial was located in the central square, the flame was often not burning.<sup>16</sup>



Fig.2.1 The memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace. At the top of the memorial it is possible to see the 'eternal flame' that is kept burning constantly to remember those who died in the conflict fighting for peace. At the bottom there is a plaque commemorating the day the Peace Accords were signed and the conflict was brought to an official end.

Photograph by Rich Polanco, taken from 'Things to do in Guatemala City', <http://www.okantigua.com/national-palace-guatemala-city/>

<sup>15</sup> Sean Sheehan, Magdalene Koh, *Guatemala* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2010), pp.51-52

<sup>16</sup> Matthew J. Taylor and Michael K. Steinberg, 'Forty Years of Conflict: State, Church, and Spontaneous Representation of Massacres and Murder in Guatemala', in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialisation of Death*, ed. Jack Santino (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.315  
Diane M. Nelson, *Reckoning: The Ends of War in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p.76

The memorial was originally placed in Guatemala City's central square, but, following numerous defacements through graffiti (see Figure 2.2), the memorial was moved to a new location inside the National Palace in 2004.<sup>17</sup> This response to the memorial provides an indication of how the Guatemalan population felt about this structure. There was clearly enough contempt for the memorial for individuals to feel the need to deface it. Such a response to memorials is not uncommon, especially if what is being represented in the memorial, or the design of the memorial itself, is controversial or divisive.



Fig.2.2 Graffiti on the outside of the 'Anonymous Heroes of Peace' memorial. Although slightly unclear, the word 'Not' is visible scrawled on the outside, and underneath this is a word that may or may not read 'Peace'. This image also provides viewers with an idea as to the size of the flame on the top of the memorial. Photograph by Matthew Taylor, taken from Michael K. Steinberg, Matthew J. Taylor, 'Public Memory and Political Power in Guatemala's Post-Conflict Landscape', *Geographical Review*, Vol.93: 4 (2003), pp.449-468

<sup>17</sup> Steven Hoelscher, 'Heritage', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), p.212



The memorial sculpture in Peru, '*El Ojo que Llorá*' (The Eye That Cries), for example, has been vandalised a number of times since it was unveiled in 2005. The artist, Lika Mutal, was criticised for including the names of members of the guerrilla group, the 'Shining Path', amongst the 32,000 names of the victims of Peru's civil war.<sup>18</sup> Between 1980 and 2000, an estimated 70,000 Peruvians died as a result of the civil war between government forces and guerrilla groups, notably the 'Shining Path'.<sup>19</sup> Both sides in the conflict were responsible for various and numerous human rights atrocities, including forced displacement, disappearances, massacres, and sexual violence. When it was discovered that Mutal had included names of 'Shining Path' members in the memorial, many Peruvians demanded that all of the names around the base of the memorial should be removed, while others wanted the entire sculpture destroyed.<sup>20</sup> Physically the public responded by defacing '*El Ojo que Llorá*'; in 2007 it was covered in orange paint, and visitors still object to both the form of the sculpture and the presentation of victims.<sup>21</sup>

Patrick Smith has argued that the memorial to the 'Anonymous Heroes of Peace' 'projects all the majesty of a battered mailbox': a description that is difficult to disagree with.<sup>22</sup> While majesty is not a requirement for memorials, considering that the 'Anonymous Heroes of Peace' memorial was intended to remember the civil war, there is little about it that suggests the magnitude of that which it purports to

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<sup>18</sup> Katherine Hite, 'The Eye that Cries': The Politics of Representing Victims in Contemporary Peru', *A Contra corriente: A Journal on Social History and Literature in Latin America*, Vol.5: 1 (2007), p.110

<sup>19</sup> The Center for Justice and Accountability, 'Peru: The Struggle for Accountability', <http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=255> (Accessed 10/03/2017)

<sup>20</sup> Hite, 'The Eye that Cries', *A Contra corriente: A Journal on Social History and Literature in Latin America*, Vol.5: 1 (2007), p.111

<sup>21</sup> Dan Collins, 'Peru attempts to address years of violence with tolerance museum', *The Guardian* (June 2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/20/peru-museum-place-of-memory-shining-path> (Accessed 10/03/2017)

Cynthia, *Art From A Fractured Past: Memory and Truth Telling in Post-Shining Path Peru* (London: Duke University Press, 2014), p.13

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Memory Without History: Who Owns Guatemala's Past?', *The Washington Quarterly* Vol.24: 2 (2001), p.59

remember. Its name is a case in point. As Steven Hoelscher has argued, as a state-sponsored heritage display, the memorial is unsatisfactory: ‘its diminutive size, lack of custodial care, and vagueness – which heroes? whose peace? – point more toward amnesia than to remembrance’.<sup>23</sup> The memorial’s focus on peace in the references to the ‘anonymous heroes’ and the conclusion of the conflict allows the violence of the civil war to be overlooked: there is no recognition of the number of people who were killed or of the forces responsible. The use of the word ‘heroes’ suggests that there was a right and wrong side to the conflict, but there is no clear indication of who these people were or what it was they were fighting against. It is also interesting to note that although the memorial includes the date when the armed conflict officially ended, there is no reference to a timescale, no mention of how many years the conflict had lasted. The memorial suggests the bland message acceptable to the State of a resolved conflict and lasting peace: it provides little information, and draws on conventional iconography (the flame) while implying monumentality (the use of marble), successfully offering little interpretation of the past.

Unlike the ‘Anonymous Heroes of Peace’ memorial, the glorification of the idea of peace within Guatemala is reflected in the physical design of the Monument to Peace. However again, through avoiding any reference to human suffering, the monument implies that peace can only be attained or sustained through abstraction. The memorial, designed by Guatemalan sculptor Luís Fernando Carlos León, and unveiled in December 1997, is a bronze sculpture depicting two intertwined hands, resting on a base of sixteen interlocked arms (see Figure 2.3).<sup>24</sup> The overall presentation of the Monument to Peace suggests unity within the country; the

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<sup>23</sup> Hoelscher, ‘Heritage’, in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Macdonald (2011), p.212

<sup>24</sup> ‘Guatemala: De la Memoria del Silencio a la Memoria Histórica’, *Memoria Virtual Guatemala*, <http://memoriavirtualguatemala.org/es/guatemala-de-la-memoria-del-silencio-la-memoria-histórica> (Accessed 04/07/2017)

message being that such unity has provided the secure base from which peace in Guatemala has grown. Physically this memorial is more impressive than the memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace, owing to its height and superior design: the message communicated is more complex than simply a focus on ‘peace’, and the eye is drawn to different details the longer you examine it.



Fig.2.3 The Monument to Peace, created by Luís Fernando Carlos León. At the top of the flight of stairs in its new location, behind the monument, is the memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace.

Photograph by Rich Polanco, taken from ‘Things to do in Guatemala City’, <http://www.okantigua.com/national-palace-guatemala-city/>

The Monument is located in the courtyard of the National Palace. Between 1943 and 2001, the Palace was the seat of the Guatemalan government, after which time it became a Museum of Culture, although the space is still used for important acts of government. The decision to build this memorial in the same space as the government suggests a degree of engagement with the past on the part of the State; an

impression that is furthered by a ritual that was in place for several years, of every day, of placing a white rose in the hands of the memorial to keep alive the memory of the peace that was achieved.<sup>25</sup> As with the Anonymous Heroes memorial, the material used suggests solidity and strength. That the message of peace is carved into and out of two materials (marble and bronze) that speak of permanence implies a commitment on the part of the State to the peace that the memorials represent.

That the Monument to Peace was intended to be situated in this courtyard of the National Palace may have something to do with why it is visually more pleasing: it has been positioned so the archway behind it frames and compliments the structure, and light is able to reach it. The memorial to the Anonymous Heroes was transferred to the National Palace after its original placement was not successful. Its impact is thus altered by being moved from an outside square to an interior. In its new location the memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace is somewhat overshadowed by the Monument to Peace: it is positioned at the top of a short flight of stairs that lead into a courtyard where the Monument to Peace is located (see Figure 2.4). That there is little information to be found about the Anonymous Heroes memorial, especially in comparison to the Monument, suggests that rather than being a focal point for remembrance, it has instead become something to forget. With its relocation, it has been disconnected from the bustle of everyday life in Guatemala City, and placed instead in a space where it gains little attention, but may be protected from any further defacement.<sup>26</sup> The removal of the original graffiti silenced the expressions of discontent, and the memorial now stands behind railings to discourage any visitors from touching it.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Monumento a la Paz en Guatemala', *La Ciudad es como Tú*, <http://cultura.muniguate.com/index.php/component/content/article/94-monumentopaz/582-monumentopaz> (Accessed 04/07/2017)

<sup>26</sup> Hoelscher, 'Heritage', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Macdonald (2011), p.214

Yet despite being more aesthetically appealing, the Monument to Peace still fails to provide any actual information about the conflict. Again, for a State that seeks silence rather than discussion, this memorial manages successfully to capture the conclusion of the conflict without implicating any members of the regime or recognizing the extent of destruction that this conflict caused.



Fig.2.4 Side view of the Monument to Peace. The Monument to Peace is located in the forefront of this image; in the top left side, it is possible to see the Memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace.

Photograph by Rosemary G. Feal, taken from 'Tamales for Dollars: Survival Guatemalan', <https://execdirector.mla.hcommons.org/2013/02/06/tamales-for-dollars-survival-guatemalan/>

Both the memorial to the Anonymous Heroes of Peace and the Monument to Peace demonstrate clearly the message that the State wanted to present about the past: a focus on the declaration of peace. Identifying what is absent from the State's discussions of the past and also from these memorials, is key to understanding why

families, organizations, and communities, have created alternative memorials that remember – and remember specifics - and also seek to challenge.

The three issues that memorials to the disappeared contest can be broadly summarized as opposition to absence: both of the disappeared and information concerning them, opposition to impunity: the lack of justice in the form of convictions for perpetrators and the continued influence of these men; and opposition to silence: the lack of discussion and awareness about the disappearances, and the disregard shown by the State for remembrance of the past. Absence is a point of contestation that is highly visible in memorials to the disappeared: the absence of the disappeared person, both when they were believed to be living and, in many cases, when they were later presumed dead, is the defining feature of the act of disappearance. The desire for absence to be resolved, either through the return of physical remains or the release of information, is seen in memorials across the world. The protests of the ‘Saturday Mothers’ in Turkey and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina both openly oppose and challenge the continued absence of the disappeared. It is estimated that around 2,000 people were disappeared in Turkey following the coup in 1980, as a result of the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party and the Turkish security forces. Since 1995, the ‘Saturday Mothers’ in Turkey have gathered on a central boulevard in Istanbul to both protest the disappearances and commemorate the disappeared.<sup>27</sup> In Argentina, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo occupied the same central plaza every week to demand answers about the status and whereabouts of the disappeared, and to shout for the prosecution of the perpetrators. Such was the connection between the Mothers and this square that a memorial, in the form of a painted white headscarf on the pavement of the square, was created to mark the

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Memorialise Turkey: The Saturday Mothers’, <http://www.memorialiseturkey.com/en/memorial/saturday-mothers/>

significance of the space to Argentina's history.<sup>28</sup> Both of these groups used the public spaces they occupied to demand that the absence of the disappeared be addressed.

These protests also touched upon the idea of achieving justice and challenging impunity. Again, for memorials that contest in Guatemala, one of the main focuses is on this idea of achieving justice for the crime of disappearance, to see whoever was responsible for orchestrating these acts of violence be put on trial. This is similar to the Argentinian practice of *escraches*. These memorials challenge the impunity of perpetrators and the lack of awareness of the crime committed by publically identifying the person and their crime at their homes. A procession will travel through the neighbourhood of a perpetrator, announcing his or her crimes to the general public. The use of space here is important, as it makes the event much more personal than if the targeted individual were denounced in an area where they were not known. As these events are announced before they take place, the perpetrator's home is usually vacated for the day and is protected by security, but such a forceful method of identifying those who committed crimes during the Dirty War not only contests existing impunity but goes some way to 'correcting' the innocent guise that the targeted individual is living under.<sup>29</sup>

In other countries where there have been incidents of violence in the past, there is often another form of contest that emerges: between the different non-State actors at work. This has occurred prior to the process of memorialisation, and also during the design and creation of a memorial. In Argentina, there was some disagreement amongst the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo over the exhumation of

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<sup>28</sup> Fernando J. Bosco, 'Latin American Social Movements: Places, Scales, and Networks of Action', in *Placing Latin America: Contemporary Themes in Geography*, ed. Edward L. Jackiewicz, Fernando J. Bosco (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), p.165

<sup>29</sup> Nora Strejilevich 'Performative Memorial Sites and Resistance in Argentina', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, Vol.22: 3 (2010), pp.236-243

bodies. In cases of disappearance, there is generally an assumption that friends and relatives wish to find the bodies of the disappeared so they can finally attain closure and take the remains of their loved one home to be ceremonially buried. While some of the Mothers were in favour of these exhumations, others did not want such procedures conducted. As a group, the Mothers have been focussed on achieving justice for the disappeared, and it was believed that the excavations of bodies would allow those responsible for the crime of disappearance to escape prosecution. The ‘disappeared’ would become the ‘dead’ and the crime of disappearance would be forgotten. One Mother, Graciela de Jeger, stated ‘we don’t agree with the exhumation of bodies. With the exhumations they want to eradicate the problem of the disappearances, because then there are no more *desaparecidos*, only dead people.’ Beatriz de Rubinstein, another Mother, made her point clearly when she said: ‘Exhumations have nothing to do with justice.’<sup>30</sup> Although the Mothers stressed that they respected the decisions of other Mothers to have the exhumations take place, this contest within the group over how the remains of the disappeared should be treated has not yet been resolved.

The creation of memorials has also been the cause of conflict amongst different organisations: disputes emerge over who has a greater ‘right’ to the memorial, how the memorial should be constructed, and whom it represents. In New York there was disagreement over how the remains of those who had died but could not be identified in the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 should be interred and presented to the public as part of the memorial. Some families wanted to create a repository within the memorial museum itself; others however, wanted a tomb ‘of the unknown’ containing these remains installed at street level on the site, claiming that

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<sup>30</sup> Josephine Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), pp.128-129



storing these remains in a place that visitors would pay to visit was ‘macabre’.<sup>31</sup> A repository within the memorial museum was eventually decided upon despite these objections, but this decision did not bring an end to contest over this memorial. Many of those whose relatives had died in the attack claimed that their opinions about the construction of the memorial had not been asked or taken into consideration.<sup>32</sup>

In Argentina, the transformation of the ESMA building (a former naval training school used during the time of junta to imprison and torture those believed to be insurgents) into a memorial also led to the emergence of a number of disagreements between different groups in operation, and also the city government of Buenos Aires. There were disputes over how the space should be used, how much of the site should be included, and whether any of the original rooms should be retained and presented as they were. Although an agreement was eventually reached (different groups would be allocated their own space to use as they wished and some of the more significant rooms and buildings, like the medical wards, would be conserved) there were still some who continued to argue against the building being turned into a museum.<sup>33</sup> The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo wanted instead to see the space turned into a centre for youth culture and popular arts: ‘Museums are associated with death, when all has finished’ said Hebe de Bonafini, leader of the organization, ‘And here, nothing at all has finished.’<sup>34</sup>

This type of contest (between different non-State actors) is not something that has happened publically in Guatemala, potentially because the opposition from the

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<sup>31</sup> Jon Swaine, ‘9/11 families angry over ‘disgraceful’ city plan to store remains at museum’, *The Guardian* (May 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/09/911-museum-families-angry-human-remains-storage>

<sup>32</sup> Jay D. Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead? The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), p.246

<sup>33</sup> Jens Andermann, ‘Returning to the Site of Horror: On the Reclaiming of Clandestine Concentration Camps in Argentina’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 29:1 (2012), pp.76-98

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

State is so solid that any disputes amongst groups would weaken the overall cause. When I was conducting an interview with one participant, in which they made several negative comments about one of the disappeared organisations within Guatemala, they made it very clear that they would not share these opinions publically out of concern that they could be used to undermine the work done by that organisation and by others, to the extent that they wished these comments remain anonymous even within this thesis. This concern expressed by the participant supports this idea that such contest has not emerged publically in Guatemala, not because it does not exist, but because the organisations exist in a vulnerable position, and any sign of weakness can be used by the State to discredit or suppress them. Such techniques were attempted by the government in the 1980s, in response to the emergence of organisations dedicated to the disappeared. In March 1985, President Oscar Victorios appeared on television and announced that those involved with Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) were ‘communists’, ‘terrorists’, and ‘international subversives’.<sup>35</sup> The stance of the government has softened over time in terms of such public denouncements, but the continued lack of cooperation by the State suggests that these concerns over presenting a united front are not groundless.

Memorials that contest in Guatemala focus their efforts on challenging the State over its attitude and behaviors concerning the disappeared, and seeking to effect a positive change that may lead to the uncovering of information regarding the disappeared; the trial of one or more perpetrators; and the creation of a space in which the disappeared may be openly discussed. This chapter now turns to examine a number of case studies in Guatemala that have this element of contest at the centre of

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<sup>35</sup> David Hartsough, Joyce Hollyday, *Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist* (Oakland: PA Press, 2014), p.116

their existence, beginning with those memorials that present this contestation in less aggressive, quieter forms.

## Memorials

### *The Metropolitan Cathedral Columns*

The Metropolitan Cathedral stands in a prominent location in Guatemala City, on the edge of Central Park, on Central Square (see Figure 2.5). During the civil war it served as a focal point for many families who were searching for the disappeared. In the 1980s, it was frequently used as the end marker for protest marches: those involved would then participate in a mass that was used to express concern over the fate of the disappeared. In August 1984, around one thousand people were in attendance at one such mass.<sup>36</sup> Since the conclusion of the conflict, the cathedral has continued to hold a number of services intended to remember the disappeared and the victims of violence, as well as separate services to remember Bishop Juan Gerardi on the anniversary of his assassination. It was at the Metropolitan Cathedral in 1998 that Bishop Gerardi publically released the REMHI report. He gave a speech that emphasised the importance of delivering truth, no matter how painful, in the process of achieving peace.<sup>37</sup> It is clear then that the cathedral has had a specific significance in the search for the disappeared: it has been used as a site from which contest has been vocalised and enacted, and it has continued in contemporary Guatemala to demonstrate objection to the attitudes of the government.

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<sup>36</sup> Edward S Herman, Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Random House, 2008), pp.75-76

<sup>37</sup> John Neafsey, *A Sacred Voice is Calling: Personal Vocation and Social Conscience* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006)



Fig.2.5 A map of Guatemala City's central park and the roads around it. On the right side of the image is the Metropolitan Cathedral, indicated by a red marker. It is also possible to see the National Palace, which appears at the top of the image. The distance between the two is not very far (the park is roughly the same size as a city block), and visitors to Guatemala City can see both buildings when standing in Central Park.

Outside the cathedral there are twelve columns. On these are listed names taken from the REMHI report of people who were victims of State violence. The names are organised according to Department and then by the act that resulted in their death or absence, such as torture, assassination, and disappearance (see Figures 2.6 and 2.7). The columns were built between 1998 and 1999, under the instructions of the Archbishop of Guatemala, Monseñor Próspero Penados del Barrio. I contacted Ana Luisa Miranda who works for the Office of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHAG), to ask her for some more information about the columns; why, for instance, were the columns built. 'It was to comply with one of the recommendations of the Guatemala Never Again Report- to dignify the victims of the Internal Armed Conflict' Ana told me. 'The purpose was to pay homage to all those people unknown by many and who were mostly peasant people.'<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Ana Luisa Miranda, 21/11/2016, by Katherine Bailey

The use of names in the columns plays a significant role in this idea of restoring dignity and paying homage to the victims of violence, especially for the disappeared. Owing to the absence of physical remains in the cases of most of the disappeared, the presence of their names in public is powerful way that they can become visible again, rather than remaining absent. As Simon Robins has written, ‘to memorialise is to reckon with invisibility’.<sup>39</sup> Remembering the disappeared is an act of resistance against the perpetrators: it fights against the very nature and intention of the act of violence itself. The grouping of the names by Department and atrocity also presents the disappeared as both part of a collective but also as individuals. Viewers are reminded of the extent of the violence, but also of the people within this number who were affected.



Fig.2.6 The Metropolitan Cathedral from the outside. It is possible to see three of the columns in the foreground of the image: the people standing next to the columns provide some indication of scale, in terms of how tall the structures are.

<sup>39</sup> Simon Robins, *Families of the missing: A Test for Contemporary Approaches to Transitional Justice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp.186-187



Fig.2.7 One of the columns outside the Metropolitan Cathedral. The names are taken from the Department of Quiché and are those people who were the victims of torture and disappearance. The name of the Department is situated at the top of the column, under which the different municipalities within that Department are listed. After this comes the form of violence ('Victimas Desaparecidos' for instance), and then the lists of names.

These columns are one of the most prominent lasting ways that the cathedral, and for that matter Catholic Church, contests the actions of the government. As can be seen in Figure 2.5, the Metropolitan Cathedral is located on the same square as the

National Palace: although the distance looks considerable on this map, it is possible to see both buildings when standing in Central Park, and when on 7 Avenida outside the cathedral, you are able to see the National Palace (and vice versa when standing on 6 Calle). Erin Manning has written that a pre-determined space cannot ‘house the political’: space must instead be created according to the needs of a particular time and place.<sup>40</sup> While the cathedral already existed, the columns with the names on were created for the purpose of remembering the violence of the past and identifying those who fell victim to this. Such a clear marker of the past is needed in Guatemala in the face of the official silence presented by the government; and that this marker exists in such close proximity to the building that still houses the government of Guatemala only makes the contest these columns offer all the more powerful. A political space was created with these markers that used the physical surroundings of the cathedral to their advantage.

When I asked Ana Luisa Miranda what the intention behind these columns was, she told me that they demonstrate the sympathy the Catholic Church feels for the victims of the conflict. They also ‘endeavoured to make known the atrocities committed by the State through the Army during the conflict.’<sup>41</sup> This clearly identifies that these columns were created with the intention to remember but also to challenge. They contest the silence that surrounds the past by visually reminding people of the names of those who were killed during the conflict and they challenge the impunity of the perpetrators. They tell people that these were not atrocities committed by an unknown force, but organised by the State itself. That the columns are located so close to the National Palace reinforces the idea that they are identifying the State as the guilty party. The absence within the National Palace of any recognition of the

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<sup>40</sup> Erin Manning, ‘Time For Politics’, in *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics*, ed. Jenny Edkins, Michael J. Shapiro, Veronique Pin-Fat (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.75

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Ana Luisa Miranda, 21/11/2016, by Katherine Bailey

violence that occurred (the conflict is only addressed by the two peace memorials discussed previously) creates a powerful juxtaposition between the two buildings and the two institutions: and the absence of any form of remembrance of violence in the face of detailed and individual reflection only reinforces the idea of guilt.

*Art work in 'Horror Vacui' and 'The Disappeared'*

This chapter now turns to explore some pieces of art that were included in the 'Horror Vacui' and 'The Disappeared' exhibitions. In terms of contest, what these works offer is an array of interpretations and experiences of the violence of the conflict, which contrast with the narrative put forward by the State. Such pieces of work are to be considered as memorials because of the wish to remember that is present within each of them. Noël Carroll has discussed memorial artworks as pieces that 'function vividly to remind [their] audience of culturally important events and persons and of the commitments, values, virtues, and beliefs for which they stand... They function to recall the past.'<sup>42</sup> The artwork discussed here creates a connection to the past, even if it is a past the artists themselves have not experienced; not all those who contributed work to the exhibitions were Guatemalan artists, nor had all of them lived through the civil war. Within these groups however, there is still a wish to stop the past from being forgotten, to remind viewers of the violence that took place, and the repercussions that are still experienced within contemporary society.

As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, the focus when discussing this artwork, as with all the memorials, will be the intention behind its creation, rather than the response that it received. Not only is it difficult to assess how the majority of people who visited these exhibitions responded to the pieces, but with artwork there

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<sup>42</sup> Noël Carroll, *Art in Three Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.169



can often be a discrepancy between the intention of the artist and the way a piece is interpreted: one can never assume that the two will be the same. Similar to Roland Barthes' author, there can be numerous interpretations of artwork because the artist is not present; they are not an authority over the exact meaning of a piece of artwork.<sup>43</sup> Even if the artist's account of their intention is sought, as David Carrier argues, this account is not necessarily 'correct': the artist is not a 'privileged interpreter' of his or her work.<sup>44</sup> Each viewer holds different experiences and opinions, which will influence their interpretation of a piece.<sup>45</sup> The focus here is on the intentions of the creator to understand how these artworks seek to memorialise the disappeared.

When the two exhibitions, 'Horror Vacui' and 'The Disappeared', were open to visitors, they were both well received by Guatemalan and international audiences. When 'The Disappeared' exhibition was on show at the Museo Del Barrio in New York, the programme accompanying the exhibition described the importance that such artwork had in terms of drawing attention to this form of violence: '...these works communicate the unspeakable and reveal the artists' assumed role of social responsibility towards ending the silence surrounding these extreme cases of human rights violations.<sup>46</sup> Even before visitors to the Museo Del Barrio had examined the pieces of art displayed in the exhibition, such a description in the programme had already introduced the idea of contest: that by creating these works of art and displaying them, artists are challenging the way the actions and attitudes of the State, in regards to speaking out against the act of violence itself, but also the subsequent treatment of the disappeared.

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<sup>43</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* (1977)

<sup>44</sup> David Carrier, 'Pale Fire Solved', in *Acting and Reflecting: The Interdisciplinary Turn in Philosophy*, ed. Wilfried Sieg (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), p.75

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>46</sup> El Museo Del Barrio Presents The Disappeared (Los Desaparecidos), <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/the-disappeared-los-desaparecidos/>

Both exhibitions confronted disappearances in Latin America and the legacy of this form of violence. ‘The Disappeared’ first opened in 2005 and featured works created by artists from around the world, all of which focussed on disappearances. The exhibition travelled across the globe to numerous locations, and had its final showing in 2010 at the Weisman Museum of Art, Minneapolis. The exposure of information about the disappeared to such a large number of people challenged the Guatemalan State’s attempts to keep this part of history quiet. It contested the silence projected by the State by informing different audiences across the world (in locations including New York, Washington, Lima, and Buenos Aires) about the disappearances and the continued absence of the disappeared.

‘Horror Vacui’ opened in 2008, and contained an array of pieces in different mediums, such as performance pieces, paintings, and sculpture. The work that was displayed had all been created in response to the disappearances that had occurred in Guatemala, and were largely made by Guatemalan born, or Guatemala based, artists. Maria Diaz, an artist who had worked on ‘Horror Vacui’, told me why she thought such exhibitions were important: ‘exhibits like “Horror Vacui” bring to life memories of the disappeared and creates a conversation between the public and artist, but also opens up political issues that nobody wants to talk about.’<sup>47</sup> ‘Nobody’ here encompasses both those in power, whether they are members of the government or the military, and also members of the public. As with the ‘The Disappeared’ exhibition, there is this idea of contesting the silence that exists around disappearances. Here, however, Diaz also implies that there is a collective unwillingness to engage with the past and the current political situation surrounding the disappeared. This relates to the idea of an ‘amnesia’ existing within Guatemala as

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Maria Diaz, 31/03/2015, by Katherine Bailey

discussed in chapter one: a forgetting of the past that is often self-inflicted. This idea of ‘nobody’ wanting to discuss political issues is an idea that appears again in relation to Isabel Ruiz’s and Daniel Hernandez-Salazar’s works, which will be discussed in due course. One can infer that this reluctance is a result of the lack of regime change that exists in Guatemala: there are no public spaces where discussions may take place. The exhibition therefore contests not only the silence that exists around the past, but also challenges this lack of space in which to talk about the politics surrounding disappearances by creating such a space in itself. With the intention to gather people together to discuss the political issue of disappearance, ‘Horror Vacui’, and indeed ‘The Disappeared’, created, to use Hannah Arendt’s term, public ‘spaces of appearance’.<sup>48</sup>

The title of the exhibition - ‘Horror Vacui’- translates from Latin to mean a fear of empty spaces, or a fear of emptiness. As mentioned earlier, one of the central features of disappearances is the very present awareness of absence, or emptiness, that is created when an individual is disappeared. All disappearances denote absence, and from that moment of disappearance, the person becomes an absent figure and there is an emptiness created.<sup>49</sup> For an exhibition that focussed on the disappearances, there could be no more appropriate title than ‘Horror Vacui’, as this form of violence did create a fear, a horror, of empty spaces. Many pieces of artwork within both ‘Horror Vacui’ and ‘The Disappeared’ reflect on this idea of a creation of absence through disappearance, both in terms of recognising that such a void was created but also in relation to fighting against attempts to deny and forget those who were disappeared. By addressing the creation of absence through disappearance within artwork, artists

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<sup>48</sup> Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 77

<sup>49</sup> Marjorie Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), p.35

have challenged the physical status of the disappeared: although their remains are still missing, their presence has been restored through the space they have left behind. They remain invisible but noticeably so: the viewer's attention is deliberately focussed on the absence rather than being allowed to skip over it. The absent becomes present.

Art has a unique ability to express absence, both in literal form and abstraction. Ziva Amishai-Maisels discusses the representation of absence in Holocaust artwork, describing how artists would represent victims and a sense of loss with 'ghosts': so that 'the victim's disappearance left behind only a spectral image, relics, smoke, or holes in the collective memory.'<sup>50</sup> This idea of artwork being 'haunted' by absence, by the loss of a person, can also be found in the work of Argentinian artist Gustavo Germano. Germano created a series of images called 'Absences' (see Figure 2.8). In these, he displayed a photograph of a group of people, which included one or many people who had been disappeared, next to a restaged version of the same photograph taken years later with the same people in the same location. The first image would be the original photograph, usually in black and white; the second image would be a colour photograph that Germano had taken. In these second images, the same positions and poses as in the original were recreated, but where the disappeared person was, there was now a blank space. Through this series, 'the politics of the [Argentinian] dictatorship is described through the absence of a child, a brother, or a sister.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ziva Amishai-Maisels, 'Haunting the Empty Place', in *Absence/Presence: Essays and Reflections on the Artistic Memory of the Holocaust*, ed. Steve Feinstein (London: Syracuse University Press, 2005), p.123

<sup>51</sup> Alejandro Baer, Natan Sznaider, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: The Ethics of Never Again* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017)



1971

Delia Calleja  
 Zulema Calleja  
 Elsa Raquel Diaz  
 Ricardo Godoy  
 Victorio José Ramón Erbetta



2006

Delia Calleja  
 Zulema Calleja  
 .  
 Ricardo Godoy  
 .

Fig. 2.8 A set of images created by artist Gustavo Germano. On the left is the original image, and on the right, the recreated photograph. Underneath each image is included the date when the photograph was taken (in this case, 1971 and 2006) and the names of those pictured. The names of the disappeared have been left as a blank space, reiterating the idea of their absence.

Created by Gustavo Germano, 'Gustavo Germano', <http://www.gustavogermano.com>

The images are simple, but exceptionally powerfully as they visually inform viewers of the physical manifestation of the disappearances: all that is left is an absence where a person once stood. The viewer gains an understanding that for those disappeared, time has stood still: the figures in the second image have aged, whereas the disappeared have been removed in their youth. They no longer have the opportunity to grow old with those they loved or were loved by. The image challenges the absence left by the disappeared by making it visible. The series reflects the highly personal nature of the disappearances, of the trauma experienced by those left behind, and because the images are shown in a collection, they also recognise the collective destruction that such violence wrought. In the two exhibitions, the depiction of absence in artwork was done in a more abstract manner; where Germano physically

shows the absent space once occupied by a particular person who the viewer can see in the other image, in ‘The Disappeared’ and ‘Horror Vacui’ artists relied upon representational objects or symbols to make present this absence.

‘The Disappeared’ exhibition featured work by artist Luis Gonzáles Palma, a photographer who was born in Guatemala. Palma’s work for the exhibition included photographs of Mayan women in various surroundings, but who were always looking directly at the camera. Palma believed that before the world could understand the suffering that the Mayan communities had endured, they first had to ‘see the Mayan as people’, rather than simply viewing them as victims of violence.<sup>52</sup> Victor Montejo wrote that only the ancient Maya are accepted within Guatemalan society: they are ‘glorified’ and the classic Maya traditions used to promote nationalism, whereas contemporary Mayans are disdained and discriminated against: ‘if they are thought of as Maya at all, [they] are just a hazy reflection of their ancestors’.<sup>53</sup> With his photographs, Palma wanted to the viewer to look into the eyes of the present-day Mayan people, and then recognize the impact that the civil war had on them. ‘His goal was to bring honor and dignity to all Mayan people who have suffered violence and racism by the hands of the Guatemalan government through eye-to-eye contact between the viewer and the person captured in the photograph.’<sup>54</sup> Even the stance the figures take in Palma’s photographs reinforces this idea of contest: there is direct, unwavering eye contact with the viewer that expresses a sense of power and self-possession, rather than the fear that one may associate with a victim.

Two of Palma’s works within ‘The Disappeared’ exhibition are especially noteworthy: ‘Hermetic Tensions’, and ‘Absences’. Palma said of these pieces: ‘I

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<sup>52</sup> Laurel Reuter, *The Disappeared* (North Dakota: North Dakota Museum of Art, 2006), p.32

<sup>53</sup> Victor D. Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p.4

<sup>54</sup> Reuter, *The Disappeared* (2006), p.90

conceive these photographs with the hope that the image will include, and somehow stress and express, the invisible.<sup>55</sup> These two pieces are shown in Figures 2.9 and 2.10 respectively.



Fig.2.9 A copy of Luis Gonzales Palma's 'Hermetic Tensions'. Images taken from Sherwin Altarez Mapanoo, 'The Appearance of the Disappearance: The Gesture of Curating an Art Exhibition on Desaparecidos', *The Multiple Exposure Project*, <http://themultipleexposureproject.blogspot.co.uk/2014/09/the-appearance-of-disappearance-gesture.html>



Fig.2.10 A copy of Luis Gonzales Palma's 'Absences'. This image is taken from the 'The Disappeared' catalogue (2006), p.91.

<sup>55</sup> Reuter, *The Disappeared* (2006), p.91

‘Hermetic Tensions’ (Figure 2.9) features two photographs: one of a Mayan woman behind a wire fence, who is looking straight at the viewer; and another of a worn shirt, also behind a wire fence. The two photographs are presented side-by-side, and from this placement, we can assume that the shirt belonged to someone this woman knew, potentially even her husband or son. That the shirt is depicted unworn, and in a separate image to the woman, suggests an incredible sense of isolation. As Palma intended, these two images illustrate the absence the disappearances created by forcing viewers to question where the owner of the shirt is: the invisible has been expressed through the suggestion that someone is missing. The object reminds the viewer of the owner’s past presence and their present absence.<sup>56</sup> This is stressed by the expression on the woman’s face in the other image: she looks frightened, vulnerable, as if she is waiting for the next emotional blow that she knows is coming yet is still not prepared for it; the type of emotions that one would associate with a family member of the disappeared, yet her gaze remains on the viewer, suggesting a directed question, a challenge, even, about where the disappeared are.

Contest is visible in this image through the recognition of the disappeared, and also in the idea that questions remain to be answered. The shirt is still empty and the woman looks to the viewer to ask where the disappeared are: there is no sense of conclusion here. The wire fence in these two images is positioned between the viewer and the shirt, and may be interpreted to reflect the political situation in Guatemala. Families, and the wider public, are unable to access information to learn where the owner of the shirt has gone because of the State’s restrictive attitude towards the disappeared. It also suggests that those searching for the disappeared have been silenced. The fence serves as a barrier between the woman in the image and the

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<sup>56</sup> Amishai-Maisels, ‘Haunting the Empty Place’, in *Absence/Presence*, ed. Feinstein (2005), p.123



viewer, and although we are able to ascertain certain ideas from her expression and the composition, what she has actually experienced remains unheard.

‘Absences’ was another of Palma’s photographs that featured in ‘The Disappeared’. It is one image, around twenty-five and a half by sixty-three inches in measurement, and is similar to ‘Hermetic Tensions’ in its ability to evoke the invisible (see Figure 2.10). It shows a scattering of miniature chairs against a wall, all empty. As with ‘Hermetic Tensions’, the image raises questions over who should be sitting in those chairs, and where they are. The emptiness left behind by the disappearances is emphasized in this image: there is no person depicted, nor a suggestion that someone is coming to sit or use those chairs. They have simply been left, as a result of the absence of those who would use them. The chairs become, to paraphrase Mieke Bal’s term, ‘indexes of lives that have been destroyed’.<sup>57</sup>

The neutrality of the objects that Palma uses in ‘Absences’ further reinforces the emotional impact that such an image can have, as the chairs elicit the viewer’s identification, albeit involuntarily.<sup>58</sup> A chair is a piece of furniture that people interact with on a daily basis; in a normal setting it would not contain any significance or power, it is as neutral an object as one can imagine. However, when combined en masse and with the title ‘Absences’, these chairs become provocative, without being obscure: the large number of chairs reflects the scale of the disappearances; the title, ‘Absences’, showing why they are empty. Owing to the identification with the object, the viewer in turn identifies with the pain that they represent. Although the experience of disappearance or having a loved one disappeared is not recreated, they appeal, as

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<sup>57</sup> Mieke Bal, *Endless Andness: The Politics of Abstraction According to Ann Veronica Janssens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.20

<sup>58</sup> Gastón Alzate, ‘Absence and Pain in the Work of Doris Salcedo and Rosemberg Sandoval’, *South Central Review*, Vol.30. 3 (2013), pp.5-20

Gastón Alzate has argued in relation to the artist Doris Salcedo's work, to the spectator's corporeal condition and sense.<sup>59</sup>

Gilles Deleuze argued that more important than thought is 'what leads to thought': emotions or experiences that force us to reflect on what we have seen whether we would have chosen to or not. He stresses the importance of these impressions that have reached us 'in spite of ourselves'.<sup>60</sup> There is a sense that Palma's work relates to this idea: the chairs are not in themselves provocative objects, but because of the context in which they are displayed, viewers are forced to think about the disappearances because of the empathic emotional response that the presentation of such objects creates. The image therefore becomes more powerful because, in a sense, the viewer has not consciously chosen to have these thoughts about the chairs and subsequently, the disappeared. It is this sense of being able to identify similarities between your own life, the life of the viewer, and the lives of those depicted, whether they are visible or not, that lends this image such an emotionally powerful presence.

Both of these images intend to provoke thoughts about the disappearances in the viewer, as they speak of the disappeared themselves but through the spaces that they used to fill. The works are 'haunted' by the absence of the disappeared: the 'ghost' or 'ghosts' challenge the propriety of everyday objects by importing a 'charged strangeness' into something that one would usually deem 'normal'.<sup>61</sup> Rather than presenting the viewer with images of the disappeared in said settings, Palma has left it to the imagination of the person viewing the image to construct a scene where the object is in use, and then a moment when the individual is no longer able to

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>60</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Continuum, 2008), p.61

<sup>61</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.63

interact with this object. Cynthia Milton wrote that ‘art happens at the intersection of experience and imagination’ and this is clearly shown in Palma’s images, which incorporate objects familiar to the viewer with an invisible action and person.<sup>62</sup> The photographs are an open challenge to the official Guatemalan narrative that fails to acknowledge the disappeared or the continued search for them. The images do not suggest conclusion, but they do make very visible the voids that past incidents of violence have left behind and the memories that are attached to them. They served as a ‘reminder’ of the past for the viewer, shaping and enhancing their understanding of the past, and preserving memory of the disappeared.<sup>63</sup>

In the ‘Horror Vacui’ exhibition, this notion of absence was explored in another abstract piece created by Guatemalan born artist Isabel Ruiz: ‘*Matemática Sustractiva*’ (Subtractive Mathematics). Unlike the previously discussed examples, ‘*Matemática Sustractiva*’ was a performance piece. ‘Horror Vacui’ featured many performance pieces alongside other static works, all of which were first performed on 7 June 2008, shortly after the exhibition opened on 24 May. One may infer that the delay in the performance of these pieces was so the exhibition could gain sufficient attention, and more people would therefore be present to view these temporal works.

In ‘*Matemática Sustractiva*’ Ruiz drew 45,000 chalk lines, one right next to the other, on one of the outer walls of the former convent Compañía de Jesús (see Figures 2.11 and 2.12). While she was doing this, several members of the public rebuked her for damaging the colonial building, claiming that she was ‘destroying’ Guatemala’s heritage. Municipal police officers tried to remove her, but were prevented from doing so after they were told that permission for the performance had already been granted. Ruiz said afterwards that these objections came because she and

<sup>62</sup> Cynthia E. Milton, *Art From A Fractured Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p.271

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.127

her artwork were drawing attention to memories that people wanted to forget, that they did not want to see.<sup>64</sup> Public art is not without controversy. It ‘forces itself upon people...inserting itself on the landscape as an anomaly or curiosity’.<sup>65</sup> I am not sure whether the hostility Ruiz experienced was as a result of her performance appearing like vandalism or, as she believes, because there is a wish to deny the past, but what is interesting is that this was Ruiz’s first assumption. Her memorial artwork honoured the victims of disappearance and because of this, she saw herself as a potential target for abuse, rather than believing that her audience would receive the artwork well with a level of empathy. This suggests that Ruiz, at least, had prior experience of the ‘reluctance’ spoken about earlier, towards discussing certain political issues in public. After Ruiz had finished drawing the chalk lines on the wall, she would rub them all out (in Figure 2.12 it is possible to see a green cloth in one of Ruiz’s hands) and begin the process again.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Rafael Cuevas Molina, ‘Arte y literatura en la construcción y disputa de la memoria in Guatemala’, *Temas de nuestra américa*, Vol.32: 60 (2016), pp.57-68

<sup>65</sup> Melvin Delgado, *Death at an Early Age and the Urban Scene: The Case for Memorial Murals and Community Healing* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003), p.132

<sup>66</sup> *Los Desaparecidos: Horror Vacui*, Guatemala, 2008, [http://issuu.com/ximenachapero/docs/los\\_desaparecidos](http://issuu.com/ximenachapero/docs/los_desaparecidos)



Fig.2.11 Isabel Ruiz drawing the chalk marks on the wall as part of her '*Matemática Sustractiva*' performance for 'Horror Vacui'.  
Image taken from Ana Tiscornia, 'Los Desaparecidos',  
<http://losdesaparecidosguatemala.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/la-actividad-de-performance-inici-este.html>

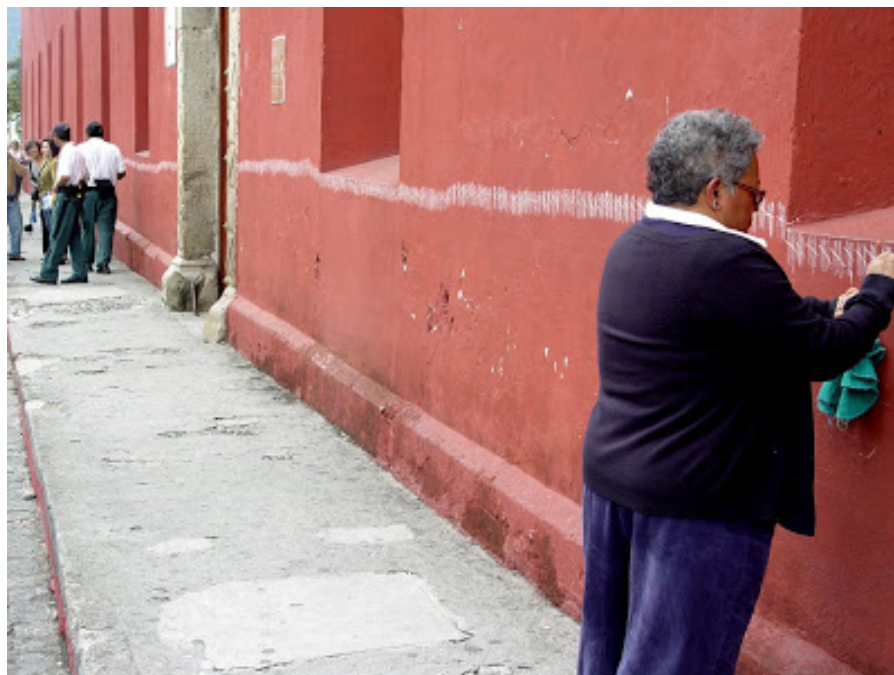


Fig.2.12 Ruiz performing '*Matemática Sustractiva*'.  
Here it is possible to see how far the chalk lines extended once they were in place: they cover the length of the visible wall in this image.  
Image taken from Jose Manuel Mayorga Saravia, 'Horror Vacui',  
<http://josemanuelmayorgas.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/horror-vacui.html>

The idea of absence within this piece is more abstract than in, for instance, Palma's photographs, which contain recognisable and relatable objects, but the idea of absence and challenging this invisibility is still present. Ruiz drew one line for each of the disappeared, and through this simple form she made them visible again. They were shown on the wall as individuals but also as a collective. Each chalk line drawn on the wall represented someone, and when the performance was finished, all these individuals became grouped together and so showed the collective of the disappeared. In drawing these lines Ruiz also created a physical indication of the scale of the disappearances. Although such a large amount may still have been difficult for viewers to process, the chalk lines at least give an idea of what this number looks like in reality: the abstract of 45,000 disappeared becomes almost tangible when facing the seemingly endless line of chalk marks.<sup>67</sup>

Ruiz's use of physical space, the decision to position this performance on the streets of Antigua, arguably has a practical aspect to it: that of needing to fit in all of the chalk lines, but there is also something significant about it. It positions the disappeared in a natural, public location, emphasising that before they were disappeared, these people existed in these spaces. They were like everybody else, and their absence is notable in these public arenas as well as in their own homes. The use of space also intended to create a reminder for those who viewed the marks: that disappearances did take place on the streets of Antigua, and more broadly, in the public spaces of Guatemala. They were not conducted in discreet locations; there could even have been a disappearance in the space where Ruiz made those marks. This open confrontation of the past through the creation of these marks challenges the

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<sup>67</sup> In his article, 'Psychic Numbing and Genocide', Paul Slovic discusses this idea that individuals find it difficult if not impossible to experience an emotional reaction to a large scale atrocity, as the numbers are just too big for people to grasp as 'reality'. (Paul Slovic, 'Psychic Numbing and Genocide', *Psychological Science Agenda* (November 2007), <http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2007/11/slovic.aspx>)

covert nature of the disappearances. It attempts to remind the public of the physical history of their city and country. Ruiz's decision to rub out all of the chalk lines and then once again, draw them, contests the attempts of the State to forget the past and the disappeared. In rubbing the lines out, Ruiz reflects the political situation in Guatemala: that of deliberately attempting to silence the disappeared and those who search for them, and to leave the disappeared lost and absent forever. By then redrawing these lines, Ruiz makes it very clear that such attempts will fail: that people will fight back (the lines will keep being drawn) and that the disappeared will always be remembered.

In terms of contest, what these exhibitions offered was a space in which ideas and experiences of the past could be discussed. Each piece of art drew attention in their own way, in a variety of forms, to the fight that was on going to oppose the actions of the State: in particular, the continued absence of the disappeared and the silence that surrounded them. One of the artists who contributed work to the 'Horror Vacui' exhibition, Jessica Kairé, told me why she thought exhibitions such as these were important in terms of remembering Guatemala's past; her response highlights the aforementioned idea of contest existing and developing within these spaces. 'I think it's extremely important,' she said, 'to create dynamic spaces where major historic events, especially those involving human rights violations, can be brought to light, learned about, and questioned by different generations.'<sup>68</sup>

Similar to these exhibitions in terms of contesting the absence of the disappeared, is the work of Daniel Hernandez-Salazar: 'Street Angels'. Like Ruiz's '*Matemática Sustractiva*', the 'Street Angels' were, as the name suggests, works of art that were positioned in public spaces. Unlike Ruiz however, Hernandez-Salazar

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Jessica Kairé, 22/03/2015, by Katherine Bailey

did not have permission to install these images in the public domain. There is an increased level of provocation with ‘Street Angels’ not only because of this lack of permission, but also because of the spaces in which Hernandez-Salazar positioned the angels: each one was intended in some way to draw attention to the violence of the past, to the historical geography of the city. They contested the absence of the disappeared and the lack of information about them, but also the continued impunity of perpetrators. As with the artwork explored in these two exhibitions, ‘Street Angels’ is discussed as a memorial in light of its relationship with the past: the artist intends for the work to ignite remembrance of what happened during Guatemala’s civil war.

*Daniel Hernandez-Salazar’s ‘Street Angels’*

Daniel Hernandez-Salazar is a Guatemalan-born photographer, whose work has mostly focused on Guatemala’s armed conflict and the violence that was inflicted upon the population during this time. Hernandez-Salazar himself grew up in Guatemala while the conflict was taking place, yet, as he told me, he was largely unaware of the violence that was happening in the highlands and other areas of the country:

all that you heard in Guatemala City was that there was some violence, you know, undetermined violence in the Highlands and that we shouldn’t use the road that went through the mountains, but instead use the road going through the coast to go to Quetzaltenango... because there was violence, and there was no further explanation and a normal citizen wouldn’t ask... so ok, they say we shouldn’t use that road we will not use it and that was it. And for me, I was pretty unconscious in the seventies of what was going on.<sup>69</sup>

This was not an unusual situation in Guatemala. There was a divide between the rural and urban areas of the country, in terms of the intensity of the violence that occurred;

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey



especially in the 1970s and 1980s, rural areas were largely targeted over urban sites.<sup>70</sup> There were also restrictions of the press put in place to curtail any reports about what might be occurring; and the simple geography of the country meant that many of these targeted locations were a considerable distance from urban centres such as Guatemala City, for anyone by chance to see what was taking place and for news to spread.<sup>71</sup>

In the 1980s, however, Hernandez-Salazar did begin, as he phrased it, to ‘meditate’ on what was taking place in the country and developed a ‘political consciousness’ as a result. ‘I began being more conscious in the late seventies, early eighties when the coup d’état against Lucas [President Romeo Lucas García] happened and Ríos Montt came to power’, he told me. ‘Then I became more... engaged with the everyday life of the country.’<sup>72</sup> At this time he was working as a photojournalist for numerous newspapers: Reuters, France Presse, and the Associated Press, and it was these surroundings that led him to think critically about the situation within Guatemala. Hernandez-Salazar’s political awareness and consciousness is evident in his work, especially in ‘Street Angels’, which, through the positioning of posters intended to challenge the attitude of the State towards the past and draw attention to the geographical history of Guatemala City.

In 1997, Hernández-Salazar created a triptych entitled ‘*No Veo, No Oigo, Me Callo*’ (I Don’t See, I Don’t Hear, I Remain Silent), a piece reminiscent of the three wise monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. ‘The first angel, hands

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<sup>70</sup> The REMHI report records 122 victims of disappearance in the Department of Guatemala (this includes Guatemala City as one of its municipalities), which may be considered an urban Department; whereas in the Department of Quiché, very much a rural Department with a Mayan population, the number of disappeared increases to 1,718. (See pages 309-311 of the English translated 1999 edition of the REMHI report)

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Graham-Yooll, ‘Censorship’, in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, ed. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, Ana M. Lopez (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), p.313

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey

covering his mouth, cannot speak. The second angel, hands covering his eyes, cannot see. The third angel, hands covering his ears, cannot hear.’<sup>73</sup> In 1998 Hernandez-Salazar had created an additional lone image, which he then added to the triptych to create an entirely new sequence of pictures. The image was entitled ‘So That All Shall Know’, and when combined with the triptych created a series entitled ‘*Esclarecimiento*’ (‘Clarification’). ‘The fourth angel, hands cupped around his mouth so that the trumpet of truth may resound, shatters the silence and unleashes the forces of memory.’<sup>74</sup> (The four images are shown in Figure 2.13.) These images were later chosen to decorate the front covers of the four volumes of Guatemala’s Historical Memory Project, ‘Guatemala: Never Again’.

The image of these angels is a powerful one. The first three angels represent the attitude that existed, and still exists, in Guatemala towards the past: a resistance to see, hear, or speak about what happened. The State attempted, when the violence was occurring, to stop the population from learning about what was happening, and then later, tried to prevent people from speaking about their experiences. The final angel destroys this by shouting about the violence that occurred. It challenges the notion of silence and forgetting, and inverts the usual meaning attached to this ‘see no evil’ triptych. Rather than being guidance to follow, Hernandez-Salazar’s ‘Street Angels’ instead fights against an ‘evil’ that has been imposed from above: being forced to see, hear, and say nothing. It also relates to the earlier mentioned idea of a refusal to discuss political matters in Guatemala: while the Angel may have been prevented from seeing, hearing, or speaking out by the State, there are those in the Guatemalan population who have chosen to abstain from these activities and instead opt for ‘amnesia’ about the past.

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<sup>73</sup> W. George Lovell, *Angels, Conquests, and Memory* in ‘So That All Shall Know’ (Austin: University of Texas, 2007), p.6

<sup>74</sup> Lovell, *Angels, Conquests, and Memory* in ‘So That All Shall Know’ (2007), p.6



Fig.2.13 Daniel Hernandez-Salzar's '*Esclarecimiento*' ('Clarification'). Taken from Jim Johnson, '(Notes on) Politics, Theory, and Photography', <http://politicstheoryphotography.blogspot.co.uk/2009/08/uses-of-photography-daniel-hernandez.html>

From Figure 2.13 it is possible to see that the wings of Hernandez-Salazar's angel are made out of human shoulder blades, positioned behind the body of a male model. Hernandez-Salazar was initially inspired to create this angel by a visit to the offices of the forensic anthropologists, where they had been conducting excavations of bodies. He described the shoulder blades upon seeing them, as looking like 'butterfly wings...like bird wings'. 'I always associated the flight of birds with the search for freedom and freedom of expression. That was something that had been destroyed in the war. But they could also be angel wings. Angels are spirits, they are messengers. They are someone who lived and died.'<sup>75</sup> The angels in Hernandez-Salazar's image therefore may be seen as messengers of memory: communicating the

<sup>75</sup> David Gonzalez, 'Angels Watch Over Memories of War', *Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism*, *The New York Times*, [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?_r=0) (Accessed 11/03/2017)

experiences of those who died or were disappeared in the conflict. The use of the shoulder blades however, prevents this image from becoming too ethereal: it grounds the angel within the conflict and reminds the viewer of the human remains that lurk behind the memories these spirits bring with them.

On 26 April 1998, Bishop Gerardi, the director of Guatemala's Historical Memory Project, was assassinated. This was just two days after he had presented the results of the investigation organized by the Catholic Church into Guatemala's violent past. In response to this assassination a demonstration was held, protesting the unlawful killing. Hernandez-Salazar had previously published 'Clarification' as a promotional poster for 'Guatemala: Never Again', and many of those who were involved in the demonstration carried copies of this poster (see Figure 2.14). When I spoke to Hernandez-Salazar about his reasons for starting the 'Street Angels' project, the assassination of the Bishop and this response from the people who respected and cared for him seems to have been a significant motivator.

That moment [the demonstration] for me was very important because I realised how important it is to express yourself in a public space. And I think I became aware in that moment, that the collective unconscious dwells in the streets, in the public space, not in the museums. So if you want to really address a lot of people or society, you have to go to the streets. Or to public spaces. So that's when I began using the public space.<sup>76</sup>

From this it is clear that Hernandez-Salazar wanted to communicate with the public through the use of his photographs, but that he also wanted to provoke a response from them. With 'Street Angels', Hernandez-Salazar was clearly attempting to gain a reaction from his viewers, even if it was just to stir thought within their unconscious minds, as either individuals or a collective society; he wanted to challenge the

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey

continued influence and impunity that members of the regime possessed, a situation only emphasised by the assassination of Bishop Gerardi.



Fig.2.14 The demonstration that took place following the assassination of Bishop Gerardi.

Many of the protestors in this image are carrying copies of ‘Clarification’. The words, ‘Guatemala: Nunca Mas’ (Guatemala: Never Again) are the title of the Catholic Church’s report, the Recovery of Historical Memory Project.

Photograph by Daniel Hernandez-Salazar (1998), taken from David Gonzalez, ‘Angels Watch Over Memories of War’, *Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism*, *The New York Times*, [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?_r=0)

To create ‘Street Angels’, Hernandez-Salazar began to produce multiple copies of the image of the fourth angel, on a larger scale, in order to paste them onto the streets of Guatemala City. The image was made up of multiple sheets of paper, about sixty, to make it easier to paste onto walls and harder to detect when carrying; and Hernandez-Salazar recruited about forty of his friends to assist him in this task.<sup>77</sup>

On the first anniversary of the assassination of Bishop Gerardi, Hernandez-Salazar first spread the images of the angels across Guatemala City. Working in small groups,

<sup>77</sup> Gonzalez, ‘Angels Watch Over Memories of War’, *Lens*, *The New York Times*, [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?_r=0)

he and his friends installed thirty-five angels across the capital in one night.<sup>78</sup> Hernandez-Salazar chose to install these large reproductions in areas around Guatemala City that were associated with the conflict and its protagonists. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau wrote, in relation to the city as a space: ‘there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can “invoke” or not’.<sup>79</sup> Hernandez-Salazar’s choices of locations were intended to, as Certeau puts it, ‘invoke’ spirits that lay dormant. As with the artwork discussed previously, the disappeared ‘haunt’ Guatemala’s capital: such hauntings occur where absences are felt most intensely, ‘in the fissures where people once lived, and in crevices where they were made to disappear’.<sup>80</sup> The angels make the absent present, but rather than making the absent disappeared present as individuals, as in the exhibition artwork, the angels focus attention more on the use of disappearance and on those who performed this act of violence: they make the perpetrators and their sustained impunity visible. They remind the population that the country’s past remains an unresolved dilemma.<sup>81</sup>

Since the spaces that Hernandez-Salazar selected for these images were all locations associated with the perpetrators or victims of violence (Bishop Gerardi), the appearance of these angels was a very public challenge, one that was visible to all who passed by, to those forces who had been involved in the civil war. It created a physical mark revealing spaces associated with violence that the government would otherwise choose to ignore. When I asked Hernandez-Salazar how he had chosen

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>79</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984), p.108

<sup>80</sup> Steven Hoelscher, ‘Angels of Memory: Photography and Haunting in Guatemala City’, *GeoJournal*, Vol.73: 3 (2008), pp.195-217

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*

these different spaces, his answer reflected this idea of wanting to indicate the invisible identity of the visible space through a demonstrative action:

I selected the spaces because they were connected with Gerardi and his struggle, or connected with the perpetrators of the war, or connected with the countries, particularly the US, who supported the coup d'état against Arbenz in the fifties, and after that, coup d'état was like the start point of all the repression, and the war, and the abuse that came after, so I always remember the responsibility the US has here, so I install the angel next to, for example, the US embassy, as close as I could... and then next to military bases, next to Gerardi church.<sup>82</sup>

What is interesting about the spaces that Hernandez-Salazar chose is that they recall the historical part that countries such as the United States played in the civil war, as well as acts of violence that occurred in Guatemala itself: they identify international, as well as national, perpetrators of violence. His work attempts to create a thorough awareness of all those who were responsible for the deaths and disappearances that occurred. He does not limit it to those events or people that the population may have direct memories of. With this he expands the horizons and ambitions of what it is his work is seeking to do. It is not just the civil war itself that his work seeks to draw attention to and challenge, but also its starting point and the culpability for this on both a national and international scale.

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey



Fig.2.15 An angel on the Portal del Comercio (merchant galleries).

This road is on Guatemala City's central square: a space that many Guatemalans frequently pass through.

Photograph by Daniel Hernandez-Salazar (1999), taken from David Gonzalez, 'Angels Watch Over Memories of War', *Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism*, *The New York Times*, [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?_r=0)

Through these installations, Hernandez-Salazar claimed spaces around the city, forcing remembrance and recognition of those responsible for violence, but also of the lack of action following its conclusion. Although the spaces that the images were placed in were connected with the violence, the presence of the image reinforced the past of that space. The military base, outside of which Hernandez-Salazar positioned one of his angels, was transformed from being just a military base, to a powerful marker of the site and space where violence had occurred, and where perpetrators still lurked. As Miguel Flores Castellanos notes, 'the location of the artistic action connect[ed] place with history, memory with remembrance; the angel insists that nothing is forgotten.'<sup>83</sup> For the disappeared, this emphasis on not forgetting anything is especially important owing to their vulnerable position: no

<sup>83</sup> Miguel Flores Castellanos, *Icon of Memory*, in 'So That All Shall Know' (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), p.26



physical presence makes it easier to forget. By connecting the disappeared to a space through the Angels, the victims of disappearance, and their memory, is made visible.

Initially the response to the Angels was somewhat muted. Many of Hernandez-Salazar's friends contacted him upon seeing them to let him know that the angels were up in the city. Rather than acknowledge his role in this, Hernandez-Salazar told me that feigned ignorance to the entire thing.

I pretended I didn't know because the project of course was a secret, because we were afraid that if they killed the Bishop they could go after us, so we kept our names out of it... the night we did the installation we sent a press release to the newspapers but without a signature. We only signed it like, 'men and women for clarification'.<sup>84</sup>

Although they had sent out a press release, no papers initially published anything about the angels. However, several days later a newspaper published an article that connected the appearance of the angels with the recent anniversary of the Bishop's death. The reaction to the angels after this article appeared changed dramatically, and Hernandez-Salazar told me with a certain amount of glee how the military reacted to this revelation of the angels' significance:

The article came out, immediately all the angels next to the military bases were taken down. And for me, that was a very clear message that the military were responsible for the killing, because if not they shouldn't really care about that...that was the strongest reaction I had to my work, the destruction of the angels. And then other angels were taken down...for me it was like a metaphor of the disappearance of people, because even the angels were being disappeared, trying to deny and hide things.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Daniel Hernandez-Salazar, 24/10/2014, by Katherine Bailey



Fig.2.16 Three photographs of the angel.

This angel was positioned across from military intelligence facilities. Hernandez-Salazar took these photographs to show how the angel was destroyed over time. Given the pattern of destruction that is present in this image: starting from the bottom, seemingly torn off rather than worn by the weather, we can assume that a person or persons tried to remove this image.

Photograph by Daniel Hernandez-Salazar (1999), taken from David Gonzalez, 'Angels Watch Over Memories of War', *Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism*, *The New York Times*, [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/angels-watch-over-memories-of-war/?_r=0)

As Hernandez-Salazar had been photographing each angel since the first day it had been installed, he managed successfully to document this response to his work (see Figure 2.16). Although the military attempted to destroy these markers that pointed to their responsibility and guilt, in their haste to remove them they only further ingrained the suggestion of culpability that the positioning of the angel had created. As Lyman G. Chaffee has noted, any form of government oppression to street art is a clear indication that the work is effective in some way: with ‘Street Angels’, the message being communicated and the memories suggested were clearly aggravating and in opposition to the wishes of the military.<sup>86</sup>

‘Street Angels’ offered a very clear challenge to the silence that the Guatemalan State had tried to create and preserve around the past. Hernandez-Salazar physically identified spaces within society that were endowed with memories of the violence of Guatemala’s civil war, whether in relation to activities that had taken place there or the roles of the people who worked in those buildings. The angels sought to remind people of the past contained within society and in doing this, alert them to the connections to this civil war era that still remained in present day Guatemala, such as the continued absence of the disappeared and the failure on the part of the State to try any of those responsible for crimes committed during the civil war.

The use of significant spaces is a tool that the next memorial examined in this chapter also engages with. Demonstrations that occur on the National and International Days Against Forced Disappearance position themselves in spaces that emphasise the challenge each of them wishes to convey. Hernandez-Salazar’s angels were intended to surprise people in their daily lives, and these events also have the

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<sup>86</sup> Lyman G. Chaffee, *Political Protests and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* (London: Greenwood Press, 1993), p.30

intention of catching people's attention; however, the methods through which they do this are less subtle and more vocal. They seek to attract people in order to engage them in discussions about the disappeared. These memorials are also transient events, in that while they may reappear annually on the same date, they only exist for that specific day in the year. In terms of contest, what this transience lends these memorials is the ability to encapsulate any changes in contemporary society that have affected the disappeared. As Nora Strejilevich writes, 'the performative memorials...have the capacity to change again and again, since they are shaped by and for the present'.<sup>87</sup> The annual days are intended to remember the disappeared but also to contest actions performed by the State in the present day. They 'honour' the disappeared, a function that Nicholas Wolterstorff argues is essential for memorials, by keeping the memory of the disappeared alive.<sup>88</sup>

*Demonstrations on the National and International Days Against Forced Disappearance*

The National Day Against Forced Disappearance takes place every year on 21 June. The date was chosen because of its historical significance: on the evening of 21 June 1980 one of the most prominent incidents of disappearance occurred in Guatemala City (discussed in the preceding chapter). Twenty-seven union leaders from the National Workers Confederation (CNT) were disappeared by members of the army and the police force. They had been detained during the day in CNT headquarters, and the street outside closed to traffic by members of the National Police; one can imagine to prevent any congestion that would stop the cars from leaving the scene of the disappearance quickly, and also to reduce the number of

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<sup>87</sup> Nora Strejilevich, 'Performative Memorial Sites and Resistance in Argentina', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, Vol.22: 3 (2010), pp.236-243

<sup>88</sup> Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought* (2015), p.146

witnesses present.<sup>89</sup> In 1990, GAM decided to start openly campaigning to have a national day that would work to stop forced disappearances from happening and also recognise the disappearances that had gone before. During the time it took them to persuade the government to create this day, GAM organised many protest marches that demanded to know where the disappeared were, that justice be done for the crimes committed, and that the day should be officially acknowledged.<sup>90</sup> GAM eventually achieved at least part of their aim: that was to see the memory of the trade union disappearances recognised, along with other incidents of disappearance, on an annual day every year. On 28 July 2004 the Guatemalan government signed the day into existence.

This decision to allow a National Day to take place that remembered the disappeared is somewhat out of character with the usual silence of Guatemalan governments. However, given the protests that were taking place to demand that such a day be created, there is the possibility that the State hoped introducing such a day would contain the issue of disappearances. GAM had been campaigning for such a day to be recognised for roughly fourteen years, so it was clear that they were not going to stop until they were heard. Unlike with information concerning the disappearances, and the prosecution of perpetrators, both of which the State can refuse based on the claim that such information does not exist (either to distribute or use to prosecute), there was no credible reason that could be offered for why such a day could not be introduced. Thereafter, if the day were cancelled after it had been

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<sup>89</sup> Amnesty International, *Guatemala: All the truth, justice for all*, 13 May 1998, AMR 34/002/1998, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a9ba4.html> (Accessed 12/3/2017)

<sup>90</sup> Comunicarte: Asociación Guatemalteca para la Comunicación el Arte y la Cultura, *Never Forget June 21<sup>st</sup> 'National Day Against Forced Disappearances'*, <http://noticiascomunicarte.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/prohibido-olvidar-21-de-junio-dia.html> (Accessed 12/3/2017)

introduced, it is easy to imagine that such an action would inspire more protests and therefore once again create a focus on the disappearances and the disappeared.

When I visited Guatemala City in June 2015, I attended the demonstration that occurred on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance. This day is an intervention in the public sphere, intended to remember all those who were disappeared but also to draw attention to the continued lack of closure around this form of violence. The demonstration on this day takes place in the capital's Central Park. For a form of memorial that seeks to draw the attention of crowds of people, choosing Central Park as a location could not have been better. As was discussed in relation to the Metropolitan Cathedral, the park is one of the busiest locations in the city, and the square around it holds some of the most significant buildings (see Figure 2.5). On the day in question, the park was also playing host to a market that sets up every Sunday and draws people in from around the city: it sells clothes, food, and various other sundries. There was even a man with a herd of goats wandering along the edge of the plaza selling milk and cheese, who, I was later informed, was a regular visitor to the Sunday market.

One of the groups namely responsible for arranging the demonstration is the organisation H.I.J.O.S (*Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio*, Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetfulness and Silence), which has a strong focus on remembering the violence that happened but also seeing justice done for those who were disappeared. David Oliva had worked with H.I.J.O.S in Guatemala for about eight years when I spoke with him. He joined the organisation because it was a collective and therefore the organisational structure was horizontal rather than vertical. He made clear to me that there was a desire, at least within H.I.J.O.S, to create a dialogue with the general public about the

disappearances, and to spread an awareness of this memory on as wide a scale as possible.<sup>91</sup> By positioning the demonstration in such a popular public place, there was much greater potential that the thoughts, experiences, and information presented would be shared amongst a wide number of people (see Figure 2.17).



Fig.2.17 Central Park, Guatemala City, on a Sunday evening. Photograph taken from Ryan Rubi, 'The Life of a Backpacker', <http://lifeofabackpacker.com/why-you-need-to-man-up-and-visit-guatemala-city/>

At the demonstration I attended, and at every demonstration on the National Day so far, the focus of attention was based around and in a large white marquee. The marquee itself was set at one edge of the park, located opposite the National Palace. The Palace was once the seat of power within Guatemala; it was where the President of the country resided while in office. Although the Palace is now used as a Museum of Culture, as mentioned previously, it is still used for the passing of important acts of government and when these demonstrations started it was the home of the government. When confronted with the narrative being projected by the

<sup>91</sup> Interview with David Oliva, 07/10/2015, by Katherine Bailey

demonstration, the Palace becomes not just the building that once housed those in power, but a representation of the forces responsible for committing the crime of disappearance and of the continued denial to release information. In short, it becomes a physical expression of everything that is being opposed.

On the outside of this marquee there was a banner spray-painted with the words: '*Justicia por los desaparecidos*' (Justice for the disappeared), and underneath this, faces of the disappeared had been drawn, enclosed on either side by two red carnations (see Figure 2.18). Red carnations are frequently used by organisations associated with the disappeared in Guatemala: they appear on material produced by organisations, on posters, and on websites. In Hispanic cultures, red carnations represent death, or spilled blood, fitting with the remembrance of Guatemala's violent past.<sup>92</sup> Images of the disappeared were prevalent throughout the day. Many of the people I saw came to the event with photographs of their disappeared relative either held in their hands, on placards, or stuck on to pieces of cardboard and worn around their necks. This use of photographs at events designed to remember the disappeared is not unusual. At the protests organised by the Saturday Mothers in Turkey, for instance, many of those women who attend the weekly protests bring photographs of their relatives with them. The same has also occurred in Argentina with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. For many, the photographs of their disappeared relative are one of the few remaining possessions they have that actually shows the person as they were. In an environment where the State refuses to share information about the disappeared or even recognise their existence, photographs of the disappeared become a personal space that cannot be controlled: the image of the disappeared and the

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<sup>92</sup> Benjamin Keen, Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America, Volume 2* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2013), p.473  
 María DeGuzmán, *Buenas Noches, American Culture: Latino Aesthetics of Night* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), p.98



memories attached to that image can be engaged with at the owner's choosing rather than subject to the actions of the State.

The presence of photographs and hand-drawn images not only brings that disappeared individual to the day of remembrance, but also reminds those watching of the people who make up the name 'the disappeared': it humanises what may otherwise be an abstract and absent concept. The photographs make the disappeared present and challenge their absence. As Barthes wrote, photographs have a 'special credibility'.<sup>93</sup> The use of photographs contests the attempt to make the person pictured disappear completely and refutes claims made by the State that the disappeared did not exist.



Fig.2.18 A banner at the 2015 National Day Against Forced Disappearance demonstration.

It shows the banner that was hung on one side of the marquee, and the two red carnations that decorated it. On the left hand side of the image, it is possible to see a t-shirt reading 'Si Hubo Genocidio' (Yes there was genocide), which was for sale that day. It reinforces the idea of contest at the heart of this demonstration: speaking out against the silence surrounding the disappearances and the attitude of the State towards the genocide.

<sup>93</sup> Peter Smith, Carolyn Lefley, *Rethinking Photography: Histories, Theories and Education* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p.82

The idea of justice, as expressed on the banner in Figure 2.18, was one of the central focuses of this demonstration: contesting the impunity that exists in Guatemala and the failure by the government to prosecute those responsible for the crime of disappearance. During the event I attended, a microphone was available for people to speak into, to share their thoughts. What was noticeable about those who got up to speak was the connection that many of them made between the disappeared and the then current political situation in Guatemala. My time in Guatemala City coincided with on-going mass protests against corruption in the Guatemalan government. Thousands of people travelled to the city's Central Park to demand that (now former) president Otto Pérez Molina resign so he could face criminal charges for corruption; something that was prevented by his presidential immunity.<sup>94</sup> One woman who stood up to use the microphone tied the fight against corruption in Guatemala to the ideals that the disappeared suffered for. She called on people to take to the streets to fight, to pay homage to the revolutionary ideas of the 45,000; she said that the best way to pay homage was to remember their ideas, their fight against oppression, and fight for changes that are still sought after today. Another speaker declared that they were there to tell corrupt politicians that the spirit of those who were killed is still alive. They spoke of the need to talk about the pain that is left in the heart of every family since the genocide was committed; that Guatemala was living the consequences of that war today.

The influence that different agents have upon the construction of memorials is evident in the demonstrations, as although the other groups involved, like GAM and FAMDEGUA (*Asociación Familiares de Detenidos - Desaparecidos de Guatemala*, or The Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained in Guatemala), do focus on

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<sup>94</sup> Geovanni Contreras and Irving Escobar, 'Renuncia el presidente Otto Pérez', *Presna Libre* (September 2015), <http://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/politica/renuncia-el-presidente-otto-perez> (Accessed 14/3/2017)

achieving justice for the disappeared, they are not as vocal with this idea as H.I.J.O.S. In June 2007 prior to the National Day Against Forced Disappearance, H.I.J.O.S posted a letter on their website explaining their motives and wishes for the day ahead. The extract below represents clearly a desire not only for legal justice, but also for a public and forceful event of remembrance for the disappeared; like Hernandez-Salazar's fourth angel, the impetus is to shout to be heard above the enforced silence.

Entrenched in our shout for memory, truth and justice, we come out in this new month of June, with the hope that within and through our struggle, they will never die. We come out once again in an Offensive for Remembrance and invite you to join us in this shout for those forcibly disappeared.<sup>95</sup>

What is noticeable about the description given within the letter is this referral to 'an Offensive for Remembrance'. The idea of remembrance is fitting with the organisation and the intention of the day, but it is the use of the word 'offensive' that is interesting here. Their collective remembrance of the disappeared is also a fight against the silence that threatens to forget the disappeared, and the impunity that allows perpetrators to escape retribution for their crimes. The demonstration on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance incorporates a variety of challenges to the actions of the State: it contests the absence of the disappeared and the silence that surrounds them; the failure of the government to provide information about the disappeared; and the lack of punishment of those who committed the crime of disappearance during the armed conflict. These ideas are also reflected in the demonstration that takes place on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance.

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<sup>95</sup> James Rodríguez, 'Offensive For Remembrance: Where Are The Disappeared?', *MiMundo.Org*, <http://blog.mimundo.org/2007/06/offensive-for-remembrance-where-are-the-disappeared/> (Accessed 10/02/2016)

The International Day for the disappeared takes place on 31 August every year. It was introduced by the United Nations in 2011, which was concerned about the increase in disappearances worldwide; in response to this they adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.<sup>96</sup> The International Day was part of this incentive to draw attention to this form of violence and the destruction that it causes. On 30 August 2016, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released a statement about the intention for the day, which included the following:

On this International Day, I call on States to acknowledge that family members and friends of the disappeared are also victims, and to guarantee their right to full protection from any form of reprisals. I also urge all Member States to sign, ratify or accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which includes specific provisions against the ill-treatment or intimidation of witnesses, relatives, and persons participating in the investigation of enforced disappearances. Let us all show solidarity with the victims and their relatives as they strive to realize their right for truth and justice.<sup>97</sup>

It is clear from this statement that the UN. intended the day to serve as a means through which numerous States around the world would acknowledge the victims of disappearance, and agree to bringing an end to disappearances.

In Guatemala, the demonstration that is held on this annual day follows this idea of recognising the disappeared as victims of a crime, but owing to the reluctance of the State to do the same, the element of contest is still present. Those who attend demand to know where the disappeared are and that justice be achieved by prosecuting those responsible for the crime of disappearance. The demonstration held on this day is similar to that held on the National Day event: different actors gather

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<sup>96</sup> United Nations, 'International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance', <http://www.un.org/en/events/disappearancesday/> (Accessed 15/3/2017)

<sup>97</sup> Ban Ki-moon, 'Secretary-General, on International Day, Calls on States to Acknowledge Family, Friends of Disappeared as Victims of Enforced Disappearances', <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm18010.doc.htm> (Accessed 15/3/2017)

and create a display in Central Park that attracts the attention of passers-by. Photographs of the disappeared are used, once again challenging their continued absence within Guatemalan society; red carnations are also displayed alongside these photographs (see Figure 2.19).



Fig.2.19 Photographs of the disappeared at the 2010 International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance.

Photographs of the disappeared were laid out on the ground in Central Park and red carnations placed on top of these images.

Photograph by Johan Ordanez (2010), taken from <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/license/103731369>

In terms of why the State allows such a demonstration to occur, it would reflect negatively on the Guatemalan government if they were to oppose an international incentive to recognise the disappeared; but despite the UN calling for solidarity with those fighting for ‘truth and justice’, the State does not get involved with the demonstration held on this day. Since the International Day has only existed since 2011 it is arguably difficult to assess whether or not such international pressures to recognise the disappeared and their families and friends as victims will have any impact on the actions of the Guatemalan government. However, pressure on an

international scale to deliver legal justice and make records available to all those families searching may yet advance the discovery of the disappeared in Guatemala.

From the perspective of the government, this attention to what was intended to be a discreet and risk free method of violence will not be welcome. It not only draws attention to the violence of the past, but also to the failure of previous and current governments to act on many of the recommendations presented in both truth commissions that would have allowed a reconciliation process to begin and offered some comfort to the families of the disappeared. When I interviewed Carlos Juarez, one of the people who work for the organization GAM, he told me that ‘the State has never wanted to make this subject [the disappearances] a part of the government program... eighteen years since the Peace Accords there has not been a definite project or program that dignifies the memory of the victims.’<sup>98</sup>

Maria Luisa Rosal whose father was disappeared in 1983 by Guatemalan authorities, wrote the following about the International Day:

In the process of searching, the personal becomes collective; the collective becomes the political. Speaking out and continuing to remember all of the disappeared, is a political decision and an ethical obligation to combat impunity – by *not forgetting*, we are honoring the memory of the disappeared and saying *this happened here....* Let’s accompany those family members who for years have been demanding truth and justice and continue their tireless search. Let’s do this. Let’s do it because in the process, the disappeared will be present among each of us.<sup>99</sup>

This emphasis that Maria Luisa Rosal places on solidarity and strength through unity is a noticeable characteristic of the International Day Against Forced Disappearances.

What comes across strongly in the above extract is this belief that by supporting all those who are still searching for the disappeared, regardless of what country they are

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Carlos Juárez, 08/07/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>99</sup> Maria Luisa Rosal, ‘Remembering: UN International Day, Victims of Enforced Disappearance’, *Popular Resistance*, <https://www.popularresistance.org/remembering-un-international-dayvictims-of-enforced-disappearances/> (Accessed 16/3/2017)

in or how long they have been looking, the disappeared will be remembered and their memory honored. Although not as direct as H.I.J.O.S with their ‘offensives of memory’, this comradeship that is evoked between those families and friends of the disappeared, creates a clear division between the powers that prevent information about the disappeared from being discovered, and those who are determined to find it: it sets up again this sensation and impression of a prolonged fight against two forces. With this in mind, the International Day becomes a definite action designed to agitate on behalf of those who are searching for the disappeared: any form of open and public remembrance of the disappeared is perceived as a fight against the enforced governmental silence.

This chapter now turns to the final memorial that will be explored in relation to the idea of contest. As with ‘Street Angels’ and the events held on the National and International Days, Regina Galindo’s work, ‘*¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?*’, makes use of specific space to communicate the idea of contest clearly and to make the past visible to as many people as possible.

*Regina Galindo ‘¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?’ (Who Can Erase The Traces?)*

Regina Galindo is a Guatemalan born performance artist who lives and works in Guatemala. Her work centres on the armed conflict: through the often shocking forms that this work takes, Galindo strives to have the violence of the past recognised and to evoke a response from her viewers.<sup>100</sup> There are very clear elements of contest within her work: in ‘Tierra’ for example, she stood naked in a field while an earth-moving machine destroyed the ground around her, to reflect the incidents in the conflict in which innocent citizens were murdered and their bodies buried in a mass

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<sup>100</sup> Guggenheim Collection, ‘Regina José Galindo’, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/regina-jose-galindo> (Accessed 16/3/2017)

grave. Her most well known piece of work however, and a piece in which this idea of contest is especially prevalent, is her performance ‘*¿Quien Puede Borrarr Las Huellas?*’ (Who Can Erase The Traces?).

In 2003 it was announced that Efraín Ríos Montt had unanimously been selected as the presidential candidate for the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG); this was despite the constitutional ruling that former dictators may not run for presidency. However, many Guatemalans did not meet Ríos Montt’s presidential campaign with enthusiasm, with crowds even booing and jeering him when he turned up to vote at a school in Guatemala City.<sup>101</sup> Regina Galindo was living in Guatemala City at the time of this announcement. She stated in an interview conducted in 2006:

I cried out, I kicked and stomped my feet, I cursed the system that rules us. How was it possible that a character as dark as this would have such power with which to bend everything to his will?<sup>102</sup>

It was this anger, and a desire to challenge what she considered to be a dangerous and corrupt decision, which led her to create the piece ‘*¿Quien Puede Borrarr Las Huellas?*’ As with the demonstrations, the violence of the past and the situation in the present are linked within Galindo’s performance: both inspired the piece to be created. This performance entailed Galindo dipping her feet into a basin of human blood, and then walking the route from the Constitutional Court to the National Palace, leaving a trail of bloody footprints behind her (see Figure 2.20).

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<sup>101</sup> Tim Weiner, ‘Guatemalan Voters Reject a Former Dictator’, *The New York Times* (November 2003), <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/10/world/guatemalan-voters-reject-a-former-dictator.html> (Accessed 16/03/2017)

<sup>102</sup> Francisco Goldman, ‘Regina José Galindo’, *BOMB- Artists in Conversation*, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2780/regina-jos-galindo> (Accessed 16/03/2017)





Fig.2.20 A map that shows the distance between the National Palace and the Constitutional Court.

The Palace (Palacio Nacional De La Cultura de Guatemala) is located in the top left corner, and the Court (Corte de Constitucionalidad) in the bottom right.

When Galindo and I discussed the creation of ‘*¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?*’ I asked her what she had been hoping to evoke with these footprints, what they represented. She told me that the footprints she created were ‘in memory of all the victims of genocide in Guatemala’: they served as a literal reminder to all who saw them of the blood that had been spilt.<sup>103</sup> ‘In this work, the line between Galindo’s body as object and subject was so subtle that the blood covering her feet appeared to be her own; she embodied the war’s victims, taking their blood as hers.’<sup>104</sup> For the disappeared, such an expression of the violence that was endured

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Regina José Galindo, 11/02/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>104</sup> Guggenheim Collection, ‘Regina José Galindo’, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/regina-jose-galindo> (Accessed 16/3/2017)

prevents their absence from being overlooked: Galindo wanted to remind people of the past through a physical statement.



Fig.2.21 A photograph taken of Galindo performing ‘¿Quién Puede Borrarse Las Huellas?’.

It is possible to see the trail of footprints behind her and the basin of blood that she carried to perform the piece.

Image taken from: Regina José Galindo, *¿Quién Puede Borrarse Las Huellas? A Walk from the Court Of Constitutionality to the National Palace of Guatemala, leaving a trail of footprints in memory of the victims of armed conflict in Guatemala, 2003*, on <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2780/regina-jos-galindo>

The performance of this piece took around forty-five minutes. Galindo had the performance filmed, and later, curator Rosina Cazali circulated images of her performing with a text speaking out against Ríos Montt’s presidential candidacy.<sup>105</sup> It is not known how long the footprints themselves lasted, but Galindo’s focus was the performance itself and the message this sent rather than its longevity. Similar to

<sup>105</sup> Francisco Goldman, ‘Regina José Galindo’, *BOMB- Artists in Conversation*, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2780/regina-jos-galindo> (Accessed 16/03/2017)

Hernandez-Salazar's 'Street Angels', the original performance of this piece and its results were not intended to be permanent: it was created in order to communicate a key idea that rested, in part, on the location it was in. Although the piece was disruptive, while creating the footprints Galindo reported that no one interacted with her or questioned what she was doing. Even when she arrived at the National Palace and was faced with a line of police officers that were guarding its entrance, there was still no reaction.

She made two final footprints side by side at the main door and left the bowl of blood next to them (see Figure 2.22). Galindo described that she felt 'eyes looking back at [her]' but that 'nobody followed me, nobody said anything.'<sup>106</sup> One might have expected her performance to cause more of a reaction in those who saw it, but given the concentration that Galindo performed with and the unusual nature of her act, onlookers were not encouraged to ask her questions; and although the police officers were positioned in front of the National Palace, Galindo made no attempt to threaten or damage the Palace itself or the people around it, so they may have been unsure about how to respond to such a performance, especially as they were being filmed.

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*



Fig.2.22 A photograph of Galindo finishing her performance. In the image it is possible to see the bowl of blood on the floor, and the police officers guarding the entrance to the National Palace. Photograph taken by Victor Pérez, on 'Regina José Galindo', Brooklyn Museum, [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/regina-jose-galindo](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/regina-jose-galindo)

What identifies Galindo's piece as an open and disruptive form of contest against the State, is not only the extremely provocative material that she used (although Galindo used human blood in her performance, the appearance of any substance that looked like blood would have arguably had the same impact) but also her use of space. The bloody footprints led directly to the Palace, and therefore to Ríos Montt, creating a powerful link between him and his actions during the civil war, and the blood of the footprints. Even if an individual were not familiar with the circumstances under which Galindo performed this piece, there can only be negative connotations drawn from witnessing bloody footprints leading up to the steps of the Palace. That the residents of Guatemala City would have been more than aware of the announcement that the former dictator was planning to run for president makes the

piece more effective, as the link is made between the route Ríos Montt would take if his bid was successful, and the violence he inflicted on Guatemala the last time he was in power.

As an act of defiance and opposition to the State, Galindo drew attention to the past that the government, and especially Ríos Montt, were hoping would remain ignored. She successfully made visible the ‘stains of [Ríos Montt’s] military actions upon the nation, kept out of view or washed away in collective memory’.<sup>107</sup> The disappeared and all the victims of violence were given a physical, tangible presence within the streets of Guatemala City. In doing this, she also openly contested the presentation of Ríos Montt as an honourable Statesman who was suitable to become president; similar to ‘Street Angels’, ‘¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?’ drew attention, and made visible, the perpetrators of past violence.

By reaching out and drawing on the past, Galindo presented an image of the danger such a presidency could bring in the future. ‘Memory’s recovery is, fundamentally, about power’, and this is an idea that is clear to see in Galindo’s performance piece.<sup>108</sup> She was recovering the past, Guatemala’s violent past and Ríos Montt’s role within this, in order to affect the process the power. By challenging the presentation that he gave of himself, Galindo was trying to take control over the past, away from former regime members, in order to influence the present and show people the crimes, deaths, and disappearances that Ríos Montt was truly responsible for.

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<sup>107</sup> Ara H. Merjian, ‘Regina José Galindo: Piel de Gallina’, *Frieze*, <http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/regina-jose-galindo-piel-de-gallina/>

<sup>108</sup> Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p.19

## Conclusion

Memorials that contest exist in a variety of different forms. As this chapter has shown, it is possible to challenge the attitude and actions of the State through physical, static memorials like the columns outside the Cathedral, but also through pieces of artwork, both performance pieces and photographs, and demonstrations. Although the form or the presentation of each memorial is slightly different, each communicates the idea of contest clearly and attempts to remove the silence that surrounds the disappeared so they may be remembered. The memorials discussed made use of space in order to communicate this challenge with more force. The identification of certain spaces within Guatemala that were related to the violence of the past removed the anonymity and invisibility that still surrounds the actions of perpetrators; although no sites where the disappeared were held after their capture can (currently) be identified within Guatemala City, there can be an awareness created of the spaces occupied by the forces who were responsible for this crime. Space was also used so that objections and challenges could be made directly to the State, and so members of the public would be able to make a connection between the violence spoken about and the government. The space affected how the memorial would be read, but the memorial also transformed the space and gave it greater meaning.

The temporality of certain memorials allowed for any changes concerning the disappeared in the present to be incorporated. The disappearances in Guatemala are not restricted to the past; the effects of this form of violence continue to be experienced in the present and the disappeared themselves remain lost and liminal, rather than being a concluded event in the past. Maurice Halbwachs wrote that ‘memory is, in fact, part of the symbolic and political struggle of each time, of each ‘present’’, and it is likely that the memory and memorials surrounding the

disappeared will continue to evolve as time progresses and new ‘presents’ are reached.<sup>109</sup> The demonstrations, for instance, are partially organised by H.I.J.O.S, who are arguably the next generation to suffer because of the disappearances. Their impressions of the past, and the present that they operate in, will be different to that of members of organisations like GAM, or family members whose children or younger relatives were taken. The temporality of certain memorials allow for these changes to occur without too much upheaval, as they are able to encapsulate contemporary challenges concerning the disappeared without needing to radically change their form.

The lack of regime change in Guatemala has had an impact on all memorials created for the disappeared. As the following chapters show, the resistance on the part of governments to discuss the past has shaped any attempts to remember the disappeared. Although remembering the individuals who were victims of disappearance is a central part of all these memorials, there is always a certain amount of recognition that such remembrance takes place against a backdrop of state-enforced silence. The memorials discussed in this chapter, which have this idea of contest as their primary focus, are arguably a product of the current political situation in Guatemala. Although memorials to the disappeared would still exist if there were a regime change and the State recognised their responsibility for these crimes, there would not be such a need to force memories of the disappeared into the public sphere, as they would already have a place where such memories could be discussed. However, until such a regime change occurs, there will continue to be a need in Guatemala (from the perspective of those who seek to remember the disappeared) for memorials that contest and challenge the State’s refusal to discuss the past and remember the disappeared.

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<sup>109</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* trans. by Lewis A. Coser (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.49

### **Chapter Three** **Recover**

The continued absence of victims of disappearance is one of the central characteristics of this form of violence, and a theme that has been discussed in relation to a number of memorials so far in this thesis. In chapter two we saw how this absence has been challenged by those connected to the disappeared: the silence that surrounds them, in part created by the disappeared's liminal status, at least momentarily shattered by demands for their return, by calls for justice, and by persistent reminders that such a form of violence took place and that the victims are still missing. What this chapter discusses is another form of challenge that emerges in memorials in relation to this absence: confronting the loss that such absence creates. In chapter one I explored in detail how the disappearances affect the family members who are left behind, but the idea of loss here extends beyond that experienced by relatives and considers loss in relation to the disappeared themselves: what they have lost. With their absence they are physically lost: their bodies are missing and some of them may never be found or identified. In addition to this, there is also the loss of the disappeared as people, who they were and what they did prior to their disappearance.

If you examine the treatment of disappearance in numerous countries, it is common to find that in an attempt to justify the use of this form of violence, the disappeared are often presented as having engaged in criminal, seditious behaviour. In Argentina, for example, when the military Junta were in power, the threat and act of disappearance was performed by the State or forces connected to the State operating with permission. Disappearances would be accompanied by speeches or press releases from State officials who would denounce those who had been taken, linking them to



the enemies the State was fighting.<sup>1</sup> In Guatemala, the effect of such propaganda was that families of the disappeared were often left with no one to turn to. Doors would be shut to them out of fear that association with those related to ‘criminals’ would lead to incrimination. One woman who gave her testimony to the researchers for the Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) described how she was shunned by friends and family members: ‘Some relatives and friends avoided us in the street as if we were lepers’.<sup>2</sup>

This connection between those who were disappeared and the idea of criminality (almost a ‘they-would-not-have-been-disappeared-unless-they-were-doing-something-wrong’ suggestion) has persevered in Guatemala and there still remains a level of stigma attached to the disappeared and their relatives. Eglá Martínez Salazar has written that in some small and medium sized towns in Guatemala, the families of those people who joined insurgent units or were accused of doing so have been unable to talk about their relatives in public and have even hidden family photograph albums.<sup>3</sup> The disappeared, in terms of how they are publically remembered as people, therefore, have been lost in this myriad of negative associations as defined by the State, seen as criminals and a taboo subject not to be broached.

When these losses are taken into consideration, both the physical and the sense of identity, what is clear is that in terms of remembering and memorialising the disappeared, there is a need, for both the families of the disappeared and the disappeared themselves (even if in memory alone) for ‘recovery’, which is what this chapter will be focussing on. This relates to the physical, literal recovery of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jo Fisher, *Mother's of the Disappeared* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p.26

<sup>2</sup> Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p.13

<sup>3</sup> Eglá Martínez Salazar, *Global Coloniality of Power in Guatemala: Racism, Genocide, Citizenship* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), p.177

remains of the disappeared, and the more emotional or abstract recovery of their beliefs and behaviours.

Although there are two distinct types of recovery being discussed in this chapter: physical and abstract, in memorials for the disappeared these two forms of recovery often appear in tandem: working together, rather than as separate entities. This chapter therefore has not divided the memorials by ‘physical’ and ‘abstract’, but has instead organised discussions on a scale, starting with memorials where the physical remains of the disappeared takes precedence, such as the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union in Guatemala City, and moving onto those memorials where abstract recovery has a more dominant position, examining how personal recollections have been used to recover the truth (the truth according to families and friends) about the victims of disappearance, such as the memory books of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, and online memorials. Before examining the different case studies where the idea of recovery has been acted upon, this chapter first explores the concept of ‘recover’ in more detail.

### **‘Recover’**

‘Recover’ as a term suggests the existence of a former attachment: whoever or whatever is doing the recovery is taking back possession or control of something that was once theirs. It is fitting then to describe part of the process of memorialisation for the disappeared as a ‘recovery’, rather than, for instance, an uncovering (which would still fit with the idea of discovery that is awakened with exhumations and the sharing of memories). ‘Recovery’ plays upon the idea that the disappeared were once present. It is a term that harks back to a time before they became ‘the disappeared’, connecting to both the past and present, acknowledging the act of disappearance and the losses

endured, but also the push to achieve change and regain what was taken. The disappeared are *recovered*, rather than being found anew, and are returned to the families and societies to which they once belonged.

A significant part of recovery, which feeds into both the physical and more abstract senses of ‘recover’ in memorials, is the exhumation of remains. Exhumations represent the ‘assertion of victims’ power’: the hidden body is recovered and made visible, and with this recovery there emerges a degree of repossessed control.<sup>4</sup> Although families may search for the disappeared, may register acts of Habeas Corpus, and demand that those taken be returned home, it is still the forces who committed the disappearance that have control over the fate of the disappeared and then ultimately over their remains.<sup>5</sup> Anna Freud has discussed the dead body as a transitional object: access to the body allows those mourning the dead to recognise their loss and move from denial into detachment.<sup>6</sup> For relatives of the disappeared recovering the body provides some closure: it creates a certainty that their loved one is dead, rather than missing, and permits the process of mourning to develop in a more ‘normal’ manner. (The relationship that exists between grief and the disappeared is discussed more in chapter five: Grief.)

Yet the body of the disappeared also becomes a *political* transitional object. It represents the liberation of the disappeared from the control and power of the military, ending their absence and the enforced silence that surrounds them.<sup>7</sup> Once exhumed, the body of the disappeared is no longer in the control of the perpetrators,

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick Ball, Paul Kobrak, Herbert F. Spierer, *State Violence in Guatemala, 1960 – 1996: A Quantitative Reflection* (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1999), p.113

<sup>5</sup> María Fernanda Pérez Solla, *Enforced Disappearances in International Human Rights* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company Inc., 2006), p.66

<sup>6</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, ‘Disappearance, Protest, and Burial in Argentina’, in *Cultures Under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*, ed. Antonius C. G. M. Robben, Marcelo Suarez-Orozco (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.85

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

but is instead possessed by the families. It can be ceremonially buried and any death rites or rituals performed. For the Mayan people, this returning of the body allows them to conduct the spirit of the dead into the afterlife and prevent it from becoming a restless, potentially harmful presence.<sup>8</sup>

Outside of this personal sphere, the presence of the disappeared's physical body is also able to bear witness to the violence that it experienced, reinforcing this idea that the body offers political transition. It speaks out where the military would strive for it to be silent. The body identifies the cause of the person's death, and how they were treated prior to their execution, and so provides solid evidence that the crime of disappearance took place. The existence of this evidence then creates the possibility for a criminal trial. Under the National Reconciliation Law that was passed in 1996 by the National Assembly, it was agreed that a general amnesty would be put in place. This meant that the majority of violence performed by both soldiers and guerrilla in the conflict would not be treated as a punishable offence. The only exceptions to this rule were acts of genocide, torture, and disappearance.<sup>9</sup> The label of 'disappeared' then was, and remains, one of the few ways for families to achieve legal justice.

Despite many witnesses being prepared to share their experiences in court, and one need only look at the number of prosecution witnesses who were called at the Efraín Ríos Montt trial to understand the willingness that exists to testify, testimonials from witnesses have not always been treated as reliable.<sup>10</sup> There have been instances

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Gidley and Hannah Roberts, 'Memory and Monuments in Guatemala: Remembering the Dead and Solidarity with the Living', in *Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*, ed. Michael A. Hayes, David Tombs (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001), p.121

<sup>9</sup> Iain S. Maclean, 'Truth and Reconciliation: Hope for the nations or only as much as possible?', in *Reconciliation, Nations, and Churches in Latin America*, ed. Iain S. Maclean, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p.19

<sup>10</sup> Peter Canby, 'The Maya Genocide Trial', *The New Yorker* (May 2013), <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-maya-genocide-trial> (Accessed 03/08/2017)

of disappearance cases being taken to court and witness statements being dismissed as circumstantial.<sup>11</sup> Physical remains offer tangible, forensic proof of the violence that took place. They substantiate claims made by family members that their loved ones had been disappeared, and so cannot be so easily dismissed. As Clyde Snow, the instigator of the *Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* (FAFG) and the scientist often credited as being the ‘father of forensic anthropology’, stated about the study of forensic science, ‘the bones are talking. They talk softly sometimes but they never lie’.<sup>12</sup>

This desire to recover the past and have some control over how it is discussed is apparent in situations of disappearance outside of Guatemala as well. In Spain, for instance, the violence inflicted on the population under Franco’s regime has, until recently, not been spoken about openly. After Franco’s death in 1975 it was agreed by the newly installed democracy to draw a line under the past and not speak about it; those who were disappeared were to be left missing. However, since 2000 there has been an attempt to reclaim this past. The Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory was set up and by 2005 the remains of more than 500 people had been found and exhumed.<sup>13</sup> These exhumations were, Layla Renshaw argues, a ‘catalyst’ to create a new public discourse about the past. Rather than having to accept silence, those who had had relatives disappeared would now have the opportunity to talk about such experiences and reclaim the past, their past, from the enforced ‘pact of amnesia’.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Iosif Kovras, *Grassroots Activism and the Evolution of Transitional Justice: The Families of the Disappeared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.91

<sup>12</sup> Saul Elbein, ‘Bringing up the bodies in Guatemala’, *Aljazeera America* (February 2016), <http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2016/2/the-bodies-under-the-base.html> (Accessed 18/09/2017)

<sup>13</sup> Layla Renshaw, ‘Missing Bodies Near-at-Hand: The Dissonant Memory and Dormant Graves of the Spanish Civil War’, in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, ed. Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, Tim Flohr Sørensen ([Place of publication not identified]: Springer, 2014), p.47

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.46

The exhumations in Guatemala are not in themselves memorials despite the part they play in the literal recovering of the disappeared. They are a forensic process rather than one that seeks to remember, yet it is a process that is key to both physical *and* abstract ideas of ‘recover’ in memorials. The exhumed body, and the process of exhumation, as Simon Robins writes, restores to the missing a place in memory, both individual and collective.<sup>15</sup> The remains of the disappeared or the information and narrative that can be garnered from their discovery become memorialised once they are presented in a setting that is focussed on remembering the violence of the past and those who were lost as a result of it. In these spaces of memory, when the remains are put on display, the physicality of the body provides evidence; it authenticates the history being told, but the intention in presenting the body is one motivated by remembrance, rather than forensic scrutiny. The presence of remains also helps to dispel ideas that all those who were disappeared or killed were guerrilla. The discovery of the bodies of children and the elderly in clandestine graves, two groups unlikely to be involved with the insurgency, challenges the idea that the disappearances were a necessary, defensive action, and goes some way to rehabilitate the reputations of those who were disappeared.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas Keenan argued in relation to exhumations in Kurdistan that a process of ‘reindividuation’ is undertaken once the remains of a person are found and exhumed, and it is a concept that fits well with the recovery of the disappeared in Guatemala: the anonymous body of the disappeared is given back the identity that was taken from them; they become an individual once again.<sup>17</sup> In chapter two I examined how memorial artwork presented in a number of exhibitions made the

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<sup>15</sup> Simon Robins, *Families of the Missing: Contemporary Approaches to Transitional Justice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p.184

<sup>16</sup> Ball, Kobra, Spiner, *State Violence in Guatemala, 1960 – 1996* (1999), p.113

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Keenan, ‘Counter-forensics and Photography’, in *Autonomous Archiving*, ed. Pelin Tan, Özge Çelikaşlan, Alper Sen (Barcelona: dpr-barcelona, 2016), p.30

absences created by the disappearances visible: the disappeared were seen in the empty spaces that they left behind, drawing attention to their continued status of ‘missing’. With memorials that focus on the idea of ‘recovery’, the approach to absence and visibility differs. The aim is not to emphasise absence, but to fill it with the person who has been disappeared, using their physical form and/or memories of who they were as a person, to ‘reindividuate’ the victims of disappearance.

Undeniably each of the disappeared has a different story to tell. Some may have been taken based on the incorrect assumption that they were actively engaged in the conflict; others because they were involved in the work of Unions or spoke out against government actions; and others still who were fighting the State. During the civil war, citizens only had to speak out against the atrocities and injustices that were taking place to be considered a guerrilla or guerrilla sympathiser. A Protestant missionary who worked in Guatemala in the years 1977 to 1981 wrote about the difficulties that Mayan Indian workers faced when they attempted to trade with other villages or plant their fields:

They fear they will be tortured and killed simply as a lesson to other Indians to stay put in the mountains and not be interested in improving their lives. As one friend told me, “We no longer have the right to care for our families. It is a crime to want to provide them with enough to eat.”<sup>18</sup>

In Guatemala, the recovery undertaken by memorials and their creators has embraced all of these disappeared. The emphasis has been on recovering the voices of as many people as possible, regardless of the reasons given for their disappearance. Whether those who were disappeared were connected to revolutionary activities or not is not important in itself, and yet recovery of the disappeared has led to changing how such acts are described, moving away from the suggestion that being in

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<sup>18</sup> Shelton H. Davis and Julie Hodson, *Witness to Political Violence in Guatemala: The Suppression of a Rural Development Movement* (Boston: Oxfam America, 1983), p.6

opposition to the State was in some way an attack on the country. Doing so, and reducing the lives of those who acted in this manner to representations of ‘anti-nationalism’ is, as Arundhati Roy has written, a theft of language: a ‘technique of usurping words and deploying them like weapons, of using them to mask intent’.<sup>19</sup> Such theft has allowed those who object to, for instance, attacks on land, culture, and lives to be marginalised by perpetrators of these actions. Recovering the disappeared, and ‘reindividuating’ them, involves not just the physical remains and memories of the disappeared, but also taking back control over the language used to discuss the disappeared and the actions performed in favour of social justice that have been so stigmatised.

It cannot be denied that actors other than the State engaged in violent actions against the Guatemalan population during the civil war: guerrillas too, and therefore most likely some of those who were disappeared, attacked villages and their inhabitants. Yet, Roy’s argument concerning language, and in this context how it is used to discuss the actions of many of those who were disappeared, still has weight. In presenting all the disappeared as enemies of the State, and the demands for a fairer and more just society as being against Guatemala, those in power are able to suggest some form of justification for the extreme violence of the civil war. As all of the memorials examined in this chapter demonstrate, such a view is not shared amongst those involved with the disappeared in Guatemala and the process of memorialisation, and as such, the language used in these memorials that recover is that which subverts the ‘anti-nationalistic’ rhetoric engaged with.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Arundhati Roy, *Listening to Grass-hoppers: Field Notes on Democracy* (New Delhi: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), pp.xiii-xiv

<sup>20</sup> It is not possible to know how everyone connected to the disappeared feels about this idea, so we must take the positions of organizations and institutions, like museums, as the reference point for this. Certainly there are no organizations set up to oppose treating the memory of Guatemala’s disappeared



The first example of memorial that is examined is one that has a close relationship with the physical, literal sense of recovery: essentially the handling and displaying of human remains. The process of exhumation is central to this aspect of recovery and to the creation of related memorials to the disappeared. Owing to this, the first section of this chapter will discuss the process of how the disappeared are found and the emotions that surround such an event, so that there may be an understanding of the importance of these physical remains to recovery. Following on from this, this chapter examines the centrality of material remains in the Museum of Martyrs, in terms of the significance they offer as a physical object, and also how they relate to the notion of abstract recovery.

### **Exhumations**

Before an exhumation can take place in Guatemala, a request for permission must be made to the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP), an institution that investigates suspicious deaths. When this permission is granted, the DPP will oversee the investigation, usually, in the cases of exhumation, calling on organisations like the FAFG for their forensic expertise. An assessment of the suspected area is then undertaken with representatives of the DPP, forensic anthropologists, archaeologists, witnesses, relatives, and members of human rights and legal organisations on behalf of the community, in attendance. Once the exhumation is completed, the forensic expert must complete a report detailing the process and findings of the exhumation, which is then presented to the public prosecutor and may be used as evidence if any

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the same, despite involvement or not, and to ascertain the feelings of each individual family member who would be nigh impossible.

criminal proceedings occur.<sup>21</sup> When the FAFG first started performing exhumations in Guatemala in 1993 there was no intention of generating evidence to use in trials: the military was still too powerful, the prosecution office too weak, and the picture of what happened in the war too murky. ‘Guatemala’s civil institutions were not ready for trials,’ said Lionel Piaz, director of archaeology at the FAFG, ‘You cannot eat a fruit before it is ripe’.<sup>22</sup>

The process of obtaining permission for exhumations has become easier over time. In the late 1980s, when members of the organisation GAM (*Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo*) first started petitioning courts to perform exhumations of suspected mass graves, their claims were frequently dismissed. In 1988 the Minister of Defence, General Héctor A. Gramajo, stated that the subversives themselves created the unmarked graves in question, claiming that insurgent forces would frequently bury their comrades clandestinely without telling villagers where they were.<sup>23</sup> Courts too would often obstruct and delay applications for months, and those making the application were frequently threatened with death if they continued with their demands. In August 1988, two GAM members, Juan Ajanel Pixcar and Sebastiana Ramos, were both threatened with death for their role in exhuming the bodies of three of their relatives who had been killed in the early 1980s.<sup>24</sup>

In contemporary Guatemala, exhumations are no longer met with such frequent bouts of extreme hostility from the offices of power. Chapters one and two discussed the importance of a lasting regime change to Guatemala’s process of

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<sup>21</sup> Ambika Flavel and Caroline Barker, ‘Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology in Guatemala’, in *Handbook of Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology*, ed. Soren Blau and Douglas H. Ubelaker (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p.429

<sup>22</sup> Elbein, ‘Bringing up the bodies in Guatemala’, *Aljazeera America*, <http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2016/2/the-bodies-under-the-base.html> (Accessed 18/09/2017)

<sup>23</sup> Anne Manuel, Eric Stover, *Guatemala, Getting Away with Murder: An Americas Watch and Physicians for Human Rights Report* (New York: Americas Watch, 1991), p.66

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

memorialisation, and whilst such a regime change has not come about in its totality, that the FAFG are now being granted permission to perform such exhumations and use their findings in criminal trials suggests that over time there has been a level of change. Although former regime members and members of the armed forces undoubtedly still wield significant influence in the country, other offices of power, like the legal courts, are evidently regaining their autonomy.

This is not to say however, that the exhumations are completely accepted within Guatemala. There is still some open, and often violent, opposition to the procedure. In the early 2000s Fredy Peccerelli, the director of the FAFG, received several death threats for his involvement in gathering evidence for a number of high profile trials. Further messages extended their threat to include the lives of Peccerelli's family.<sup>25</sup> Such actions clearly display that whilst exhumations may have become more accepted over time, there are still those in Guatemala who would prefer the missing and the murdered, and the potential truth that they might offer, to remain buried. The difference now is that such violence comes from anonymous sources, possibly members of the public who support the military and the former regime, rather than from those who have power and control over whether exhumations may take place.

There are two main forms of exhumation in Guatemala: those that involve the excavation of a mass graves in rural surroundings, and those in which bodies are exhumed from public cemeteries. Mass graves are typically found in rural areas of Guatemala, at or near sites of massacre, or close to military bases. During the civil war rumours circulated that those who had been disappeared were being held in military bases, although attempting to prove these claims often proved to be

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<sup>25</sup> 'Guatemala: Forensic Scientists Under Threat', <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/guatemala-forensic-scientists-under-threat> (Accessed 10/10/2017)

dangerous and frustrating. If family members visited bases looking for relatives they ran the risk of being disappeared or murdered. After her husband was disappeared in the early 1980s, Doña Angela visited the military base in Nebaj three times to try and find out if he was being held there. The soldiers initially dismissed her as being ‘stupid’, but on her third visit, she was told that if she returned again she would be killed.<sup>26</sup> If family members or official figures were successful in gaining entry to a base, the areas they were shown by the military were frequently empty. Even on the rare occasions when a judge would visit areas suspected of holding the disappeared after a habeas corpus appeal had been placed, there was nothing to be found. Bases were notified several days in advance that a judge would be coming to inspect the site, giving the military plenty of time to move any prisoners who were being detained. As one court employee stated in the 1980s, ‘they [the military] let us come freely to military bases because they knew we wouldn’t find much’.<sup>27</sup>

Towards the end of the war and after its conclusion, these testimonies from family members about where they believed their missing relatives were being held were used by organisations like the FAFG to try and find the disappeared. Some of these testimonies have led to the discovery of mass graves, while others have not always proved to be fruitful. There have been numerous cases where forensic teams have spent weeks digging for remains but finding nothing.<sup>28</sup> As Clara, a woman whose husband was disappeared, stated, after all the trauma and difficulties that she, and others, had encountered, and all the things she had been told, the details become lost. ‘I would like to have a memory like a tape recorder’, she said, ‘it’s impossible

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<sup>26</sup> Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.111

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Marie Simon, *Closing the Space: Human Rights in Guatemala, May 1987-October 1988* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1988), pp.56-57

<sup>28</sup> Elbein, ‘Bringing up the bodies in Guatemala’, *Aljazeera America*, <http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2016/2/the-bodies-under-the-base.html> (Accessed 18/09/2017)

with so much suffering'.<sup>29</sup> At other times it is disturbances in the environment that lead to these rural mass graves being found. There is often a dip in the land at the site of a grave, a noticeable lack in vegetation, or the ground may appear to be a lighter colour, caused by the darker topsoil mixing with the lighter subsoil.<sup>30</sup> Whether by testimony or environment, there is a certain amount of chance at work in the discovery of these rural mass graves.

The locations of graves in city cemeteries are often easier to track down. Rather than be reliant upon witness statements for location, or differences in soil, documents discovered in the National Police Archives have helped forensic archaeologists locate where remains are. These documents, records kept by the perpetrators responsible, show that the disappeared were often dumped at cemeteries, marked as 'unidentified' or 'XX'.<sup>31</sup> Exhumations in *La Ciudad* cemetery, Guatemala City, for instance, resulted in more than sixteen thousand bodies and body parts being uncovered.<sup>32</sup> Yet although forensic anthropologists have a clearer idea of where to begin their search, their attempts to find and identify the disappeared are often complicated by the presence of other unidentified bodies in these mass clandestine graves.

When a person dies in Guatemala, they will often be placed in a tomb at their local cemetery. If, after time, the family of said person cannot maintain their payments for this tomb, the remains of the deceased are removed and thrown into a mass grave located in the cemetery, known as an *osario*. No records are kept in

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas F. Reed and Karen Brandow, *The Sky Never Changes: Testimonies from the Guatemalan Labor Movement* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), p.59

<sup>30</sup> Manuel Stover, *Guatemala, Getting Away with Murder* (1991), p.69

<sup>31</sup> Mejia, 'Digging Guatemala', *Scientific America*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/anthropologists-study-political-killings/> (Accessed 19/09/2017)

<sup>32</sup> Shakira Bedoya Sánchez, 'My Name is Not "NN": Field-Notes from an Exhumation Site in Guatemala City', *Allegra Lab*, <http://allegralaboratory.net/my-name-is-not-nn-field-notes-from-an-exhumation-site-in-guatemala-city/> (Accessed 10/10/2017)

cemeteries about who has been placed into which *osario*, nor are the depths of these graves known.<sup>33</sup>



Fig.3.1 A view inside one of *La Verbena* cemetery's *osarios*.

From this image it is possible to gain an idea of how chaotic the inside of these mass graves are, and to imagine how difficult it is to process the different remains contained within.

Photograph taken by James Rodríguez (September 2010). Accessed at *MiMundo.org*, <http://www.mimundo-fotorreportajes.org/2010/09/exhumaciones-en-la-verbena-llego-la.html>

It is believed that the absence of record keeping for the *osarios*, and therefore the absence of any paper trail, is the reason why *osarios* were used to dispose of the bodies of the disappeared, as it allowed for the anonymity of the perpetrator and the continued ambiguity around the fate of the disappeared. In 2010 when permission was granted to perform exhumations of the *osarios* in *La Verbena* cemetery, one of the largest in Guatemala City, one of the mass graves there was found to be around ten

<sup>33</sup> James Rodríguez, 'Exhumaciones en La Verbena: Llegó la Hora, con esta Evidencia, de Buscar Justicia', *MiMundo.org*, <http://www.mimundo-fotorreportajes.org/2010/09/exhumaciones-en-la-verbena-llego-la.html> (Accessed 10/10/2017)

metres deep.<sup>34</sup> Owing to the scale of these exhumations, the process of recovery, identification, and analysis of the remains uncovered is often considerable.

The process of exhuming bodies in both instances is a social one, in the sense that it is shared between all those in the affected community, and often even visitors who have travelled from surrounding areas so they may observe the procedure. Large groups often gather around the site to watch as forensic anthropologists slowly uncover the bones of the interred, many hoping to recognise a piece of clothing or a scrap of fabric that might identify their disappeared relative. Some people say prayers for the deceased who lie in the grave, and others will produce photographs of their missing and talk about how they were disappeared.<sup>35</sup>

Figure 3.2 is a photograph taken by photojournalist Victor J. Blue of an exhumation being conducted in Comalapa, a village located in the department of Chimaltenango, nearly two hours outside of Guatemala City. During the civil war Comalapa was home to many Mayan people and an army base, and it was here, in 2003, that one of the largest exhumations in Guatemala was undertaken. The photograph clearly shows that a crowd has gathered around the exhumation site. There are women, men, and also children present to watch the forensic anthropologists at work. The presence of adults in this image is not surprising, as one would assume that those hoping to identify the disappeared would be older and in attendance. However, that there are children included in this process speaks of the significance such exhumations have for communities.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Eric Stover, Rachel Shigeekane, 'Exhumation of Mass Graves', in *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*, ed. Eric Stover, Harvey M. Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.88

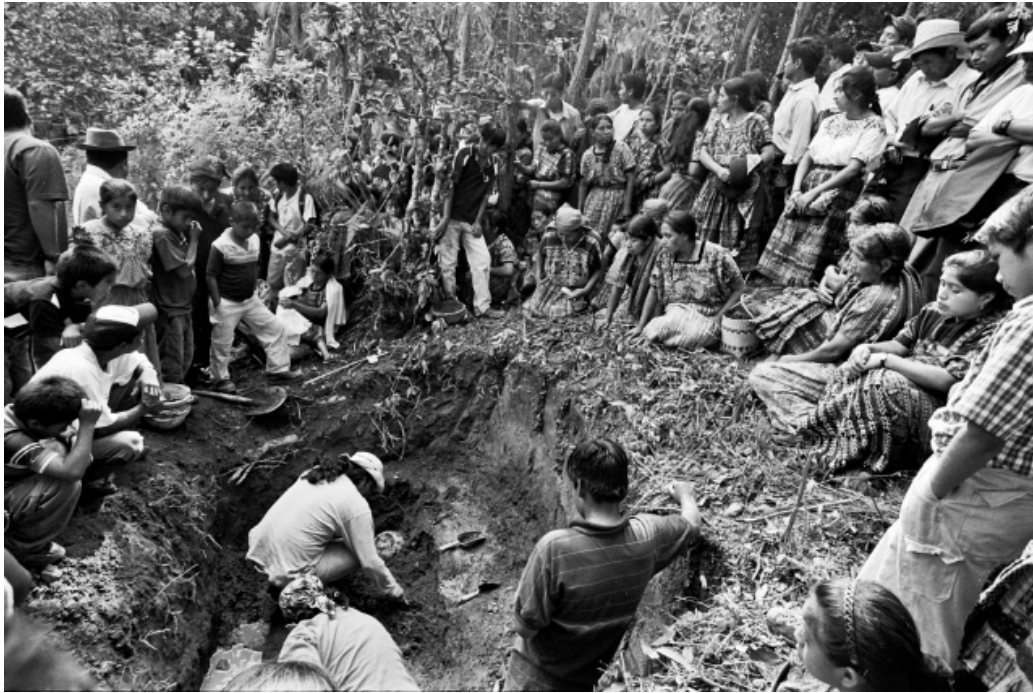


Fig.3.2 The exhumation undertaken in Comalapa in 2004. The exhumation was begun in 2003 and continued until 2005. Those who were exhumed and identified were buried by their families shortly afterwards. Photograph taken by Victor J. Blue, 2004. Accessed at: 'Exhumation at Comalapa', *lensculture*, <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/victor-blue-exhumation-at-comalapa>

From looking at the image we also gain an idea of the surroundings that exhumations can take place in. The clearing is surrounded by what appears to be thick plant growth, indicating that, at least in this situation, the disappeared were buried with the intention that they not be found; the plant growth suggests that this area would not often be frequented. What is also striking with this image is the lack of any barriers between the open site and those who have come to watch. One would assume that in situations such as this there would be concerns about potentially damaging any materials that were recovered, and so barriers may be installed to prevent access to the site. However, here there appear to be no such measures, which speaks to the almost communal attitude that is taken with such exhumations, and of the sense of ownership that comes with this. The land and those being recovered from it belong to the communities who have gathered to watch.



In Comalapa, as well as at other sites of exhumation, in addition to watching villagers often engage with the actual process of exhumation: helping the forensic anthropologists with the initial dig at the site; removing the uncovered earth; and at the end of the day, covering the site with tarpaulin and carrying tools back to the village. Such engagement, Eric Stover and Rachel Shigekane have argued, has been important for the relatives of the disappeared. Denied information for years by the police, the military, and the courts, through the exhumations families were now able to regain a sense of control and assist in finding their disappeared.<sup>36</sup> The idea of the body being a political transitional object is extended to encompass the search for that body. Even for those who do not recover the remains of their disappeared relative, participating in an activity that generates indisputable scientific evidence of the disappearances occurring, which could result in the conviction of those responsible, is a means of recovering control from those who committed the crime and tried to conceal it.

The religious implications of such exhumations within Guatemala are varied. There are a number of different beliefs held throughout the country and, on a smaller scale, amongst the relatives of the disappeared. It is not possible to speak of a singular set of beliefs held by Mayan people, for instance: many traditional beliefs have been amalgamated with practices of the Catholic Church, but the extent of the influence of both varies amongst different groups. It is common to find that, before an exhumation takes place, a Mayan priest will perform a special ceremony. Victoria Sanford described how she witnessed one such ceremony in Plan de Sánchez:

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<sup>36</sup> Stover, Shigekane, 'Exhumation of Mass Graves', in *My Neighbor, My Enemy*, ed. Stover, Weinstein (2004), p.88

After lighting candles, burning copal incense, and adorning the area with red gladiolas and pine needles, the Maya priest would speak with God to explain why the exhumation should take place and ask permission from God to disturb the bones.<sup>37</sup> Then the priest would call upon the spirits to explain to them that God had given permission for the exhumation to take place. He would plead to the spirits to hear God's call. Instead of using their powers against those who disturb the bones, the priest asked the spirits to use their powers to bless and protect the forensic team and all who worked at the exhumation.<sup>38</sup>

Such a ceremony is conducted to prevent the spirits from 'attacking' those that exhume the remains, hence why the priest asked the spirits to 'bless and protect' the workers rather than using such powers against them. In many Mayan communities there is the belief that the spirits of the dead hover above the graves where their remains are buried. After death, a person splits into three parts: the body, which disintegrates, the soul, which travels, and the spirit that remains where the person is buried.<sup>39</sup> The digging up of bones therefore disturbs the spirits. An exhumation is justified, however, by the wish of communities to discover what happened to the disappeared, to achieve justice, and so a proper religious burial of any remains discovered can take place.

For other relatives of the disappeared, however, such exhumations are, from a religious perspective, considered unacceptable, regardless of the circumstances. 82% of evangelicals in Guatemala object to the exhumation of graves (compared to around 12% of Catholics), 62% of who claim to have had at least one relative disappeared or

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<sup>37</sup> Flowers are frequently used in Mayan ceremonies: they are often used as altar decorations, presented as gifts to the gods because of their bright colours and perfumes. The significance of pine needles is less clear, although they are used in nearly all Mayan ceremonies. It has been suggested that they are representative of Mother Earth and so their use creates a connection between those involved and the earth. ('The Mayan Calendar Portal', <http://www.maya-portal.net/blog/kenneth-johnson/symbolism-mayan-fire-ceremony>)

<sup>38</sup> Sanford, *Buried Secrets* (2003), p.41

<sup>39</sup> Marion Lloyd, 'Anthropologists Exhume Guatemalan Massacre Sites as Victims' Families Watch', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol.48: 29 (2002)

killed during the conflict.<sup>40</sup> A 2013 report found that over 40% of Guatemalans identify as Evangelical Protestants, a figure that, when taking into consideration the on-going continental shift away from Catholicism towards Protestantism, has undoubtedly grown over time.<sup>41</sup> In 2016 Guatemala was even dubbed Latin America's 'most evangelical' country by the Evangelical Alliance, who estimated that there were some 40,000 churches in Guatemala.<sup>42</sup>

One of the main reasons for this objection towards exhumations is based on a fear that uncovering the past in this manner would lead to a rise in hatred, to conflict between the people and the army. One man from Nebaj who worked as a preacher and whose father had been killed by the army when he was six, claimed that exhumations would lead to further violence in Guatemala: 'what would you do if they told you: "That is your father. Look, here is his bone"? And if you aren't evangelical: "And who killed him?" "It was the army."...The hatred would start all over again.'<sup>43</sup> A schoolteacher, whose brother and two uncles were disappeared from the family home in 1982 voiced similar concerns: she believed that exhuming the dead would cause a lot of suffering. 'Nothing good comes of these [exhumations] because those feelings could make us hate and kill each other again...Why dig up the bones if they're already dead! It's in the past.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> J. Jailey Philpot- Munson, 'Peace Under Fire: Understanding Evangelical Resistance to the Peace Process in a Postwar Guatemalan Town', in *Mayas in Postwar Guatemala: Harvest of Violence Revisited*, ed. Walter E. Little, Timothy J. Smith, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p.50

<sup>41</sup> Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Guatemala: Treatment of members of evangelical churches, particularly members of the Pentecostal Church, by the authorities and society (2011-August 2013)*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/538c2e7a4.html> (Accessed 15/10/2017)  
Zach Dyer, 'Catholics look to hold their ground to rising number of evangelicals in Latin America', *The Tico Times*, <http://www.ticotimes.net/2015/04/02/catholics-look-to-hold-their-ground-to-rising-number-of-evangelicals-in-latin-america> (Accessed 15/10/2017)

<sup>42</sup> 'Guatemala is the "most evangelical" country in Latin America', *Evangelical Focus*, [http://evangelicalfocus.com/world/1431/Guatemala\\_the\\_most\\_evangelical\\_country\\_in\\_Latin\\_America](http://evangelicalfocus.com/world/1431/Guatemala_the_most_evangelical_country_in_Latin_America) (Accessed 15/10/2017)

<sup>43</sup> Philpot- Munson, 'Peace Under Fire: Understanding Evangelical Resistance to the Peace Process in a Postwar Guatemalan Town', in *Mayas in Postwar Guatemala*, ed. Little, Smith (2009), p.50

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

Despite such objections, exhumations do continue to take place in Guatemala, and once such a process has been completed, there comes the possibility of not only identification but also of death and burial rituals. As is discussed in chapter five, rituals involving the dead often extend beyond the act of burial itself and continue to occur around the grave of the person. Traditional Mayan beliefs espouse a close relationship between the dead and the living that is cemented through the process of burial. It is believed that not burying relatives prevents them from being admitted into the afterlife, to the divinities of the dead, and subsequently such spirits become a danger to the living. A measles epidemic in El Quiché in 1990 was attributed to the spirits of the unburied dead; bad dreams were seen as communications from the unhappy, wandering dead; and one woman's physical pain was traced to the spirit of her disappeared father who had become vengeful as a result of her 'neglect'.<sup>45</sup> 'Projections', Judith Zur writes, 'of the feelings and experiences of the bereaved, for whom the certainty of death has not been established'.<sup>46</sup>

To be able to perform death and burial rituals for the disappeared therefore has reportedly been of great comfort to relatives, many of whom were often distressed at not knowing where their loved one was or what state their remains had been left in. When asked why burials were important to him, one man told Victoria Sanford it was because he did not want his family buried 'like dogs'.<sup>47</sup> Mass graves that have been exhumed, both rural and those in public cemeteries, have frequently found the remains of the disappeared, or the victims of massacres, in a tangled heap. Some bodies are wrapped in cloth, some still have blindfolds across their eyes, and others have their hands tied behind their backs (see Figure 3.3). One mass grave was located

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<sup>45</sup> Judith N. Zur, *Violent Memories: Mayan War Widows in Guatemala* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), pp.210-211

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p.211

<sup>47</sup> Sanford, *Buried Secrets* (2003), p.47

near a river and as a result of constant flooding, the remains had formed into one solid block of bones and clay, which had to be carefully separated by forensic archaeologists before any identifications could take place.<sup>48</sup>



Fig.3.3 Blindfolded bodies uncovered during an exhumation.

This photograph was taken at an exhumation in Cobán, Alta Verapaz, in 2012. In the photograph it is possible to see that the person was blindfolded when they were buried and their hands were tied behind their back.

Photograph taken by James Rodríguez (May 2012). Accessed at: ‘Exhumation Inside Cobán’s Former Military Garrison’, <http://blog.mimundo.org/2012/06/2012-05-exhumation-inside-cobans-former-military-garrison/>

The recovery of bodies allows for a respectful burial to take place that restores the disappeared’s dignity and re-individuates them. They are no longer lost in a mass grave but are instead interred in, for instance, a community cemetery where their friends and relatives can visit and communicate with them. This offers comfort to the families and also recovers the rights of the disappeared to be treated in death as citizens. As Antonius Robben has argued in relation to the disappeared of Argentina and Chile, clandestine graves ‘withhold the dead their ritual burial and enduring

<sup>48</sup> Elbein, ‘Bringing up the Bodies in Guatemala’, *Aljazeera America*, <http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2016/2/the-bodies-under-the-base.html> (Accessed 3/05/2017)

remembrance'; the graves are invisible, they negate spiritual, religious, and political meanings about death and resurrection, and destroy individual and group identities.<sup>49</sup>

Ceremonial burial removes the anonymity that surrounds the disappeared, reincorporating them into society as deceased members.<sup>50</sup>

Recovery then is an act that enables a physical connection to be re-formed between the disappeared and their community through the possession and burial of the body, and one that also leads to the more abstract re-attachment of identity and existence to those who were once anonymous in the eyes of wider society. The memorial that this chapter will now examine, the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union, is one that reflects this idea. There are many strands of purpose woven into the Museum of Martyrs, and it is a memorial that I discuss in relation to Informing and Grief (chapters four and five respectively). Here, however, I wish to focus on the processes of recovery that it engages with. The presence of physical remains is central to the museum and how it functions as a memorial that recovers, but the ideas that are attached to the disappeared through the presence of this body (that, for instance, disappearances did take place) are evidence of it being a memorial that engages in abstract recovery too.

## **Memorials**

### *The Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union*

Samuel Villatoro set up the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union (referred to from this point onwards as the Museum of Martyrs) in Guatemala City in 2012. His father, Amancio Villatoro, had been a prominent figure amongst various

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<sup>49</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, 'Exhumations, Territoriality, and Necropolitics in Chile and Argentina' in *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights*, ed. Francisco Ferrandiz, Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p.58

<sup>50</sup> Robben, 'Exhumations, Territoriality, and Necropolitics in Chile and Argentina' in *Necropolitics*, ed. Ferrandiz, Robben (2015), p.57

unions, working as a coordinator and as a leader. In 1984 he was disappeared as a result of this engagement. The Death Squad Dossier showed that he was held and tortured for fifty-seven days after he was taken. The entry is below in Figure 3.4: it includes information about why Villatoro was disappeared, where he was picked up, and his date of execution. His remains were found twenty-seven years later, in 2011, at a military outpost.<sup>51</sup>

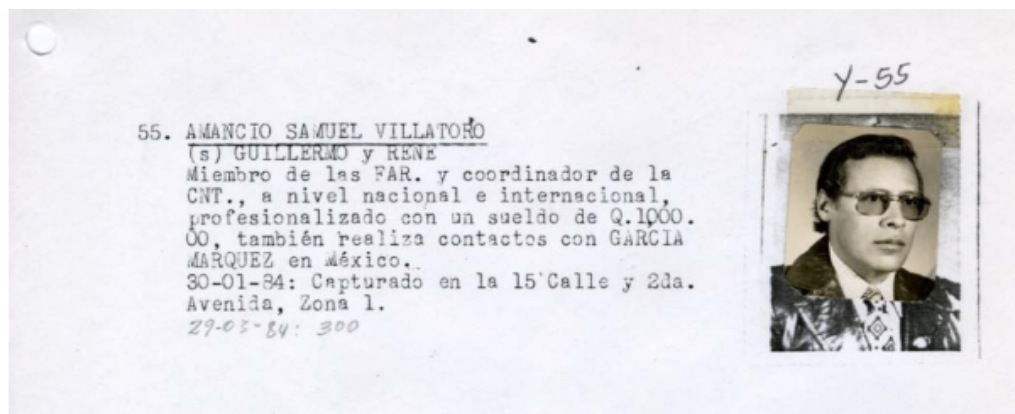


Fig.3.4 Amancio Villatoro's entry in the Death Squad Dossier.

This is the record of information about Amancio Villatoro taken from the Death Squad Dossier. It suggests that he was a member of the organisation FAR, which was an insurgent group operating during the conflict. It lists the date of his capture and where this took place (15 Calle, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenida, Zona 1). The final line has been added in pencil and records Villatoro's date of execution: the code '300' was frequently used throughout the dossier to indicate that the person had been executed on the given date. Villatoro was entry number fifty-five.

Image taken from: Emily Willard, 'Notes from the Evidence Project: Premiere of "The Echo" a Smashing Success', *Unredacted: The National Security Archive, Unedited and Uncensored*, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/notes-from-the-evidence-project-premiere-of-the-echo-a-smashing-success/>

Owing to this treatment of his father, Samuel's focus for the museum has so far been entirely on disappearances and the disappeared, namely those who are listed in the Death Squad Dossier. In 2012 Samuel Villatoro said that he wished to raise enough funds to expand the museum and include more information on all those

<sup>51</sup> Sonia Perez D., 'Guatemalans Use Portraits, Museum To Seek Missing', *US News*, <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2013/11/15/guatemalans-use-portraits-museum-to-see-missing> (Accessed 13/02/2017)

activists and human rights defenders who were tortured, executed, or disappeared during the conflict.<sup>52</sup> Such an ambition has yet to be fulfilled. From my conversations with those who work at the museum and those who are connected to it, this lack of development appears to be the result of limited funds. The museum is located on the grounds of the FAFG offices, where they are allowed to use a small space free of charge, and is run entirely by volunteers. Yet despite the low running costs, the museum is currently struggling to remain open and is reliant upon donations from individuals or international funding bodies. Like the FAFG, they presently receive no funding from the Guatemalan government. Although there has been progress in terms of the exhumations, there is evidently still no wish to see the disappeared, and the role the State played in their disappearance, openly remembered.

When Villatoro's body was discovered the family decided that they wanted to make it visible. 'We don't want to close this story by burying him', Samuel said. 'There's still no justice.'<sup>53</sup> This decision speaks to the on-going development of the narrative surrounding the disappearances, and, although there has been physical recovery here, Samuel's words demonstrate that this alone is not enough to bring closure to the disappearance of his father. The remains were placed in the museum and are arguably the central focus of the space, contained in a glass case in one of the first rooms the visitor comes to. (The remains can be seen in Figure 3.5.) The role that the body is playing in the museum is that of evidential proof, recovering the truth of the disappearances from the silence enforced by the State. A crime was committed: Villatoro was disappeared and murdered, and in its presentation the remains silently

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<sup>52</sup> Willard, 'Notes from the Evidence Project', *Unredacted: The National Security Archive, Unedited and Uncensored*, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/notes-from-the-evidence-project-premiere-of-the-echo-a-smashing-success/> (Accessed 13/02/2017)

<sup>53</sup> Sonia Perez D., 'Guatemalans Use Portraits, Museum To Seek Missing', *US News*, <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2013/11/15/guatemalans-use-portraits-museum-to-see-missing> (Accessed 15/02/2017)



demand the justice that Samuel and his family seek. The body takes a stand against any attempts made to deny that such events in the past occurred.<sup>54</sup>



Fig.3.5 The body of Amancio Villatoro in the Museum of Martyrs. The case is lined with red material and lit from all angles to ensure that visitors can see details of the body clearly.

Surrounding Villatoro's remains are photographs of the man when he was alive: there are images of Villatoro with his wife, of their home, and of trade union events he was involved with.<sup>55</sup> With these photographs a connection is created between the physical remains (the product of physical recovery) and the life Villatoro led before he was disappeared. There is a recovery and remembrance of this life.<sup>56</sup> In showing his remains alongside these memories, the anonymity forced on him through the disappearance is removed. He is not shown as anonymous remains, but as someone who had a life.

<sup>54</sup> Timothy Luke, *Museum Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.38

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>56</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.132

Elsewhere in the museum there is further physical evidence that has been recovered, proof that the disappearances took place. Along one of the walls further into the museum, located in a different space to Villatoro's body, there are photographs of the six people who were discovered at the same time as Amancio Villatoro. Directly underneath these images is the name of the person and any known information about their disappearance and their eventual date of execution (see Figure 3.6). Underneath this, on the floor, are wooden boxes, each with a lid, on hinges, that has been opened and rested against the wall (see Figure 3.7). The inside of these boxes have been lined with red material, as with the glass case containing Villatoro's remains, and they contain any items that were found with or on these men when their bodies were exhumed. 'This person, they found his boots,' Salomon Estrada, my guide around the museum, said, pointing to the specific box. 'This other person they found his glasses and his trousers.'<sup>57</sup> If there were no items found, the box simply contained a single rose: a mark of respect and remembrance from those who run the museum.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey



Fig.3.6 Photographs of the disappeared in the Museum of Martyrs.

These men were discovered with Villatoro. Underneath the photograph there is information explaining who the person was and when they were disappeared. The question mark in the second frame from the left has been put there at the request of the disappeared man's son: he does not want the image of his father to appear in the museum. The museum has allocated a space to the disappeared man anyway, and will leave it there in case the son decides to change his mind and have his father's picture displayed.



Fig.3.7 The boxes underneath the photographs of the disappeared.

The box on the left contains a single white rose, while the box in the centre of the image contains clothing worn by the disappeared when they were exhumed: the box with clothing in is positioned underneath the photograph of the man at the far left in Fig.3.6

As a whole, the museum participates in the recovery of the disappeared, via physical recovery, by reminding those who come to visit it that such a form of violence, the disappearances, took place and that the disappeared remain missing. This is where the ideas of Inform (discussed in chapter four) and Recover are most closely interlinked. By informing visitors about the disappearances and the disappeared themselves, the disappeared are recovered from the silence enforced by the State. They are presented through images and through objects that offer a level of authenticity to the narrative of the disappearances (an idea that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter).

There is also an attempt made by the museum to address the idea of criminality that surrounds the disappeared, discussed above, and to remove some of the stigma attached to this form of violence. Clara, whose husband was one of the twenty-seven union leaders kidnapped on 21 June 1980 (the event that determined the date for the National Day Against Forced Disappearance), voiced some of the frustration experienced by families of the disappeared over this presentation of their relatives as criminals:

We'd like to go and scream, "You are this and that!" and to cry out against them [those who committed injustices], "why did you do this? Our relatives weren't criminals! You let the criminals run free! And you yourselves are the criminals!"<sup>58</sup>

Being seen to be involved with a revolutionary group was effectively a death sentence in Guatemala during the civil war, and anyone suspected of such involvement would be disappeared, after which, judging by the marks that have been identified on the exhumed bodies, people would be tortured to find out information about others also involved in such organisations. Villatoro himself was not a member

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<sup>58</sup> Reed, Brandow, *The Sky Never Changes* (1996), p.70

of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* group (Rebel Armed Forces or FAR), Salomon told me, although he was believed to be. ‘They wrote there [in the Death Squad Dossier] that he was a member of the FAR, which was a revolutionary group’, Salomon said, ‘and that he earned 1000Q and he had a contact with someone in Mexico.’<sup>59</sup> The Union he was involved with, however, would sometimes receive information from FAR.

By including this information in his narrative about Villatoro, Salomon was not attempting to justify how Villatoro had been treated. Indeed, he followed up this statement by explaining that he, and those who worked for and set up the museum, believed such acts were never defensible. ‘We believe that regardless of what he was accused of and what he might have done, he had the right to a trial not to be disappeared in this way,’ Salomon said. ‘He should have stood trial and even if he’d got a life sentence at least he’d still be alive and we’d still have him there. That’s the message that we give to the families: not to feel ashamed about what happened.’<sup>60</sup> It is a message that is communicated throughout the museum. There is no attempt, for instance, to hide Villatoro’s connections to the Unions; rather the photographs showing this involvement that surround his remains are displayed with pride.

This move away from condemning those who were disappeared, whether they were part of the insurgent forces or not, returns in part to the work of Arundhati Roy that was discussed earlier. To recover the disappeared the language used to discuss them and their opposition to the actions of the State must be taken out of the control of those who would condemn them as ‘anti-Guatemalan’. In the case of Villatoro the language is that of images, ‘a language common to all men...intelligible to

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*

everyone'.<sup>61</sup> Villatoro is shown to be a man who was committed to improving Guatemala and striving for fairer working conditions for all. It is a positive association with the work of the Unions and with those who were disappeared, and one that recovers the memory of the disappeared from the usual criminal associations.

As with those memorials discussed in chapter two, the museum operates within a contested space. It challenges the presentation of the past, and more specifically of the disappeared, 'disrupting the demonizing narratives' projected by the State and recovering the voices and beliefs of the disappeared.<sup>62</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh wrote that while museums do not provide 'essential historical truths', just as history does not provide finite answers, they can open up a dialogue about the past.<sup>63</sup> In the context of Guatemala where there is still such division over how the conflict should be portrayed and remembered, and where the disappeared are at risk of remaining anonymous, the creation of such a dialogue can only be considered beneficial for those who wish to see the disappeared remembered, and remembered as the people they were. 'What we're fighting for is the story to be known', Salomon said. 'For these people's rights; to have a fair trial rather than be disappeared.'<sup>64</sup>

This is a similar ambition to that held by the next memorial this chapter examines. As with the Museum of Martyrs, the memory book that was created in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa sought to remember the disappeared and recover memories of them from the silence enforced by the State. Again, as with the museum, there is a cross over between Informing and Recover, as the book was created to transfer memory: to the local population, but also further afield if possible. What is being recovered here are the reputations of those who were disappeared. When people

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<sup>61</sup> Moshe Barasch, *The Language of Art: Studies in Interpretation* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p.15

<sup>62</sup> Salazar, *Global Coloniality of Power in Guatemala* (2012), p.176

<sup>63</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), p. 127

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

are informed of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa's history with the memory book, it is a narrative that has been written by the population who lived through the conflict. It is their truth, and one that challenges the State's depiction of events.

*The Memory Book of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa*

The municipality of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa is located in the department of Escuintla on the south coast of Guatemala. It is home to many of Guatemala's large sugar plantations and has been described as being at the 'heart' of the country's sugarcane industry. Before and during the internal conflict, workers on these plantations were poorly treated and underpaid for the labour-intensive work they performed; they could expect to take home around 1.12 Quetzales per day (one US dollar is worth around one Quetzales).<sup>65</sup>

During the 1970s, many workers on multiple plantations, frustrated with this treatment, began to organize and form Unions. In Santa Lucía, the *Comité de Unidad Campe* (the Committee for Peasant Unity or CUC) was formed in 1978: it aimed to be an organization that represented all those who worked in the countryside, and sought to improve working conditions in sugarcane farms and mills. Many Catholic priests who worked in areas like Santa Lucía supported these endeavors: Father Walter Voordeckers who worked in the department of Escuintla had spoken out in favor of peasants rights many times and supported members of the CUC.<sup>66</sup> In February 1980 a strike broke out across many of the plantations and continued for several weeks. In

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<sup>65</sup> *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* (Impunity Watch, 2011), p.4

Although wages have increased today, those who work on sugar plantations in contemporary Guatemala continue to experience instability in terms of their work hours and the amount they are paid, with many living in poverty because of the low wages. (See the 2005 report by COVERCO and the International Labor Rights Fund, *Labor Conditions in the Guatemalan Sugar Industry* for more information.)

<sup>66</sup> Blase Bonpane, *Guerrillas of Peace: Liberation Theology and the Central American Revolution* (Nebraska: toExcel, 2000)

response to this, and worried about further actions from workers, the government increased the minimum wage to 3.20 Quetzales per day. Although the CUC had asked for 5 Quetzales this increase in wages was considered a success. However, although the strike initially brought in positives, the community of Santa Lucía was soon to experience the extreme repression of the civil war government.

In the last few days of the strike, the leader of the CUC, Pablo Bautista, was attacked and taken to hospital. He survived the attack, but was later disappeared along with his wife and six other members of his family. In May 1980, Father Voordeckers was shot in front of his parish church in Santa Lucía. Months before this, threatening messages had appeared on the walls of the church, warning him to leave Guatemala. Other members and sympathizers of the CUC experienced similar fates. Some were shot, others were arrested, and others still were disappeared. In total it is estimated that over 100 people were killed or disappeared over the course of three years.<sup>67</sup> Many members of the Santa Lucía community also fled the area out of fear of this persecution, seeking refuge in other parts of Guatemala, Mexico, and even Canada.<sup>68</sup> Following this violence, the attempts to improve workers rights in Santa Lucía dwindled and eventually stopped out of fear of the repercussions such activities would bring.

For many years after the conclusion of the civil war the population of Santa Lucía were reluctant to speak about their experiences. The cases of those who were killed or disappeared remain uninvestigated and so far no one has been charged for the crimes. However, in 2011, with the support of the organizations *Solidaridad* and Impunity Watch, the community of Santa Lucía produced a book entitled '*Porque*

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<sup>67</sup> Sven Sielhorst, 'Workers' Rights Are The Heart of a Sustainable Sugarcane Industry', *Solidaridad*, <https://www.solidaridadnetwork.org/news/workers'-rights-are-the-heart-of-a-sustainable-sugarcane-industry> (Accessed 09/02/2017)

<sup>68</sup> *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* (Impunity Watch, 2011), p.4



*Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* ('Because We Wanted To Get Out Of Poverty. The memorable history of Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa'). 'The silence that dominated is breaking', the introduction to the book reads, 'the memory of what was lived is sprouting with uncontrollable vigor.'<sup>69</sup>

The introduction suggests a new keenness to engage with the past. It speaks of those who have not seen each other in years reconnecting, and of families giving long, painful interviews about those 'who disappeared forever'.<sup>70</sup> It also stresses the importance of telling the struggle of this time, the attempts to 'get out of poverty' that so many engaged with, so that not only will those who were killed or disappeared as a result of this be remembered for their actions and have their dignity restored, but new generations can learn of what was done. 'It is also time for the children and youth of St. Lucia to build their own forms of organization and struggle' the introduction reads. 'They are the precious seed of hope that the forces of evil have not been able to kill, they are the children of a new dawn.'<sup>71</sup>

The book as a whole is essentially a record of the period in the 1970s and 1980s when the CUC was organized and the community suffered at the hands of State oppression. Testimonies from those who lived through the violence take up many pages within the book, alongside lists of names of those who were disappeared or killed. There are also pages of colourful photographs of the community, the sugar plantations, and those who were killed or disappeared. Pencil drawings and newspaper clippings are scattered amongst these on some pages, presenting what appears to be almost a collage of memories from Santa Lucía (see Figures 3.8 and 3.9).

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, pp.4-5

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p.5

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p.5

In total the book is only about 140 pages long, but it manages to convey a clear message: what was being fought against in the late 1970s and 1980s; the cost that was paid for these actions; and the work the present day community now engages with in an attempt to discover their relatives. There is a mention of the FAFG in the introduction and a section in the latter pages of the books about the work they have done, and continue to do, with the community: taking DNA samples and performing exhumations in the Department's cemetery in an attempt to find some of Santa Lucía's disappeared relatives so they may then be given a 'dignified burial'.<sup>72</sup>



Fig. 3.8 Screenshot of pages 22 and 23 in *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza*. The image on the left shows a collection of photographs of life on the sugar plantations. The right shows newspaper cuttings about the strike.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.5

Pablo Almira y Almira 17.10.1979	Macabeo Aguilar Gutiérrez 16.07.1981	Maximiliana Roca Estrada 7.12.1981	Román Reyes Elías 8.09.1983
José Yos 31.01.1980	Carlos Enrique González Godoy 16.09.1981	Ricardo Bautista Escobar 04.1982	Julián Back 14.09.1983
Padre Walter Voordeckers 12.05.1980	Benigno Ambrocio Colorado 23.09.1981	Miguel Ángel Bautista Escobar 1984-1985	Florentín Gudiel Ramos 20.12.2004
Marcelina Catalán Yoché 24.09.1980	Alejandro Bautista 21.10.1981	Juan Gordón 21.10.1981	José Miguel Gudiel 21.09.1983
Elvi Francisco Martínez Palala 20.10.1980	Isabel Batres Estrada 21.10.1981	Elgido Roquel Chalí 13.01.1982	David Saj Rión 27.09.1983
Albino Ajú Cumar 3.04.1981	Pablo Bautista Escobar 25.10.1981	Fidel Ascencio 21.11.1982	Isidro Loch 27.09.1983
Victor Manuel Ajú Esquit 23.04.1983	Alberta Bautista Escobar 7.12.1981	Leonel Ascencio Girón 5.05.1983	María Victoria Loch 27.09.1983
		César Nájera Galicia 5.01.1983	José Canagüí 5.11.1983

Fig. 3.9 Screenshot of pages 34 and 35 in *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza*. The image shows lists of names of those killed or disappeared in Santa Lucía.

Mario Coolen, who arrived in Guatemala in 1972, had worked in Santa Lucía for eight years, in his own words, ‘organizing meetings with the people, speaking about their situation, reading the bible, but always relating the bible texts to their daily life.’ He stated that he thought *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* would be enthusiastically received by the people of Santa Lucía: ‘For them it is evidence that they are not children of criminals, but sons and daughters of people with values and with the will to fight for them.’<sup>73</sup> This relates to the ideas that were expressed in the Museum of Martyrs: challenging the narrative put forward by the State that presents all the disappeared as criminals, and instead recognizing that such opposition to the government was valid and not anti-Guatemalan. The title of the book, ‘*Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza*’ (‘Because We Wanted To Get Out Of Poverty. The memorable history of Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa’) emphasizes this idea, implying that the disappearances only occurred because there was an attempt within the community to better their lives. It removes any suggestion that the disappeared

<sup>73</sup> *Living Memory For A Different Santa Lucía* 2011, video, World News, 23 December, viewed 6/05/2017

were criminals and instead recovers both their right to oppose the government and their reasons for doing so.

This is supported by the content of many of the testimonies contained at the beginning of the book, which provide insight into the poor working conditions that existed. Victoriano Mejia's testimony details how many of those who travelled to the South Coast of Guatemala for seasonal work became very ill because of the living conditions they were forced to stay in:

As they [peasant workers] came from other places they stayed in those big galleys where there were no beds, there were no toilets, no drinking water, so many people became sick and died. I remember that whole families, children, men and women came down, became ill- feverish, and diarrhoea.

Further into this testimony, Mejia also outlines how such events led to many workers joining the CUC:

So it was that, faced with the economic problems and the great exploitation that took place.... because of the great need to do something for ourselves and for others, we decided to organize and join the CUC. For us, the CUC was like a space where we could claim or assert our rights, which in the years would give us fair treatment, a better salary and just hours of work.<sup>74</sup>

It is clear from this testimony that workers who travelled to different plantations for work were very poorly treated and that joining the CUC was the only means through which this situation could change. Mejia speaks of the CUC in very positive tones and we can take from this statement the sense that being part of a union allowed the voices of workers to be heard and for conditions to improve.

In terms of recovering the disappeared, testimonies like this one highlight what it was that first, the disappeared had to experience in their work, and second,

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<sup>74</sup> *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* (Impunity Watch, 2011), p.10-11

what they sought to achieve: positive changes and more protections for workers. Such information counteracts the impression given of the disappeared by the State: that they were criminals seeking to harm the country, and instead emphasises the true beliefs and ambitions that many of them held. Marielos Loch's father and aunt were disappeared during the civil war. She believes that they were taken by the G2 (an army sponsored death squad that operated during the conflict) because of their involvement in the CUC. 'They [G2] accused them of being guerrillas, of being subversive,' she said. 'Only because they fought for poor people. So that they were treated with justice and would receive a fair salary for their work.' She said of *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza*, 'it means a lot to us because it reflects the lives of our loved ones.'<sup>75</sup>

The latter section of *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* is divided into sections by the names of those who were disappeared; above or next to the name of the person there is also a photograph (see Figure 3.10 on the following page). Listed under these headings are testimonies from villagers about that individual and the impact their disappearance had.



Fig.3.10 Carlos Enrique González Godoy.  
The image is a screenshot taken from *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* (Impunity Watch, 2011), p.67

<sup>75</sup> *Living Memory For A Different Santa Lucía* 2011, video, World News, 23 December, viewed 6/05/2017

A number of these testimonies also tie into the previously discussed idea of recovering the disappeared from the criminality that they are associated with. Felicita de Jesús Aguilar Gutiérrez described how her brother, Macabeo, became involved in revolutionary activity after he became aware of the poverty that many Guatemalan's lived in. Her testimony stresses that these actions were not 'bad', he simply wanted to help people.

My brother was a very active young man... Being in the university he visited many places in Quiche and in the South Coast where he saw the reality of poverty that existed in those places. I believe that this made him very much identify with the struggle of the farm workers and that he supported the CUC... My brother disappeared on July 16, 1981.... We do not know what became of him, what he did or how he ended his life. And although that gives us a lot of sadness personally, I ask God to have him in his holy glory because he was not bad or what he did was bad and God is witness of that.<sup>76</sup>

Felicita does not attempt to hide that her brother was involved with the CUC, or in another part of her testimony, that he was involved in revolutionary activity. She instead stresses the reasons why he did this. In doing so she recovers the beliefs and values of her brother, which otherwise would have been simply dismissed as criminal activity.

Other testimonies included in this later section of the book describe how disappearances negatively affected their lives; that the traumatic memory of their disappeared loved one has remained with them. One woman, Maura, described how the disappearance of her father, Carlos Enrique González Godoy, changed her life:

There are nights that go back in time. I begin to talk to myself and say that if my father lived we might not have that accumulation of fears, sorrows, illnesses, good or bad, we would have been together... The only thing we can do now is to participate and contribute our DNA test to see if someday we can recover the remains of people.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* (Impunity Watch, 2011), p.62

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*

The inclusion of testimonies like this recovers a sense of the disappeared as individuals within the collective. Readers are reminded that each of those who were disappeared in Santa Lucía had friends and family who suffered as a result of that loss. That this act of violence did have personal repercussions for those left behind. Such recollections also recover the past: it reminds those who read them that this violence occurred and that the disappeared remain missing. Maura's testimony refers to giving DNA sample, which stresses the notion that the disappearances remain an unanswered aspect of Guatemala's past, despite the silence that surrounds them.

*Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* presents a range of testimonies that recover the disappeared: families have been recorded speaking about their losses and sharing memories of those who were taken. These testimonies offer detail about the lives of the disappeared, showing them to be individuals outside of the collective, and offering insight into their beliefs and values that inspired their involvement in revolutionary or union activities. It recovers them from the more simplistic, negative associations created and presented by the State.

#### *Online Memorials: The GAM Facebook Page*

The final memorial that this chapter discusses is an online memorial. Whether created via a professional website or through the use of social media, online memorials are becoming an increasingly popular way to remember the dead. It has been argued that such memorials continue the bond between the living and the dead: 'the dead become part of everyday social interactions and so are given existence'.<sup>78</sup> They continue to have an online, social presence, which keeps them 'alive'.<sup>79</sup> This

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<sup>78</sup> Connor Graham, Michael Arnold, Tamara Kohn, 'Gravesites and Websites: A Comparison of Memorialisation', *Visual Studies*, Vol.30: 1 (2015), pp.37-53

<sup>79</sup> Jo Bell, Louis Bailey, David Kennedy, "'We do it to keep him alive": Bereaved individuals' experience of online suicide memorials and continuing bonds', *Mortality*, Vol.20: 4 (2015), pp.375-389

notion of having life within the online world is an interesting one in relation to the disappeared, who are considered to be neither alive nor dead. Yet the notion of 'life' online appears to extend to a presence that reminds the viewer of that person's existence, regardless of whether or not they are still living. Through online memorials, the disappeared then are able to regain some notion of 'life' through the promotion of their memory and the recovery of control over how they are depicted.

The Facebook page for the organization GAM posts pictures of disappeared people on the anniversaries of their disappearance. Alongside this picture there are details about the person and often, information about when and how they were disappeared. On 3 July 2017, for instance, a photograph of Gloria Elvira Barreno Coyoy was posted, along with her occupation at the time (she was a student at the social work school) and the time of her disappearance. A screenshot of this post can be seen in Figure 3.11.





Fig. 3.11. A screenshot taken of GAM's Facebook page.

The writing on the right hand side reads: *02 de Julio de 1985: Desaparición forzada de Gloria Elvira Barreno Coyoy, estudiante de la escuela de Trabajo Social de Quetzaltenango. Fue secuestrada a las 14:30 horas en Zunil, Quetzaltenango mientras se encontraba almorzando, momento en el que cuatro hombres armados la golpearon, la esposaron y se la llevaron con rumbo desconocido. Hasta el momento se desconoce de su paradero.* It outlines that Gloria was disappeared on 2 July 1985 in Zunil, Quetzaltenango, at around two thirty in the afternoon while she was at lunch. She was attacked by four armed men who handcuffed her and took her away.

Through these posts, GAM draws attention to the disappeared and the act of disappearance. The disappeared are recovered in one of the more simpler ways: that is, they are drawn out of the silence created by the State and promoted on a visible platform. What is interesting with this memorial, and what makes it slightly different to the previous two, is the emphasis that is placed on the individual. Posting these photographs on particular dates has two noticeable impacts. Firstly, the viewer is made aware of the frequency of the disappearances. Although generally only one post is made per day, that there is a near constant stream suggests how widespread this act of violence was when it was taking place. But secondly, and almost in contrast to this idea of mass that is created, we, as the viewer, are forced to focus on one particular person and the connection that they have with the date. As a public memorial, the

posts designate certain dates, and the events that occurred on them, as something to be noticed and remembered.<sup>80</sup> There is a sense of individuality being recovered, with each day being dedicated to a different person and the removal of anonymity. The posts put faces to the numbers and recover the disappeared from the repression of the State, but also from the disappeared as a group.

As with the Museum of Martyrs and the memory book of Santa Lucía, the narrative that surrounds the disappeared in this online memorial is one that challenges the assumption that all those who were disappeared were criminals. As each person's post is given its own space, no two people will be included in the same post, there is room and time to include details about the person in question. We learnt that Gloria was a student; on other posts it is possible to find out that the disappeared included trade union members and teachers. Some of those whose pictures are displayed may have been members of insurgent groups, but the photographs are posted nonetheless. As with the museum, there is the idea of not being ashamed of who the disappeared were, but of accepting their past and fighting to ensure that others see beyond the criminal label that is attached to them.

## **Conclusion**

The recovery of the disappeared has been, and continues to be, a physical and abstract process. The physical recovery of remains has meant that many of the disappeared have been identified and returned to their families for burial, while abstract recovery has allowed for the voices of the disappeared, in the form of their beliefs and actions, to be heard. Families have been able to speak about their loved ones, as in the process of recovering the disappeared, there have been spaces created

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<sup>80</sup> Joyce Walker, 'Narratives in the database: Memorialising September 11<sup>th</sup> online', *Computers and Composition*, Vol.24 (2007), pp.121-153

that allow or encourage such conversations to occur; such as the site of an exhumation or the demonstration on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance. This sharing of experience in turn feeds into the recovery of the disappeared, as memories held by family members are of individuals, rather than of a collective group, and so more detailed knowledge of those who were taken becomes available to wider audiences, developing the view held of the disappeared.

An aspect of recovery that has reoccurred in a number of the memorials looked at was this idea of criminality that the disappeared have been associated with, and the process of both challenging and accepting this label. Salazar wrote that for many families the shame of being associated with the disappeared had prevented them from talking about their loved ones in public places; memorials that recover the disappeared have gone some way to removing this shame. With physical remains, the identification of children and elderly people in mass graves, for instance, has called into question the State's condemnation of all the disappeared as guerrilla. It is clear from the bones that have been uncovered that many of those who were murdered could not have been active members of resistance groups. This distinction however between those who were guerrilla and those who were not is not intended to justify the disappearance of resistance members. It is instead supposed to draw attention to the barbarity and extremity of the violence inflicted by the State. Their operations, despite what they claimed, were not focussed on protecting the country; rather they intended to eliminate as many opponents or potential opponents as possible while also persecuting the Mayan people.

Removing the stigma surrounding the disappeared extends to all: active participant or not, and has been the intention of many of the memorials examined in this chapter. Many of those involved in the creation of such memorials have not

attempted to deny that some of the disappeared were members of the guerrilla, rather they have accepted it and instead of being ashamed, have questioned why being in opposition to the government was considered a sufficient reason to perform a disappearance. The reasons why many of the disappeared became involved in resistance activities has also been explored in these memorials that recover, which has allowed for such struggles to be recognised as something other than just criminal activity. The disappeared are represented by their families and those who knew them, as people who sought a fairer and more just world for the majority of Guatemalans.

A large part of recovering the disappeared has been about regaining control. In essence, wanting to shape the narrative that surrounds the disappeared rather than allowing the State to continue with its negative portrayal. Memorials that recover allow for families to take control over the depiction of the disappeared, to challenge the process of vilification that has been pushed by the State, and to share these ideas and memories with wider audiences. Recovery of the disappeared is an on-going process and one that will undoubtedly continue to be present in memorials throughout Guatemala until there is a regime change, and attitudes concerning the disappeared alter and information about their capture is made more readily available.

## **Chapter Four** **Informing**

The desire to inform is another theme of memorials to the disappeared in Guatemala. The use and presence of information in memorials has previously been discussed in relation to memorials that contest and those that recover. Contesting memorials use information to do just that: contest the narrative of the past put forward by the State. Memorials that recover seek to spread ideas that, again, contest the presentation of the disappeared, whether they are attached to the physical remains of the disappeared or in relation to how the disappeared are perceived. There is a desire to inform the general, wider public about who the disappeared were and thereby recover their identities from perpetrators. This chapter examines those memorials that primarily seek to inform. There is some cross over between the memorials examined in chapter three and this chapter, such as the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union, and the memory book of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, as the ideas of recover and inform are tightly intertwined. Where the Museum of Martyrs, for instance, recovers the disappeared from the narrative of the State, it also, as part of this recovery, informs others of this contesting information. The difference between the examinations of these memorials between the two chapters lies in the focus of the analysis. In chapter three they were discussed in light of their ambitions to recover the disappeared; here, they are examined as memorials that aim to inform the public.

There are a selection of memorials in Guatemala that have been created with the aim to inform and educate people about the past. These include the aforementioned Museum of Martyrs and the memory book of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, and also the *Casa de la Memoria* museum. The memorials each differ in their forms and in the amount of detail they include about the past, but with

each memorial comes this wish to convey an awareness of the past to those who are uninformed, both in current and future generations. There is a particular focus on the importance of passing information on to young people within Guatemala, with all of the memorials discussed here intending to educate later generations about the conflict and the disappearances, so the disappeared and the fight surrounding them are not forgotten. Given the reluctance shown by multiple governments towards discussing the past, these memorials with their protected vats of information have become one of the few public spaces where those who did not experience the civil war may learn about how it unfolded and the impact it had.

The memorials in this chapter are organised on a spectrum, similar to those discussed in chapters two and three. Here, this spectrum is defined by the focus of the information communicated and how broad or specific it is. In each of these memorials the intended audience influences the information presented. Memorials such as the Santa Lucía memory book for instance, are intended to remember particular members of a community and were created with the primary ambition of keeping this memory alive within that community. The information included is therefore more refined and specific than that in say, a museum, which has a wider intended audience and would present information with a more general historical overview. As the chapter progresses, the breadth of the information included in the memorial increases. It begins with those memorials that have specific information to communicate, and then works through those that have an increasingly wider historical gaze. Before moving on to examine the different memorials in question, this chapter first explores the idea of ‘informing’ in greater detail, examining what this information entails, and what this actually means for memorials.

**‘Informing’**

The search for the disappeared has frequently relied upon the distribution of information by those in positions of power and because of this, has often been curtailed. As chapter one explored, the absence of a lasting meaningful regime change in Guatemala has had an impact on how the past is discussed – if it is discussed at all. Even while negotiations to bring the civil war to an end were underway and the Peace Accords were being drawn up, there were attempts made by the military to conceal information and destroy evidence of their activities during the conflict. In post civil war Guatemala, this attitude towards information continued and was supported by a number of governments while they were in power. The creation and destruction of the Peace Archives, founded in 2008 by the Guatemalan government, is a clear example of the impact this lack of lasting regime change had on the availability of information. The idea of the archives was originally conceived in 1996 when the Peace Accords were signed, and it was intended that they would be one of many creations through which reconciliation could take place. Yet the project was not realised until Álvaro Colom was elected president in 2008. Colom’s presidency was one of the few moments in Guatemala’s post-civil war history where the possibility of a regime change seemed possible. In contrast to the preference for silence seen in his predecessors (and those who followed him), Colom seemed willing to engage with the past and provide state funds to facilitate this. He sought to make military archives public, despite the resistance he faced from his Minister of Defence.<sup>1</sup> The Peace Archives digitised around two million government documents concerning the conflict,

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<sup>1</sup> Susanne Jonas, ‘Guatemala: Acts of Genocide and Scorched-earth Counterinsurgency War’, in *Centuries of Genocide: Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, ed. Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.370

and published nine reports on issues relating to this period of history such as forced disappearance, illegal adoptions, and the National Police archives.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these positive steps towards creating a discussion about the past, or maybe because of them, the Peace Archives were short-lived. In 2012, over the course of a few months, Otto Pérez Molina had the archives closed. The then Secretary of Peace, Antonio Arenales Forno, said in May 2012 that the focus of the archives should be on providing information to the National Reparations Committee rather than investigating the military.<sup>3</sup> The staff were dismissed, the investigative team dissolved, and the materials were distributed to archives and government institutions around Guatemala. Kate Doyle, senior analyst and director of the Guatemala Documentation Project at the National Security Archive, wrote in 2012 that such closure brought an end to an important source of support to human rights prosecutions.<sup>4</sup> Many of the staff that worked in the archives had provided expert testimony to the Public Ministry for numerous human rights trials, including the trial of Ríos Montt.

The closure of the Peace Archives is a prime example of the influence and control the State still exerts over the past in terms of who is allowed to interact with it and what aspects of the past are available to public scrutiny. It also shows just how tangled progress towards open discussion of the past is within Guatemala. It has not been, as chapter one demonstrated, a continuous succession of governments influenced or run by former regime members from the end of the Civil War to the

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<sup>2</sup> Kate Doyle, ‘Notes from the Evidence Project: Guatemalan Government to Dismantle its “Archives of Peace”’, *Unredacted: The National Security Archives, Unedited and Uncensored*, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/guatemalan-government-closes-peace-archives/> (Accessed 01/02/2017)

<sup>3</sup> Guatemala Human Rights Commission, ‘GHRC Denounces Closure of Peace Archives Directorate in Guatemala’, <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/resources/press-room/comunicadodap/> (Accessed 01/02/2017)

<sup>4</sup> Doyle, ‘Notes from the Evidence Project: Guatemalan Government to Dismantle its “Archives of Peace”’, *Unredacted*, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/guatemalan-government-closes-peace-archives/> (Accessed 01/02/2017)



present day. There have been moments in Guatemala's history where opportunities to start a reconciliation process have been put forward by those in power. The creation of this archive speaks of a desire to set out documents and information from the conflict so that they may be engaged with and discussed. The closure of the archives, and even the initial gap between their suggestion and creation, however, are in direct contrast with this and represent instead a wish to silence and control the past. When the archives closed, so did the State endorsed public sphere that encouraged the circulation of ideas. Andreas Huyssen has noted that 'issues of memory no longer simply concern the past but have become part of the very political legitimacy of regimes today'.<sup>5</sup> The information contained in the Peace Archives would serve as more than just memories of events; it could also threaten to unbalance the power of the regime.

The distribution of information through memorials therefore is of particular importance when these barriers are taken into consideration. Memorials that inform create a public space, a visual representation of public opinion, in which information about the past, and the present struggle, is projected and may be discussed.<sup>6</sup> Memorials are one of the few public resources available to the population of Guatemala through which the past can be engaged with, and such engagement is needed if the history of the country is to be known, the disappeared are to be remembered, and the fight for information concerning the disappeared is to continue. For memorials that inform then, there is a certain reliance on permanence in terms of the forms they take, owing to the very lack of permanence that exists in the country's moments of regime change. While the strength of many of the memorials examined in relation to the theme of contest in chapter two is found in their abilities to shock and

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<sup>5</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p.94

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p.41

surprise, in part because of their temporality and therefore unexpectedness, for those memorials that seek to inform there is a need for an almost steadfast approach, so there is a constant presence from which information can be sought and a place in which this information may be preserved. Memorials that inform strive to not only present information to the public but also protect such information from being silenced or removed by the State.

It is clear that there are variations in the information contained within memorials for the disappeared, and that the focus of the information is dependent upon the intentions of the creator. In those memorials created for smaller, often intimate groups, the individual disappeared and information concerning them is brought to the fore, usually through the use of testimony from those who knew the person/s in question; whereas in those memorials intended for bigger, more anonymous groups, the disappeared as a collective tends to take centre stage and information regarding the general act of disappearance and the numbers involved is included. This divide is not absolute however, and it is possible for general information to be included in those memorials that prioritise the individual, and for personal information about individual persons to appear in those memorials intended for larger groups. Outside of Guatemala, one such example of this is in the information centre in Berlin's Holocaust memorial. The voices and images of individuals are presented alongside an overarching narrative of the violence that took place and the numbers of people killed.<sup>7</sup> The individual and the collective are combined.

If we take a step back from examining the detail included in these memorials and look at them all together, it becomes apparent that the type of information

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<sup>7</sup> Karyn Ball, *Disciplining the Holocaust* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), p.243

presented can be broken down into several sub-groups. Even if the content is different, memorials that inform all tend to follow this broad pattern in terms of the categories of information they present. There is information concerning what happened: how the disappearances occurred, when, and to how many; information about the people it happened to: as stated previously this can vary in detail depending on the type of memorial and the intended audience; who performed the disappearances: within each of the memorials that inform there is an indication of who the perpetrators were; how this information is known: memorials will often provide evidence, whether it is physical or testimonial, that supports the information shown; and what information is not known: here, the disappeared's simultaneous position in the past and the present is brought to the fore, as memorials acknowledge that there are limitations to their knowledge and that there is still much to learn about the disappearances. Often leading on from this, memorials that inform may suggest a way that those engaging with the memorial are able to help and further attempts to gather information.

Memorials that inform seek to spread information about Guatemala's violent past to the public and the wider world, but they also draw attention to the continued absence of the disappeared and the impunity that still protects perpetrators. The past is shown to be a present issue. The experience of the disappearances, to paraphrase Koselleck, orientating actions in the present.<sup>8</sup> The desire to inform in these memorials is connected to the intention spoken about in chapter two: to contest. The memorials that are discussed in this chapter clearly show the influence the contemporary political situation in Guatemala has on the depiction of the past, and although each memorial communicates information slightly differently, there is a constant thread through each

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<sup>8</sup> Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), p.223

of them that such information should be seen as the start of a process: to seek positive change.

## **Memorials**

### *The Memory Book of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa*

The memory book of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza*, was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the theme ‘recover’, and focused on the included testimonies, which discussed members of the community who had been disappeared and gave some historical insight into why the municipality was so involved with the work of unions. It is the first memorial examined in this chapter because of this particular focus on the Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa community. The information the memory book presents is detailed and confined to events that took place in a particular geographical location during a certain historical period (the late 1970s, early 1980s).

On 2 November 2011 the memory book was officially presented to the community. Those who had been involved in the creation of the book, some of whom had contributed their testimonies, gave speeches about what *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* meant to them and why they thought it was important. Some speeches reflected on the personal loss of a relative and how the creation of the book felt akin to finding that relative. Others spoke of its creation as a fight against the attempts made by the State to silence them. Gloria Almira, one of the women to speak at the presentation in November 2011, said: ‘we will go and share this with our children, with our cousins, with everybody. So that they know the history and so that we reflect, and so that this will never happen again.’ She added, her voice at this point becoming overcome with emotion, ‘...we will take care of the book, because for us

it's like finding my father. Thank you.'<sup>9</sup> This idea of sharing the history of Santa Lucía with children and the wider community, serving almost as an extension of a family, so that they know what happened is echoed in other speeches made that day. Marielos Loch, a woman who lives in Santa Lucía and worked on *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* stated that 'it [the book] means a lot to us because it reflects the lives of our loved ones, so that the new generation become aware of what happened in our Santa Lucía. They will understand that here in Santa Lucía there was a genocide'.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear from the testimonies of those involved that *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* had immense personal value to the people of Santa Lucía. As James Young has pointed out, for people without graves, without bodies to bury, these books can often serve as 'symbolic tombstones'.<sup>11</sup> The book created a space otherwise not available where the physically absent disappeared may be remembered, but also connected with. As an object, the book became a tactile representation of those who were disappeared. To quote Diane Taylor's discussion in relation to Argentina, it offered a 'material equivalent for the missing victims of repression'.<sup>12</sup> In addition to this, it is evident that the book also offered an opportunity to teach others about the history of the conflict. There were references made in speeches to the 'next generation', which demonstrates an intended longevity for the memory book, so that people in the future know about and remember the disappearances that occurred during the civil war and the reasons why they happened. The book contains, for instance, the testimony of Maria Lydia Saj Garcia, whose father, David Saj Rión, was

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<sup>9</sup> *Living Memory For A Different Santa Lucía* 2011, video, World News, 23 December, viewed 10/02/2017

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.7

<sup>12</sup> Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts. Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p.142

taken away by members of the army. In the middle of the night on 28 September 1983, armed men broke into the family home, threatened Maria's mother and brother, and then took David Rión away in a car with tinted windows.<sup>13</sup> Although her mother searched continuously for David until she died, Maria still does not know what happened to her father. Her testimony within the memory book not only immediately informs current readers of the violence that occurred, but preserves this memory for those in the future, potentially even beyond Maria's own lifetime. It offers the possibility of transforming communicative memory, the living memory of an individual shared socially, into collective memory, which may be disseminated to a wider group beyond and away from the original rememberer.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the hard copies that were handed out to members of the community, the memory book is also available online. In relation to the idea discussed earlier of memorials preserving information as well as distributing it, the community has ensured that even if the hard copies of the book are destroyed, through time, inclement weather, or a malicious act, information about the community's experiences during the conflict is still accessible; and since it is online, accessible to a much wider audience beyond the Santa Lucía community. Online memorials are immune to the dangers of physical decay, and while they might have their own vulnerabilities, the memory book still takes on a sense of permanence as it exists in two different formats, thereby allowing the weaknesses of one to support the other.<sup>15</sup> Returning to the idea of distribution, it is also interesting to note that the presentation

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<sup>13</sup> *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* (Impunity Watch, 2011), pp.108-109

<sup>14</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, Vol.65 (1995), pp.125-133

Juliette Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.11

<sup>15</sup> Tim Hutchings, 'Wiring Death: Dying, Grieving and Remembering on the Internet', in *Emotion, Identity and Death: Mortality Across Disciplines*, ed. Douglas J. Davies, Chang-Won Park (London: Routledge, 2016), p.49

of *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* to the Santa Lucía community was filmed and put online; it is available on both the World News website and on YouTube. The film includes a number of speeches given at the presentation, shows the reactions of people in the audience, and also contains interviews with different people from the community. While the focus of the book is on the events that occurred in Santa Lucía and the heavy emphasis on both wanting to inform the next generation and remember the missing within the community itself, this distribution of material online suggests there is also a wish for the information contained in the book to spread to wider audiences.

During the speeches made at the presentation of the book, there was one speaker who referred to the idea of challenging the silence imposed by the State: ‘But luckily in Guatemala and Santa Lucía’, he said, ‘we are contributing to the recuperation of historical memory’.<sup>16</sup> There is an inevitable overlap between memorials that inform and those that contest: a government that seeks to silence will always be challenged by those who wish to tell the world about their experiences of state-inflicted violence. The earlier mentioned closure of the Peace Archives, cutting off public access to information about the past, is exemplary of this, as are the threats faced by those family members who publically demanded to know what had happened to their disappeared relatives, as outlined in chapter one. This speech further reinforces the idea that there is a wish to have the experiences, and the history, of the Santa Lucía community heard by others in order to not only remind future generations of the struggle that was endured in their municipality, but, as the speaker said, to ‘recuperate’ historical memory from those who currently control it and who

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<sup>16</sup> *Living Memory For A Different Santa Lucía* 2011, video, World News, 23 December, viewed 10/02/2017

would see the disappeared forgotten.<sup>17</sup> The information contained in the memory book is therefore being used to not only inform others about the past, but also to contest the official narrative and recover the disappeared from within this.

This wish to remember the past and inform others of it is visible in the creation of other memorials around Santa Lucía. There is a plaque, for instance, dedicated to Father Walter Voordeckers, a Catholic priest involved in the organization of cooperatives, on the side of the Municipal Building near to where he was shot in May 1980, and another placed on the base of a cross in the courtyard of the parish church where he used to work.<sup>18</sup> These were erected by *la Asociación Memoria, Dignificación y Esperanza* (AMDE or the Association for Memory, Dignity, and Hope of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa), a local organisation created, as the name suggests, to encourage remembrance of the past and with this, help the community recover from their experiences. The two buildings, and therefore memorials, are close together and one may question why two memorials to one man are needed and in such close proximity to one another. However, the decision to mark the places where Father Voordeckers worked and was also killed is significant. It speaks of a wish to remember the man and the work he did within the community, but also remind people of the manner in which he lost his life and parallel to this, the brutality of the violence faced by Santa Lucía.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> ‘Assassination of Walter Voordeckers’, *The Historical Marker Database*, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=99872> (Accessed 10/02/2017)





Fig.4.1 One of the plaques for Father Walter Voordeckers. Image taken from the Historical Marker Database, <https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=99872>

The inscription on the plaque near the church, which can be seen in Figure 4.1, reads: ‘Lord, for my brothers I have given you everything, even my life. In memory of Father Walter Voordeckers. 1939 - 1980’. In the top right corner of the plaque is the engraving of a dove, and the quotation ‘Lord, for my brothers I have given you everything, even my life’ is written on the outline of an open book, presumably the bible. The plaque that marks where Father Voordeckers was assassinated reads ‘Father Walter Voordeckers was assassinated here on May 12, 1980. "Only let us hold true to what we have attained" (Phillipians 3:16)’.<sup>19</sup> Although both remember Father Voordeckers, there is a difference in tone between the two plaques. The one near the church with the choice of quotation and dedication focus more on the man himself and religious devotion, remembering his actions when he was alive; whereas the one to mark his assassination speaks instead of the struggle that took place, the bible verse encouraging the people to focus on the reasons why they were fighting and why

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

Father Voordeckers was assassinated. This is similar to the idea presented in *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* of informing people of the reason why such violence occurred in the first place.

*Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza* demonstrates how a memorial can be designed to remember the past and those who were disappeared, and also inform people about these events. It also shows that even with community-based projects such as this, there is often an intention to spread this knowledge beyond the community to broader audiences as well. The prospect of a wider audience did not lead to detracting from the personal relevance of the book to the people of Santa Lucía, nor from the specificity of the information contained within it. These were maintained, but enough information was included in the introduction of the book and in the film made of the presentation so that readers or viewers would be aware of the historical context in which the text was grounded, and subsequently why it was so significant to those who created it.

The next examples of memorials intending to inform that will be examined are two museums in Guatemala City: the Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union (referred to from here as the Museum of Martyrs) and *Casa de la Memoria*. Like the book produced in Santa Lucía, these museums have the intention of communicating information to those who may have been personally affected by disappearances as well as those who, because of generational or geographical distance, for example, were not. Given what I have previously written about the attitude of the Guatemalan State towards the disappearances, and the attempts that have been made to restrict public access to information about these and the violence of the past in general, it may seem surprising that two such museums exist within the country's capital and that none of the post-civil war governments have approached the museums in an attempt

to have them closed down. *Casa de la Memoria* is even located on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenida: one of the most popular streets within Guatemala City. Potentially the higher levels of observation and surveillance that are now in place on the government's actions towards incidents of human rights abuses have prevented the use of comparable suppression to that seen during the conflict. The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) for instance, operates a system where volunteers accompany human rights defenders in Guatemala in an attempt to ensure their security.<sup>20</sup> The United Nations and Amnesty International also regularly publish information about any repressive actions.<sup>21</sup>

The closest the State has come to having these museums closed down, is by restricting funding to them. For the *Casa de la Memoria*, the current financial situation is stable. The museum was created by the *Centro de Acción Legal para los Derechos Humanos* (Center for Human Rights Legal Action or CALDH), an institution that promotes and defends human rights, to encourage people to engage with memories of the past and learn about the history of the country. The institution therefore ensures that the museum is maintained and able to stay open. However, such stability does not extend to all museums within Guatemala. The Museum of Martyrs, for instance, is supported by the FAFG (*Fundacion De Antropologia Forense De Guatemala*), which in turn relies upon donations from a variety of bodies, including international donations and contributions from members of the public; there is even the option to make a donation on their webpage.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 'Guatemala Accompaniment Project', <https://nisgua.org/what-we-do/guatemala-accompaniment-project-gap/> (Accessed 20/10/2017)

<sup>21</sup> 'Human rights in Guatemala under scrutiny by UN', <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/03/human-rights-guatemala-under-scrutiny-un/> (Accessed 20/10/2017)

<sup>22</sup> Fundacion De Antropologia Forense De Guatemala, <https://www.fafg.org> (Accessed 10/02/2017)

The information contained within these museums is broader than that presented in *Porque Queríamos Salir de Tanta Pobreza*: they offer more of an overview of the disappearances and violence within Guatemala as a whole, rather than in relation to a particular location. Yet, there is a difference between the two museums themselves and their information in terms of the breadth and the detail included. While *Casa de la Memoria* offers historical context for the entirety of the civil war, and even touches upon history prior to this, the Museum of Martyrs has a narrower focus; the displays are centered mainly around those disappeared who were mentioned in the Death Squad Dossier and, in even closer detail, on Amancio Villatoro. The first memorial examined in this section then, is the Museum of Martyrs, as, when compared to *Casa de la Memoria*, the information it presents is located further towards the detailed, specific end of the scale.

#### *The Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union*

There are memorial museums located in countries all over the world, established as part of, what Paul Williams has referred to as, ‘a global rush to commemorate atrocities’; structures enthusiastically constructed despite not knowing whether or not such spaces aid reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> In these museums, the presentation of the past is undeniably influenced by the culture and politics of the contextual present in which they work (although this criticism can be levelled at any moment of reflection). The history included in the national museums in Guatemala, for instance, largely focus on ancient Mayan culture and artefacts, rather than any of the more recent historical events, and even then some of the information included is reportedly

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000)

sparse.<sup>24</sup> Despite this, and despite the ‘rush’ that such constructions may have been established in, for incidents of past atrocity and violence, museums can offer the opportunity for education and discussion to take place due to the vast amounts of information contained within them. In places like Guatemala, where such incentives are discouraged, this ability to encourage thought and discussion about the disappearances in a public place is a positive for those who would seek to have the violence of the past openly addressed.

The Museum of Martyrs was built with the intention of informing others about the disappearances that took place in Guatemala during the civil war. ‘For us as family members of the disappeared,’ Salomon, my guide around the museum, told me, ‘its important to us to tell this story because there’s a lot of young people who don’t know what happened, and there’s 45,000 people who were disappeared.’<sup>25</sup> As with the Santa Lucia memory book, there was an emphasis on ensuring younger generations know about the disappearances and the conflict. Salomon’s referral to the number of disappearances here is worth examining, as it places an emphasis not just on the fact that there were disappearances, but also on the scale of this violence. It offers a broader context in which the select examples focused on in the museum may be better understood. It is also possible to infer from Salomon’s referral to the number of disappeared the implication that because so many lives were lost, and so many lives affected by the form that this loss took, there is an additional need for young people to know what happened. Salomon told me when I visited the museum in 2015 that since its creation, the museum had received around 20,000 visitors: a small number, he said, when compared with the number of those who were disappeared.

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Guatemala City Attractions: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología’, *Lonely Planet*, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/guatemala/guatemala-city/attractions/museo-nacional-de-arqueologia-y-etnologia/a/poi-sig/431950/358409> (Accessed 12/10/2017)

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

Yet visitors do seem to come from both within and outside Guatemala: families of the disappeared visit the museum; students from local universities; and people from all over the world. ‘Brazil, Holland, and all sorts of countries,’ Salomon stated. ‘They’ve come here to visit.’<sup>26</sup>

When setting up the museum, Samuel Villatoro also intended that its existence would create a space of memory for the disappeared.<sup>27</sup> The relationship between the disappeared of Guatemala and public space is a negative one, in the sense that such a relationship can only be said to exist in absence. Unlike other countries that experienced disappearances, like Argentina or Chile, in Guatemala there are no public spaces (areas that are open and accessible) particularly associated with the disappeared, or even the violence as a whole. In chapter three I discussed how in Guatemala, the disappeared are physically recovered from mass graves. For those who are aware of these spaces, there is undeniably a connection formed between them and the disappeared. Yet, these spaces cannot be considered public. There is the question of accessibility, especially in relation to those mass graves found on military bases: once the disappeared are recovered, the base once again becomes closed and stops being a public space. In Argentina, the ESMA building, which was used as a prison and torture centre, has been turned into a museum.<sup>28</sup> In Chile, the National Stadium, which was used to detain and process nearly 20,000 people over the course of two months in 1973, was declared to be a Historic Monument in 2003.<sup>29</sup> Both of these spaces exist in very public locations and the association between them and the

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Emily Willard, ‘Notes from the Evidence Project: Premiere of “The Echo” a Smashing Success’, *Unredacted: The National Security Archive, Unedited and Uncensored*, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/notes-from-the-evidence-project-premiere-of-the-echo-a-smashing-success/> (Accessed 12/06/2016)

<sup>28</sup> Janet A. Kamien, *The Thoughtful Museum: Sites of Memory: Argentina, Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 55:3 (2012), pp.267-77

<sup>29</sup> Peter Read, Marivic Wyndham, *Narrow But Endlessly Deep: The Struggle for Memorialisation in Chile Since The Transition to Democracy* (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2016), p.67

disappeared is therefore one that is shared by the many; the meaning has been ascribed collectively. To paraphrase Max Weber's thesis, the building has been understood through its violent purpose: the imprisonment and torture of victims of state repression.<sup>30</sup> This has then been reinforced by the transformation of such spaces into memorials. This has not happened in Guatemala and there are no comparable *public* spaces that can claim this same association with the disappeared.

This absence of specific spaces associated with memory in Guatemala is in part because the State did not use buildings for their operations that were, at the time, well known, like a stadium, or have since become openly linked with events, as with the ESMA building. Instead, military units often used basement and subbasements in the National Police Headquarters, military bases, or the basements of private houses.<sup>31</sup> The lack of regime change in Guatemala must also be mentioned as a contributing and influential factor. As Patrizia Violi argues, preservation of these sites implies a precise choice regarding which traces of the past ought to be retained and in which ways.<sup>32</sup> Amancio Villatoro's body, for instance, along with others who had been disappeared, was found at a military base and there are other bases around Guatemala where remains of more victims have been found. In the early 2000s for example, the FAFG performed an exhumation at a military base in Cobán where they discovered eighty-four graves and 565 bodies. (This discovery is now being used as evidence in the trial of eight former military leaders, who stand accused of ordering or

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<sup>30</sup> Martina Löw, Silke Steets, 'The Spatial Turn and the Sociology of the Built Environment', *Routledge Handbook of European Sociology*, ed. Sokratis Koniordos, Alexandros Kyrtis (Oxon: Routledge, 2014) p.216

<sup>31</sup> Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p.168

<sup>32</sup> Patrizia Violi, 'Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory. Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.29: 1 (2012), pp.36-75

orchestrating massacres, torture, and disappearances from said military base.)<sup>33</sup> However, because of the refusal on the part of the State to engage with the past and attempt to reconcile with the violence that occurred, these military bases remain in operation and, as I stated previously, are largely inaccessible. Unless the government is willing to declare them as Historic Monuments, echoing the process in Chile for example, these bases remain isolated and the absence of public spaces of memory persists.

In terms of memorialisation, what these public spaces or ‘trauma sites’ offer is ‘authenticity’. They ‘exist factually as material testimonies of the violence and horror that took place there’.<sup>34</sup> Steve Stern has written that memorials become more accessible to the public when they have this ‘authenticity’. They become more convincing when grounded in something real; one supposes, something that is visible or tangible.<sup>35</sup> While Guatemala does not have public sites of trauma to authenticate the histories told about the disappearances, the Museum of Martyrs does possess a collection of objects relating or once belonging to the disappeared, which offer a similar form of ‘material testimony’. They are traces of the past that offer some physical proof of the existence of the disappeared.<sup>36</sup> James Young has been critical about the presentation of such objects within museums. Citing examples from the museum at Auschwitz, which displays artefacts such as toothbrushes, eyeglasses, suitcases, Young argues that when shown by themselves, these objects only represent victims at the moment of their destruction; the scattered belongings do not remind us

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<sup>33</sup> Maggie Jones, ‘The Secrets in Guatemala’s Bones’, *The New York Times Magazine* (June 2016), [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/magazine/the-secrets-in-guatemalas-bones.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/magazine/the-secrets-in-guatemalas-bones.html?_r=0) (Accessed 15/02/2017)

<sup>34</sup> Violi, ‘Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.29: 1 (2012), pp.36-75

<sup>35</sup> Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.115-116

<sup>36</sup> Violi, ‘Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.29: 1 (2012), pp.36-75



of the lives that once animated them.<sup>37</sup> While Young makes a convincing argument, the context in which the objects are displayed in the Museum of Martyrs prevents the memory of life from being lost.

Within the room where Villatoro's remains are displayed, there is a pair of trousers, hung in a large display box at the head of the glass case containing Villatoro (see Figure 4.2).



Fig.4.2 The body and trousers of Amancio Villatoro in the Museum of Martyrs. On the left are photographs of Villatoro and his family; to the right of the image, and at the head of the glass case, is the pair of trousers that Villatoro's body was recovered wearing. In the top right hand corner, by the trousers, is a small information sign telling visitors the significance of this item of clothing.

‘Those are the trousers that he [Amancio] wore for fifty-seven days while he was captured,’ Salomon explained. ‘His wife remembers stitching these trousers- stitching the hem up- and remembers the trousers that he was wearing.’<sup>38</sup> When exhumations of graves take place and bodies are recovered, family members often recognise the

<sup>37</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory* (1993), p.132

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

clothing on the remains as items worn by their relatives the day they disappeared.<sup>39</sup> The presentation of these trousers, an object connected to one of the disappeared, does not, as Young suggests, reduce Villatoro to the moment of his disappearance because of the context the rest of the room offers. Photographs of Amancio Villatoro adorn the walls of this room. As I stated in chapter three, his life has been presented with pride and he has been represented as an individual, something that is lacking in the museum displays that Young cites, which are attempting to convey the scale of loss of life through vast displays of objects. The trousers act as material evidence, supporting the information presented in the museum and creating a connection between the viewer and the disappearances. As Young himself acknowledged, visitors respond ‘more directly to objects than to verbalised concepts’.<sup>40</sup>

The remains of Villatoro themselves also offer the authenticity that Stern described. For those who visit the museum looking for information, the presence of this body supports all of the informative descriptions that are provided and contests the idea presented by the State that the disappeared were not victims of violence, they had either not existed in the first place or had decided to leave the country. For those visitors who are unaware of the lack of regime change and silence surrounding the disappearances, the body raises questions. The inclusion of any remains within a museum is a topic that is highly contested. Bodies can serve as a connection between the past and present, between the living and dead, offering information, inspiration, and succour, but such a display renders the person as ‘ambivalent’: both person and thing, and there is a question of where the line is drawn between ‘socially acceptable’

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<sup>39</sup> Ambika Flavel and Caroline Barker, ‘Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology in Guatemala’, in *Handbook of Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology*, ed. Soren Blau, Douglas H. Ubelaker (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p.435

<sup>40</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory* (1993), p.132

treatment of remains and ‘socially unacceptable’.<sup>41</sup> For a son to display the body of his father in a museum therefore is a more unusual occurrence than usually presents itself, which suggests a significant reason for doing so. The placement of the body in the museum opens up these avenues for questions and discussion.

The Museum of Martyrs centres on the information discovered in the Death Squad Dossier (which was discussed in chapter one of this thesis). When you walk into the museum, one of the first things you see is a wall of photographs of the disappeared, which were copied from the dossier itself (see Figure 4.3). The museum has even included the information that was originally recorded in the dossier alongside these images. Salomon explained some of the notations on these entries to me: “‘Handed over to S2”, that’s the military detachment in Cobán’, Salomon said pointing out different records; ‘when it says “passed over to U4”, U4 is another intelligence unit... there’s also a plus sign, which basically means that person was executed without any more intelligence being given.’<sup>42</sup> A large poster, left of the wall of photographs, lists the common notations on the records and their meanings, so visitors are able to understand for themselves the information contained in each record. The photographs themselves are of mixed origin: there are some that were clearly taken willingly for official documents (and later copied for use in the dossier), and others that are the product of surveillance work. The disappeared here are presented to the viewer as the perpetrator saw them: not through the taking of the image, as Violi discusses in relation to the S-21 memorial museum in Cambodia where prisoners were photographed upon their arrival at the prison, but through the presentation of them. The images are shown next to the information gathered by

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<sup>41</sup> Mary M. Brooks and Claire Rumsey, ‘The Body in the Museum’, in *Human Remains: Guide for Museums and Academic Institutions*, eds. Vicki Cassman, Nancy Odegaard, Joseph Frederick Powell (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), p.261

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

military intelligence and so we view the images as they were positioned in the dossier. The spectre of the absent perpetrator that Violi refers to is conjured here through the realisation that we are looking at the same images, the same information, in the same format, as the perpetrators who constructed the dossier and used it to disappear the individuals mentioned.<sup>43</sup>



Fig.4.3 A section of the wall of photographs in the Museum of Martyrs. The wall is covered in copies of records from the Death Squad Dossier. The record highlighted by the red circle shows an example of where a new photograph has been added on top of an old one. Other records show where information has been added by hand at a later date.

What the inclusion of copies of these records offer is an insight into how Guatemala's military forces and the violence they inflicted, were organized. As a

<sup>43</sup> Violi, 'Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol.29: 1 (2012), pp.36-75

memorial that intends to inform, the inclusion of this information in the museum is vital if visitors are to grasp the systematic, calculated manner in which this form of violence was conducted, and understand how the State was operating during this time. While there were random incidents of disappearance during the conflict, the people who are listed in the Death Squad Dossier had been monitored and their movements tracked. Many of the documents that were discovered in the National Police Archives support this idea of vigilance on the part of the State; watching the population and making notes about certain people to try and identify anyone who may be involved in the insurgency.<sup>44</sup>

Most importantly, what the display of these records communicates to visitors is the confirmation that the State played a role in the disappearances. Although the particular authors of the document are difficult to trace, and there are no real means of identifying who it was that performed the disappearances, torture, or executions that are listed here, the existence of the dossier itself makes an indisputable statement about the role the State had in disappearances. The records are, like the physical objects, evidence that the State did perform and condone disappearances. In present day Guatemala, the significance of this information cannot be underrated. Governments have repeatedly denied that either the disappearances took place, or that the State was involved in them, or even that there was any information about the disappearances that could be handed over, to the truth commissions and to families demanding to know what happened to their loved ones. By sticking these records on the wall of the museum, in a place where visitors will immediately see them, the museum is making a very bold statement against the official attitude.

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<sup>44</sup> Archivo Historico de la Policía Nacional Guatemala (AHPN), *Historia*, <http://archivohistoricopn.org/pages/institucion/historia.php?lang=EN> (Accessed 15/02/2017)

In terms of informing, therefore, the Museum of Martyrs displays information with the intention of engaging audiences that are connected to the disappearances, but also those who are learning about the history of Guatemala's civil war. Owing to the restriction on information in Guatemala, viewing the copies of dossier records at the museum may be the first time visitors are able to engage with material that provides insight into the disappearances. The use of physical objects, human remains, and records all ensure that despite the small scale of the museum, it has authenticity and offers the opportunity to engage visitors in the information provided through the initial attraction of objects. Awareness of the existence of this museum has grown over the years and it has now been discussed in numerous international news articles focusing on the disappeared in Guatemala; it has even turned up as part of a Guatemalan travel itinerary.<sup>45</sup> This exposure goes some way to ensuring that the information contained in the museum will spread to wider audiences.

The next and final memorial that this chapter will examine is the *Casa de la Memoria*. As with the memory books of Santa Lucía and the Museum of Martyrs, *Casa de la Memoria* emphasises the importance of younger generations learning about the conflict and the disappearances, and has noticeably adopted techniques to make the displays as engaging as possible. The information contained here therefore is far broader than that within the Museum of Martyrs. *Casa de la Memoria* was created with the intention of giving insight into as much of Guatemala's history as possible.

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<sup>45</sup> IPSL, Origins of Food, 'Guatemala One Health: Ecology. Culture. Justice.' <https://www.theoriginsoffood.com/onehealth> (Accessed 15/02/2017)

*Casa de la Memoria*

*Casa de la Memoria* originally opened in February 2014, in a building located on Guatemala City's 13<sup>th</sup> Street in Zone One. Although the city is set out on a grid, 13<sup>th</sup> Street can be a little difficult to find and is located outside the Historical Centre. When I went to visit the museum in 2015, I found myself asking for directions from people living or working in the vicinity, the majority of whom were not aware that the museum even existed. Whether this was because I was unlucky with the cross section of people I spoke to, or because the museum had had little impact is not clear. There may also have been some confusion over the existence of the museum given that in September 2015 it was in the process of moving locations. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenida however, where the museum is now located, is in the heart of Zone One, also known as the Historical Centre of the city (where the National Palace, Presidential Palace, and the Cathedral are based), and since its refurbishment in 2010, has become one of the most popular places for Guatemalans to socialise and for tourists to wander. 'Memorials' reach, their potential to make broad publics aware of their existence and meaning, depends on locations that are easily accessible', writes Hite.<sup>46</sup> If this is the case, awareness of this museum is bound to increase, and with this the chance of distributing information to large audiences.

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<sup>46</sup> Katherine Hite, *Politics and the Art of Commemoration* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p.10



Fig.4.4 The Historical Centre in Guatemala City.

The red marker at the top shows where the *Casa de la Memoria* is. In the bottom right of the image is the Metropolitan Cathedral.

The slogan of the museum is '*para no olvidar*' (Never Forget). Such a phrase speaks openly about the intentions of *Casa de la Memoria*, further supported by the name of the museum itself (House of Memory): that is to know and remember the past. The museum is free to access. Considering the levels of poverty in Guatemala (approximately 75 per cent of Guatemalans live below the poverty line) an entrance charge might well have restricted the information to just those that could afford to pay.<sup>47</sup> While accessible to everybody, there is a degree of emphasis placed on younger

<sup>47</sup> 'Guatemala: An Assessment of Poverty', <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,,contentMDK:2>



people within the museum: encouraging them to engage with the past and also develop their own sense of identity in relation to what they are told. Director of CALDH, Francisco Soto, said of the museum, ‘this is a space for young people to know the history of struggle and resistance so that this country is different’.<sup>48</sup> This focus on the next generations of Guatemalans, and the idea of achieving change through their actions, has influenced how information has been presented within the museum. The use of narrative to communicate information, for instance, has been utilized. It has been argued that people make sense of the world through a narrative, that they find it easier to absorb information when it is presented as such, and here, visitors are taken on a chronological journey through Guatemala’s history; they are told a ‘story’.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the tour guides that show visitors around the museum are aged between thirteen and twenty-four in an attempt to establish a connection between the past and present day; the past is not dead, but is ‘lived each day by the next generation’.<sup>50</sup> One tour guide is Andrea Fabiola Plician Méndez, a local high school student, whose reflections on working at the museum support this idea of younger generations becoming aware of past events through the museum. She said she initially got involved with the museum out of a need to ‘discover a place for [her] roots’, but enjoyed the feeling working at the museum gave her, that she was part of the ‘difference’ and ‘resistance’. ‘Contrary to popular belief, youth are not the future of society. Youth are the present, which is alive and strong’, she wrote. ‘...We can create

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0207581~menuPK:443285~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html (Accessed 20/10/2017)

<sup>48</sup> Sandra Sebastián, ‘Casa de la Memoria’, *Plaza Pública*, <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/casa-de-la-memoria> (Accessed 12/02/2017)

<sup>49</sup> Leslie Bedford, ‘Storytelling: The Real Work of Museums’, *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol.44.1 (2001), pp.27-34

<sup>50</sup> ‘Step Into The House Of Memory’, *Network In Solidarity with the People of Guatemala: NISGUA*, <http://nisgua.org/step-into-the-house-of-memory/> (Accessed 12/02/2017)

a better place, a better world, because the change starts with us, and because the change is us.’<sup>51</sup>

The information contained in the museum’s displays also reflects this wish to engage younger people. Although not omitting information about the violence, there is an emphasis on hope, designed, one would imagine, to encourage people to get involved with attempts to right the wrongs of the past rather than shy away from them. There are two rooms in the museum that focus on the violence of the conflict: the museum follows a chronological structure, so these rooms are some of the last ones to be accessed. Before reaching these, visitors have walked through rooms that tell of the Ancient Mayan civilizations that existed; the arrival of the Spanish; the process of colonisation and the institutional racism against the Mayan people that developed; and a room focussing on the year 1944, when many positive changes in terms of social reform were made in Guatemala. Each room contains a number of sculptures or pieces of artwork that relate to the information at hand, and have been decorated to reflect the historical focus. The room that deals with the Spanish invasion, for instance (see Figure 4.5 on the following page), has white swords on scarlet ribbons dangling from the ceiling, reflecting the violent means by which Spain took control.

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<sup>51</sup> Andrea Fabiola Plician Méndez, “‘Kaji Tulam’ Memory House The Need for a Place to Discover My Roots’, on *International Coalition of Sites of Conscience*, ‘The Present Needs Memory’, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/2016/12/the-present-needs-memory/> (Accessed 12/02/2017)



Fig.4.5 Interior of the Spanish invasion room at *Casa de la Memoria*.  
 Image taken from: 'Step Into The House Of Memory', *Network In Solidarity with the People of Guatemala: NISGUA*, <http://nisgua.org/step-into-the-house-of-memory/>

After the room focussing on 1944 comes the first room dealing with the civil war. Visitors enter this room by pushing aside a heavy curtain. What is held here is deliberately concealed from view until the curtain is pushed back. The choice to make these rooms dark is an interesting one: they contrast sharply with the previous light and open spaces that visitors interact with in the museum and with this contrast, the conflict instantly becomes a stand-alone moment in Guatemala's history. It is singled out as something uniquely serious and different. Such a presentation also has a potentially emotional side to it. Entering a dark room, visitors may feel a sense of initial suspense or uncertainty, which is transformed into one of fear, discomfort, or unease when they take in the scene displayed before them.

The walls of this first room have been painted black and the outlines of standing human figures drawn onto them. The first scene visitors come across is that of a living room (see Figure 4.6): the table has been overturned, plates have fallen to the ground, and two chairs lie on their sides, one with a broken leg. It is an image that

suggests disruption, destruction, and the presence of danger within a familial environment, and is one that may be applied to the many. As with the image ‘Absences’ created by Luis Gonzáles Palma, discussed in chapter two, the use of such mundane, everyday objects creates a connection between the viewer and the scene in front of them. The home is an image that ‘recalls a way of life common to many men’.<sup>52</sup> That the figures on the walls are simply silhouettes rather than figures depicted in detail furthers this idea of openness. This could be any family who has been attacked. It also speaks to the violence of disappearances and the absence they created. The family home has been destroyed and the only suggestion of the family who once lived there are the shadows on the walls: they are not physically, tangibly present unlike the remains of the house.



Fig.4.6 Interior of the first room depicting violence at *Casa de la Memoria*. Image taken from: ‘Step Into The House Of Memory’, *Network In Solidarity with the People of Guatemala: NISGUA*, <http://nisgua.org/step-into-the-house-of-memory/>

<sup>52</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, ‘Space and the Collective Memory’, in *Memory*, ed. Ian Farr (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), p.48

In the hall leading off from this room, visitors walk past more silhouettes, this time of people fleeing from soldiers armed with guns. The two scenes can be read in a timeline: the destruction of the family home and then the terrified family fleeing for their lives. The story-like telling of this portion of Guatemala's history adds a level of coherence to events. Although the family are not named, and the situation depicted is, as Kay Schaffer suggests, likely to be a combination of several individual stories, the two rooms manage to retain the feeling that what is being shown is a first-person narrative of accounts.<sup>53</sup> Owing to this perceived close proximity to the experiences and pain of the victims, visitors are able to feel emotional discomfort or 'empathic unsettlement'.<sup>54</sup> This use of information to depict the disappeared as figures with which to empathise contrasts with the official narrative, which has described the disappeared as criminals who received their just punishment.

The next hallway that visitors enter into is still dark, but on the walls there are engraved the names of thousands of people who fell victim to the violence of the armed conflict. Within the museum's narrative, the space follows on naturally from the two previous rooms: it shows the conclusion of the events depicted. The ceiling of this room has been made out of a patchwork blanket (see Figure 4.7). On each patch is the name of someone who was disappeared or killed. That each of the patches has been handwritten serves almost as a reminder of the people who were left behind after this violence, who may still be searching for their relative or grieving their murder. It contrasts with the more official looking engraved names on the walls, but the two work together to give some idea of the magnitude of the violence in terms of disappearance or death; the contrast is also a welcome one as it serves to give dignity

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<sup>53</sup> Kay Schaffer, 'Memory Work and Memorialisation in the New South Africa', in *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*, ed. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Chris Van Der Merwe (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publication, 2009), p.365

<sup>54</sup> Leanne Munroe, 'Negotiating Memories and Silences', in *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, ed. Alexandre Dessingué, Jay M. Winter (London: Routledge, 2016) p.180

back to those who died with this very formal looking memorial, yet also speaks to the personal impact that this conflict had on people's lives.



Fig.4.7 The ceiling of one of the rooms in *Casa de la Memoria*, made out of a blanket. Image taken from: *Step Into The House Of Memory*, *Network In Solidarity with the People of Guatemala: NISGUA*, <http://nigua.org/step-into-the-house-of-memory/>

At the end of this hallway, there is a video projection that documents the resistance that emerged within communities. It is an interesting choice to couple the list of names and this video together and one that has most certainly been decided upon deliberately to communicate a certain idea: that although many people and many communities were attacked and murdered they were not just victims, there were attempts made to fight against this violence. As Kirsten Weld has written, many histories created about the Mayan people and the violence of the conflict do not allow room for the Mayans unless they are in the role of the passive victim.<sup>55</sup> While this museum acknowledges all those who were involved in the conflict, and not just the Mayan population, it does go some way to changing the existing narrative by

<sup>55</sup> Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 10

informing visitors of the resistance that did exist. This idea is one that can be found throughout the museum and, if the statements made by the young guide quoted earlier are anything to go by, is a purpose of the museum that is being fulfilled. There is an awareness of the resistance and a feeling of belonging to it. In earlier rooms, the museum has included the Mayan symbol for a butterfly, which has been used to mark the location of a secret door. If visitors look into this space, they discover the story of a Guatemalan woman who lived during the time period in question. Many of these are tales of resistance, but just by presenting some information about historical figures that would not normally be engaged with, the museum manages to present the history of the Mayan people in a varied and complex way that steps outside of the racism so often expressed towards these communities in Guatemala.

After the darkness of these rooms, visitors emerge into a well-lit, brightly coloured space that focuses on the work that has been done, and is still underway, to correct the wrongs of the past. People and organizations that have campaigned for justice and reconciliation are featured on these walls. The museum's intention to appeal to young people is evident in this room. Rather than the final message being one of violence, the narrative has concluded with the more empowering idea of change being at work in Guatemala. Visitors are invited to place their hand atop a red cut out hand against a wall. When visitors do this, the walls of the room are illuminated with words such as 'education', 'humanity', and the phrase 'things only change if you change them'. It centres visitors within the history they have just been told: the violence of the previous rooms is not abstract, rather it is something that continues to have an impact on contemporary Guatemala and is something that they, the individual, can engage with in the present. Such an emphasis goes some way in preventing visitors from 'excusing' themselves from further enquiry, an approach that

Jenny Edkins argues is often taken when confronted with violent periods of history to shield ourselves from the reality of what happened.<sup>56</sup>

In relation to the disappeared this message is key: in chapter one I discussed the difficulties of memorialising the disappeared and stressed that the inconclusive nature of this form of violence has meant that memorials have been unable to show the past as something that has finished. By engaging with the situation in contemporary Guatemala in their displays and passing information about the work being done onto visitors, the museum has communicated the idea that the violence of the past in many ways has not yet drawn to a close. There is a need for more people to become involved in this work in order to for this situation to change. This is the final message that I believe visitors are intended to take away with them from the museum, and it is one that speaks very clearly to this connection between the ideas of inform and contest. Whether visitors were new to learning about Guatemala's violent past or not, the information contained in *Casa de la Memoria* has been organised so as to inspire action from those who visit it, to encourage efforts to make positive changes that are in opposition to the government's current position over the past and disappearances.

Both the Museum of Martyrs and *Casa de la Memoria* have the very clear intention of sharing information about Guatemala's disappeared with younger generations. From both examples you get the sense that for the disappeared to be remembered and for the perpetrators of disappearances to be charged, younger generations must be engaged with events of the past. As Salomon told me, quite frankly, when discussing current efforts to remember the disappeared, those who started this struggle are beginning to die. 'Many of the relatives, particularly the

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<sup>56</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.176



parents of the people who are here, have passed away’, Salomon said. ‘In my family my mother passed away last year.’<sup>57</sup> Unless younger people get involved with this fight for the disappeared to be found, for information to be released, for legal prosecutions to occur, there is the possibility that it will dwindle and eventually die out with those who initiated it. The two museums examined here are both attempting to spread information about the past to younger generations to stop this happening. As memorials that inform these museums create the opportunity for local people to engage with the past but in addition to this, through a growing awareness, this potential also expands to include those who are visiting Guatemala as well: the variety of countries that Salomon mentioned visitors come from is testament to this.

## **Conclusion**

For the disappeared in Guatemala, information is key. Owing to the lack of lasting regime change, public access to information concerning the disappearances or the disappeared is almost non-existent. The closing of the Peace Archives in 2012 and the distribution of information held there symbolized another step backwards in Guatemala’s journey towards reconciliation. For the disappeared to be remembered as their relatives would wish (and in parallel to this, for the fight for official information and justice to continue) there must be awareness amongst the population of Guatemala, especially the younger generations, of the events that took place in the past. This chapter has established that there is a clear link between the ideas of contest and inform, and for this contest to continue, there must be grounding in information to inspire such action to take place. Memorials that intend to inform fill the gap created by the government’s silence and in doing so, offer the opportunity to learn about the

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

disappearances and Guatemala's past to younger generations and international audiences. As I stated at the start of this chapter, there is one factor shared between each of these memorials, and I believe that the individual discussions held here about the memorials have supported this claim, and that is the idea of permanence. To some extent, every example discussed in this chapter is 'permanent' in respect to the information it contains lasting for an extended period of time. To return once again to the lack of regime change, this permanence is needed for these memorials that offer access to information if they are to have a lasting impact. Not only do they create a public space where information may be discussed, but they also preserve this information. If they close or are removed unexpectedly, there is one less source through which detailed information, memories, and experiences about the disappearances can be reached at any moment of a person's choosing.

In addition to this, what each of the memorials discussed in this chapter are also capable of doing is changing. They have a *flexible* permanence: the Santa Lucía book or website may be edited, if the community chooses to update that project with more recent information; and both the museums are able to include new information about the disappeared should it come to light. The narrative presented in *Casa de la Memoria* did not conclude with a final answer, but left the end of the story open. These memorials can adapt with the narrative surrounding the disappeared and so preserve and present information that will ensure the current and next generations can remain informed. Memorials that inform serve a valuable role in remembering the disappeared, and in continuing challenges over the presentation of the past. Information is vital to remembrance and memorialisation in Guatemala and will continue to be so for as long as the State is determined to ignore that the disappearances took place.

## Chapter Five Grief

The relationship that exists between disappearance and grief is a complicated and distorted one. Numerous scholars have written about the transformative effect such a violent event can have on what is arguably the ‘natural’ grieving process and the negative repercussions these distortions can cause. Freud wrote that grief entails coming to terms with a loss, and eventually severing the ties that existed between the person and the deceased.<sup>1</sup> This theory has been criticised by constructivist thinkers in social psychology, and even Freud himself reconsidered his arguments in later years. Constructivist thinkers have suggested that instead of grief aiming to sever connections that existed, mourners instead ‘create a biographical narrative that incorporates memories of the dead in their daily lives’: a process that Antonius Robben argues, is essential to the grieving process especially in the cases of a violent death.<sup>2</sup>

However, these theories all relate to situations where death has definitely occurred: even in the violent circumstances that Robben refers to, additional trauma may have been incurred because of the nature of the deceased’s death but there is no question that the deceased is definitely that: ‘deceased’. With disappearances, this confirmation is initially absent and may stay so permanently unless the remains of the disappeared are discovered or information regarding their death uncovered. Instead of being able to accept the death of a loved one and eventually proceed beyond the initial emotional turmoil grief can bring, relatives of the disappeared are instead left in a

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Murder, Mourning, and Melancholia* (London, 2005), p.214

<sup>2</sup> Antonius C.G.M Robben, ‘Social Trauma, National Mourning, and Collective Guilt in Post-Authoritarian Argentina’, in *Violent Reverberations: Global Modalities of Trauma*, ed. Vigdis Broch-Due and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.96-97

situation where the death of a loved one is not confirmed and so the grieving process cannot run its course: it becomes frustrated or unresolved.<sup>3</sup>

For some families this does change over time. After a number of years have passed certain relatives do eventually accept that their disappeared loved one is dead, even without confirmation of this death. Such recognition can evoke feelings of guilt in family members and even cause division between those who have and those who cannot accept this death. In Argentina Julia Braun, whose son, Gabriel, was disappeared, described how after hearing a speech given by the president of the military junta, realised that Gabriel was dead; when she told this to her husband, he accused her of ‘killing’ their son: ‘Gabriel’s fate was suddenly sealed in my mind: at that moment, I told myself he was dead. Mariano [her husband] was horrified and insisted that it was I who was killing Gabriel. I felt terrible.’<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Virginia Garrard-Burnett has argued, this sense of finality can still be rattled by questions about whether a loved one suffered, when and how they died, and in the cases where successful exhumations have not occurred, where and how they were buried.<sup>5</sup> Even with ‘finality’, the disappearances still create questions that alter the grieving process.

In relation to the disappearances therefore, grief cannot be spoken about in a singular sense: different families experience different types of grief depending on their own acceptance or rejection of the death of a loved one, or the recovering of remains. There is the grief of relatives who grieve for the loss, but not the death, of the disappeared; grief for the death of the disappeared tied to a frustrated wish to carry out burial rituals; and grief for the death of the disappeared who has been recovered

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<sup>3</sup> Jorge Rodríguez Sánchez, ‘Psychological Aspects’, in *Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Stonaker (Washington: Pan American Health Organization, 2004), p.113

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Caro Hollander, *Uprooted Minds: Surviving the Politics of Terror in the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p.128

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, ‘Living with Ghosts: Death, Exhumation, and Reburial among the Maya in Guatemala’, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol.42: 3 (2015), p.185

and buried. These are of course, just a few of the possible causes of grief in relation to the disappearances, and as with any large group, it is not possible to identify all the different ways in which grief is experienced by the families of the disappeared.

The memorials that this chapter explores reflect this. Memorials have been created to allow relatives a space in which they can express their grief, in whatever forms it may take. Some memorials focus on *individual* grief, such as the Museum of Martyrs and the Rabinal Achi Community Museum in Río Negro, while others are spaces in which *collective* grief may be expressed: commemorative events at the sites of violence in Río Negro, and events held on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance. It is this notion of individual and collective grief that has been used to structure this chapter, although as with the previous chapters, these categories are presented on a spectrum rather than as two distinct groups. Memorials that are spaces where individual grief is more likely to be expressed are discussed first, leading into those that encourage collective grief. As with all memorials this division is not absolute, and some memorials, such as the events on the National Day, encourage both individual and collective grief to occur in one space. Before examining these memorials in detail, this chapter first discusses grief in relation to the disappearances in more detail, drawing out some of the ideas mentioned in this introduction and exploring the various literature and historical examples that support them.

### **‘Grief’**

In discussions about disappearances, the absence of the disappeared and the impact this has on the waiting family is a feature that is repeatedly highlighted. Confirmation of death remains elusive in the face of State repression and in later years, especially in the case of Guatemala with its lack of regime change, often

continues to be withheld from families as a form of protection for those responsible. Without this confirmation of death, Jenny Pearce argues, relatives are left in a state of perpetual hope and hopelessness, unable to grieve the death of their loved one nor accept their loss.<sup>6</sup> Those left behind, as Gabriela Fried Amilivia states, live in the timeless space of a funeral vigil that never ends.<sup>7</sup> One woman's testimony from Argentina describes this state of hopeful hopelessness. Laura was aware that her disappeared son was more than likely dead, but could not get rid of the expectation that he would still return home. 'Disappearance is nothing like death', she stated. 'You never have any certainty... that they may be dead. They can tell you, "Yes, he is dead." And you reason, "Yes, he is dead." But deep inside, your subconscious is still waiting.'<sup>8</sup> Another woman in Guatemala, whose two sons had been disappeared, reportedly ran outside every afternoon at dusk for fifteen years to see if her sons were finally returning home from the fields, believing and hoping that they were still alive.<sup>9</sup> The disappeared then are an 'ambiguous loss': physically absent, but psychologically present.<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean, however, that grief is absent; instead what emerges in the wake of disappearances is an alternative form of grief. Marie Langer has defined it as 'frozen grief': a 'psychic condition in which someone finds himself who has suffered a hard loss but was forced by circumstances to forgo even lamenting it. The grief is

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<sup>6</sup> Jenny Pearce, 'Conclusion: The Politics of Violence Control in Latin America', in *Violence and Crime in Latin America: Representations and Politics*, ed. Gema Santamaría, David Carey (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), p.251

<sup>7</sup> Gabriela Fried Amilivia, *State Terrorism and the Politics of Memory in Latin America: Transmissions Across the Generations of Post-Dictatorship Uruguay, 1984-2004* (New York: Cambria Press, 2016), Section 9

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Garrard-Burnett, 'Living with Ghosts', *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol.42: 3 (2015), p.185

<sup>10</sup> Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live With Unresolved Grief* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.8

then sometimes pushed aside'.<sup>11</sup> With disappearances, as there is no tangible proof of death, Langer argues that relatives of the disappeared engage in fantasies that the disappeared are still alive. While the denial of the disappeared's death may bring some comfort, these fantasies end up becoming a distress causing double bind: the disappeared may not be dead, but they are still captured and therefore are likely to be enduring torture. The appearance of bodies on roadsides bearing the marks of torture reinforces this idea. Both options - that either the disappeared are alive but being tortured, or are dead - are, Langer argues, too painful for relatives to imagine and leave the imaginer with an 'omnipresent sense of guilt'. Due to this, these fantasies are eventually repressed and 'frozen grief' is created.<sup>12</sup> Families grieve their loss, that a loved one has been taken from them and remains missing, but are unable to enter into a process of mourning the death of the disappeared owing to the ambiguity of the situation.

Many families also grieve the loss of a burial place where they may go and visit the body of the deceased. In the REMHI report, one woman described her wish to have a place where she might visit her relative who was disappeared:

For three days I cried, crying that I wanted to see him... Just a little bit of earth to be able to say there he is. There is our little bit of dust and we will go to show our respect, leave a candle... but when are we going to light the candle? And where are we going to go? There isn't any place. I feel so much pain.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Karcher, "'In My Fingertips I Don't Have A Soul Anymore": Body Psychotherapy With Survivors of Torture', in *At the Side of Torture Survivors: Treating a Terrible Assault on Human Dignity*, ed. Sepp Graessner, Norbert Gurrus, Christian Pross (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp.84-84

<sup>12</sup> Henrik Ronsbo, 'A Republic of Remedies: Psychosocial Interventions in Post-Conflict Guatemala', in *The Clinic and the Court: Law, Medicine and Anthropology*, ed. Ian Harper, Tobias Kelly, Akshay Khanna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.274

<sup>13</sup> Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p.20

Here it is clear that the speaker believes her relative is dead, yet her grief for his death is exacerbated by the lack of a space where she may express this grief and connect with him.

This desperate desire to be reunited with the disappeared, and to have a body to bury and a death to grieve is also reflected in Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman's story *Widows*. The story is set in Greece, although Dorfman, an exile from Chile, is actually describing Chile under Pinochet. In *Widows* people have been secretly arrested, taken away, and never seen again; until that is the bodies of those taken begin to wash up on the riverbank. Rather than wait for confirmation that these are their disappeared relatives, groups of women instead cling to the bodies and identify them as their own disappeared. Soon, as Jennifer Wallace describes, 'the whole village is claiming some family connection with those faceless corpses, thirty-seven widows all mourning their private losses through their determination to get these bodies properly buried and lamented'.<sup>14</sup>

As well as providing confirmation that the disappeared are dead, the presence of a body also allows the rituals that surround death to take place. For relatives of the disappeared, the inability to conduct such rites can be the cause of further trauma, especially to those who believe that the spirit of the deceased cannot rest unless they are buried properly and with respect. As Jorge Rodríguez Sánchez argues, being able to perform such rituals is a significant part of the recovery process for those who survived violence; not doing so can lead to feelings of emptiness.<sup>15</sup> The process of exhumation and identification, as outlined in chapter three, allows these rites that surround death to be carried out. It also alters, once again, how relatives grieve for the

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<sup>14</sup>Jennifer Wallace, "'We Can't Make More Dirt...': Tragedy and the Excavated Body', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol.32: 2 (2003), p.107

<sup>15</sup> Sánchez, 'Psychological Aspects', in *Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations*, ed. Stonaker (2004), p.111



disappeared. Although they have been found, it should be stressed that the disappeared continue to be victims of disappearance, rather than becoming the dead, in part so the violence of the past is remembered and also so the crime of disappearance may be prosecuted in court. It also continues the collective identity of the disappeared as a group. In the majority of cases, even if a relative has exhumed and identified the body of their disappeared, they will continue to support and work with others who have not.

In Mexico, this was reflected in the words of one of the fathers of the forty-three students who were disappeared in September 2014: the police had arrested these students, and then while at the police station, they were abducted by a group of armed men. In October 2014, the bodies of twenty-six individuals were found a few miles outside of Iguala; according to Mexican officials, they were burned beyond recognition.<sup>16</sup> Only one body was identified and that was Alexander Mora. His father, Felipe de la Cruz, stated, 'If [the government] thinks that, because one of our boys' DNA was identified, we will sit and cry, we want to tell them that they're wrong...We will keep fighting until we find the other 42.'<sup>17</sup>

While the collective identity of the disappeared and the support of relatives who have found their disappeared remain, there is no denying that for those who know their disappeared are dead and have been able to bury their remains, grief changes; it stops being frozen as there is something tangible to mourn. 'Exhumation and reburial open up social and emotional spaces in individual lives and communities

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<sup>16</sup> Nick Miroff, 'Mexico finds mass graves with 28 bodies where students went missing', *The Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/mexico-finds-mass-graves-with-28-bodies-where-students-went-missing/2014/10/06/009b049f-a59d-482d-bd4c-3a10cbef0fe6\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/mexico-finds-mass-graves-with-28-bodies-where-students-went-missing/2014/10/06/009b049f-a59d-482d-bd4c-3a10cbef0fe6_story.html) (Accessed 16/05/2017)

<sup>17</sup> 'Mexico missing student 'identified' from remains', *BBC News: Latin America and Caribbean*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-30365680> (Accessed 16/05/2017)

where healing of a sort can begin.’<sup>18</sup> Margarita Hermoso Pérez’s three sons and daughter, as well as her parents in law were killed during a massacre in the village of Xecax in February 1982. After their bodies were exhumed, she was able to bury them in the town cemetery; because of this, she could lay flowers for them, and reportedly felt more ‘at peace’ to see them.<sup>19</sup> While not a disappearance, this case study highlights the significant role that exhumations and burials can have in relation to grieving: being able to recover her relatives allowed Margarita Hermoso Pérez a sense of conclusion; her concerns about where their bodies had been buried were answered. With the reburial, she was also then able to visit the remains of her relatives and lay flowers for them, establishing a connection between the deceased and the living and creating a space where she may reflect on her individual grief.

For many families of the disappeared, however, acceptance of death comes without a successful exhumation or the identification of a body. There is no set time in which such acceptance may occur, but it is often the case that a few years have passed between the disappearance and the present before a person is willing to admit that their loved one may be dead. Mayan people will often eventually recognize the death of their disappeared through dreams: many believe that dreams are a channel through which the living and the dead may communicate, and so studies of dreams are frequently made.<sup>20</sup> One woman described how she dreamt of her disappeared husband: he returned home from work and was very thirsty, so she gave him a glass of water. He then told his wife to take care of the children. From this dream, she understood that her husband was dead. Another woman said that it was the dream of

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<sup>18</sup> Garrard-Burnett, ‘Living with Ghosts’, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol.42: 3 (2015), p.190

<sup>19</sup> Johan Ordóñez, ‘Guatemalans bury victims of 1982 civil war massacre’, *The Tico Times*, <http://www.ticotimes.net/2014/07/30/guatemalans-bury-victims-of-1982-civil-war-massacre> (Accessed 16/05/2017)

<sup>20</sup> Mónica Esmeralda Pinzón González, ‘Psychosocial Perspectives on the Enforced Disappearance of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala’, in *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared*, ed. Derek Congram (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2016), p.109

her daughter that helped her accept her disappeared husband's death: 'I told the old man [elder] about my daughter's dream of her father. "Oh, poor man", he replied, "he's dead; he died and was buried with the others, they all died".'<sup>21</sup>

For some families who have accepted the death of the disappeared but have yet to find the remains, there may still be concerns about how the death occurred and what happened to the body of the deceased, but for others this may not be troubling.<sup>22</sup> One Mayan woman described how, after she had accepted the death of her husband, she gave him a *Kotzi* (an offering of flowers or Maya ceremony) and visited the cemetery to light a candle for him: 'I wished he were in a cemetery, but I go to the cemetery on Monday and Thursday and I light a candle for him, my poor husband, God knows where his body is'.<sup>23</sup> Evidently, although she had accepted that her husband was dead, she still suffered because she did not know where his remains were.

There is therefore an apparent division in how grief may be discussed in relation to the disappeared of Guatemala: there are those who have accepted the death of a loved one, either with an exhumation or otherwise; and there are others who continue to deny that the disappeared are dead and still retain hope they will return home. Within this of course there are different factions, such as grieving the absence of a body even after accepting death. The memorials that have been created for the disappeared therefore, have been done in a way that allows all forms of grief to be expressed by family members. They create a space where an individual or a group may reflect on the memory of the disappeared and grieve for them, in whatever form this grief takes.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, pp.112-113

<sup>22</sup> Sánchez, 'Psychological Aspects', in Stonaker (Ed.), *Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations* (2004), p.113

<sup>23</sup> González, 'Psychosocial Perspectives on the Enforced Disappearance of Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala', in *Missing Persons*, ed. Congram (2016), p.115

Individual grief here refers to the emotional distress that is felt and expressed by one person. They may reflect on their own, and at a time of their choosing, what it is that they have lost. Although it is not possible to know what every person who engages with these memorials thinks or feels in their grief, it is reasonable to speculate that when individually grieving, the focus is on their own disappeared relative. One of the earlier testimonies, in which a Mayan woman visited the local cemetery to light a candle for her husband, would be an example of individual grief, as the woman in question carried out the ritual of lighting a candle and thinking of her husband, alone. Rituals like this are visible across all cultures: in all societies there are forms of expressing grief that relate to beliefs about life and death.<sup>24</sup> Visiting burial places, laying flowers, or looking at photographs of the deceased and reflecting on personal memories are all actions that are motivated by personal grief. There does not have to be a reason for these rituals to be performed other than the wishes of the person undertaking them. Memorials that have been linked in this chapter to the idea of individual grief are those that have been utilised by individual family members as spaces where they can grieve and remember their own disappeared relative.

Expressions of collective grief involve groups of people. They are most likely to occur at a specific time or place and reflect a sense of solidarity amongst those in attendance. Funerals are one such example of this. María I. Vera cites street processions in New Orleans: the following of the coffin by mourners and jazz musicians reflecting social solidarity and a shared expression of grief.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in Latin America the process of exhuming bodies and then conducting a ceremonial

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<sup>24</sup> Sánchez, 'Psychological Aspects', in *Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations*, ed. Stonaker (2004), p.113

<sup>25</sup> María I. Vera, 'Social Dimensions of Grief', in *Handbook of Death and Dying*, ed. Clifton D. Bryant (California: Sage Publications, 2003), p.845

burial is a process that Naomi Roht-Arriaza explains leads to collective grieving.<sup>26</sup> Memorial services in which friends and relatives are given the opportunity to share their memories of the deceased are another example of collective grief. Janet Shaw Rogers outlines the case of two parents, Kathleen and Alex, whose daughter Amanda had unexpectedly died, and their decision to hold two memorial services for their daughter: one in the city where she had been living, and one in her home town. At the service in the city where Amanda had been living at the time of her death, friends of hers shared testimonies and placed objects on the altar that Kathleen and Alex had made for the occasion. Rogers states that this memorial service was a chance to share the love that was felt for the deceased and grieve this loss as a group.<sup>27</sup> The memorials discussed in this chapter in relation to this idea of collective grief are those that have created an environment, or have been created intentionally, in which groups of people may share the grief they feel amongst others with similar feelings and experiences.

This chapter now progresses to explore the forms of memorial in detail. While discussions about memorials in previous chapters have focussed on the intended action of the memorial (such as contesting the past or recovering the dignity of the disappeared), the memorials here are examined in relation to how they have created a space in which the relatives of the disappeared may grieve. The memorials represent the grief that is felt by relatives, but they also offer the opportunity for families to share and express their grief in whichever of the myriad of forms it may take.

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<sup>26</sup> Naomi Roht-Arriaza, 'Truth Commissions and Amnesties in Latin America: The Second Generation', *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)*, Vol.92 (1998), p. 315

<sup>27</sup> Janet Shaw Rogers, 'Grief and the Sacred Art of Ritual', in *The Art of Grief: The Use of Expressive Arts in a Grief Support Group*, ed. J. Earl Rogers (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.135

## Memorials

The first two memorials that are discussed in this chapter are those that relate closely to the idea of ‘individual grief’. Arguably there is nothing to stop these memorials from becoming sites of collective grief: both the Museum of Martyrs and the Rabinal Achi Community Museum are spaces that allow groups of people to visit and encourage remembrance of the disappeared. Indeed, when it is discussed, this section will argue that the Museum of Martyrs serves as a site of individual and collective grief. As the museums are open to receive visitors, relatives can visit at any time they choose to connect with their disappeared and grieve their absence.

### *The Rabinal Achi Community Museum*

In the early 1980s, the municipality of Rabinal, located in the northern department of Baja Verapaz, was the focus of extreme state-enacted violence: villages were destroyed and thousands of people were either massacred or disappeared. The municipality initially became a place of interest to the Guatemalan government because of the Chixoy River. In the 1970s, the government had decided to build a new hydroelectric dam on the section of river that passed through Rabinal. They received loans from the Inter-American Development and World Banks to complete the project.<sup>28</sup> This construction meant that much of the land surrounding the river would be flooded, including some areas that belonged to nearby villages; occupants were told that they would have to move to new settlements and were stripped of their rights to their ancestral lands. The majority of communities living in Rabinal were Mayan, meaning that as well as losing their homes, they also lost access to many of the sacred sites that surrounded their villages. This was a situation that researchers for the

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<sup>28</sup> Nathan Einbinder *Dams, Displacement and Development: Perspectives from Río Negro, Guatemala* (Springer: 2017), p.xiii

REMHI report came across frequently: during the course of the civil war, many Mayan people had to abandon sacred sites as a result of forced displacement.<sup>29</sup> This inability to visit these spaces meant that rituals could not be performed and the spirits associated with these sites could no longer be connected with.

In 1980 leaders from the village of Río Negro were taken to see Pacux, which was to serve as the site for their new, resettled community. The villagers of Río Negro largely made their livings from fishing and farming, and so seeing that the land offered was not arable, the leaders of the community rejected the offer.<sup>30</sup> Following on from this, tensions rose between villagers and the military police: an argument in March 1980 led to several Río Negro residents being shot dead. After this event, the army made frequent visits to the village, believing that because of their refusal to move and because they were Mayan, the villagers of Río Negro were also guerrilla. Between 1981 and 1983, the army massacred, tortured, and disappeared villagers from Río Negro and other surrounding communities; it is estimated that between September 1981 and August 1983, 5,000 people were killed in Rabinal.<sup>31</sup>

There have been a number of memorials created in Rabinal to remember these years of violence and those who were murdered or disappeared. The Rabinal Achi Community Museum is one such museum that, as well as informing visitors about the past, also serves as a place where individual grief can be expressed. The Museum was founded in 1999 by local civil society institutions; funds were provided by a variety of non-governmental organisations, including a donation from the Inter-American

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<sup>29</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.14

<sup>30</sup> Einbinder *Dams, Displacement and Development* (Springer), p.xiii

<sup>31</sup> Thaddeus al Nakba, 'Guatemala: The Forgotten Spirits of Rabinal', *Upside Down World*, <http://upsidedownworld.org/archives/guatemala/guatemala-the-forgotten-spirits-of-rabinal/> (Accessed 20/05/2017)

Foundation.<sup>32</sup> It contains information about the events in Rabinal, and also has a library, a computer lab, and an exhibition about local Maya Achi culture.<sup>33</sup> Around a quarter of the museum is dedicated to the massacres that occurred: as can be seen in Figure 5.1, photographs of those who were killed or disappeared are displayed on the walls of a permanent ‘Hall of the Victims’.<sup>34</sup>



Fig.5.1 The Hall of the Victims within the Rabinal Achi Community Museum. Photographs of those murdered or disappeared are displayed here.

Image taken from Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo en Guatemala, ‘Programa de Acompañamiento a la Justicia de Transición –PAJUST’, <http://www.gt.undp.org>

Family members of those who were victims of the 1980’s violence frequently visit the museum, especially when it is the anniversary of the massacre or the birthday of a loved one.<sup>35</sup> They will visit the photograph of their relative, and many will pray, light candles, and make offerings. Heidi McKinnon noted upon visiting the museum

<sup>32</sup> Heidi McKinnon, ‘Proposing a Museum of Memory: Reparations and the Maya Achí Genocide in Guatemala’, in *Museums and Truth*, ed. Annette B. Fromm, Per B. Rekdal, Viv Golding (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p.61

<sup>33</sup> James Rodríguez, ‘The Chixoy Hydro-Electrical Dam and Genocide in Río Negro’, <http://blog.mimundo.org/2007/07/the-chixoy-hydro-electrical-dam-and-genocide-in-rio-negro/> (Accessed 22/05/2017)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> McKinnon, ‘Proposing a Museum of Memory’, in *Museums and Truth*, ed. Fromm, Rekdal, Golding (2014), p.61



that the floor is regularly dotted with candle wax and remnants of small offerings. The museum, or at least the section of the museum where photographs of the victims are displayed, evidently serves as a space where families can remember their disappeared relatives, acting as a substitute gravesite.

After visiting the museum, James Rodríguez described how one man, Mr Nicholas Chen, would go to the museum to see the photographs of his daughter, Marta Julia Chen Osorio, and of other relatives. He was a survivor of the massacres at Río Negro, but his daughter and many of his other relatives were murdered.<sup>36</sup> During his visit, Chen ‘caressed’ the photograph of his daughter that was on display in the museum. Such behavior is reflective of a desire to be close to his daughter once again, and of the deep love and affection he felt for her. The photograph is a reminder that Marta Julia Chen Osorio once existed, but also that she is no longer there: it is a ‘melancholy object’ as Susan Sontag argues, as it constantly represents something no longer present.<sup>37</sup> The photographs of the victims have become individual sites of remembering and of grief as they create a space in which relatives may connect with the physical image of their dead or disappeared relative and reflect on the loss or absence of this life.

Although exhumations have started in Rabinal, as in all situations of disappearance in Guatemala, there is no guarantee that all the disappeared will be recovered; not all relatives will be granted the opportunity to bury their disappeared’s remains and be able to visit this place of burial to grieve. For relatives who need to have a physical space in which to express their individual grief, the museum becomes a memorial that offers them this chance. This relates back to the division in grief

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<sup>36</sup> James Rodríguez, ‘The Chixoy Hydro-Electrical Dam and Genocide in Río Negro’, <http://blog.mimundo.org/2007/07/the-chixoy-hydro-electrical-dam-and-genocide-in-rio-negro/> (Accessed 22/05/2017)

<sup>37</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979)

discussed earlier in this chapter: those who have recovered the bodies of their disappeared are more likely to visit the site where they are buried to connect and grieve for them, rather than the museum.



Fig.5.2 Nicholas Chen in the Rabinal Achi Community Museum with the photograph of his daughter, Marta Julia Chen Osorio.  
Image taken by James Rodríguez, taken from ‘The Chixoy Hydro-Electrical Dam and Genocide in Río Negro’, <http://blog.mimundo.org/2007/07/the-chixoy-hydro-electrical-dam-and-genocide-in-rio-negro/>

### *The Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union*

The Museum of Martyrs has so far been discussed in chapters three and four, in relation to the functions of recovery and informing, but the museum also serves as a space that facilitates grief. The varying perspectives of those who visit the museum mean that the content can be interpreted and used in a number of ways. For instance, those who treat the museum as a space of learning, as somewhere they would visit to learn about the past and the disappearances, would engage with the material presented in a different manner to say, a relative of the disappeared who may choose to visit the

space to think and grieve for their family member.<sup>38</sup> Like many other sites of memory, such as the ESMA building in Argentina, or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., the Museum of Martyrs has the power to educate and also allow personal reflection; to apply Julia Rose's argument, it provides grieving visitors with a place where they can 'physically connect to and mourn the losses of a difficult history'.<sup>39</sup>

This idea of offering relatives a physical space where they can connect with the past and their grief is of special significance for the disappeared. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, owing to the absence of remains (in the majority of cases) and the silence around the process of disappearance there are no sites where relatives can visit to connect with the disappeared. The museum therefore becomes a substitute for these absent sites of grief, creating an environment in which the disappeared are remembered and may be spoken about openly. When I visited the museum, Salomon Estrada told me that for many relatives speaking publically about the disappearances had previously not been possible; being in the museum was one of the first opportunities for them to do so:

There are a lot of people who know that they have a disappeared relative but they've never spoken about it. So until they see the campaign from the FAFG [asking family members to provide DNA samples] and they come here to give their DNA sample for the first time they haven't spoken about it publically.<sup>40</sup>

This in part ties in with the previously discussed idea of 'recovery' in chapter three and the desire to escape from the stigma that is attached to disappearances and the disappeared. Eglá Martínez Salazar argues that such was the process of vilification of the disappeared in Guatemala after the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1996, that the

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<sup>38</sup> Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), p.55

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp.56-57

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

grief of families was often self-censored as a ‘survival strategy’.<sup>41</sup> The museum is a site where these negative associations have been removed. This is evident in the information they display, and also in the backgrounds of those who created the museum and the volunteers who run it. They have a shared experience with the visiting relatives: that of losing a loved one to disappearance.

I asked Salomon about the response of family members to the museum and he told me that many of them were initially reluctant to speak about the disappearances, until they found out the volunteers also had disappeared relatives: ‘When people come in here they lose the fear to speak. When we tell them we’re relatives of the disappeared, they start to open up and start to lose their fear of speaking.’<sup>42</sup> Grief then can be expressed publically without fear of condemnation. It is legitimised by the presence of the museum and those within it.<sup>43</sup> The need expressed by individuals to have a place where they can speak publically about their grief is reflective of the political situation in Guatemala: the lack of regime change has prevented the disappearances from becoming a topic that can be openly discussed and understood; ‘histories of the war and *la violencia* that assign blame and urge for accountability are fragile and are subject to ongoing attempts to silence, distort, and change them.’<sup>44</sup> There is a lack of space in Guatemala in which mass communications about the past can take place.<sup>45</sup> The narrative created by the State about the civil war leans towards denying responsibility for the disappearances or offering justifications for their occurrence. The recognition that the Museum of Martyrs gives to the disappearances

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<sup>41</sup> Eglá Martínez Salazar, *Global Coloniality of Power in Guatemala: Racism, Genocide, Citizenship* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), pp.144-145

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>43</sup> Erika Doss, ‘Death, art and memory in the public sphere: the visual and material culture of grief in contemporary America’, *Mortality*, Vol.7: 1 (2002), pp.63-82

<sup>44</sup> Jennifer L. Burrell, *Maya after War: Conflict, Power, and Politics in Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), p.85

<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey Andrew Barash, ‘Virtual experience, collective memory, and the configuration of the public sphere through the mass media. The example of Ex-Yugoslavia’, *Configurações*, Vol.17 (2016), pp.11-29

not only challenges this silence but also, as Iain Maclean argues, facilitates grief and remembering.<sup>46</sup>

Individuals have often visited the museum after they have given a DNA sample at the FAFG (*Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala*) laboratories. The Museum of Martyrs is located in property owned by the FAFG, at the centre of its operations; to the left of the entrance to the museum are the doors to the forensic laboratories. Such placement is due to the availability of the building, but it creates a connection between the museum and the work that is conducted by the FAFG. The Museum of Martyrs would argue that what it presents is the truth about disappearances and the disappeared in Guatemala, and being situated next to the FAFG reinforces this; the processes of exhumation and identification by the FAFG aim to uncover the truth.<sup>47</sup> This focus on the disappeared and the idea of ‘truth’ relates again to the idea of reversing the process of vilification, which further suggests that the museum is a space in which grief for the disappeared may be expressed without judgement.

When relatives first visit the FAFG to give a DNA sample, there is no instant confirmation of this death. Such confirmation may not come for a number of years, if at all; but it does offer families the hope that one day it might. The physical results of the FAFG’s work are present in the museum in the form of Villatoro’s skeleton: he has been recovered and identified, and so his family have been able to recognise his death. Salomon emphasised to me that the site of Villatoro is a source of hope to people: he is proof that finding the disappeared is possible. People have hope that

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<sup>46</sup> Iain S. Maclean, ‘Truth and Reconciliation: Hope for the Nations or Only as Much as Possible?’, in *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*, ed. Iain S. Maclean (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.28

<sup>47</sup> ‘Nuestra Labor’, FAFG: Fundacion De Antropologia Forense De Guatemala, <https://fafg.org/nuestra-labor.html> (Accessed 20/05/2017)

‘they’ll one day be able to find their own relative as Amancio has also been found’.<sup>48</sup> This possibility is however also the cause of sadness amongst relatives: ‘They’re [relatives] happy and sad at the same time’, Salomon told me. ‘They usually come here when they come to give a saliva sample to help forensic experts identify a person. So it’s kind of like a mix of hope and sadness.’<sup>49</sup>

This is similar to the double-bind discussed earlier: relatives want to know what happened to the disappeared, are hopeful that their questions may soon be answered and the disappeared returned home, but at the same time, are upset by the thought that, if this does happen, it will confirm that the disappeared are dead and may reveal that they suffered before they died. Villatoro’s remains become representative of all the disappeared who are still to be found, which serves as both a comfort and a source of grief: he is dead but present. This is similar to the creation of a tomb for ‘The Unknown Warrior’: it does not commemorate a specific death; rather it is a ‘generalizable death’.<sup>50</sup> Although Villatoro has been identified, he is a centre point for the grief and hope of others who are still searching for the disappeared, as he represents the search for truth and the eventual uncovering of it.

As well as being a site of individual grief that relatives may visit after giving a DNA sample to the FAFG, the Museum of Martyrs is also a place of collective grief: Salomon described the museum as a ‘collective space where the families can come and cry together’. Previously, he explained, grief had been experienced privately, each person in their own home: the result of the shame and stigmatisation surrounding the disappeared. At the museum however, people can ‘be together and share that

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Grace Kyungwon Hong, ‘Fun with Death and Dismemberment’, in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, ed. Grace Kyungwon Hong, Roderick A. Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p.243

grief'.<sup>51</sup> This refers to the idea discussed in relation to expressions of individual grief: that the information contained in the museum, its proximity to the FAFG, and the backgrounds of those who worked there all created an environment in which family members felt safe to share their experiences of disappearance and feelings of grief with others. From Salomon's descriptions it is evident that these moments of collective grief have been spontaneous, rather than being organised by the museum itself. This differs to other examples of collective grief, which usually centre on the anniversary of a particular event. A family who visited the museum, for instance, made the decision that on the birthday of their disappeared relative they would buy a cake and celebrate their life.

This next section of the chapter moves on to examine examples of these memorials that serve as sites of collective grief in detail. This section first returns to Río Negro, Rabinal and discusses the memorial events surrounding the Los Encuentros massacre, and then explores the memorial activities held on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance, which are intended to facilitate collective expressions of grief. Both of these examples revolve around specific dates: anniversaries of either the disappearance of a large number of people or of a particular massacre. Collective grief occurs outside of organised events; when an incident of violence first occurs for instance, or the death of a well known person happens, one could argue that what members of the public engage in is a form of 'collective grief': experiencing the loss of an 'object' (to use Freud's terminology) common to all members of a group.<sup>52</sup> These groups can differ in size, from a country to a small community. Arguably after massacres and mass disappearances, Guatemalan

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Salomon Estrada, 19/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Claude Métraux, 'Community Losses and Grieving Processes: An epistemological revolution', in *Activating Psychosocial Local Resources in Territories Affected by War and Terrorism*, ed. E. Baloch-Kaloianov, A. Mikus-Kos (Netherlands: IOS Press, 2009), p.37

communities would fall into a form of collective grief; testimonies given to the REMHI project describe the grief and sadness people experienced: ‘it was hard to get through that year- our hearts were no longer happy after they killed my father... All of our relatives were grief stricken’; ‘so many people were left grieving- wives for their husbands; people who were poor and couldn’t provide for their children. We grieved for all those things’. This grief even extended to physical structures and objects: ‘all the houses were sad because there were no longer any people inside them’.<sup>53</sup> In relation to the connection between memorials and collective grief, however, it is frequently the organisation of an event around the memorial that will lead to these expressions of collective grief, with the memorial as the central focus for inspiring this.

#### *Memorials for the Los Encuentros massacre*

The Los Encuentros massacre was one of several that occurred in Río Negro in 1982. As I outlined earlier, the municipality of Rabinal was targeted by the government and military during the late 1970s and 1980s as part of a plan to build a dam on the Chixoy river and in connection to the nationwide counterinsurgency plan; the communities of Río Negro experienced some of the more extreme incidents of violence during this time owing to their proximity to the river, the refusal by many to leave their homes, and (as with others in Rabinal) the fact that they were Achi Maya. The people of Río Negro are still seeking compensation from the government of Guatemala for all that they lost as a result of this dam construction: when in power, President Colom negotiated and agreed a reparation package that included an

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<sup>53</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), p.15



extensive budget for long-term community development. However, he never officially signed this and so the reparations were not implemented.<sup>54</sup>

There were four massacres of the people of Río Negro in 1982: in the village of Xococ; on Pacoxom; in Los Encuentros; and in Agua Fría. On 13 February 1982, a military commander ordered seventy-four men and women to report to the nearby village of Xococ: when they arrived they were tortured, raped, and murdered by the Xococ Civil Patrol.<sup>55</sup> One woman, who managed to escape, walked back to Río Negro to tell other villagers of the violence that had happened and to warn the men to leave while they had chance. ‘They thought it was only the men that the patrollers from Xococ wanted,’ one survivor recalled. ‘That’s what we all thought.’<sup>56</sup> In March, a month after the massacre at Xococ, civil patrollers from Xococ and members of the Guatemalan military arrived in Río Negro; by this time the men of the village had hidden in the mountains. The civil patrollers and members of the military rounded up 70 women and 107 children and marched them to Pacoxom (a high point in the mountains), where they were raped and then killed; these actions were justified by claims that there was significant guerrilla activity in the area.<sup>57</sup> ‘How can innocent women and children, many of them pregnant, be mistaken for guerrillas?’ one survivor of the massacre asked. ‘They couldn’t be. None of us were.’<sup>58</sup>

Survivors of this massacre fled to nearby communities. Two months later, on 14 May the army and civil patrollers arrived in Los Encuentros, a nearby community where many survivors were seeking refuge. 79 Río Negro community members were

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<sup>54</sup> Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, ‘Río Negro Massacres’, <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/our-work/important-cases/rio-negro/> (Accessed 24/05/2017)

<sup>55</sup> Matt Pacenza, ‘The Chixoy Dam, Guatemalan Massacres and the World Bank’, *Multinational Monitor*, Vol.17: 7/8 (1996)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Allan D. Cooper, *The Geography of Genocide* (Maryland: United Press of America, 2009), p.171

<sup>58</sup> Pacenza, ‘The Chixoy Dam, Guatemalan Massacres and the World Bank’, *Multinational Monitor*, 17: 7/8 (1996)

eventually killed: ‘they [soldiers and patrollers] raped several women, set fire to houses, and tied up and hung a number of people from trees, forcing them to stand on an iron sheet heated by a fire until they died.’<sup>59</sup> At least fifteen people, a mixture of women and children, were disappeared: it is reported that on at least three occasions a helicopter came to the community and people were forced to board it. One woman, Carmen Sánchez Chen, who was living in Los Encuentros at the time, was bathing in the Chixoy River when the soldiers and civil patrollers arrived. She remembers hearing gunfire and explosions; when she came out of the river she saw her three-year-old son, Manuel, and her neighbor, Margarita, being forced into a helicopter. In 2013, Manuel was successfully identified in one of the mass graves in Coban; in 2014, Carmen and her husband, Bernardo, were able to finally hold a funeral for their son.<sup>60</sup> The exact number of people disappeared from Los Encuentros that day is not clear: estimates range between fifteen and thirty-five. Some of the survivors from this massacre travelled to the village of Agua Fría: here on 14 September, soldiers and civil patrollers killed at least 92 people.<sup>61</sup>

Memorials have been created for each of these massacres and commemorative events take place on their anniversaries: on 13 March each year, for instance, Río Negro villagers will climb to Pacoxom, to the site of the massacre, where they will light candles, leave offerings of flowers and food, and speak about those who were murdered and the events of 1982.<sup>62</sup> As this thesis is exploring disappearances and how they have been memorialised, rather than examine all of the memorials to the

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<sup>59</sup> Inter-American Court of Human Rights, ‘Case of the Río Negro Massacres v. Guatemala. Judgement of September 4<sup>th</sup> 2012’, [http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_250\\_ing.pdf](http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_250_ing.pdf) (Accessed 24/05/2017) p.35

<sup>60</sup> James Rodríguez, ‘A Funeral for Manuel, 32 Years After the Guatemalan Massacre That Killed Him’, *Vice*, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/a-funeral-for-manuel-32-years-after-the-guatemalan-massacre-that-killed-him](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/a-funeral-for-manuel-32-years-after-the-guatemalan-massacre-that-killed-him) (Accessed 24/05/2017)

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p.36

<sup>62</sup> McKinnon, ‘Proposing a Museum of Memory’, in *Museums and Truth*, ed. Fromm, Rekdal, Golding (2014), p.62

massacres this chapter will instead focus on the memorialisation that has occurred around the massacre and disappearances at Los Encuentros.

Every year on 14 May, on the anniversary of the Los Encuentros massacre, Río Negro community members gather to remember those who were killed and disappeared. This remembrance takes place on a hilltop near to the site of the original Los Encuentros settlement; it cannot be at the actual site as this is now inaccessible because of the Chixoy dam. The flooding of the original settlement has also meant that the clandestine cemetery believed to hold bodies of Río Negro community members cannot be exhumed as it is completely under water.<sup>63</sup> Community members gather early in the day and travel to this place together: they arrange photographs of those who were disappeared and killed, and arrange flowers and light candles next to them (see Figure 5.3 on the following page). Over the course of the day villagers will share their memories of the events of that day and of those who were disappeared and killed, and will speak of all that they lost as a result of the massacre: their homes, their land, their animals.<sup>64</sup>

It is a time used to grieve for not only the people who were murdered, but also the destruction that was wrought on the community as a whole and the traditions that were lost because of this. The REMHI report outlines how communities were destroyed as a result of the violence: people suffered material losses, but also the destruction of social, religious, and political customs.<sup>65</sup> In Mayan culture, for instance, the earth is of great importance. The crops that are grown come from seeds that have been inherited and preserved for generations. When the military attacked

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<sup>63</sup> Centro Histórico y Educativo Río Negro, 'Sitio conmemorativo: Los Encuentros', [http://www.rio-negro.info/che/monumentos\\_encuentros.html](http://www.rio-negro.info/che/monumentos_encuentros.html) (Accessed 24/05/2017)

<sup>64</sup> Grahame Russell, "It sounded like Christmas day fireworks going off, ... and we knew the Army had killed them all", *Rights Action*, <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/it-sounded-like-christmas-day-fireworks-going-off-and-we-knew-the-army-had-killed-them-all> (Accessed 24/05/2017)

<sup>65</sup> REMHI, *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), pp.40-49

communities, burning crops, poisoning creeks, and leaving pounds of poisoned salt behind them, they not only destroyed people's means of survival, but also eliminated the connections they once had with the earth.<sup>66</sup>



Fig.5.3 Remembrance event for the Los Encuentros massacre held on 14 May 2017. Photographs of the murdered and disappeared have been lined up and candles and flowers laid before them.

Photograph taken from Russell, "It sounded like Christmas day fireworks going off..." , *Rights Action*, <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/it-sounded-like-christmas-day-fireworks-going-off-and-we-knew-the-army-had-killed-them-all>

Given the communal emphasis placed on these anniversary events, whether or not someone has recovered the remains of their disappeared does not alter participation: someone may know their disappeared relative is dead and have a burial site they can visit to remember and grieve them, whereas another community member may still be living in a state of 'frozen grief', yet because of the emphasis on community destruction all are able to grieve the losses experienced at Los Encuentros.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p.41

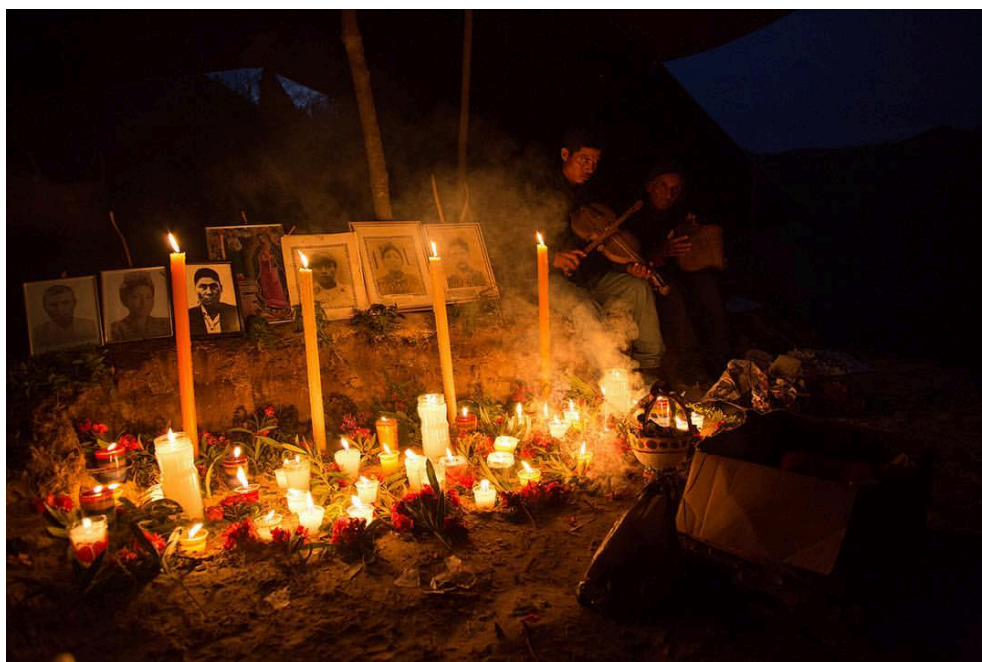


Fig.5.4 A photograph of the commemorative event held for the Los Encuentros massacre in 2017.

To the right of the image it is possible to see two people playing instruments. Photography by James Rodríguez, Los Encuentros, Rabinal, Baja Verapaz. 14 May 2017

This remembrance continues long into the night and concludes the following morning. During this time a Mayan priest will say prayers for the deceased and light incense; community members and relatives will also pray and sing, and music will be played. Music plays a significant role in Mayan beliefs: many Mayans believe that traditional music was created and handed down to them by primordial ancestors as a means of pleasing gods and spirits. At wakes and funerals it is common to engage a musician to sing or play the violin or guitar; a local specialist in ritual music may also be present to sing sections of the Catholic burial service.<sup>67</sup> To have music at a remembrance event for those killed and disappeared in Los Encuentros is therefore fitting with traditional Mayan funeral and grieving rites.

<sup>67</sup> Linda O'Brien-Rothe, 'Guatemala', in *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*, ed. Dale Olsen, Daniel Sheehy (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp.226-227

Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson wrote that symbols of collective ritual can represent mastery over the past.<sup>68</sup> As well as giving the people of Río Negro the opportunity to reflect and grieve their loss, the event held in Los Encuentros takes control over the past and how it is treated. It ties in with the ideas discussed in chapter three in relation to recovery: the memorial events allow the people of Los Encuentros to recover the memories of the disappeared from the narrative of the State. After the massacres in Río Negro survivors fled to the mountains and spent many years hiding there trying to avoid discovery by the military. Owing to this, and the manner in which their loved ones were murdered or disappeared, they were unable to conduct any of the traditional rituals usually connected to death.<sup>69</sup> By holding a commemorative event once a year on the anniversary of the Los Encuentros massacre, community members are able to do this and so take back control over the memories of their loved ones and their own ability to grieve.

#### *The National Day Against Forced Disappearance*

The final memorial that this chapter discusses is an event held on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance: the releasing of hundreds of balloons in Guatemala City's Central Park. This event takes place every year as part of the National Day; it is usually organised so that it will be one of the last commemorative acts of the day. When I visited Guatemala in 2015, the releasing of the balloons was used to symbolise the end of the event, in the sense that the speeches and organised activities in Central Park had come to an end. The marquee that had been constructed remained in place and many of the organisers, members of H.I.J.O.S for instance,

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<sup>68</sup> Brandon Hamber & Richard A. Wilson, 'Symbolic closure through memory, reparation and revenge in post-conflict societies', *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 1:1 (2010), p.38

<sup>69</sup> Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 'Case of the Río Negro Massacres v. Guatemala. Judgement of September 4<sup>th</sup> 2012', [http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_250\\_ing.pdf](http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_250_ing.pdf) (Accessed 24/05/2017) pp.37-38

stayed for some time. Those of us present at the National Day that year were instructed to gather around a circle of grass, flowers, and candles that had been constructed (see Figure 5.5). Earlier in the day I had asked Sara Alavarez, a Mayan woman in attendance, why the circle had been made. She told me that making this arrangement was a Mayan tradition; the circle was created whenever someone died.<sup>70</sup>



Fig.5.5 A circle of grass, flowers, and candles at the National Day Against Forced Disappearance, 2015.

As so many of the disappeared remain absent, it is not possible for a lot of families to perform this ritual: there are no remains and so there are no graves. For relatives who have recovered their disappeared, the situation is slightly different as they have been able to conduct a ceremonial burial with all the traditional rituals in place. However, for those families who have not, creating this arrangement for the spirits of the disappeared is a means of engaging with the normal practices associated with a loved one. Earlier I described how many Mayan people hold the belief that the

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Sara Alavarez, 21/06/2015, by Katherine Bailey

spirits of the dead cannot settle unless the appropriate rites are performed; for the disappeared this excludes a traditional burial until (if) their remains are recovered. Although Sara did not mention this, it is possible to infer that by creating this formation so associated with rituals of death, those in attendance were intending to show respect for the disappeared and also assist the restless spirits find some satisfaction and peace.

While people were gathering around the circle, they were handed a white balloon and instructed not to let go of it until the appropriate moment. The message written on these balloons differs year to year: in 2011 it read ‘if you see this, I want you to know that we are still waiting for you’; in 2016: ‘45,000 reasons not to forget’.<sup>71</sup> In 2015, when I was in Guatemala, the message on the balloons was ‘the missing are everywhere’. Each of these messages speaks of the desire to have the disappeared remembered, whether addressing the wider population of Guatemala or the disappeared themselves. They stress the on-going uncertainty that surround the disappearances, the scale of this form of violence, and the far-reaching impact they have; ‘the missing are everywhere’ speaks to the absence of the disappeared and the graves that are scattered throughout Guatemala, but also to the homes that were left empty after they were taken: the disappeared are missing, are present through this absence, everywhere. These balloon messages suggest a collective: it is all the disappeared who are each being remembered here, yet that a balloon was handed to every individual present (for as many balloons as there were) gives this event a personal edge to it as well. As I will discuss shortly, the emotional responses of some of those in the crowd suggested that as well as participating in a collective event

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<sup>71</sup> NISGUA, ‘Guatemala Observes National Day Against Forced Disappearance’, <http://niscua.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/> (Accessed 25/05/2017)

Johan Ordonez, ‘Guatemala busca a 45.000 desaparecidos a 20 años de fin de guerra civil’, <http://lanacionweb.com/internacional/guatemala-busca-a-45-000-desaparecidos-a-20-anos-de-fin-de-guerra-civil/> (Accessed 25/05/2017)



designed to remember and grieve the loss of the disappeared, they were also reflecting on their own individual losses as well. The individual may be subsumed into the collective but it retains its function and value for the relatives.



Fig.5.6 People holding balloons at the National Day Against Forced Disappearance. This photograph shows a section of people who had gathered around the circle of grass and flowers, all holding balloons. It is possible to make out the inscription on a couple of the balloons: '*Las y los desaparecidos están en todas partes*' ('The disappeared are everywhere').

The use of balloons in connection with grief is an activity often performed by those in mourning. In some cases, people will attach a message to their loved one to the end of the balloon string before letting it go, or will see the balloon as a representation of their deceased loved and in letting the balloon go, are also letting

them go.<sup>72</sup> In Guatemala there is also the wish to draw attention to proceedings on the National Day and to the struggle for the disappeared as a whole, and balloons are visible, cheap, and accessible means of doing this; and yet the connection with expressing grief and loss cannot be overlooked.

Before the balloons were released, one of the organisers shouted into a microphone: ‘for all the disappeared: we don’t forget and we don’t forgive’, a chant which was then taken up by the gathered crowd of people. The balloons were then released. Within this statement contest is clearly expressed: against the silence surrounding the disappeared, the attempts to forget the past, and the continued reluctance by the State to put those responsible on trial. This idea of contest, and the activism that is attached to it, has an interesting relationship with grief. Gail Holst-Warhaft has argued that in the cases of Guatemala and Argentina, it is grief that serves as the fuel for this continued action. Rather than remaining at home and mourning what they have lost, the relatives of the disappeared have instead turned their grief into a weapon: ‘the absence of the corpse made the passion of the Mother’s [of the Plaza de Mayor] grief a continuous but not steady state. Like a slow burning flame, it flared then settled, never losing its heat.’<sup>73</sup> Grief at this event then, inspires contest, and through that contest, a desire to inform others about the disappeared and the impact this violence still has in contemporary society. There is almost a cyclical process at work between the different forms of memorial in Guatemala, with one igniting the need for the other and so forth.

At the event in 2015, the grief felt by relatives was also visible to see in the emotions they expressed before and after the balloons were released. There was no

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<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Pomeroy, Renee Garcia, *The Grief Assessment and Intervention Workbook: A Strengths Perspective* (California: Brooks/Cole, 2009) p.131

<sup>73</sup> Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion: Grief and Its Political Uses* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.122

sure way of identifying who in the crowd of people at the National Day was a relative or friend of someone who was disappeared, but many people had photographs of the disappeared with them. From this, I inferred a close personal connection with the disappeared. Some carried the photographs on placards, others on posters, and some wore them attached to string around their neck. Those with photographs were, in the majority of cases, the people in the crowd who looked particularly focussed before the balloons were let go; one woman I saw was clutching two balloons, one in each hand, and kept glancing up at them while we waited for the call to release them. Another woman stood silently holding her balloon, clearly in thought. Although I have listed this memorial event as one that engages in collective expressions of grief, the individual presence of the disappeared was very visible throughout. It is because the emphasis is on the disappeared as an entire group, rather than a particular person, that I would argue it is a memorial that places greater significance on collective grief.

As everyone in the crowd was letting go of their balloon, several of the organisers began to read out a list of names of the disappeared; in response to each name would come the shout '*presente*'. Initially, it was just the organisers who gave the reply, but gradually those who had taken part in the releasing of the balloons joined in. This is different to the use of roll call in other memorial events; for instance, in the United States army at memorial services, there is a deliberate silent pause left between each of the names called to emphasise that person's absence.<sup>74</sup> In Guatemala with the disappeared, the call of '*presente*' is a shout against the forced absence and the silence that surrounds the disappearances. This calling of names is again reflective of the individual/collective expression of grief: the names of being read out emphasise the individuality of the disappeared, while the shout of '*presente*'

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<sup>74</sup> Salvatore Anthony Esposito, Jr., *Abu Ghraib After the Scandal: A Firsthand Account of the 344th Combat Support Hospital, 2005-2006* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), p.174

comes from many, rather than only those who are connected to a particular person. The grief for the disappeared and the representation of them falls on the many that are there.



Fig.5.7 One of the organisers of the National Day Against Forced Disappearance reading out names of the disappeared.

During the roll call of names the reaction of members of the crowd differed. Again, it was those who were either organising the event, and therefore were evidently connected to the disappeared, or those people with photographs who expressed more emotional responses. One woman I saw dissolved into tears while the names were being called and had to be comforted by another person. She had a portrait of one of the disappeared around her neck, so the assumption can be made that the day had a more personal edge to it, that she had attended to remember

someone she knew, as well as engaging with the collective remembrance of the disappeared.

This event on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance has been organised so as to remember the disappeared and it is clear that within this, space and time has been created to allow those relatives in attendance a chance to publically grieve for their loss. The other National Day events that have been discussed in this thesis have a more active, almost confrontational edge to them, and while the releasing of balloons and the calling of names does still challenge the silence surrounding the disappeared, it is also a more reflective event, where the disappeared as individuals and as a group are presented to the public so that they may grieve their loss. The reactions of those in the crowd demonstrate that for many relatives, the event is an emotional one that encourages reflection on the disappeared; this is regardless of whether they have been recovered or not, or the relative believes them to still be alive or dead: all are encouraged to take a balloon and think of the disappeared.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of grief in relation to the disappeared is different in terms of time and space to grief that is evoked in other incidents of violence; in some ways, a discussion about grief and disappearances is almost to contradict the nature of disappearance. It is well established that when disappearances first occurred in Guatemala during the civil war, and in the early years following this, there were endless questions from relatives about where the disappeared were, whether they were safe, and when they would be returned home. For some relatives these questions changed over time depending on whether they believed their loved one to be alive or

not: where was their body, how and when were they killed; but the questions still remained. I have spoken before of the liminal position that both the disappeared and family members find themselves in, and it is clear that in relation to these memorials intended to facilitate grief, there is a 'biliminality' in operation.

Family members and the disappeared become stuck in two liminal positions. Antonius Robben argues that for the disappeared the first liminality they exist in concerns their status as a human being: neither alive nor dead. The second liminality refers to them as social beings: excluded from civil society in life, and then in death, prevented from obtaining a passage to the hereafter. For relatives, they exist in one liminal position of searching for their disappeared loved one, and in another liminality of being unable to either socialize with their abducted family member or bury their dead with the proper rituals.<sup>75</sup> The disappearances were, and arguably still are, an unanswered, open-ended question that caused distress to relatives even as the years progressed. This was only prolonged by the refusal of numerous Guatemalan governments to provide families with any information about what had happened to the disappeared.

Grief then does not at first glance appear to fit with this form of violence: if it is not known that the disappeared are dead, then surely grief cannot be experienced? However, as this chapter has discussed the form that grief takes in these situations where the disappeared have not been recovered and ceremonially buried is a mutated one that renders families in a position where they are often unable to recognise the death of the disappeared yet do not want to hope for them to be alive. There is grief for the loss of the disappeared, despite the unknowing: the relative has lost someone they love and with this the opportunities to continue their lives together. Arguably

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<sup>75</sup> Antonius Robben, 'Disappearance and Liminality: Argentina's Mourning of State Terror', in *Ultimate Ambiguities: Investigating Death and Liminality*, ed. Peter Berger, Justin Kroesen, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), pp.103-104

grief does not need certainty to exist, only to progress; it can exist in frustrated, unchanging form.<sup>76</sup>

The memorials that have been discussed in this chapter are those that have been created to allow expressions of this grief, both individual and collective. Personal reflections and individual grief for the disappeared are apparent in memorials that allow relatives access at flexible times; it is the choice of the individual relative when they would like to visit a space connected with their disappeared in order to grieve. Collective grief relies upon the presence of a group of people and so for memorials, as has been discussed in this chapter, this involves a level of organisation or an anniversary around which people can congregate. As the majority of the disappeared remain missing, the creation of spaces where people can express these feelings of grief either individually or as part of a group, is an evident necessity, although a difficult thing to place: testimonies contained in the REMHI truth commission highlight the wishes of many relatives of the disappeared to have a site where they can connect with and remember their loved one. For many Mayan people, these spaces also mean they have somewhere to leave offerings of flowers or food to the spirits of their disappeared relatives.

The lack of regime change in Guatemala has meant that the memory of the disappeared continues to be attached to the idea of criminality. As was discussed in chapter three, there are attempts made by relatives and organisations to remove this stigma. However, it is clear that these negative assertions have had a detrimental impact on how relatives have been able to grieve for their relatives. This chapter has shown that many family members felt unable to share their grief with others, and others in turn attempted to repress their feelings. Family members have embraced the

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<sup>76</sup> Sánchez, 'Psychological Aspects', in *Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations*, ed. Stonaker (2004), p.113

memorials examined here as they allow them to express this grief and share their emotions with others. If more of the disappeared are recovered perhaps sites of individual grief will be used less, or their meaning will change, as families will have a site specific to their relatives remains that they can visit; those memorials that encourage collective grief will, I believe, remain popular. These memorials not only allow grief to be shared with others who have experienced a comparable loss, but they also tie into the wish to contest the actions of the State; a desire that is not likely to end until there is lasting regime change.



## Conclusion

‘The families of the disappeared don’t have weapons or power, only the truth that our family members were abruptly torn from our homes’, noted Aura Elena Farfán, director of FAMDEGUA (Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala). ‘Nevertheless, we maintain the hope that one day, we will know where they [the disappeared] are, where the military left them.’<sup>1</sup> The disappearances of Guatemala’s civil war remain an open question. Where the disappeared are, what happened to them after they were taken, and who was responsible, continue to be questions without answers for the majority of relatives. The position taken by multiple post-conflict governments, that silence and forgetting rather than remembering are the best policies, has done nothing to modify this situation. Unlike in other Latin American countries that experienced high numbers of disappearances during the Cold War era, members of the regimes that held influence during Guatemala’s civil war have not been shaken from their positions. While there has been change in the country, with the move away from military governments and the gradual return of autonomy to the law courts, to say that there has been a lasting and meaningful regime change comparable to those in Chile or Argentina, for instance, is untenable.

In such an environment, memorialising the disappeared becomes a complex process. My primary aim with this thesis is to examine whether the nature of disappearance (that is, the liminal status of the victim, the absence of conclusion for families) and the political situation in Guatemala (the lack of meaningful regime change) had affected the process of memorialisation. In other countries around the world there have been memorials created for the disappeared: they exist despite the

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<sup>1</sup> NISGUA, ‘Forced Disappearance: Resilience and Creativity in the Defense of Memory and Search for Justice’ (September 2017), [https://nisgua.org/wp-content/uploads/R93\\_September17CreativeStrugglesForMemory.pdf](https://nisgua.org/wp-content/uploads/R93_September17CreativeStrugglesForMemory.pdf) (Accessed 16/12/2017)

complexities associated with the form of violence. The same can be said of Guatemala. All of the memorials discussed in this thesis incorporated in some way, depending on their form, a sense of continuation. The disappearances are recognised as an event that occurred in the past, but the impact they had are shown to be an issue of the present and the future. While this means that the forms these memorials take often differed from those that may be termed more ‘traditional’ memorials for victims of violence, so as to allow flexibility even alongside permanence, the defining features of disappearance were not a hindrance to memorialisation; they were just one of the factors that determined the forms and intentions of the memorials created. What became apparent, and what is shown in this thesis, was that the political relationship that existed between the State and the disappearances in Guatemala had a much greater impact on the creation of memorials. The struggle that existed in post-conflict Guatemala over whether the past should be discussed or not meant that alongside remembering the disappeared and commemorating this loss, memorials had to fight for a space in which to exist.

While all of the memorials discussed in this thesis serve to remember the disappeared and preserve their memory, the aims of their varied creators, from artists, to families, to communities, go beyond this. The process of memorialising the disappeared in Guatemala has been born out of the persistence and tenacity of families and friends, who have been determined that their loved ones will be recognised for the people they were, and that the violence of the past will never be forgotten. Therefore in addition to remembering, memorials to the disappeared work actively to break down the silence created by the State by projecting their own narrative into the public sphere. These memorials fulfill the needs of their creators, offering the possibility of representation in spaces where such conversations about the

past are often discouraged, creating visual markers of claims and demands.<sup>2</sup> Whether they relate to the disappeared as individuals or as a group with a ‘liminal’ existence or in many cases both, these memorials perform a number of crucial functions that this thesis has investigated: contestation; informing; recovery; and grief. By structuring this thesis around these four themes I have allowed for the complexity of memorialising the disappeared to come to the fore, and was able to identify the different motivations at work in the creation of memorials and the variety of ideas and intentions that were expressed.

In Chapter Two I explored the theme of ‘Contest’ in relation to memorials. It is evident from these discussions that the ability of memorials to challenge the State is a highly valued one. All memorials for the disappeared relate to this theme, as owing to the behavior and positions of multiple governments, it is nearly impossible to publically discuss the disappearances and the role of the State in this act of violence without challenging the official intention of forgetting. Memorials that contest offer actors the opportunity to publically draw attention to the failure on the part of governments to prosecute those responsible for the crime, and to release information concerning the disappeared, which may lead to the discovery of remains or provide families with some knowledge of what happened to their loved ones. The demonstration held on the National Day Against Forced Disappearance is one such example of this. By gathering in a public space those involved in the demonstration are able to engage with members of the public and openly challenge the actions, or inaction, of the government.

Chapter Three examined the idea of ‘Recovery’ and argued that in the case of the disappeared in Guatemala there are two forms of recovery that take place: the

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<sup>2</sup> Katherine Hite, *Politics and The Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p.6

physical and the abstract. The exhumation of bodies is considered to be a form of physical recovery, and it allows families the opportunity to conduct any death or burial rites that they wish, and also creates a specific site where the disappeared may be connected with. In recovering the disappeared, the endless unknowing about where the disappeared are and whether or not they are still alive comes to an end. The idea of abstract recovery in memorials was discussed in relation to the idea of ‘reindividuation’: the identities of the disappeared as individuals are returned to them and rather than be shown as criminals, they are presented in memorials to be the people their loved ones knew them to be. Such recovery is reliant upon the testimony of those who knew the disappeared, and while there are some instances where family members refuse to speak about their relatives, either out of fear or indeed, shame, memorials are still able to present an alternative version of the past that recovers the disappeared from the State’s portrayal of events. The Museum of the Martyrs, Students, and the Union shows this clearly. One of the men who was recovered at the same time as Amancio Villatoro is represented in the museum as a question mark, as their relative did not want their picture included. Yet because of the context of this display, and the surrounding information, the unnamed man is still presented in a manner that challenges the State’s ideas of the disappearances.

Chapter Four examined the theme of ‘Informing’. As many of the Guatemalan governments have refused to discuss the past, there are often gaps in people’s knowledge in relation to who the disappeared were and how the disappearances came about. What became clear while researching memorials to the disappeared was the intent that many, if not all, of them had to inform different audiences about Guatemala’s past. As with Contest, it is a topic that is difficult to avoid. If, for instance, a family member of the disappeared wishes to encourage other people to

support their struggle for information and justice, then those people must be informed of what it is that is being fought for and why. To recover the disappeared requires the transmission of information. Basic information concerning the disappearances and the contemporary state of affairs is therefore visible in all memorials for the disappeared; it is how much significance is placed on this information and the form that the memorial takes, which create distinctions. *Casa de la Memoria* was one example that this chapter discussed, which was created with the primary purpose of informing visitors about Guatemala's past. The challenge that such information presented and how it affected the reputations of the disappeared were secondary to this function.

Chapter Five of this thesis considered the theme of grief in relation to the disappearances and memorials. It is clear that because of the violence of the disappearances (the unending unknowing) the relationship between relatives of the disappeared and grief was distorted. Many family members were unable to believe that their loved one was dead without the presence of a body (which, again, emphasizes the important role that recovery can have) and so were unable to grieve their loss. 'Frozen grief' created a double bind, whereby a family member may imagine their loved one is alive but reject the thought that, if they were, they were being tortured; however the thought that the disappeared might be dead caused extreme guilt. Instead of entering into what may be termed a 'natural' grieving process, grief instead was suppressed. For family members, owing to the inconclusive and open-ended nature of the violence, the lines between different times became blurred. The disappearance continues to be experienced as if it were in the present. As Richie Morales, a Guatemalan artist, told me during an interview: 'when talking about

the armed conflict I don't understand it as past, maybe because at some point it was part of my present'.<sup>3</sup>

From the examples of memorials discussed in these chapters it is clear that the forms memorials to the disappeared take are wide and varied. There are differences in appearance, in materiality, use of space, and even in temporality. While some of the memorials that I have examined in this thesis have been made of stone and are intended to be permanent, like the columns outside the Metropolitan Cathedral, others, like Daniel Hernandez-Salazar's 'Street Angels', have been made of paper and relied upon their brief and sudden appearance to make an impact. Still others, like the Rabinal Achi Community Museum, approached the remembrance of the disappeared differently, creating a space where visitors may learn about the disappearances or simply reflect on their own loss. It is not possible therefore to speak of a 'typical' memorial for the disappeared in Guatemala and this thesis has reflected that by presenting a cross-section of the different forms in existence. The reason for this variety of form relates largely to the absence of lasting and meaningful regime change, and the responses to this from those actors who seek to have the disappeared remembered. This thesis examined memorials that were created in an roughly defined twenty-year period following the signing of the Accords in 1996, and it is clear from these memorials that, across this time period, the struggle over how the past should be depicted has persevered, tied together with the desire to have the disappeared returned home.

When the civil war came to an end in 1996 there was hope that change would come to Guatemala. The UN supported CEH truth commission had suggested numerous methods through which reconciliation could be achieved, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Richie Morales, 12/10/2016, by Katherine Bailey

acceptance of this report, plus the signing of the Peace Accords, suggested a level of complicity and willingness amongst all those who had been involved in the war to introduce positive reforms to the country. Yet, as I discussed in chapter one, this understanding between groups only went so far and it soon became clear after the signing of the Accords that although peace had been declared, extensive, lasting change would be harder to obtain. The frustration of peace being declared but no change and no answers being forthcoming made demonstrations, an agitatory and confrontational means of remembrance, the most appealing, and this form of memorial has been present in Guatemala since peace was declared. It is predictable that it will remain so until the various groups involved feel satisfied that their voices have been heard, their demands have been met, and further political change has occurred. Regina Galindo's performance, '*¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?*' (Who Can Erase The Traces?), is testament to the frustration and anger that is still present within the country over the lack of regime change and the impact that this has on the country.

Over time, there have also been more permanent forms of memorial emerging. That such spaces have been created for the disappeared suggests that although the struggle over the past is still in existence, the grip the State has over the public sphere had weakened. In contemporary Guatemala, there is still undoubtedly opposition to the idea of the disappeared being publically remembered, their remains recovered, and the State taking responsibility for the violence. I discussed in chapter three the death threats the Fredy Peccerelli faced because of his work with the FAFG. But that these *permanent* memorials are able to exist, that they can openly challenge the State and its portrayal of the past without fear of repercussions, shows that there has been gradual change in Guatemala, which has influenced the forms that newer memorials have

taken. The creation of museums and exhibitions dedicated to the disappearances and Guatemala's past suggest that while the emotional impact of the disappearances is experienced in the present, and while in the eyes of relatives the disappeared and their absence remain a present issue rather than one in the past, for younger generations who did not experience the conflict or the effects of it first hand (with, for instance, the loss of a parent), the disappearances are something to be learnt about. The idea of preserving memory whilst also still continuing with the fight for information emerged in memorials as time progressed and the need to recruit others to support the search for the disappeared became more apparent.

Iwona Irwin-Zarecka wrote that 'to secure a presence for the past demands work', and it is evident throughout this thesis that in Guatemala, in light of the stance taken by governments and the lasting impact of the disappearances, to secure a presence for the disappeared requires perseverance and drive.<sup>4</sup> The memorials that have been created for the disappeared have largely come from those with a personal connection: family, friends, or organisations comprised of the two. Because of this, many of the memorials discussed in this thesis also remember the impact disappearances had on those who were left behind. As this thesis has shown, the impact of the disappearances extended beyond those who were disappeared and beyond the time period in which the disappearance occurred. The testimonies contained in the memory book of Santa Lucía, for example, tell us not only of the disappearances as they happened but also how the speakers felt when the act occurred and how they feel now, in the present day.

Throughout this thesis I have referred to the disappeared as existing within memorials as both 'individuals' and as a 'collective'. Within nearly all memorials for

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<sup>4</sup> Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p.13



the disappeared there is an attempt to recognise the individual within the group, and also establish a sense of the scale of the violence by presenting the disappeared en masse. The disappeared are thus represented in two states simultaneously. In Isabel Ruiz's '*Matemática Sustractiva*', the individual disappeared became a single chalk line within a group of 45,000. The overturned table in *Casa de la Memoria* represented one family's story, but owing to the everyday setting, could apply to many. The roll call at the National Day Against Forced Disappearances demonstration, or the lists of names on the columns outside the Metropolitan Cathedral highlight the individual person by drawing the audience's or the viewer's attention to their single name, but presents this within the context of the disappeared as a group. The weighting of this division depends on the actors responsible for the memorials' creation: some will emphasise a particular person or people who was disappeared, like the Santa Lucía memory book, which was based around personal experiences and testimonies about violence, while others will focus on the disappeared as a collective, as in *Casa de la Memoria*. While the collective presentation attempts to communicate the extent of the violence, the representations of the individual disappeared within these memorials serves as a reminder that behind the collective term, 'the disappeared', there were people who once existed independently outside this form of violence.

Katherine Hite stated that memorials commemorate the past in ways that recognise sacrifice or loss, and throughout this thesis it has been clear that each of the examples discussed acknowledges the loss of the disappeared, frequently on both a personal level and a national one.<sup>5</sup> Personally there is the loss of a child, brother, father; collectively, the changes that many of the disappeared sought and fought for

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<sup>5</sup> Hite, *Politics and The Art of Commemoration* (2012), p.6

have been lost with them. The speeches made at the demonstration that I attended on the National Day Against Forced Disappearances in 2015 attest to this. There were numerous reflections on how the work done by the disappeared should not be lost; rather than be forgotten, their ambitions for the country should inspire the population into action. By including the suggestion that Guatemala as a country has itself lost something through the disappearances communicates a sense of pride in the disappeared. As I discussed in chapter three, part of memorialising the disappeared has involved families and friends taking back control over how the disappeared are shown and how they can be spoken about in public. The open suggestions within memorials that the changes attempted by the disappeared were actually good and worth commendation, is a significant aspect of challenging and rewriting the narrative of the civil war.

The process of memorialising Guatemala's disappeared is far from concluded; indeed, one may argue that given the relatively short space of time since the end of the conflict, it has only just started. While researching this thesis it became clear to me from speaking to those involved in the creation of memorials, attending events, and reading testimonies from family members, that until there is further, more meaningful political change in Guatemala, which allows for an enduring regime change or the emergence of a more open attitude towards the past, many relatives, friends, and supporters of the disappeared will continue to create and attend memorials that openly contest the failure of the State to address the disappearances. Even for those who live a distance from the capital city (notably Mayan people), where most of these contesting actions take place, there is still a wish to recover the disappeared and learn what happened to them. Recent triumphs for families of the disappeared, such as the 2016 trial of eight military officers for the crime of

disappearance and crimes against humanity, suggest that recognition of the disappearances as an act of illegal violence during the civil war is emerging, at least in the law courts.<sup>6</sup> Change is still occurring. This thesis has highlighted clearly how central contestation is to memorials for the disappeared in Guatemala, but it has also shown that in addition to this theme of Contest, memorials have been created with other intentions; that is, to recover, inform, and reflect grief. Even if a meaningful regime change is brought about in Guatemala, these themes will continue to be present in memorials. There will still be a desire to remember the disappeared in a certain manner – to recover them from the control of the State both bodily and in reputation – and inform others of Guatemala’s violent past through the experiences of those who endured it. There will also be the need for a space where grief may be expressed, both by the individual and by the collective group who have lost the disappeared. Although political change over the next twenty years cannot be predicted, it is evident from the memorials discussed in this thesis that political context will continue to have a defining impact on the memorials produced, and that for as long as the effort to remember the disappeared in Guatemala exists, memorials will continue to be created.

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Guatemala Crimes Against Humanity Trial Takes a Historic Step’, *telesur* (June 2016), <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Guatemala-Crimes-Against-Humanity-Trial-Takes-a-Historic-Step-20160608-0002.html>

## Appendix One Consent Form

### Memorialising Guatemala's Disappeared Consent Form

*You are being asked to take part in a doctoral (PhD) research being undertaken by Lancaster University. I am asking you to take part because of your association, work with, or involvement with activities related to, the disappearances that took place in Guatemala. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.*



**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this interview is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. A full transcription of the interview will be sent to you. If there is anything that you are not happy with, the material in question can be removed and deleted within a two-month period after the time you have received the transcript.

You may withdraw from the research project up to two weeks after the interview has taken place, and the material will be deleted and not used in the project. If you choose to withdraw after this two week period, the data will be used.

**Storage:** The interview will be recorded and then transcribed. Both the recording of the interview and the transcription will be treated as confidential information, and encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer. The data from the interview will be retained for 10 years, and then deleted.

**Future use:** Some or all of the material will be published as part of my PhD and may also be published in the future for research projects or included within public presentations.

**If you have any questions:** Please feel free to contact me with any questions at [k.bailey1@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:k.bailey1@lancaster.ac.uk).

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you can contact the following independent party at Lancaster University: Professor Aristotle Kallis, Bowland College, Lancaster University, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4YT ([a.kallis@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:a.kallis@lancaster.ac.uk), telephone number +44 1524 594297)

**Statement of Consent:** I have read, understood and agreed to the above information, and have received answers to any questions and concerns I have raised. I consent to take part in the study.

Please state your preferred mode of contact \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded and the information used for the purposes outlined above.

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_

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Regina Galindo '¿Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas?' (Who Can Erase The Traces?)

Demonstrations on the National and International Days Against Forced Disappearance

The Museum of Martyrs, Students, and the Union

The Rabinal Achi Community Museum

Casa de la Memoria

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