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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TESTIMONY, REMHI AND *SENSELESSNESS* IN GUATEMALAN MEMORY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SPANISH

BY
MELISSA J. BOROUGHS

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I am dedicating my thesis to my childhood friend Betty Salanic, a shining example of how even the most horrible experiences can create the most amazing people, and my friend Osman Rossil, who continues the good fight in Guatemala.

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INTRODUCTION

One day when I was eight years old my mother told me that we were going to the airport to pick up a lady and her nine-year-old daughter and bring them to a friend's house. She told me that they were from Guatemala but they had been living in Texas for a few years. She thought it was the perfect opportunity for me to befriend the little girl. Just as my mother predicted, we became good friends and ended up spending most of our childhood together, taking turns flying between Minnesota and Texas to see one another. One winter day as we were laying in the snow and staring up at the snowflakes falling from the sky, she told me that her father and brother had been shot and killed when she was six, and that she had watched as her mother held them while they slowly bled out and died. When I asked her who had killed them, she said she didn't know, and that she couldn't go back.

Seventeen years later I elected to spend my last semester of college studying abroad in Guatemala. To paint an accurate picture of this decision I should mention that it was my third choice of the three programs that my college offered in Spanish-speaking countries. I didn't want to go there. In my mind's eye Guatemala was brown, dusty, violent and war-torn. This has turned into the grand joke of my life, as my mind's eye now sees it as paradise.

For part of my course studies I elected to take a human rights class at Universidad Rafael Landívar in Quetzaltenango. My professor was Osman Rossil, an ex-guerrilla

turned political activist. The only required text for his course was *Guatemala: Never Again*, a report compiled by the Archdiocese of Guatemala on the war crimes committed between the years 1960 and 1996 against the indigenous Maya of Guatemala. Twice a week I would sit in a coffee shop where Osman held his class and listen to his story. One day we would hear about riots in the capital city and the next he would tell us about how he exhumed human remains for the purpose of returning them to their families. I was acutely aware that I was closest I had ever been to extreme violence. It was mesmerizing and terrifying at the same time.

While in Guatemala I learned that the internal conflict in Guatemala that started in 1960 and ended in 1996 has been characterized by scholars as a civil war, an armed conflict and genocide. In reality it *was* genocide. It is best characterized as a bloody 36-year clash between the government's military and a *specific* group of people: Mayan indigenous peasants. By the end of the war over 250,000 Guatemalans were dead or missing. I came to understand that this particular blueprint for war produced a society with a disputed collective memory of that violence and its destructive effects for indigenous cultures.

Osman Rossil is also a Mayan spiritual guide, and when I left Guatemala in May of 2008, almost exactly five years ago, he told me that nobody else in my study abroad group would ever return, except for me. His prophesy has proven to be eerily true. Guatemala had taken hold of me, and in the following years I would return time and time again to what I considered to be an incredibly beautiful country with an unbelievably terrifying past.

The more I learned about Guatemala's history the more I became aware of the fact that nobody else seemed to know much about it, or if they did, they were reluctant to talk about it. One of the other classes I took that semester was a class on Guatemalan history, and when we got to the 1960's a brief summary was given about the "internal conflict" that lasted all of ten minutes. If someone had lost a parent, brother, sister, friend or child during the time of the "conflict" they would always have any other reason for the death except for what really happened, much like my childhood friend. Given that I certainly had not been taught about Guatemalan history during any educational experience in the United States, I began to feel that what had happened in Guatemala was an unspoken secret. Indeed, the genocide in Guatemala has been labeled "the silent holocaust" and even the Truth Commission mandated by the United Nations found it appropriate to title their report *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*. It always seemed absurd to me that despite all the literature, testimonials and historical accounts of what happened in Guatemala, it still seemed to go unacknowledged. As Bill O'Driscoll notes:

The atrocities committed in this small country just south of Mexico are much less widely acknowledged than those that occurred even in Nicaragua and neighboring El Salvador, then suffering through their own bloody civil wars. If awareness of Guatemalan genocide is scant, it's not for lack of information...within three years of the war's end, two major reports, one of them by a United Nations truth commission, documented the full extent of the horror. (1)

Like O'Driscoll, I too felt that it was incredible that what had happened in Guatemala went unacknowledged and unknown when there were so many reports, books, testimonies and documentaries that proved that it had occurred. If there was no collective memory in Guatemala of what had happened, how could the nation heal? If the

Guatemalan people couldn't reconcile with their past, how could they look towards the future?

On April 24th, 1998, Bishop Juan Gerardi, a great defender of human rights and indigenous communities in Guatemala, presented the book *Guatemala: Never Again* to the world and stated:

We are collecting the people's memories because we want to contribute to the construction of a different country. This path was and continues to be full of risks, but the construction of the kingdom of God entails risks, and only those who have the strength to confront those risks can be its builders. On June, 23, 1994, the parties who negotiated the Peace Accords expressed their conviction that "all of the people of Guatemala [have] the right to know the full truth" about the events that occurred during the armed conflict, and that "this clarification will help to ensure that these sad and painful pages of history will not be repeated and that the process of democratization in this country will be strengthened. They emphasized that [knowing the truth] is an indispensable condition for achieving peace. (*Guatemala: Never Again* xxiv)

Two days later Bishop Juan Gerardi was found murdered at his house, his face disfigured to the point of being unrecognizable. Just as he stated in his speech, the path to remembering what had happened in Guatemala was risky, and for him it meant his life. His dedication to the indigenous people of Guatemala made him a martyr for their cause, and the trial of the men who murdered him would make history in Guatemala. Bishop Juan Gerardi established that a collective memory of the past is important because it can mean the difference between the healing and reconstruction of a society or the repeating of the past. In Guatemala the later rather than the former seems to be the reality.

The purpose of my thesis is to present a comprehensive picture of the Guatemalan collective memory of the genocide. I argue that the fragmented form of the Guatemalan collective memory concerning the genocide can be more clearly understood by analyzing

and comparing testimonial literature, documentaries, a Truth Commission report, a novel, and works of performance art. I consider all of these works to be artifacts of memory of the Guatemalan genocide, each one offering a different perspective on the past and present of Guatemala.

The first chapter gives the historical context for my study, going back to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors to today's attempts to bring justice to a former dictator. This chapter specifically focuses on the indigenous versus non-indigenous cultural, ethnic and social divide of Guatemalan society that has been the source of the injustices committed against the indigenous Mayans for over 500 years. I summarize the events that led up to the genocide and examine the impact that the Truth Commissions have had in the country. I also discuss the current trial of the dictator Efraín Ríos Montt and the actions of the current president, Otto Pérez Molina, who claims that genocide never occurred in Guatemala. By understanding the history of Guatemala we are able to contextualize theories and analyze artifacts of memory in their specific context with the supporting evidence provided by history.

In the second chapter I look at testimonial literature and trauma with a critical eye, examining the aspects of historical and collective memory that are imbedded in the production, recirculation and reception of testimony. I will also discuss the implications of the reading of traumatic testimonial literature for both the person that gives the testimony and the person that partakes of the testimony. Throughout the whole chapter I focus on trauma as being a distinctive producer of memory, creating both conscious and unconscious memory, and analyze why collective memory is important for the

construction of a democratic society. By resorting to these theories of trauma and memory we are better able to understand memory in Guatemala.

In the third chapter I examine several artifacts of memory with the intention of examining collective memory and its fragmented expressions of the genocide. Throughout the chapter I use the categories of “conscious” and “unconscious” memory borrowed from the Atkinson-Shiffrin model of memory to analyze archives of Guatemalan memory.

First, I examine the testimonial literature of Nobel peace prizewinner Rigoberta Menchú in her biographical work *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1984). I argue that her account still adds to the collective memory of Guatemala. I compare Menchú’s story with an account from the REHMI project (Informe de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica), culminating in the book *Guatemala: Never Again* (*Guatemala: Nunca Más* 1999), which is included in the thesis as a historical archive of the Guatemalan genocide. *Guatemala: Never Again* is a Truth Commission’s collection of testimonies of victims, perpetrators, militants, guerrillas and civilians that serve the purpose of presenting the truth about the genocide. This testimonial account is important because it stands as a tangible material archive of memory.

Following the discussion on *Guatemala: Never Again* I analyze two documentaries directed by Pamela Yates; *When the Mountains Tremble* (1983) and *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (2011). These two documentaries are paramount because they were filmed during two important points in Guatemalan history. *When the Mountains Tremble* was filmed in Guatemala in the middle of the genocide and *Granito:*

How to Nail a Dictator was filmed as part of an effort to bring the dictator Efraín Ríos Montt to justice at the Spanish court. They would both go on to be evidence in his trial in Guatemala. These two films are importance not only to the collective memory of Guatemala but also in bringing to justice the perpetrators of genocide.

In the fourth chapter, I analyze Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Senselessness* (2004), a rare piece of literature that tells the personal account of a man looking from the outside at the genocide. The protagonist in *Senselessness* is hired to copy-edit the documents that would become *Guatemala: Never Again* and through the process of working with the documents we are able to see how extreme trauma can affect a non-victim of an event. By including *Guatemala: Never Again* in his novel, Horacio Castellanos Moya gives us a half-fictional half-real artifact of memory that I have used to better understand how a traumatic event can affect anyone who comes in contact with it and how memory of trauma does not always pertain only to victims.

Lastly in this chapter, I discuss the performance art of Regina José Galindo in relation to trauma and memory. Born in Guatemala City in 1974, Galindo has lived her life under the shadow of the Guatemalan genocide, and commits her body to representing violence to convey the depth of injury and abuse that has been endured by Guatemalans, especially Mayan indigenous peasants. Galindo's art is not only related to the genocide but to the current state of affairs in Guatemala resulting from years of impunity following the Peace Accords. Regina José Galindo's art is a corporeal archive of memory, reflecting that memory of trauma is not limited to our minds but rather is printed on the

body itself. In this instance, the artists' body becomes the vehicle for expressing pain and violence from racism to physical abuse.

Finally, I conclude that all these works have led me to think that Guatemalan collective memory of this long and violent genocide against the Indigenous Mayans of Guatemala has led to a fragmented collective memory. I postulate that this fragmentation is due in part to the difficulty of remembering a traumatic past, and in part to the unavailability of archives of memory for indigenous Mayans in Guatemala.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A comprehensive history of post-conquest Guatemala is best characterized by the interplay between its indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Since the first Europeans arrived in Guatemala in the beginning of the 16th century, indigenous Mayans have faced diverse affronts to their way of life. Whether these offenses have been deliberate attacks on the Mayan people, the consequence of blind ethnocentrism or simply unintentional result of two groups co-existing together, they nevertheless have not managed to rid the country of its majority indigenous population.

According to the World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, “the Mayans of Guatemala are the only indigenous culture that constitutes a majority of the population in a Central American republic. There are 21 different Mayan groups in Guatemala making up an estimated 51% of the national population” (1). The remaining 49% of Guatemala’s population is mestizo, or, of mixed Mayan, Spanish and European decent. Although the majority of Guatemala’s population has always been and continues to be indigenous Mayan, this has not stopped the minority population from ostracizing the Maya.

The persecution of the indigenous Maya in Guatemala began with the arrival of Spaniards to Central America. The Spaniards transplanted a well-cultivated ethnocentrism from Europe into Guatemalan society. Their abuse of the indigenous

people of Central and North America is undisputed and well-documented. Spaniards viewed the Maya as a sub-human race, and therefore undeserving of even the most basic human rights. To them, the indigenous Maya were a setback to civilization and progress and were only useful inasmuch as they could provide labor to benefit the Spanish crown.

This mindset of viewing the Mayans as lesser members of society began with the Spaniards, but racism continues to be present in Guatemalan society. According to a BBC News report, the United Nations issued a warning to the government of Guatemala in 2006, urging them to “overcome historically racist attitudes towards indigenous peoples” and adding that “should the government fail to act, the country will be increasingly hard to govern” (UN in Guatemala 1). Since the time of the Spaniards racism has continued through generations of white Guatemalan elite, living and thriving even today.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Mexico was the reigning colony of Spain, while Central America presented a particular problem for the crown due to its unrelenting resistance to Spanish rule. In the case of Guatemala, Mayan resistance was especially problematic. The Guatemalan Maya struggled against Spain for nearly 200 years and eventually gave over to Spanish rule not due to military defeat but to the disintegration of their former way of life. According to Thomas Percy, “Mayan capitulation in the late seventeenth century had less to do with military conquest than it did with agriculture. Spaniards took control of so much land that traditional Mayan agricultural techniques became increasingly difficult to sustain” (30). In the end, the

affront afforded by the Spanish on the Mayan's traditional way of life was what allowed Spain to colonize Guatemala.

With the colonization of Guatemala came the *encomiendas*. In an effort to control all of the land in a region with the intention of making it profitable for Spain, the crown ruled that choice Spanish gentlemen would be given a grant that gave them the right to land and labor. The Spanish government would choose an area of land that they would award to a qualifying Spaniard and include the Mayans that lived on the land as part of the package. Effectively, an entire community of people could be "given" to a single Spanish conquistador and lose the land that they had lived on for hundreds of years with a single act of the Spanish crown. They were expected to serve their master on pain of torture or death. In exchange for receiving this "gift" of labor from the Mayan people, the conquistador was meant to civilize them and convert them to Christianity. In her book *A Brief History of Central America*, Lynn Foster states:

Spain hoped the *encomienda* would accomplish many essentials: payment to the conquistadores, conversion and assimilation of the Indians, and production of foodstuffs to sustain the colony. In regard to their civilizing influences on the Indians, the Crown quickly learned otherwise: as the proselytizing friars said, the Indians could best be protected and Christianized by keeping them in towns separate from those of the Spaniards. (73-74)

As Foster states, the Spanish colonizers created a society in which the Mayans were expected to not only gratefully accept their status as an enslaved class of sub-humans, but also to forfeit their deep-seeded religious beliefs and become Christians. This treatment clearly aided in framing a society around the belief that to be indigenous was to be less. When the Spaniards found it more difficult to "civilize" the Mayans than

they had anticipated, they decided that it would be best to separate them from “high” society, adding North American-style segregation to the list of abuses that the indigenous peoples of Guatemala had to contend with. The *encomiendas*, the enslavement of the Maya and the subsequent segregation tactics used by the Spanish all characterize how the Maya were and continue to be viewed in Guatemala.

Before the Spanish arrived and colonized the region, only indigenous Mayans existed in Guatemala. When the Spanish arrived there were two groups: the Mayans and the Spaniards. When only these two groups existed there was as clear hierarchy of power in society: the Spanish were the masters and the indigenous were their slaves. Soon, a third class of people developed: the *ladinos*, born of both Spanish and Mayan blood. Eventually, *ladinos* would become that largest group in all of Central America with the exception of Guatemala. From this time forward Guatemalan society would be split into three groups: indigenous, ladino and European.

By the late 16th century the population of indigenous Guatemalans was decreasing rapidly due to sickness, slavery, starvation and social dislocation. According to Foster, “By the end of the century, the number of Indians in Central America had been reduced by as much as 90 percent: one of the worst demographic disasters in world history” (86).

Conversely, the population of ladino Guatemalans was growing and thriving. Although one generation away from their Mayan parents, ladinos were not subject to *encomiendas*, forced labor or tribute to the Spanish crown as their parents would have been. Unlike the Maya, ladinos were able to work and live in society, regarded as a

lower class than the Spaniards, but afforded the basic human rights that the indigenous Maya were denied.

The 1500's would mark the precedent for a process called "ladinoization" that is largely present in Guatemalan society today. Similar to Guatemalan society in the 16th century, ladinos are still afforded more consideration in society than an indigenous Mayans. This makes it advantageous to be considered a ladino in Guatemalan society. Unlike in the 16th century, in order to become "ladino" one does not necessarily need to be of mixed blood, rather, one may become ladino by eschewing one's culture and customs in order to practice the culture and customs of society's dominant elite. In Guatemala, indigenous Mayans can "ladinoize" themselves by wearing "western" clothes instead of their traditional Mayan dress and by speaking only in Spanish, showing that they have distanced themselves from their Mayan past. By doing this they will receive more consideration in society. "Ladinoization" proves that in many ways, attitudes towards indigenous Guatemalans have not changed in 500 years.

In Global Multiculturalism: Comparative Perspectives on Ethnicity, Race and Nation Fuoss and Hill assert:

The current ladino-Indian dichotomy represents a further shrinking of social categories whereby those of "pure" European descent, those of "mixed" European descent, and those of full Indian ancestry who have undergone a process of "ladinoization" are collapsed into a single social category. No doubt, it is this wide range of lines of descent, along with the attendant range of class positions, that motivates many ladinos, particularly those of pure European descent and those who occupy upper-class positions, to eschew the ladino label. Others, however, embrace the term as a means of self-identification, no doubt largely because the label allows them access to a position of perceived superiority over the still more lowly Indian. (113)

Here we can see that Guatemalans who are of direct European descent or of higher class positions refrain from calling themselves “ladino” because it would connect them with their indigenous ancestry. Those who are not in one of these positions embrace the term because it is still better than being Mayan. While “ladinoization” began hundreds of years ago, it is a phenomenon that continues today due to the prevalent prejudice of Guatemalans against indigenous Guatemalans.

In September of 1821 Guatemala declared its independence from Spain. What followed were over one hundred years of Guatemalan “reform” governments that bounced between liberal and conservative factions. One might assume that upon becoming independent from Spain the new governments of Guatemala would right the wrongs committed towards the indigenous people for over 400 years, but they didn’t. Not surprisingly, the new political leaders of Guatemala were of ladino or direct European descent, and they viewed the Mayans much like the Spanish had, with a few small differences. In *Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians*, René Reeves says:

Conservatives and Liberals disagreed over how to conceptualize the country’s indigenous majority...Conservatives held a racialized or biologically deterministic view of society, in which the Maya were considered a distinct class of citizens because of the supposedly stunted intellect. Legally speaking, the Conservatives treated indigenous people as wards of the state. Liberals, by contrast, believed that the “Indian problem” was more cultural in nature. Mayan “failure” to conform to “modernity” had little to do with biology, and everything to do with their implacable resistance to change and a stubborn determination to retain their distinctive culture and identity. (9)

From 1821 until the 1940’s the different governments of Guatemala would oscillate between these two views of the indigenous Maya, each adding their own type of prejudice against them. For the conservatives, the Maya were unable to conform to

society because they were *biologically* inferior. Due to being a lesser race, they were intellectually stunted and unable to progress as a part of society. As Reeves states, they were treated as problematic wards of the state. Just as the Spanish conquistadors before them, these conservative governments regarded the Maya as sub-human, continuing and adding to existing prejudices against the Mayan people of Guatemala.

The liberal governments during this time did not share the belief that the Maya were sub-human, but they did share the belief that they were a stumbling block to progress and civilized society. To them, the indigenous Maya's resistance to westernized culture by retaining their language, clothing and customs was incomprehensible. Progress and conformation to western society was paramount for the liberal governments, and the indigenous Maya's refusal to become a part of their "liberal revolution" meant that Guatemala would have a harder time entering the world stage.

Whether regarded as sub-human by the conservative governments or as stubborn and anti-progressive by the liberal governments, the Maya of Guatemala continued to face discrimination in the years between their independence from Spain and the first democratic presidential election in 1944.

Unfortunately, racial oppression was not the only thing the indigenous Maya would face in the name of progress during this period in Guatemalan history. It is also during the time between 1821 and the 1940s that the Guatemalan government would sell the rights to the majority of their fertile land to foreign investors such as The United Fruit Company in an effort to modernize their country. These companies were able to revel in tax-free revenue and incredible profit due to the complicity of the Guatemalan

government and the exploitation of indigenous Mayan labor. The atrocities that occurred to the indigenous workers at the hands of these companies are indescribable. They were forced to labor under horrific circumstances with little to no pay, exacting a type of indentured servitude reminiscent of the *encomiendas* during the 1500s.

The time between 1821 and 1944 was a period wherein the governments of Guatemala added to the oppression of the indigenous Mayans. By selling their land to foreign companies and condemning them to labor under appalling circumstances in order to survive, they insured the continuation of a social framework and political policies that treated the Mayans as non-citizens and a setback to progress and modernity.

On October 20th 1944 a coup d'état led by Francisco Javier Arana and Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán forced Juan Federico Ponce Vaides out of power, he himself having had taken the Guatemalan presidency by force from dictator Jorge Ubico several months earlier. A few days after the coup d'état, prominent teacher and writer Juan José Arévalo said in a radio address:

What has occurred in Guatemala is not a *golpe de estado*; it is something more profound and more beneficial: it is a revolution...It is a revolution that will go to the roots of the political system...In a word: it is a revolution called to wash, to purify our political life, to quiet everyone and honor Guatemala. (Handy 24)

This would prove to be true as the military junta (made up in part by Arana and Arbenz), would call Guatemala's very first democratic election. Juan José Arévalo won with an 85% majority. As the first democratically elected president of Guatemala, hopes were high that he would usher in a new era that would work towards the end of the exploitation of the indigenous Maya. Unlike his predecessors, Arévalo focused on the

intellectual and moral rejuvenation of his country. However, as progressive and forward-thinking as Arévalo claimed to be, he found great opposition from the Guatemalan military and U.S. business interests, the biggest of them being the United Fruit Company. For Arévalo to exact the social transformation of his country as he intended to do, he would have to start with an Agrarian Reform that would give indigenous Mayans the right to live and work on their own land. This type of reform was exactly what companies such as United Fruit did *not* want, as it would signify a drastic reduction in their profits. In the end, the pressure that Arévalo felt from the foreign companies insured that no reform would happen. According to Jim Handy, “Arévalo actively discouraged peasant and rural labor organization and did little to begin the social transformation of the country he heralded. He also bequeathed to his successor, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, a nation seething with conflict” (22).

Unlike his predecessor, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán put Agrarian Reform into motion in 1952, despite mounting pressure from within and without Guatemala. Arbenz knew that an Agrarian Reform was the key to toppling the foreign companies that exploited his country. If it worked, it would also mean that indigenous Mayans would have the ability to live and work on their own land for the first time in hundreds of years. This would have meant an entirely new societal construct in Guatemala.

Unfortunately, Arbenz’s Agrarian Reform couldn’t have happened at a worse time. It was 1952, which meant that the United States was in the throes of the Cold War and the Red Scare. In addition to a loss of profit for the United Fruit Company, Arbenz’s Agrarian Reform meant that parcels of land were being meted out to families and

organized groups of Guatemalans. Given the anti-communist stance of the opposing party, transnational companies as well as the United States, Arbenz's Agrarian Reform was seen as an act of communism, thereby indicting Arbenz as well.

The United Fruit Company, capitalizing on its many ties to the US government, convinced major politicians that communism was at play in Guatemala. "By the summer of 1953, Eisenhower, reacting to political pressure from allies of the United Fruit Company, obsessed with communism in Guatemala and advised by Dulles, agreed to a plan for the overthrow of the Arbenz government" (Handy, 143).

Fearing not only the loss of profit but also the hold of communism in Guatemala, the United States acted fast. In 1954, less than two years after the Agrarian Reform began, Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by the CIA. In his place the United States placed Carlos Castillo Armas, who immediately overturned the Agrarian Reform law.

The years 1954 to 1960 would see Guatemala in a time of unrest. While indigenous Mayans had been able to organize in collective communities around the Agrarian Reform during the previous ten years, the new government of Carlos Castillo Armas would make it impossible for them to continue. His U.S.-backed government was determined to rid the country of all the "communists" that had supported Jacobo Arbenz. The unions and communities that had formed around the Agrarian Reform were attacked. According to Charles Brockett:

Rural and urban elites took full advantage of the “communist” witch-hunt to get rid of any “troublemakers”....many of those arrested were leaders of campesino¹ unions, but, it was conceded, they usually had little understanding of communism...one small farmer boasted to an Embassy officer that he had ‘finished’ with Communism in his area by personally loading 82 campesinos on a truck and sending them to Guatemala City...When peasants were freed from jail, punishment continued when they returned to the farms where they had been working: they were evicted. (7)

For the indigenous Mayans in Guatemala, the Castillo Armas government meant the loss of all they had gained during the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz. Unfortunately for Castillo Armas, it was not only the Guatemalan peasants that longed to return to the ten years of spring. Factions of the military itself were unhappy with the new U.S.-backed governments, and on July 26th, 1957 Castillo Armas was shot and killed by a palace guard. During the next year there were several transfers of power in the government, culminating in the presidency of Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes on March of 1958.

The unrest in the military would come to a head on November 13th of 1960 when a leftist group of dissident officers headed up an attack on the Ydígoras Fuentes government. “A third of the army tried to occupy the military bases at Zacapa and Puerto Barrios on the eastern coast, to create a revolutionary focal point and take up the armed struggle against the dictatorship” (Nieto 147). This small revolution was successfully suppressed, but it would not mean the end of dissent in the military. According to Ralph Woodward:

There is little doubt that the November uprising was indeed an internal matter prompted by grievances with the armed forces...perhaps the sorest point...was the president’s apparent willingness to subordinate Guatemalan interests to those

¹ A *campesino* is a native of a Latin-American rural area, *usually* a Latin-American Indian farmer or farm laborer. Source: *Merriam-Webster online*.

of the United States. This touched a sensitive nerve that had first been exposed in 1954, when Guatemalan officers allowed a U.S.-sponsored coup to topple the reformist--some believed communist--government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, only to have the United States virtually dictate to them an unacceptable successor to Arbenz, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. (50)

The November 13th uprising was the beginning of one of the bloodiest periods in Guatemala's history: the war of 1960-1996. The military officers who originally revolted would find allies amongst Guatemalan peasants and the Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajadores (PGT). Together, they attacked a United Fruit Company office and two military outposts in February of 1962, which inspired student and labor demonstrations in Guatemala City. Not surprisingly, the Guatemalan army used considerable force to put down these attacks.

The revolt that started as an inter-military contention in 1960 would soon move to the rural areas of Guatemala, as the original rebel leaders would find their biggest allies in their war against the government amongst Guatemalan peasants. An umbrella movement known as the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) was formed as well as other organizations, such as the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC) and the Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajadores (PGT). According to Kay Warren, "from the guerillas' point of view, this was an armed struggle to challenge the legitimacy of the state and the exploitation of Guatemalan peasants by wealthy landowners and export-oriented commercial elites...this was a war of liberation to resolve brutally conflicting class interests in a country with the lowest physical quality-of-life index in Central America" (86-87).

For the next 36 years indigenous Mayan peasants-turned guerillas would fight for their liberation from a life of exploitation at the hands of the Guatemalan government. The United States would heavily back the Guatemalan government and military for almost the entirety of the war, owing their involvement to the necessity of eliminating communism and guerilla activity in the country. According to Manolo Vela Castañeda:

Al ocultar su autoría, la política de Estados Unidos no se comprometía con el éxito o el fracaso de este tipo de operaciones, en las que, además, podría hacer uso de una amplia gama de recursos, desde las más sutiles acciones de propaganda y Guerra psicológica o entrenamiento, apertrechamiento y transporte de tropas disidentes, hasta la organización de acciones de desembarco, bombardeo aéreo e incluso atentados y asesinatos. En adelante, la acción encubierta, llevada a cabo por las agencias de seguridad de Estados Unidos, se extendería como una sombra sobre América Latina. (97)

Although the government of Guatemala cited many different reasons for their part in the war, their real intention is quite arguably the entire destruction of the indigenous Maya of Guatemala. To back this claim, one need only read about the Scorched Earth campaign initiated by president Efraín Ríos Montt in 1982. Although he was only president for a little over a year, 70,000 people disappeared or were killed during his presidency, making it by far the bloodiest period in Guatemala's history. To highlight just how many people died, in a 36-year-long war, roughly thirty percent of the total deaths can be attributed to one single year in which Ríos Montt was in power.

Although Ríos Montt's Scorched Earth campaign did not explicitly say it was anti-indigenous, the facts prove that it was. The introduction to the Truth Commission report conducted by the Archdiocese of Guatemala (*Guatemala: Never Again*) reads:

In the early eighties, counterinsurgency policy took the form of state-sponsored terrorism featuring systematic, mass destruction, particularly of indigenous

communities and organized peasant groups. The magnitude of the destruction went beyond all conceivable horror and extinguished any hopes for change. (xxxii)

During this time 626 Mayan villages were attacked, their inhabitants raped, tortured and murdered for their supposed support of “subversives”, although actual guerillas were rarely present. According to the Center for Justice and Accountability, “A number of secret CIA cables from the period – declassified years later – documented the military's sweeps through Mayan villages. In one cable describing a raid on a Quiché village, the author notes that the guerillas were often a phantom enemy, and that the army's successes consisted of slaughtering civilians for their suspected rebel sympathies” (1). By the time that peace accords were signed in 1996, 1 of every 20 people in Guatemala had been killed.

While the estimate of the total number of dead ranges from 200,000 to 250,000 as a result of the war, there is no contesting the fact that the vast majority of those killed were indigenous Mayans. According to the official report of the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala, “the cumulative *government* responsibility (including the army, police forces, civil patrollers, military commissioners, and death squads) is a staggering 89.65 percent of the total violations” (290). According to the United Nations-appointed Commission for Historical Clarification, 93% of all of the massacres during the war were perpetrated by the State, while only 3% were perpetrated by the guerillas. This report, finished in 1999, resulted in the UN’s ruling that genocide had been committed in Guatemala.

Despite this ruling by the UN, the findings of the Commission for Historical Clarification and the report made by the Archdiocese of Guatemala, little has been done to bring to justice those who committed these crimes against the indigenous Maya. In one case brought forward in 1998, only three of the 42 members of a civil patrol that raped and killed 77 Mayan women and killed 107 Mayan children and infants were tried and sentenced.

In the case of Ríos Montt, it took until June of 2001 for a charge of genocide to be exacted against him, and that only after a grand total of 12 Mayan communities rallied around the charge. It wasn't until January 28th of this year, 2013, that a Guatemalan judge would order for Ríos Montt and his intelligence chief to stand trial on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity that were committed three decades ago. Up until now, Ríos Montt has been so far acquitted of his crimes that he has served as a congressman in Guatemala and even tried to run for president in 1990. He was banned from entering the race not because of his crimes, but because of a constitutional provision banning people who participated in military coups from becoming president.

All of this has caused many historians and scholars to call Guatemala the "Kingdom of Impunity". Since the peace accords were signed in 1996, almost all efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable for their crimes have met insurmountable obstacles and in many cases those who have worked towards justice for the Mayan people have been killed. In April of 1990 a renowned anthropologist who was working towards justice for those killed during the war, Myrna Mack Chang, was stabbed to death in Guatemala City by a military death squad. In 1998 Bishop Juan Gerardi who backed the

Recovery of Historical Memory project by the Archdiocese of Guatemala was killed two days after the report was released. To speak out against the perpetrators of the genocide in Guatemala has been and continues to be dangerous.

The obstruction of justice in Guatemala is directly related to the reality that many of the former military leaders that were complicit in the war crimes are still active in the government, a prime example being the current president of Guatemala, Otto Pérez Molina who was elected in November of 2011. Pérez Molina is a former military officer and graduate of the School of Americas who had an active hand in the Guatemalan military from 1983 to 2000. He is tied to accusations of genocide himself, but the fact that he represented the military in the negotiations with guerrilla forces during the 1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords has led many to believe that he would be a just president.

In an interview on July 25th, 2011, just four months before he was elected, Pérez Molina was questioned about the genocide that occurred during the war in Guatemala. The interviewer began by stating that the UN and the Commission for Historical Clarification had declared that genocide occurred in Guatemala, and asked for his opinion on the matter. To this, Pérez Molina said that he would like to know who said that there was genocide in Guatemala. When the interviewer replied the UN had declared it, the president's response was as follows:

Mire, yo le voy a decir algo que siempre he dicho y no lo voy a negar ahora siendo candidato presidencial. La Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico no logró recoger y no dice la verdad de lo que pasó en el país... Exterminio de una población por razones de etnia o una religión no sucedió. Aquí lo que sucedió fue porque había gentes que estaban involucradas dentro de las acciones y dentro del campo de batalla. Pero aquí no se fue a decir "todos los kakchiqueles o los k'iche's o los ixiles van a ser exterminados. (*Plaza Pública* 5)

The interviewer then goes on to list several instances in which it has been proven that innocent women and children were massacred. Otto Pérez Molina states that they were all involved with the guerillas, and so it was the guerillas' fault that they were killed.

These statements made by Otto Pérez Molina become increasingly ludicrous when considering the fact that his predecessor, Álvaro Colom, made a public apology to the victims of the Guatemalan genocide on February 25th, 2006. Commemorating the tenth anniversary of the peace accords, the then-president said “Como presidente, jefe del Estado y comandante en jefe del ejército les pido perdón...Cómo llegó tan lejos no sé, cómo llegamos tan lejos como sociedad, no lo sé, pero llegamos lejísimo” (*La Jornada*, 1-2).

To have one president apologize for genocide that has been declared by the United Nations and then have his successor deny that it ever happened is an example of the barriers that the indigenous Maya of Guatemala still face today. If the leader of a country denies that injustices occurred, it can be next to impossible to realize justice within that country.

In her book *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*, Kay Warren argues that four ethnical implications occurred as a result of the war in Guatemala. Firstly, that racism was inflamed and manipulated. Secondly, that the violence was understood by all sides as a “conflict with strong ethnic overtones” (87). Thirdly, that it greatly impacted interethnic relations in the country and fourthly, that it “sparked a wave of cultural resurgence in communities and provoked wider concerns with cultural identity among

university students” (87). The fourth point is evidence of the tenacity that the indigenous Maya of Guatemala have possessed throughout time.

Guatemala is a country where the United Nations has declared genocide, but the president denies it. It’s a country where a president who ordered the mass murder of thousands of people is allowed afterwards to be a member of congress. It is also a country where the history of its indigenous peoples proves nothing if not their will to survive and preserve their culture and customs from the arrival of the first Spaniards to the current day. According to Percy, “resiliency during the colonial era also helps us understand Mayan resiliency in the face of the genocidal intents of Guatemalan governments during the last decades of the 20th century. For the Maya, the “scorched-earth” war Guatemala’s president Ríos Montt declared against them in the 1980s was merely a continuation of a struggle that has now gone on for more than 500 years” (30-31).

The reports made by the UN’s Commission for Historical Clarification and the Archdiocese of Guatemala have gone a long way to prove the injustices committed against the indigenous Maya of Guatemala during the war, but it is clear that true justice is yet to be found. From the first conquistadors to the current president, the indigenous Maya of Guatemala have been denied their rights and ostracized from society. Only time will tell if the future can bring change to Guatemala.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY

The indigenous Mayans of Guatemala are not alone in their traumatic experience. The past century of world history is laden with shocking barbarity committed by mankind. Whether we use the Holocaust, Rwanda, Darfur, Iraq, Sarajevo, Vietnam, Afghanistan or the multiple dirty wars in Central and South America spanning from the 40's to the 90's as examples, it is easy to see that the last century of the world has not been a shining model of justice. The victims of these atrocities are obliged to spend the rest of their lives dealing with the effects of trauma. Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw state in their book *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*:

If every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma. Naming a wide spectrum of responses to psychic and physical events often with little in common beyond label, trauma has become a portmanteau that covers a multitude of disparate injuries. Stories that would seem to belong to different orders of experience enjoy troubling intimacies. But whatever their origin, the effects of historical trauma have a tenacious hold on the popular imagination. (2)

While in the past the trauma of others was largely unavailable to the rest of the world, testimonials of traumatic events have now become available in literature, film and art for mass consumption. There is hardly a soul in the United States who has not heard of *Anne Frank's Diary* or *Shindler's List*, and because of this, atrocities such as the Holocaust have become the front-runners of known historical events. After all, once Disney produces it (as was the case with Anne Frank's story), people will watch it. Whereas not long ago cinema genres included cowboys and Indians and Marilyn Monroe,

times have changed. According to Miller and Tougaw, “we’ve become accustomed in American culture to stories of pain, even addicted to them...narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture, or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventures as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion” (2).

These stories of pain often take the form of testimonial literature. The consumption of testimonial literature means that we are effectively able to share in the experiences of others, allowing us to take part in their trauma.

According to George Yúdice, Testimonial literature can be defined as:

An authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.f., war, oppression, revolution, etc.) Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as a representative of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcising and setting aright official history. (Gugelberger and Kearney 4)

As George Yúdice states, the purpose of testimonial literature is to allow the witness the opportunity and ability to express and share a traumatic event. In addition to denouncing oppression and adding to the official history of an event, the ability to share trauma can be cathartic for the testimony-sharer. By understanding the complexity and distinctness of traumatic events, we can further understand the necessity for testimony.

According to Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, trauma can be defined as:

The response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. (91)

According to Caruth, traumatic events are too sudden and immediate to be grasped and comprehended by the mind in the moment that they occur. The mind experiences the trauma, but due to its inability to come to terms with it in the moment, it must store it away for a later date. This explanation of trauma and the human mind gives sense to the post-trauma episodes that a victim often experiences, whether the trauma returns in nightmares, flashbacks or in post-traumatic stress disorder. Without processing the event, the psyche will continue to re-live it.

This is where testimonial literature serves a purpose. By sharing a traumatic story, a “testimony attempts to bridge the gap between suffering individuals and ultimately communities of listeners, whose empathetic response can be palliative, if not curative” (Miller and Tougaw 11). The sharing of testimony is a way to re-live the traumatic event, and this re-living is a way in which the mind can process the event. By further re-living the traumatic event in community with others, the victim can complete an even broaden processing of that traumatic event which can lead to a “cure” for re-living of the trauma.

While the sharing of testimony can be curative for the testimony-sharer, it is not a one-sided phenomenon. The sharing of testimony necessarily implies that someone is receiving it. According to Dori Laub, “for the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other--in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to somebody: to somebody they have been waiting for a long time” to hear their story (Felman and Laub 70-71).

As we can see, the person or people that hear a testimony are also intrinsically involved in the creation of that testimony. The testimony itself can draw its meaning from the community of listeners that hear it. We also know that sharing a testimony can positively affect the testimony-giver. The question that follows is: what effect does the testimony of trauma have on the listener? In contrast with Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma, Miller and Tougaw define trauma as "the experience of both the victims- those who have suffered directly-and those who suffer with them, or through them, or for them, if only by reading about trauma" (2). For them, a person who listens, reads or views a testimony of trauma is not a passive receiver of the testimony. In their opinion, he/she becomes a part of the testimony by entering into the trauma that they read about. Their emotions and feelings can mirror the emotions and feelings of the victim of trauma, and in this way they are partaking of the trauma as well. If testifying is beneficial for victims of trauma, we must also examine how trauma can affect the "readers" (as defined by Miller and Tougaw) of testimonial literature.

The first type of reader is the one that does not share a common background or experience with the testimony-giver and reads about the experience. This person is unable to enter into the testimony through the sharing of *similar* experiences. However, they have still chosen to "participate" in the testimony by listening to it. Miller and Tougaw state:

Readers must make a connection to what's described by finding a place of pain in themselves to which they may relate a suffering they probably have not experienced; remembering *with* the other in this bodily (and yet rhetorical) way is an intense form of "reader involvement"...Faced with the gaps and incompleteness

of testimony, readers fill in the blanks from their own storehouses of memory and phantom pain. (10)

One reason why a reader who does not share the experience of the testimony-giver would nevertheless be interested in reading the testimony could be to feel the “thrill of borrowed emotion” mentioned earlier. The reader, by entering into the emotion conveyed by the trauma in the testimony, is able to experience a thrill that their day-to-day life does not afford them. This heightened sense of excitement is exactly what has made testimonials such as *Anne Frank’s Diary* and *Shindler’s List* become international curiosities. While it is impossible for the masses of people who have read or seen these two testimonial pieces to have shared in the same exact experience, it did not hinder their desire to “partake” in the testimony. It follows that there are readers of traumatic testimony that read, listen or view testimonials in order to feel the emotion conveyed by the testimony-giver. These “readers” of testimonial literature are not necessarily benefitting from partaking in the trauma.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the readers who have themselves experienced trauma, and reading the testimonial literature lets them re-live their trauma in a different setting. If these readers of trauma have themselves experienced traumatic events, the reading of traumatic testimony may also allow them to recover from those events. For these people, reading a testimonial account of trauma can be cathartic, just as it is for the testimony-giver. It can allow for conscious or unconscious memories of trauma to be worked out in a “safe” space that is not directly related to their own traumatic experience.

Consequently, readers of trauma that do not share the same experience that the testimony-giver has experienced benefit from reading the testimony by feeling the thrill of borrowed emotion. Readers of trauma that do not share the same experience that the testimony-giver has experienced, but have experienced traumatic events of their own, can enter into the experience with the pain from their own traumatic history. This allows them to enter into the same type of healing process that the testimony-giver experiences and use traumatic testimony as a means of individual recovery. These readers, those that do not share the same traumatic experience as the testimony-giver, nevertheless add to the *historical memory* of the traumatic event, which I will discuss later.

The third type of reader of testimonial literature is the reader that *does* share the experience with the testimony-giver. The interaction of this type of reader with the testimony adds to a phenomenon known as *collective memory*, which is the combined memory of a group of people. According to Lewis Coser:

There are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society. Social classes, families, associations, corporations, armies and trade unions all have distinctive memories that their members have constructed, often over long periods of time. It is, of course, individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past. (22)

Coser states that memory is not static, but can change based on ever-changing perspectives on historical events. Testimonial literature has an effect on collective memory by providing a framework around which a group contextualizes a common experience.

Miller and Tougaw argue that “the memoir and all forms of personal testimony not only expand the boundaries of identity construction and the contours of the self but also lay claim to potential territories of community. In complex and often unexpected ways, the singular “me” evolves into a plural “us” and writing that bears witness to the extreme experiences of solitary individuals can sometimes begin to repair the tears in the collective social fabric” (3). When a traumatic event happens to a whole community of people, that whole community can be united by the re-telling of the event through testimony. While each individual will experience the trauma in a different way, historical events happen to specific *groups* of people. The involvement that the members of that specific group have in listening to a testimony of the traumatic event will greatly differ from those outside of the group. Unlike historical memory, collective memory belongs only to the members of a specific group of people that can share in the memory of that event due to their personal experience with it.

The distance between two people due to being members of two different groups, and therefore pertaining to separate collective memories, is not necessarily a geographical distance. It can also be a distance of gender, age, religion, education and any other variable that sets one human being apart from another. It is around these similarities or differences that different groups in society are formed, and it is around these different groups that collective memory is created. For example, the indigenous Maya of Guatemala, regardless of their age, gender, religion or education, all form the collective memory of the genocide that happened in their country. A non-indigenous person from

Guatemala can form part of the historical memory of the genocide, but as they are non-indigenous they cannot form part of the collective memory of this specific ethnic group.

In his introduction to Maurice Halbwachs' famous book on collective memory, Lewis Coser gives us an example of what it means to relate to a different type of collective memory than his peers:

I came to this country as an immigrant shortly before Pearl Harbor. It did not take me long to establish friendships, or at least contacts, with young people of roughly my own age ... (but) they talked about common experiences in high school that made little sense to me... They were not particularly history-minded, yet I often found it hard to follow when some historical reference cropped up in conversation. In summary, much of what I had experienced until my twenties made but little sense to my new friends, and, reciprocally, I could not make much sense, lacking points of reference, when talking to American age-mates... I was excluded from their collective memory and they from mine. (21)

Lewis Coser provides us with a framework for understanding collective memory outside of the sphere of traumatic experience. The difference between the collective memory of Lewis' friends and Lewis was not due to any traumatic event. The difference was due to twenty previous years of growing up in different locations. Although the collective memory of Lewis' friends was composed mostly of non-traumatic experiences such as sporting events, Lewis still felt a measure of exclusion. However, after arriving in the United States and spending years with these friends, Lewis would come to be a part of their "group" and share collective memories of their exploits together in their twenties. As mentioned earlier, the "you" would become an "us", and a collective memory would be formed.

Coser also provides us with an example of how collective memory can change drastically when the collective perspective of a historical event changes. Coser published this account in 1992:

Talking with Soviet colleagues in the last few years, I was struck again and again by the degree of hesitancy on their part when we discussed recent events in the Soviet Union. It dawned on me after a while that these people had been forced in the last few years to shed their own collective memory like a skin, and to reconstruct a largely different set of collective memories. All the historical figures of the past who had been killed, slandered, vilified under Stalin's bloody reign were now shown to have been good Bolsheviks and major revolutionary heroes. (22)

The hesitancy Coser noted in his Soviet friends to talk about their collective past was due to a shifting of collective memory. At the time, they were experiencing a shift in the way that the rest of the world viewed their history. Or, we could say that the outside world was re-shaping the historical memory of the events that took place in the Soviet Union. This shift meant that the group of people that had actually experienced events from inside of the Soviet Union were suddenly forced to re-evaluate their own ideas, perspectives and opinions on their history. In this instance, historical memory was affecting the collective memory of a group of people. It would take time for this re-evaluation to take place, and could quite possibly lead to the formation of new "groups" that would form different collective memories of similar pasts.

This example gives us a context for understanding historical memory and collective memory and how they are formed while simultaneously showing us that one can affect the other. This can further help us understand why testimonial literature may have a great effect on both historical and collective memory.

Testimonial literature allows for those within the group of people affected by trauma to rally around their experience while simultaneously creating a context for other groups for forming a historical memory of an event. According to Halbwachs, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories...Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs” (38). In the case of the Soviet friends of Coser, the difference in how they were beginning to perceive their history meant that they could not aid each other in remembering their past. Their memory of their past was changing, not only as individuals, but also as a collective group.

Testimonial literature that tells the story of an event that was experienced by many members of a group can shape how that group remembers the event. Since our memory is created and aided by those around us, their perspective of a past event can shape our own memory. This happens because collective memory is created out of a desire to understand oneself as a part of a larger group. Miller and Tougaw argue that “the culture of first-person writing needs to be understood in relation to a desire for common grounds-if not an identity-bound shared experience, then one that is shareable through identification” (3). Testimonial literature that tells the story of a member of a group, whether or not it is historically accurate, can then shape the collective memory of that group of people.

Testimonial literature is the intersection where history and memory come together. The delicate interplay between history and memory is how collective memory

is formed. In Pierre Nora's article *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* he explains:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. (8)

Understanding memory and history as separate entities can also help us to understand the difference between historical and collective memory. To frame this difference, we can reflect on Lewis Coser's argument that there is a "sharp distinction between historical and autobiographical memory...The first reaches the social actor only through written records and other types of records, such as photography. But it can be kept alive through commemorations, festive enactment, and the like...autobiographical memory, on the other hand, is memory of events that we have personally experienced in the past' (24). Knowing that memory is subjective to the person, situation and context, and that testimonial literature is based off of memory, and that collective memory is based on the sharing of the memories of individuals, we would have to conclude that testimonial literature of traumatic events affects groups in an ever-changing and evolving manner.

When considering memory we must also consider the fact that not all groups of people perceive memory in the same way. There are many cultures and groups of people that consider the memory of an individual to be the memory of an entire group and vice versa. These groups of people consider their collective memory to be their personal

memory of events, which is a point of contention for historians. The indigenous Mayans of Guatemala are one of these groups, and the controversy surrounding the now-infamous autobiographical account *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) exemplifies the push and pull between trauma, memory and historical accuracy.

In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, an indigenous woman, Rigoberta Menchú, describes the deaths of her family members to the anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos as she “remembers” that they occurred during the genocide in Guatemala during the 1980’s. The authenticity of the account has been called into question, as historians have discovered that Menchú was not actually present at many of the events that she claims to have witnessed. In his book *Testimonio*, John Beverley examines the Menchú case and asserts:

Menchú has publicly conceded that she grafted elements of other people’s experiences and stories onto her own account. In particular, she has admitted that she was not herself present at the massacre of her brother and his companions in Chajul, and that the account of the event...came instead from her mother, who (she claims) was in fact there. She says that these interpolations were a way of making her story a collective account, rather than an autobiography. (81)

For Menchú, the grafting together of stories in order to testify what happened to her brother was not a fabrication, but a way of portraying the history of her family. It can also be argued that the indigenous Maya of Guatemala have a rich tradition of passing down their collective history orally from generation to generation and that Menchú was acting within her cultural understanding of story-telling. Here we can see the issue of authorship, which in the West is highly valued, but not deemed as important in indigenous cultures. In Mayan indigenous tradition the importance lies not with the individual but with the community. Gugelberger and Kearney note that “whereas the

Western writer is definitely an author, the “protagonist” who gives testimony is a speaker who does not conceive of him/herself as extraordinary but instead as an allegory of the many, the people” (8). In any case, the horrific account of Rigoberta Menchú’s brother being burned alive after being tortured would not have been told if she had only spoken of what she had seen with her own eyes.

For some historians, the fact that Menchú was not present at the massacre that claimed her brother’s life makes her account inaccurate and inappropriately designated to testimonial literature (Beverley, 81). Either way, the presence or absence of Rigoberta Menchú at the death of her brother does not change the fact that he did die in the exact manner described in her testimony. His death has been immortalized here, and it is an account that many Guatemalans can relate to. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is a narrative that has contributed substantially to the historical and collective memory of the Guatemalan genocide.

As mentioned earlier, the readers of testimonial literature are susceptible to feel the emotions that the testimony-giver describes, whether or not they have personally experienced the trauma that they are reading about. Through the emotion that the testimony causes them to feel, a reader can enter into a traumatic experience. If testimonial literature immortalizes the traumatic experience of a group of people, what is our moral obligation, if any, to that memory? If we, as readers, enter into the “trauma” that we read, where do we stand in regards to the historical memory of that group of people?

Cathy Caruth states that “the psyche’s relation to the real not as a simple matter of seeing or of knowing the nature of empirical events, not as what can be known or what cannot be known about reality, but as the story of an urgent *responsibility*, or what Lacan defines, in this conjunction, as an *ethical relation to the real*” (102). This would suggest that on a certain level, when we read testimonial literature, we are relating to the very real experience of the testimony-giver, and in that sense, we have related to *them*. Although we may not belong to the specific group of people that the testimony-giver belongs to, and therefore cannot contribute to the collective memory of that group, by reading their testimony we have contributed to the historical memory of their group. This relation to their trauma gives us a certain amount of responsibility to the memory of the people that we have just read about.

Miller and Tougaw reflect on the same subject in different terms, using the Holocaust as an example:

If, moreover, the Holocaust in our times stands not only *for* memory but for what is owed *to* memory, then that lesson should lead us to a more intense awareness of what implicates us in the lives of others. It is far easier, even seductive, to memorialize past injustice, to weep over human crimes of another era, than to take responsibility for what’s before our eyes. (5)

This suggests that that reading of testimonial literature, by the nature of its subject matter, obligates us to take responsibility for what we read. When we read about the traumatic experience of a group of people we internalize it as a part of our memory and, in a sense, it is only moral for us to remember what we have learned and “experienced”. Testimonial literature is able to invoke a sense of responsibility and a desire for justice is on the part of the reader that cannot be achieved through fiction. For example, Anne

Frank's diary is the world's most widely spread document about Nazi crimes (Miller and Tougaw 4), meaning that it is also the most common medium through which the world has become *aware* of Nazi crimes and anti-Semitism. In being testimonial literature, it has had a great effect on the world's historical memory of the Holocaust and the Jewish people.

Solidarity with the victims of traumatic experiences can be one of the most beneficial results of testimonial literature, but in the case of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, it has also been seen as a downfall. In *Testimonio* John Beverley describes concerns that scholars have with the book:

(David) Stoll's argument with Rigoberta Menchú is precisely with the way in which her book "matters." It concerns how the canonization of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* was used by teachers like myself or solidarity and human rights activists to mobilize international support for the Guatemalan armed struggle in the 1980s, long after that movement had lost whatever support it may have initially enjoyed among the Mayan peasants that Menchú claims to speak for. The inaccuracies and omissions in Menchú's account lend themselves, Stoll feels, to "justify violence". That issue—"how outsiders were using Rigoberta's story to justify continuing a war at the expense of peasants who did not support it"-- is the main problem. (82)

In this instance we see that readers of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* felt so involved in her story that it led them to take action against the oppressive government of Guatemala. Their actions, whether or not justified, show us that testimonial literature can have a great impact on the memory of the dead and the lives of the living.

However testimonial literature may impact a person, it is clear that testimony, whether in literature, art or film, has become a sensation in our day and age. Although there could be many explanations for the sudden popularity of testimony, perhaps the real

answer is that “in a culture of trauma, accounts of extreme situations sell books” (Miller and Tougaw 2). The extreme situations and traumatic events in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* have been sold and read around the world, but does mass consumption mean that we are becoming more or less sensitive to the story of the indigenous Mayans in Guatemala? Is it possible that we have over-consumed the story?

Gugelberger and Kearney state that “official history too often has been the history of “great” individuals rather than the history of the people... Testimonial discourse is reversing this tendency and speaks for those who previously were not allowed to speak” (10). But when a copy of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* can be found in every school library, isn’t that the opposite of being the testimony of someone who isn’t heard? How does that affect the urgent responsibility towards the issues that we might otherwise feel?

We can find a plausible answer in the more recent narrative coming out of Central America. In his novel *Senselessness* (2004), Salvadorian writer Horacio Castellanos Moya conveys this sentiment when his main character states that “*nobody in his right mind would be interested in writing or publishing or reading yet another novel about murdered indigenous peoples*” (74). This sarcastic remark is conveying an important point: the over-abundance of testimonial literature coming out of Latin America has made it less relevant. With this statement made by the protagonist Castellanos Moya is adding his novel to the debate on memory, postulating that the time has come for us to find a new way to understand the plight of the indigenous Mayans in Guatemala. He is stating that the over-consumption of testimonial literature has deemed it ineffective.

In *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community* Patricia Yaeger asks, “how far should we go in invoking the ghost, how far in consuming traumas? If circulating the suffering of others has become the meat and potatoes of our profession, if this circulation evokes a lost history but also runs the danger of commodification, how should we proceed?” (30). These questions are becoming more and more urgent as testimonial literature continues to be produced and consumed in our society.

The past hundred years of the world’s history abounds with human against human atrocities which has added to an increase in testimonial accounts of traumatic events. In this chapter I have looked at testimonial literature and trauma with a critical eye, examining the aspects of historical and collective memory that are inherently to the production and consumption of testimonial literature. I have also discussed the implications of reading traumatic testimonial literature and alluded to the possible problems that could result from its over-consumption. In the next chapter I use this theoretical framework in order to examine several artifacts of Guatemalan collective memory.

CHAPTER THREE

ARCHIVES OF CONSCIOUS MEMORY

Just as the processing and storing of a traumatic event can take a distinctive form in the mind of each individual, the genocide¹ in Guatemala has likewise translated into distinctive artifacts of memory. These artifacts can be understood as archives of Guatemala's history and collective memory, existing as a public record of the genocide.

Each one of these artifacts of memory has taken on a different form and used a different medium in order to remember. The artifacts I will examine are: the *Guatemala: Never Again* national archive, two documentaries directed by Pamela Yates (*When the Mountains Tremble* 1984 and *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* 2011), Rigoberta Menchú's testimony *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1984), *Senselessness* (2004), the novel by Castellanos Moya, and the work of contemporary Guatemalan performance artist, Regina Galindo (*Who Can Erase the Traces?* 2003 and *Hermana* 2010). All these works reflect on the violence and abuse against indigenous Guatemalans who have been systematically excluded and killed for the past sixty years. In the previous chapter I argue that trauma is distinct from other experiences because of its multifaceted nature and the inability to name it on the part of the victim. Cathy Caruth asserts that it is "the response to an

¹ According to the United Nation's general assembly resolution 260A Article 2, genocide is "any of the acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, as such: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena...(meaning that) the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it..." (Caruth 91). This means that the memory of traumatic events can reside in the subconscious and conscious part of memory. This is not to say that a traumatic event will always be remembered subconsciously or consciously, but that it may live in the conscious or unconscious memory or have aspects that belong to both. For example, a victim of trauma may have a conscious memory of the event but be triggered years later to remember more of what happened due to a song, an object or another occurrence that incites his/her mind to recall what happened that day. The victim may not know why he/she is responding to the new trigger, but their mind and body contain the memory of what happened and react in the form of a symptom.

This propensity for trauma to incite both conscious and unconscious memory makes it unique in the realm of human experience. While there are many categories of memory, I will resort to two categories: the subconscious and the conscious memory. According to the Atkinson-Shiffrin model, all human memory is divided into three parts: sensory memory, short-term memory and long-term memory (Izawa 17). Since trauma resides in an individual's long-term memory, all of the artifacts of memory that will be discussed in this chapter are likewise representative of long-term memory. By analyzing several examples of memory using the framework of conscious versus unconscious recollection I aim to better understand the archives of Guatemalan memory.

Conscious memory is explicit memory, or, memory that is clearly developed and formulated. This type of memory can also be called declarative memory and is what allows us to remember facts, events, experiences and concepts. (Brainerd, Stein and Reyna 1). The majority of the archives of memory that will be discussed in this chapter are representations of conscious memory. They are intentionally remembering the past and recognizing the violence and trauma that were experienced. These artifacts of memory show how victims conceptualize and grasp the traumatic events that they have experienced. While it is possible that they have additional subconscious memories of the events, these works reveal their conscious memory.

The first example of conscious and explicit memory is also the most famous testimony of memory to come out of Guatemala: Rigoberta Menchú's autobiographical *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Menchú's account is a testimonial that remembers the past of systemic abuse and cruelty. First published in 1982, this book took the world by storm with the story of Rigoberta's life told and transcribed by anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos. Her description of the horrifying deaths of her family members and the plight of the indigenous Maya brought the injustices in Guatemala out of obscurity for the world to see. In the first few lines of the book Rigoberta declares that her autobiography is the collective testimony of the Guatemala people:

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only my life, it's also the testimony of my people. It's hard for me to remember everything that's happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: my story

is the story of all Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people (Menchú 1).

With this statement Rigoberta Menchú all but defines collective memory.

She states that the memories have been painful, but they are important because they belong to all of the people who have experienced them. In claiming that her testimony was the testimony of all indigenous Mayan in Guatemala, Rigoberta ensured that a piece of historical memory was made.

I, Rigoberta Menchú went on to be translated into languages all over the world and earn her the Nobel Peace prize in 1992. It also became incredibly controversial in 1999 with the publication of David Stoll's book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. In the book Stoll discusses the fact that historians have discovered that Rigoberta was not present at the death of her brother, even though she claims to have been in her book. This and other discrepancies have led David Stoll and other scholars such as Mario Roberto Morales and John Beverley to debate over the legitimacy of Rigoberta's tale and its ensuing affects both within and without Guatemala.

David Stoll takes issue with "how outsiders were using Rigoberta's story to justify continuing a war at the expense of peasants who did not support it" (241) and argues that "what makes *I, Rigoberta Menchú* so attractive in universities is what makes it misleading about the struggle for survival in Guatemala. We think we are getting closer to understanding Guatemalan peasants when actually we are being borne away by the mystifications wrapped up in an iconic figure" (227). Mario Roberto Morales "is more concerned with the effects of this inside Guatemala, which, he feels, are to legitimize the

emergent discourse of separatist Mayan identity politics” (Beverley 87) and John Beverley argues that Rigoberta Menchú is someone who “assumes the right to tell the story in the way she feels will be most effective in molding both national and international public opinion in support of the ideas and values she favors, which include a new kind of autonomy and authority for indigenous peoples” (93).

It may be true that Rigoberta Menchú was not *present* at the death of her brother, but even Stoll “does not contest the fact of the murder of Menchú’s brother by the army” (Beverley 80). She may have included testimony that didn’t necessarily belong to her sole experience, but the accounts of murder in her autobiography are echoes of what can be found in the report on war crimes compiled by the Archdiocese of Guatemala titled *Guatemala: Never Again (Guatemala: Nunca Más)* published in 1998. This report, also known as the REHMI project, is a compilation of hundreds of testimonies taken from indigenous Mayans who were affected by the government policy to murder them.

In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Rigoberta describes the death of her brother as follows:

After he’d finished talking the officer ordered the squad to take away those who’d been “punished,” naked and swollen as they were. They dragged them along, they could no longer walk...they poured petrol over each of the tortured. The captain said, “This isn’t the last of their punishments, there’s another one yet. This is what we’ve done with all the subversives we catch, because they have to die by violence. And if this doesn’t teach you a lesson, this is what’ll happen to you too...and then the soldiers set fire to each one of them. Many of them begged for mercy. Some of them screamed, many of them leapt but uttered no sound—of course, that was because their breathing was cut off. (Menchú 179)

This same type of killing is reported in *Guatemala: Never Again* more than a decade later, stating that “one method used systematically was to pour something flammable over the bodies and set them on fire. This complicated the identification

process and eliminated much of the potential evidence” (174). A testimony titled “Case 1741 (perpetrator), Izabal 1980-83” asserts:

(There was) a clandestine cemetery where thirty or forty people were put into each hole. There was no way around it; we had to cut them off at the knees so that they would all fit down the hole...and then we threw gasoline on them. That flame shot up ten or fifteen meters high, that high the gasoline. And those moans coming from inside the fire, they cried and screamed. (174)

Does it really matter if Rigoberta Menchú was present at the murder of her brother, if his murder was one of thousands of its kind and her autobiography is what lets us know about it? Does it really matter *how* we learn of these events, as long as we learn of them? My response would be a resounding *no*. The fact is, the autobiography of Rigoberta Menchú was able to denounce to the world the events that were going on in Guatemala twelve years before the official *Guatemala: Never Again* report came out. For better or worse, her “testimony” in fact matches the testimony of many indigenous Mayans. For all of these reasons I am including *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in the category of conscious memory that recollects and denounces genocide.

According to Victoria Sanford, “Rigoberta’s book, more than any other publication, drew international attention to the plight of the Maya. In the midst of genocide in her country, she offered an alternative vision to the official version of a “war on communism” and, in so doing, firmly placed herself as an active subject directly challenging state violence” (51). Whatever the case may be regarding Rigoberta Menchú, the fact still remains that her account has done more to bring the genocide to light than any other single piece of work to have come out of Guatemala. For this reason,

I argue that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* has become integral and constitutive of Guatemalan collective memory.

The second example of conscious explicit memory I have selected is the previously mentioned archive of material evidence of the genocide in Guatemala titled *Guatemala: Never Again (Guatemala: Nunca Más)* published in 1998. Carried out by the Archdiocese of Guatemala and also known as the REHMI project, this is an official report of war crimes committed in Guatemala during the 36-year-long conflict. The report was compiled over several years and includes the word-for-word testimonies of hundreds of indigenous Mayans, government soldiers and paramilitary. *Guatemala: Never Again* is a conscious effort to remember the past, and it is a tangible artifact that can be touched, read and understood. It is, in essence, a report of those involved.

Guatemala: Never Again is one of two truth commission reports carried out in Guatemala after the peace accords were signed. The other report is entitled *Guatemala: Memory of Silence (Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio)* and was mandated and carried out by the United Nations' Historical Clarification Commission and published in 1999. While both reports found the government and its military and paramilitary groups to be responsible for the genocide, what sets *Guatemala: Never Again* apart is the inclusion of testimonies from many different Mayan communities. Unlike the predominantly foreign United Nations investigators that carried out the report that became *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, the compilers of *Guatemala: Never Again* had the linguistic resources to interview the rural indigenous populations in their 23 Mayan languages. Certainly, speaking the language of a population wherein the majority cannot read or write in

Spanish is a necessity for collecting testimonial accounts. *Guatemala: Never Again* exists not only as an expression of conscious memory of the genocide spearheaded by the Catholic Church and Human Rights NGOs, but also as an archive representative of many Mayan communities.

Guatemala: Never Again is separated into sixteen chapters apportioned into four separate parts titled: The Impact of the Violence, The Methodology of Horror, The Historical Context, and The victims of the Conflict. The book also includes recommendations towards the social reconstruction of Guatemala and detailed reports on the methods used by the Guatemalan government to exterminate the Mayan people. The section that describes “the methodology of horror” has a 10-page list of 410 of the massacres that occurred during the genocide, detailing the date they occurred, the location, and who was responsible (302). The report is particularly important because it also includes testimonies of members of the military, a phenomenon rarely heard of in impunity-riven Guatemala.

The testimonies recorded in the book include case numbers, dates and places. Many of them also include the name of the witness or the name of their particular Mayan group such as “Aché man.” *Guatemala: Never Again* grounds the memory of these events in place and time. This acted as a type of catharsis for many victims. A testimony titled “Case 3967, Caserío Pal, Quiché, 1981” states:

Now I am content because the testimony I have given will become part of history. I have no more misgivings; now I have released my pain by giving my testimony. (xxxii)

As exhibited by this testimony, through *Guatemala: Never Again* victims were able to document their history and share it with the world. This was momentous not only for each individual, but also for the Mayans of Guatemala as a whole, many of whom were able to understand the experience of other indigenous Mayans in their country for the first time. Many Mayan communities that previously believed to be alone in their experience were able to know that what happened to them was traumatic and collective. This process was and continues to be a contributing piece of collective memory in Guatemala.

Guatemala: Never Again reports that 89.7% of the atrocities committed during the war were the direct responsibility of the government forces and their allied paramilitary bands, while only 4.8% of the crimes were the responsibility of the guerrilla forces (290). This information along with the testimonies of the victims makes *Guatemala: Never Again* a material archive of the murders in Guatemala that represents both victims and perpetrators in order to uncover the truth of what happened and memorialize it for all prosperity.

In addition to exposing the atrocities that occurred in Guatemala to the world, *Guatemala: Never Again* was able to explain *how* they transpired. One question that is often asked in the case of human rights violations is *how* the mentality of the perpetrators allowed them to rationalize and therefore commit the crimes. The testimonies in *Guatemala: Never Again* expose the Guatemalan government as the mastermind behind the genocide, systematically implementing policies and methods to eliminate the Mayans.

The “internal conflict” in Guatemala was framed as the fight between the Guatemalan government and the guerrillas, but infants and children were killed in inhuman massacres at an alarming rate. *Guatemala: Never Again* reports:

Half of the massacres recorded include the collective murder of children...descriptions of children’s deaths often contain atrocities (incineration, machete wounds, and drawing and quartering, and most frequently, head trauma). Many young girls were raped during massacres or while detained. Cases of children killed by indiscriminate fire or machine-gun strafing or communities are reported less frequently. This suggests direct, deliberate aggression consistent with the overall treatment suffered by communities in these situations. (30)

This report is followed by several testimonies that describe acts of incomprehensible violence against children. If the conflict was between the government forces and the guerrilla as the government of Guatemala claimed, children should not have been the victims of half the massacres. In war children are often killed as the result of stray bullets or explosions, but it is clear from this report that the killing of children in Guatemala was a planned and calculated event. Children were not casualties of war, but the targets of the government’s brutality. This fact reiterates the charge of genocide against the Guatemalan military.

Children were not the only innocent victims that were killed. A testimony labeled “Key source 11, Chimaltenango, 1967-68” states:

They threw bombs, grenades...they approached through a ravine. That was when more children died. And they captured the pregnant women alive, they sliced them open and removed the baby. (30)

Once again, if the conflict in Guatemala was between the Guatemalan government and the guerrilla forces, how can this kind of atrocity be accounted for? An unborn baby clearly is incapable of being a guerrilla, and violence against pregnant

women is a clear violation of human rights. These testimonies reveal the genocide against Mayans conducted by the military in Guatemala.

Furthermore, the testimonies of Guatemalan military and paramilitary forces in *Guatemala: Never Again* show the magnitude and extent of the massacres. In order to turn soldiers into killing machines, the Guatemalan government convinced them that entire communities of indigenous Mayans were guerrilla fighters. “Key Source 80 (former soldier and intelligence officer [G-2])” is quoted as saying:

When it was time to patrol they told us, “Okay, guys, we’re going to an area where there are only guerrillas. Everyone is a guerrilla there. Children there have killed soldiers, and supposedly pregnant women have just come and thrown a bomb and killed; they have killed soldiers. And so you all must distrust everyone. No one is a friend where we are going. So, they are all guerrillas and all of them must be killed. (31)

As we can see, the Guatemalan government clearly and purposefully misled its soldiers into believing that entire communities were guerrillas, including the women and children in those communities. This soldier’s testimony is a clear example of the indoctrination that the military received in order for them to commit acts of genocide. By denouncing all members of a community as guerrillas, the Guatemalan soldiers were given free rein to kill. These testimonies are just as important as the testimonies of the victims, because they prove that what happened in Guatemala was genocide, not war. *Guatemala: Never Again* has been and continues to be instrumental in the formation of a

collective memory of the Guatemalan genocide waged against the Mayan communities which make up majority of the entire population.²

Yet, for all of this, what has made *Guatemala: Never Again* famous is the death of Bishop Juan Gerardi, who was found murdered in his garage on April 26th, 1998, just two days after he presented the book to the public. Bishop Juan Gerardi oversaw the project, and his death incited many to remember the 1980 death of Oscar Romero in El Salvador. His death gave urgency to the cause for justice in Guatemala while simultaneously testifying to the continued violence and impunity that have made it impossible to achieve. Two other expressions of conscious memory are the documentaries of Pamela Yates: *When the Mountains Tremble* (1983) and *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (2011). Like *Guatemala: Never Again*, these documentaries are archives of memory that have greatly influenced how the world views the genocide in Guatemala. Scenes from the films were so accurate of what occurred in Guatemala that they have been used as evidence in trials against perpetrators of the genocide. Both of these documentaries have also been instrumental in remembering this violent past.

In 1982 Pamela Yates snuck into Guatemala under the ruse of being a journalist that would cover the presidential election. Her real intention was to film the conflict that was occurring in the Guatemalan highlands and smuggle the footage out of the country in

² The World Factbook (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) currently estimates the population of Guatemala to be as follows: Mestizo and European 59.4%, K'iche 9.1%, Kaqchikel 8.4%, Mam 7.9%, Q'eqchi 6.3%, other Mayan, 8.6%, indigenous non-Mayan 0.2%, other 0.1%. This information is from a 2001 census. However, in the 1999 version of The World Factbook, indigenous Mayans accounted for 52% of the total population (Foster 275) and in an article published in 2011, Caroline Rodrigues claims that over 80% of the population is indigenous (293).

order to make a documentary. At the time, she had no idea that she was filming genocide.

During her time filming *When the Mountains Tremble* in 1982, Pamela Yates was able to spend weeks in the jungle with the guerrillas. The testimonies she filmed were messages of hope. Nobody could know that in the very moment that she was filming the documentary, extermination was being planned by the Guatemalan government led by Efraín Ríos Montt at the time. In truth, when Pamela Yates returned to the country many years later, she was unable to find most of the people that she had previously interviewed because they had been killed or simply disappeared. For this and many other reasons, *When the Mountains Tremble* is an archive of the memory of those individuals that were killed.

The guerrillas that Pamela Yates spent time with in 1982 were mostly indigenous Mayans. Many of them had joined the guerrilla forces after experiencing the death of a loved one at the hands of the government. They believed that fighting an unjust government of Guatemala would mean a better future for their people. Among the guerrillas were many women, some dressed like the men and some fighting in their traditional Mayan skirts and *huipiles*.³

Like Rigoberta Menchú, they had made a choice between following more traditional paths in life and becoming guerrillas. Rigoberta was engaged before she

³ A *huipil* is a traditional garment, consisting of a rectangular piece of cloth that is folded and stitched at the sides. The design of the *huipil* identifies the community to which the wearer belongs, and gives each individual the opportunity to display elements of their religious and/or spiritual beliefs. The designs more often include elements of nature, important to Mayan spirituality. Source: Florida Museum of Natural History.

became a guerrilla, but felt that it was more important to stay single to fight for her people:

Well, there I was between these two things-choosing him or my people's struggle...I left my compañero with much sadness and a heavy heart. But I told myself that I had a lot to do for my people and I didn't need a pretty house while they lived in horrific conditions like those I was born and grew up in...there'll be a time when things will be different, when we'll all be happy, perhaps not with nice houses, but at least we won't see our lands running with blood and sweat. (Menchú 226)

During her time in the jungle with the guerrilla, Yates also filmed the Mayan villages and communities that she encountered. The testimonies she filmed relate the story of a people that are left with few options. They talk about two things: the inability to own land and the injustices afforded to them by the Guatemalan government. In one instance she comes across the aftermath of a massacre (location and date not revealed in order to protect the victims). The scene shows battered and bloodied corpses strewn on the front porch of a house surrounded by grieving friends and relatives. When Pamela asks who is responsible for the massacre, the reply is "soldiers". These moments, caught on film, would become the cultural carriers of memory of a murdered people.

The Guatemala army, unsuspecting of the fact that Pamela Yates had spent months in the jungle with the guerrillas, also allowed her to film them. In one scene she goes up on a helicopter mission with a group of soldiers and as they are flying over a village in the mountains, it can clearly be noted that a massacre has occurred. When Pamela inquires about who is responsible for the massacre, the soldiers reply that the guerrilla is. Years later the documentarian would learn the truth. In that moment,

however, Pamela Yates could not know that her footage would become evidence in a trial (Rohter 1).

Pamela's time with the soldiers earned her the right to interview the then-President of Guatemala, Efraín Ríos Montt. In the interview she films he brazenly insists that the army is not responsible for any of the deaths in the highlands and attributes all violence to the actions of the guerrilla. In reality, Efraín Ríos Montt ordered the killing of approximately 70,000 indigenous Mayans as a part of a scorched earth policy that would become known as the bloodiest time in Guatemala's history since the Spanish Inquisition. However despicable it may be, this interview is also an archive of memory, recording for posterity the spurious words of a man that embodies impunity and injustice in Guatemala.

When she finished filming in Guatemala, Pamela Yates returned to New York. There, she edited the footage and began searching for a person to narrate the film. Coincidentally, a young Rigoberta Menchú had recently arrived in New York as a refugee. Eventually she would become the narrator of *When the Mountains Tremble*, adding her own testimony to the documentary. On October 1st, 1983 the documentary was released.

Not surprisingly, one of the critics of *When the Mountains Tremble* is the same David Stoll that critiques Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography. He states:

I continue to show 'When the Mountains Tremble' to my classes because it has a wonderful range of footage and really gives students the visuals on Guatemala. Obviously it has a solidarity perspective that assumes the guerrillas represent the people, so it's very limited in that respect. But filmmakers always have to simplify things, and she's trying to get people interested in Guatemala, which is a good thing. (Rohter 1)

Stoll's critique of *When the Mountains Tremble* is an echo of his critique of Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography: it doesn't do a good job of telling the whole story. Yet even in his critique he states that he continues to use it in his classroom. Like Menchú's testimony, whether the critics like it or not, *When the Mountains Tremble* is one of the most well-known documentaries to come out of Guatemala. It was and still is an important archive of the Guatemalan story that represents a conscious memory of the genocide.

Over two decades later, Pamela Yates was contacted by Almudena Bernabéu, a lawyer in Madrid. Almudena was trying to collect enough evidence to convince the Spanish court that Efraín Ríos Montt and other Guatemalan military leaders should stand trial on charges of genocide. She had seen *When the Mountains Tremble*, and she was convinced that Pamela Yates's footage could be important evidence for the trial. Pamela Yates agreed to help, and the story of her return to Guatemala and her involvement in the Spanish trial became the documentary *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (2011).

In *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* Pamela Yates returns to Guatemala in order to find the people that were a part of her film in 1982 and shed light on the current state of affairs. What she finds is that many of the people have died or disappeared, and that nothing has changed for the indigenous Maya of Guatemala. Pamela Yates is baffled by this outcome. When she left Guatemala in 1983 she felt hopeful for the cause of the Guatemalan guerrilla and convinced that their actions would bring change to Guatemala. In an interview for the *New York Times* she says, "I thought the good guys would win, that the guerrilla movement and the civil society that supported it had right and the force

1 of history on their side. But it was much more complicated than that, and that didn't happen" (Rohter 1). Decades later, she finds that impunity reigns in the government and the indigenous Maya continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty and injustice.

It is difficult to comprehend how the conditions in Guatemala continue unchanged when Peace Accords have been signed and Truth Commissions have exposed the crimes committed by the government. Efraín Ríos Montt not only got off scotch free, he was a congressman between 1990 and 2004 and even tried to run for president in 1990. In *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* Pamela Yates finds that the Guatemalan government continues to be ruled and controlled by the same men and political parties that were complicit in the genocide, and it is for this reason that it is impossible to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Efraín Ríos Montt is not the only example of this fact. In 2011 Otto Pérez Molina won the presidential election in Guatemala. Molina, an alumni of the School of Americas like Ríos Montt, served in the notoriously brutal special forces (known as the Kaibiles), as director of military intelligence during the genocide. He has been accused of human rights abuses, yet he still became president. His political party, the Patriot Party (Partido Patriota) and Efraín Ríos Montt's political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (Frente Republicano Guatemalteco) continue to hold many seats in congress. As can be seen, the government of Guatemala continues to place the perpetrators of the genocide in positions of power.

Granito: How to Nail a Dictator and its predecessor *When the Mountains Tremble* are not only archives of memory, they were evidence in the trial against Efraín Ríos

Montt at the Spanish court in 2011. According to Almudena Bernabéu, the lawyer that contacted Pamela Yates and inspired her to film *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator*:

This is the first time that videographic evidence has been admitted in a Spanish court of law, so it establishes an important precedent. By the very nature of human rights litigation, almost all evidence is indirect or circumstantial. So this is perhaps the most direct proof one could provide. We have a theory of command responsibility for the abuses, and he admits clearly that he is in control and that he knows what they are doing. (Rohter 1)

The Spanish court ordered the arrest of Efraín Ríos Montt. Instead of extraditing him, the Guatemalan constitutional court blocked the warrant for his arrest. This meant that the only effect of the ruling of the Spanish court was that Ríos Montt was unable to leave Guatemala, because any other country would arrest him for his crimes, except his own.

One of the people that Pamela Yates interviews in *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* is Fredy Peccerelli, the head of the team of anthropologists that are working on an exhumation of bodies in the cemetery La Verbena, which is located in Guatemala City. According to Fredy, the majority of the bodies found in Guatemala City during the “internal conflict” were dumped in the mass grave that his team is working to excavate. One particular day of filming, Fredy tells Pamela that he has received a written death threat. He reads it to Pamela in front of the camera:

Fredy,
We got what we wanted, all of your information in our hands. Today you’ll all pay, sons of bitches. We have photos and details on your family. We’re watching your kids’ schools and where you work. Your days are numbered. The Forensic Anthropologists Foundation won’t ever be able to do anything. Two or three armored cars, won’t save you. Your family will pay. Damned revolutionary son of bitches. We’ll dump your bodies in graves. We’ll scatter you in pieces throughout the city. Your family, sons, nephews, sister and parents will pay for

everything son of a bitch The forensic anthropologists will pay. Death.
(*Granito: How to Nail a Dictator*, 2011)

When Fredy is done reading, Pamela asks him if he will cancel the exhumation and leave Guatemala. Fredy replies that he won't. He states that if he ever leaves Guatemala, it will be on his own terms.

The death threat shows why justice is so hard to achieve in Guatemala. *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* shows not only the impunity of the government, but the danger that can befall those who seek justice on their own or as a part of an organization. When the government of a nation refuses to take responsibility for its crimes and the people of a nation are unable to seek justice for fear of retaliation, reconciliation is not possible. Without it a nation cannot move forward.

Another important distinction to make in the discussion of memory is the difference between symbolic and material artifacts. Artifacts such as the novel *Senselessness* represent symbolic artifacts of the past, while *Guatemala: Never Again* allows survivors to have tangible material evidence of their past. Seeing their town on a list of massacres next to a date and time or seeing footage of a community that no longer exists grounds their memories in the realm of the real. This acts as a type of confirmation of their memory and allows them to come to terms with their trauma and heal. The documentaries of Pamela Yates are especially interesting, because film in general is a symbolic discourse, but the footage in *When the Mountains Tremble* and *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* also serve as material evidence of the past.

In *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* Pamela Yates shows the warehouse where a massive amount of police archives were discovered in Guatemala in 2005. As a result of this discovery, many families in Guatemala are finding out what happened to their loved ones for the first time. One of these family members is Alejandra García, the daughter of prominent revolutionary Fernando García. Alejandra says that when she was a young girl she was told that her father was away, but that she always knew that something was wrong. She passed every day of her childhood wanting to find out about her father and became a lawyer with the same intention. Due to the discovery of the police archives, Alejandra was able to learn of the details of her father's disappearance for the first time. In tears, Alejandra García states:

Having these documents is like having him in some way. It's having a piece of him, it's like finding him, even if it's just in papers, and I'm finding my father. I'm solving the puzzle I've worked on since I was a kid. A picture of my father is made possible by the documents in this police archive. I've been able to see his handwriting, his signature...(yet) I have a lot of hope that my father will be found at the exhumation at La Verbena because it is essential, there is nothing more important for me. (*Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* 2011).

We can understand from Alejandra's testimony that there is a compelling desire for physical evidence of her father. This desire is common among the victims of trauma. It is the reason why exhumations and archeological studies are so important. While symbolic memory of the events can help a victim to feel a sense of solidarity with fellow victims, it cannot replace missing bodies and justice for the crimes committed. Fredy Peccerelli, the head of the exhumation at La Verbena cemetery says that Guatemala is a "sick country", unable to heal from the wounds of its past. He believes that the exhumation at La Verbena cemetery is important, because returning bodies to

their families means that the families will finally be able to grieve and heal. For many Guatemalans, the hope of having any material evidence of their deceased loved ones doesn't exist. For them, a symbolic memory of the past is the only memory they will have. This inability to have tangible material evidence of crimes committed has greatly affected the memory of many Guatemalans.

Granito: How to Nail a Dictator is a perfect example of conscious memory in Guatemala. In a sense, the film exemplifies the awareness of Guatemalans concerning the genocide: they know what happened, but they also are aware of the fact that all efforts to bring the perpetrators to trial have been futile. In this way *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* serves as an important element of Guatemalan memory. It is an effort to preserve Guatemala's history by exposing the impunity in the government and the difficulties faced by those seeking justice.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARCHIVES OF UNCONSCIOUS MEMORY

The other face of long-term memory is implicit memory, or, unconscious memory. This is memory that exists even if we are unaware of it. As mentioned earlier, this type of memory is often created as the result of a traumatic event. In order for a victim to survive, the memory of trauma is stored in the subconscious, only to exhibit itself without warning through physical, emotional or mental acts later on in the victim's life (Caruth 91).

It is important to note that our body is just as capable of remembering trauma as our mind. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "There are two types of trauma—physical and mental. Physical trauma includes the body's response to serious injury and threat. Mental trauma includes frightening thoughts and painful feelings" (National Institute of Mental Health 1). In this section we will look at two artifacts of memory that are representative of both mental and physical *unconscious* memory. The first is the novel *Senselessness* by Horacio Castellanos Moya and the second is the performance art work of Regina José Galindo.

Horacio Castellanos Moya was born in El Salvador in 1957 but moved to Honduras as a child. Since then he has lived in Guatemala, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Spain, and Germany as a journalist and critically-acclaimed writer. In 1997 he fled El Salvador after receiving death threats for *El Asco (Revulsion)*, a book describing his

revulsion to aspects of education, religion, politics, politicians and even his own family in El Salvador. His work is almost always political, and known for “fluid sentences and acerbic wit, a feature that occasionally gets him in trouble...but also endears him to fans of his honesty and force” (Barnes 1). Horacio Castellanos Moya is currently living in exile in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as part of the City of Asylum project.

His novel *Senselessness* is the fictional account of a man who travels to Guatemala City to copy-edit the testimonies that would make up *Guatemala: Never Again*. The novel is a complex multilayered narrative of the historical and fictional stories embodied in the figure of the protagonist, also a journalist and writer like Castellanos Moya himself, whose task is to write up the *Guatemala: Never Again* book. Horacio Castellanos Moya got the idea for writing the book when he read parts of the archive in Guatemala. “As a veteran political journalist, he’d known of that country’s dirty war, but he’d still been shocked by the savagery the report described, and by its concentration among the indigenous population” (O’Driscoll 4). By using the real report of the Archdiocese of Guatemala and a fictional character, Castellanos Moya gives us an unprecedented view of the genocide and its historical archive.

Although Horacio Castellanos Moya claims that testimonial novels are a “genre he doesn’t cultivate and doesn’t like at all” (Cardenas 3), *Senselessness* nevertheless is a kind of meta-testimonial account by an outsider, a reader experiencing second-hand trauma. Misha Kokotovic notes:

Insensatez (*Senselessness*) then, is marked by a double tension: between the narrators’ postwar cynicism and the structuring presence in the novel of the nonfiction, politically committed genre of *testimonio*, and between the two

different ways that *testimonio* manifests itself in the text, as seemingly parodic formal allusion and as direct quotation. The result of this combination of disparate, even contradictory elements, is a kind of fictional, meta-testimonial narrative that represents not the experiences of oppression recounted by properly testimonial subjects, but rather the experience and effect of reading such account. (548).

The protagonist, who is never named, is parodic himself being an alcoholic sex-obsessed racist male who does everything that he can to distance himself from the testimonies he reads in the archives that he is copying and editing while trying to have sex with any possible female available. Rather than being affected by the genocide, he is obsessed with the syntax and literary style of the victims' testimonies. He carries a small notebook with him that he uses to record particularly interesting sentences that he encounters while at work. In one part of the novel he says:

I proceeded to take my notebook out of the inner pocket of my jacket intent on calmly relishing those sentences that seemed so astonishing from a literary point of view...sentences I could, with luck, later use in some kind of literary collage. (32)

In the beginning of the novel it seems that the protagonist's blatant disregard of the violence he reads about is having the desired affect; he is not affected by the testimonies he reads. As time goes on, however, he starts to become physically and mentally agitated almost paranoid, believing that he is being followed and observed. One night his dinner companion mentions "The Archive" referring to the documents of the REHMI project, and it sends him into a tailspin.

...nobody talked about The Archive in public, much less in a restaurant just a few blocks from the presidential palace in whose chambers The Archive had its headquarters a restaurant where more than a few officials and specialists from that sinister office undoubtedly ate on a daily basis...I was in the grips of a panic attack, stoked by a furtive glance from the waitress before she pushed the

swinging doors that led into the kitchen, a glance that in other circumstances I would have interpreted as natural feminine interest...instead a panic attack paralyzed me, bathed me in sweat. (76)

Eventually the protagonist is convinced that he will be killed if he stays in Guatemala City, and asks to be relocated. He is moved to a retreat house in the country side, and it is there that he realizes that a general in the army named Octavio Pérez Mena¹ has come to kill him. He both hears and sees the general outside of his door, and flees for his life through the jungle to safety. In the last chapter we see the protagonist safely outside of the country, still unable to shake the paranoia that has taken over his mind. In one of the last scenes of the book the protagonist is in a bar in Germany, where he unexpectedly sees a familiar face:

All of a sudden I realized to my amazement that leaning against the bar to my right and drinking was General Octavio Pérez Mena himself-*shit!*-the very same face I had seen through the rear window was now looking at me insolently through the mirror and when I responded with a threatening scowl, for the beers I'd drunk were many and his impunity here nonexistent, he turned away to avoid me that sissy, which only added fuel to my ire and gave me the courage to shout at him, raising my mug in the air, *We all know who are the assassins!* For this was the toast that torturer deserved. (140)

The protagonist ends up repeating the line "We all know who are the assassins!" over and over again, declaring a blaring truth known by everyone. That night he checks his e-mail and receives a message from a friend in Guatemala informing him that Bishop Juan Gerardi has been killed. The email states:

¹ The current president of Guatemala is Otto Pérez Molina. It is quite possible that Horacio Castellanos Moya was referring to him with the name he used in the book for the General that wanted to kill the main character. If this was indeed the intention of Castellanos Moya, it was prophetic, as Otto Pérez Molina was not yet president when the book was published.

Yesterday at noon the bishop presented the report in a bombastic ceremony in the cathedral; last night he was assassinated at the parish house, they smashed his head in with a brick. Everybody's fucked. Be grateful you left. (142)

This account of Bishop Juan Gerardi's death is another non-fictional elements of the novel and how history is intertwined in the narrative. Bishop Gerardi was indeed killed two days after the presentation of the book *Guatemala: Nunca Más*, and Horacio Castellanos Moya's inclusion of this fact in the book legitimizes the main character's paranoia. According to Bill O'Driscoll, "*Senselessness* is not simply an ironic joke at the expense of a self-absorbed proofreader. While the narrator (main character) might be paranoid, for instance, someone really might be out to get him...Part of the balancing act in *Senselessness* is to keep readers wondering which threats are imaginary and which are plausible" (4). This is precisely what characterizes the narrative structure of the novel, a combination of historical and fictional as well as what is plausible and imaginary.

By portraying real-life traumatic events through the experience of a fictional character, Castellanos Moya is able to effectively portray the paranoia that can result from trauma, even from the perspective of an outsider looking in. Although the main character is deeply affected by the trauma, he himself was not a direct victim of the violence. In her article on the book, Valeria Grinberg states:

A otro nivel, en la novela de Castellanos Moya se propone que aquellos que no han vivido la guerra directamente tienen la posibilidad de entender la dimensión de los sucesos ocurridos por medio de la imaginación simbólica en su dimensión cognitiva. En otras palabras, la imaginación se perfila en *Insensatez* (*Senselessness*) como un camino posible para colocarse en el lugar de las víctimas y lograr así una identificación con las mismas. (1)

Grinberg's argument takes us back to a concept discussed in chapter two, in which we looked at how the readers of testimonial literature "partake" of the traumatic experience that they read about by entering into the emotions and feelings that they read about. Grinberg is asserting that at one level, *Senselessness* achieves this by portraying how an outsider can enter into the trauma of a victim and identify with their experience. The person reading the novel is able to enter into the paranoia of the main character, as events in the novel become increasingly disconcerting and the mind of the main character increasingly disturbed. It is in this way that *Senselessness* exemplifies how trauma creates unconscious memory, affecting our minds even though we may be unaware of it.

To further drive this point home, Castellanos Moya creates a character that is not predisposed to empathy. In an interview with Mauro Javier Cardenas, Horacio Castellanos Moya comments on the fact that the main character in his book is a "depraved atheist" instead of a saintly humanist. He responds that "it was a way to give consistency to the fictional character of the book...the challenge was indeed to explore how the editing task of the report could break the psychic and emotional apparatus of a cynical character without faith of any kind" (3). Valeria Grinberg likewise states that "el narrador se revela muy pronto como un personaje frío y egoísta, que tiene un manejo irreverente, incluso irrespetuoso de los textos de los sobrevivientes y por lo tanto socava su aptitud como polo positivo de identificación empática" (2). This ability for a person not predisposed to empathy to nevertheless be greatly affected by the account of another's trauma deserves attention, for as we discussed in chapter two, ours is a day and age of trauma. If the effect of traumatic experience is not isolated solely to the victims of

the experience, it could have great repercussions in society. On this topic Bill O'Driscoll states:

Moya, whose work is still controversial in his homeland, belongs to the new wave of his region's literature, and *Senselessness* has been reviewed in periodicals from *Publisher's Weekly* to *The Village Voice*, which called it "an innovative and invigoratingly twisted piece of art." Meanwhile, the new attention for Moya, and for the book, also forces readers to reflect on the ways in which we seek to understand the outbreaks of mass violence that are hallmark of modern times. (2)

With *Senselessness*, Horacio Castellanos Moya is signaling a an major aspect in the creation of memory; it doesn't only pertain to the victims of a traumatic event but all those that experience the event through news, literature, film media, or any other form of telling of the event. The book sketches a picture of what can happen to the unconscious memory of those who "partake" of trauma by reading about it. For all of these reasons *Senselessness* is another form of the memory of genocide in Guatemala that belongs not only to Guatemalans, but to all who are made aware of the genocide by reading it.

The last example of memory that I will discuss is the performance art work of Regina José Galindo. Regina José Galindo was 22 years old and working in an advertising agency when the Peace Accords were signed in Guatemala. On that day Galindo states that "we all burst into the streets to make art, write poetry and attend demonstrations...for me, the transition from poetry to performance was easy because I already had this advertising experience. I basically deepened and transformed superficial ideas, adapting them to what I want to convey" (Escorza 1). Since that day Galindo has become well-known for her work, winning her the Golden Lion award for Best Young Artist at the Venice Biennale in 2005. All of her performances can be seen on her

website, making her art available to anyone in the world with access to the internet.

Using her own body, Galindo intimately portrays the pain and horror of two inter-related subjects: political events in her country and acts of violence against women.

One of her most famous performances is “*Who can erase the traces?*” performed in 2003 is summarized by Goldman:

A slight young woman in black dress walks barefoot through the streets of Guatemala City, carrying a white basin filled with human blood. She sets the basin down, steps into it and then out, leaving a trail of bloody footprints from the Constitutional Court building to the old National Palace. The corrupt Constitutional Court had recently allowed the former military dictator, General Ríos Montt, to run for president despite the Constitution’s barring of past presidents who gained power by military coup. A Guatemalan who didn’t know that this was a performance titled “*Who can erase the traces?*”—or even who had never heard of performance art—would have no trouble understanding the symbolism...that trail of bloody footprints was the most powerful statement I’d encountered in ages. (39)

In addition to “*Who can erase the traces?*” Galindo has repeatedly injected herself with valium in a piece titled “*Valium 10 ml*” (2000) to demonstrate what it means to be Guatemalan and cope on a daily basis with injustice, racism and all sorts of violence.

In a performance titled “*No perdemos nada con nacer*” (2000) she placed herself in a garbage bag that was deposited at the municipal dump to portray the little value that Guatemalans have, the great majority have become disposable.

She has also carved the word “perra” (bitch) into her own leg in a performance entitled “*Perra*” (2005) in an attempt to bring attention to all of the women who were murdered in Guatemala and found with words carved into their skin. Her art is described as excessive, carnivalized and grotesque (Bowskill & Lavery 51), but it nevertheless has gotten the world’s attention. Through her performance art, Galindo has brought “the

illegal border crossing between Mexico and the United States, violence against women, postcolonial hostility and military technique of control” to the stage (Rodrigues 291).

Galindo’s performance art is an artifact of unconscious memory in Guatemala because it often comes from deeply-rooted feelings about her country’s past. When asked about the inspiration for “*Who can erase the traces?*” Galindo replied:

It emerged from rage and fear. When it was announced that Efraín Ríos Montt had managed to win acceptance as a presidential candidate, I was in my room, and I suffered an attack of panic and depression. 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? I decided then and there that I would take to the streets with my shout and amplify it. (Goldman 40)

For Galindo, the fact that Ríos Montt would be able to run for president triggered her body to react physically. This physical response of rage and fear can be understood as the result of unconscious memory. Unlike the previous artifacts of memory discussed, Galindo’s art performances are meant to reach deep down into the subconscious part of our minds where the most painful memories are stored. For this reason Francisco Goldman mentioned that a Guatemalan who does not have a concept of what performance art is would nevertheless be able to understand Galindo’s works (39). Guatemalans have suffered through a collective experience of violence, pain and suffering and Galindo’s art represents the collective memory of that experience.

Another performance that conveys a collective experience in Guatemala is “*Hermana*” (2010). In it, an indigenous Mayan woman dressed in her traditional attire who slaps, whips and spits on Galindo. While seemingly simple, this performance conveys many things about Guatemalan society. First, Galindo, a *ladina* or “white”

Guatemalan is being abused by an indigenous Guatemalan, when we know from history that it is the indigenous population that has suffered at the hands of the “white” population. Second, the act of one woman abusing another woman reenacts intragender relationships as defined by Guatemala’s patriarchal machista society. Third, the performance is titled “*Hermana*” which Galindo uses to convey a multitude of images, but one in particular that unites two women from different ethnic backgrounds. This performance, while seemingly simple, speaks to deep-seeded racism, sexism and injustice in Guatemalan society. It is a performance that has the ability to evoke a subconscious reaction, whether to the violence, to the perpetrator, the victim or what the title conveys. It is a testament to the subconscious memory of violence of indigenous Mayan women.

Galindo also uses her body to convey the violent history of her country:

Though Galindo uses the female body to express the private experiences of self, womanhood and sexuality, the corporeal, when it becomes associated with violence, also serves as a powerful tool to explore the ‘public’, that is, the Guatemalan nation. Thus, in Galindo’s *oeuvre*, violence against the female body is presented as a legacy of the experiences of colonization, the Guatemalan Civil War, and, most recently, neoliberalism. (Bowskill and Lavery 53)

In Galindo’s performances we can come to understand the violent past and present in Guatemala, and the impunity that still conquers over all. Galindo states that her performance art represents “My body not as an individual body but as a social body, a collective body, a global body. To be or reflect through me, her, his or others experience; because all of us are ourselves and at the same time we are others” (Rodrigues 294). As Galindo states, her body represents the collective body of all Guatemalans who are excluded and abused. The violence her body endures in her performance art represents

the violence endured by all disenfranchised Guatemalans. Álvaro de Benito Fernández asserts:

She wants her body to be the channel for the expression of the rest of the bodies which, out of fear or by imposition, are not able to express themselves. The itinerary allows us to meet with the Regina that dominates words and the time of her transition from paper to skin, but also with the one who allows her body to be abducted by the impulses of the more disadvantaged communities. We bump into the limits of physical resistance; we are faced with the death of each individual symbolizing everybody's death. (1)

Unlike the previous archives of memory that we have discussed that took form in film or in narrative form, the archive that contains memory in the performance art of Galindo is her body. The implications of Galindo's body art are multifarious. In essence, Galindo gives audience members the ability not only to remember and reflect on the past, but to be present-day witnesses to violence. In this way her performance art is the portrayal of *current* violence and oppression. Her art reflects on the past by putting violence in the context of the present, and creates new memories of violence and oppression.

In 2007 Regina José Galindo performed "*Confession*", in which she underwent a torture tactic known as waterboarding. In her performance her head was repeatedly forced into a barrel of water for almost unbearable amounts of time. Julian Stallabrass was an audience member, and his eye-witness account to the violence is as follows:

I have been struggling with words, trying to be accurate, to avoid newspaper cliché, and finding that the words that come to mind cannot do all the work that I want them to. Yet while the violence here was real, it also was artificially constrained, a pale imitation of what is conducted in similar cells across the globe by agents of our states and their allies. What is it to face such force, unbound in duration and severity, to be confined with no prospect of release, to have no choice in when one eats, drinks or sleeps? If language alone seems inadequate to

the task of sufficiently describing such situations, Galindo, with her bare sparse actions, says something that words cannot. (1)

We can see in this reflection that Galindo's performance had great impact in many ways. First, Stallabrass was struck by the force of the violence. Second, he reflected on current situations of violence in the world. Third, he tried to place himself in the situation by imagining what it would be like to endure what those suffering the same types of oppression and violence endure. Fourth, he exited the performance with a new memory of violence and oppression that he didn't have before. Lastly, he reflects on the impact that her performance has, which he feels cannot be expressed by words.

From this reflection we can see that Regina José Galindo's performance has the ability to contain memory, reflect on the past and also create new memories and meanings. Her art is best described as an artifact of unconscious memory, because it often comes from deep-rooted feelings about her country's past. Her performance art is meant to reach deep into unconscious feelings about violence and oppression, and the fact that Julian Stallabrass felt incapable of finding words to describe the performance he witnessed testifies to this fact. Galindo's performance art is meant to remember the past and incite change for a better future for her country. For all of these reasons, the performance art of Regina Jose Galindo can be considered an artifact of Guatemalan memory.

I, Rigoberta Menchú, Senselessness and Regina José Galindo's performance art allows victims to remember their past without giving them tangible factual information. While the ability to have something that symbolically remembers the past goes a long

way towards healing, it cannot replace the material evidence that can show that what we remember actually happened. During the genocide in Guatemala people disappeared, never to be found or heard of again. Entire villages were wiped off the map and thousands of bodies were dumped into mass graves. Tangible, material evidence of their existence is oftentimes nonexistent. It is for this reason that the actual memory of the genocide is not shared amongst all Guatemalan people. What's more, the majority of Guatemalans cannot read and live in a state of poverty that does not allow them to own DVD players or travel to see works of performance art. In fact, the first showing of *When the Mountains Tremble* happened in Guatemala in 2003, twenty years after it was released in the United States (Rohter 1). In her interview with Francisco Goldman, Regina José Galindo states:

I say that these efforts were necessary, because Guatemala is a country without memory. The people, with little access to education, are easy to mislead with promises and the little gifts that politicians hand out during elections campaigns. The official party, to which Ríos Montt belonged and belongs, made a huge effort and had all the power to reach the Guatemalan minorities, who had difficulty connecting the actual Ríos Montt to the past dictator-president who was guilty of the greatest crimes against their own people, their own blood. (Goldman 40)

The truth is, the ability to think about collective and individual memory and hypothesize about how they form a part of Guatemalan society is not a luxury afforded to most Guatemalans who have been deprived of basic civil and human rights. For the majority of the indigenous Maya of Guatemala, the ability to *eat* is a major concern, not the ability to process trauma and remember the past. For them, the trauma of violence is something they continue to live through daily, and they are not able to

think about the causes or effects of the said trauma. In a sense, the archives of memory discussed in this thesis do not belong to the indigenous Mayans of Guatemala.

In her article on Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Senselessness*, Valeria Grinberg argues:

En mi opinión, la novela *Insensatez* (*Senselessness*) de Horacio Castellanos Moya funciona como lugar de la memoria de los ladinos, y en particular de los intelectuales, ya que el protagonista es un periodista salvadoreño y no los indígenas sobrevivientes. Parece por ende pertinente afirmar que las formas del duelo, tanto discursivas como no discursivas, han de ser distintas para los sobrevivientes indígenas y para aquellos, en su mayoría ladinos, que no han sufrido la guerra en carne propia...el duelo de los unos no puede sustituir el duelo no la memoria de los otros. (3)

This reflection on *Senselessness* could be a reflection on all of the artifacts of memory that I have discussed. The documentaries *When the Mountains Tremble* and *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* were directed by a North American. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* was translated into Spanish by Elizabeth Burgos and even *the Guatemala: Never Again* report was edited and translated by non-indigenous Guatemalans. To do justice to the topic of memory, we need to reflect on *whose* memory is being portrayed. Until the indigenous Mayans of Guatemala are able to live as equal members of society, own their own land, and have access to education, they will not have equal access to all of the archives of memory that we have discussed or the ability to create their own archives of memory.

Memory of the past is important because without it, we are doomed to repeat history. Guatemala is a perfect example of this fact with the election of former army General Otto Pérez Molina in 2011. Before, during and after his election there were

much speculation about his role in the Guatemalan genocide, yet he was still elected as president. On April 5th, 2013 Hugo Ramiro Leonardo Reyes, a former Guatemalan soldier active in 1982 and 1983, gave his testimony for genocide trial of Efraín Ríos Montt.² Shawn Roberts reports on his testimony:

Reyes told the court that Otto Perez Molina—the official then in charge of the military installation in Salquil Grande, Nebaj, Quiche and now president of Guatemala—ordered soldiers to burn and loot villages, and later to execute people as they fled to the mountains. There were gasps in the court room as Reyes made these accusations. Reyes also identified officials in charge at other military installations where torture and executions occurred in Nebaj (Arnoldo Otoniel Lopez, Pedro Diaz, and Luis Felipe Ruano) and Tzabal (Mario Rene and Juan Chiroy Sal). Reyes testified: “As far as I could tell, the order was: ‘Indian seen, Indian dead’ (*Indio visto, indio muerto*). (1)

Later on that day, an attorney for President Pérez Molina issued a statement saying that “the president’s rights were violated by the testimony today” (Roberts 1). I would highly disagree. I believe that the rights of indigenous Mayans have been violated for hundreds of years, and that a truthful and comprehensive collective memory of what happened is the only remedy for Guatemala. The introduction to *Guatemala: Never Again* states:

The compiled testimonies are imbued with the virtue of the victims’ own words...it can be read as a book, it can be heard as a story, but above all it can be learned from as collective memory that reclaims the victims’ dignity and the survivors’ hopes for change. Besides examining past events, this memory sustains the demands for truth, respect, justice, and reparation that must be a part of Guatemala’s social reconstruction process. (*Guatemala: Never Again* xxxii)

As this introduction states, memory is a necessity for the reconstruction of society in Guatemala, yet we can see in the discussion of *Senselessness* and Regina José Galindo’s

² A daily report of the trial of Efraín Ríos Montt can be found at www.riosmontt-trial.org.

performance art that collective memory of a traumatic event is complicated and often hard to achieve. Yet, the current trial of Efraín Ríos Montt has created a new possibility for the formation of memory in Guatemala. Only time will tell what the verdict will be, and what effect it will have on the reshaping of collective memory of the Guatemalan genocide.

CONCLUSION

I set out writing this thesis with the intention of presenting a more complete picture of the Guatemalan collective memory of the genocide using several artifacts of memory. By analyzing these artifacts I hoped to gain a more complete understanding of the various ways in which the genocide is remembered and how this memory continues to affect the lives of the victims. I was also aware that an understanding of the way that genocide in Guatemala is remembered might give way to a more complete perspective of the problems facing Guatemalan society today.

At the beginning of this thesis I commented on the fact that the Guatemalan genocide is known as the “silent holocaust”. When I started my research I was convinced that this was due to victim’s inclination to keep quiet for a fear of retaliation. However, through my research I have realized that the silence can be attributed more to ignorance on the subject than to fear. I was especially struck by this fact when I read that the first showing in Guatemala of *When the Mountains Tremble* was in 2003, a full twenty years after it was released in the United States (Rohter 1). This led me to reflect that while the people of many countries outside of Guatemala are able to read books, watch films and access the internet to learn about the genocide, the literacy rate amongst indigenous Mayans in Guatemala is dismal and their ability to buy books and access the internet is limited.

This combined with the fact that many older Guatemalans may indeed be reluctant to talk about what happened means that the silence surrounding the genocide within Guatemala is likely not the result of fear or the lack of information, but the inability to access the information. In a sense, it seems that the collective memory of what happened in Guatemala belongs to outsiders, and not to Guatemalans themselves. In her interview with Francisco Goldman, Regina José Galindo states that the lack of education is the reason that many Guatemalans have voted for the same political party (Guatemalan Republican Front) that perpetrated genocide (Goldman 40). This conjecture requires further study and would be a perfect follow-up to this thesis.

This thesis paper is timely and relevant to what is going on in Guatemala today. Efraín Ríos Montt is finally on trial for genocide as of March 19, 2013. Pamela Yates, Rigoberta Menchú and Almudena Bernabeu, all mentioned in this thesis, have been credited for helping to bring him to trial (O'Neil 1). The artifacts of memory that I have discussed have not only contributed to collective memory, they have brought a dictator to trial, and their importance cannot be undervalued. As of the printing of this thesis the trial of Efraín Ríos Montt is still in session. Only time will tell if his trial will bring justice to one of the perpetrators of the genocide and help to bring to light what happened in Guatemala, or if it will come to naught. Here's to hoping that justice is served!

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